

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the background of the study which presents ideas reasoning the study, continued by presenting the research questions and the purposes of the study. While the significance of the study, the scope of the study, and the definitions of the terms are described later. To give such a brief description of the structure of this research report, then, the organization of the thesis is also illustrated briefly in the end of this chapter.

1.1. Background of the Study

English teaching and learning practice has been developing through times. The development is indicated by many innovations and improvements (Iwamura, 2006). The improvements in English language education seem vary, ranges from the most philosophical aspects such as the view of English as the target language to the more specific aspects of teaching practices, such as the teaching approaches and methodologies and so on (Rausch, 2000). In the particular context of English as a foreign language education in Indonesia, it is indicated by improvement in English education which always takes places from time to time (Wijanarko, 2007).

The improvements evidentially indicate that the government gives attention to English teaching as one of language teaching practices and that the

need of the proficiency of the target language is progressively getting demanding for the community (Nasution, et.al, 2009). In line with this idea, Alwasilah (2000:27) says that language education is aimed at developing people's language skills for various purposes.

Rausch (2000) says that language testing is one of the aspects in the English language education which is also improved in harmony with the development in English teaching. English language testing's fundamental roles have been shown by the great attention of teachers, learners, government, and society especially to some definite form of tests, for example on some high-stakes tests such as final tests at schools, university entrance tests, job entrance tests, and so on. These facts are relevant with Harris's (1969) statement that English test is an undeniable need in educational practice which provides some principal uses in educational programs. Since test seems as unavoidable as tomorrow's sunrise in virtually every kind of educational setting (Brown, 2004:1), it is impossible to position test far from teaching and learning practice. They are closely related and the relationship has some principal functions. In line with these ideas, McNamara (2000) also gives some arguments. First, language test plays a powerful role in many people's lives. Secondly, it is needed in professional life such as teacher, administrator, and so on. Thirdly, it may be needed in conducting research in language study.

Testing or other forms of assessment is actually a learner's need, too. It is also demanded by learners when they are learning as they need to know their own achievement (Ellaneri, 2009). In line with it, Harmer (2001:59) states that one of

the things that students expect from their teachers in learning English is an indication (which is represented by the tests' result) of whether or not their English are right. In this case, according to him, teachers have to act as an assessor who can assess students' English through some suitable ways, such as offering feedback and correction and grading students through testing their language proficiency.

Since language testing has significant roles in language education, therefore, there is no doubt that developing a critical understanding of the principles and practice of language testing is an undeniable need for all those involved in language educational practices. It means that adequate understanding of language testing is not merely relevant but also be needed for more generally those involved in using tests or the information they provide in practical and research contexts, and more specifically those actually involved in teaching language and creating language tests. Based on those arguments, it seems reasonable for English teachers and educational institutions to have sustainable capacity to develop and resemble language testing for students in their language teaching and learning programs.

As a result, teachers as the pillars of teaching practices are those who are central in developing and conducting a test as one of the teacher's roles in educational duty is taking part as an assessor (Harmer, 2001:59). In the context of Indonesia, however, it is common to find erroneous English tests especially those which are constructed by the teachers (Wijanarko, 2004).

In consideration of the importance of language testing in language education and the fact that it is common to find erroneous English tests especially those which are constructed by the teachers, the present study, therefore, concerns with the importance of the practice of developing English tests. It investigates descriptively how final tests on English for the sixth grades primary school students in 2008/2009 are constructed by the teachers. It also reveals the test's compliance with the objectives of the program. This study firstly focuses on the steps in the construction of the English final tests which are conducted by the selected English teachers. Then, it analyzes the compliance of the English final tests constructed by the teachers and the objectives of the English program applied at the schools.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study is particularly attempted at investigating descriptively how the construction of the final test on English which are done by the English teachers for the sixth grades primary school students in 2008/2009 and how the test's compliance with the objectives of the program. Based on the formulation of the research questions, therefore, the purpose of this study is more specifically formulated as follow:

1. To find what steps the teachers do in constructing the final tests on English for the sixth grades primary school students.
2. To find out to what extent the tests comply with the objectives of the English program conducted in the schools or not.

1.3. Research Questions

This study is attempted at answering these following research questions:

1. What steps do teachers do in constructing the English final tests for the sixth grades primary school students?
2. To what extent do the English final tests comply with the objectives of the English program conducted in the school?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is particularly attempted at investigating descriptively what steps the teachers do in constructing the final tests on English for the sixth grades primary school students and to find out the tests' compliance with the objectives of the program. It is hoped that this study can reveal any valuable information deals with the development of English test, which is gained from the particular case of the English final tests' development.

Despite numerous studies regarding language testing on English as a foreign language teaching and learning being of different contexts, empirical research is still lacking on the investigation of the process of construction of language test of public examination for primary school, particularly in the area where the present study is conducted. It might be caused by the fact that English has been being taught in primary school as a relatively new subject since in the context of Indonesia.

The finding of this study is, therefore, hoped to have valuable remark to be taken into account especially by the English teachers as the decision makers in

conducting such sustainable English language testing at schools. It is also hoped to be useful for those who deal with language teaching and language testing, since one way to minimize the potential for negative washback on instruction is to change the way we test so that the characteristics of the test and test tasks correspond more closely to the characteristics of the instructional program (Bachman & Palmer, 1996).

Specifically, the significance of the study is formulated as follows:

1. For English teachers, the result of this study is hoped to be valuable information especially related to their consideration and effort in attempting any development of EFL testing for their teaching and learning activities.
2. For other researchers, this study is hoped to be beneficial information which may function as additional information or possibly as such starting point for their own further researches on language testing.
3. For the government as the policy maker of the public education, this study is hoped to provide such valuable information to be taken into account especially by the Department of the National Education of Indonesia in developing and conducting such sustainable English language testing for students which does not only comply the objectives of the program and the students' need, but also being able to motivate students and to support teachers to conduct such quality language testing activities for students at school.

1.5. Scope of the Study

To focus the study into its' particular concern, the researcher makes some limitations of the scope of the study. The present study attempts to investigate descriptively what steps the teachers do in constructing the final tests on English for the sixth grades primary school students in 2008/2009 and to find out the tests' compliance with the objectives of the English program. It deals only with the case of the construction of the English final tests for the students of the sixth grade primary school which is conducted by the teachers at the primary Schools in Purworejo, Central Java, in the academic years of 2008/2009.

The study involves only the sample which is quite limited as it involves three selected teachers who teach English in three different primary schools as the sample of the study. The three teachers are selected as the respondents since they are obliged by the UPTD (the Unit of Technical Operation of the Office of National Education) to construct the English tests for the sixth grade of elementary schools students. Due to the limitation of the research scope, as well as the time constraint, the data will be collected from the limited particular sample.

In relation to the second research question, the research particularly concerns only with the English final tests for the sixth grade primary school students which are in the form of written multiple choice tests. Therefore, the tests do not deal with language skills, but they deal with some discreet point of language elements, i.e. vocabulary and grammar. Consequently, the objectives of the English teaching and learning here, particularly deal with the standards of competence which also deals with the students' mastery of language elements of

vocabulary and grammar which were involved in all of the semesters (from the first semester of the fifth grade to the second semester of the sixth).

Since the characteristic of qualitative research is subjective and it is an exploration of what is assumed to be a dynamic reality in which it does not claim that what is discovered in the process is universal and, thus, replicable (McKereghan, 1998), therefore the result of the study may not be generalized for other cases in other different contexts.

1.6. Definitions of the Terms

This present study operates some key terms which are in details explained in the following definitions:

a) *Investigation*

Investigation is the process of inquiring into a matter through research, follow-up, study, or formal procedure of discovery (online-dictionary). In this particular context of the study, investigations means inquiring the problems which are represented by two research questions through a research.

b) *Language Test Construction*

Language Test Construction is the process of developing a test for measuring learners' achievement in a language program which involves several periodical steps. In this research, the language test construction means the construction of English final tests of the selected elementary

schools constructed by the teachers through steps who are the respondents of the study.

c) *Compliance*

Compliance is the degree of how something submits or conforms to its requirements, rules, or objectives. The word compliance is used in this research particularly in the sentence 'the English final tests' compliance with the objectives of the program' to represent the degree of how the English final tests submits or conforms to the objectives of the English program conducted in the schools.

d) *Program:*

A program is a plan of what is to be done (Hornby, 1974:666), or a plan which has been developed for particular purposes or objectives (Collins' English Dictionary). Here, the researcher uses the term program particularly in the phrase 'English program' which means systematic plan in the form of syllabuses of the curriculum which has been developed to achieve particular purposes or objectives.

e) *English final test*

English Final Test is an achievement test which is used for measuring students' achievement of English materials addressed in curriculum and roles to determine whether course objectives have been met –and appropriate knowledge and skills acquired- by the end of period of instruction (Brown, 2004). In this context of study, the English final test is the achievement test on English which is used for measuring the sixth

grade elementary schools students' achievement of English materials addressed in curriculum and roles to determine whether course objectives have been met –and appropriate knowledge and skills acquired- by the end of period of instruction of English teaching and learning activities in the three elementary schools which have been selected as the sites of the study. The test is limited in the form of written multiple choice test which deals with linguistic elements of the target language, i.e. vocabulary and grammar.

1.7. Organization of the Thesis

The report of this study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter mainly discusses the reason and the purposes of the study. It presents the background of the study, the aims of the study and research questions, significance of the study, the scopes of the study, the definitions of the terms, the delimitation of the study, and the thesis organization.

Some concepts adopted for the study is discussed on chapter two. The definition of language testing, the qualities of language testing, the understanding of achievement test on foreign language, and the process of constructing a language test are discussed in series. In addition, this chapter discusses the previous studies undertaken by others on similar issues.

The third chapter of this thesis explains the way the researcher carried out this study. It covers the research design, the research site, the participants, the data collection techniques, and the data analysis.

Chapter four is the data presentation and discussion. Here the data which are from questionnaires, interviews and documentations are categorized and analyzed based on the formulation of the research questions.

The last chapter consists of the conclusion of the study based on the results of the study and some suggestions which are possibly valuable for those who are interested in English language teaching and English language testing, especially for those who are the test writers for the final tests on English for the sixth year of elementary school students.

