

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

For many years, English has been officially taught in Indonesian schools as a foreign language. Since then, English has become a necessity among the Indonesian public. Many English courses have been developed rapidly. This phenomenon also affects education for young learners. English has begun to be introduced to them, either as subject matter or for communication. Therefore, parents are busy to involve their children to the English course institutions hoping that they can follow the demands of the times.

Most of English courses in Indonesia offer English for communication programs. Since the aim of the learning program focuses on communication, it is not wrong if we assume that speaking ability plays an important role in the process. Speaking is considered as an important skill that should be acquired by someone who learns a foreign language. Moreover, for children, it is very important to acquire the speaking skill in their language development (Linse, 2005). Linse further says that it would be better if teachers teach the speaking skill first to the students than other skills since it is a foundation to develop other language skills. As Brown (2001) states that this skill helps students to convey their ideas or opinion. It means that if students have achieved the speaking skill, it would be much easier for them in mastering the other skills. Therefore, it is so obvious that speaking takes a crucial role among other skills.

In supporting teachers to have a better way in teaching speaking, many strategies have been discovered by researchers. These strategies are believed to help students in improving their speaking ability, such as studies conducted

by Brown (2001), Linse (2005), Geoffrey (2006), Szpotowicz (2012) that reveal many interesting strategies in teaching speaking skill to young learners. But then, the other problem emerges. The problem is related to the assessment made by the teachers. Georgiou and Pavlou (2003) found that most teachers have not been able to make an assessment that appropriate with the strategies they use in teaching process. Appropriate assessment is very crucial for the teachers in evaluating their students. Příbilová (2008) says that assessment leads to students' development. It is one of the important aspects of teaching learning process that influences students' learning. It concerns the quality of the teaching as well as the quality of the learning. Therefore, teachers must have an appropriate assessment that will not interfere with their students' language development.

Obviously, assessing speaking skill is a challenge in language teaching (Weir, O'Sullivan & Horai cited in Boxer & Cohen, 2004), especially, when it relates to young learners. McCauley (2004) explains, conducting an assessment for young learners is a quite difficult task since they have higher activity levels and they are easy to be distracted by others. They also have a shorter attention span, wariness of strangers, and inconsistent performance in unfamiliar environments. In line with her, Grieve (1992) states that assessment for young learners is more complex than for the other learners because they have an uncertain temperament that may affect their cognitive ability. Katz (1997) also says that teachers need to have a great sensitivity in deciding the best assessment strategies. Young learners have unique characteristics. They are considered as poor test takers. It will be hard to assess young learners who are easy to produce errors.

To overcome this problem, several studies have been conducted in recent years. Smith (2006), Kallonen (2011), Ovalles and Mata (2011) advise teachers to conduct an informal assessment of the speaking skill since teachers often encounter difficulties in organising oral testing. It can be done by

observing and listening to oral performance. This is in line with Nancy and Rubin (1985) that explain there are two approaches used for assessing speaking skills; observational approach and structured approach. In observational approach, students are observed and assessed from their behaviour, while in the structured approach, the students are asked to perform specific oral communication tasks.

However, Nancy and Rubin (1985) explain, before conducting speaking skill assessments, teachers must know the principles of reliability, validity, and fairness. They must prepare accurate and consistent instruments. It is important to know what abilities they want to assess and what for they do the assessments. Therefore, it is so obvious that teachers must understand the purpose of assessments they used, so they will have a more accurate data after they assess their students.

On previous studies in Indonesia, most of researchers only focused on teaching speaking strategies (Yuliani, 2010; Gantika, 2010; Suherman, 2011; Astarina, 2012; Ningsih, 2012; Widya, 2012), yet they did not discuss the assessment. Based on the facts above, the researcher is interested in investigating teachers' strategies in conducting speaking assessments for young learners. This study wants to explore more about how speaking assessment conducted for young learners. Hopefully findings of this study will provide an insight for the teachers in applying appropriate assessments for assessing young learners. It is also expected that this study will give useful information about how to assess young learners in teaching learning process.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the explanation above, the following questions are carried out to guide the study.

1. What do EYL teachers know about speaking assessment?
2. What strategies do they use in assessing young learners' speaking skill?

1.3 Aims of The Study

The aims of this study will be elaborated as follows.

1. To know teachers' understanding of speaking assessments, especially for young learners.
2. To identify teachers' strategies in conducting speaking skill assessments.

1.4 The Scope of The Study

This study is concerned with speaking assessment strategies that are used by EYL teachers in assessing their students' speaking skill at five selected English courses in Bandung.

1.5 Significance of The Study

The results of the study are expected to give contributions to EYL teachers in assessing their students so the students' skill can be measured effectively. In addition, hopefully this study can give contributions to the government regarding to the assessment training programme that is obviously rarely conducted for EYL teachers. This study is also expected in providing an insight on how young learners should be assessed.

1.6 Overall Approach to the Study

This study employs a qualitative research design. As Preissle (2002) says, "qualitative design is useful to obtain an in-depth data and to understand

a particular phenomenon”. This study also employs a descriptive method. To obtain accurate data, this study relies on observations and interviews.

1.7 Clarification of Terms

- In this study, the researcher defines young learners as a unique person. Sometimes they are sensitive, therefore they need to be praised and encouraged.
- The meaning of strategies in this study are generalized plans for a lesson or lessons that made by teachers which include structure, desired learner behavior; in terms of the goals of instruction and an outline of tactics necessary to implement the strategy.
- Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information.
- Assessment defined as any method used by teachers in testing students' understanding of current knowledge.