

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

This study explored the features of a Moodle-site used in teaching how to write narrative texts in English as a foreign language (EFL) context at the eighth grade level of Indonesian junior high school.

Over the years, the teaching of writing at Junior High School level in Indonesia has been confronted by a number of problems such as the poor writing abilities of most of the students and teachers' negative attitude towards the teaching of writing (Alwasilah, 1997). Researchers in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language in this country have spent a considerable amount of time attempting to investigate the impetus for the problems. One of the reports says that the problems are concerned with the factors related to teachers, students, curriculum, class size and cultures (Sahirudin, 2013).

Other accounts suggested that the problems found in learning to write in English as a subject at school have something to do with limited time allocated for teaching English, lack opportunity to actually practice English in the classroom, less authentic materials and lack opportunity to socialize English outside the classroom (Dardjowijoyo, 2000; Musthafa, 2001; Nur, 2004). Similarly, Nagatomo (2006, p. 774) conceived that in order to develop proficiency in writing students need to spend a lot of time in practice. This study addressed the

importance of creating engaging online learning activities for students to invest a great deal of time and practice in learning to write.

To overcome some of the problems in teaching writing in English as a foreign language, the teaching of writing can be enhanced by incorporating the web-based language learning (Brandl, 2002). According to Son (2008), web-based language learning or WBLL is the language learning that “involves the use of the Web and exploits Web materials, resources, applications or tools” (p. 34). Further, Son (2008) suggested, with the Internet and computer networks language teachers are provided with network-based teaching environments in which they can create meaningful tasks and use various materials for language learners.

Warschauer et al (2001) supported this assumption adding that with a variety of hyperlinked multimedia documents and computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, the Web can support language teachers to integrate Web resources into the language classroom. In addition, Web-based language learning (WBLL) has the potential to increase learner motivation and engage learners in culturally authentic and highly interactive language experience (Chun & Plass, 2000; Osuna & Meskill, 1998; Rico & Vinagre, 2000).

In this regard, one of the web-based learning that can be applied is the use of a Moodle-site or a website created using the MOODLE (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) software package.

The use of Moodle in teaching English has captured a vast interest from teachers during the last two decades (see Al-Jarf, 2005, Brandl, 2005, Tsai & Liou, 2006, Wu, 2008, Robertson, 2008). With the rapid development of ICT in

nowadays life and especially in education, a huge challenge is before the teacher's eye. While being a salient object of skepticism, the use of Moodle in teaching English is a great opportunity to apprehend the need to develop teacher's skill in using ICT in learning suggested by the regulation as a part of professionalism, the urge to make the most of benefit of ICT infrastructure available at schools, and the concern to create good attitudes of students in using virtual or online environment.

As an open-source Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) application, Moodle was reported as an effective aid in teaching English. It has been used by many language practitioners and linguistic researchers (see Al-Jarf, 2005, and Brandl, 2005). Moodle has also been applied to ESP teaching practices (Baskerville & Robb, 2005). More specifically, Robertson (2008), Wu (2008) and Chen & Miao (2010) stated that Moodle was effective for teaching writing. These accounts provide the assumption that Moodle can be used for improving the teaching of writing in Indonesian context.

The teaching of writing in the Indonesian junior high school settings, especially in the eighth grade level, is based on the School based curriculum or also known as the 2006 Curriculum. This curriculum contains the standard of competence of English Subject for Junior High school. In relation to teaching writing, the standard of competence states that junior high school students are expected to be able to write not only to certain extent of skills but also in various genres such as Descriptive, Recount, Narratives, and Report (Depdiknas, 2006). In this study, the teaching of writing focused on the Narrative Texts for it was considered as the most difficult among other genres (Grabe, 2002).

The 2006 curriculum of English Subject follows the genre-based approach (Emilia, 2005). With reference to such approach, this curriculum encourages the teaching writing to follow four stages of learning: Building Knowledge of the Field, Modeling of Text, Joint Construction of Texts, and Independent Construction of Texts (Emilia, 2011).

An abundance of inquiries have investigated the effectiveness of using of Moodle in teaching English as a foreign language outside Indonesia (see Al-Jarf, 2005; Brandl, 2005; Tsai & Liou, 2006; Baskerville & Robb, 2005; Nagatomo, 2006; Robb, 2004; Yates & Delgado, 2008; Chen & Miao, 2010). Most of the studies suggested that the use of Moodle is helpful and effective in creating effective learning environment for writing instruction. However, this effectiveness is mostly sought from the perceptions of students and teachers as the users (Walker et al, 2011; Ahmad & Al-Khanzari, 2011; Miyazoe & Anderson, 2010; Richardson et al, 2012; Meurant, 2010; Kennedy, 2005; Yates & Delgado, 2008; Al-Ani, 2013). Review of previous literature reveal that the methodologies employed in the studies of Moodle were colored by surveys, questioners, interviews and product-wise assessment (Su, 2006; Wu, 2008; Robertson, 2008).

In Indonesian junior high school setting, a study conducted by Jati (2011) attempted to elaborate the use of Moodle in teaching English. Jati's web-based Model was aimed at facilitating the learning activities in English in general. Although there was a claim that the model was appropriate for the teaching English at junior high school level, little was known about how it can be used for teaching writing particularly in the genre-based approach. This was the entry point

for the present study. It was expected that this study will fill the gap of how a web-based learning is designed for teaching writing using the genre-based approach.

Based on the aforementioned background, this present study was designed to explore the possibilities of using the features of Moodle as a support for teaching to write in English with the genre-based based approach. For this challenge, a dedicated Moodle-site was created and hosted on <http://www.widyanarko.com>. To set the focus of this research, the exploration of the site was targeted on illustrating the features of Moodle in relation to users, content, and use. In conclusion, this present study presents the results of an exploration of a website to seek for appropriate features to be used in teaching EFL writing for a certain context.

1.2 Research Question

Sensing potential benefits a Moodle-site offers to enhance language learning, this study was guided by the following question: *What features does a Moodle-site have to support the teaching of writing using the genre-based approach to the eighth grade students of a junior high school?*

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the features of a Moodle-site that can be used for writing activities in teaching English with the targeted population of eighth grade junior high school students in an Indonesian context. In attempting to accomplish the purpose, the researcher reviewed some theories such as Moodle and language teaching, writing instruction using the genre-based approach, and the

nature of narrative texts. Afterwards, a Moodle-site was created and developed using understanding from such theories. Subsequently the researcher observed, described and presented the Moodle features in relation to the research question being posed.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of present study can be elaborated in three perspectives. Theoretically, this study was expected to provide information on the issues of using web based materials in teaching English. With the growing awareness of the use of genre-based approach in teaching EFL writing in the Indonesian context, this study illustrated a web based model of the implementation of the approach especially in teaching a particular genre.

Practically, this study would be beneficial to other teachers as this study offers the knowledge of using Moodle from start to finish. Additionally, this study would be beneficial to material developers as this study would provide the necessary information on the different web based activities which they can contribute to the content. This would open the collaboration among teachers, materials designers and IT specialists.

To the future researchers, this study can provide baseline information on how to take advantage of students' interest in using online activities such as chatting and browsing transferred into a 'learning by doing' experience. Once this study on using Moodle site on conventional computers and Internet environments was disseminated, the next area of research could be the 'Moodle for EFL mobile learning.'

Bambang Widyanarko, 2014

Features of a Moodle-site for Teaching How to Write Narrative

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1.5 Definition of Terms

The following are some important terms used in the present study.

- (1) A website is a group of related web pages stored in a web server. A web page can take the form of text, graphics, audio, video, or a searchable database. A web server is a computer or a network of computers that store web pages and make them available on the web. (Mitchell, 2005; Downing, Covington, & Covington, 2009)
- (2) Moodle is the acronym that stands for Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment. Moodle was a software package for creating and managing an educational website. It was developed by Martin Dougiamas to provide educators and students with an opportunity for online interaction and collaboration (Dougiamas & Taylor, 2003).
- (3) A Moodle-site is defined as a website using Moodle as the Course Management System (Dvorak, 2011)
- (4) A feature is defined as a tool, functionality, or capability (Rice, 2008).
- (5) A narrative text is a text written for the purpose of entertaining or gaining readers' interest in a story (Derewianka, 1990) and dealing with "actual or vicarious experiences in different ways" (Gerrot & Wignell, 1994, p. 204).

1.7 Thesis Organization

As a report for the present study, this thesis was divided into five chapters. Chapter I introduced the problem, the drive and the motive, and the expectation from this study. Chapter II addresses the available related literature as the map for

the study. Chapter III gives insight on how this study is set including the research site and participants, the approach and method used, the data collection procedures and the data analysis. Chapter IV deliberates the results and discussions. Chapter V enunciates the lessons learned from this study as a whole.