CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Writing is one of the essential skills students learn when learning English. Writing aims to make the students use the target language communicatively and avoid misunderstanding in written work. Sahbaz & Duran (2011) state that writing is a complicated problem-solving process involving controlling the text, reaching the purpose of writing, planning the thoughts, and collecting data for the target. Writing and speaking skills are categorized as productive skills. Writing is also the most challenging skill in learning English as a foreign language. It requires producing written work concerning grammar structure, vocabulary, and the ability to find ideas and then arrange them to be coherent and cohesive paragraphs.

Richards & Renandya (2002) state that writing is a difficult skill for learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organizing ideas but also in translating these ideas into readable ones. A student must have skills in writing because it is one of the skills in learning, especially in English. Therefore, the nature of learning English writing is highly emphasized for students because there are many things that students get in writing, but writing cannot be done instantly. It should be done and practiced throughout the process; the more extended learning about writing, the better results. Writing has some steps that need to be mastered by the students to produce a good writing product. To avoid writing difficulties, they have to be able to follow the steps in writing a good composition.

In its implementation, the goals of writing ability are not easy tasks to achieve because writing ability is said to be the most difficult skill to learn. Johnson (2008) states writing is having, arranging, and communicating ideas. In this sense,

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grammar, spelling, and punctuation are a means to an end, but they are not ends alone. It means that writing is not an instant skill due to the time needed to produce good writing. Students need time to think about what they want to write in writing. It must be done through a long process to produce good work, and the writers need to find ways to deliver meaning to represent their ideas clearly.

Regarding the ability to convey ideas well and clearly, writers must be trained regularly. This statement is supported by Oshima & Hogue (2007), who state that writing is an ongoing activity requiring extra creativity or more ideas. This means that writers have to go through many processes in writing. They suggest four writing steps, including creating ideas, organizing ideas, and compiling and revising a rough draft. These steps are important and must be carried out orderly and correctly. These steps must be carried out in every writing activity. By applying these steps regularly and accurately in writing any genre, the writer can convey the meaning and produce a well-drafted composition.

Based on the preliminary observation, some of the seventh-grade students at SMPN 2 Ubud struggled to write a good paragraph, especially in generating and organizing their ideas in descriptive paragraph construction. In addition, they did not know how to arrange the paragraphs well using the correct format, punctuation, and mechanics. As a result, the students' scores in writing paragraphs were not good enough, and they had less interest in writing. When the teacher asked them to write a descriptive paragraph, they made the same paragraph as the example. It indicated they were still confused about organizing their ideas in descriptive paragraphs. To help them, the teacher should provide an appropriate teaching technique.

Based on an interview with one of the teachers at SMPN 2 Ubud, the teacher used a monotonous technique in teaching writing. The teacher explained the

material and displayed pictures or examples, and then students were asked to create their paragraphs based on the examples given. Thus, students became confused in determining what they should do first. Sometimes, students were asked to write a paragraph without guidance in composing a good paragraph. Moreover, the writing process was done without considering paragraph structure and other criteria. They still had difficulty generating and organizing ideas into well-written paragraphs.

Teachers still used the old teacher-centered learning as the focus of the teaching and learning process. This old strategy must be changed because the curriculum has changed, and teachers should focus on students. This means that students should be more active than teachers and always be involved in the teaching and learning process. Teachers tended to ask students to make paragraphs after explaining. Students were also asked to listen carefully to the explanation and then make a paragraph based on what the teacher had explained. This would certainly make students bored because the learning process was monotonous. In the end, they could not develop ideas in writing, which made their written work messy, disorganized, and not in accordance with the material being taught.

Referring to the problem faced by students above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study to help the students improve their writing ability by applying Clustering Technique in writing descriptive paragraphs. Clustering is another prewriting technique in writing. From these clusters, the writers can begin to see which ideas to use and which to throw away (Hogue, 2008). In its implementation, students are required to write a word circled in the center of a piece of paper. Students are then instructed to expand on the word written in the center with as many associations as they come to mind in a given amount of time. Thus, the students can pick and sort what they want to include in their writing.

Applying Clustering Technique to improve writing skills allows students to be more active in pre-writing. Students can be creative in finding ideas. The ideas they determine make it easier for them to create sentences conveyed to the group. This helps them write more quickly because it is done from the first step of the writing process. They discover ideas from the first steps, which can make them understand how to organize them and what they should write in the text. Clustering Technique also helps students write the object they want to describe. The technique assists the students in developing their ideas. Thus, the right technique used in the pre-writing process can greatly help them carry out the text-writing process.

From the explanation given above, the researcher is very interested in using Clustering Technique in the classroom learning process to improve descriptive paragraph writing ability. This technique can also help students process the ideas they have thought about, as the students generally find it difficult to process them into an essay that can be conveyed. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting research to improve students' writing skills, especially in writing descriptive paragraphs at SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2023/2024. Therefore, the researcher was strongly motivated to carry out research entitled "The Use of Clustering Technique in Improving Writing Skills of the Seventh-grade Students of SMPN 2 Ubud in the Academic Year 2023/2024."

1.2 Research Problem

Since writing was assumed to be the most difficult skill to master in learning English, the learning objective could not be maximized because of some difficulties the student faced. The researcher found that most students had problems creating ideas and lacked grammar in writing activities, so they were confused and had

trouble expressing what they wanted to write. Referring to the background of the study above, the researcher recommended Clustering Technique, which could stimulate students to think creatively to convey an idea and improve their grammar to communicate the ideas. The research problem of this study can be formulated as follows: can writing skill of the seventh-grade students of SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2023/2024 be improved through Clustering Technique?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is the goal that the research plans to do and achieve after the study is conducted. Concerning what has been described in the background above, writing is one of the critical skills to be learned by students in learning English. The aim is to enable the students to use the target language communicatively and avoid misunderstanding in written works. The research objective is to know the answer to the research problem. The research would apply one of the appropriate techniques that can be used and applied to improve students' writing skills. The present study was conducted to answer the research question that had been previously determined. Thus, the main objective of this study was to determine whether writing skill of the seventh-grade students of SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2023/2024 can be improved through Clustering Technique.

1.4 Limitation of the Study

Research limitations are significant to make the discussion of the research problem more specific and researchable. Based on the problem formulation, the current research was restricted to improving writing ability of the seventh-grade students of SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2023/2024 through Clustering Technique. This research was expected to develop the students' creativity in

thinking and generating ideas in writing. This study uses descriptive paragraphs as the learning material for writing. Moreover, it uses Clustering Technique to help develop students' ideas. It uses Clustering Technique to help them find ideas and appropriate grammar in writing descriptive paragraphs.

Based on the systematic-phased learning objectives *(Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran)*, the lesson focused on exploring writing descriptive paragraphs. According to the *Merdeka* curriculum of the school, the researcher focused on Chapter III Unit 3. Chapter III Unit 3 was about describing My sweet house. Thus, the present study focused on writing and presenting elements in Phase D. The learning objective 7.1 was clearly stated as follows: when the students are given some topics, they can write a good descriptive paragraph that fulfils the criteria. Therefore, writing skills in this study focused on creating descriptive paragraphs that describe an object. Besides, the paragraph should have a complete generic structure, such as identification, description, and conclusion. Furthermore, it should fulfil the scoring rubric criteria by Oshima & Hogue (2007), which focused on format, punctuation and mechanics, content, organization, and grammar and sentence structure. Furthermore, they should be able to write a good descriptive paragraph that fulfils the criteria based on the aforementioned scoring rubric.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is concerned with implementing Clustering Technique to improve writing skill of the seventh-grade students of SMP N 2 Ubud. The results of this study are expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance toward teaching and learning. It is expected to provide benefits related to improving students' writing ability through Clustering Technique theoretically and practically.

Both theoretical and practical significance are important to make sure that the present study would have a beneficial impact. Moreover, theoretical and practical could support and strengthen the explanation that is presented properly. The significance of the current research can be briefly explained as follows.

Theoretically, this research is expected to be a reference in developing knowledge and supporting established theories in improving writing abilities. It is hoped that the findings of this research can prove that Clustering Technique can effectively improve writing skills. It could be used by researchers or linguists to further investigate the development of language learning in writing ability. Moreover, this study can also be used as a reference for the teacher to choose an effective technique in teaching writing, especially descriptive paragraph. It is also hoped that the results of this research could be useful as a reference for improving the quality of the students' writing at SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2023/2024 by implementing Clustering Technique as the teaching technique.

Practically, this research is hoped to provide new insights and benefits for teachers, students, and other researchers. For teachers, it is hoped that this research can enrich the way of teaching writing skills, especially in finding ideas and prohibiting the use of grammar to improve students' ability to use grammar to be effective and efficient in writing. The research findings can enrich the students' knowledge that writing skills can be improved by using Clustering Technique in the classroom. Hopefully, this research can be used as a guide in teaching writing. For students, they are expected to be able to improve their writing skills regarding paragraph descriptions through Clustering Techniques and also gain new perspectives in writing. Students can find new ways to solve their problems while writing descriptive paragraphs. For other researchers, the findings of the research

can hopefully be useful references, and it is useful to inform the readers about Clustering Technique, which is useful to improve students' writing.

1.6 Definition of key Term

A key term is a word that contains essential concepts, ideas, or things to be discussed to avoid misunderstandings for readers in understanding this research. In addition, the definition should give a clear explanation. The researcher provided clear information on the terms used in this research to give readers a good understanding of this study and provide clear guidance on specific discussion topics. The key terms in the present study were divided into two parts. The first was writing skill, and the second was Clustering Technique. Thus, the keywords used by this researcher regarding writing skill and Clustering Technique can be briefly and concisely elaborated in the following sub-discussions.

1. Writing Skill

   Writing skill in the present study is operationally defined as the ability of the seventh-grade students in SMPN 2 Ubud in the academic year 2023/2024 to construct a short and simple descriptive paragraph that consists of 6 – 12 sentences and has a complete generic structure: identification, description, and conclusion.

2. Clustering Technique

   Clustering Technique is a technique that would be used to improve the writing skill of the seventh-grade students of SMP 2 Ubud. Clustering Technique is used to help students develop ideas. The teacher provides a main topic and asks the students to write the topic in the large circle in the middle. They should then draw a line to determine the subtopic described in

the small circle. The subtopic created can produce other ideas in the next circle; the subtopic must relate to the main topic, making it easier for students to create descriptive paragraphs according to the ideas created.

CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Theoretical review is an essential part of this research. A particular study must be carried out on a theoretical basis. Several theories related to concepts and strategies are reviewed to support understanding the research problem. This research aims to discover that using Clustering Technique can improve the writing skills of seventh-grade students. Several theories related to writing skills are reviewed to support the problem formulation discussed in the previous chapter. This allows the readers to understand the points discussed in the current research. This chapter has several important points to support the research, including relevant theoretical reviews from related literature. The academic reviews used in this research were collected from relevant sources and experts. This research examines several important related issues with the current research: writing skill, descriptive paragraph, Clustering Technique, and writing assessment.

2.1.1 Writing Skill

Writing is one of four language skills that should be mastered in language learning. Furthermore, the skill is used for communication in daily life, and it is especially important for high school and college students. Writing is a productive skill; as such, how the teacher treats it in class is similar to the teaching and learning of speaking. In other words, to be able to write well, the teacher has to learn the other skills because they are related. Hyland (2003) argues that every act of writing is, in a sense, both personal and individual; it is also interactional and social, expressing a culturally recognized purpose, reflecting a particular kind of

relationship, and acknowledging an engagement in a given community. It means that a writing product can express a personal feeling of an individual, and its topic comes from different situations common in daily life.

In addition, Harmer (2004) states that writing is a productive skill that must be coherent and cohesive in certain situations. Coherent writing can make sense if it follows a series of ideas and main points. Meanwhile, cohesive writing deals with technical things about how to connect ideas in phrases and sentences. Writing has several components: grammar, vocabulary, handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and written content. Students must also consider creating coherent and integrated content in a paragraph. Skills are needed to organize the flow of ideas. This means that the quality of writing can be seen in how students think about their ideas and organize them into writing. In writing, using these components is very important because in creating a good work or writing, the process and content of the writing are necessary to be meaningful and readable by readers.

Oshima & Hogue (2007) state writing is never a one-step action. The process of writing has roughly four steps: creating ideas, organizing ideas, writing a rough draft, and polishing the draft by editing it and making revisions. It means that writing is a complicated process that can be done quickly because the writers should take steps to make good writing. Kane (2000) states that writing in its broad sense as a district from simply pitting words on paper has three steps: thinking about it, doing it, and doing it again. It means they can write everything that comes to their minds without worrying whether their ideas are good or the grammar is incorrect. The important thing is that the ideas should be connected to the topic.

Most people perceive writing as a skill that is difficult to master. For some beginner students, writing requires writing a few words and forming a paragraph.

They do not realize that writing skills require ideas and creativity to produce good and correct sentences or paragraphs. Apart from that, writing also requires a good and accurate vocabulary. Indeed, for some students, eliminating the writing process is not easy because it takes a long approach to create a good paragraph. Writing takes a long time to be processed into a written work because writing cannot be done instantly. Even though writing is complicated, students need to apply or learn. It is supported by Hyland & Hyland (2019), who states that writing is the most significant skill students must develop. Writing also helps students to communicate in written form. In this way, students can take advantage of learning to write.

According to Hyland (2003), writing is a way of sharing personal meaning, and writing courses emphasize students' power to express their views on a topic. However, several aspects must be considered in writing, such as using words that make sentences good. Therefore, students must pay attention to conjunctions when making sentences. Another aspect is that students must be creative and express their ideas to get perfect sentences in making paragraphs. Urquhart & McIver (2005) state that writing is a process of exploration that benefits students and content-area teachers alike. In addition to the creativity and ideas needed in writing, accuracy is also very necessary, such as conveying the meaning outlined in writing so that readers easily understand the importance of writing.

Regarding the benefits of the writing process, getting good results is long and not instant. (Brown, 2001) states that writing is a thinking process. This means that students can think before taking action or writing on a piece of paper. Students will think about their ideas from the beginning before the process begins. Students must also pay attention to the writing process to become coherent and unified in paragraph form. It requires consistent ideas and skills, which means that the quality

of writing can be seen from how students think about ideas and arrange sentences into written work. Composing the process of writing requires the understanding of writing itself. Producing good writing products means putting the idea into the process of producing a well-organized composition.

Moreover, Ur (1991) states that the purpose of writing, in principle, is the expression of ideas. Writing is also often referred to as a tool for conveying ideas, facts, and thoughts, which means that writing requires students to think creatively and innovatively to have the right ideas. In the writing process, students must have ideas that will be written before they express them using language in written work. This writing can be used as a medium of communication. Therefore, the choice of structured words determines the quality of the writing that has been created. Writing is a skill that must be taught and practiced well. Writing is essential as it is an excellent way of foxing vocabulary, spelling, and sentence patterns.

Apart from that, producing quality writing is also an individual matter. This is due to the challenging task of making decisions and choices, including at the level of ideas and creativity. To get quality results, students must be able to connect all things or thoughts. One of the things that students must do is hone their creativity in determining and placing the ideas they have before composing a sentence. According to Brown (2004), writing as a written product is often the result of thinking and revising that requires specialized skill. Students must know how to use grammatical structures properly and correctly. In good writing, the critical criteria are accuracy and clear exposition (Hyland, 2003). Students should explain the meaning to the readers so that their writing is not misunderstood.

Furthermore, Hyland (2003) states that writing is how the personal and special meaning of writing will pressure individuals to build their funding for a

topic, which means the writers can share their work and experiences in writing. This can influence several factors such as point of view, ability to arrange words, and how to organize ideas based on the topic created. However, all students get the same process and things through the same writing steps. The process is the same, but the results will determine the difference depending on the students' factors. If they know how to write, they will get along faster and farther. Indeed, many jobs can get along with. No one would argue that being able to write will make the writers morally better. It will make them more complex and interesting (Kane, 2000).

In the process, students must complete several steps. Writing steps are roughly divided into four steps (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). The first step is to build an idea. The first thing students should do is to find ideas and discuss them. The second step is organizing ideas. In this step, students want to organize the ideas they have found in an orderly and sequential manner. The third step is to organize ideas roughly. Drafting helps students to imagine after their ideas are developed into a paragraph. Finally, the last steps are editing the rough draft and making several revisions. Editing and revising inappropriate things in a piece of writing is the final step in making the writing good and correct. Students must carry out all these steps to obtain maximum writing in spelling, format, etc.

In conclusion, writing is an activity that writers do to express their ideas in written text, which have to be coherent and cohesive in particular writing and make sense. In producing good writing, the writer needs to consider the steps in writing. To make a good writing product, the writer should follow the writing process because writing is a complex skill. Based on some theories that have already been mentioned above, the researcher intended to use the theory from Oshima & Hogue (2007), which explains that writing has roughly four steps that writers must follow

to achieve good writing. They are prewriting, organizing, writing, revising, and editing. These steps should be procedurally conducted to produce a well- written paragraph. The theory that was used was relevant to the present study because it was about improving the students' paragraph writing ability.

2.1.2 Descriptive Paragraph

Students are expected to make written products since writing is an essential skill that should be mastered. A written product that is meant, in this case, is a paragraph. The paragraph is a collection of several related sentences. Oshima & Hogue (2006) state a section is a group of related sentences that discuss one main idea. A paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences. It is supported by Zemach & Rumisek (2005), who state that a paragraph often consists of five to ten sentences long. It depends on the topic being written. However, the most important thing in a section is to clearly explain the main idea. Therefore, when the writers can arrange the paragraphs appropriately and clearly, the readers will easily understand what the writers will tell the readers through their writing.

A paragraph is a group of sentences that a writer develops about an object. According to Zemach & Islam (2005), a paragraph comprises about 6 – 12 sentences about one topic. Every sentence in a strong paragraph is about the same topic. A paragraph may give information, give an opinion, explain something, and tell a short story. A paragraph is a group of related statements the writer develops about a subject (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). In making descriptive paragraphs, there are several arrangements, such as an introduction and description, which are closed with a conclusion at the end of the paragraph. The introduction usually contains general information about the topic discussed before discussing it in a more detailed

description. In the report, the author explains the characteristics of the object in detail. At the end of the paragraph, the writer will conclude that the results obtained from the contents of the description are shorter. Usually, the third thing above is a mandatory layout for writers to follow. They can make it easier for the readers to understand the contents clearly so the purpose of the paragraph can be achieved.

In the process of developing the main idea of a paragraph, there are several sentence functions. The first sentence is to state the idea, purpose, or topic. At the same time, the remaining sentences are used to support the first sentence (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Moreover, the other sentences in the descriptive paragraph are called supporting sentences. It gives more information about the topic, specific details, and an explanation. A paragraph will also have several closing sentences to end a piece of writing or mark that the paragraph is finished. These sentences show that the paragraph is complete in any text genre, including descriptive paragraphs studied by the classes of the seventh-grade students.

A descriptive paragraph is a paragraph that describes a person or object. The descriptions include its shape, characteristics, and other numbers. The definition of a descriptive paragraph is a paragraph that explains an object. A descriptive paragraph is writing that describes a person, object, or place. According to Juzwiak (2009), two types of words are considered descriptive: adverbs and adjectives. Those words play a vital role in modifying sentences so the readers can distinguish the details in which they can simultaneously see, feel, hear, and taste what is described in the paragraph. Descriptive paragraphs are the writer's way of helping readers imagine the topics that are being discussed in one paragraph. Therefore, descriptive paragraphs must have a clear purpose and also have a clear structure so that readers can easily understand the writing they are reading.

In addition, descriptive writing appeals to students' five senses (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). It tells about something seen, felt, smelled, and heard. Descriptions have a moral nature, namely ordering or organizing something to discover the object to be discussed (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). The preparation of description paragraphs must be able to provide information that describes the object as clearly as possible. This clear explanation is intended to explain a good paragraph. This statement is supported by Oshima & Hogue (2007), who state that a good description is a picture of a word, and the readers can imagine the object. It is stated that a good description comes from a good grouping of words and following the rules of how to group them in the correct structure of a good descriptive paragraph.

Moreover, there are three points of descriptive organization: introduction, body paragraph, and conclusion (Savage & Mayer, 2005). According to Evans (2000), the generic structure of a descriptive paragraph is an introduction, main body, and conclusion to support the theory above. In the introduction, the writers tell about location, population, and reason. The main point tells the general information of the paragraph, whether it is about describing a place, person, thing or animal. The main body is about a specific description. If it is about describing a person, it can be their physical appearance, characteristics, hobby, habit, etc. The last part is a conclusion. It can behow the writer feels, comments, or sometimes there will be a recommendation. A pattern is followed to create a paragraph, and it is called spatial order (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Spatial planning is the physical arrangement of an object or space. Using spatial regularity patterns will help the writers and assist the readers in clearly imagining the objects in their minds.

According to Oshima & Hogue (2007), a descriptive paragraph tells how something looks, feels, smells, and sounds. A good descriptive paragraph is a word

picture, and the readers can imagine that object, place, or person in their mind. The more details the writers include in a descriptive paragraph, the more clearly the readers would imagine what the writers are describing. The details should appeal to the five senses. They should tell the readers how something looks, smells, sounds, feels, and tastes. They can write about colors, sizes, shapes, noises, and textures. The students would describe it as clearly as possible to make the readers imagine it easily, which is the key to writing a descriptive paragraph.

Based on the statements above, a descriptive paragraph is a paragraph that describes a person, thing, animal, or place, which consists of a generic structure. Compiling paragraph descriptions must provide clear information so the reader can easily understand the writing. Regarding the theory method, the researchers used the theory from (Zemach & Rumisek, 2005) which states that a descriptive paragraph is how a person, thing, animal, or place looks or feels and is described by using adjectives. Moreover, the researcher used the theory of (Zemach & Islam, 2005), which states that a paragraph is a group of about 6 – 12 sentences about one topic. Those theories could be used as a guide relevant to the present research.

2.1.3 Clustering Technique

Clustering is a very effective tool for the pre-writing stage of the writing process. This was introduced by Rico (2000) in his book Writing the Natural Way. Clustering is a generative, open, non-linear arrangement of ideas, events, and feelings. This is a way of mapping the interior landscape as it emerges. It is based on prior knowledge of how both sides of the brain process the information. They process information in very different ways. In clustering, the writer uses lines, boxes, arrows, and circles to show relationships among the ideas and details that

occur in the writing. From the explanation above, it can be said that clustering or mapping is a way to draw out our ideas like a spider's web. The main idea is in the middle, and the students expand their thinking outward.

Clustering or word mapping is a pre-writing technique for creating a framework of ideas. In grouping, the writers use the main topic, which is placed in the middle of the page, and then note everything necessary and unnecessary. Clustering is also called an ideas-unlocking technique for writing and must be done quickly and uncritically. Zemach & Islam (2005) state that word maps are another kind of brainstorming. Clustering frees writers from following a strict linear order. This allows writers to think more creatively and create new ideas. To use this technique, the writers can start with a topic circled in the middle of the sheet of paper, then draw a line out of the circle and write down ideas related to the topic. In this way, the writers can easily organize their thoughts into a written work. This technique allows the writers to write everything related to the main topic in large circles and connect subtopics using lines to smaller subtopics.

Clustering Technique is usually used in writing, especially in pre-writing. Clustering, also known as diagramming or mapping technique, is used to generate material for an essay (Langan, 2005). This technique assists the writers in exploring ideas. It supports Oshima & Hogue (2007) who claim that clustering is another pre-writing technique that can be used to get ideas. This technique is used to enrich students' ideas before writing. Clustering is also called Cluster mapping or idea weaving. This is a great way to show connections between ideas. Cluster mapping is also part of the idea generation, so students will know exactly how to group their ideas once they are ready to write. To start, the writers write the topic in the middle of the page and circle it. Then, the writers can move in one of two directions.

Langan (2005) states that the Clustering Technique also known as diagramming or mapping, is another strategy that can be used to generate material of paper. Clustering Technique begins by writing the circled word as the main topic in the center of the paper. Then, it can be developed by connecting ideas related to the main issues. However, minor cases can also be developed into smaller sections. Clustering is used as scaffolding in the writing process to direct the writers to focus on the main topic. This technique can also free writers from strict linearity to express their creativity within themselves. It will make it easier for writers. Even though the writers write down their ideas freely, in the end, they must pay attention to the main topic so the composition becomes more organized and can be formed in paragraphs. Thus, the results can help readers understand content while reading.

Clustering Technique is useful for writers to provide ideas visually (Langan, 2005). This means that the writers can see their ideas written on a piece of paper through clustering. In this way, they can easily organize their thoughts into writing because this technique makes it a habit for them to write ideas related to the main topic circled with a large circle and connect it to sub-topics circled with a small circle, in the sense of clustering the writers' thoughts to write independently the words that arise in their mind. There are several benefits to clustering. Clustering helps writers organize and generate ideas from main topics, making it easier to rearrange thoughts early on. It assists in focusing on a stimulus to create a mental picture. This quick and significant process, taking just seconds to minutes, uses free association to form diverse structures for writing based on personal experiences.

Baroudy (2008) defines Clustering Technique as a pre-writing technique that helps students choose detailed topics from main topic branches that have a relationship between these topics. The author can write as much as possible and

ultimately choose a branch that can become the main topic. Clustering Technique begins by writing a word circled in the middle to indicate the main topic. Then, it can be developed by connecting many sub-topics with small circles. However, small topics can be developed into parts of these small sub-topics. Clustering is used as scaffolding in the writing process to direct the writer to focus on the main topic, where the author will focus on the main topic to provide ideas for other sub-topics.

In this study, the researcher applied Clustering Techniques at the pre-writing stage during the writing process because that was what the researcher was investigating. The students were assigned to practice Clustering Technique at the pre-writing stage during the writing process, while they were writing. It was hoped that this experience would lead them to think that writing was a complex skill that must be acquired through several processes. The researchers applied the theory of Oshima & Hogue (2007) because the steps were clear and easy to understand. This would make it easier for the researcher to explain the steps of Clustering Technique. The writer should do several things in clustering. The steps of applying Clustering Technique were carefully and procedurally adapted from Oshima & Hogue (2007). The steps of Clustering Technique are as follows:

1. The teacher presents a topic and asks the students to write it in a large circle in the middle of the paper.

2. The teacher asks them to think about the topic for one or two minutes and write each new idea that comes into their minds in smaller circles around the large circle.

3. The teacher asks them to think about the idea in each smaller circle for one or two minutes and write each new idea in even smaller circles.

4. The teacher asks them to review the group circles and cluster their ideas.

5. The teacher asks them to write a good descriptive paragraph based on the cluster.

2.1.4 Assessing Writing

In the teaching-learning process, assessment is very important for students' achievement of the material during the teaching-writing process. Assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. Whenever students respond to a question, offer a comment, or try out a new word or structure, the teacher subconsciously assesses the students' performances (Brown 2004). Assessment is also an evaluation. In addition, a teacher should assess students based on objective evaluation, not subjective. In the classroom, the teacher is, therefore, deeply involved in the assessment and cares about the outcomes. There is nothing distant or neutral about intervening in the lives of learners.

Furthermore, Carter & Nunan (2001) state that assessment is carried out to collect information on learners' language proficiency and achievement that can be used by the stakeholders in language learning programs for various purposes of teaching and learning. Daily student learning assessment is unquestionably one of the teachers' most important, complex, demanding tasks. Teachers are the principal agents of assessments, so they need to ensure the quality of classroom assessment practices and use them in ways that best support the students learning. Assessment activity can be carried out between a teacher and students or a group of students. Besides, the activities include classroom tests and daily assessments. It is called an umbrella term, which includes daily classroom assessment practices and large-scale testing that is externally designed and administered to students. Being successful in an external, large-scale context is one of students' learning goals.

In addition, assessment is an important stage in the teaching and learning process. Setting can be done in various ways to gather information on student performance. In addition, Brown (2004) states that assessment is a popular and sometimes misunderstood term in the current educational practice. Assessment is an ongoing process that encompasses a much wider domain. This means that assessment measures students' abilities during the learning or teaching and learning process, whether students have understood the material. It is an inseparable part of the teaching and learning process. Professional teachers spend a long-time testing and evaluating students. It aims to measure their ability, whether they are eligible to enter a course or to see how good the progress and development of students are.

Testers give rise to the four test categories (Harmer 2001). The first type is a placement test, which is given to students who will enter an institution to determine the placement of students' skill levels in a particular field so that they can get groups according to the abilities of students. The second type is a diagnostic test, which helps students deal with difficulties so that they discover what difficulties they are experiencing. The teacher can help students solve these difficulties. The third type of progress test aims to measure whether students understand the material that has been given, which is usually related to the syllabus they have followed. The last type is an activity that evaluates students regarding the material provided so that the teacher can give grades according to the results obtained by students at the end of the teaching and learning process.

Assessing writing is not an easy thing for a teacher to do. Teachers need clear objectives or criteria to assess students' writing abilities. In assessing writing, the teacher focuses on the content and form: language use, test structure, argument construction, grammar, and punctuation. In addition, the writing rubric assessment

assessed several criteria, namely format, punctuation, mechanics, content, organization, and grammar and sentence structure. These aspects will provide a clear direction for the assessment. In addition, the criteria for assessing student writing provide an objective assessment of what is appropriate for student writing. Clear scoring criteria help teachers to score easily.

Brown (2004) states that writing assessments are not simple tasks that assess students' writing ability. Usually, to be clear about objectives or criteria such as handwriting ability, correct spelling, writing grammatically correct sentences, paragraph construction, or logical development of a main idea. These and more are possible objectives, and each objective can be assessed through various tasks. A similar statement is supported by Coffin et al. (2005), who state that in assessing writing, lectures focus on both the content and the form of the writing, which is the language used, the text structure, the construction of argument, grammar, and punctuation. Thus, giving feedback at the end of the assessment is very important to make students know their mistakes when constructing descriptive paragraphs.

There are four main reasons for testers, which give rise to four categories of testing (Harmer, 2001). The first type is a placement test, which places students in classes according to their abilities. The second type is a diagnostic test; this test is used to find difficulties found by students so that teachers can help overcome these difficulties. The third type of progress or achievement test is designed to measure students' understanding of material related to the syllabus they have followed. The last type is the professional test, designed to give students a general overview of their knowledge and abilities. To assess the accuracy of a test, there are criteria used to measure the test. These criteria are validity, the test measures what it is intended to measure, and reliability, namely, a test that provides consistent results.

Research has two similar functions: formative and summative (Brown, 2004). Formative assessment is useful in student competence and skills to help the growth process as it progresses. Formative tests are also used to help teachers assess how far students' abilities are at the start of learning. Formative tests are widely used by teachers in classroom assessment. At the same time, summative tests are intended to measure or summarize students' abilities regarding the material taught and are usually carried out at the end of a teaching unit. Summative assessment does not directly influence the learning process but often influences decisions that may affect students' learning. Teachers will use summative tests at the end of the semester to measure whether students' abilities have developed.

In connection with this research, the researcher felt it necessary to assess students' writing skills by constructing paragraphs as a test in selecting or designing written tests. The researcher planned to use two tests, namely pre-test and post-test. The researcher asked the students to write descriptive paragraphs based on the examples. The paragraph contained instructions for writing descriptive paragraphs and would be given several topics about a person, thing, and object that would be described. This researcher would use a scoring rubric adapted from (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). Paragraphs should consist of 6 – 12 sentences; they should remember these criteria to create a well-written paragraph. In this way, students would try to compose a well-constructed paragraph based on these criteria.

2.2 Empirical Review

An empirical review is a review obtained from research that has been done previously by other researchers. It is also a way to obtain information related to present studies, whether the study is successful or not based on the results at the end

of the research. The information obtained would be used as a guide to improve the present study. In the present study, the researcher used two relevant previous studies. Furthermore, the empirical review stated that observation and measurement derive knowledge from experience. An empirical review aims to show whether the problem being studied has been done before the researcher conducts the present study. In addition, it was also used to consider whether the present study could be as successful as the relevant studies. In the present study, the researcher wanted to improve the students' writing skills using Clustering Technique. The following are the relevant studies the researcher has reviewed as an empirical review.

The first empirical study, "Improving Writing Skill of the Tenth-grade Students of SMAN 1 Abiansemal in Academic Year 2017/2018" was written by Aryanti (2018). This study aimed to determine whether Clustering Technique effectively improved students' writing skills in the description text at SMAN 1 Abiansemal. The study results showed that Clustering Technique positively improved students' writing skills in descriptive text. There was an increase in writing ability, as indicated by the average score on the pre-test, which increased in post-test 1 and 2. It means that the research carried out was successfully conducted. The study conducted by Aryanti was good because the researcher provided a clear explanation of the steps in applying Clustering Technique. Therefore, students can imagine what they have to do by using the grouping technique,

Another study was conducted by Septiari (2023) entitled "The Use of Clustering Technique in Improving Writing Ability of the Eighth-grade Students of SMPN 1 Payangan in Academic Year 2022/2023." This research aimed to find out whether Clustering Technique can improve students' skills in writing descriptive paragraphs. Clustering was a technique students could use to make a descriptive

paragraph with their ideas. The result of this study showed the improvement of students' writing skills. It could be seen in the progress of the students' scores from the pre-test to post-tests. Besides, they responded positively to the implementation of the technique. This can be seen in the questionnaire results delivered.

Both of the previous researchers found that using Clustering Technique could effectively improve students' writing abilities. Their ability to organize the descriptive paragraph improved significantly, and they could write a complete paragraph. This showed that Clustering Technique could effectively improve students' writing skills in paragraphs or texts. Both researchers used the theory of Clustering Technique proposed by Oshima & Hogue (2007). They have clearly mentioned the steps in applying Clustering Technique in the theoretical review. However, in the steps, they both described the general steps without any step-by-step explanations. They did not clearly mention in their lesson planning when the students should cluster the ideas already written down. It would confuse students when developing their ideas in the form of paragraphs. As a result, in the current research, the researcher would clearly state the procedural steps of Clustering Technique implementation in the teaching modules. The steps would be aligned with the theoretical concepts proposed by Oshima & Hogue (2007). Thus, it would be expected that procedural steps of implementing Clustering Technique would help the students organize and enrich their paragraphs, especially descriptive paragraphs. It would, of course, affect their writing achievements.