

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The National Education Department which has been undergoing up to the present has achieved significant extent, nevertheless a number of complicated barriers are still remaining to be solved such as low access and distribution of education, low quality, relevance, and competitiveness of education, and low management, accountability, and public image of education administration.

To solve the problems, the National Education Department has formulated three pillars of general policy of National Education Development, they are : (1) the increase of education distribution and expansion, (2) the increase of quality, relevance, and education competitiveness, (3) revitalization of management, accountability and public education administration images. The three pillars underpin the emergence of national education vision which is to establish intelligent and competitive Indonesians.

One of the problems of education today is the incompetency of the first up to the third graders in reading, writing and arithmetic, three basic competencies obligatorily owned by early stage learners.

According to the research report by PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), the reading competency average of Indonesian children is at the 41st out of 45 countries studied. Nurhadi (2004: 6) reports that from several international institutions known that the competitiveness of Indonesian human resources is far from several international institutions known that the competitiveness of Indonesian human resources is far from expectation. Based on

Human Development Report year 2000 of UNDP version, the rank of Indonesian Human Resources (Human Development Index) is the 105th among 108 countries. Indonesia is far below Philippines (the 77th), Thailand (76th), Malaysia (61st), Brunei Darrussalam (the 32nd), South Korea (the 30th), and Singapore (the 24th). Other international organizations also indicated so. The International Education Achievement (IEA), reported that Indonesian elementary school student's reading competency is the 38th among 39 countries under study. Meanwhile, The Third Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), an institution that measures the quality of education in the world, reported that Indonesian junior high school students' mathematics competency is the 34th among 38 countries and their natural science competency is at the 32nd among 38 countries.

In addition to the problem above, the National Education Department reported that there are more problems at the levels of early education (grade 1 up to 3). Course repetitions and drop outs were very high at these levels. The data of 1999/2000 revealed that the number of course repetition in grade 1 was 11.6%, in grade 2 was 7,51%, in grade 3 was 6,13%, in grade 4 was 4,64%, in grade 5 was 3,1%, and grade 6 was 0,37%. In the same years the percentage of drop outs in grade 1 was 4,22% much higher than grade 2 which was 0,83%, grade 3 was 2,27%, grade 4 was 2,71%, and grade-6 was 1,78%. These national figures were even worse in provincial areas especially in those where there are very few play groups such as in remote isolated areas. At the moment there are only a few elementary school students who were previously educated in preschool programs. In 1999-2000 it was recorded that 12,61% or 1.583.467 learners of 4-6 years of age were enrolled in play groups, and fewer than 5% of learners were enrolled in

other form of preschool programs. These problems indicated the preparedness of early education in Indonesia is very low. Research finding indicates that learners who were educated in play groups are more prepared for the next level of education compared to those who are not. Besides, different approaches, models, and learning principles employed in grades 1 and as well as 2 those employed in preschool programs could be responsible for failure in promotion to the next grade or even drop outs.

The following table contains data of national examination result of the sixth graders at the 4 subjects.

TABLE 1.1

Examination Result of Catholic Elementary School Students of Sibolga
School Year 2007/2008

No.	Subject	Average	The lowest	The Highest
1.	Mathematics	8.51	6.00	9.75
2.	Indonesian	8.43	6.40	9.80
3.	Natural Science	7.54	6.25	8.25

Source : Catholic Elementary School No. 2 of Sibolga, File

TABLE 1.2

Examination Result of Catholic Elementary School Students of Sibolga
School Year 2008/2009

No.	Subject	Average	The lowest	The Highest
1.	Mathematics	7.63	4.75	9.50
2.	Indonesian	7.64	6.00	8.60
3.	Natural Science	7.88	6.50	9.25

Source : Catholic Elementary School No. 2 of Sibolga, File

TABLE 1.4

Examination Result of Catholic Elementary School Students of Sibolga, Grade
Three Semester I
School Year 2008/2009

No.	Subject	Average	The lowest	The Highest
1.	Mathematics	71	61	85
2.	Indonesian	70	60	82
3.	Natural Science	73	64	85

Source : Catholic Elementary School No. 2 of Sibolga, File

TABLE 1.5

Examination Result of Catholic Elementary School Students of Sibolga Grade
Three Semester II
School year 2008/2009

No.	Subject	Average	The lowest	The Highest
1.	Mathematics	72	56	87
2.	Indonesian	70	54	90
3.	Natural Science	73	55	90

Source : Catholic Elementary School No. 2 of Sibolga, File

The above data prevails the learning outcomes of Catholic elementary school students at three mandatory subjects : mathematics, Indonesian, and natural sciences in the state examination of 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 academic years.

The data show that the result of the Indonesian examination is lower than those of mathematics and natural sciences. The learning outcome of the third graders in the first and second semester of 2008/2009 school year prevails that the result at Indonesian is the lowest compared to the other subjects. This indicates that the learning outcomes of the Indonesian subject in elementary school is yet to be improved to a great extent.

The law of National Education System Number 20 year 2003 prescribed that every Indonesian child is obliged to obtain the nine – year basic education (6 years of elementary school and 3 years of junior high school). The education for

elementary school students especially in early grades such as grades 1,2 and 3 are administered by employing Thematic Approach as stated in the Regulation of Minister of National Education Number 22 year 2006 Enclosure of Chapter 11 of Basic Frame and Structure of National Curriculum Sub CHAPTER B, point 1.c, i.e, education in grade 1 up to 3 is executed through Thematic Approach, while education in grade IV up to VI is executed through Subject- Based Approach.

To overcome the problems of education outlined above, it is imperative that quality and comprehensive educational management be achieved. In addition, enhancing education management as well as the quality of the educators so that they can provide meaningful and joyful learning is also of necessity.

The quality of education which is low in Indonesian is caused by conventional methods applied by the teacher. The method gives bad result in which the students are not challenged to think critically during class. With various approaches and strategies, the learners would understand the learning materials and be able to implement them in real life situation.

Applicable approach in early grades is Thematic. This approach is oriented at enabling students to read, write, and count by using Thematic Approach. It is expected that the learners study holistically in which lessons start with the nearest to the farthest and from the easiest to the hardest as well as from the most concrete to the most abstract. Following such concept of learning, students will find studying easier and learning objectives will be achieved more easily because such learning is done through various strategies characterized by active learning.

The structure of Curriculum Program of elementary school contains number and kind of subjects to be taken in one of learning period as long as 6

years starting from grade 1 until grade 6. Particularly for elementary school students grades I, II and III thematic approach is employed in which 26/27/28 hours of class are presented per week. Time arrangement and division are rendered to the teachers. Total time allocation provided is 26,27,28 hours. Schools are given freedom to increase or decrease the amount of time matching needs. The learning presentation is executed by integrating one subject to the others, for instance religion is integrated to Indonesian, civics, social science, mathematics, physical education, arts, and natural sciences by considering the possibility of integrating their indicators. Time allocation of 26/27/28 hours per week can be arranged with intensity about (a) 15% for religion (b) 50% for reading and introduction writing as well as counting and (c) 35% for natural science, civics, social science, arts, and physical education. In case that the indicators can not be taught integrated, hence class teacher can teach the subject in isolation or other teachers can teach them (for example, religion teacher and physical education teacher).

1.2. Problem Identification

Based on the background discussed above, the roots of the problems occurring in basic education especially in early grades are identified as the following :

1. Has thematic approach in early grade education been well applied?
2. How has the teachers' understanding been on the thematic approach?
3. Do various teaching strategies in thematic approach significantly affect the learning outcomes of the third graders?

4. Does the teacher do innovation in Thematic learning?

1.3. Research Focus

In reference to the background and problem identification, this research is focused on the endeavor of increasing the learning outcomes of grade three students of Catholic elementary school No. 2 of Sibolga by employing Thematic Approach.

1.4. Problem Formulation

The problem of this study are formulated in unisons as the following;
"How to increase the learning Outcomes of the third grade students of Catholic Elementary School Number 2 of Sibolga by employing Thematic Approach?"

1.5. Research Objectives

Generally, this study is oriented at increasing education quality by employing Thematic Approach in early grades, namely:

1. Increasing the third graders learning outcomes by employing Thematic Approach including reading, writing and counting
2. Increasing the implementation of active learning strategies in grade 3 by employing Thematic Approach.
3. Increasing the teachers' insight in the implementation of Thematic Approach

1.6. Research Significance

It is expected that the finding of this study are significant theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the research findings are expected to provide a basis for farther research of different stages for education development in elementary school, practically, the research finding are expected to be useful for three parties, namely students, teachers, and education institutions.

For the students, thematic learning approach with active learning method is expected to give opportunity to enrich students' learning experience. In so doing, they will not adhere to memorizing but convert to meaningful and joyful learning.

For the teacher, thematic learning approach with active learning method is expected to serve as an alternative for learning model which can be applied to enhance learning outcomes and learning motivation particularly in reading, writing and counting.

For education institutions, this classroom action research is expected to develop professional- academic atmosphere in education department, universities and schools. Also, to increase teacher's and lecturer's competency in solving learning problems particularly in early grades.