CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly presents the overall research outline. It includes the background of the research, the research questions, the aims of the research, the scope of the research, the significance of the research, the clarification of related terms, and the organization of the paper.

1.1 Background

English in Indonesian context takes its status as a foreign language (EFL) which is only learnt and used by students in any different levels of education. Since 1994, primary school students have been taught English as a subject at school. It proved that the government considered English as important to be familiarized to students in early age (Hawanti, 2011).

From the time when English was started to become one of the subjects in the primary schools in Indonesia, the government has made some changes to the national curriculum, namely 1994, 2004, curriculum of KTSP 2006 (School Based Curriculum) and the latest one is 2013 national curriculum (Taufik, 2013). Based on the curriculum of KTSP 2006, the status of English in elementary schools in Indonesia was local content subject in which each school had full authority to decide whether English would be taught as subject or even omitted. It is supported by Hawanti (2011) who states that the consideration of teaching English in primary schools depends on the schools' readiness, particularly with the teacher resources, learning resources and curriculum. In spite of this, according to Ministry of Education and Culture (2012), the latest national curriculum which is thematic integration changes the previous status of English subject in primary school into extracurricular. It means that English is no longer a subject that is officially taught to students in the classroom.

However, according to Ministry of Education and Culture (2013), it is revealed that 2013 national curriculum is implemented only in 2% from the total 148.695 elementary schools in Indonesia, specifically 2.598 pilot schools

(Sumadi, 2013 as cited in Aziz, 2013). It indicates that English is still taught as a local content in 98% elementary schools. As the preparation of the total implementation of this latest curriculum in the whole schools, there is an approach that accomplishes the educational policy of applying thematic integration curriculum, namely Theme-Based Teaching approach.

In accordance with Cameron (2001, p. 180), "the essential notion of theme-based teaching is that many different activities are linked together by their contents; the theme or topic runs through everything that happens in the classroom and acts as a connecting thread for pupils and teacher." It is a similar idea with the thematic integration curriculum which requires the teaching and learning activities to integrate each other under one theme with the intention that students can acquire in-depth study of the content ("What are thematic", 2012). Thus, instigating Theme-Based Teaching can also be defined as instigating thematic integration curriculum.

Additionally, based on Cameron's viewpoint (2001), Theme-Based Teaching approach suits the way young learners naturally learn. It provides lots of linked activities that allow students who commonly have high enthusiasm to participate actively in the teaching and learning process. Hence, it is teachers' responsibility to design the whole activities as meaningful and attractive with the purpose of stimulating learners' curiosity to be involved within something rather than only keep silent and listen to their teacher's explanation (Harmer, 1991).

In the case of teaching EFL to young learners, speaking is assumed as the most important skill to master for the reason that a new language is largely introduced orally, understood orally and aurally, practised and automatised orally. (Cameron, 2001 and Nazara, 2011). However, foreign language learners lack of exposure to use English in communication or interaction (Damayanti, 2010). This is an obstacle that should be faced both by the EFL teachers and learners. This reality is supported by the following statement of Cameron (2001).

The central characteristics of foreign language learning lie in the amount of exposure to the language: there will be very little experience of the language outside the classroom, and encounters with the language will be through several hours of teaching in a school week. (p. 11).

Since this research was done in Indonesian context which English has status as foreign language (EFL), a classroom observation was accomplished before implementing Theme-Based Teaching in order to find out the real condition of the site and respondents in learning English. As a result, it was revealed that students usually learn English through textbook with some unsystematic themes and without sufficient exposures to really speak up in the classroom.

Therefore, Theme-Based Teaching is an appropriate approach to be implemented to teach speaking to EFL young learners, especially in this research. The teachers can invent various linked activities which offer lots of opportunities for students to speak up in the classroom. It is important since classroom is young learners' primary source of language learning (Cameron, 2001).

A prior study about the implementation of Theme-Based Teaching had been done by Yang (2009) in English as Second Language (ESL) young learners' English course in Hong Kong. The result of his study proves that most students gave positive responses toward the implementation of Theme-Based Teaching approach because they found many new vocabularies (Yang, 2009).

This research adapts Yang's study in case of implementing the same approach to teach English to young learners with some different features. Firstly, this research is done in more formal context of Education, which is second grade of elementary school. Secondly, the degree of English in Indonesia is a foreign language (EFL). Lastly, this research focuses only on speaking skill of the respondents.

As a final point, this research represents the implementation of Theme-Based Teaching to young learners in an elementary school in Bandung. This research addresses to find out the improvement of students' speaking skill and the challenges faced by the teacher in the teaching and learning process.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the problem that has been mentioned above, therefore the issues of this research are formulated as follow:

1. To what extent can Theme-Based Teaching improve students' speaking skill?

2. What are the challenges faced by the teacher in implementing Theme-Based Teaching to teach speaking to young learners?

1.3 Aims of the Research

In accordance with the research questions, the aims of this research are to identify:

1. The improvement of students' speaking skill toward the implementation of Theme-Based Teaching.

2. The challenges faced by the teacher in teaching speaking to young learners using Theme-Based Teaching.

1.4 Scope of the Research

This research focuses on identifying: (1) the improvement of students' speaking skill which covers some aspects including vocabularies, pronunciation and grammar; and (2) the challenges faced by the teacher in teaching speaking to young learners using Theme-Based Teaching.

1.5 Significances of the Research

This research is expected to give input to teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to young learners. Theoretically, the result of this research is expected to contribute to the theories of English language teaching to young learners. Furthermore, this research can be a reference for the future studies. Practically, this research is expected to give an alternative approach for EFL teachers in teaching speaking to young learners since it gives the description of the process of implementing Theme-Based Teaching approach started from the planning, action, and reflection.

1.6 Clarification of Terms

The followings are some terms which are frequently used in this research. In order to avoid the misunderstanding about the terms, the researcher provides the clarification below:

1. Foreign language (FL)

Foreign language is a second language that is not widely used in the learners' immediate social context, but rather one that might be used for future travel or other cross-cultural communication situations, or one that might be studied as a curricular requirement or elective in school with no immediate or necessary practical application (Saville-troike, 2006, p. 188).

2. Young learners

In the field of this research, the terms young learners only refer to children who are in the second grade of elementary school whose age ranging from seven to eight years old.

3. Theme-based teaching

Theme-based teaching (also termed theme-based instruction or topic-based teaching) is one of the approaches within the broader model of content-based instruction (CBI) 4 in which the emphasis is on exposing students to a "highly contextualized" second language environment by using the subject matter as the content of language learning. It is an approach in which different areas of the curriculum are integrated instead of being separated into different subjects (Wesche & Skehan, 2002, p. 220 as cited in Yang, 2009, p. 162).

4. Speaking skill

Speaking skill in this research refers to one of two productive skills in a language teaching which is used to build and share meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Chaney, 1988 as cited in Kayi, 2006 and Harmer, 2007).

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This paper has been organized into five chapters, as follow:

Chapter I Introduction

The first chapter presents a brief overview on background of the research, the research questions, the aims of the research, the scope of the research, the significance of the research, the clarification of related terms, and the organization of the paper.

Chapter II Theoretical Foundation

This chapter begins by describing the theoretical features of the research, which are: (1) the characteristics of young learners; (2) teaching speaking to young learners; (3) theme-based teaching in language learning; and (4) teaching speaking to young learners using theme-based teaching.

Chapter III Research Methodology

This chapter elaborates the methodology of the research including the statement of problems, the research design, the site and respondents, the data collection, the data analysis, and the reliability and validity.

Chapter IV Findings and Discussion

Chapter IV conveys the result of the research in form of the description of the findings and discussion.

Chapter V Conclusions and Suggestions

Finally, chapter V displays the conclusion of the research and suggestions for the teacher and future research based on the results found by the researcher.