

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study is intended to explore the EFL students' experiences who participated as a speaker during the virtual exchange program in developing their presentational communicative competence. This chapter will provide crucial aspects of this research such as the background of the study, the scope of the study, the research question, and the purpose of the study. In addition, this chapter contains the significance of the study and the definition of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Virtual Exchange (VE) also known as telecollaboration, has been approached and examined from many different perspectives. Because of its pervasiveness in foreign language education research and practice field, the term VE has been increasingly used in recent years as a generic term to promote understanding across different educational contexts (O'Dowd & O'Rourke, 2019). Recently, some tertiary education institutions have introduced VE programs as alternative ways to experience global learning opportunities. Many studies showed that studying abroad provides a big opportunity for students for expanding their worldviews and become open-minded and understand other's cultures (Byker & Putman, 2019; Cushner, 2007; Salisbury, An & Pascarella, 2013).

In addition, data from the American Association of Colleges and Universities, also reported that global learning is one of 11 highly effective educational practices to accelerate student engagement and retention (Kuh, O'Donnell & Reed, 2013). Recent work by Zak (2021) also stated that global learning clearly has positive impacts for the retention, engagement, and employability of college students.

Consequently, the VE programs are becoming one of the endeavors of universities to provide more access to global learning opportunities for students who are unable to study abroad due to financial, physical, or other limitations. The VE programs arrange a global learning online experience eased via Internet as an affordable and secure alternative to studying abroad (O'Dowd, 2018; Ruiz-Corbella, 2014; Rubin, 2016, 2017). As educational systems around the world seek a protected, less expensive, and more inclusive means to give global experiences to their students, VE has the potential for exponential growth (Zak, 2021).

Virtual Exchange has been used in foreign language education in the form of telecollaboration or e-tandem learning since the first reports and research studies began to emerge over 20 years ago (Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Eck, Legenhausen & Wolff, 1995; Tella, 1992; Warschauer, 1995). VE has become one of the main applications of online technologies in foreign language education (O'Dowd & O'Rourke, 2019). In language education, these exchanges can be in the several different forms depending on the type of interlocutor (native, non-native speakers, pre-service teacher students, and so on). The development of a

massive variety of VE projects generated no model has dominated, which in turn has provided the freedom to creatively respond the different needs of learners (O'Dowd, 2017). The virtual exchanges can focus on developing particular skills (oral, writing, interpersonal, critical thinking) and competencies (intercultural, presentational, interpretative) and have advanced over time with technological advancements (Canals, 2020).

Several previous studies have reported that VE programs help to develop students' perception of intercultural communicative competence (Belz, 2003; Bohinski & Leventhal, 2015; Lenkaitis, 2020; Schneker, 2012) and promote cross-cultural communication (Helm & Guth, 2010; O'Dowd, 2018) at the higher education level.

In recent years, communicative competencies are considered an essential aspect of English language learning (Giron-Garcia & Liopis-Moreno, 2015). Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983) proposed the term communicative competence to describe a combination of language knowledge and social knowledge for communication. The mastery of presentational skills as one of the communicative competencies is important in the workplace (Campbell, Mothersbaugh, Brammer, & Taylor, 2001) and is one of the key competencies that should be mastered in higher education in particular (Boud & Falchikove, 2006).

To date, very few studies have been undertaken on the development of oral presentation communicative competence (Grez, Valcke, & Roozen, 2009) through VE programs. The available research only focuses on the construction of

evaluation instruments (Carlson & Smith-Howell, 1995; Conor, 2006; Edens, Rink, & Smilde, 2000), or the role of self and peer assessment (Campbell et al., 2001; Cheng & Warren, 2005; Langan, Wheeler, Shaw, Haines, Cullen, Boyle, Penney, Oldekop, Ashcroft, Lockett, & Preziosi, 2005; Magin & Helmore, 2001; Patri, 2002).

There is a scarcity of studies that specifically investigate the presentational skills of Indonesian EFL students in VE program settings. To fill in the gap, this present study focused on exploring the EFL students' experiences during a VE program which implements information exchange task type (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009) and utilizing synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) platform (in this case Zoom) in developing presentational communicative competence. This research contributes to preliminary study in the context of Indonesian EFL students which is hoped to lead further research in the onset of Covid-19 due to the increased attention of higher education to VE in much larger scale (O'Dowd, 2021).

1.2 Scope of the Study

This study focused on exploring the EFL students' experiences' in developing their presentational communicative competence during virtual exchange program. The data of this study was obtained from the five English Department students who took a part as speaker and presented specific topic in the virtual exchange program. Therefore, this study focused on how the EFL students' experiences in develop their presentational communicative competence

from beginning of the presentation preparation until the end of their presentation in VE program.

1.3 Research Question

This study is attended to answer the research question: “What are students’ experiences in developing presentational communicative competence during VE program?”

1.4 Purpose of the Study

Based on the research question, this present study is aiming to explore the EFL students’ experiences in developing presentational communicative competence during Virtual Exchange program.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Directed from the purpose of the study, this study offers important insight into theoretical and practical aspects. For the theoretical aspect, it is expected that this study is able to enrich the literature for the other researcher in the context of Indonesian EFL students due to the increased attention of higher educations to VE in much larger scale. As for the practical aspect, it is hoped that the finding of this study can expose the EFL students to the positive impact of VE in improving their communication skills. In addition, it can encourage institution to keep, develop and improve the quality of the virtual exchange program in the the future.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

EFL Students' experience: refers to English education department students at one of the universities in Southeast of Sulawesi who were experiencing becoming the speaker in the virtual exchange programs.

Presentational communicative competence: defined as the ability of learners to present information, concepts, and ideas to inform, explain, persuade, and narrate on a variety of topics using appropriate media and able to adapt to various audiences.

Virtual Exchange Program: refers to describe a variety of programs which facilitate online interpersonal communication among learners in different parts of the world to learn language or other subjects.

