

CHAPTER I

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I.1. Background of the Study

From time to time, people are interested to learn another language beside their mother tongue. English has become a language which is learned by people all over the world. In learning English, we have to deal with the language skills – listening, reading, writing, and speaking. However, most people usually focus on learning how to be fluent in speaking English. They just want to be able to communicate with other people using the language, but sometimes they forget that they have to pronounce the words correctly in order to be understood by the native speakers of English.

A language is made up of sounds. These sounds make up words and sentences. We should practice the sounds and the words but our aim should be to master the complete utterance – to understand what is said to us in ordinary conversation and to be able to speak so that an English speaker can understand us.

It is very important for English language learners to have an ability in pronouncing English words. Since the sounds of vowels in English words are different from one word to another, such as in ‘cap’ and ‘cape’, students find this aspect particularly difficult.

The reason of the writer in doing this study came from the fact that many Indonesian elementary students find difficulty in pronouncing English words correctly. There might be several reasons why these young learners face this problem. It could be from the students themselves who do not know the exact pronunciation of the English words. It

also could be from their teachers who do not teach them how to pronounce English words correctly. These children do not have confidence in pronouncing the English words since they are not sure about the correct ones. They are not able to identify and pronounce the sounds of the English vowels correctly, either. In other words, the students are not able to know the relations between sounds and letters in English. These relations are called *phonics*.

Moreover, when a student of a foreign language who has had some instruction according to the usual method first hears the spoken language, he often fails to understand what has been said. He usually claims that the vocabulary is too difficult for him. When a written text is placed before him he might be able to interpret the same material correctly and react accordingly. It is not, then, only a lack of knowledge of vocabulary items which is causing trouble, but it is the inability of the student to recognize the sounds of the language.

Based on the phenomena, phonics is very important to be taught to English language learners. Lado and Fries state that we must teach the sound system of English just as we teach the system of structure. (Lado and Fries, 1973: ii) Many words are distinguished solely by a difference of vowel sound as in *peal, pill, pale, pal, pull, pole, Paul*. Likewise there are many words that are differentiated by a single consonant sound as in the series *fin, pin, bin, tin, din, kin, sin, shin, thin*. These contrasts in a sound must be taught just as we teach the contrasting structure 'He's a doctor' and 'Is he a doctor', pronounced with the same falling intonation.

Teaching the pronunciation of a foreign language often means teaching the students merely to produce the sounds of the language. However, pronunciation of a foreign language is a two-fold process. It involves aural receptivity or the recognition of

sounds as well as the actual production of sounds. (Lado and Fries, 1973: iii) That is, a student is faced with the problem of recognizing the significant sounds in the language he is learning before he can learn to produce them. It means that learning phonics is very important for a student in order to be able to produce the correct pronunciation.

The problem is that the English teachers of elementary schools usually do not teach phonics during the English lesson. They usually just teach the names of the alphabets along with the examples based on the alphabets as the beginning letters of the words, such as 'A' for apple, alligator, etc. They do not pronounce the words with correct pronunciation, either. Even, they are not able to distinguish the sound distinctions of the words. It is because the teachers themselves do not master English phonics. That is why the teaching of phonics is rarely done.

Based on this phenomenon, the teachers actually make the students confuse because there are differences in pronouncing the English words from one teacher to another. But they do not realize this. They think that their pronunciation is already correct.

Moreover, the teachers of English at elementary levels usually do not pay too much attention to the correct pronunciation. Instead, they deal more with the vocabulary and sometimes with the ability to speak English without considering the correctness of the pronunciation of the words. This is due to the fact that teachers of English at elementary schools are not familiar with the teaching of phonics.

Another phenomena that happens in the teaching of English at elementary schools is that the teachers might teach phonics to their students, but it is boring. The students do not like learning phonics, because it is difficult for them. Moreover, it is not interesting and fun at all, because the teachers just use the traditional method – that is 'just spoken'. In this case, the teacher says the beginning sound of the word 'apple' and the

students listen and repeat after the teacher. For example, the teacher says 'A' sounds [æ] like in 'apple', and the students just repeat after the teacher. The teachers are not able to make the teaching and learning phonics fun for the students, so, the teaching of phonics in elementary levels usually does not work well.

Learning phonics is a way to develop children's ability in pronouncing English words. It is because in learning phonics, children will not learn the alphabets only, but also the sound distinctions of the English consonants and vowels. We know that the teaching and learning phonics are not that easy, both for teacher and students, so we should find a way to make these effective and enjoyable, especially for children.

There are many ways of teaching and learning phonics. Since children have an enormous capacity for finding and making fun, one of the resources that can be utilized in the teaching and learning of English phonics is the use of songs. Music and rhythm are an essential part of language learning for young learners. Children really enjoy chanting raps.

There are many advantages of using songs and music in the language classroom. Songs and music can be used to relax students and provide an enjoyable classroom atmosphere (Griffie, 1992:4). When we learn a new language, we feel insecure. However, when there are songs, we feel more secure since it gives us the external cover while at the same time providing the internal support to carry on with the task. Songs and music can also expose students to the rhythms of language. Additionally, popular songs contain examples of colloquial speech. For example, the use of [n] sound instead of full '-ing' form can be found in many songs, because this kind of use is a regular feature of standard English.

Furthermore, bringing a song into the classroom entails bringing the culture of the song with it. Therefore, songs can be used as a way of looking at a culture and comparing it with other cultures. Next, songs can be used as texts in the same way as a poem, short story or novel or any other piece of authentic material. Thus, teachers can use songs to develop a special course for which no text exists.

Other advantages of songs can be seen from their use in teaching: (Griffiee, 1992:5-6)

- Conversation: as a launching pad for conversation, it means that the form of the songs can be discussed or their content can be used for class discussion.
- Vocabulary: songs provide a meaningful context for the vocabulary.
- Grammatical structures: songs provide a natural context for the most common structures such as verb tenses; rhythm and stress on songs can provide for some languages a suitable way to teach and practice the several skills we group together under the term pronunciation.
- Pattern practice and memory retention: songs give pleasurable repetition with no boredom and provide active participation in the language.

Since the effect of the syllabus on selecting and developing materials is of utmost significance, the writer will design a syllabus for learning phonics for grade one and grade two elementary students. There are several types of syllabi. The writer combined a structural/formal syllabus and a skill-based syllabus. It is due to the use of syllabus in this study, since in phonics the learners learn specific language skills, - pronunciation and reading, in this case reading aloud -, and include a collection of forms, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and so on.

I.2. Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is that there has not been any English Phonics Materials that can be used by teachers for elementary level in Indonesia. There are many readymade teaching materials that can be used to teach phonics. On the other hand, a lot of them cannot be used directly, because they might not be suitable to gain the objective of the intended program as they are either too broad, too easy, or too difficult for students' level. Therefore, an alternative is offered to solve this problem, that is by developing learning phonics materials based on the ability of grade one and grade two of elementary students.

In developing learning phonics material, the writer develops a syllabus as a basic operation of the teaching.

I.3. Purpose of the Materials Development

This study is intended to develop and provide materials for teaching phonics to the elementary school students especially for the first and second grades of elementary level.

I.4. Specification of the Product

The result of this development is a teaching-learning package on phonics for grade one and grade two elementary school students as part of the English course.

The teaching-learning package consists of one course book to guide the teaching and learning process in elementary school and one workbook for students to do the exercises on phonics.

In a course book, teachers can find the syllabus of the phonics course, the teaching-learning materials, and a guidance for teaching the materials. The workbook is intended for the students to do the exercises after learning phonics from the course book and after the teacher's guidance.

1.5. Significance of the Materials Development

Developing the syllabus and materials for students is very important to overcome the gap between the ideal condition and the real condition. The ideal condition is that there should be a syllabus and its teaching materials that can support the teaching-learning process to gain the instructional objectives.

The result of this study is intended to provide a model of syllabus and its teaching material for teaching phonics to elementary school students and to guide other researchers of the same field of study in developing their teaching-learning materials.

1.6. Assumptions of the Materials Development

This study is done with the assumptions that (1) phonics is very important since the ability of producing sounds in the language – in this case is English – is influenced by the ability to recognize the significant sounds in the language and (2) the availability of the phonics syllabus and its teaching materials can accelerate the achievement of the instructional objectives.

1.7. Scope and Limitation of the Materials Development

The teaching materials are going to be used by first and second grades of elementary school students, since the beginners are the important phase for learning how to pronounce and read correctly.

There are, however, severe limits on how much phonics can be learned and taught. Smith in Krashen, S. on *The Phonics Debate: 2002* points out that phonics rules can be very complex and many do not work well, such as the famous one “two vowels go walking, first does the talking” rule. Other problems with phonics include the different size of students' vocabularies and different dialects of English that vary in their pronunciation rules.

The phonics learning material will not cover the audio program, because of the limited time the writer has.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms

- 1) Syllabus is the specification of content for a single course or subject (Yalden, 1987:72).
- 2) Phonics is the relation between letters and spelling patterns of English' alphabet and the speech sounds they represent (Balmuth, 1982:3).
- 3) Elementary students are pupils of elementary school/primary school.
- 4) Developing materials is making the materials evaluation and providing appropriate phonics materials for grade one and two of elementary students.