

The Use of “Google Docs” in Teaching Writing: An Alternative Way of Collaboration in Writing

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Abstract: This article describes one of innovative strategies for education in digital era. It is based on the research of utilizing “Google Docs” in teaching writing. Starting from the questionnaire and observation that had been done by the researcher to English students of Widya Dharma University of Klaten in preliminary research, there are still many students that have low ability in writing because insufficient practice in writing. Most of writing activities in the class give the theories of writing with less practicing. Even when the students did the task, they only did the task based on the instruction then submitted without any revision. Some students said that sometimes the lecturer gave correction in class but it consumed the time and not all students got their correction because limited time. When the correction given in other meeting, it wastes the time and there is no time for making revision. This research is aimed to face those problems by using “Google Docs”. The using of “Google Docs” gives the opportunities for the students to review others’ works everywhere and whenever they want, not only in the class. The findings of the research show that there are significant improvements of students’ writing skill after applying collaborative learning using “google docs”. So, it is proven that utilizing “Google Docs” in reviewing students’ work can be alternative method to improve writing ability.

Keywords: *writing skill; collaborative learning; google docs; classroom action research*

1. INTRODUCTION

In language teaching, writing is supposed to be a difficult skill. Rovimiyanti (2008), Pranata (2013), and Nasution & Siregar (2013) in their research said that mastering writing skill is not easy. It is because writing is a productive and expressive activity, so we have to be able to use correct language patterns and vocabularies. According to Nurgiyantoro (2001) and Alwasilah (in Mamluah (2013), writing is assumed as the most difficult skill (43.22%) than other language skills, namely listening, speaking, and reading. It caused by National Education System gives only 23.34% writing skill in language teaching lower than reading skill (23.45%). Furthermore, in process of teaching

learning writing often dominated by grammar discussion and writing theories, so gives fewer opportunities for the learners to practice their writing.

It is also felt by students of Widya Dharma University of Klaten. Based on observation, questionnaire, and interview to students from first semester until seventh semester who are writing a thesis, it is found that writing is the most difficult skill. It is because as English students, they have to not only explore their ideas but also concern English patterns. Even though, for English students, they should skilled in writing English because most of subject of studies ask them to write a paper in English as a task or final test. Furthermore, in their final of study they

have to write a thesis as a requirement of completing the study that of course must be written in English. The data also show that the difficulties are faced by the students are because they have to pay attention to English rules of writing, such as using appropriate words that suitable to the topic (vocabulary), appropriate time of using (tenses), verb using (infinitive, past, and past participle), punctuation, spelling, organization, and exploring ideas. Furthermore, after completing their work, they have to reread it to make sure that it has correct English patterns. This activity consumes more time compared with writing in Indonesian language, as it is our mother language. Even reread many times, sometimes it is still found some mistakes of writing in English. It is way most of the students feel that writing in English is boring and uninteresting.

There are many researches that study about how to improve students' writing skill, for examples using diary (Ningrum & Rita, 2013), journal (Safriana, Said, & Waris, 2013), and web (Asri, 2011). Unfortunately, those methods have weaknesses because they are autonomous learning so the students learn individually. Even though, collaborative learning is important part in 21st century. The students are motivated to communicate and work together in group or pair. Collaborative learning is proven can improve the students' ability significantly (Alwasilah, 2001). This method gives opportunities for the students to express their ideas and opinion, and ask suggestion each other. Writing activity is not only for completing the task but also becomes enjoying activity based on own desire. The students enjoy multiple drafting activities because writing activity with collaborative learning becomes continuing exercise to get new knowledge and experience.

Some latest studies prove that the use of current technology, as Facebook is successful to influence the study achievement of senior high school students positively (Marza & Hafizh, 2013). Nevertheless, this media also has weaknesses that can disturb the students learning activity because Facebook has many useless contents (even some of them are non-educative) can be as distraction for students' concentration.

That is way, this study makes use of Google Docs application that can access by networking and can collaborate with more multiple members. Document in google docs can be read, edited, given comments, and shared to other selected members, thus this activity as like as discussion without meeting directly.

Based on those backgrounds, this study is aimed at giving alternative ways in improving students' writing ability, so that they are easy to correct and review others' work by using Google Docs application. Based on some theories and assumption, it is believed that Google Docs application can be used to improve students' writing ability.

2. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN WRITING

Effendi (2012) says that writing is a communication activity that uses language as a media. It is consistent with Akhadiyah, et al (in Effendy, 2012) that define writing as a language activity using written language as a media. So, it can be inferred that writing is a written communication. The message can be information, ideas, enticement, and so on.

Writing ability cannot be mastered outright in the first trying. It is repeatedly process to get a good writing. Tompkins (in Laksmi, 2006) states that writing process consists of prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Because those processes can take several times, a

writer usually uses another person to review as a second opinion to give correction of the writing.

In teaching-learning writing, review process usually conducted in collaborative learning, in pair or in a group. Barkley et al (in Nahdi, 2011) state that collaborate means work together. Collaborative learning means students learn in pair or group to achieve the learning goal. According to Barkley, et al (in Nahdi, 2011), there are some characteristics in collaborative learning: the first is planned plan. Collaborative learning has planned plan to get learning goal. Second, all group members actively completing the task. Third, there is meaningful learning; the students really can improve their skill and knowledge.

According to Nelson (2000), collaborative learning in writing focuses on the process of problem solving and thinking together. Collaborative learning gives opportunities to students who skilled in writing (that sometimes are not detected) to share the knowledge to others. In addition, Nelson (2000) believes that collaborative learning improves the students' communicative ability and automatically improves their positive social attitude in learning and their life. In writing, collaborative learning conducted by the process of writing a work, reading it, reviewing, giving over and over correction, discussing, question and answering, and giving comments.

3. UTILIZING GOOGLE DOCS IN WRITING

3.1 Google Docs

Google Docs is a free web-based service and storage of documents, spreadsheets, presentations, and forms from google. By using Google Docs' application, we can create and edit documents directly from web browser,

without any special software. Moreover, it can collaborate with more multiple members. Document in google docs can be read, edited, given comments, and shared to other selected members, so the members work together in real time from geographically diverse location. Thus, this activity as like as discussion without meeting directly.

To use Google Docs is the same as Microsoft word, excel, and others, but online. All edited documents can be seen in link <http://docs.google.com/>, and there is attachment in email Gmail. And sometimes the documents are also automatically stored via browser in google drive, so there is no risk of total data loss as a result of a localized catastrophe.

The main advantage of Google Docs is we can save our documents in google.co.id as our backup data storage. If our computer or laptop is exposed to virus, we do not have to worry because it already stores our data in Google Docs. We can hide our secret files as far as we do not tell other our Gmail account and password.

How it works is first we create a document that will be done by selecting menu "create a new document". Then move or convert the document to docs. Then we can edit by selecting the "edit and format" option. If we want to share our documents to our colleagues just select the "share" menu. Our colleagues can edit, give feedback or comments, and can give a direct response just by clicking "show chat" to start a conversation. Google Docs also provides a feature to print our documents, by selecting the menu "file" then "print".

<https://gsuite.google.com/learning-center/products/docs/get-started/>

The steps for uploading files are as follows:

- 1) Make a Gmail account.
- 2) Go to google.com.

- 3) Find the service menu for "more" and click.
- 4) Click on "documents".
- 5) Fill in your email and password
- 6) Once open the window to upload the file, click "upload" and select the option "files".
- 7) Click the "browse" button to locate the saved file.
- 8) In the "look in" window you find where the file you saved, then click the "open".
- 9) After the data appears uploaded, then will come out the window that reads "start upload", then click, then the file will be uploaded.
- 10) Then you will see the file name in the file upload window. If you want to see the results, you just click the title of your uploaded posts.

3.2 The Steps of Collaborative Learning in Writing Using Google Docs

This research uses an action research as a method. According to Arikunto (2006: 16), classroom action research conducted through four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Planning begins with a general idea or a difficult problem requiring resolution and arranges steps to solve it. The problem of this research is the low ability of students' writing. Then, prepare everything dealing with the action requirements. In acting stage, collaborative learning using Google Docs is applied. While conducting this stage, the researchers also observe and make a note all students' activities during the action. In reflecting step, the researchers evaluate the process and result of utilizing Google Docs in teaching writing. The evaluation gives advantages in deciding what had to do in the next cycle. The researchers then spirals into developing second and possibly further action steps leading to further planning,

implementation, evaluation, and making decision.

In applying collaborative learning in writing using google docs, there are many steps conducted in this research. The steps are:

- 1) The lecturer explained about google docs and how to operate it.
- 2) The students are asked to make google account and install Google Docs in their laptop or smartphone.
- 3) The lecturer asked the students to discuss about one of genre text and analyze its generic structure.
- 4) The students are asked to make a group.
- 5) The students are asked to work collaboratively to create a text by using Google Docs.
- 6) The discussion activities continue beyond the writing class using Google Docs application.
- 7) In the next meeting, the students are asked to present their work and discuss it with other groups.

4. THE ADVANTAGES OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN WRITING USING GOOGLE DOCS

Collaborative learning using google docs has many advantages. They are as follow:

4.1 Google Docs Gives Opportunities to the Students to Review Others' Works Everywhere and Whenever

Google Docs is very practical, effective, and efficient because more effective use of time. Collaborative learning using Google Docs conducted anytime, not only in the class. Therefore, it can be as solution of the problem that writing class very consumes time to give review and correction.

4.2 Google Docs Improves the Students' Writing Skill Significantly

Collaborative learning in writing by using Google Docs proven improves the students' writing skill significantly. There are improvements in exploring ideas, using correct vocabularies, grammar, punctuation, and organization. By creating and editing documents by online make students do not afraid of making mistakes in exploring their ideas. They can share their ideas without worrying the mistakes. They can build their vocabulary mastery as good as they can give correction of the grammar each other. Review and correction activity can also improve their understanding of organization of the text.

4.3 Google Docs Improves the Students' Social Relations

By working together in creating a document collaboratively by using Google Docs makes the students learn to appreciate each other. They are trained to reduce their individual egos and be open to others' opinion. This activity enhances the students' personality and positive social attitude to become more respectful each other. Furthermore, collaborative learning in working a project together can help them as an experience in their future careers.

4.4 Google Docs Makes the Students to be More Confident to Show Their Real Ability

Google Docs provides an opportunity for introverted student who is actually adept at writing but sometimes undetected. By collaborative learning using Google Docs, he/she can be more confident to show his/her real ability and share his/her knowledge to others. He/she can teach his/her friends by reviewing their work and give correction each other.

The students also do not have to worry about whether right or not the result of their work and discussion because they can still also interact with lecturers even by online. The lecturer will give correction if there are any mistakes of their discussion. The students' activity and progress can also be controlled by the lecturer anytime.

4.5 Collaborative Learning Using Google Docs can Save Paper

Making a writing project using Google Docs can save paper because the activity of review and correction directly in the soft file document, so the print out of the document only if the project has finished.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research can be useful for academic purpose as one of alternative ways in language teaching learning, especially to enhance students' writing skill by utilizing Google Docs in reviewing students' work. Moreover, peer-review technique in collaborative learning can improve the sharpness of students' analysis that can be utilized in other field of studies. In addition, the use of technology can prepare students to collaborate and work together so that they have ability in competing in global era.

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