

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to investigate the classroom-based assessment for reading comprehension, i.e. the way English teachers assess their students' reading comprehension through classroom-based assessment. This chapter presents the background of the study, research questions, the objective of the study, scope and limitation of the study, significance of the study, and thesis organisation.

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Reading comprehension and listening have become the main material of National English Examination in Indonesia since 2006. The score achieved by the students in the examination should be used to judge whether the students have or no have a good competence in English especially in the reading and listening skills. Then, it is stated whether the students can graduate or not. If they reach the score determined nationally by the government, they will graduate from a certain level. On the other hand, if they do not reach the determined score, then they will be fail to continue their study in the next level. This is not so fair because the success of students' learning, in this case, English subject, is determined based on one assessment, National Examination as one of large scale standardized test.

This issue recently has become a public complaint, including the teachers as the main education practitioners. As if they objected to the government's policy which judges the students' achievement in learning English through the final

examination only. Meanwhile, the teachers think that they are the right ones who should judge the quality of students because they teach them everyday. At least, the result of assessment conducted both by the government and teachers are compromised. Some educators think that such state-mandated test constricts curriculum and force teachers to “teach to the test,” thereby reducing the quality of instruction rather than enhancing it (McNeil, 2000 cited in Jia et al 2006:3).

Other issues related to the implementation of state-mandated test as a measurements are that such test needs high cost and the unfairness of some school institutions in conducting the test. As *Fajar* (28<sup>th</sup> April 2008), one of a daily newspaper in *Makassar*, reports that there are four cities in Indonesia: Batam, Solo, Makassar, and Deli Serdan where the teachers manipulate National Examination 2008 by giving the key answer to students.

Due to the power of the tests, some teachers teach their students for the test. In formal schools, they teach skills and strategies how to pass the tests, just like a test preparation class. In addition, some teachers seem to separate classroom assessment and instruction. Even, according to Sari (2007:423) that as a teacher trainer, she found that some teachers rarely make their own tests to evaluate their students' aptitudes. They just use tests provided on the textbooks without any review whether the tests test what they have taught. Some others simplify their tests in order their students can achieve higher score with less work and effort.

In line with the judgment of the achievement of students in learning English, especially in reading through assessment, it should not only use large scale standardized assessment but also classroom-based assessment. It requires

that teachers use their judgments about children's knowledge, understand how to include feedback in the teaching process, decide how to meet students' varying learning needs (Tunstall & Gipps, 1995), and learn how to share decision making about learning and teaching with colleagues, parents, and students (Stiggins, 1977; Gipps, 1994).

According to (Rosner et al, 1981 cited in Arthaud et al, 2000) standardized, norm-referenced measures of reading skill were found to be administered at least once each year, and provided the only means of assessment used to evaluate student progress. These authors supported the use of such measures for analysis of group performance, but did not advocate them as the only measure of progress as the complexity of the reading process cannot be summarized by a single score. Further, Klingner (2004) states that "such traditional measures of reading comprehension only provide a general indication of how well a student understands the text, failing to provide information about how the students uses cognitive and met cognitive process or sufficiently explain why a student may be struggling".

Classroom-based assessment (Calfee & Hiebert, 1991; Gottlieb, 2006; Stiggins, 1994) or informal assessment (Brown, 2001), unlike state wide mandated standardized testing which mainly contributes to public accountability, have more power to evaluate instruction and identify students' personal needs (Resnick and Resnick, 1992 cited in Jia, et al 2006). Further, Airasian (1991 in Jia, et al, 2006) states that classroom-based assessments 'occupy more of a

teacher's time and arguably have a greater impact on instruction and pupil learning than do the formal measurement procedures'.

Classroom-based assessments are seen as helpful because they give a more immediate measure of progress and achievement of students, guide and improve instruction, and diagnose student knowledge of a topic (Hurley & Tinajero, 2001; Short, 1993), provide day-to-day help with teaching and learning, which is the core and base for attaining excellence in education and school improvement (Stiggins, 1999), as well as help teachers find the weaknesses and strengths of their instruction and encourage them to continuously search for better ways to teach (Shepard, 1995 cited in Jia, et al, 2006). More specifically, in relation to reading comprehension, classroom-based assessment have a greater ability to measure complex reading tasks in a contextualized setting and can provide ample information about the use of reading strategies and skills by students (Garcia & Pearson, 1994). Since classroom-based assessments are individually oriented, they run less risk of suffering from the cultural bias to which state-mandated standardized test are prone.

Assessment is often considered as the most important part in instruction. The way learners are taught and activity carried out in the classroom are greatly influenced by assessment. In addition, Rixon (1992 cited in Defianty, 2007) says that the success of a learning program is commonly determined by the result of assessment. The learner is the centre of the learning. Consequently, the learners can choose what and how to learn, and develop the knowledge or competence in the way their want and do it. Here, the learners construct their own knowledge or

competence. In order to know and assure competency, learning must be assessed either in terms of the process or the product of the learning.

A language assessment is to measure the students' ability to use the language. This because people learn a language to be able to use the language. Brown (1994), Sato & Kleinsasser (1999) cited in Andika Sari (2007) propose "students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively". Thus, the learners need to be assessed in the actual use of the language in performance.

The high score achieved by the students in doing reading texts through formal tests, for example, final examination does not seem to guarantee that the students are very good in reading. The writer found most of students seem low and uninterested in reading subject. This is probably because they do not have strong self-confidence and enough experience in reading. They rarely do interaction with reading through varieties activities during learning of reading in the classroom. It means that teachers neglect the process rather than product in teaching learning process. The teachers use test as the best tool to measure their students' ability in reading. Hence, they assume that test gives a whole reflection of their students. Accordingly, to meet the end goal of reading instruction there must be a kind of assessment. As far as we know that to assess the students' ability especially in reading, we may not only use formal assessments in which measure the product but we may also use informal or classroom-based assessments which measure the process of constructing meaning in written text.

In relation to the power of classroom-based reading assessment as has been discussed above, this study is proposed to examine how English teachers assess the students' reading comprehension in the classroom.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

This study formulates the problems in the following research questions:

1. To what extent do English teachers understand classroom-based reading assessment?
2. What techniques do English teachers employ in assessing reading comprehension?
3. How do English teachers construct classroom-based reading assessments?

## **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

Based on the research questions mentioned above, this study is designed,

1. to investigate the teachers' understanding of classroom-based reading assessment.
2. to find the techniques that the teachers employ in assessing reading comprehension.
3. to find the way English teachers construct classroom-based reading assessments.

#### **1.4 The Scope and The Limitation of the Study**

This study attempts to investigate the three English teachers who teach English at a Madrasah Aliyah Negeri in Makassar. More specifically, this study describes teachers' understanding of classroom-based reading assessment which covers the assessment purpose, the timing of assessment, and assessed skills, what kinds of classroom-based reading assessment technique employed in assessing students' reading comprehension which consists of teacher-made and student-conducted method, and analyzing the way of English teachers in constructing the classroom-based reading assessment which consists of what sources used by the teachers in designing reading assessment instruments and methods for providing feedback.

#### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

Hopefully, this study will contribute to the development of reading assessment especially, classroom-based reading assessment at Madrasah Aliyah and for the future teaching in that school and other schools in the town. Further, this study is hoped not only for enlightening and enriching English teachers with varying classroom-based reading assessment but also for giving students insight to develop their reading comprehension by doing some different English assessment instruments. Finally, the findings of this study may inspire other researchers to conduct research on other issues in assessing reading comprehension.

## **1.6 Thesis Organization**

This study is organized in the five chapters. The first chapter is about general introduction. Chapter two presents my own perspective on relevant literature comprising the theories which have given shape to this study. The theories are to do with values of assessing reading comprehension and classroom-based assessment. Chapter three describes the research methodology of this study. The research methodology comprises the research design, data collection techniques, and data analysis. Chapter four elaborates findings and discussion. And chapter five attempts to offer conclusion and suggestions of this study.

