

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Background of the Study

The learners of a foreign language who attempt to speak the language are often confronted with problems resulting from an inadequate command of the appropriate language. Although this occasionally leads to breakdown in communication, foreign language learners generally manage to overcome their problems by employing one or more so-called communication strategies. Hence, it is acknowledged that one of the problems of learning a second or foreign language is how to communicate in that language.

The learners of a second or foreign language have different experiences in learning a language. Some are more successful than others. This is because the type and amount of experience vary from person to person as well as from language to language. Actually, the learners have developed habits of thought as well as speech patterns of their first language or their mother tongue which has a very different system from the target language. Such differences pose some problems for the second or foreign language learners. The differences between two languages interfere when learners of one language set out to learn the other language (Spolsky, 1989: 89).

Consistent with the explanation above, it must be noted that there are some necessary conditions that have been stated by Spolsky (1989: 88) for second or foreign language learners:

- a. Learning a language involves an opportunity to analyze it, consciously or unconsciously, into its component parts.
- b. Learning a language involves an opportunity to learn how its constituent parts are recombinable grammatically into larger units.
- c. Learning a language involves an opportunity to learn how its elements are embedded in linguistic and non-linguistic context.
- d. Learning a language involves an opportunity for the learner to match his or her own knowledge with that of native speakers or other targets
- e. Learning a language involves an opportunity for new items to be remembered.
- f. Learning a language involves an opportunity for the new skills to be practiced.

Besides those necessary conditions, it may also be necessary to compare formal and informal learning situations which greatly influences second and foreign language learners. Spolsky (1989: 89) states that in a formal situation, language is used only to study whereas in an informal situation the language is being used for communication. In an informal situation, the learners are surrounded by fluent speakers of the target language, but in a formal classroom, only the teacher is fluent. In a formal situation, it is carefully controlled, while in an informal situation the language is free and normal. In an informal situation, attention is on the meaning of the communication, but in a formal situation, it is on the meaningless drill. Hence, if we are to learn a second or foreign language, we are to understand the situation and

condition of a language, and it is indeed necessary to rely on the descriptions of a second or foreign language.

Moreover, English has become the primary international medium of science and technology, diplomacy, business and communications, and a significant body of the world's literature has been written in English (Kachru, 1986 in Ownie: 1997: 7). Indonesia's increasing participation in the international arena in diplomacy, trade, commerce, science and technology as well as in academic pursuits has raised an awareness within the country of the necessity to acquire of English. The use of English in Indonesia has become necessary. In terms of the concept outlined above, Indonesia's policy emphasizes the role of English in the country as a strong first foreign language rather than a second language.

The term 'English as a foreign language', must be distinguished from the term 'English as a second language'. Ownie (1997: 8) states that a language is considered a foreign language when the language is taught as a subject in school but is not a medium of instruction or communication, for example, English in Indonesia, Thailand and Japan. English as a second language is one in which English is not spoken natively but is widely used as a medium of instruction and a means of official and informal communication for intranational functions in schools, for informal situation and for publication, for example, English in Singapore, the Philipines and India.

English occupies a special position in comparison with other foreign languages. The Indonesian government chooses English for practical considerations as it is the

language for international communication. (Kachru, 1987: 98 in Ownie, 1997: 8). English is one of the main sources of the enrichment of the Indonesian language in its attempt to be a language of science, technology, commerce, politics and others which are useful for Indonesian development. The Indonesian government has decided that English become a compulsory subject given in schools. English is given priority over other foreign languages, for example, the Indonesian government has sent some lecturers overseas to improve their proficiency and competency in the language. Other efforts have been made by the Indonesian government to improve the English language competency such as conducting upgrading courses for young lecturers and sending them abroad to continue their education.

Unfortunately, a research report from Badan Litbang Depdikbud RI in 1993 concluded that Indonesian junior high school students' ability in English were regarded low. The conclusion comes from the data that 76.95 % students of second year of Junior High School are unable to use dictionaries. Thus, only 5 % students who are able to use dictionaries (Sugiarto, 2001). The conclusion implies that the failure is caused by the teachers' emphasis on the teaching of language structure rather than language skills.

The research findings also implied that the communicative approach proposed in the 1994 national curriculum has failed to achieve its goals since the students were unable to communicate in English. Therefore, the present study tries to investigate the application of communicative approach in senior secondary level. The purpose is to find out the causes of the failures in achieving the curriculum objectives.

As it is in other Indonesian schools, English subject is one of the main subjects stated in the National Curriculum for Senior High School and taught in SMU Negeri 1 Medan. In the curriculum, English subject is taught twice a week and in each meeting it is taught for two hours. The duration of time in each meeting is 45 minutes. However, the amount of meeting varies from a grade level to others. For instance, for the first and second year grade, English is taught four hours a week, but for the third year level, English is taught four hours for the Natural Science major, six hours for the Social major and eight hours a week for the Language major.

There are eleven English teachers in the school. All of them have S1 degree in English. Each teacher teaches different grade. The English teacher for the first year students is graduated from English Department of the State University of Medan (UNIMED), and the English teachers for the second and third year grade are graduated from English Department of the University of North Sumatra (USU).

The English teachers teach English by using English textbooks as their main source materials. They use the books entitled *Komunikasi Aktif Bahasa Inggris* written by Sugeng HS, Sri Mulyono, and Sri Loo Widodo, which is published by Tiga Serangkai Jakarta in 2003. The curriculum is based on the 1994 English curriculum, which has already been revised which is called as the curriculum supplement of 1999.

1.2. Problems of the Research

The problems of the present study are stated as follows:

- a. What are the teachers' perspective towards the communicative approach in language teaching and learning?
- b. What are the constraints that act against a successful application of the communicative approach in the EFL context?

1.3. Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is investigating the application of communicative approach in SMA Negeri 1 Medan which emphasizes on the teachers' attitude in teaching English.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. to investigate the teachers' perspective in teaching English.
- b. to investigate the constraints against the success of communicative approach.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The present study' findings will be useful for English teachers especially in SMA Negeri 1 Medan as to improve their teaching strategies and also useful for school administrators as a contribution for the better improvement in teaching English.