

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

This study attempts to investigate Senior High School students' critical thinking in writing. In this chapter, the general overview of the study, which focuses on the reason to conduct the study, is presented. This chapter begins with a description of the background of the study followed by the general notion of academic reports encompassing research questions, purposes of the study, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, definition of key terms, and the organization of the paper.

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

In the twenty-first century, people are constantly encountering numerous of information. The proliferation of the available texts on the internet and other media exposes people to interact with texts containing different information that put people in a fashion open to critique around gender, socioeconomic, and ethnic issues (Stevens & Bean, 2003). At the same time, our thinking is influenced by powerful emotions or desires that affect the quality of our thinking (Paul & Elder, 2007). In this essence, the skill for carefully perceiving information is becoming urgent. Critical thinking, as a reasonable and reflective thinking focuses on deciding what to believe or do (Ennis, 1993), reinforces people to take control of their conscious thought and decision-making process. On the other hand, critical thinking is also considered as the most important skill for problem solving, inquiry, and discovery (Thompson, 2011) that is essential to be enhanced to evaluate our judgement on an issue and to take decisions. For that reason, critical thinking becomes a vital skill to be strived for.

In the field of education, educators and educational theorists put critical thinking in a preeminent position among the many educational issues, aims, and ideals today (Ennis, 1993; Siegel, 2010; Mok, 2009; Thompson, 2011; Hughes, 2014). Facione (2011) argues that teaching people to think critically would allow people to make good decisions and equip them to improve their own futures and to become contributing members of society, rather than burdens on society. Moreover, learning to think critically and fairmindedly will also lead the students to become effective citizens who are capable of reasoning ethically and acting in the public good (Elder & Paul, 2010). Hence, integrating critical thinking in education is essential for preparing students to give a positive contribution to society. For that reason, critical thinking is significant to be in the heart of education.

Various types of classroom activities, including writing, can be a medium to nurture students' critical thinking. To follow Hatcher (1999), the integration of critical thinking instruction with written composition gives significant effects on student performance. In addition, integrating writing activities in critical thinking instructions enables teachers to portray the levels of students' critical thinking. As stated by Norris (1985), despite the difficulties in grading an essay, essays could lead to a profound insight into the thinking process the examinee used in the arriving at solutions. In this respect, diagnosing students' critical thinking in writing informs us to know where to focus on the instruction (Ennis, 1993). Therefore, knowing the students' levels of critical thinking becomes necessary to improve and to refine the instruction.

To conduct a successful critical thinking instruction, critical thinking teaching needs to be woven into curriculum content at all grade levels. The Senior High School level is one of the important stages to develop students' critical thinking since the students need to prepare and to develop their critical

thinking for a college life. Thomas (2011) states that critical thinking is a crucial skill that students need to develop while at university to be able to explain their reasoning and to solve unknown problems. However, students cannot acquire critical thinking skills overnight. Critical thinking is a skill in which the ability to execute will improve with practice (Gray, 2012). Therefore, initiating critical thinking instruction and diagnosing students' critical thinking at the Senior High School level is important.

Unfortunately, although a number of studies regarding critical thinking in education had been conducted, limited studies under the area of critical thinking in relation to writing, especially in Senior High School level, had been conducted. Emilia (2005), Flores (2007), and Vyncke (2012) had conducted the study of critical thinking in students' writing. Emilia (2005) conducted a study to investigate students' writing skill in improving the achievement of the argumentative genre in a tertiary EFL context in Indonesia. Flores (2007) conducted a study to analyze and to describe the ability of the first year students of one private university in Manila to demonstrate critical thinking skills in their argumentation paper. Meanwhile, Vyncke (2012) investigated students' critical thinking in academic writing at Western Universities. The study of Emilia (2005), Flores (2007), and Vyncke (2012) provide insights into students' critical thinking in writing, such as students' good grasp of critical thinking disposition, students' interpretations of critical thinking, and students' skill level in writing an argumentative essay. However, the study of Emilia (2005), Flores (2007), and Vyncke (2012) focus on graduate and postgraduate students only. It indicates that the study of critical thinking in writing at the Senior High School level is barely conducted.

The aforementioned explanations confirm the importance of critical thinking instruction, particularly in writing, for Senior High School students.

However, the research underlying the area has not been widely conducted. By considering the scarcity of the study under the area, this study is accordingly conducted to investigate Senior High School students' critical thinking in writing an argumentative essay, especially a Hortatory Exposition text genre.

The Hortatory Exposition text was selected to find out the students' critical thinking in writing for two reasons. First, the nature of Hortatory Exposition text's structure which includes the thesis statement, the body of argument, and recommendations (Gerot & Wignell 1995, Priyana *et. al.*, 2008) is potential to portray students' critical thinking as it requires argumentation, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation during the process of writing. According to Lai (2011), to activate critical thinking and to make students' reasoning visible, materials containing contradictions and requiring students to provide evidence or logical arguments in support of judgments, choices, claims, or assertions are needed. Secondly, the Hortatory Exposition text is one of three argumentative essays introduced in Senior High School level. The Hortatory Exposition text is taught to the eleventh graders in the second semester after the Analytical Exposition text. Thus, the students are potential to have a background knowledge of argumentative essays. In this essence, the hortatory exposition text was chosen for the text's structure that is fluid with the nature of critical thinking and its strategic placement in the curriculum. By considering the aforementioned reasons, this study is accordingly investigating Senior High School students' critical thinking in writing, as well as students' beliefs on their critical thinking and their difficulties in incorporating critical thinking in their writing.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

The study focuses on investigating the answers to the following questions:

1. What elements of critical thinking are demonstrated by the students in writing an English hortatory exposition text?
2. What do the students believe about their critical thinking before and after writing an English hortatory exposition text?
3. What difficulties do the students face in incorporating critical thinking in writing an English hortatory exposition text?

## **1.3. Purposes of the Study**

This study aims to:

1. investigate the elements of critical thinking demonstrated by the students in writing an English hortatory exposition text;
2. investigate the students' beliefs on their critical thinking before and after writing an English hortatory exposition text;
3. investigate difficulties the students face in incorporating critical thinking in writing an English hortatory exposition text.

## **1.4. Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on investigating how critical thinking is demonstrated by Senior High School students in writing an English hortatory exposition text, what beliefs on their critical thinking the students have before and after writing an English Hortatory Exposition text, and what difficulties the students face in incorporating critical thinking in their writing.

## **1.5. Significance of the Study**

The result of this study is expected to contribute to the EFL teaching in theory, practice, and professional perspectives. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature in the field of critical thinking, especially in relation with writing. Practically, the outcomes of this study are essential in providing information regarding students' critical thinking in writing, including the elements of critical thinking demonstrated in students' writing, students' difficulties in incorporating their critical thinking in writing, and students' beliefs on their critical thinking in writing. This information is expected to be beneficial to conduct a better instruction in the future by considering the aspects that need to be refined. Lastly, this study might contribute to the development of critical thinking instructions that is vital in today's complex realities.

## **1.6. Definition of Key Terms**

To avoid the misbeliefs of terms frequently mentioned in this study, the followings are the definition of key terms.

1. Critical thinking: a reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do (Ennis, 1993).
2. Fallacy: an error in reasoning (Barry, 1983; LaBossiere, 2002; Height, 2011).

## **1.7. Organization of the Paper**

This thesis paper is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the study. This chapter includes background of the study, research questions, purposes of the study, the scope of the study, the significance of the study, definition of key terms, and the organization of the

paper. The second chapter addresses literature review underpinning the proposed study. The theories covered in this chapter include the general concept of critical thinking, the elements of critical thinking, critical thinking in EFL classrooms, critical thinking in writing, critical thinking in Senior High School students' writing, and previous studies. Chapter three presents methodology of the study, which covers research design, research setting, participants, data collection, data analysis, and research procedure. Chapter four comprises research findings and discussions of the data obtained from the whole instrument employed. Chapter five presents the conclusion, limitation, and recommendation of the study.