

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

One of the ways to improve students' proficiency in English is introducing English language in early stage, in the primary school (Listia & Kamal, 2008). English language subject at Indonesian primary school is a local content subject which is usually taught as an extracurricular subject. Local content subjects are subjects that can be taught in primary and secondary education level apart from compulsory subjects stated in National Curriculum.

However, teaching young learners a foreign language takes extra considerations. Teaching a starter (young learner grade 1-3) poses unique challenges. According to Cameron (2001, p. xii), teaching foreign languages to children requires skills to reach into children's world as teachers need to understand how children make sense of the world, and how children learn. Durrant (2014) gives an example of teaching English to first grade students, a strategy to manage students in her class. In one of her first lessons, she wanted to tell a story, but she found it hard to maintain the students' attention and keep the students in their place. She decided to make a strategy for the next lesson. She asked half of the

students to sit at the front and the rest at the back. She explained that the front ones were 'doers' and the back ones were 'helpers'. Then, she drew a line on the floor using chalk. Her strategy was that the 'doers' had to participate actively in her lesson and the 'helpers' had to help those at the front to understand the story. They had to make sure the 'doers' were listening and attentive. She also told the students that the line was a magic line. She said that the magic line wanted them to sit and listen, and they could not cross it until the story was ended. Durrant writes that from that day, many classes begin with magic line and the children sit in front of it. Durrant (2014) concludes that those strategies really help the teacher to manage the students better and help the students to stay focused.

Steinberg (1999, p. 209) says that children are easier to accept language in a natural situation. Then, the method must be implemented by teachers, i.e. teaching in natural situations. The method may consist of teaching through activities such as playing, singing, drawing, coloring, and other activities related to the characteristics of children in general (Scott and Ytreberg, 1995). Scott and Ytreberg mention that very simple sentences related to the theme being studied can be inserted in the game as well as in the song to be sung. Through playing and singing children will remember the lessons delivered more easily. In both activities, children will be directly involved in the learning process so that they will be more active. In short, teaching children or young learners a foreign language is

not only to teach them language skills academically, but also to make them familiar with the language itself.

In the learning process, the role of the teachers, then, is important. Tompkins (2009) states that teachers must be able to draw on the learning process associated with prior knowledge of the child to be associated with the material studied. Being able to connect the knowledge that the students had already had to the subject being studied will result in an effective learning process and achieve learning objectives (Tompkins, 2009).

Based on the facts that teaching children or young learners needs understanding of children's characteristics such as children's preference to natural settings, children's playing and singing activities, and materials appropriated to children's prior knowledge, the researcher has decided to analyze the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English for primary school students especially the first grade. Then, the researcher analyzed how the teachers overcome those challenges.

1.2 FIELD OF THE STUDY

The field of this study is applied linguistics.

1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study encompasses the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English to the first year students and the

strategies to overcome the challenges. The researcher conducted her study in three primary schools in Semarang.

1.4 PROBLEM FORMULATION

The researcher, in this study, formulates two problems:

1. What are the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English to first year students of primary school?
2. What are the strategies that English teachers take to overcome the challenges?

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Considering the problems mentioned above, this study is conducted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching English to first year students.
2. To identify the strategies that teachers take to overcome the challenges.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is important for many reasons. The importance of this study is to find out the challenges of teaching English to first year students in primary school and the strategies to overcome the challenges. Therefore, the researcher expects that this study can be a useful reference

for English teachers in primary school especially for those teaching first year students.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

a. Young Learners

Young learners are those who learn foreign or second languages during the first six or seven years of formal schooling. Most countries apply a system in their education system that young learners are children who learn foreign languages in primary school (McKay, 2008, p.1).

b. English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

EFL refers to the English learning in a country where English is not the native language (Paul, 2007, p.1).

c. Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Teaching English as a foreign language involves teaching adults and children whose first or main language is not English (AGCAS, 2015).

d. Challenge

Mariani (1997) stated that challenge is facing the unexpected and the unpredictable things. In Cambridge dictionary, challenge is the situation of being faced with or something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully (Cambridge, 2017).

However, the challenge in this study is limited to the challenges of teaching English faced by English teachers in the classroom.

