CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

I.A. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As part of language development, many but by no means all children learn to read. Many of those children learn to read before they enter primary school at the age of 6. Some of them are taught individually by parents at home. One important question should be tackled is; When are children ready to lean to read?

In many parts of the world, many parents teach their preschool children reading. Of course, different cultures may define different strategies. Taylor and Taylor (1983) in their book *Psychology of Reading* describe that in the United States most preschoolers who learn to read do so largely on their own with little help from family members. Some learn from TV. Only a minority of those early readers' parents deliberately set out to teach them reading.

What other parents did was to provide models for their children, by teaching those children themselves, by reading to the children, or by having reading materials around the house. A Japanese survey shows that the earlier the parents (usually the mothers) begin to read to the children, the more fluently the children read at the age

1

of 5 (Taylor and Taylor 1983: 345) . In a Canadian study, almost all early readers had stories read to them daily (Patel and Paterson in Taylor and Taylor 1983: 350).

I believe that in Indonesia there are many parents who teach their preschool children reading. And I also believe that those children are able to learn to read at their early ages.

Therefore, the question of when children are ready to learn to read seems to make no sense at all. It implies that there is a stage the children must possess from a state of being unable to learn to read to the· stage of being ready. In fact, there is no test that will measure the state the child is in because there is no intellectual or linguistic basic for the notion of readiness (Smith 1985: 115).

Brief examination on the relationship between speech and reading exposes that for the Indonesian-speaking children printed language is bound to spoken language. But children acquire speech readily by being immersed in the speech environment. Thus, acquiring reading for the non-Indonesian-speaking chidren should be managed with acquiring speech. Mino-Garces argues that children should acquire reading like speech, not learning it like a foreign language, that is, they should pick up reading effortlessly; just because they are exposed to

printed words and just because those words convey meanings (Mino-Garces in Taylor and Taylor 1983: 387).

Early speech is closely tied to the child's vital and immediate communicative needs. For Indonesian child, when he dislikes something, he can scream *Nggak!*(Ina., means *No*), when he is disturbed by peers or siblings *Nakal* (Ina., means *Naughty*). Reading is seldom used in such manners. Nevertheles, most children want to know what happens in a story or what labels on objects say, and this desire can be kindled and fostered. For Indonesian preschoolers, learning to read really helps them to expand their vocabulary because in Indonesia, languages used in reading and speaking can differ much. Children who speak dialects can learn new language through learning to read.

In speech development, understanding precedes speaking (Taylor and Taylor 1983: 364). Accordingly, a 12-month old baby can be taught to discriminate and identify letters and words by pointing. There are also children who have adequate receptive speech but lack articulatory speech (e.g., delayed speech, deaf, cerebral palsied). For these children, rudimentary reading with logographs (Lower level 1: Word Recognition) provides a valuable means of communication. A logograph can be directly associated to its meaning, bypassing its sound if necessary (Taylor and Taylor 1983: 365).

There is an active relationship between cognitive and language. Cognition and language are critical components in human development. This statement is based on the theory of reading which views reading as language process (Vacca et al 1991: 41). According to Piaget and Vygotsky's views, children must be actively involved to grow and learn (Vacca et. al 1991: 61). Merely reacting to the environment is not enough. When parents make use of or accept early learning as a language process children must undergo, they must understand the importance of learning written language. All in all, children are language users; for them learning to read is inherently social. If children perceive little use of written language, then they will have difficult time learning to read (Vacca et. al 1991: 14).

Bright children in a literate environment (refers to educated parents and a number of books around the house) may acquire reading largely by themselves, with a lot of encouragement but with the minimum of instruction. But such probability might mainly be found in developed countries such as in the United States . In fact, most children have to be instructed in reading because reading is not `caught´ from exposure to books like infection. The essential thing is that a child needs to be stimulated in order to be able to learn to read. And the considered

effective stimulation comes from parents.

I am sure that the phenomenon of teacher-parents also exists in Indonesia. And I believe in the importance of children home environment input in their early learning. Based on the environmental input theory, I did a research on parental role in preschooler's early learning to read.

The implication of early learning to read is the importance of method of teaching reading to young children. Most people have encountered an effort when a child is learning to read. One approach of how children read is the *ear approach* (sometimes referred to as bottom-up theory). The alternative approach is *eye approach* (sometimes referred to as top-down theory). It is evident that neither approach explains all aspects of reading behaviour; it is likely that people make use both strategies at various stages in learning and in handling different kinds of reading problems (Crystal: 251). However, the ear approach is evidently very important during initial stages. Perhaps, after several exposures to a word, a direct print-meaning pathway comes to be built up.

With the ultimate purpose to find the reading ability of 3-4 years old prekindergarten children who are learning to read through parents' instruction, parent's role on those children reading acquisition was also

investigated in this study . On the one side, children's reading ability was assessed by using four verbal tasks on reading. On the other side, parent's strategies in teaching reading were also investigated and presented in short case studies. Bullough (Vacoa et al 1991: 43) puts this way: "Cases and case studies are stories that in their telling invite the reader to question and explore personnal values and understanding." In the oases that presented in this study, the three parents are in the same position: as teacher-parents of prekindergarten chidren.

I.B. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Based on the background of the study above, the problems of this study are stated as follows:

I.B.1. How do Indonesian parents devise their strategies in teaching reading to their children?

I.B.2. What is the reading ability of Indonesian prekindergarten children aged 3-4 years old?

I.C. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study based on the statement of the problems above are :

I.C.1. To explore the Indonesian parents' strategies in teaching reading to their prekindergarten children.

1.C.2. To find out the reading ability of Indonesian

prekindergarten children aged 3-4 years old

I.D. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Most adults form an expectation that learning to read is the function of formal instruction at school. Until recently, only a few of them have begun to believe that learning to read begins through interaction with parents. In fact, the foundations of literacy are built on children's social and linguistic interaction with their world and significant persons in it. Home is where literacy learning begins.

This study attempts to provide a real description about preschoolers' language skill DDthat is, their ability in reading along with parents' support and encouragement. It is important to know that child's achievement in formal schooling is affected by his preschool intellectual experiences at home. But far more importantly, it should be borne in mind that parent should not neglect their child, send him to school at the age 6 or 7 with expectation that he would learn to read quickly without any preparation. Accordingly, I hope this study will be able to give an input, particularly to parents of preschool children, on the importance of the nature of learning to read. Learning to read should be started

before children receive formal schooling. Besides, this study might be a foundation for educators to understand their students' different level of reading ability due to their different experiences with written language.

I.E. SCOPE AND LIMITATION

Learning to read involves a host of complex factors, such as teachers, reading materials, approach to reading instruction, and writing system. In this study, learning to read covers parent-teacher role, reading materials and approach to reading instruction and its implication toward child's reading strategy.

I.F. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Vacca et. al (1991) in their book *Reading and Learning to Read* state that the support of whole language teaching comes from two areas of language inquiry: Psycholinguistics and Sociolnguistics.

A psycholingustic view of reading combines a psychological understanding of how language works. Thus, viewing reading and learning to read strictly from cognitive prespective is not sufficient. The view implies that the basic theory of learning, which emphasizes that

language acquisition must be viewed within the context of child's intellectual development, needs to be related with other learning theory.

Sociolinguistics and reading. According to Vacca et. al (1991: 73), since reading is uniquely human, learning to read requires sharing, interaction and collaboration. Parent/child relation and participation patterns are essential in early learning.

Taylor and Taylor (1990) in their book *Psycholinguistics: Learning and Using Language* provide two basic and useful methods of teaching reading to young children: Whole-word and Phonics methods. They state that parents ,who teach their preschooler children reading, usually use one of the two methods or a combination of the two.

Whole-word refers to the method by which a child learns to associate the visual pattern of a whole word directly with its meaning without analysis. Taylor and Taylor (1990: 364) contend that it is the quickest and easiest way for getting the process of reading underway. Naturally enough, it is the method used by most English-speaking preschoolers who learn to read on their own. The whole-word is particularly suitable for teaching irregularly spelled words in alphabetic ortography especially English (e.q., *the, laugh, comb*).

By phonics method, children learn letter-sound relation and sound out on their own even unfamiliar printed words. Phonics is suitable for teaching such regularly spelled words as *buku* and *bulu>*.

Letter-by-letter recognition is characteristic of unskilled reader recognizing common words. But letter recognition is not prerequsite to word recognition since word recognition should be impossible when letters of the word cannot be identified individually.

Young children learn to recognize words not instantaneously. It is done through process. Theory of pattern recognition can be characterized in one dimension as bottom up or top down (Taylor and Taylor 1990).

A bottom-up process progresses from small, lower units to the larger, higher units. For example, word recognition starts with the sensory data and the forms in small units, which are then combined into larger ones : letter features, letters, and then words.

Word recognition by top-down process starts with target word and checks whether the sensory data are consistent with the target. Most word-recognition models mix the two.

Learning to read in young children is claimed to be evitable since it helps to develop child's phonological ability in speech and expands their vocabulary, particularly for children who speak vernaculars.

I.G. METHOD OF THE STUDY

In this research, the experimental qualitative approach is used. It is because in order to be able to find out children's reading ability, I devise relevant tasks for them to carry out.

I.G.1. THE DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

This study is psycholinguistic study, so I make some reasonable limitations and justifications to the definitions. Some important terms have presumably been explained indirectly in the background so that only the most pertinent terms are defined.

1. Preschooler in this study is a prekindergarten child aged 3-4 years old who is not attending playgroup or nursery school.

2. Parental role in this study is limited on parent's role in teaching their preschool child reading .

3. Early reader in this study is prekindergarten child who is learning to read before entering kindergarten

4. Verbal tasks are a set of tasks designed to predict prekindergarten children's performance in reading. Based on Taylor and Taylor's format, the tasks cover four areas of children' skills :

   a. *Naming letters* : The child names letters, matches letters, and says the first two letters of his

name.

b. *Visual-auditory paired associates* : The child indicates which of the four possible responses spoken by the examiner is the correct match to a visual stimulus.

c. *Reversal* : The child selects a match for a two-letter combination presented in correct and reversed orders (e.g., 'nu' : nu, un, nu, un).

d. *Categories* : The child produces class names for group of three words (e.g., rose, jasmine, and orchid are names of ...)

5. Assessment is a synonym for an evaluation (as the least structured and the most infomal type of test). In assesment, scoring is not the ultimate goal. Thus, assessment in this study is used to evaluate the ability of 3-4 years old children in reading. They were given tasks on reading to be carried on. It turns out, that in assessment process, the examiner is parent since the study corresponds to the nature of parent/child relationship as teacher/pupil.

I.G.2. LOCATION AND POPULATION OF THE STUDY

Nowadays, it seems that upper-middle or upper class

parents living in urban areas prefer to send their preschool children to playgroup or nursery school as a step fostering their children's language development. Such tendency is less apparent in semi-urban areas such as in Malang. It this situation makes parent's role in child language development considered more influential. This phenomenon encourages me to choose Malang as the location of the research.

Because I believe that social classes tend to provide different home environment, the target population of this study are middle class parents and their preschool children. It has been claimed by Berstein (Corsini 1994: 101) that middle class, as contrasted with lower class, convey such values as planning for the future, self responsibility, and motivation for education. Besides, parents socioeconomic and education backgound always show relationship with children's mental growth and intellectual development. Children of wealthy homes where there are more care, more materials such as educative toys, books, and more stimulating activities obtain higher learning capacity on average.

Based on the above affecting factors of learning ability, all children as the population of this study are to meet the following criteria :

1. Normal children, have no physical or mental

retardation.

2. Have normal organs of speech.

3. Aged 3-4 years old, and not attending playgroup or nursery school.

4. Have one older sibling or none.

5. Born and reared in Indonesia.

6. Parents' characteristics are :

-Midlle class, undergraduates or diploma graduates as the minimum. In fact, educated parent is more inluential than wealthy parent with lower education.

-Aged not more that 35 years old at the time the research was done.

-Indonesian, live in Indonesia, and speak Indonesian fluently

Three children with their parents who were able to meet the requested criteria were taken as the population of this study. They were:

1. Oni (3;11 years old)

2. Dito (3;9 years old)

3. Nia (3;9 years old)

I.G.3. TECHNIQUE OF DATA COLLECTION

I used observational approach in collecting the data because the presence of the observer might have an

effect on child's responses on the tasks. This approach enabled me to do an unseen observation without getting involved in assessment process.

It took several steps to collect the data. The first step was to choose the population consisting of children aged 3-4 years old with their parents from middle socioeconomic background. Three children with their parents were taken as the population. Next, I devised relevant tasks for the children to carry out. For the purpose of eliciting the valid data, I used Taylor and Taylor's (1983) verbal tasks on reading as the initial task material. For higher level task, I devised word recognition task. The words presented in list were those which are commonly used by Indonesian children in speech (based on Yulie 1996). The words were composed of di and tri-syllabic of open syllable-final content words, mostly nouns without affixation. Words arrangement systematization was not based on alphabetical order. Under the instrument of verbal tasks , I added three categorizations namely skills assessed to the children, presentation which looked how the items were presented to the children, and responses given by the children to the tasks.

Factors like fatigue, short span attention, and active participation exhibited by the children greatly determined the length of assessment duration. My fourth

was to determine assessment duration, then. Basically, all tasks were untimed. But each task took twenty to thirty minutes to complete. I scheduled subsequent sessions as soon as possible, that is no longer than one week apart. Remembering the above possibilities, I purposely lengthened assessment duration. Accordingly, each child was assessed for the period of two weeks at the longest.

Afterwards, I asked the parents to do the assessment. They were to check some of children's responses on the task sheet. During the assessment process, I did an unseen observation.

The last step was to make a depth interview with the parents concerning their strategies in teaching reading.

In short, the steps in eliciting the data are:

1. Choosing the population

2. Determining the samples

3. Devising task materials

4. Determining assessment duration and session

5. Asking the parents to do the assessment and making recording of the assessment results at the same time

6. Interviewing the parents

I.G.4. TECHNIQUE OF DATA ANALYSIS

Several procedures are required in analyzing the

data.. Firstly, I classified responses on verbal tasks from word recognition task. Secondly, I made tables of assessment results and analyzed them since the reliance on task scores would not provide sufficient information about child's ability (Nuttal et. al 1993: 185) . To allow no misinterpretation I used response analysis for verbal tasks whereas for word recognition I used error analysis. In response analysis child's correct and incorrect responses are analyzed. In error analysis, child's reading errors are described and categorized. According to Gibson and Levin (1985: 278), reading errors can provide information about children's strategies in reading if they are analyzed in ways other than simple categorization of correct-incorrect. Therefore, in categorizing the errors I also analyzed child's types of errors including the additional information about child's phonetic coding.

In answering the second question about the strategy of parent in teaching reading, I composed a short case study. Each case tackles the same problems: parent's strategy in teaching and child's capability in accepting the parent's method. The last step was to make qualitative interpretation of the data. The purpose is to find out the correlation between reading instruction the child is receiving with child's ability in reading.

In short, the procedures of data analysis are:

1. Classifying the data

2. Making tables of tasks results

3. Compositing case study of parent's strategy

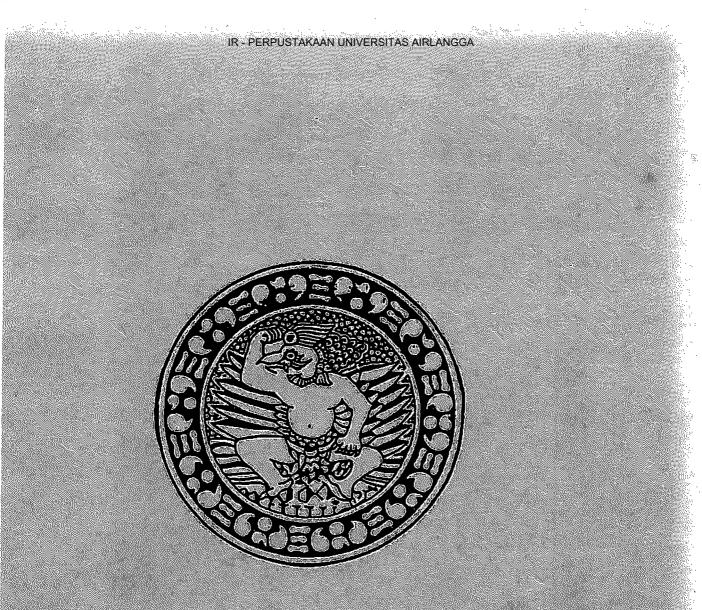4. Interpreting the data

CHAPTER II
GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECT