**A Child-Friendly Way to Teaching Young Learners
The Implementation of M-U-F Framework**

Abstract

This study reports on the implementation of the M-U-F framework for teaching grammar in a child-friendly way. This M-U-F framework which stands for meaning, use, and form was conducted at grade 4 of an elementary school in the southern part of Bandung. The study was aimed at investigating (1) the strengths and challenges that occurred when designing lesson plans, implementing the framework in the class, and assessing students' learning progress; and (2) teachers and students' perceptions towards the implementation of the framework. The study was an interpretative research which employed observation, interview and document analysis to collect data. The results indicated that teachers were more aware of building relevant contexts in teaching a certain language focus for their young students. They also provided the students with variety of communicative activities and meaningful as well as interesting media so that the students had more opportunities to practice and use the language focus. There were also more opportunities to administer child-friendly assessment such as observation and contextual written test. These efforts allowed more students took part actively in the class and were willing to take risk and experiment with the language. The study also revealed that there were some challenges faced by the teachers related to their English proficiency and their ability in managing a big class effectively. The study recommended that schools and higher institutions participated in providing the teachers with trainings and necessary facilities to support the implementation of a child-friendly teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Based on the study conducted by Damayanti, et al. (2008) in Bandung, the English language teaching in elementary school did not have much attention on children's characteristics. One of the factors causing this is the teachers'competence. Many teachers are not well-trained to teach children, they prefer teaching English focusing on grammar and translation. Such methods are not quite appropriate applied in elementary school because they require higher level of brain development. The methods are more applicable for adults for their mature abstract concept. Children need more learning experiencesthat expose them to what they can sense at the present.

In addition, this early study indicates that there are some things that need improvement in the implementation of English teaching and learning in elementary school, such as teachers' proficiency in English language and skills in child-friendly teaching methods and techniques. Also, assessment and media are other aspects that need perfection. Based on the observation in the study, it is found that the teachers had hesitation in applying their creativity to design effective and interesting learning activities for children. This was assumed to be the effects of their low level English proficiency, and their limitedteaching skills in applying child-friendly teaching methods or techniques. To their backdraws, they tended to maximize the use of the textbooks with their classes. They often did not feel confident to improvise activities in the textbooks. They preferred teaching according to the order set in the textbooks, without observing the appropriateness of the contents with the classes' condition or background. These conditions will influence the students' competence. Therefore, actions need to be taken towards the condition soon.

Considering that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, one of the methods appropriate to be applied is grammar-based English teaching, as suggested by Paul (2003). He uses the term *step-by-step syllabus*, which is applicable for beginners. In line with this, Cullen (2008) states that teaching grammar explicitly is a way to free the students from English language learning difficulties. However, teaching grammar cannot be isolated from its context. Grammar can be treated as the centre of learning if it is presented in meaningful contexts for children.

In line with this concern, a program *Primary Innovation* held by British Council in Indonesia proposes a grammar teaching framework--M-U-F(Meaning-Use-Form). The framework integrates grammar and its context. M-U-F was introduced by Moon (2008) through a British Council's program concerning about the development of English teaching and learning in elementary school in Asia, where English is a foreign language throughout the countries, including Indonesia. Regarding the current formulation of the framework and its potentials for teaching English in elementary school, this study attempts to develop the framework of M-U-F in elementary school.

1.2 Aims of the Study

Based on the background above, this study is aimed at:

1. Measuring how far the model of M-U-F is applicable through:
   a. Identifying the strengths and challenges emerging from the model when planning the lesson;
   b. Identifying the strengths and challenges emerging from the modelwhen observing the class interaction;
   c. Identifying the strengths and challenges emerging from the modelwhen conducting the assessment;
2. Identifying the teacher and students' perceptions towards the model.

1.5 Benefitsofthe Study

This study provides benefits for relevant parties. For the study program of English Education, it enriches English teaching models for children. There have not been many studies conducted in this level so far. This study provides opportunities for teachers to do self-teaching reflection on their teaching practices in elementary school. Besides, it also expands their knowledge and understanding on teaching English in elementary school.

This study is also beneficial for the researchers of this study, and the students taking part in this study. It gives them more experiences on doing research, especially about the teaching models for children.The most important advantage of doing this study is improving the lecturers' awareness towards the needs of the teachers in applying the teaching and learning activities in their classrooms.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will discuss literatures and previous research relating to child-friendly English teaching. Therefore, children's characteristics, children development theories, and grammar teaching are presented in detail.

2.1 Young Learners' Characteristics

Several experts explain that children learn differently from adults. Lewis andBedson (2000) mention that young learners are those whose agesare between four to twelve years old.On the other hand, Wright (2003) states that young learners are at the ages of five to twelve. Different from those experts, Linse (2005) calls young learners if they are seven to fourteen years old. However, those opinions are influenced by the contexts where the children are (Pinter, 2006). For Indonesian context, young learners are those who are attending kindergarten and elementary school. For the sake of the study, young learners are those who are studying in elementary school.

In her book *Teaching Young Learners,* Pinter (2006) explains that children learning in elementary school havetheir own characteristics, that differ them from pre-school children and adults: (1) they start to feel comfortablewith theschool routines; (2) they show interests in analytical approach, i.e. being interested in language as an abstract system; (3) they show awareness that they are language learners; (4) they have the skills of reading and writing; (5) they are interested in the world around them; (6) andthey are attracted to real world situations.

2.2 Learning and Development

Experts have done research and propose concepts on children development, especially on how they learn. Among others are Piaget, Vygotsky and Gardner. Piaget, with his *constructivism*, suggests that children areactivelearners (Paul, 2003). They build their knowledge by making meaning of their surroundings. Children' process of thinking goes through three stages: assimilation-accommodation-adaptation. He asserts that the first two stages is the learning process that makes sure the children make meaning. Interactions between children and their surroundings take place continuously, and give the children endless knowledge. Based on this assumption, Piaget states that children are active learners.

In addition, Piaget explains that each person undergoes four stages of development (Cameron, 2003): *sensori-motor, pre operational, concrete operational* and*formal operational*. According to their age, children are at the*concrete operational*stage, that is seven to eleven years old. On this stage children are developing their cognition and starting to think like adults. They are developing their competence to apply *logical reasoning*in several fields of study, such as mathematics and science. Nevertheless,such

competence is still limitedto *here and now* context. It means that at this stage children are not able yet to generalize their understanding.

Vygotsky is another expert who is famous for his theory on children's learning and development—social constructivism. He believed that children's learning is influenced by their social environment, such as their social context, peers, parents, and teachers (Paul, 2003). Vygotskyhighlighted each of individuals' learning potential. Based on his theory, children reach their potentials through their exploration of their surroundings and interaction with their peers and/or adults.

One of Vygotsky's important concepts is ZPD (*Zone Proximal Development*) (Pinter, 2006). It explains the difference or 'zone' between children's current knowledge and their knowledge potentially reached by the help of other people, like peers or adults. Vygotsky argued that children learn in the zone because that is where they have their current knowledge. Then, the knowledge develops depending on their needs. It needs scaffolding in the zone (Paul, 2003). Scaffolding is a learning strategy to help children reach their potential level. While interacting, within the range of the zone, adults give supports through praises and clues; and try to ease the children to master a language.

After discussing the stages undergone by children and the way environment influences children's development of thinking, there is one more theory that is related to learning and development—that is individual uniqueness. A child may be attracted to music, and another child in dance. Some children are interested in math. Other children are passionate when they are learning a language. This is discussed seriously by Howard Gardner that each of individuals has different characteristics and potentials. In his theory, the characteristics and potentials are interpreted into *Multiple Intelligences*. The intelligences proposed by Howard Gardner are linguistic, logic-mathematic, musical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist.

2.3 Curriculum of 2006

The English language curriculum for elementary school of 2006 consists of two components: competency standard and basic competencies.The competency standard covers four language skills—reading, listening, writing and speaking. Each of the skills is elaborated into the competencies that are expected to be reached by students. Each competency standard has one basic competency. For example, the competency standard in reading skill for grade 6, semester 2, is to comprehend short functional texts and simple pictures as descriptive texts in the contexts related to children's life. The basic competency for reading is to read aloud short texts using appropriate pronunciation and intonation.

2.4 Step by Step Syllabus

The learning and development theories influence the English language teaching greatly. Teachers are expected to have the knowledge of children's learning and development and understand the concepts, and they apply the knowledge while developing the syllabus. An approach of developing a child-friendly syllabus as proposed by Paul (2003) isstep-by-step syllabus. This is applicable for teaching English in this country where English is not the main language of communication. In other words, learners are limitedly exposed to English.

Step by step syllabus is appropriate to be applied in teaching and learning English as a foreign language to children because they need to develop their understanding on English step by step so that they have confidence to use English. Besides, children need to be aware of the language aspects they encounter. This way they can guess meanings of the English words and patterns that they find.

In relation to the 2006 English language curriculum for elementary school level, there are no specific themes or language functions that students are expected to master. Instead, the curriculum mentions four language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) and learning objectives. Teachers have the

authority to decide the themes and language functions that are suitable for their students and schools. Therefore, step-by-step syllabus is suitable in teaching and learning English in elementary school.

English teaching and learning should follow the sequence of activities that help students to reach their optimum potentials. For this reason a framework suggested by Janey Moon (2008) can be used as a reference. The framework has five important elements to be applied in developing lesson plans. The elements are *Topic*, *Activities*, *Language Focus*, *Situation* and *Sequence*. They are known as *TAFLSS*

Moon (2008) explains that there are several things that teachers should pay attention to in sequencing the classroom activities:

- Learning what you need for the next step—students learn some things first to prepare them for hect activities
- Moving from receptive to productive—the activities move from receptive skills (listening and reading) to productive skills (speaking and writing)
- Moving from more controlled/more supported to freer an less supported—teachers take the control in the first few activities, then they have to let the students do freer activities , but still under the teachers' guidance
- From easy to more difficult/challenging—the activities should start from easy, then go on to more difficult or challenging
- Impersonal > personal—the learning process starts from an activity that is not personally related to students' experience. Then, the next activities involve the students' experiences and personal ideas
- Concrete to more abstract—students are introduced to concrete objects, such as dolls, videos, and pictures. After that, they can imagine the objects as challenge activities
- Activity dependency—each activity in the classroom is connected to each other. They are dependent to one another.

Based on the above description, the step-by-step syllabus highlights the language aspects. This is contradictory to the idea of avoiding explicit grammar teaching (Brown, 2001). In the era of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT),English teaching has shifted from "form" to "meaning" (Saraceni, 2008). Grammar has lost its main role in English language teaching.Different from that idea, Widowson, as quoted by Cullen (2008), mentions that grammar as "liberating force".Learners are forced to depend on lexis and context, combined with gesture, intonation, and other non-verbal elements.

Based on those two ideas, this study attempts to find a solution to teach grammar that has the power of liberation, but has clear meaning. British Council in*Primary Innovation*offers the concept of M-U-F (Meaning-Use-Form) to teach English in Indonesian context.

2.5 Model *Meaning-Use-Form*

Children need an appropriate model of teaching to reach the goals. British Council offers a model that consists of three steps: meaning, use and form.

1. Meaning

In the first step, teachers introduce a new language to children in meaningful contexts to help the children understand the meaning of the language they are learning. Meaning can be created through situations that are related to children's life. There are some ways that help create meanings:

- Set situations or dialogues that are fun for children using dolls or other media
- Using stories
- Playing dramas

- Using *TPR* (*Totally Physical Response*)
- Using pictures
- Using children's experiences as learning materials

Regarding language use, children need clear objectives when learning so that they know thereasons of using the language. In this step teachers have to help children mastering English vocabularies. Teachers also have to assist children to learn how the words are pronounced through meaningful activities. In order to get the expected output, repetition of activities is essential, though it has to be administered in interesting ways, not boring ones. Such interesting activities are group or pair games, surveys, plays, singing, etc.

2. Use

After they are exposed to English language through the situations manipulated by teachers, children also need opportunities to use English to communicate with others (their classmates). They may use the language to play or to act in plays. In order to facilitate children to use English, teachers can give activities as follow:

- Games
- Information gap
- Quiz
- Plays
- Giving and following instructions to do or make something
- Creating funny rhythms or songs

3. Form

Children subconsciously notice forms of language (grammar). They tend to use language naturally in accordance with their need. Therefore, teachers have responsibilities to attract children's attention to language forms during English lesson. This does not mean that children are taught grammar explicitly. Instead, teachers make children aware of accurate language use both orally and written.

In accordance with building children's awareness of accurate language use, children need certain conditions to makethem understand meanings of English vocabularies and to use the language in natural contexts. If teachers do not do as suggested—for instance, introducing children to language forms without meaningful contexts; the output will not meet teachers' expectation. In other words, children notice the forms before they produce the language. To make it worse, they will not be motivated to use English.

Some strategies are promoted to attract children's attention to English language forms:

- Games—children raise their right hands if teacher says singular animals, and their left hands if teacher says plural animals
- Writing—completing sentences, arranging words into good sentences, or completing dialogues
- Activities that increase students' awareness on grammar—teacher asks "*What is similar about these sentences*?
  He is talk<u>ing</u>   She is listen<u>ing</u>   They are eat<u>ing</u> at the restaurant

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study employs interpretative approach. This approach focuses on searching, interpreting and explaining meanings on what is going on understood or interpreted by participants in social contexts being studied. (Smith et. al. 1990; danMynard&Almarzouqi, 2006).

A state elementary school in Bandung Kulon became the site of the study. This school was accredited B and a *'challenged school'* (Pillay, 2007). It was a school that has limited provision of facilityand English language teachers with poor English proficiency. An English language teacher (teacher A), 30 students of grade four, and four university students majoring English Educationwho were writing their thesis took part in this study. Teacher A and the university students attended trainings of M-U-F teaching model held by the researchers before they interacted with thestudents in the classroom. Then, teacher A and the university students developed six set of lesson plan to be carried out in the English class. The next stage was administering the lesson plans in the classroom. One of the university students (teacher R) became the teacher of English lesson because the real teacher (teacher A) felt not ready and confident enough to teach using the model.

CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

M-U-F model is applicable in English lesson at elementary school, though there are some challenges to overcome. This relates to the steps of meaning-use-form(M-U-F) motivating teachers to design classroom activities concerning children's characteristics and learning objectives.

To put the step of meaning into realization, for example, teacher is required to teach vocabularies or grammar (language focus being taught) in contexts. Building contexts is inevitable. Teachers should pay attention to relevant contexts when planning the lesson, administering the lesson in the classroom, and designing and doing evaluation. According to experts in English instructions for children, such as Pinter (2006), Paul (2003), and Cameron (2001), children pay more attention to meaning than structure or grammar of a language. Children are accustomed to be in situations where they do not know many things. However, they can understand what they do not know through contexts. In addition, they get the help from adults who know more to explain or confirm something. This is what Vygotskycalled as*Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD);children learn from interacting with peers or adults, and they reach their optimum potentials (Pinter, 2006).

Building contexts was the key element of the model, as admitted by teacher A and teacher R. However, they voiced that they met difficulties to build contexts, because they had to complete the syllabus in time as required by the school authority. They assumed that building meaningful contexts led to longer preparation and implementation of the instructions. Teacher A was afraid that she could not cover the syllabus for one semester. Teacher A thought that carrying out the materials in textbook was much easier to do and more effective to cover.

Another thing related to building contexts is English language used by teachers as source person or model. Based on the observation, teacher R seemed to have difficulties in using full English with the class, though she majored English in her. She tended to translate English into Bahasa Indonesia, instead of using simplified English. As a matter of fact, she could use simplified English, especially if she had maximized the use of the media she had prepared beforehand. In fact consistency in using English in the classroom is important to do because if teachers translate English into students' mother tongue, it would make the students hesitant to use English.

According to the teachers involving in the study, using English continuously during the lesson was impossible to do because the students would not understand what the teacher said in English. Besides,

teacher A whose educational background was not English thought that her English proficiency did not enable her to use English all the time with her class. She even felt harder to teach when she thought of the contexts she would have to build through stories using English.

In addition, the difficulty in creating contexts isa challenge to anticipate by teachers. One of the ways out is holding trainings to help teachers familiar with natural use of English language. It is hoped that teachers are accustomed to teaching English by integrating language focus and its context. Even though teaching grammar or vocabulary isolated from its contexts is considered a lot easier, it is not relevant to the characteristics of children. As mentioned earlier, children focus on meaning, not on explanation of abstract concept, like sentence patterns (Moon, 2008). It also needs to highlight that teaching a language is not to memorize sentence patterns vocabularies, but to use them. In relation to M-U-F model, the next step after students are good at making meaning is providing students with opportunities to use a language focus in communicative activities.

In the stage of *use*, as described earlier, children have more opportunities to use the language focus being taught. Teachers provide variety of activities that enable students to interact with each other using English. For example, in the second meeting of observation the students played a guessing game. One student had to guess which superhero that his friend was playing as by asking *"Can you...?"*.Besides giving tasks for class activities, teachers are also suggested to provide media that enable students to complete the tasks. For example, teacher R showed several pictures of popular superheroes for children, and prepared a worksheet to help the students complete the task.

From the observation, the challenge that the teacher faced in this stage was classroom management. The teacher seemed to find difficultyto give enough attention to each student and to make sure that each student follows the instructions well. In addition, another difficulty also emerged when the teacher had to observe the class as a part of assessing the students' competence. Both difficulties, classroom management and observation, are part of assessment, need solutions that should be proposed by relevant authorities. In this case the researchers of this study should think of follow up actions to help teachers design effective management techniques for big classes and systematic observations.

The last stage is form (conditioning students towards language patterns). Teachers and students reflect the language learned in the previous stage by noticing and analysing the language focus. Noticingis important to do because it is appropriate to be applied in Indonesia where English is considered as a foreign language, that exposures to the language are limited. Paul (2003) claims that children need opportunities to consolidate their knowledge of language focus. This can be done by providing written exercises or drilling, and by discussing grammar that involves the students to finally identify the patterns (Moon, 2008). At this stage, students are also expected to be aware of thepatterns that are useful for communication, as exemplified in the stage of meaning and drilled in the stage of use.

The result of the observation shows that the stage form was not explored much. The analysis on this issue finds that time management became the cause. And, there was a feeling of hesitation to discuss a language focus being learned longer. As discussed earlier, English language was taught based on the sequence provided in the textbook that teacher A usually used with her class; because it was easy to arrange for each semester in one year. Teacher R seemed to be very careful when explaining the concept of a language focus, as she admitted that she was afraid of being carried away by the common practice of isolating grammar and its contexts.

In conclusion, the M-U-F model is potential to apply and gives positive impacts. However, improvements need to be done. Conducting a longer follow-up research is one of the improvements that need to be done. This is important to do to find ways out to ease teachers' worries. There must be solutions that enable teachers tocomplete a year-syllabus without being afraid of the many materials that should be covered. Regarding evaluation, there should be more child-friendly assessment techniques that

can be employed in English lesson throughout each semester of one academic year. For example, teachers develop rubrics and indicators as the assessment in each meeting to see the students' progress. Another thing to improve is the collection of students' tasks (portfolio) to figure out students' progress of achievement (Ioannou-Georgiou & Pavlov, 2003). It is hoped that this study provide information of the early stage of the implementation of the M-U-F model. Thus, the researchers have a great optimism to do follow up research to help teachers overcome their problems in teaching English to young learners.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings and discussions in the previous section show that this model created a child-friendly English teaching and learning. However, some aspects are in need of improvements. The concern of this study is to develop a model that is in line with children characteristics.The aims of the study are to identify the strengths and challenges of the implementation of child-friendly grammar teaching, known as M-U-F model. This study also attempts to recognise the teachers and students' perceptions towards the model.

M-U-F model has significant strengths to teach English to young learners. In planning a lesson, the teacher could design instructions adjusted to the students' needs and conditions.The teacher did not depend too much on textbooks. She developed her own classroom activities. In terms of interaction it was proved that the teacher and students did two-way interaction. At first, the teacher dominated the class's activities, especially in giving instructions. But, this does not mean that the students were passive. In fact, the students showed their enthusiasm to join the lesson in full attention. Surprisingly they made short conversations with each other without hesitation or being afraid of making mistakes. This fact was also supported by the provision of interesting and various media. The students did not feel bored or tired to participate in the lesson.

In the case of evaluation, the teacher assessed the students through observation and written exercises. The teacher observed the students' use of English in the structured exercises. The students were also givena written test before the class ended. The teacher could monitor the students' progress of achievement through this test. The test was designed in such a way to make the students comfortable when doing it.

This study needs more improvement and development. Based on the data analysis, there are some things that have to be developed and improved more, such as increasing the teachers' understanding on M-U-F model. Without good understanding on the model, there will be less impacts on English teaching in elementary school, particularly in designing lesson plans. The teachers' English proficiency is another thing that needs attention. Appropriate and active use of English should be adjusted to the level of the students. This is to provide exposures to the children. The last thing is child-friendly assessment. It is important to measure the students' learning in English class.

The things that need follow up are:

1. Socializing model MUF
2. Helping improve teachers' English proficiency
3. Holding trainings on designing and implementing child-friendly classroom activities
4. Holding trainings on designing and implementing child-friendlyevaluation

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