

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the general issues related to the present study. These include the background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, clarifications of key terms central to the study, and organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

In English-major programs at the tertiary level, written work is an integral part of its education. Students are prompted to think independently about particular issues and subjects by performing assignments and research papers. At the same time, students also learn how to access, select and evaluate information from different sources and to formulate ideas (Anderson and Poole, 2001:4). In other words, academic writing is arguably the most important language skill to English tertiary students whose grades are largely determined by their performance in written assignments, academic reports, term examinations and graduation theses (Nga, 2009:112).

Nevertheless, several studies have revealed that even advanced learners at a high proficiency level of English have problems with written academic discourse at the level of text organization (see Braine, 1995; Benson & Haidish, 1995; Bloor, 1996; Casanave, 1995, among others, in Jogthong, 2001:2). Several other studies also show that students often experience problems in particular

genres, especially in writing a research report as their thesis. Some studies examine the students' problem in writing the whole thesis (see Kareviati 2004; Emilia, 2009), while some others focus on a particular section, e.g. abstract (see Abdul & Sadeq, 2006), data presentation and discussion (see Bitchener & Basturkmen, 2006; Emilia, Rodliyah, & Gustine, 2009), and conclusions (see Bunton, 2002).

Although many previous studies as mentioned above have investigated the students' problems in thesis writing areas, little research has explored the students' problems in writing a research proposal which functions as the first step in producing a thesis. There is a need to increase research-based knowledge of students' ability and problems in writing a research proposal since the researcher has found that in the research site, many students find it is difficult to write a research proposal. It is in line with Swales (1990) stating that a research proposal is one of 'occluded' genres; that is, genres which are difficult for students to have access to, but play an important part in the students' lives. A study has also revealed the research proposal writing anxiety faced by the students which includes four components: library anxiety, statistics anxiety, composition anxiety, and research process anxiety (see previous study and related articles by Onwuegbuzie, 2002). Further, Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) also present similar view and highlight several common mistakes made by the students as beginning researchers in preparing a research proposal.

Thus, this present study aims to investigate the students' ability and problems in writing a research proposal. This study has been conducted in an undergraduate English study program in a university in Banten. This study attempts not only to identify the students' ability and problems in writing a research proposal, but also the possible causes of the problems and the possible solutions that can be proposed to solve the problems based on the students' work.

1.2 Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the students' ability and problems in writing a research proposal?
2. What are the possible causes of the problems faced by the students?
3. What possible solutions can be proposed to solve the students' problems based on the students' work?

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The specific purposes of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the students' ability and problems in writing a research proposal.
2. To identify the possible causes of the problems faced by the students in writing a research proposal.
3. To propose the possible solutions to solve the students' problems based on the students' work.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study will provide a reference on the study on academic writing. Furthermore, this study will be preliminary inputs for other researchers to further study in the similar area of research with different interest.

Practically, this study will provide a general guidance by the experts to write a research proposal, especially in term of its elements and linguistic features.

Professionally, the results of this study are expectedly beneficial for English study program students and lecturers, especially writing instructors and supervisors.

For students, the results provide information to understand how they organize a research proposal and to see how this organization may lead to problems, and to better understand the expectations of discourse community to which they will be initiated.

For writing instructors, the results can be used to pursue academic writing strategies for foreign language students who seek to write in English in ways that will allow their work to be accepted in English academic journals, in a world in which academic discourse is dominated.

For supervisors, the results can be used to help them understand better the problems faced by the students so they can provide more meaningful feedback to their students and can provide students with better analytic tools for use in writing a research proposal.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study is a case study of undergraduate English Study Program students in a university in Banten. It uses text analysis and in-depth interview to investigate the students' performance in writing a research proposal. The analysis focuses on the elements and linguistic features employed in the research proposals. The analysis attempts to identify the students' ability and problems in writing a research proposal, the possible causes of the problems, and the possible solutions that can be proposed to solve the problems based on the students' work.

1.6 Clarifications of Key Terms

For the sake of clarity, key terms in this study are defined and specified as follows:

Students: The seventh-semester undergraduate students of English study program in a university in Banten.

Ability: The students' ability in writing appropriate elements and linguistic features of a research proposal to convey its communicative purposes.

Problems: The students' problems in writing appropriate elements and linguistic features of a research proposal to convey its communicative purposes.

Research proposal: Students' written plan for conducting their research study as one of the requirements for completing their study which is written in English.

Elements: The elements of a research proposal and each chapter of it.

Linguistic features: Forms and structures used by the students to achieve a particular communicative and rhetorical purpose in writing a research proposal.

Genre analysis: A study of a particular type of a written discourse made distinctive by its purpose and the discourse community for which it is intended. Examples of genres are abstracts, grant proposals, laboratory reports, poems, letters, editorial, novels, etc (Swales, 1990). Particular genre to be analyzed in this present study is students' research proposals (to follow Swales, 1990, 1996, 2004; Swales and Feak, 2004, 2009; Paltridge and Stairfield, 2007; Emilia, 2008, 2009, among others)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL): Halliday model of text analysis as a point of reference and theoretical framework for the analysis of students' writing in terms of linguistic features based on the Transitivity system (developed by Halliday, 1985, 1994; Martin and Rose, 2003, 2007; Eggins, 1994, 2004, among others).

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter One gives general description of the introduction to the topic of the research. Chapter Two presents the theories that support the study, i.e. the theory of genre analysis and SFL, especially about aspects related to writing a research proposal. Chapter Three discusses research methodology. It describes about what are investigated in this study, where the study is conducted, who the participants are, how the study is designed, how the data are collected, and how the data are analyzed. Chapter Four shows data presentation and discussion. Chapter Five gives the conclusion and recommendation derived from the study.