

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Study

Writing plays an important role not only in the success of learning process but also in the daily life. The development of language skills affects a person's productive ability. Foong (1999) claims that learning to write is important and useful for language and rhetorical practice for communication, and as a discovery as well as cognitive process. Several researchers have demonstrated personal success in disciplines is strongly related to a person's writing ability (Lerstrom, 1990) and depends on good writing skills (Cho & Schunn, 2007). This is also realized by the decision maker of education in Indonesia. Therefore, the government of Indonesia, the department of education in particular, nowadays pays more special attention in the development of writing skill than they used to.

Among the four language skills taught in schools, writing is the most difficult skill to learn. It needs specialized skills that include the ability to express the writer's opinions or thoughts clearly and efficiently. These abilities can be achieved only if a learner masters some techniques of writing such as how to obtain ideas about what s/he will write on, how to express them in a sequence of sentences, how to organize them chronologically and coherently, and how to review and then to revise the composition until the writing is well-built (Ratnasari, 2004).

Schools in Indonesia especially schools for grade XII still apply the School Based Curriculum or KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan) as a

reference to teach English. The aim of English teaching and learning process in High School is to enable the learners to reach the functional level, i.e. to communicate in both spoken and written form. In relation to written communication, writing becomes the important skill to be mastered.

For years, the researcher has practiced teaching English at Saint Thomas 1 in Medan. It is a private Roman Catholic high school educating male and female students in the Catholic tradition of youth formation. Most of them come from Bataknese and Chinese tribes. Normally, they are highly motivated to learn any subject at school including English. For grade XII students, they are taught by three teachers. One teacher teaches written skill, another teaches oral skill in the class and the other teacher coming from the Philippines teaches oral skill in a language lab. Some of them are active in extracurricular activities. One of them is English club. It's no wonder, some of them are ESL learners.

Anyway, through researcher's teaching experience as an English teacher there, she senses there is a gap between male and female students to achieve basic and standard writing competencies. She finds that male and female students in classrooms learn in gender-specific ways. She is always finding some difficulties in teaching male students writing subject. She always finds that female students write better than male students in English writing.

From her everyday observation of her students, it was found that the major problem the students encountered, other than the language barrier, was idea generation. She found that it was difficult for the male students to accomplish their writing tasks. Most of them would rather copy from other sources than write themselves or only have fewer words to write whenever they are asked to write an

essay. In other words, they lack ideas. Evidence from a preliminary study showed that the major aspects of the students' weaknesses in their writing were lack of ideas and poor ability to organize them. These difficulties lead them to lose motivation in writing.

Research that describes the differential performance of boys and girls has drawn on what might be considered stereotypical notions of gender as well as on features of the learning context. For example, from psychological view, writing is viewed as a passive, reflective act that is incompatible with the stereotyping of boy as being more active than girls.

Then, David Geary, PhD, professor of psychological sciences at the University of Missouri says, "when males listened, only the left hemispheres of their brains were activated. The brains of female subjects, however, showed activity on both the left and right hemispheres. This activity across both hemispheres of the brain may result in the strong language skills typically displayed by females. "If there's more area dedicated to a set of skills, it follows that the skills will be more refined.

Furthermore, Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model is designed to account for the role of social factors. It interrelates four aspects of L2 learning: the social and cultural milieu (which determines beliefs about language and culture), individual learner differences (related to motivation and language attitude), the setting (formal and/or informal learning contexts), and learning outcomes. Integrative motivation involves a desire to learn an L2 because individuals need to learn the target language to integrate into the community. In addition to this interest, the people or the culture represented by the other language group may

also inspire them. On the other hand, instrumental motivation acknowledges the role that external influences and incentives play in strengthening the learners' desire to achieve. Learners who are instrumentally motivated are interested in learning the language for a particular purpose. Learners' attitudes, motivations, and goals can explain why some writers perform better than others.

As Millard (2001, p. 1) states, the difference between primary school boys' and girls' writing attitudes becomes apparent at an early stage: even boys who are skilful writers do not find school writing interesting.

Having a positive attitude toward the language and culture and toward learning a foreign language is an important contributor to the success of foreign language learning. A positive attitude might spur learners to interact with native speakers, which in turn increases the amount of input that learners receive. A positive attitude often leads learners to use a variety of learning strategies that can facilitate skill development in language learning. A positive attitude brings out greater overall effort on the part of language learners and typically results in greater success in terms of global language proficiency and competence in specific language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. A positive attitude also helps learners maintain their language skills after classroom instruction is over (Gardner, 1985).

The study supports the idea that writing without a purpose does not interest boys. Many of them have already found out that writing requires great effort, and they do not start writing without a good purpose. As was mentioned earlier, often boys who in school dislike writing nevertheless use it for many purposes outside school. Therefore, it is important that the teacher pays attention

to his or her pupils' interests when planning writing exercises. A pupil finds exercises that are connected to his or her interests meaningful. Pupils can feel that they are "experts" when writing about their own hobbies, whereas this is not the case when the topic of the writing task is unfamiliar

However, if students show an overall interest in the target language (integrative motivation), perceive that there is parental and social support, and have a desire to achieve their professional goals (instrumental motivation), they can become more proficient in their ability to write in English, despite the initial lack of self-motivation.

Recent studies highlight a long-held suspicion about the brains of males and females. They're not the same, so how does the brain of a female look and function differently from a male's brain, and what accounts for these differences?

According to Dingwall (1998) males and females tend to function differently in their brains. He concluded that language function may be more organized in females.

Scientists now know that sex hormones begin to exert their influence during development of the fetus. A recent study by Israeli researchers that examined male and female brains found distinct differences in the developing fetus at just 26 weeks of pregnancy. The disparities could be seen when using an ultrasound scanner.

The corpus callosum -- the bridge of nerve tissue that connects the right and left sides of the brain -- had a thicker measurement in female fetuses than in male fetuses.

Observations of adult brains show that this area may remain stronger in females. "Females seem to have language functioning in both sides of the brain," says Martha Bridge Denckla, PhD, a research scientist at Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Researchers concluded that when it comes to math, the brain of a 12-year-old girl resembles that of an 8-year-old boy.

Conversely, the same researchers found that areas of the brain involved in language and fine motor skills (such as handwriting) mature about six years earlier in girls than in boys.

The following are some of the characteristics of girls' brains:

A girl's corpus callosum (the connecting bundle of tissues between hemispheres) is, on average, larger than a boy's—up to 25 percent larger by adolescence. This enables more “cross talk” between hemispheres in the female brain.

Girls have in general, stronger neural connectors in their temporal lobes than boys have. These connectors lead to more sensually detailed memory storage, better listening skills, and better discrimination among the various tones of voice. This leads, among other things, to greater use of detail in writing assignments.

Boys and girls perform differently in class. Lee (1996) found that while male students talk, female students write. Each of the female students in his study wrote more and wrote better than any of the males. Besides, the literature dealing with language function and brain also arouses her interests in conducting this study.

Female students performed significantly better than male students in terms of content, organization, grammar, and diction. Still, it was beyond the scope of the current study to draw a concrete conclusion on gender differences in English writing performance Kann (2001)

Therefore, from her teaching experiences and psychological, science, and social theories above have made her realize that as a teacher she has never been aware of the differences how female and male students learn writing. This also makes her curious to know more about what are the different writing competencies between her male and female students if they are analyzed based on Systematic Functional Linguistics like the social function, generic structure and the lexico-grammatical features. She analyzed her students' essays based on SFL because the English teaching curriculum in Indonesia stated by Ministry of National Education has been concerned with communicative competence of the students. In turn, in high school level, the students are targeted to be able to communicate through spoken and written language appropriately (Depdiknas, 2003). Concerning the communicative competence through written mode, the national curriculum prescribes that the writing competence to be achieved by the high school students is not determined by the number of words that the students can produce but more on the quality of the writing they produce (Depdiknas, 2003). In addition, by analyzing the students' essays based on SFL it enabled her to analyze her students' writing competency to write essays based on communicative context emphasizing various text genres either in oral or written context and native speakers' culture and contexts. Then, from grammatical

analysis shows whether students have capability to convey their ideational, textual and interpersonal meanings through written context.

As far as the researcher knows, normally writing teachers analyze students' writing competency based on only five aspects: content is weighed 30 points, language use is 25 points, organization and vocabulary are weighed 20 points, and mechanics is weighed 5 points, but SFL genre approach analysis is more effective and that students benefit more in aspects of content development and rhetorical organization than in such domains as linguistic accuracy and lexical diversity.

Then, the researcher also would like to find out how the students' individual writing backgrounds affect their writing competencies and whether there are still other factors making male students weak in writing subject.

In order to get the findings, the researcher gets her students to write analytical exposition as a representation of informational genre as well as *non fiction* and narrative genre as representation of *fiction*.”, she does this because in *Getting going: generating, shaping and developing ideas in writing* (DCSF, April 2008,14), Professor Richard Andrews says, techniques for improving writing will include practice in writing, not only of literary and fictional genres but also in informational and argumentative genres.

The narrative and analytical exposition drafts written by her male and female students will be analyzed by using Functional Writing Approach like based on their social functions, generic structures, and linguistic realization or lexicogrammatical features of both genres.

1.2. The Research Questions

In relation to the background of the study, the problems are formulated as the following.

- (1) What different competencies do male and female students at Saint Thomas 1 Medan have to write narrative and analytical exposition genres?
- (2) How do the individual writing backgrounds (interest, confidence, following writing processes and abilities to produce words) affect male and female students at Saint Thomas 1 to write narrative and analytical exposition genres?
- (2) Why can Saint Thomas 1 male and female students' writing competencies be different?

1.3. The Objectives of the Study

With reference to the research questions, the objectives of the study are:

- (1) to describe the different competencies of male and female students' narrative and exposition genres (based on social function, generic structures and linguistic realization of narrative and exposition genres),
- (2) to elaborate how the male and female students understand the social function, generic structures, and linguistic realization for both genres, and
- (3) to reasons for different narrative and analytical exposition writing competence of male and female students at Saint Thomas 1 Medan there is a relationship between different gender with their writing narrative and exposition genre ability competency.

1.4 The Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the significance of this study is to give contribution to development of linguistic studies especially for writing studies about some insight of possible obstacles faced by students in writing narrative and exposition genres.

For practical significance, hopefully, the findings of this research can be used as a reference in the process of teaching writing to the students. Furthermore, EFL Language teachers could use the results as diagnostic information to provide appropriate assistances toward different gender to facilitate learning. EFL Language teachers could further understand students' weaknesses and help solve their learning problems.

Then, the research findings also provides insights into Saint Thomas 1 students' responses either to the approach and the effect on learning out