CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Research

In the context of learning English, vocabulary gives significant contribution to language proficiency, so it cannot be separated from the learning process. Some applied linguists believe that the amount of words known by learners seems to be the key aspect in L2 learning. Meara in Putra (2009: 2) stated that learners with big vocabularies are more proficient in a wide range of language skills than the learners with smaller vocabularies. The previous study belongs to Wiranti, S. Pd entitled ‘A study on the correlation between the vocabulary competence and English learning achievement of the fourth semester students of Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto in academic year 2003/2004’ showed that there was positive correlation between students’ vocabulary competence and their English learning achievement. It proves that vocabulary is the crucial thing in learning English.

In fact, learning vocabulary is not something easy. Sometimes the learner is hard to find how to discover the meaning of new words, how to keep them in their memory, and how to use them by practicing and expanding their vocabulary. According to Thornbury (2002: 27-28), the factors that make vocabulary difficult to learn are: how the words pronounce (the more difficult to pronounce, the more difficult to learn); how the words spelt (sound spelling...
mismatches are likely to be the cause of errors); length and complexity of the words, grammar (which is often have different structure with L1); meaning; and the range, connotation and idiomaticity. Thus, based on the awareness of the vocabulary importance, it has given birth to the growing development of vocabulary testing. One of the vocabulary testing area is vocabulary breadth. The breadth of vocabulary knowledge is also called vocabulary size, defined as “the number of words for which the person knows at least some the significant aspects of meaning” (Anderson and Freebody in Putra, 2009: 18).

Several studies showed that reading comprehension and academic achievement are the most popular fields being studied in relation with the learners’ lexical breadth. Many teachers believe that drilling sufficient vocabulary through reading and listening also can affect their productive skills to produce meaningful output. However, despite the frequent studies on vocabulary and reading, this study is more curious about the other possible link which is yet to be explored fully, that is, the vocabulary-writing relationship.

Writing is associated with reading process, and the processes are heavily dependent on vocabulary. Brown (2003: 243-246) states that writing is a process of getting products influenced by such elements as vocabulary, grammar, organization, content, mechanic, and style of writing. For students who are learning foreign language, the challenge that must be faced in addition to formulate ideas into a writing, the selection of appropriate vocabulary is also an important point to note. Wilkins as cited in Thornbury
(2002: 13) stated that without grammar very little can be conveyed, and without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. Thus, by having good vocabulary knowledge, the students will also may be able to produce good writing.

Writing is one of the skill in the English language that is learnt by the students. Based on the curriculum, English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto includes writing as the course subject. Thus, for English Department students, it is undeniable that mastering writing skill is a must. Besides, writing in the university level is more than knowing the language, but also how the learner can boarder their knowledge in the real study. Nevertheless, writing is a difficult activity to be done. In principle, to write means to try to produce written messages (Leo, et al. 2007:1). According to Sokolik in Linse (2005: 98), writing is a combination of process and product. The process refers to the act of composing ideas through several stages. Through the process, the message that the writers are trying to say is conveyed. The process seems very complex to do, that is why to write does not mean only writing something, but also means as the way to communicate with others in order to convey the messages of the writers.

In order to find out the extent to which the vocabulary knowledge influence writing skill, a correlational study between vocabulary knowledge and writing skill among the sixth semester students at English Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto will be carried out.
B. Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The correlation between vocabulary knowledge and students’ writing skill at English Department Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto is set as the topic because the researcher realizes that writing skill plays an important role in the college life. Writing skill is well recognized by many people as a determinant of academic success in the college. However, many students think that writing is a difficult skill to be mastered. There are some reasons of the researcher has in choosing the topic:

1. Several basic problems in writing faced by students are grammar and lack of vocabulary.
2. To examine whether or not there is a correlation between having good vocabulary knowledge and having good writing ability.
3. By knowing the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and students’ writing skill, hopefully this research can be useful for education field.

C. Problems of Research

Regarding the reasons above, the problem of this study is formulated as follows:

1. What is the students’ vocabulary knowledge?
2. What is the students’ writing skill?
3. Is there any relationship between students’ vocabulary knowledge and their writing skill?
D. Purpose of the Research

In line with the problem formulation above, the aim of this study are to find out:

1. The students’ vocabulary knowledge.
2. The students’ writing skill.
3. The correlation between students’ vocabulary knowledge and their writing skill.

E. Clarification of Key Terms

The title of this study is “The correlation between vocabulary knowledge and students’ writing Skill at English Department Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto”. The terms which are stated in the title above need to be defined in order to get some insight of the key terms.

1. Vocabulary knowledge

The term of vocabulary knowledge has two dimensions, that is, the breadth of vocabulary knowledge and the depth of vocabulary knowledge. In this study, vocabulary knowledge is narrowed down only in the breadth of vocabulary knowledge which refers to “the number of words for which the person knows at least some the significant aspects of meaning” (Anderson and Freebody in Putra, 2009: 18).

2. Writing skill

Writing actually is a way to transfer information, message, or idea in sentences. In this study, writing skill is the ability to generate and organize
ideas, and to compose in standard written English in response to an assigned topic or task (Weigle in Putra, 2009: 9).

F. Contribution of The Research

This study hopefully will be useful for giving significant values to the readers and other researchers, especially for teaching and learning English.

1. For the readers

This study is expected to be able to give the readers an insight about the correlation between vocabulary knowledge and writing skill, which may enable in improving their writing skill.

2. For other researchers

This study may be useful as a reference to conduct a research with the same interest to be more accurate and better research.