

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background of the research, research questions, aims of the research, hypothesis, limitation of the research, significances of the research, and clarification of terms.

1.1. Background of the Research

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indonesian government implemented the principle of social distancing and *PSBB* (Large-Scale Social Restriction) in several big cities to prevent the spreading of the virus. The policy of social distancing, as it must be applied in all levels of society, has affected all life sectors, including education. As face-to-face meeting in the classroom was not encouraged, yet the learning process must be continued, online learning became the only solution to conduct the teaching and learning process. However, both teacher and students faced some challenges during its implementation since the shift from offline to online classroom was unexpected and without enough preparation.

Among the challenges, several studies (see Alawamleh et al., 2020; Putri et al., 2020; Siswati et al., 2020) emphasized interaction and communication between the teacher and the students to be one of the aspects that were being affected the most during online learning; majority of the students viewed online learning limited their interaction with the teachers, their fellow classmates, and learning contents which led them to feel disconnected and isolated (Alawamleh et al., 2020; Lemay et al., 2021). In addition, due to the lack of emotional relationship that used to form through frequent face-to-face meetings and interactions in traditional offline learning—which obviously did not present or was limited in online learning—the students reported that the sudden shift from offline to online learning made them feel more anxious (Siswati et al., 2020).

Responding to the issue mentioned previously, it was believed that the co-presence of the teacher in online classroom could provide the students with a less

distant learning environment (Harms et al., 2006). However, teacher's role did not just stop at being present on the computer screen to deliver the lesson during online learning (Huang, 2018); they should also create meaningful communicative interaction with the students so a sense of connectedness or closeness could be created and successful language learning could be promoted (Hampel & Stickler, 2005). In other words, teacher's presence alone was not enough; teacher also needed to create learning environment where sense of connectedness could be found; and one effective way to do so was by establishing positive rapport with the students.

Many aspects of online learning have become the focuses of recent research, particularly since the outbreak of Covid-19. However, little attention was given to teacher-student rapport which was known for its role in creating safe and comfortable learning environment, improving sense of connectedness between teachers and students, and decreasing anxiety (Creasey et al., 2009; Leitão & Waugh, 2007) which seemed to be the solution to cope with one of the major challenges faced by the students during online learning—which were disconnected and isolated feeling and anxiety. Besides, in order for the students to experience a constructive, active, cooperative, and enjoyable learning process; it would depend on the teacher's ability to build rapport and create a meaningful interpersonal connection with their students (Fleming, 2003; Lawrence et al., 2020). Studies also showed that when the students felt they were well connected with the teacher, it encouraged them to work harder in the classroom, coped better with stress and anxiety, and being active or engaged more to the course (Little & Kobak, 2003; Roach et al., 2005). For this reason, conducting a study under the theme of teacher student rapport, especially the strategies to build positive rapport during online learning as well as taking into consideration the students' perception of this matter was necessary.

The implementation of teacher's rapport building strategies in traditional offline learning has been studied by many researchers (see Lammers & Gillapsy, 2014; Sánchez et al., 2013; Sherif, 2020). However, in the context of online learning, there were still few studies that focused on this matter. Realistically, the level of difficulty in implementing the rapport building strategies during online learning

would be more challenging considering the distance and the limitation; the effort and the amount of time that the teacher spent to establish strong and positive rapport with his/her students might also be twice harder. Regardless, investigating effective ways—in this case, strategies implemented by the teacher—to build rapport and the students' perception of these strategies were necessary to conduct.

Other than limiting interactions and communication, the shift from offline to online learning also affected many other aspects such as teaching technique and assessment (Dwiyantini & Suwastini, 2021; Madya & Abdurahman, 2020). Among the four major skills—listening, reading, speaking, and writing—this study focused on writing performance, especially to see how the teacher carried out rapport building strategies during teaching writing or writing process and how these two aspects—rapport and writing performance—were correlated to each other; whether the correlation between the variables would be significantly positive or negative. Additionally, writing was selected since many previous studies focused on the correlation between rapport and students' achievement in general (see Lammers & Gillapsy, 2013; Lammers et al., 2017), but not on students' particular skill such as writing.

Addressing the challenges that many students needed to face due to the unexpected shift from offline to online classroom mentioned above—which were lack of interactions that led to disconnected and isolated feeling and anxiety; and the limitation of teaching technique and assessment—this study aimed at investigating some teacher's strategies in building rapport as studies had proven that the existence of rapport in learning process could provide the students with a safe and enjoyable learning environment as well as a sense of connectedness and comfort, especially in the context of online learning where establishing rapport might be more challenging compared to building rapport in traditional offline learning where interactions were not limited and distance was not a problem. Moreover, this study also explored students' perceptions of the rapport building strategies implemented by the teacher to find out which strategies that they found important to carry out in the context of online learning. Lastly, the correlations between two dimensions of rapport—teacher

connectedness and students' anxiety when interacting with teacher—and writing performance were also investigated to find out the rapport between the teacher and the students—positive or negative—and its correlation with the students' writing performance.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How does the teacher implement the strategies in building rapport with the students?
2. What are the students' perceptions of the teacher's strategies in building rapport?
3. How is the relationship between the teacher and the students according to two dimensions of rapport and its correlation with the students' writing performance?

1.3. Aims of the Research

In accordance with the research questions above, the aims of the present study were to investigate teacher's strategies in building rapport during online learning; explore the students' perception of these strategies, and investigate the rapport—which was divided into two dimensions namely teacher connectedness and students' anxiety when interacting with the teacher—between the teacher and the students and its correlation with the students' writing performance.

1.4. Hypothesis

Based on the third research question, the hypotheses of this study were:

H_0 : $\rho \neq 0$ (There is no significant correlation between teacher connectedness and students' writing performance).

H_0 : $\rho \neq 0$ (There is no significant correlation between students' anxiety and students' writing performance).

Referring to the hypotheses above, the independent variable (IV) in this study was two dimensions of teacher-student rapport (teacher connectedness dimension and

students' anxiety when interacting with the teacher dimension); meanwhile the dependent variable (DV) in this study was students' writing performance.

1.5. Limitation of the Research

The current research limited its study into five aspects. First, among the four basic essential skills to master in learning a second/foreign language—listening, reading, speaking, and writing—this study only focused on writing. Second, as writing could be evaluated through various texts, this study only assessed student's writing performance through descriptive text. Third, the term “students' anxiety” in this study referred to one of the two dimensions of teacher-student rapport and it was defined as the feeling of nervousness when the students were interacting with the teacher during online learning or in need to reach out to the teacher outside online classes. Fourth, the findings did not reflect the experiences of all students or take into account the practice of online learning at other schools. Fifth, this study only focused on the rapport building strategies which were implemented by the teacher without taking into account other strategies that the students wished to have been implemented by the teacher. Sixth, since online classroom observations were only conducted twice, there might be some rapport building strategies that had not been observed. Lastly, the findings regarding the correlation between two dimensions of rapport (teacher connectedness and students' anxiety when interacting with the teacher) and students' writing performance in the context of online learning were seen and interpreted as tendency and not as causation; i.e. the independent variable (two dimensions of teacher-student rapport) was not a cause for the change or improvement of the dependent variable (students' writing performance); the changes (either up or down) simply meant that the two variables were correlated with each other.

1.6. Significance of the Research

The current study was expected to provide significances in the following aspects. First, theoretically, considering there were still few studies that focused on the implementation of teachers' strategies in establishing positive rapport with the

students in the context of online learning; the findings were hoped to contribute and enrich the existing literature regarding teacher-student rapport. This study was also hoped to raise teacher's awareness about the role and the importance of teacher-student rapport especially during online learning and encourage other researchers to continue or carry out some studies under the same topic.

Second, practically, considering the fact that establishing positive rapport in the context of online learning were different and much more challenging compared to building rapport in traditional offline learning, the findings were expected to give significant information by aiding language teachers with some potential rapport building strategies in the context of online learning.

Third, for future implication, the findings of this study would still be helpful for the institutions that chose or had intention to use online learning as the substitute for offline learning. After all, the implementation of online learning was not limited to crisis situation such as the current pandemic.

1.7. Clarification of Terms

1.7.1. Teacher-student Rapport

In the present study, teacher-student rapport referred to a friendly, positive educational relationship between teacher and students in terms of interaction and communication, during online learning. This relationship was characterized by genuine care, trust, closeness, respect, mutual acceptance, and great cooperation. Furthermore, there were two dimensions of teacher-student rapport in this study; teacher connectedness and students' anxiety when interacting with teachers (Creasey et al., 2009).

1.7.2. Teacher Connectedness

Teacher connectedness was one of teacher-student rapport dimensions proposed by Creasey et al., (2009). In this study, this term referred to how connected or close the student felt towards the teacher. Teacher connectedness reflected a sign of positive rapport between the teacher and their students.

1.7.3. Student's Anxiety

Student's anxiety was one of teacher-student rapport dimensions proposed by Creasey et al., (2009). The term anxiety here specifically referred to the feeling of anxiety or uneasiness when the students needed to interact with the teacher (e.g. asking about homework or other things that the students found it hard to understand so they needed teacher's assistance to solve the problems). While teacher connectedness was a sign of positive rapport, student's anxiety was a sign of negative rapport.

1.7.4. Writing Performance

To measure students' writing ability, the teacher assessed it through their writing performance as it was the actual use of students' knowledge.

1.8. Organization of the Paper

The present study would be divided and presented into five chapters as elaborated below.

Chapter I Introduction

This chapter serves the introduction of the present study which consists of the background of the research, research questions, aims of the research, hypothesis, limitation of the research, significances of the research, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

Chapter II Literature Review

This chapter provides previous related theoretical background of the present study which comprises of teacher-student rapport, two dimensions of teacher-student rapport, teaching writing during online learning, how teachers can build rapport in online learning which included several subcategories such as: recognizing the person or individual, supporting and monitoring students, availability, accessibility, and

responsiveness, non-text based interactions, tone of interactions, and non-academic conversation or interactions. Perception and related previous studies will be discussed after the elaboration of teacher's rapport building strategies during online learning.

Chapter III Research Methodology

This chapter presents research design, research site and samples, research procedure which also includes pilot study, data collection which comprises of several subcategories such as: online classroom observation, teacher's rapport building strategies questionnaire, student's perception questionnaire, teacher and student interview, teacher student rapport questionnaire named Student Instructor Relationship Scale (SIRS), and a writing test. Data analysis follows after data collection is explained. This section elaborates how each instrument is analyzed.

Chapter IV Findings and Discussion

This chapter serves the findings of the present study and relates it to the theories and relevant research discussed in Chapter II. This chapter is divided into four major categories to answer three research questions. The first category focuses on the topic of building rapport with the students while teaching writing. The second category discusses about teacher's strategies in building rapport during online learning in details. The third category elaborates the findings of the students' perceptions of these teacher's rapport-building strategies. The last category focuses on the rapport between the teacher and the students and its correlation with the students' writing performances.

Chapter V Conclusions, Limitations, Implications and Recommendations

This chapter is separated into four major categories namely conclusion of the research, the limitation of the research, implications of the research, and recommendation for future research.