II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter would deal with review of previous research related to writing, particularly descriptive writing; theoretical assumption and hypotheses; and mainly with teacher error feedback.

2.1 Writing Skill

Writing is assumed as a rational activity (Kane, 2000). Rational means nothing more than that it is an exercise of mind requiring the mastery of techniques anyone can learn. Basically, anyone can write. By learning and mastering the techniques of writing one can write and share his/her ideas. However, there are obvious limitations. Students cannot learn to write like geniuses. Yet we do not need to be a genius to be able to write clear and effective English. We just need to know how to understand words and sentences combined in paragraphs and how to share and communicate with others through writing. If it is accomplished, then we will be able to write in such a way that people understand what we are talking about in our writing.

Besides rational, writing is also a valuable activity, and thus, worth learning (Kane, 2000). It is of immediate practical benefit in almost any job or professional career. Certainly there are many jobs in which we can get along without being able to write clearly. However, if we know how to write, we will get along faster and further. There are also a growing number of institutions that require their employee to be able to write in English. Some universities and colleges, for instance, demand their lecturers and / or staffs to be able to publish their writing in journal of science. Moreover, if we have published many of our writings in such journal, the scholarship for higher degree of education awaits us. We can also see the benefit of writing skill is to earn money. Many great writers make their fortune from writing though they never expected to be as fortunate as he/she is.

Moreover, Kane (2000) proposes a more profound value of writing. He claims that we create ourselves by words. Before we are business people or lawyers or engineers or teachers, we are human beings. Our growth as human beings depends on our capacity to understand and to use language. Writing is a way of growing.

More specific definition of writings are offered by authors such as Raimes (1987), who defines writing as a form of expression of feelings, ideas, propositions, or the conveyance of specific message for specific effect(s), using a graphic system arranged into words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and so on.

The various purposes a writer may have on his or her writings—to inform, to persuade, to entertain—result in different kinds of prose. The most common is

prose that informs, which, depending on what it is about, is called *exposition*, *description*, or *narration*. This study will specifically deal with *description* or *descriptive writing*.

2.2 Descriptive Writing

Description, or descriptive writing, is about sensory experience—how something looks, sounds, tastes (Kane, 2000). Mostly it is about visual experience, but description also deals with other kinds of perception, as when we're describing a condition of a break-hearted young man or when we are trying to invite the readers to feel the weather when a storm strikes.

Kane (2000) divides descriptive writing into two broad kinds: *objective* and *subjective*. In *objective description*, the writer sets aside those aspects of the perception unique to himself and concentrates on describing the percept (that is, what is perceived) in itself. In subjective (also called impressionistic) description a writer projects his or her feelings into the percept. Objective description says, 'This is how the thing is'; subjective, 'This is how the thing seems to one particular consciousness'.

Neither kind of description is more 'honest.' Both are (or can be) true, but they are true in different ways. The truth of objective description lies in its relationship to fact; that of subjective in relationship to feeling or evaluation. Subjective description is 'true' because it presents a valuable response, not because it makes

an accurate report. If we do not agree with how a writer feels about something, we cannot say that the description is false. We can say only that it is not true for us—that is, that we do not share his or her feelings.

Nor are these two approaches hard-and-fast categories into which any piece of descriptive writing must fall. Most descriptions involve both, in varying degrees. Generally, however, one mode will dominate and fix the focus. In scientific and legal writing, for instance, objectivity is desirable. In personal writing subjectivity is more likely. But in both kinds, success hinges on three things: (1) details that are sharply defined images, appealing to one or another of the senses; (2) details that are selected according to a guiding principle; and (3) details that are clearly organized.

2.3 Teaching of Writing in English as a Foreign Language

The current approach to the teaching of writing focuses on what goes on when learners write and on what the teacher can do to help the learners get into the natural writing process. This approach to the teaching of writing is called the *process writing approach* (White and Arndt, 1991; Johnston, 1996; in Cahyono, 1999*)*. According to this approach, writing is considered a way of learning and developing as well as a communication skill. In this perspective, before writing, writers are assumed to know only partial ideas of what they are going to write (Caudery, 1995; in Cahyono, 1999). In fact, many new ideas appear during the act of writing. In addition, the process writing approach sees that writing is a creative

process consisting of a sequence of stages occurring recursively throughout the process and supporting on one another.

The development of the process writing approach may be attributed to two reasons. First, the process writing approach has appeared as a correction of the previous approach to writing (Johnston, 1996). In the previous product-oriented approach, students were invited to imitate a model text in order to reinforce a certain structure. The old model did not reveal how learners could achieve the product. Second, the process writing approach reflects what skilled writers do when they write. Sommers (1980) suggests that skilled writers tend to use early drafts experimentally and are willing to make substantial changes to them, while unskilled writers are much more concerned about details from the outset. Furthermore, unskilled writers are determined not to commit errors and therefore attend to them prematurely, while the more skilled writers devise strategies that allowed them to pursue the development of their ideas without being sidetracked (Raimes, 1987).

Although it has been conclusively proven that the process of writing consists of several stages, researchers classify the stages differently. The first three stages – *generating ideas*, *focusing*, and *structuring* – are self-explanatory activities classified as the pre-writing *stage*, while the writing activity starts from drafting. *Drafting* is concerned with how ideas can be organized and how readers can be led to a conclusion with a sense of completion. *Evaluation* deals with the cultivation of a sense of responsibility for being critical to the writing. *Re-viewing*

aims at developing critical capacities and enriching the repertoire of linguistic resources for writing.

While we can divide the writing process in various ways, it is perhaps simplest to see writing as a three-step process: pre-writing, writing, and re-writing.

Prewriting

Prewriting includes everything that a student does before beginning to draft a paper. Prewriting can be classified further into five activities: reading as a writer, generating ideas, organizing ideas, contextualizing ideas, and coming up with a working thesis.

Reading as a Writer. With most academic papers, prewriting begins with reading a text (here "text" broadly includes everything from books, to works of art, to results of scientific experiments, to cultural, social, and economic systems). Students often read these texts passively, satisfying themselves with absorbing the information in front of them. They rarely read actively, raising questions or challenging the writer as they read. Students should be encouraged to look for patterns, or to underline allusions that they don't understand.

Generating Ideas. Seasoned writing instructors offer students several strategies for generating ideas. Some of these ideas are time-tested. Others—like asking students to do free-writing, or brainstorm, or write a discovery draft (a bit like free-writing, but with more focus)—are more informal and can be used not only to come up with a topic but also to nudge a student out of a writing funk. Perhaps the best way of helping students to generate ideas is through good old-fashioned

dialogue. Asking questions—both in conference and in writing workshops—models for students a way of interrogating their ideas that will yield better papers. With practice, students will internalize these methods of inquiry and will apply them to all of their academic tasks.

Organizing Ideas. Students have several strategies to choose from when organizing their ideas. Some students draft formal outlines and follow them faithfully as they write. Others make informal outlines that they revise as they draft. Some students look for umbrella ideas and try to cluster related ideas beneath them. Still others write short paragraphs to try to summarize their thinking. While students should be permitted to use the organizing strategies that work for them, sometimes young writers rely overmuch on one organizational strategy.

Contextualizing Ideas. Sometimes students do not have a good sense of where their argument fits in the ongoing academic conversation, and so they cannot see the point (or the structure) of their paper.

Coming up with a Working Thesis. The last step in the prewriting process is coming up with a working thesis (or thesis question). Students should post the thesis where they can see it as they write: this sentence, if well crafted, will help them to stay focused on the argument they are trying to make. At this stage, they have only a working thesis—most writers revise their theses as they go, in order to accommodate shifts in perspectives and new ideas.

Writing / Drafting

To begin to write is a difficult task. Most young writers suffer from one of three tendencies: 1) they are perfectionists and so keep writing the same first sentence again and again, trying to get it right; 2) they are terrified of making a decision and so continue to stare at the page as the clock ticks on; or 3) they see writing simply as the process of getting what's in their head onto the page. Once they've done a "brain dump" they think that the paper is finished. None of these writing strategies will yield a good paper in a timely fashion.

Students need to understand that writing tends to happen in two stages: first they write to express themselves, then they write to make sense for their readers. More experienced writers have learned how to conflate the two stages into one, crafting their sentences and paragraphs as they write so that they express their ideas in ways that will engage their readers. Students, however, will need to understand that, for young writers, there are many drafts between the first and the last. In this way, writing is always rewriting.

Writing is also understood by experienced writers as a recursive process. As writers draft, they discover new ideas and unexpected problems. At these junctures, they may have to return to earlier processes: they may brainstorm, re-sketch their ideas, and rewrite their outlines. They will inevitably revise or refine their theses. Some young writers will find this process discouraging. By modeling it as normal—or even as necessary—teacher can support students as they struggle through the writing process.

Feedback is given on this stage of writing process. It can take on different forms according to teachers' preferences, students' proficiency level, types of writing tasks, and the stages of writing process (Hyland, 2003). Two major forms of feedback that are known to take place in recent teaching of writing are feedback on grammatical errors and feedback on contents.

Rewriting / Revising

After the students are being given the feedback then the next stage is rewriting / revising. Rewriting a paper is, for some students, even more difficult than writing it. Substantive revision requires that students re-envision their papers, trying to understand how readers understand (or misunderstand) them.

Most first-year students could benefit from a discussion of general reader expectations. The students need to be asked to consider: *Why do paragraphs require topic sentences?* Because readers expect them. *Where do they expect to find them?* Generally at or near the beginning of a paragraph. *When would you make an exception?* When you're using a paragraph not to support a claim but to lead a reader to it; in this case, the topic sentence might end up at the end of the paragraph. But regardless of where you put it, a topic sentence is needed to state, implicitly or explicitly, the paragraph's main idea. *Why?* Again, because readers expect it. *Can this expectation be violated?* Sure. But you need to craft the paragraph exceptionally well if you're going to violate your reader's expectations.

Readers' expectations can also help students to revise their style. For instance, readers expect to find the main idea of a sentence in the main clause. If you've placed it elsewhere, the reader will have to work to figure out what you're trying

to say. Indeed, many of the problems in a paper can be worked out if students spend more time considering readers' expectations regarding style.

2.4 Feedback Provision

As stated before, feedback in recent teaching of writing may occur in form of grammatical error feedback and content feedback. While the types of feedback that are likely to occur in recent teaching of writing are teacher-student conferencing, peer feedback, and teacher written error feedback.

Feedback on Grammatical Errors

It cannot be denied that responding to students' errors is time consuming and tedious. In the day-to-day teaching of composition, language teachers are likely to find that errors are the most exasperating aspect of students' writing. Exercises in the classroom and low marks given to the students seem to do little to reduce the rate of errors effectively. However, it does not mean that students' composition containing grammatical errors should be left without giving any feedback or correction, as Truscott (1996) suggests. Truscott emphasizes that grammar correction should be abandoned because of its harmful effects and arguable roles in a writing course. Truscott's strong opinion has invited some arguments from other researchers. Ferris (1999) for example, argues that Truscott has defined error correction vaguely as correction of grammatical errors for the purpose of improving a student's ability to write accurately. Everyone seems to agree that poorly done correction will not help students write; it may even mislead them. On

the contrary, error correction that is selective, prioritized and clear will be helpful for student writers.

One of the studies that Truscott refers to supports his thesis about the ineffectiveness of error correction, is the study by Kepner (1991). Kepner found that message-related comments on the students' journal writing is more effective than the feedback on surface grammatical errors. However, in Kepner's study, there was no rewriting, so Kepner could not compare the performance of the students before and after they were given feedback. Error correction and explicit rule presentations on the students' paper do play a role in promoting the accuracy of the student's writing, but the students have to rewrite their paper after receiving feedback to show their awareness and understanding of the mistakes they have made.

The identification of the location of errors by the teacher appears to be an effective means of helping students correct their grammatical errors, which in turn improve the accuracy of their writing. Hendrickson (1978) suggests that the errors that should be corrected are those, which impede the intelligibility of a message. Grammatical errors in the student's composition sometimes cause a reader to misunderstand a message and sometimes make a sentence incomprehensible. Furthermore, Hendrickson argues that the least comprehensible sentences are those containing multiple errors.

Feedback on Contents

Another type of feedback that has a great influence on the improvement of the student's writing is that of feedback on content.

Kepner (1991) has compared a group receiving surface error-correction and another group receiving message-related comments. Although this study shows that feedback on content is more superior than that on error correction, this study has indicated that in order to make students improve their writing, they need feedback.

Another study which shows that feedback on content can lead learners to improve their writing is that of Semke (1984). Semke found that L2 student writers who received content-focused feedback on their writing spent more time writing and became more fluent than those whose writing received error corrections. This finding suggests that feedback on content in the students' writing enhances the progress of the students' writing.

In Semke's study, however, it is not shown how the students performed in grammar after receiving feedback in grammar. This may be because the students in the group received feedback on all the errors they made. The teachers did not seem to be selective. The grammar correction may be more effective if it is selective.

Then come to the types of feedback in teaching of writing. The types of feedback that will be discussed here are peer feedback, teacher-student conferencing, and teacher-written error feedback, or commonly known as teacher error feedback, as these three types are the most relevant to recent study, with teacher error feedback given special attention.

Peer Feedback

Peer response is difficult to apply at lower language levels as it demands certain linguistic knowledge. Furthermore, the students need to trust each other for the peer response to be productive and sometimes cultural differences can be an obstacle. Peer feedback has been successful where the students have given each other support and advice during the writing process instead of focusing on the final product.

Teacher – student Conferencing

This type of feedback is different among others in that it is done orally. It can take the form of one-to-one activities between a teacher and a student or be held in small groups. Hyland (2003) elaborated that the interactive nature of the conference gives teachers chances to respond to the diverse cultural, educational, and writing needs of their students, clarifying meaning and resolving ambiguities, while saving them the time spent in detailed marking of papers. Especially, students at lower levels might benefit from discussions where the teacher provides guidance on how to interpret written feedback.

Teacher Error Feedback

Hyland (2003) further stressed the importance of feedback when he pointed out:

> A response is potentially one of the most influential texts in a process writing class, and the point at which the teacher's intervention is most obvious and perhaps most crucial. Not only does this individual attention play an important part in motivating learners, it is also the point at which explicit correction and explicit language teaching are most likely to occur.

The researcher has distinguished between direct and indirect feedback strategies. Direct or explicit feedback occurs when the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form, while indirect refers to situations when the teacher indicates that an error has been made but does not grant a correction, thereby leaving the student to detect and correct it.

A variety of techniques have been applied when providing written feedback to students. Here, three types will be addressed; written comments, rubrics, and correction codes. In this research, only written commentary was used.

Written commentary. In second language writing written commentary is considered the most common form of written feedback (Hyland, 2003). Written response has been emphasized as being more preferable to the students. The students find written response easier to work with than peer or teacher talk as the written texts are reviewable while teacher and peer talk are not.

Rubrics. Referring to Hyland (2003), rubrics are a form of commentary usually used on the final product as an assessment. One of the advantages of using rubrics is that they indicate more explicitly what aspects of the assignment are being

assessed. Providing the students the rubrics in advance can make the students better aware of what the criteria are on which their writing will be judged. In addition, rubrics may help teachers to be more concise when assessing papers and save time for them as it simplifies the grading process.

Correction codes are a kind of written feedback which is in-text and form-based, a type of response that has been called “minimal marking” (Hyland, 2003). Correction codes utilize symbols intended to locate and give the type of error without providing the correct answer, hence intended to stimulate the student to find and spot the mistakes. One setback is that younger learners might find the codes confusing.

2.5 Teacher Error Feedback

2.5.1 Arguments Against Teacher Error Feedback

Truscott (1999, 2007) argues strongly against the efficacy of grammatical feedback in L2 writing, pointing out some practical problems associated with this practice such as the teachers’ lack of grammar knowledge, their abilities to respond to errors, and the students’ different behaviors after receiving teacher feedback. He strongly claims that grammatical feedback from teacher would weaken the creativity and bravery of the students to use their knowledge onto their writing.

In an earlier study, Zamel (1985) had already doubted the quality of teacher feedback, finding that teachers have been neither consistent nor systematic in responding to student errors. The inconsistency itself may have resulted in confusion to the students regarding their writing and the grammatical errors. Furthermore, Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) also found the same inconsistencies. They even discovered teacher biases, where teachers provided grammar corrections according to the beliefs they held about a particular student's language abilities.

In addition, students' responses to teachers' feedback may also be problematic. For example, Cohen's study (1987) found that many students had difficulties understanding teachers' feedback, and did not know what to do with the feedback even if they understood it. As the researcher's also found during his field-practice (PPL) in 2011, the students did not understand the feedback if stated in indirect feedback, i.e. the feedback that stated only as to note that there are errors on the writing without telling what the errors are. In providing indirect feedback, some teachers tend to *code* mistakes to indicate the precise location and type of error, while others provide *uncoded* feedback that simply locates the error without disclosing the error type. Usually with uncoded feedback, it becomes the student's task to diagnose and correct the mistake. Nevertheless, they seem to be unaware of the errors they made and not knowing how to deal with it.

In a more recent study, Fazio (2001) has found that because of "the limited attention students paid to the corrections" (p. 245), teachers' feedback could

actually impede students' ability to write accurately. Hence, researcher may think that the core problem is the lack of the attention of the students to pay attention to the error corrections feedback from the teachers.

Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990) pose that teachers and students need to work more on establishing agreement between their separate agenda for feedback and on expanding the repertoire of strategies learners need to employ for maximum benefit from the feedback provided.

In Kepner's (1991) experiment, students were provided with two types of written feedback: message-related comments and surface error-corrections. The experiment found that the consistent use of L2 teachers' written error-corrections as a primary medium of written feedback was ineffective in L2 writing, whether for higher-proficiency or for lower-proficiency learners.

In contrast, the consistent use of message-related comments was effective for promoting both overall quality and surface-level accuracy. Nevertheless, the study needs to be examined closely. As surface error-corrections addressed errors only at the sentence level, they naturally did not lead to improvement in the content of student writing. Also, students were not required to produce a new draft incorporate the teachers' corrections. Thus, the effect of error correction was minimized. Instead, message-related comments addressed more of the high-level concerns, thus it helped students improve the content of the writing.

From Zamel, Cohen and Cavalcanti, Fazio, and also Kepner we can examine that teacher error feedback does not have bad effect as long as some points elaborated above are closely put into consideration. Zamel suggests that the problems are the inconsistency and that the responses are not systematically prepared and done by the teachers. Cohen and Cavalcanti further add that the lack of students' understanding of what need to do after getting the error feedback, the lack of agreement on the separate agenda of teachers and students, and the lack of understanding towards the expansion of repertoire of strategies learners need to employ as the problems that mostly occur. Furthermore, Fazio declares that the limited attention students paid to the corrections has made teacher error feedback ineffective to do. No matter how often and how good the feedbacks are, as long as there is a barrier that caused the students' attention paid to the corrections is limited, then it would be ineffective.

Kepner strongly recommends that the consistent use of L2 teachers' written error-corrections as primary medium for written feedback in L2 writing being ineffective and that it caused the problem arose.

2.5.2 Arguments for Teacher Error Feedback

Ferris (1999, 2006) strongly rejected Truscott's views, and argued for error correction to be continued because most students value teachers' feedback. This belief was confirmed in Zacharias' study (2007), where students were found to prefer teacher feedback to other forms of feedback.

Apparently, as the researcher also saw and experienced during the field-practice (PPL) in 2011, students believed more in the competency of the teachers rather than their classmates as they were given constructive comments regarding to the grammatical errors of their writing. This is probably because they are also lack of mastery in English grammar.

In addition, Ferris points out the adverse effects that errors can have on the quality of students' writing, especially for students who are writing for academic purposes. As noted by Ferris (1999), grammar errors can jeopardize the overall evaluation of the composition for most academic contexts, as teachers at the university level are "less tolerant of typical ESL errors than of typical native speaker errors".

Furthermore, Ferris stresses the importance for learners to develop the habit of revising their own writing. She mentioned that if teachers do not provide an adequate amount of feedback, it will be extremely difficult for students to revise on their own, even when they perceive the importance of editing.

Fathman and Whalley (1990) further reiterate that revision in and of itself has a positive effect on the quality and accuracy of the students' written output. Findings of these studies offer help to writing teachers in making informed choices in providing feedback to learners.

Ferris, Pezone, Tade, and Tinti (1997) have found significant variation in the teachers' commentary across different essay assignments given to students with different proficiency levels. They conclude that teachers' feedback goes beyond whether a teacher responds to "content" or "form," instead the substance and form of teacher responses vary significantly depending upon the genre of writing being considered and the abilities and personality of individual students.

Treglia's study (2009) shows that students understand and are able to address corrections whether feedback is indirect/hedged or direct, assuring writing teachers that mitigating their comments will not affect the clarity of its intent. In a similar study, Treglia claims that mitigation serves as a "face-saving" technique and a tool to motivate and engage students actively in the revision process.

Bitchener, Young, and Cameron's (2005: 313) investigation reveals that direct oral feedback in combination with direct written feedback did not only have a greater effect than direct written feedback alone on improved accuracy over time, but it also found that the combined feedback option facilitated improvement in the more "treatable" rule-governed features (past simple tense and definite article) than in the less "treatable" feature (prepositions). Moreover, they believe that upper intermediate L2 writers can improve the accuracy of their use of rule-governed linguistic features if they are regularly exposed to oral and written corrective feedback.

Bitchener and Knoch's (2008) query on the extent to which different written corrective feedback options (direct corrective feedback, written and oral meta-linguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback and written meta-linguistic explanation; direct corrective feedback only; no corrective feedback) improve students' accuracy in the use of two functional uses of the English article system.

The study shows that (1) students who received all three written corrective feedback options outperformed those who did not receive written feedback, (2) students' level of accuracy was retained over seven weeks, and (3) there was no difference in the extent to which migrant and international students improved the accuracy of their writing as a result of written corrective feedback.

A number of studies on error correction in L2 writing classes have shown that students receiving error feedback from teachers improve in accuracy over time (Hyland, 2003; Chandler, 2003). Hyland (2003) observed six ESL writers on a full-time 14-week English proficiency program course at a university. It was found that feedback focusing on form was used by most of the students in their immediate revisions to their drafts and was highly valued by them. The case studies suggest that some language errors may be "treatable" through feedback.

With experimental and control group data, Chandler (2003) shows that teachers' feedback on students' grammatical and lexical errors resulted in a significant improvement in both accuracy and fluency in subsequent writing of the same type

over the same semester. This finding disproves Truscott's (1999) claim on the negative effect of error correction on fluency.

Lee (2009) reveals a number of mismatches between teachers' beliefs and practice in written feedback, namely, (1) teachers pay most attention to language form but they believe there's more to good writing than accuracy, (2) teachers mark errors comprehensively although selective marking is preferred, (3) teachers tend to correct and locate errors for students but believe that through teacher feedback students learn to correct and locate their own errors, (4) teachers use error codes although they think students have a limited ability to decipher the codes, (5) teachers award scores/grades to student writing although they are almost certain that marks/grades draw student attention away from teacher feedback, (6) teachers respond mainly to weakness in student writing although they know that feedback should cover both strengths and weaknesses, (7) teachers' written feedback practice allows students little room to take control although teachers think students learn to take greater responsibility for learning, (8) teachers ask students to do one-shot writing although they think process writing is beneficial, (9) teachers continue to focus on student written errors although they know that mistakes will recur, and (10) teachers continue to mark student writing in the ways they do although they think their effort does not pay off. In an earlier investigation made by Lee (2004), results show that teachers and students preferred comprehensive error feedback, and that the students were reliant on teachers in error correction.

2.6 Theoretical Assumption and Hypotheses

To write an accurate text is not a skill that learners easily master. In order to be able to write a text accurately students need to avoid errors in their writing. If, somehow, the errors occur then the students prefer to have suggestions on how to revise their writing. The researcher's experience during his PPL confirms this as well as other experts' researches.

Teacher error feedback as a technique used to encourage and give the students a 'hint' of what they need to do to revise their writing has been in a disputation for years. For those who argue for it to be implemented, like Truscott (1999, 2007) see that it would weaken the creativity and bravery of the students to utilize their knowledge onto their writing. While for those who support teacher error feedback, like Ferris (1999, 2006) notice that most students value teachers' feedback and they benefit from it.

Pursuant to the background from the previous chapter, the literature review, and also the previous statements then the researcher assumed that students would profit from teacher error feedback regarding to the accuracy of their writing. The researcher, hence, took position as to prove that teacher error feedback has effect on the accuracy of students' writing, in this particular case, descriptive writing.

Thus, the researcher proposed the hypothesis that teacher error feedback has positive effect on the students' descriptive writing accuracy.