CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides information of the research background which describes the brief overview of the issues on the use first language or L1 in EYL classroom and the reason to conduct this research, the purposes of the study, the research questions, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, the definition of terms, and the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

The issue of the L1 use in the English as a foreign language classroom has been debated for years (Erton, 2009; Brown 2000; Miles, 2004; Tang, 2002). Some proponents for maximizing English as a target language use emphasize the benefits of language exposure, which, it is maintained, can bring about language learning gains in the form of effective and confident language use, as well as intercultural competence (Duff & Polio, 1990; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain (2009) also argues that the use of L1 should be avoided in teaching target language to make effective instruction and not to interfere learner’s target language development. Several authors (see, Krashen, 1987; Duff & Polio, 1990; Pennycook, 1994) maintain that L1 has no essential role to play in EFL teaching and that too much L1 use might deprive learners of valuable input in the L2 (Ellis, 1984).

In contrast to the arguments above, some theorists perceive that L1 could facilitate or benefit in the English language learning. The first language can be
beneficial as a cognitive tool that aids in second language learning (Antón & DiCamila, 1998; Blyth, 1995; Brooks and Donato, 1994; Cook, 2001; Swain and Lapkin, 2000 in Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009:131) and these claims have prompted them to argue in favour of some sort of principle alternation between first and second language use in the foreign language classroom (Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009:131). Other research supporting the L1 issue in EFL classrooms is discussed by Schweers (1999) that reports most of the EFL students want to use L1 in the classroom because they believe L1 could facilitate learning. Burden (2001) also argues in his study that both students and teachers believe the importance of L1 in explaining new vocabulary, giving instruction, talking about tests, grammar instruction, checking for understanding and relaxing the students.

It is also interesting to note that the use of first language may contribute to student target-language comprehension, use and learning (Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009:5). Skinner (1985, cited in Macaro, 2001 in Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009:5-6) argues that some first language use can facilitate connections between the target language and prior knowledge and ideas already developed in the first language. A number of recent studies on the use of mother tongue in the EFL classroom indicated that appropriate and judicious L1 use in the EFL classroom can play significant role in facilitating a successful second language acquisition (Schweers, 1999; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nation, 2003; Tang, 2002).

Regarding the research on EFL to young learners, the following studies support what this study intends to explore the use of L1 in EYL classroom. Inbar-Lourie (2010) has conducted a study in young EFL learners in Hebrew and Arabic
middle schools which the study particularly examined the teachers’ use of the students’ first language (L1). In line with this, Kim and Petraki (2009) have conducted the research concerning the use of L1 in EYL Korean classroom; they find that L1 plays a supportive role in the language classroom, especially in the early stage. Al-Hinai (2002) also conducted the study concerning on the use of L1 in elementary English language classroom in Oman. The classroom data suggest that the main purpose for which Arabic is used in this study was to translate words and instructions. Arabic was also widely used for class management and control.

So, based on the various positions and argumentations regarding the use of L1 in the EFL/EYL classroom, the study investigates the use of L1 at elementary school which has not been conducted yet previously specifically in Tasikmalaya. Moreover, the study focuses on the aspects of the stages of teaching in which L1 is used, the function of L1 and teachers’ reasons for using L1 in EYL teaching learning process. The study is expected to give contributions to the enlightenment of the use of first language in EYL classroom.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

According to the background, the study is addressed to:

1. Investigate in what stage of teaching the teacher uses L1 in EYL classroom.
2. Investigate what function of L1 is being used in EYL classroom.
3. Find out teachers’ reasons in using L1 in EYL classroom.
1.3 Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. In what stage of teaching does the teacher use L1 in EYL classroom?
2. For what function is L1 being used in EYL classroom?
3. Why do the teachers use L1 in EYL classroom?

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study is intended to find out the use of L1 in EYL classroom at three elementary schools in Tasikmalaya, which become the representatives of higher, medium and lower level of elementary schools. Particularly, the study also concerns on the use of L1 in each stage of teaching teacher uses, and the frequency of using L1. Moreover the study aims to figure out the function of L1 which is being used and to look for the teacher’s reason to use L1 in the process of teaching learning process in EYL classroom. Therefore, this study is hopefully expected to give the benefit for teacher and students in enhancing the teaching learning process of young learners in learning English.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant and valuable since so far studies related to the use of L1 focused in teaching English as a foreign language, therefore this study as a study that focused on young learners classrooms may potentially contribute to three aspects of education; theoretically, practically and professionally.
Theoretically, this study imparts some information as one study attempted to fill in the gap of related studies previously which are dominated by research on the L1 use in adult context of teaching EFL. Additionally, the study which deals with this approach in the use of L1 to young learners is also still rare; if there is any, some of them still focus on its role of L1 (Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Kim and Petraki, 2009). This study will contribute to add the repertoire of those previous related studies. Practically, this study is beneficial for the teachers to utilize L1 in some certain situations related to the process of teaching English to young learners that students are able to come up their English performance with the use of L1 in the classroom. They can be guided and facilitated in developing their English. Hence, this hopefully can help them to gain in their understanding of learning English as a foreign language. Lastly, from professional aspect, the result of the study could be beneficial for the English teachers who are directly involved in teaching English to young learners classroom. The information can be used as a basic to improve the teaching learning process of English to young learners in terms of students needs in order to facilitate them in learning English as a foreign language particularly by the teachers at the research site.

1.6 Definitions of the Terms

- First language or L1

First language defines “a person’s mother tongue or the language acquired first. In multilingual communities, however, where a child may gradually shift from the main use of one language to the main use of another, first language may
refer to the language the child feels most comfortable using.” (Richards et al., 1985:106)

- Young Learners

According to Pinter (2006:2) young learners include children who are at pre-school or in the first couple of years of schooling.

- Teaching English to Young Learners

The program of government as a local content which aims to teach English at the age between 6 to 12 years old in Indonesian primary school level.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters involving Chapter 1 which discusses the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, scope of the study, and also the significance of the study, Chapter 2 presents the literature review of the study, Chapter 3 talks about the research methodology that involves research design, site and participants, collecting the data, and analyzing the data, Chapter 4 displays how the data are interpreted and discussed according to the finding, and chapter 5 concerns on the conclusion and recommendation of the study.