

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, the research questions, the research goals, and the significance of the study. In addition, some definitions of specific terms and the organization of the study are also presented.

1.1 Background

When a teacher stands in front of the class and starts teaching, i.e. accommodating students with a set of planned activities, he bears certain beliefs within himself. In relation to teaching children, what he believes about how children learn affects what activities he develops to be administered in his class. In other words, the way he creates conditions for learning through planning, management and responses to his students is determined by his beliefs and assumptions (Moon, 2004).

One of the factors that require consideration in teaching is the students' age. Teachers of young learners should be aware of the age of their students and make the best out of it. It is to consider when designing teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Activities in the classroom are to be adjusted to the students' characteristics in order to achieve the success of the learning. Consequently, during the lesson a good scenario that involves consideration of the characteristics of a certain age group, young children, is believed to promote students' motivation in learning (Harmer, 1999: 8).

Teachers of English need to consider their students' age which supports the basis of their teaching practices and materials, including media. Recognizing their

students' characteristics would enrich their knowledge on how to deal with their students with certain age. Teachers would take the factor of the students' age into account in formulating a topic to deliver, starting from the learning objectives, activities, media, and assessment. Harmer (2001) claimed that people of different ages have different needs, competence, and cognitive skills. Thus, by being aware of the children's development of learning, teachers will be better in providing appropriate learning experiences for their students (Linse, 2005).

The focus of the study is to investigate what teachers believe about their students' characteristics and way of learning in public elementary schools. There are some points that are accounted as misunderstandings of teachers towards young children, as stated by Cameron (2001), in her book *Teaching Languages to Young Learners*. These false assumptions include that teaching children is straightforward and that children only need to learn simple language. The first assumption refers to teaching children seen as an extension of mothering, not as an intellectual enterprise. And, the latter claims that the topics (the teaching materials) for teaching language to children are simple, for example colors, numbers, songs and talking about themselves.

Those assumptions are considered false because teaching children needs specialty. Teachers of young learners need skill in managing children, beside to have knowledge of language, of teaching, and of language learning. Children are not only interested in simple topics but also complicated, difficult, and abstract topics (Cameron, 2001). Therefore, teachers of young learners have to have capability of how to manage children and what to teach them.

These kinds of misassumption interest me in such a way that I would like to know more on what the teachers of English in elementary school believe about

children's characteristics, children's way of learning and implication of their beliefs in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Many studies report teachers' beliefs in language learning principles and how the beliefs affect the teachers' teaching practices in the classroom. Two studies—among others—are discussed as follow. Hind, et al (2000) observed that there were five kinds of practices of English language teaching as a second language in the classes of a primary school in Australia. First, the teachers provided practical and multimodal activities. Second, they gave explicit modeling and discussion of managing the students' own learning. Third, in order to ease of the students' feelings of comfort and to foster their self-confidence, the teachers referred to the students' experience of other cultures and languages. In addition to the skills to be mastered by the students, the teachers provided the four language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The last is being aware of their role as a teacher; they focused on the students' production of language--emphasizing on modeling 'correct' 'standard' English.

What the teachers did in the classroom was very much influenced by the age principles and the approach they believed. The principles and approach are of how to teach children in primary schools. Age was a factor affecting methods by which language was best learned. Children were perceived to have more time to achieve mastery of a second language and thus freer to 'explore' and 'discover' in the language learning.

Another study carried out by Liao (2007) revealed that elementary school English teachers in Taiwan, both in-service and pre-service ones, shared a similar and consistent set of beliefs. Most of them had common beliefs about: (1) the nature of children's English language development, which was in accordance with the research

literature on foreign language learning; (2) English teaching methods and techniques employed in the classroom, which were basically in tune with the teaching principles of CLT; and (3) a strong sense of self-efficacy as English teachers in terms of doing their work, which might have a positive impact on their performance based on the research findings of educational psychology.

Particularly in Indonesian setting, Huda (1999) points out that the teaching English in elementary school should be conducted using special methods that suit the nature of young learners. It needs special environments and techniques of teaching so that children can learn effectively. Furthermore, it is obvious that to create the special environments and to use the techniques, teachers need to identify the characteristics of their students and how they learn.

Several facts are exposed to the teaching and learning English language in Indonesia. Suyanto's observation exposed that children in elementary school learning English were burdened with grammars and translation (<http://www.bpkpenabur.or.id/kps-jkt/berita/200106/bahas.pdf>). This phenomenon is generally caused by the lack of knowledge on how children learn, that refers to the approach the teachers believe in, and of understanding on the factors influencing foreign language learning for young children. Consequently, children may lose their interest to learn English. He further asserted that teachers had an important role in the success of teaching and learning English language in the elementary school.

Another finding is stated by Dormer (2007) in his article. He found that many teachers focused on accommodating their students to pass the test. Neglecting the learning principles, the process of teaching and learning English in the classroom put

much effort on the success of the students in achieving high scores. They neglected their focus to teach their students on the pursuit to proficiency in English.

Considering the facts above, it is worth investigating the teaching and learning English in elementary schools, particularly in the public elementary schools in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. The study reports what the teachers believe about children and how they learn, and how it affects the ways their teaching the language in the classroom. The implication studied is limited to the teaching practice during the lesson hour. Accordingly the result of the study supports the improvement of English language teaching and learning in elementary schools.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background mentioned above, this study is to address the following questions:

- (1) What do the teachers believe about children's characteristics?
- (2) What do the teachers believe about how children learn a foreign language?
- (3) Is what they believe reflected in the process of teaching English in their classrooms?

1.3 Research Goals

There are several aims to achieve in this study. First, it is to find out the teachers' beliefs on children's characteristics and their way of learning. Then, it is to see whether what they believe are reflected in the way they administer the lesson in their classrooms.

1.4 Significance of The Study

This study suggests the teachers' beliefs about children, including their learning principles and the effects on their techniques in teaching English language in the classroom. The findings of the study are expected to be beneficial to the improvement of English teaching and learning activities in elementary schools. Since teaching children is not the same as teaching adults in regards of having different natures, teachers of English in elementary schools are more encouraged to learn more about the nature of children and approaches that are suitable for teaching children in elementary schools.

1.5 Definitions of the Terms

To the extent of the study, some terms are clarified as follow:

Teacher's beliefs refer to teachers' beliefs on pedagogic setting. It relates to the principles the teachers have in the way children learn and their reflection on the teaching practices in the classroom

Young learners refer to elementary school students. They range from grade 1 to 6.

English for Young Learners is English language taught to children, especially in elementary school.

Teaching techniques refer to specific classroom activities, conducted by teachers and students (Brown, 2001).

1.6 Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. Here is the list of the organization.

Chapter 1 deals with the background and focus of the study and relevant researches concerning teachers' beliefs and the teachers' teaching practices in their classroom.

Chapter 2 presents the discussion on the teachers' beliefs, children characteristics and theories of learning. It also includes implications of the children characteristics and learning theories in language learning.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology and explains how the data are collected and analyzed based on the literature reviews presented in Chapter 2.

In **Chapter 4**, the findings are presented to show what the teacher participants' beliefs on children and how children learn a language. Then, these findings are discussed to see the implications of the beliefs and the teaching practices the teachers conducted in their classrooms.

In **Chapter 5**, some limitations of the study are discussed, the conclusions of this study are provided, and suggestions for further research are proposed.