

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents background of the study, research questions investigated, objectives of the study, significances of the study, scope of the study, definition of variables investigated, and organization of this thesis.

#### 1. 1. Background of the study

Academic writing course is identified as an important subject for university students by many experts of education (Bruce, 2008; Coffin et al., 2003; Imani & Habil, 2011; Swales & Feak, 2004). This subject is aimed at preparing the students to cope with writing requirements which are the major focus of the lectures in university institutions nowadays (Bruce, 2008, p. 1; Swales & Feak, 2004, p. 7). It is the center of teaching and learning program in higher education (Coffin et al. 2003, p. 2). Over the last few decades, written academic genre is one of important genres in university life, which were studied by many researchers in the world (Imani & Habil, 2011, p. 42).

Recognizing the importance of academic writing for university students, institutions around the world have offered a course of academic writing aimed at accommodating the students' needs in academic writing. At the beginning of university study in the United States and in the United Kingdom, first-year academic writing courses are provided as a required course (Coffin et al., 2003, pp. 6–7). Virginia International University (Bayraktar, 2011), Delta College (O'Conner, 2012), Texas A&M University Commerce (Stephens-Jr, 2013), University of Palackeho (Glogarova, Molnar, Kasparkova, & Obrink, 2013), Harvard University (Stephen, 2015), The University of Pennsylvania (Walker, 2015), and University of Victoria (Christie, 2015) are the examples of university institutions that provide an academic writing course for their students to satisfy their needs in academic writing tasks. Universities in Indonesia have also undertaken a similar thing. Prior observation reveals that Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia in Bandung, Universitas Cokroaminoto in Palopo, Universitas Negeri

Yogyakarta, Universitas Siyah Kuala in Aceh, and Universitas Sriwijaya in Palembang are among the universities in Indonesia which provide an academic writing course in order to fulfill their students' academic writing needs.

Facilities and programs are also provided to help students to cope with their academic writing tasks. Writing center has been one of the most popular facilities provided by universities to support their students' academic writing assignments (Coffin et al., 2003, pp. 6–7). The facility can be used all day by the students. However, that kind of facility is still difficult to find in Indonesia. Another kind of available support provided in Indonesia is a specific program aimed at helping students to enhance their academic writing skill. *Up skill* in Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia and *workshops of research* in Universitas Cokroaminoto Palopo are two examples of such programs.

However, a pilot study conducted in one of the universities in Palopo revealed that even though academic writing courses have been provided and some supporting workshops and facilities have been offered as well, the students still have serious problems to write their research theses (Tangelangi & Widayari, 2015). The problems are related to discourses, linguistics, and critical thinking competences, namely: plagiarism, grammatical errors, vocabulary lacking, and problems on analyzing data and formulating research question. Those problems are the collection of fundamental problems in academic writing which should have been solved in academic writing courses offered at campus.

The similar condition also occurs in other institutions around the world. Al Fadda (2012) and Imani and Habil (2011) found that insufficient mastery of the target language and first language interference become the next problems besides the low skill in writing for the students who use English as a foreign language. Moreover, Mbirimi (2013) revealed that it was challenging for the students to deal with aspects of academic literacy. They tended to do plagiarism since they lacked knowledge in terms of referencing and citation. It was also difficult for them to develop coherent paragraphs. They also faced challenges in dealing with grammar and vocabularies required in academic writing. In a similar vein, Ali Al-Khairi (2013) found that grammatical errors and shortage in writing skill become

challenges faced by the university students in academic writing. Based on those previous studies, it can be seen that those students' problems on academic writing are on discourse competence that includes cohesion, coherence, paraphrasing, and generic structure of the text (Celce-Murcia & Dornyei in Bruce, 2008, p. 3). Another problem that becomes an additional problem for foreign language learners on academic writing is the problem on linguistic competence including specific language features in academic writing (Emilia, 2012, p. 1).

Comparing between the condition of the institution where the pilot study took place and the condition of other institutions, it is known that the causes of the case are different. The university where the preliminary study was conducted has big number of the students compared to other universities, but it does not have sufficient number of the lecturers to help the students deal with their academic writing. There are 40 students in each class for all courses, including the academic writing courses. Moreover, the academic writing course provided in that institution is an elective subject with two credit hours, while in the other universities; the academic writing course is a compulsory subject with more than two credit hours. Thus, the students in the university, where the preliminary study was conducted, do not have adequate time to learn much about how to write academically through their academic writing courses offered at campus. This condition deteriorates the students' weaknesses in academic writing in that institution.

Looking at the characteristics of the academic writing course offered in the institution which are not found in other universities, the present study is focused on examining the academic writing course provided in that institution. The course, which is offered as an elective subject with two credit hours, is inspected whether or not it fulfills the students' needs in academic writing. To investigate whether the course accommodates the students' needs, the items of the students' needs and the syllabus of the course are important to examine. The students' needs are investigated through need analysis or need assessment (Print, 1993, p. 120; Seel & Dijkstra, 2004, p. 172). Meanwhile, syllabus is investigated by document analysis to identify the learning objectives, what are taught, in what order, how they are

taught, and how they are assessed (Cunningsworth, 1995; Khranke, 1987; Posner, 1992). Analyzing the syllabus is crucial since it involves some elements that capture the whole picture of the course. After investigating those two points, the students' needs and the syllabus, the question of whether or not the course accommodates the students' needs can be answered accordingly by comparing what are included in the syllabus and what are needed by the students.

However, the possibility of the absence of the syllabus is there since some other courses in the institution are conducted without any syllabi. Therefore, the present study is conducted to examine four points: what aspects of the academic writing the students need to improve, whether or not the syllabus of the academic writing course exists and accommodates the students' needs, what model of syllabus can be proposed to satisfy the students' needs, and what learning concept is effective for the students in the context investigated.

## **1. 2. Research questions**

Based on the background above, this study is conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are students' needs in academic writing?
2. Do the elements of the syllabus for the academic writing course exist and accommodate the students' needs?
3. What model of syllabus can be proposed to accommodate the students' needs?
4. What learning concept is effective for the students in the context under investigation?

## **1. 3. Objectives of the study**

Referring to the research questions above, this study is aimed at finding out the students' needs in academic writing. Then, the existence of the syllabus of the academic writing course is also examined. If the syllabus exists, it is then inspected more whether or not it accommodates the students' needs. If it does not, the study investigates whether the elements of the syllabus exist and how the course is run without a fixed plan of the course which is generally written in the syllabus. At last, a new syllabus is designed to satisfy the specific needs of the students where the study takes place.

#### **1. 4. Significances of the study**

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the theory development of academic writing for university students. Then, this research is practically expected to provide beneficial information for the institution where this study takes place, and the provided syllabus designed from this study is then expected to be a reference or even used on the next semester for the same course. At last, the information provided as the result of this research is expected to be a point of consideration for the stakeholders and the lecturers at the institution in deciding the policy related to the courses under investigation.

#### **1. 5. Scope of the study**

this study focuses on investigating the students' needs in academic writing. Since this study is focused on students' needs in a particular institution, the information resulted in this study might be only directed to the institution where this study takes place and the other institutions that have similar condition. Moreover, related to the elements of the syllabus investigated, the students' needs, learning goals, learning materials, learning activities and kinds of assessment are the focused points examined in the present study since those four points are the significant elements of a syllabus (Khranke, 1987). Considering the limited time of my study at campus, this study is only limited to designing a new syllabus without investigating the impact of the implementation of the syllabus. A follow up study is called for to investigate the point.

#### **1. 6. Operational definitions**

To get general understanding about this study, definition of key terms used in this study is presented below:

1. Academic writing course is a course that provides learning materials and activities proposed to prepare the students to do their task in accordance with academic writing.
2. Needs analysis is a series of activities to gather information that will become consideration to design the learning system in order to meet the students' needs (Brown, 1995). Then, the students' needs here refer to learning materials, and

activities needed by the students to help them to complete their academic writing tasks.

3. Syllabus is a list of learning topic and activities for a particular subject; in this case it is for Academic Writing course. The syllabus will contain a series of goal, materials, learning activities, and assessment types (Cunningsworth, 1995).

### **1. 7. Organization of the thesis**

There are five chapters involved in this thesis, namely introduction, literature review, research methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion and recommendations. The first chapter, introduction, covers the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significances of the study, scope of the study, operational definitions, and organization of the chapters. The second chapter, literature review, consists of theories and previous studies related to academic writing, need analysis, and syllabus design for an academic writing course. The third chapter, research methodology, describes how the study is conducted. It covers the research design of the study, research site and participants, data resources, and procedure of data analysis. The fourth chapter, findings and discussion, display the data collected and the discussion between the data and the related theories. At last, in the fifth chapter, conclusions as the answers of the research questions and some recommendations related to the results of the study are presented.