

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will elaborate the background of the study, the research questions, the purposes of the study, the significance of the study, clarification of terms, and organisation of the dissertation.

1.1 Background of the Study

Academic writing in tertiary education plays an important role for students. It can serve as a medium for the students in the learning of the knowledge base of their discipline (Maguire, Reynolds, & Delahunt, 2013) in which they are also learning to develop and organise their arguments (Barnet & Bedau, 2011; Quitadamo & Kurtz, 2007; Spiller & Ferguson, 2009). The students' capacity to organise their arguments leads to information-organising skills that can reflect their critical thinking (Lipman, 2003).

In writing academic texts, the students are also building and practising their critical thinking (Robinson, 2011) and character values (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, 1999a) e.g. honesty and respect where the students learn to write a good academic writing in accordance with the ethics of academic writing (Lars Jones, 2011). Critical thinking and character values are important aspects that have been emphasised by the national curriculum of Indonesia starting from the primary to tertiary level of education (The Ministry of National Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2012). Without critical thinking and character values in the context of tertiary education that emphasises academic writing, their writings will not be sufficient to be called as academic writing (Jiang, 2011).

In reality, learning academic writing is not an easy task (Giridharan, 2012; Hamman, 2005; Wingate, 2012). This is the case in Indonesia (Akuntono, 2012; Bramantyo, 2013; Emilia, 2005; The Directorate General of Higher Education, 2012). Students at the tertiary level of education need an explicit instruction on how to write the genres expected by their particular discourse communities (Alvarez, 2007), that is, the academic writing genres.

One approach that has been proven effective to develop academic writing is a genre-based approach. The genre-based approach with its explicit pedagogy (Herrington & Moran, 2005; Macken-Horarik, 2002; Martin & Rose, 2005; Rose, 2011) is developed under systemic functional linguistics that views language as a social practice (Hasan, 2014; Martin, 2014). Some studies found out that the genre-based approach could help develop the students' academic writing in the English as a foreign language (hereafter EFL) tertiary context (Kongpetch, 2003; Lerdpreedakorn, 2008; Payaprom, 2012), including in the Indonesian EFL tertiary context that emphasised critical thinking (Emilia, 2005). The genre-based approach was also found effective in building the students' character in the context of secondary education (see Hardini, 2013). Apparently, the use of the genre-based approach in building character in the context of tertiary education in Indonesia is still limited.

Accordingly, this study fills the gap in terms of character building that is still limited in the context of tertiary education in Indonesia by adapting Emilia's study (2005) which synthesised the genre-based approach with critical thinking, critical literacy, and critical pedagogy principles to teach academic writing. The difference of Emilia's study (2005) from this study is that this study synthesises the genre-based approach with the critical thinking and character building principles to teach academic writing, critical thinking, and character. In terms of character building, Emilia (2005) did not synthesise the character building principles explicitly as critical thinking eventually is a form of character building activity (Easterbrooks & Scheetz, 2004; Kwak, 2008a; Orr & Klein, 1991; Siegel, 1993; Williams, 2011). This kind of study, especially in the context of the research site, has not been conducted.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the genre-based approach under the term a critical genre-based approach to teaching not only the students' academic writing but also their critical thinking and character. The term critical genre-based approach was firstly coined by Emilia (2005). In particular, the study aims to find out whether the critical genre-based approach can help develop the English as a foreign language

(EFL) students' academic writing, critical thinking, and character at the tertiary level of education in Indonesia and in what ways it can help develop them.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the study, this study attempts to address the following research questions.

Can a critical genre-based approach help develop tertiary EFL students' academic writing, critical thinking, and character in a tertiary EFL context in Pontianak, Indonesia?

In what ways a critical genre-based approach can help develop tertiary EFL students' academic writing, critical thinking, and character in a tertiary EFL context in Pontianak, Indonesia?

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The aims of this study are as follows:

This study aims to find out whether a critical genre-based approach can help develop tertiary EFL students' academic writing, critical thinking, and character in a tertiary EFL context in Pontianak, Indonesia.

This study aims to find out in what ways a critical genre-based approach can help develop tertiary EFL students' academic writing, critical thinking, and character in a tertiary EFL context in Pontianak, Indonesia.

1.4 Significance of the study

The study is expected to be significant from two perspectives, theoretical and practical perspectives. From the theoretical perspective, the present study can enrich the literature of a critical genre-based approach to teaching academic writing, promoting critical thinking and building character values that is still limited at the tertiary level of education in the Indonesian context (see Emilia, 2005, Hardini, 2013). From the practical perspective, the results of the study are expected to provide information on using the critical genre-based approach to teach academic

writing, develop critical thinking, and build character, which are important for the contemporary Indonesian education system and society.

1.5 Clarification of Terms

The terms used in this study are described as follows:

- a. Critical genre-based approach (hereafter CGBA) is an approach to teaching academic writing, critical thinking (CT), and character of the tertiary English as a foreign language (EFL) students in Indonesia by synthesising the systemic functional linguistics genre-based approach (SFL GBA) principles with critical thinking (CT) and character building (CB) principles. The term was firstly coined by Emilia (2005) who synthesised the genre-based approach under systemic functional linguistics (SFL) with critical pedagogy (CP), critical literacy (CL), critical thinking (CT) principles to teaching academic writing. Under CP, the term “critical” is used to analyse a certain issue critically by considering certain social factors, which is mainly based on Freire’s works. Under CL, the term “critical” focuses on critical reading and writing that is drawn from a general view of literacy and a critical social theory of literacy. Under CT, the term “critical” focuses on using certain skills and dispositions to analyse an issue critically (see Burbules & Berk, 1999; Emilia, 2005). In this study, the term “critical” is used to emphasise the CT principles. The study also synthesises CB principles to enrich the foundation of this study as Emilia (2005) did not synthesise the CB principles explicitly due to the fact that CT eventually is a form of CB activity (Easterbrooks & Scheetz, 2004; Kwak, 2008a; Orr & Klein, 1991; Siegel, 1993; Williams, 2011).
- b. Academic writing is writing in an academic setting that requires specific skills and knowledge of the genre of the academic writing with its linguistic features and the ethics of academic writing. Academic writing can also be a medium for the students in a higher education context to develop their critical thinking and character.
- c. Systemic functional linguistics (hereafter SFL) is a linguistic approach that is related to the language function. It deals with “what language can do, or rather in what the speaker, child or adult, can do with it; and that we try to explain the

nature of language, its internal organisation and patterning, in terms of the functions that it has evolved to serve” (Halliday, 1978, p. 16).

- d. Systemic functional grammar (hereafter SFG) is a description of grammar under systemic functional linguistics that focuses on how a language is used in a certain context. In this study, it is used as a guideline to conduct a text analysis (Halliday, 1994).
- e. Systemic functional linguistics genre-based approach (hereafter SFL GBA) is an approach to teaching literacy based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics that is developed by “Sydney School” in Australia (see Emilia, 2005).
- f. Critical thinking (hereafter CT) is a way of thinking towards an issue by using proper CT skills and dispositions. CT skills cover information-organising skills (Lipman, 2003). Dispositions are manners or character traits that are important in guiding the students in applying CT (Paul & Elder, 2001; Siegel, 1986). The CT dispositions cover the intellectual standards, namely clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logicity, and fairness (Elder & Paul, 2010; Paul & Elder, 2002).
- g. Character building (hereafter CB) is developing character qualities or values that consist of performance values and moral values (Davidson & Lickona, 2006). The character values that are built should be visible and in accordance with academic writing and critical thinking. In addition, the term character building are also known as character education and moral education.

1.6 Organisation of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into seven chapters. Chapter one will present the introduction to the topic of the study. Chapter two will present relevant theories of the study. The theories that are relevant to this study are academic writing, critical thinking (CT), character building (CB), and systemic functional linguistics genre-based approach (SFL GBA). Chapter three will discuss the research methodology that consists of participants and site of the study, research design, data collection, and data analysis.

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Chapter four will present an overview of the teaching program based on the participant observation field notes and the students' responses to the open-ended questionnaire. Chapter five will discuss the analyses of the students' texts. Chapter six will discuss the analyses of the data from the interview sessions. Chapter seven, as the latter chapter, will provide the conclusions, implications, and recommendations of this study.