

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This chapter presents background and rationale of the study. It also consists of research questions, research objectives, hypothesis, scope of the study, definition of terms and the significance of the study.

### 1.1 Background and rationale

Writing is a reflective activity that needs sufficient time to conceptualize ideas of the written topic. It relates to writer's background knowledge in the subject matter (Ahmed, 2010). It is considered a difficult skill as it involves cognitive process that makes meaning from a thinking process to readers understanding and visualizing (Kitchakarn, 2012). Additionally, it is a mental process of using and arranging formal words and structures to create meaning of what the writer has in mind and needs to be expressed in a written form (Kashani, Mahmud and Kalajahi, 2013).

In English language teaching, English writing skills appear to be the most difficult skills for Thai students to accomplish since it requires both syntactic and semantic knowledge (Watcharapunyawong and Usaha, 2012). Both syntactic and semantic in English writing are apparently different from Thai writing. According to Baker (2002), she summarizes the contrastive features between Thai and English. The different feature are a) there is no tense system in Thai language, b) there are no obligatory inflections on verb forms in Thai for either tense or aspect, c) temporal placement of a situation or event is shown predominantly through context (*e.g. I go to market yesterday*) and, d) a past time reference and a present time reference would be through context (*e.g. Fon tok laew = it rained*). Based on Bennui's study (2008), he reveals that Thai language structure is different from English structure in terms of word order. This often causes words order to be displayed in reverse to English writing structure. He also finds that Thai students literally translate Thai words into English in their writing crating word order in reverse form. Hence, it seems to be clear that the errors made by Thai students are from the interference of their first language, Thai. Many previous studies revealed that the interference of the first language causes writing errors and mistakes such as spelling errors, composition errors, article errors, verb errors, noun errors, conjunction errors, adjective errors, word order errors, time expression errors, word choice, sentence structure, preposition, modal/auxiliary subject-verb agreement, and noun determiners (Baloch, 2013; Maisarah, inpress; Watcharapunyawong and Usaha, 2012; Bennui, 2008). Clearly, these errors are features needed for grammatical correctness.



The differences between Thai and English and interference of the first language cause Thai EFL students have difficulty to overcome their writing errors. Therefore, errors should be “noticed”, so that they can be stored into consciousness for the future use (Schmidt, 1990). Hence, students need to be helped to notice their error by providing written feedback. Written feedback plays essential role in language learning and language instruction. Additionally, the purpose of written feedback in teaching practice is to correct any errors made by students (Purnawarman, 2011). However, Swain (1995) claims that written feedback does not only promote noticing linguistic features, but also drives students’ awareness towards gaps and problems in their interlanguage. Likewise, Beuningen (2010) agrees that giving written feedback offers opportunities for learners to notice the gaps in their development of L2 systems, test interlanguage hypotheses, and engage in metalinguistic reflection. Thus, she concludes that developing accuracy and fostering SLA can be done by providing written corrective feedback. Regarding to Reigeluth (1999), he asserts that written feedback is a part of instruction that can promote cognitive learning. Furthermore, Gagné, Briggs and Wager (1992) reassure the important function of written feedback, which provides corrective information for cultivating students’ written performance. Hence, second or foreign language learners will learn to improve their writing skills more effectively. Based on socio-cultural theory, feedback plays essential role in teaching writing since its function is to raise students’ awareness of a gap between what they do and what they need to do to be productive in their writing (Schmidt, 2001). Providing written feedback would also promote collaborative learning which enhance social interaction. This interaction involves acquiring and sharing experience or knowledge among students and teachers (Wichadee, 2013). Therefore, written feedback acts as scaffolding to help students improve their writing skills.

Regarding to the role of feedback, traditionally teacher is believed to be the primary source, who can help L2 students to overcome their errors and mistakes in writing by written feedback. However, they seem to focus on accuracy in grammar and or linguistic form in order to help students master their writing competency. Thus, there is argument that by providing written feedback, particularly on grammar area is fruitless use of teachers’ time and harmful for students writing progression. According to Truscott (2004), he claims that written feedback on grammar interrupts communication and instructive writing activities. He points out teacher written feedback on grammar is not useful. Students do not gain knowledge from corrections and they tend to avoid such corrections. Such written feedback interferes and distracts students’ thoughts from creative and constructive writing in expressive writing of content and ideas.

Feedback to a learner is a critical element in scaffolding students writing skills (Bitchener, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Ferris, 1999). There are several approaches in order to provide written feedback such as direct, indirect feedback (known as implicit and explicit) and focused/unfocused written feedbacks to assist students’ writing improvement. Abedi defines the phenomenon of direct and indirect feedback that “Direct or explicit feedback occurs when the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form while indirect strategies refer to situations when the teacher indicates that



an error has been made but does not provide a correction, thereby leaving in overall quality of students' writings" (Abedi, 2010, p. 169). Focused written feedback is the provision focusing on specific grammatical errors that need to be corrected and or improved such as articles, proposition, and past tense, but then ignore error in other areas (Purnawarman. 2011). On the contrary, giving the correction to all errors that students have made in their writing is considered unfocused written feedback (Ellis, 2008).

Apart from not only focusing errors in grammar, means to provide feedback to students' writing plays significant role in helping them learn writing as well. Traditional pen and paper mode of feedback given by a teacher is common. Computer Assist Language Learning (CALL) has been taken into consideration in English teaching for 55 years (Tafazoli and Golshan, 2014). CALL is used to refer to the area of technology and second language teaching and learning (Chapelle, 2001). However, the employment of asynchronous and synchronous network tools like the World-Wide Web, e-mails and blogs have replaced the old function of computer in language learning (Pennington, 2004, cited in Kashani, Mahmud and Kalajahi, 2013). There are widespread use of computers and applications in the Internet, such as Blogs, Wikis and Google Drive.

Based on Google Drive features, students would be able to create and edit their documents with online word processor as Google Drive offers comments, highlights and hyperlinks. More importantly, students can provide comments on a document in a similar manner in Microsoft Word. This function would draw direct attention to particular errors or area according to the comments given. Thus, it would prevent the confusion of comments. According to a number of recent studies, the researchers used Google Drive for collaborative writing, particularly in online feedback activities (Firth and Mesureur, 2010; Kittle and Hicks, 2009; Lin, 2013; Arslan, 2014).

Regarding to the use of application of the Internet particularly for writing activities, the researchers have found that online peer comments significantly motivate and improve students' writing. Due to Cequena (2013), she states that online feedback received by peer helps students to realize their gaps in writing, since feedback or comments involves with pointing out errors, mistakes and suggesting in organizing ideas and paragraphs. Pinkman (2005) also suggests that students perceive benefits from online peer feedback because of interaction from classmate and teacher. Similarity to Ware (2008), he asserts that emphasizing online peer feedback improves students' writing skills. Yang and Meng (2013) have confirmed that online feedback has an effect on students' text revision. The less-proficient group of students received benefit of online feedback during their revision. Thus, feedback through asynchronous dialogues can help to improve students' writing ability. However, there are two sides of the same coin. The disadvantages of online writing activity are found. According to Kirk (2009), he states the drawbacks in using online in writing. He finds that students may perceive communication online as a loss of a personal connection. Therefore, they may feel uncomfortable proving online feedback if they know that there is not only their teacher who reads their writings.



Likewise, Hossain and Quinn (2012), they have found disadvantages in using online writing activity in classroom. They claim that students who are new in writing and posting online may find it is difficult task. Consequently, some students feel forcing to collaborate with others. Nevertheless, they find the lack of training in providing comment with ambiguous directions can demotivate their learning. Thus, some students may fail to provide and received useful feedback from online peer feedback activity.

Although teacher feedback and online peer feedback may show some negative effects, the positive outcome of the feedbacks are greater. In addition, providing feedback on students' writing is an important task in order to help students improve their writing skills. However, the most effective way in improving students' writing is still inconclusive. Thus, the researcher was interested in using two different modes; namely Google Drive and pen and paper mode in business writing letter to see whether or not these two modes would enhance students' writing ability. Additionally, the effectiveness of indirect written feedback given from peer and teacher was also investigated. The feedback given was indirect written feedback along with codes, which focused not only grammar errors but also focused on contents/ideas, organization, vocabulary/word choice, language use and mechanics/ conventions.

To date, there are few studies that have investigated the effects of Google Drive on students' business writing improvement, especially with vocational students. Regarding to the vocational students' characteristic, their ability in the aspects of academic ability, vocabulary, reading, and mathematics are extremely limited when compare to the abilities of high school students (Echternacht, 1976). Vocational students learning seem to be based on occupation training skills that necessary for career development and opportunities for workplace (Evans, 1976). Since they need to study a prerequisite course that requires their academic skills such English subject, conducting this study would be helpful to vocational students in order to assist their learning. Furthermore, this study would be useful for counselors, program planers, and policy maker to enable the use of Internet applications into course syllabus in order to enhance vocational learning ability.

This study therefore, chose to incorporate Google Drive to publish students' writings and investigate the effects of online peer feedback and teacher feedback on Thai vocational students English business writing. Thus, both online peer feedback and teacher feedback were given feedback base on the same criteria. The study also examined students' opinions towards teacher response and online peer feedback to determine which mode was preferable and most useful perceived by the students. The findings of this study would help to confirm the effects of indirect written feedback along with codes given from online peer feedback as well as teacher feedback. Henceforth, it is hoped that it could offer alternative choice for the teachers to benefit from the innovation of technologies and the traditional way in their teaching writing as well.



## **1.2 Research questions:**

1.2.1 What are the effects of online peer feedback and teacher feedback on students' writing ability?

1.2.2 What are students' opinion towards written feedback from online peer feedback and teacher feedback?

## **1.3 Research objectives:**

1.3.1 To investigate the effects of written feedback of online peer feedback and teacher feedback on students' writing ability.

1.3.2 To examine students' opinion towards online peer feedback and teacher feedback.

## **1.4 Statement of hypothesis:**

The writing ability of students who received online peer feedback was higher than that of the students who received written feedback from the teacher.

## **1.5 Scope of the study**

1.5.1 The participants of this study were Thai vocational students of the first year in high certificate of Lanna polytechnic Chiang Mai Technology College only. There were 26 students selected for this study; 16 students in business computer major and 10 students in business accounting major. They enrolled in English for Workplace course in summer semester of 2013. The total of learning time was 28 hours. It was covered seven weeks, two sessions per week, two hours per session.

1.5.2 This study focused on students' improvement in business writing course named English for Workplace. The five topics of application letter, complaint letter, responding to complaint letter, inquiry letter and responding to inquiry letter were employed in this study. They were selected from textbook analysis and were used in order to be sufficient for instructional time and course syllabus given. The genre of business writing topic was descriptive writing. This was suitable for this specific group of participants because they studied in Business majors.

1.5.3 This study applied indirect written feedback along with codes to indicate errors made from online feedback and teacher feedback only. Other forms of feedback were not considered as the variable. The correction codes were based on the five traits of contents/ideas, organization, vocabulary/word choice, language use/grammar and mechanics/conventions adapted from Arslan (2014), Maxim (2004), British council (2007) and Ferdouse (2012).



1.5.4 Online peer feedback in this study was gathered from online application of Google Drive only.

1.5.5 The independent variables in this research study were online peer feedback, teacher feedback. The dependent variables were writing ability from application letter, complaint letter, responding to complaint letter, inquiry letter, responding to inquiry letter, pre – writing task, post – writing task and students' opinion towards modes of feedback, modes of writing and writing activities.

1.5.6 Students' opinions in this study were only focused on modes of feedback (online feedback and teacher feedback), modes of writing (Google Drive and pen and paper) and writing activities and were investigated in this study. For students' opinion towards modes of feedback, it was investigated under the five aspects of usefulness, motivation, acceptability, autonomous learning and awareness of errors. The five aspects of enhancement, convenience, motivation, collaborative leaning and autonomous were investigated for students' opinion towards modes of writing. For students' opinion towards writing activities, it was examined under the three aspects of usefulness, motivation and background knowledge.

## **1.6 Definition of terms**

### **1.6.1 Online peer feedback**

Online peer feedback was indirect written feedback with codes and verbal comments from fellow students in the use of Google Drive. The correction codes were based on the five traits of contents/ideas, organization, vocabulary/word choice, language use/grammar and mechanics/ conventions adapted from Arslan (2014), Maxim (2004), British council (2007) and Ferdouse (2012). Students provided written feedback on five business writings; application letter, complaint letter, responding to complaint letter, inquiry letter, and responding to inquiry letter via Google Drive. Students were asked to post their writings on Google Drive and provided indirect feedback along with codes to their peer.

### **1.6.2 Teacher feedback**

Teacher feedback was teacher's indirect written feedback given to students' business writing with codes only. Teacher feedback was given based on the five traits of contents/ideas, organization, vocabulary/word choice, language use/grammar and mechanics/ conventions adapted from Arslan (2014), Maxim (2004), British council (2007) and Ferdouse (2012). The errors were highlighted by using a highlighter on the traits designed. Teacher feedback was given on students' writing by using pen and paper only.



### **1.6.3 Writing ability**

Writing ability in this study referred to students' writing score computed from descriptive business writing of English for workplace. They were five writings of application letter, complaint letter, responding to complaint letter, inquiry letter, responding to inquiry letter, pre – writing task and post – writing task. The five writing topics chosen based on textbook analysis. Students' writing ability was focused on the criteria of contents/ideas, organization, vocabulary/word choice, language use, and mechanics/ conventions only.

### **1.6.4 Students' opinions**

Students' opinions toward modes of feedback (online peer feedback/teacher feedback), modes of writing (Google Drive/pen and paper) and writing activities were examined through the questionnaire and interview. Regarding to students' opinion towards modes of feedback, it was investigated under the five aspects of usefulness, motivation, acceptability, autonomous learning and awareness of errors. For opinion towards using modes of writing, it was investigated under the five aspects of enhancement, convenience, motivation, collaborative learning and autonomous learning. The aspects of usefulness, motivation and background knowledge were also used to investigate students' opinion towards writing activities. The open – ended questions consisted of two questions; 1) what do you think about online peer feedback /teacher feedback using Google Drive/pen and paper? 2) What do you think about writing activities? The statements in the questionnaire were also used to interview students in online feedback and teacher feedback groups in order to reconfirm the answers from the questionnaires.

## **1.7 Significance of the study**

### **1.7.1 Theoretical perspectives**

1.7.1.1 There are some benefits of computer assisted language learning (CALL) in online feedback in this study. It may motivate and encourage students to become autonomous learners in their writing. Students would have opportunity to continue learning outside the classroom while having collaborative learning in online environment.

1.7.1.2 By providing indirect written feedback to students' writing, it would help student to develop their writing ability because the feedback was given within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). It would also stimulate students' critical thinking, creativity and analytical skills. Therefore, it would affect students' long – term writing development.

## **1.7.2 Pedagogical perspectives**

1.7.2.1 This study would lead to the comprehension of how to advance students' writing by cooperating technology in writing. It would also help teachers and faculty to integrate information technology as an option to traditional methods in writing classes.

1.7.2.2 This study promoted collaborative learning which students would learn through interaction and participation with peers and teacher. Thus, using collaborative learning approach is hoped to help students to become autonomous learners by providing and receiving feedback from peers.

### **Summary**

This chapter consists background and rationale of the study, research questions, research objectives, statement of hypothesis, scope of the study, definition of terms and significance of the study.