

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

In the Indonesian educational context, the introduction of English language learning commonly begins in elementary school. These early experiences are crucial as they shape students' feelings, motivation, and attitudes toward future learning. The first formal exposure to English is not only about learning vocabulary or grammar but also about how students emotionally respond to a new language. Some may feel excited and curious, while others may experience fear or hesitation. These emotional reactions are part of the learning journey and can influence how students engage with the subject in the long term.

Previous research has mostly focused on teaching strategies, curriculum design, or learning outcomes. However, limited attention has been given to the learners' own perspectives, especially at the early stages of language learning. The voices of young learners are often overlooked, even though their personal experiences can offer valuable insights into how English is received and processed emotionally and cognitively at an early age.

Furthermore, research in Indonesia has not fully embraced the idea of seeing young learners as active participants in their own learning. Most of the time, young learners are still seen as passive receivers of lessons, rather than individuals who can express their own thoughts and feelings. Children are not just passive listeners in class because they actively learn by doing things, getting

involved, and interacting with their surroundings. They tend to understand better when they can move, explore and take part in meaningful activities that help them connect with what they are learning (Mercy, 2023).

This study challenges that common view by recognizing students' voices as something meaningful and worth listening to. By paying attention to how they feel and what motivates them during their early English learning experiences, this study hopes to not only add something to academic discussions, but also encourage more caring and responsive teaching practices in the classroom. However, some arguments might show that elementary school students are not mature enough to reflect on their learning because they are still dependent on teachers and not yet fully independent. However, child-centered education suggests that children are actually able to express what they feel and experience, as long as the method fits their level.

This study believes that even young learners' voices matter. They may not be able to explain things in academic terms, but they know how they feel during their first English lessons whether they feel excited, nervous, confused, or motivated. By using instruments such as semi-structured interviews and narrative frames, this study tries to create a space where students can comfortably share their stories. The goal is not to make them fully independent learners, but to listen to their experiences and understand their point of view. In doing so, teachers can learn to build a more supportive and meaningful learning environment from the very beginning.

Through daily classroom engagement, the researcher noticed a huge contrast and differences in how students responded to their initial exposure to formal English learning. Some learners showed enthusiasm, while others showed anxiety or reluctance. These diverse emotional reactions evoked deeper curiosity: What do these students actually feel during their first experiences? How do they perceive their ability and motivation in facing a new language?

The concept of first-time experience in this study is viewed through two main aspects: emotional experience and affective factors. Emotional experience refers to the positive and negative feelings students encounter during their early exposure to English. Affective factors, on the other hand, include internal aspects such as self-esteem and motivation, which are crucial in determining how learners engage with new academic content. Self-esteem relates to how students perceive their ability to learn and use English, while motivation encompasses the internal drive that encourages them to keep learning despite challenges.

These aspects are essential because they may shape learners' long-term interest in the language. A negative first experience might lead to a lack of confidence or avoidance of English in the future, while a positive experience can encourage further engagement and curiosity.

A relevant verse from the Qur'an in Surah An-Nahl (16:78) states:

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۚ لَعَلَّكُمْ

تَشْكُرُونَ

This verse reflects the idea that knowledge begins with awareness and that learning is part of the natural human process. Each learner's first-time experience is meaningful and deserves thoughtful attention. Understanding these early emotional and affective experiences can provide valuable insights for teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers who seek to create more inclusive, supportive, and learner-centered environments.

This study aims to explore the first-time formal English learning experiences of young learners who are in the 'Concrete Operational Stage' of cognitive development, as defined by Piaget. These learners, typically fifth-grade elementary students are capable of basic logical thinking and beginning self-reflection when guided appropriately. A narrative-inquiry approach is used to highlight students' personal stories, by utilizing instruments such as semi-structured interviews and narrative frames. These methods help uncover how young learners experience and interpret their first encounters with English in a formal classroom setting.

Participants in this study consist of six fifth-grade students, categorized into three achievement levels: high, medium, and low. The classification is based on long-term classroom observation and assessment. By involving students from different achievement groups, the study seeks to understand whether academic performance influences emotional and affective responses to early English learning.

In addition, despite the increasing importance of early language education, most studies still focus on older learners, assuming that younger students are less

capable of expressing their thoughts. This study argues otherwise: with the right approach and instruments, young learners can provide meaningful insights into their experiences.

In conclusion, by giving space to young learners to share their first-time English learning stories, this study hopes to contribute to a more holistic and empathetic understanding of early language education. The findings are expected to inform teaching practices that are more responsive to learners' emotional and motivational needs.

B. Definition of Key Terms

1. Young Learners

In this study, young learners refer to children in elementary school, specifically those around the ages of 10 to 11 years old, who are at the Concrete Operational Stage according to Piaget's cognitive development theory. These learners are developing the ability to think logically about concrete situations, understand basic cause-effect relationships, and begin reflecting on their learning experiences with appropriate guidance.

2. First-Time Experience

The term first-time experience refers to students' initial encounters with formal English learning in a school setting. It includes their earliest memories and reactions during their first structured English lessons. This study focuses on how these initial experiences are perceived and remembered by the learners

themselves, as shaped by their emotions and personal meaning-making processes.

3. Emotional Experiences

Emotional experience in this context refers to the range of feelings that young learners go through during their early exposure to English learning. These emotions can be positive (e.g., excitement, joy, curiosity) or negative (e.g., fear, anxiety, confusion), and they play a crucial role in shaping how students respond to new learning situations.

4. Affective Factors

Affective factors include internal aspects that influence a learner's motivation and self-belief. In this study, the focus is on two key components such as:

- a) Self-Esteem: the way learners view their ability to learn and use English.
- b) Motivation: the internal drive that encourages them to engage in learning.

This includes both intrinsic motivation (driven by interest or enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (influenced by rewards or external expectations).

C. Research Question

1. How are the students' emotional experiences during their first-time formal English learning
2. How do affective factors influence students' first-time experience with formal English learning?

D. Objective of Study

1. To explore the emotional experiences of young learners during their first-time formal English learning.
2. To describe how affective factors such as self-esteem and motivation influence their first-time experience with formal English learning.

E. Significance of Study

It is expected that this study will give many inputs as follow:

1. For the English teacher

This study could help English teachers to understand students' first experience with English from their perspectives.

2. For the students

This study could provide a space for students' voices, experiences, and challenges toward learning English, potentially improving teaching methods and approaches.

3. For future researchers

This study hopefully will be useful for the other researchers who might be interested in conducting in similar topic related.