CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the background of the study, the research questions, the purposes of the study, the significance of the study, the definition of the key terms, and organizational of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Writing is a skill or ability in delivering ideas into text in order to be accepted by intellectual and social heterogenic readers (Alwasilah & Alwasilah, 2005). Likewise, according to Brown (2001), in producing writing students need to focus on how to generate ideas, how to organize them coherently, how to use discourse markers, and rhetorical conventions to put them cohesively into a written text, how to revise text for clearer meaning, how to edit text for appropriate grammar, and how to produce a final product. In other words, writing is not only a process of transferring ideas into text; it involves knowledge on using correct grammar, free from mechanic and punctuation mistakes, suitability of vocabulary selections, and good paragraph coherency. Therefore, in order to develop writing skills, practicing intensively is needed.

To prepare students with sufficient knowledge to compose a good writing product, many lecturers have applied a number of methods and techniques in teaching writing. However, students still face difficulties in writing as well as developing their writing skills. The difficulties usually faced by students are associated with: (1) spelling (Westwood, 2008), (2) feeling incompetence and lack of success (Westwood, 2008), (3) the poor vocabulary (Flowerdew, 1999), (4) writing technique (Deane et al., 2008), and (5) grammar (Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010).

Moreover, it is quite hard for the lecturers to figure out each of the student’s problems, and give solutions for those problems for every student in a writing activity. Therefore, a better alternative way to solve those problems above
is demanded. When lecturers cannot provide solutions for every student’s problem in writing, collaborative writing activity is an alternative way to solve both lecturers and students’ problems in teaching and learning writing.

Further, Alwasilah (2001) states that peer collaboration is considered the most practical solution for coping with big classes because through collaborative work, students work and learn from one another by reading, correcting, and suggesting while working together. Thus, collaborative activity involves several students to work together through reading, correcting and suggesting one another. In addition, collaborative writing is a group work that can prove to be as important to students’ work after classroom learning as it is to students’ learning in the class (Vens, 2010). For that reason, students’ writings can be edited and revised in order to compose a good writing product by their colleagues – although lecturers’ feedbacks on their writings are also needed.

Meanwhile, the emergence of technology in learning, especially in writing, is demanded recently. The use of technology can be an alternative solution which decreases the problems in writing, as well as facilitates collaborative writing. Collaboration and construction of knowledge can be improved through interactive technologies, such as web-based technology (Zhu, 2012; Comeaux & McKenna-Byington, 2003). An example is the recent web-based technology, Web 2.0, may be characterized by openness, user participation, knowledge sharing, social networking and collaboration, user-created content, and folksonomy (Brown & Adler, 2008; Thompson, 2007; Alexander, 2006). Therefore, Web 2.0 technologies are becoming popular in teaching and learning environments as they allow the exchange of ideas and opinions via the Web without any time and space restrictions.

In the Web 2.0 online environment, the most important feature is social networking. The goal of social networking is to provide a community-based website where users can share personal experiences and also construct their knowledge (Chou & Chen, 2008). Examples of Web 2.0 technologies are Twitter, Facebook, My Space, Wikis, Google Docs, EtherPad, and blogs. Among them are
some online collaborative writing tools, such as Wikis, Google Docs, EtherPad, blogs, which have been integrated into educational settings (Brodahl, Hadjerrouit, & Hansen, 2011) as tools for facilitating collaborative writing.

Google Docs, an online word processing, is believed to be a promising tool for collaborative writing activity (Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012). It is developed by Google, which offers four major options: Google Documents, Google Spreadsheets, Google Presentations, and Google Drawing, which all share similar features as the ones in the Microsoft Office applications. This study focuses on Google Documents as a collaborative writing platform. Furthermore, a student normally is able to learn how to start and create Google Docs in less than an hour (Gehringer, 2010). To get started with Google Docs, a user must first create Google account and then make a new document or import the existing document to Google Docs. One can then invite others to collaborate and edit the document.

When students edit the documents, they insert comments by highlighting some texts in the body of the document and the comment box will appear on the right side of the page. Changes made on Google Docs will be automatically saved in the Google Drive. Moreover, compared to other online collaborative writing platforms (Media Wiki, Etherpad, and etc.), Google Docs is easy to use, practical, and has user-friendly layout (Brodahl & Hansen, 2014; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Zhou et al., 2012; Brodahl et al., 2011; Kai-Wai Chu & Kennedy, 2011). Users do not need certain software or applications to be installed to their computers or laptops in order to operate work on Google Docs. In addition, the layout and the display features of Google Docs are not sophisticated, so users can work on Google Docs easily. Moreover, Google Docs can be installed in supporting devices, including smartphones and tablets, so the users can do collaborative writing at campus, home or any places from any computers and supporting devices with an Internet connection. Hence, Google Docs is potentially considerable to serve as online collaborative writing platform, fitting with Web 2.0 learning environment.
Regarding the use of Google Docs in English writing class in Indonesia, it is unlikely that Google Docs and/or other online collaborative writing platforms have been utilized widely. A few education institutions may have started using Google Docs in the process of learning, therefore the empirical report on how Google Docs is applied is hardly found. This is because Google Docs is still a relatively new alternative way for many institutions and it takes time to introduce it. Meanwhile, outside Indonesia (Brodahl & Hansen, 2014a; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Zhou et al., 2012; Zhu, 2012; Brodahl et al., 2011; Kai-Wai Chu & Kennedy, 2011; Gehringer, 2010; Chu, Kennedy, & Mak, 2009; Neumann & Hood, 2009; Chou & Chen, 2008) Google Docs and/or other collaborative writing platforms have been applied for years. This study, hence, aims to fill this gap by showing how the process of collaborative writing activity is applied by using Google Docs. Furthermore, this study aims to analyze the development of students’ writing skills through Google Docs.

1.2 Research Questions

In details, this research seeks to provide answers to these questions:

a. How is Google Docs used in collaborative writing activity?

b. What aspects of writing are developed by using Google Docs?

1.3 Purposes of the Study

Based on the background of the study above, this study aims:

a. To identify how Google Docs is used in collaborative writing activity.

b. To analyze the development of students’ writing skill over collaborative writing process using Google Docs.

1.4 Significance of the Study
The results of this study are considered to be significant theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it is expected that the research findings will greatly develop and also enrich the theory of collaborative writing through Google Docs for the development of writing skills. Meanwhile, practically, the results will be significant for both the lecturer and the students. For the lecturer, the results will gain lecturer’s understanding on collaborative writing as an alternative way to develop students’ writing skill. For the students, the results will contribute to the improvement of students’ writing skill since Google Docs, as a collaborative writing platform, is an alternative way to improve writing skills.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

1. Technology in language teaching and learning in this study refers to the integration of ICT to improve learning, motivate and engage learners, promote collaboration, foster inquiry and exploration, and creates a new learner centered culture (Voogt, Fisser, Pareja Roblin, Tondeur, & van Braak, 2013).

2. Collaborative writing in this study is a teaching technique that involves colleagues to correct each other (Alwasilah & Alwasilah, 2005).

3. Google Docs in this study deals with an online word processing that offers the collaborative features to facilitate collaborative writing (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014).

4. Stages of writing in this study are classified into four: prewriting, drafting, revising and editing, and publishing (Langan, 2013; Harmer, 2007).

5. Aspects of writing in this study refer to ESL composition profile comprising content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughhey, 1981).

1.6 Organization of the Study

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provides the introduction which highlights the basic description of the study: background, the research
questions, the research purposes, significance of the research, and definition of key terms. Chapter II deals with the theoretical framework underpinning the study including: (1) the use of technology in language learning, Virtual Learning Environment and blended learning, (2) theories of writing skill, common errors of writing, stages of writing, collaborative writing and a narrative text, (3) the Google Docs and the use of Google Docs in collaborative writing, and (4) relevant studies related to the present study. Chapter III describes the methodology employed to conduct the study involving: research design, research site and participants, data collection techniques, and data collection analysis. Chapter IV elaborates the research findings and discussion. The last point, Chapter V presents conclusions, and offer recommendations for both the classroom practice and the further studies.

1.7 Concluding Remarks

Chapter I has outlined the introduction of the present study. The introduction of this study comprises the background, the research questions, the research purposes, significance of the research, and definition of key terms. The following chapter will address the theoretical framework building up theories and references for this study.
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USING GOOGLE DOCS AS ONLINE COLLABORATIVE WRITING PLATFORM FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' WRITING SKILL

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