

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses a general issue related to teaching writing and critical thinking. It covers the elaboration of the background of the study, the aim of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, and the organization of the thesis.

1.1. Background of the study

Critical thinking (CT) has become a buzz word in educational issues in many countries in this 21st century. The significant roles of CT in this global information era have been widely recognized in academic, career, and civic lives. CT is believed to contribute to one's ability to solve problems, to make intelligent decisions, and to reach the goals of lives that make someone's life meaningful (Chaffee, 2000:2; Gokhale, 1995). This era, which has also emphasized teamwork skills in the workforce requires human resource to be able to work collaboratively and think critically as well as creatively to attain a common goal (Gokhale, 1995; Shelley, 2009). In addition, Ten Dam and Volman (2004) add the "citizenship competence" that enables someone to "determine their own position" in the rapidly changing society that needs more reasonable citizens. Concerning this issue, critical thinking instructions become the concern of educators and have been carefully evaluated in order to improve students' learning and thinking skills (Lipman, 2003; Ok and Toy, 2011:46).

Focusing on ELT, writing has been particularly emphasized because it entails social and cognitive aspects which are crucial for students' learning development. Ennis (1996:xx) argues that much of the writing activities requires critical thinking. Chaffee, McMahon, & Stout (2002:5) also suggest that writing encourages students to use their thinking skills especially when they move through the writing process, so that they can write effectively. Citing Applebee (1984), Quitadamo and Kurtz (2007:142) also confirm that writing improves thinking since it requires individuals to clarify their ideas, to evaluate, and choose necessary tools for effective discourse. More specifically, Emilia (2010:51) and Liu, (2014 citing Kun and Crowell, 2011) suggest that argumentative writing can

be an effective vehicle used to help students develop critical thinking and critical literacy.

Closely related to the teaching of writing and critical thinking is collaborative writing (CW) approach, which is shaped under the theories of cooperative or collaborative learning (CL) and social constructivism. This approach has been proved by research to be effective in enhancing students' CT. The study conducted by Gokhale (1995), for example, showed that CL fostered the development of CT through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluating other's ideas. Research in both L1 and L2 settings conducted by Storch (2005) and in EFL by Emilia (2010), also revealed that CW promoted reflective thinking, mainly if the learners were engaged in the acts of explaining and defending their ideas to their peers. In terms of language development, these studies also showed that CW improved students' language in the sense of grammar accuracy, lexis and discourse, as well as pooling knowledge about the language itself.

Besides the approach to writing, the GBA's stages of Modelling and Joint Construction, in which the students collaborate to produce a text, have also contributed to students' development in CT and language learning as studied by Emilia (2010) in Indonesian school contexts. Other studies on educational benefits resulted from such social constructivist teaching are well recognized such as enhancing learning, developing language, supporting higher-level thinking, self-esteem, providing feedback and assistance through interactions with more knowledgeable others, that support ongoing learning (Gokhale, 1991; Emilia, 2010; McCafferty et al., 2006; Gray, 2001).

A lot of research in the area of writing connected to critical thinking has been conducted either in tertiary education or high schools. However, the particular research on collaborative writing related to critical thinking in Indonesian secondary school setting is still rarely given serious attention. Meanwhile, to meet the future demands as previously mentioned, secondary school students need to be prepared well for their further study by activating their critical thinking ability, as a "necessary attribute of academic achievement" (Egege and Kutieleh, 2004:75; Lai, 2011:4), for the real world demands of work and everyday life, (Marin and Halpern, 2011; Masduki, 2011), as well as for being

a citizen of the modern democratic society of this age (Ten Dam and Volman, 2004). Accordingly, there is a change of priority in today's education task as suggested by Lipman (2003:2) and Rafi (n.d:63), that teachers are responsible for developing students' critical thinking in the classroom practice other than pushing them from one educational level to the next. Such a condition brings an instructional implication that teachers need to provide explicit instructions in critical thinking, use collaborative learning methods and constructivist approaches that place students at the center of the learning process (Lai, 2011:2).

Aligned with the education paradigm shift is the demand of the national curriculum which is going to be implemented gradually in all national schools in Indonesia. Collaborative and critical learning patterns are stated as two of the nine points of mindset that become the rationale for developing this curriculum (the Copy of *Permendikbud* Attachment No. 69/2013). Thus, collaboration and critical thinking can be suggested as the models of learning required to facilitate students to meet the 21st Century Skills as the national curriculum expects.

However, Alwasilah (2001:56) reveals that many school teachers in Indonesia prefer to ignore the teaching of writing since they lacked information and knowledge of teaching their students to write so that students are rarely exposed to the practice of writing. Brown (2000:334) citing Lenneberg (1967) asserts that writing is a "learned behavior", so we learn to write if we become a member of a literate society and usually, only if someone teaches us. Thus, it is obvious that writing is not naturally acquired but it should be learned under guidance, and accordingly a teacher plays a significant role in developing students' writing skills. In line with this idea, Gibbons (2002:10) introduces scaffolding term to assist learners how to do something so that in the future they can complete a similar task by themselves.

Departing from these facts and motivated by the responsibility as a teacher, the researcher is interested to research critical thinking by investigating this area through the teaching of collaborative writing. This research aims to investigate the elements of critical thinking in students' writing texts which are resulted from collaborative writing activities, and how collaborative writing helps develop students' critical thinking.

1.2. The aims of the study

This study is aimed

1. To investigate the elements of critical thinking demonstrated in students' writing resulted from collaborative writing.
2. To investigate how collaborative writing helps develop students' critical thinking.

1.3. Research Questions

The problems in this study are formulated in two research questions.

1. What elements of critical thinking are demonstrated in students' writing resulted from collaborative writing?
2. How does collaborative writing help develop students' critical thinking?

1.4. The significance of the study

Regarding the significance of the study, this research is expected to have the contribution to the theory, educational and professional practices and policy.

- a. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the information and understanding on critical thinking and collaborative writing which still likely receive a little attention in Indonesian EFL context.
- b. Practically, this study is expected to provide senior high school English teachers with an alternative solution in teaching critical thinking through writing activities.
- c. Politically, the result of the study can be implemented to improve the English teaching quality, in at least the school where the researcher teaches. In addition, since critical thinking is considered generalisable and can be practiced across curriculum, the result of the study is also expected to provide a model of integrating the core values in curriculum, which is emphasized by the education foundation where the researcher works.

1.5. The scope of the study

The study was conducted in a private senior high school in Bandung, involving 27 students of Grade XII of Science Program as the researcher's regular class and another researcher from a post graduate school as an observer. The researcher was

involved as a participant observer. This study employed a case study and qualitative data collection and analysis. Data collection was obtained from students' writing texts, classroom observation, and interviews with students. Text analyses was focused on the *issue, arguments, facts and opinions* produced in the students' Discussion texts to investigate the elements of critical thinking (CT). Recorded students' activities and talks in each group discussion were analysed to investigate how collaborative writing helps develop students' critical thinking. Meanwhile, the interview was used to enhance the validity of the results of both data analyses.

1.6. The organization of the thesis

This thesis is organized in six chapters with the description as follow:

1. Chapter I presents the background of the study, the aims, research questions, significance of the study, the scope of the study, and the organization of the study.
2. Chapter II discusses theoretical reviews on collaborative learning (CL), collaborative writing (CW), and critical thinking (CT). This chapter also discusses the theory of scaffolding and feedback in writing as the relevant supporting theories, completed with a brief theory of the Discussion genre as the writing task chosen in this study.
3. Chapter III describes the methodology of collecting and analysing the data , including the design, participants, data collection techniques and analysis.
4. Chapter IV discusses the teaching program as the implementation of the teaching of collaborative writing and critical thinking. Some findings from classroom observation during the writing process are also presented and discussed in this chapter.
5. Chapter V presents the findings and discussion of the obtained data from the students' writing texts and classroom observation which are triangulated with the interviews.
6. Chapter VI, the last, presents the conclusion of the study and some recommendations for improving the teaching of CT in EFL contexts and for further study.