CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the main issues involving the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the research question, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, the definition of key terms, and the organization of the thesis.

1.1 Background of the Study

Writing is one of the four language skills which students must acquire in order to be able to demonstrate competence in the use of English language. It also plays an important role in communication. By means of writing, students are able to explore thoughts and ideas, and make them noticeable and concrete, encourage thinking and learning, motivate communication and make thought available for reflection (Elashri, 2013). However, writing skill is difficult not only to master but also to teach. It is considered as the most difficult skill because it requires the application of the knowledge of the other three skills. Moreover, this skill is deemed to be the most difficult skill to accomplish for most students, whether they are first or second language speakers of English (Richards, 1990; Williams, 2005).

Furthermore, the teaching of writing has always been a challenge to teachers, because it is possibly the hardest skill to teach effectively and the one probably most neglected in ESL/EFL classrooms that are not exclusively dedicated to writing (Brown, 2001). According to Alwasilah (2011), there is a tendency among the English teachers in Indonesia to neglect teaching writing. In addition, the teaching of English writing in Indonesia needs improvement for two reasons, the lack of time and the lack of practice in writing a complete coherent text in various genres as it is said by Emilia (2005). Teaching writing is challenging. After doing a short observation and unstructured interview, the researcher identified the problems mentioned above in the school where the research was conducted. The first problem found is the students' inability to
express their idea through writing. Most of the students did not enjoy writing and had a lack of confidence in writing on their own. As a result, most students were still unable to communicate with others through written language. Understandably, it was reasonable that the students in this school found it difficult to communicate in English through written language. They did not know how doing free writing, and they even did not possess the strategies for composing texts independently. Many of them organized their ideas in Indonesian, and then translated them into English when they write. This led to the weak structural organization and improper use of language. It was also perceived that many of the students in that school relied on teacher centred learning and lack of confidence in their own skills.

English teachers in this school neglected teaching writing. They had provided students with less opportunity to practice writing skill. In other words, the teachers had concentrated more on teaching of other skills, like reading, speaking, listening, and language components, such as vocabulary and grammar. The teachers are still dominant in the classroom and they tended to use a traditional approach, especially in teaching and learning writing. Most teachers still prefer using the translation method and the students do not actively engage in class and do not have much opportunity to practise this skill. The teacher asked the students to read a text, translate the text by using a dictionary, and rewrite the translation. The students were not asked to practice their writing ability. Furthermore, the teacher never makes a variation in teaching and learning process. This situation made the students’ motivation and attitude in writing decrease.

Indeed, in order to overcome these difficulties, teachers should adopt an effective approach to teach writing that provides useful supports for students to learn writing. This becomes important because teaching students with appropriate approach is related to the success of students themselves. To solve the aforementioned problems, the researcher suggests one way to address this situation is to adopt a Genre-Based Approach to the teaching of writing in the research site.
This approach has already been adopted in some English curriculum used in Indonesia, namely 2004 and 2006 curriculum (Emilia et al., 2008) and even in the last curriculum, 2013 curriculum. The adoption of Genre-Based Approach (henceforth mentioned as GBA) in English curriculum for junior high schools in Indonesia was a way to overcome the difficulties in teaching and learning writing (Permendiknas No. 22, 2006; Emilia et al., 2008). By adopting this approach, it is hoped that the difficulties encountered by the teacher and the students in teaching and learning writing can be partly solved.

GBA has considered an effective approach in teaching writing (Emilia, 2005, 2010, 2012; Emilia et al., 2008). GBA is effective for some reasons. First, in GBA, students are given more freedom to write about their real life. As a result, the products they produce should be more meaningful and communicative. Second, this method does not emphasize the rhetorical conventions of English texts. It is selected as language seen in context and presented to the students as part of a complete text and not as unrelated sentences. The approach offers a teaching methodology enabling teachers to present explicit instruction with respect to its forms and functions in highly systematic and logical ways (Feez and Joyce, 1998; Hyland, 2007; Emilia, 2010), which are factors that the researcher believes would assist students with the cognitive organisation of information.

Although this approach has been adopted in English curriculum in Indonesia, in practice, the implementation of this approach in the research site had not been maximized especially in the research site because the English teachers did not understand how to implement this approach properly. Even, some of the English teachers in the school did not know or hear what the GBA is. Realizing these facts, the teaching of English writing in the research site needed improvement for three reasons, insufficient time for the teaching and learning writing, lack of practice in writing a complete coherent text in various genres and the fact that the teaching of writing still follows the “traditional one-off writing task” (Gibbons, 2002: 67).

A number of research studies related to the implementation of GBA in teaching writing have also been conducted in different settings and for different
reasons (Emilia, et al., 2008; Tuan, 2011; Ahn, 2012; Pribady, 2012; Elashri, 2013). Most of the studies found that the GBA is helpful and effective in improving student writing. However, very few studies discuss the practical details of how this approach can be introduced by teachers in a low learning achievement EFL context, especially in Indonesia. Moreover, it is recommended by Emilia et al. (2008) in their research review to identify the effectiveness of the GBA and the challenge in its application in the schools with lower learning achievements. Additionally, there are still few studies discussing about students’ attitude towards the implementation of the GBA in teaching writing, especially in Indonesia.

Due to the above reasons, the present research was conducted in a state junior high school (SMP) in Kabanjahe, Karo Regency, North Sumatra. It is a school in a suburban area with limited facilities and lower learning achievements. This study intended to investigate the implementation of Genre-Based Approach to teaching writing skill, especially descriptive text and to find out the students’ attitude towards the implementation of GBA in the teaching of writing.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study was aimed to investigate whether the GBA can help improve students’ ability in writing descriptive text. Moreover, the study also intended to explore the students’ attitudes towards the implementation of the GBA in the teaching of descriptive text writing.

1.3 Research Question

With regard to the background and the purposes of the study above, by implementing the principles of Classroom Action Research (CAR), these two research questions were addressed:
1. Can the GBA help improve students’ ability in writing descriptive text?
2. What are the students’ attitudes towards the implementation of the GBA in teaching descriptive text writing?
1.4 Scope of the Study

This research was limited to investigating the teaching of writing skill by implementing the GBA and the students’ attitude towards the implementation of the GBA in the teaching of writing in the research site, a State Junior High School in Kabanjahe, Karo Regency, North Sumatra. This research focused on the teaching of descriptive text writing. The research was conducted in a class of seventh grade at the school. To solve the problems arising in this study, a procedural framework was developed by the researcher based on concepts related to Classroom Action Research. Classroom Action Research is a “self-reflective, critical and systematic approach to explore a teacher’s own teaching context” (Burns, 2010: 2). In this kind of research, a problematic situation which is worth investigating is identified and certain actions are taken to “intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes, and even better, improvements in practice” (Burns, 2010: 2).

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. Theoretically, this study will provide a reference in the study of teaching and learning writing based on the Genre-Based Approach at Junior High School level in Indonesia, especially in low learning achievement context. Furthermore, this study will become preliminary inputs for the readers or other researchers to further studies in similar areas of research with different interests. The finding of this study will also be useful for other researchers to conduct similar research in order to obtain deeper and better results.

Practically, this study provided general guidance for improving the practice of teaching writing descriptive text and as a guide for teachers in selecting, designing, and using appropriate methods in teaching English writing. The result of this study might also give input on the implementation of GBA in teaching writing to the English teachers so that they are able to implement this approach.
orderly and to reflect their own practices and to develop their ability in teaching English skills, especially writing. Moreover, teachers may put their capacities into practice and gain experience to facilitate and guide their students in learning to write by using the GBA.

Professionally, pertaining to the present English curriculum used in Indonesia, the results of this study are hopefully beneficial for students and teachers, especially in teaching and learning writing. The results of this study are important for English teachers in junior high school in Indonesia to enable them to implement the GBA in their classroom. It is also hoped that this study will enlighten and inspire other English teachers to explore Classroom Action Research as a powerful tool for professional development. Classroom Action Research is not an additional burden of what we do as teachers. It is fundamental and the core of accomplished teaching.

1.6 Definition of the Key Terms

Several key terms are used in explaining, discussing and reporting the results of this study. There are four key terms used in this thesis, i.e. Genre Based Approach, Descriptive Text, Attitude, and Classroom Action Research.

**Genre Based Approach** is “the way to language and literacy education that combines an understanding of genre and genre teaching together in the writing class” (Hammond and Derewianka, 2001).

**Descriptive Text** is a text about a particular person, thing, or place (Martin, 1985 cited in Emilia, 2010; Gerot and Wignell, 1995).

**Attitude** is “a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given attitude object” (Oskamp and Schultz, 2005: 9).

**Classroom Action Research** is “simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in order to improve the rationality and justice on their own practices, their understanding of those practices and the situations in which the practices are carried out” (Carr and Kemmis in Nunan and Bailey, 2009: 226-227). In this study, Classroom Action Research is defined as a process of investigating problems about teaching and learning descriptive text writing by
implementing GBA that is undertaken in a systematic way by a teacher-researcher who want to better understand her own work.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis organized into six chapters. Chapter I is an introduction. This chapter elaborates background of the study included the background of the study, the identification of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, the definition of key terms, and the organization of the thesis. Chapter II discusses some theoretical concepts and some findings underlying this study. This chapter presents some concepts relating to Genre-Based Approach, teaching writing, an overview of descriptive text, and concept of attitude. Chapter III describes the methodology that was used to conduct this research. It outlines the research methods including research design, research site, participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV discusses the problems of teaching and learning writing in the research site, the solutions to overcome the problems based on the theory of the GBA, the design of the teaching program and the research schedule. Chapter V presents the implementation of the GBA, the findings and the discussions of research problems. Chapter VI, finally, summarizes the findings and the discussion, specifies how the findings answer the research questions, points out the main limitations of the study and provides recommendations for further research.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the introduction of the whole study which includes the background of the study, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the scope of the study, and the significance of the study, and the definitions of key terms. The following chapter will present the theoretical foundation that frames the study.