CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background of the study, the research questions, aims of the study, significance of the study, limitation of the study, methods of the study, data collection, data analysis, clarification of essential terms used in the study, and the organization of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Among the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is generally considered as the most important skill for literate society. The skill becomes one of five indicators on determining how good a university is in terms of teaching, research and international reputation (Alwasilah, 2005, p.17). Geiser and Studley (2001) in Kellogg and Raulerson (2007) stated that one's ability to compose an extended text is the only indicator best to predict the success of freshmen within their first years. However, by and large, in Simpson (1998, p.34), it is stated that learning to write well is agreed to be a difficult and time-consuming process. Instead of saying that writing is an exciting task, most of people tend to say that it is a frustrating one since a good writing requires many elements.

Regarding the issue on the elements of writing required by a writer, Richards (1990, p.100) in Simpson (1998, p. 34) proposed that to write well, besides basic mechanical control, one needs to have enough language and general

intellectual skills to generate and organize ideas and put those ideas into coherent, logically ordered, intelligible sentences, paragraphs, and essays.

In line with Richards, Wolfersberger (2003, p.1) asserted that L2 writing entails all L1 writing process and L2 processing issues. As in L1 writing, an L2 writer must get involved in producing content, drafting ideas, revising writing, choosing appropriate vocabulary, and editing text. However, she should also find words, phrase or sentences fit to her intended expression.

Relating to this issue, Angelova (1999) in Mu (2005, p.1) proposed that at the core of L2 writing, there lies language proficiency, L1 writing competence, use of cohesive devices, metacognitive knowledge about the writing task, writing strategies and writer's personal characteristic as affecting elements. However, Mu (2005) proposed that among the factors, strategy is the most essential factor that may differentiate proficient writer from the other one.

There is some research relating to this matter of strategy, both in L1 and L2. In L1 area, the most notable study came from Flower and Hayes (1981), the study concluded that:

> (1) The process of writing is best understood as a set of distinctive thinking processes which writers orchestrate or organize during the act of composing; (2) these processes have a hierarchical, highly embedded organization in which any given process can be embedded within any other; (3) The act of composing itself is a goal-directed thinking process, guided by the writer's own growing network of goals; (4) Writers create their own goals in two key ways: by generating both high-level goals and supporting sub-goals which embody the writer's developing sense of purpose, and then, at times, by changing major goals or even establishing entirely new ones based on what has been learned in the act of writing (p. 366).

However, in the field of L2, there were at least the study from de Larios, Manchon, Murphy, and Marin (2008) and Mu (2005). De Larios et al. (2008) investigates the allocation of time of each strategies applied within writing by students in three different year groups in the Spanish educational system with 6,9, and 12 years of instruction in English and whose L2 proficiency was assessed with a standardized test. The study found that 'formulation took up the largest percentage of composition time for all groups and writing processes are differentially distributed across the three periods depending on the writer's proficiency level. However, Mu and Carrington (2005) conducted their research on investigating L2 writing strategies of proficient L1 writers who were taking doctoral degree in Australia based on the approach of cognitive development theory, communication theory, social constructivism, and contrastive rhetoric theory. The study noted that the participants employed cognitive strategy, metacognitive strategy, social / affective strategy and rhetorical strategy.

Though all strategies seem to be important to study, yet the cognitive strategy is superior to others. Macaro (2004) proposes that the best way to model strategies is under the domain of cognition. Further, Stein (1992, p.7) proposed that the mental structures in the mind and the processes whereby they generate cognitive products (thoughts and feelings) are of the greatest interest. However, Matlin, (1994, p.316) stated that though writing is a cognitive task, research on the cognitive processes in writing is relatively more uncommon than research on the act of the other language skill. In fact, it is the thinking process that determines whether one's performance and intelligence is good or not (Kirby,

1984, p.52). Since thinking can be equated with cognitive strategies (Macaro, 2004) and that thinking may subsume a goal, where the terms of goal corresponds to the terms of problem, this study then took problem solving framework (Cumming, 1989 in Manchon, 2001) or narrow conceptualization (Manchon, 2001) as the basic point of view.

Based on the aforementioned explanation, the study took the theme of cognitive strategies as the topic. Further, for the sake of a deep exploration on the thinking process and considering the limited time, the study investigated writing process in terms of problems and the entailed cognitive strategies of college students. Indonesia University of Education was then chosen as the site of the study since the university is well known for its English department and for the convenience reason.

1.2 Research Question

The study was aimed to address the following research question:

What cognitive strategies (and metacognitive strategies if there are any) do the students apply in their L2 writing?

1.3 Aim of the Study

Pertaining to the research questions formulated above, this study was aimed largely at:

Exploring the cognitive strategies the students use in the writing task.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is generally assumed that by comprehending the nature of a strategy, a teacher may examine the difficulties, the benefits and the complexity level of it. Accordingly, the teacher may comprise a syllabus that basically encompasses method so called technique or strategy. As cited by Hu and Chen (2007, p. 37), by considering a growing body of research showed that writing teachers should understand the process of L2 writing and allow them for writing instruction, it was supposed that the study on the strategies is significant to be conducted.

Though it was realized that there are numerous studies on L2 writing strategies, yet it cannot be taken for granted that the study result on L2 writing strategies will resemble those of other countries. Further, it was hoped that the study could fill in the gap within the studies on writing that would be useful for writing instruction in Indonesian EFL classrooms and elsewhere.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

This study was conducted to investigate the L2 writing strategies employed by English college students of Indonesia University of Education. However, it took only the students who join English Debate Community of English Students' Association. Further, since there are many kinds of strategies within writing process as noted by experts, this study was specified for cognitive strategies relating to thinking process. In other words, the study did not include social, affective, and other strategies to be investigated. Further, the study was not directed to investigate the strategies on publishing as well.

However, as there are various kinds of text within the range, the study took argumentative text as the focus. In addition, it was hoped that by taking the argumentative task as the focus, the participants would be involved in a more problem-solving behavior. Then, by the expected problem-solving behavior that would emerge within the participants' cognitive activity toward the accomplishment of the task, the more useful and informative protocols would be obtained.

1.6 Methods of the Study

This study used qualitative research to get a deep understanding on L2 writing as a phenomenon. In other words, the study was aimed at obtaining a more complete picture of what happen with the facts relating to the writing process. It may also be said that it was more to quality than quantity. As qualitative study may refer to the study investigating quality (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993), this study used qualitative method.

1.6.1 Site and Participants

The study was conducted at Indonesia University of Education considering that the university is representative, for the study, for some reasons. First, Indonesia University of Education is one of two universities in Indonesia which asserts the terms of education within its name. Further, it is well known for its English department. Thus, it was assumed as well that its students would be knowledgeable in the argumentative writing task and give a rich data.

Further, in supporting the intention of gaining a deep source regarding the topic and due to the limitation of the time constraint, the participants involved within the research was focused on the English students who has joined English Debate Community and view writing in a positive way, as well as have knowledge in argumentative writing and a sufficient language proficiency.

1.6.2 Instruments

Since thinking process is considered to be an unobservable phenomenon, the best way assumed to get the data on this is by asking the subject. Cohen (1987, p.31) proposed that it tends to be difficult to obtain accurate insights about learners' conscious thought processes through observation since it only captures the physical movement of the students, such as nods of the head, smiles, eye movement and what they say. Regarding the research on thinking process, Cohen (1987, p.31) further said that it is not much help. Further, to avoid subjectivity and to attain some valid and reliable data, the study applies more than one data collection method (Alwasilah, 2005, p. 175). The sources of data included think aloud protocol, written draft, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview.

In order to answer the first question, the think aloud protocol or verbalization was taken as the main instrument. Within the protocol, participants were asked to have a continuous recording during writing process. This method was considered to be beneficial in exploratory studies (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2003, p. 261).

Further, since the study was intended to have an in-depth data, it needed a method to clarify what the writers actually experience. Semi-structured interview was then conducted with all of the participants in order to gain various data regarding the strategies.

1.7 Data Collection Procedure

The data on cognitive strategies the participants applied within writing were collected by using think aloud protocols. Beforehand, the participants were asked to practice the method as to get used to it. After accomplishing the task, they were asked to have post writing interview discussing the strategies used within the composing.

The themes used within the data collection and the participants to be involved within the study, however, were investigated during the preliminary study. The investigation took questionnaire as the method of data collection. There were two kinds of questionnaire used. The first questionnaire was an open ended questionnaire that was used to find the intended participants. The second one was a rank order questionnaire which was used to decide the themes used in verbalization or thinking aloud.

1.8 Data Analysis

The data resulted from the protocols, drafts and writings, questionnaires, and interviews were analyzed based on descriptive qualitative method in order to find out the cognitive strategies the students used in writing. The data from

protocols, supported by drafts and writings were coded by following classification of problem and strategies afterwards.

The classification of problems used within the study was that of Cumming (1989) in Manchon (2001), while the classification of strategies was that of Wenden (1991). Further, the data from semi-structured interview were then classified following the previous analysis of the protocols in order to support the data.

1.9 Clarification of the Key Terms

- Cognitive strategies

  Cognitive strategies here means "mental operation or steps" used to specific task (Wenden, 1991)

- Narrow conceptualization

  Narrow conceptualization here refers to the framework of problem – solving (2001)

- Problem – solving

  Problem – solving here represents thinking process as to get the goal state (Manchon, 2001)

- Argumentative text

  Argumentative text here corresponds to a kind of text used to convince readers that there lies making sense conclusion within it (Axelrod & Cooper, 1988).

- L2 writing

L1 is generally accepted as the term to represent "first language" and L2 is by and large used to symbolize "second language" (Beare, 2002). Accordingly, L2 writing refers to writing by using second or foreign language that in this paper it points to English.

1.10 Organization of the Paper

The paper consists of:

- Chapter I: Introduction; it includes background of the study, research questions, the aims of the study, significance of the study, limitation of the study, methods of the study, data collection procedure, clarification of the key terms, and organization of the paper.

- Chapter II: Cognitive Strategies in Narrow Conceptualization; it provides some theories from expert relates to the study.

- Chapter III: Research Methodology; it explores the methodology in conducting the research that includes overview of methodology, participants, data collecting methods, data analysis methods, and establishment of trustworthiness.

- Chapter IV: Finding and Discussion; it consists of all data from the study and interpretation of the writer towards the data.

- Chapter V: Conclusion and Suggestion; it presents the conclusion of the study and suggestion to other research who has in the future the same intention with the writer to conduct the same study.