

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introductory parts of the paper. It covers the background of the present study, the statements of the problems, the aims of the present study, the scope of the present study, the significance of the present study, the clarification of terms and lastly, the organization of the paper.

### 1.1. Background

The ability to think critically brings potential benefits to the quality of human life. Nowadays, critical thinking is a powerful tool to prepare students in the workplace, particularly because it is closely related to important abilities such as analysis and evaluation (see Erwin and Sebrell, 2003; Snyder and Snyder, 2008; Emilia, 2010; Emilia and Safrina, 2010). In higher education, critical thinking is highly desirable, even considered as the top priority (Grant, 1988; Reed, 1998; Ng, 2006; Kuhn, 1999; Ennis, 1993; Moon, 2008; Dunn *et al.*, 2008; Stassen *et al.*, 2011; Qing, 2013; Feng, 2013; Sharadgah, 2014; Golpour, 2014; Perry, 2014).

As students in higher education are demanded to think critically, practices are required for students to apply their critical thinking. Egege and Kutieleh (2004) as cited in Djiwandono (2013) found that Asian students tend to lack critical attitude as well as awareness of the principles of analysis and critique. Some studies also found that EFL students often find difficulties in making good argumentative statements and have lack of sufficient knowledge of critical thinking (see Alagozlu, 2004; Emilia, 2005; Nariza, 2014). In this regards, students, then, are required to be given tasks that can accommodate and improve their critical thinking since teaching critical thinking is closely related to the tasks given to the students (see Grant, 1988).

As language reflects thinking (Chaffee, 2009), students' critical thinking can be reflected through their writing. The writing process, given as a task to the students, can help them develop critical thinking. This is because writing is a process through which

students can practice and apply their critical thinking since it requires them to collect, analyze, synthesize and evaluate information (see Paul, 1990; Liaw, 2007; Fliegel and Hollan, 2011; Bekurs and Santoli, 2011; Vyncke, 2012; Sharadgah, 2014).

Critical writing in higher education is essential because students in higher education are required to be able to go beyond basic writing into more advanced elements of critical thinking (Nariza *et al.*, 2014). To understand students' critical writing, analyses should be done. Analyzing students' critical thinking is basic to understand the extent to which students have been able to think critically that later leads to select the right steps to enhance students' critical thinking. The strengths and weaknesses of students' critical thinking analyzed can inform educators of the aspects which require improvements. Additionally, improving students' critical thinking can also be done by understanding students' opinion related to the way writing process contributes to critical thinking. This will give insights into how writing process relates to critical thinking.

In writing, one of text genres that requires critical thinking is a Discussion text. This text genre reflects students' critical thinking since the nature of the genre requires the author to present arguments to convince the readers to believe in a certain point of view by discussing the issue from two different perspectives (see Knapp and Watkins, 2005). This genre employs argumentative uses of language in which they will succeed or fail only to the extent that they can be supported by arguments, reasons or evidence, and that they are able to convince the readers only because they have a rational foundation (see Toulmin *et al.*, 1984).

Some studies have examined students' critical thinking in writing. However studies that include critical thinking elements and dispositions in students' writing so far have been very few, particularly in Indonesian context. Current research in this area has been frequently focusing on critical thinking elements (Stapleton, 2001; Condon and Riley, 2004; Alagozlu, 2007) or dispositions (Reed, 1998; Ng, 2006). Previously, Golpour (2014) conducted a study of critical thinking and EFL learners' performance on different writing genres, including on students' argumentative texts. From his study,

it was revealed that students who can think critically can write better argumentative texts. In addition, critical thinkers' writings tend to show more coherence and well-organized thoughts. Other studies have also attempted to reveal students' critical thinking which is reflected in students' texts. Nariza *et al.* (2014), for instance, found out that the investigated students could show their critical thinking in presenting arguments, even though they often failed to maintain elements of argument completely that consist of claim, reason, evidence, and conclusion.

Taking the issue above as the point of departure, studies concerning critical thinking that include different aspects of critical thinking, particularly elements and dispositions, need to be conducted. Therefore, the present study focuses on analyzing critical thinking aspects reflected in students' Discussion texts and the way students' writing process contributes to students' critical thinking aspects in students' opinion.

## **1.2. Statements of problem**

In regards to the issues mentioned earlier, the current study seeks to address the following research questions.

1. What critical thinking aspects are reflected in students' Discussion texts?
2. In students' opinion, how does students' writing process contribute to students' critical thinking aspects?

## **1.3. Aims of the study**

Regarding the issues investigated, the aims of the present study are

1. to analyze critical thinking aspects reflected in students' Discussion texts.
2. to understand how students' writing process contributes to students' critical thinking aspects in students' opinion.

## **1.4. Scope of the study**

The present study focuses on analyzing students' critical thinking aspects reflected in the students' Discussion texts as well as understanding the contribution of students'

writing process to students' critical thinking aspects in students' opinion. The critical thinking aspects investigated in this study are limited to critical thinking elements and dispositions which are elaborated in Chapter Two.

### **1.5. Significance of the study**

The present study is expected to be beneficial theoretically, practically, and professionally.

#### **1. Theoretical Benefits**

Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich studies in critical thinking area, particularly related to students' critical thinking aspects reflected in the students' Discussion texts. It is also expected to provide theoretical information on the contributions of the students' writing process to the students' critical thinking in students' opinion.

#### **2. Practical Benefits**

Practically, this study is expected to be significant to portray students' critical thinking abilities in writing. This description can reveal students' critical thinking strengths and weaknesses which provide information for better efforts in developing critical thinkers. In addition, this study is expected to provide information on stages of writing process which can foster students' critical thinking to be applied in the classroom practices.

#### **3. Professional Benefits**

Professionally, this study is expected to increase awareness for teachers of the importance of developing critical thinking in the classroom.

### **1.6. Clarification of terms**

To avoid misconception, several terms in the present study are clarified as follows.

#### **1.6.1. Critical Thinking**

Dewey (Fisher, 2001: 2) explains critical thinking as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.”

#### **1.6.2. Critical thinking aspects**

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Aspects of critical thinking in this study cover critical thinking elements and disposition which will be elaborated in Chapter Two.

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## **1.7. Organization of the paper**

This paper is organized into five chapters as follows.

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

The paper begins with Chapter I, in which it portrays the background of the present study as well as provides the statements of the problems, the aims of the present study, the scope of the present study, the significance of the present study, the clarification of terms and the organization of the paper.

### **Chapter II: Theoretical Foundation**

This chapter lays out the theoretical dimension of the present study. It covers the theories relevant to the present study, which include the framework of critical thinking, the critical thinking aspects, the theory of the Discussion text genre and the theory of writing process.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

This chapter presents the methodology consisting of the research design, the research site and participants, the data collection procedures and the data analysis used in this study.

### **Chapter IV: Findings and Discussions**

This chapter provides the findings and the discussions of the present study.

### **Chapter V: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations**

This last chapter covers the conclusions, the limitations, and the recommendations of the present study. It provides the conclusion and the limitations of the current study as well as offers some recommendations for educational practices and for further study.