Docs in EAP Courses: Investigating and Promoting Collaborative Writing Experience

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Abstract
Currently, technologies are widely used in education as they are important for assisting language teaching and learning. There are several technologies that can be integrated into language learning and teaching to improve students' writing skills. Google Docs is a tool that allows students to work collaboratively and develop their skills. Various studies have been done to identify students' perceptions and views of using Google Docs in their writing, its effectiveness in collaborative writing, and also how it can be used to encourage student participation. This study investigates the effectiveness of using Google Docs in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) writing class and identifies possible challenges in further promoting students' writing skills in their collaborative writing. In this qualitative study, 64 students of the University of Finance and Economics participated in a survey after using Google docs in their writing classes. The findings showed that students felt comfortable using Google Docs due to its accessibility, availability, and advantages. It helped them improve their writing skills by interacting with others and learning from each other. However, students commented that possible challenges such as equal participation, the uncertainty of roles, and clarity of instruction should be considered further to be more productive and practical. Based on the results, we made several suggestions and recommendations to minimize the challenges and make students more comfortable when producing collaborative writing.

Keywords: Google Docs, Collaborative Writing, Online Writing Tool, Collaborative Learning

Introduction

Technology is essential in the English language classroom since innovative teaching methods are connected with the use of internet technologies. Because of its popularity and accessibility, Google Docs is one of the devices that can be used to promote students' writing (Abrams, 2019). Additionally, as Suwantharathip and Wichadee (2014) mention in their research, Google Docs is an essential tool that enables for an online learning experience. Students at the University of Finance and Economics, Mongolia, have gained knowledge through online courses and the use of various online tools and platforms. As for language learning, digital technologies are widely used in students' learning as well, so they have experience in using multiple online tools. Additionally, following the pandemic, when students have experienced taking classes online, the University of Finance and Economics modified its curriculum to allow students to have their classes both in-person and online. Following this modification in their lesson mode, students are required to complete their assignments and tasks both in-class and online, which requires expertise with online tools, one of which is Google Docs. Google Docs is one of the handiest tools for students to submit their individual writing assignments and share their files. However, students have no experience using it in collaborative writing, which enables them to produce more developed writing and promote their social and language skills. Collaborative learning is a teaching and learning approach in which groups of students collaborate to solve a problem, accomplish assigned tasks and produce a product. Collaboration is a concept of interaction and individual lifestyle in which individuals are accountable for their activities, including learning and respecting their group members' abilities and contributions (Laal & Ghodsi, 2011). Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' opinions and comments on using it in EAP course collaborative writing and find ways to promote collaborative writing through this online platform. The research questions were:

1. What are the students 'experiences and impressions of using Google Docs in their EAP classes?
2. Can Google Docs be used in EAP courses to improve students' writing and social skills?
3. What challenges do students face when using Google Docs?
4. Can Google Docs promote collaborative learning?

In this research, students participated in collaborative writing tasks using Google Docs before answering closed and open-ended survey questions regarding their experience including its usefulness and challenges.

Literature Review

Looking at the literature review, there have been various studies on Google Docs for collaborative writing, its usage, effectiveness, and drawbacks. Sa'diyah and Nabhan (2021) conducted research on the benefits and challenges of using Google Docs in collaborative writing. They concluded that this tool improves students' digital skills, social skills, and learning motivation. Students could use Google Docs to comment on each other's work, share ideas, and revise their work in order to improve their writing and learn from each other (Afdaliah, Uswatunnisa, & Marliana, 2019; Metilia & Fitrawati, 2018). Literature also indicates that Google Docs is an effective tool for improving students' writing and social skills as it allows students to collaborate for creative writing (Perry & Rangu, 2020). Furthermore, research indicates its positive results such as improving writing structure,

content and student performance . According to Alwahoub, Azmi, and Halabieh's (2020) study, students' writing skills can be improved with Google Docs, explicitly improving not only their writing's organization, structure, and content, but also their performance and skills. Khoiriyah (2021) states that collaborative writing enables students to improve their writing and produce developed writing through online collaboration by receiving feedback from teachers and sharing ideas with group members. Moreover, when comparing online collaborative writing in Google Docs to face-to-face writing, Moonma (2021) concludes that Google Docs promotes collaboration, reduces student nervousness, and offers corrections for students' grammar errors. In terms of teacher and student interaction, students feel comfortable communicating and interacting with their teachers or lecturers and gaining new experiences when using Google Docs in writing (Hidayat, 2020).

Apart from the effectiveness, literature reports tha there are some challenges associated with utilizing Google Docs. According to Zhou, Simpson, and Domizi (2012), educators and teachers should be aware of both benefits and challenges when using Google Docs in their teaching to achieve better outcomes. Even though the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, many issues such as regular internet connection, technology availability, digital skills (Sa'diyah, & Nabhan, 2021), and grading of students' participation and contribution have been identified. Regardless of these difficulties, as recommended in Woodrich and Fan's (2017) study, current and future teachers should embrace technologies to promote student language learning and encourage their students. Moreover, as Zhou, Simpson, and Domizi (2012) summarize, today's students prefer doing out-of-class collaborative work and assignments through technologies such as e-mails or other online meeting tools rather than face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, Google Docs is a tool that connects teachers and students regardless of time and location allowing students to interact with their peers (Hidayat, 2020) and improving the quality of group collaboration (Brodahl, Hadjerrouit, & Hansen, 2011). As a result, Google Docs is an indispensable tool for students learning, particularly when it comes to collaborative writing.

Research Method

This study was conducted at the University of Finance and Economics, and it is qualitative in nature. The participants were mostly in their first year of university academic year, studying EAP courses. As the students have prior experience using Google Docs for individual assignment writing and submission, students were not taught how to use Google Docs but how to use it in collaborative work. Students were instructed to create a file on Google Docs, invite teachers to monitor their participation and progress, and work with group members on the given writing task. After their submission, a qualitative approach was used through a survey to explore students' views and experiences after using Google Docs in their collaborative writing and investigate ways to use this tool to encourage their collaborative work. Students were directed to use this platform to produce collaborative writing both in class and out of class and they were asked to use its functions as much as possible, specifically the comment section, to encourage participation and contribution to the writing process. Students were asked to paraphrase complex sentences together as paraphrasing is a challenging task to avoid plagiarism, and it requires different techniques. Collaborating on Google Docs enabled them to share their ideas on paraphrasing and explored various paraphrasing techniques working together. The paraphrased sentences were better than the sentences they worked on individually proving are effective. After students experienced this collective writing process, they completed a 13-question survey, as shown in Table 1, regarding their experience, its advantages, and difficulties. The survey result showed that all

students' comments were positive and had high average scores despite some challenges. The following are the survey questions (see Table 1) used to answer the research questions.

	GOOGLE DOCS STUDENT SURVEY
1.	Is Google Docs accessible and available to you?
2.	Did you have any previous experience using Google Docs before?
3.	Were you familiar with the different functions in Google Docs?
4.	Could you use the various functions on Google Docs comfortably?
5.	What was your first impression when using Google Docs in your collaborative writing?
6.	How handy was it in improving students' writing skills?
7.	Could Google Docs influence a group's collaborative experience positively?
8.	What challenges do you have when using Google Docs in your collaborative writing?
9.	Could students participate equally in collaborative writing?
10.	What do teachers need to consider to provide equal opportunity to every student?
11.	What advantages did you have when using Google Docs?
12.	I would enjoy using Google Docs for my writing assignments in the future (rate)
13.	What did you think specific skills students need to develop in collaborative writing?

Table 1: The survey questions from EAP course students

Findings and Discussions

Students' experiences and impressions of using Google Docs in collaborative writing. The responses to the survey questions were carefully analyzed. The result showed that students feel optimistic about using Google Docs in their collaborative writing as the percentages were high on average, and the comments were positive. The first four were closed questions regarding their access to Google Docs, their comfortability of using it, and its different functions.
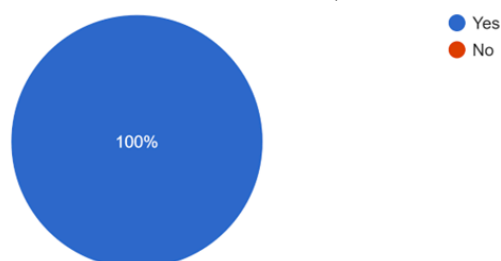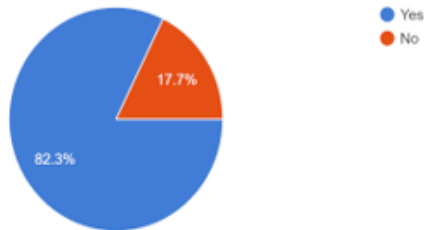

Figure 1: The survey question from EAP course students

As we can see from the above graph, students answered that it is generally available (100%) as it is a well-known online platform.
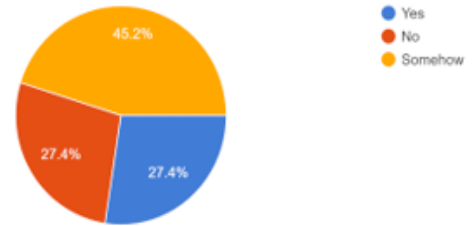
Figure 2: The survey questions from EAP course students

Of the sixty-two students who participated in the study, 82.3 percent had previous experience using Google Docs and were familiar with its different functions while 17.7 percent of the students answered that they had no previous experience of using this tool.
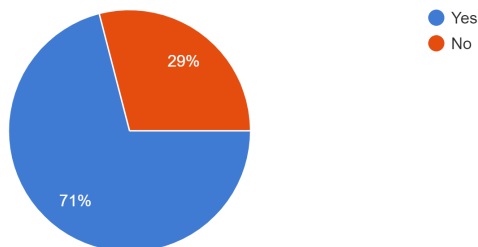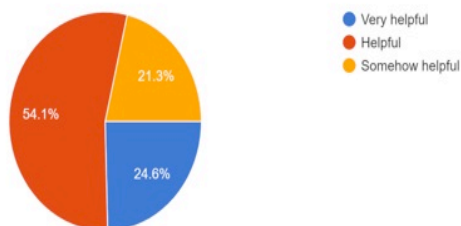

Figure 3: The survey questions from EAP course students

Typically, students feel comfortable as it is available and accessible, and its tools are familiar to them.
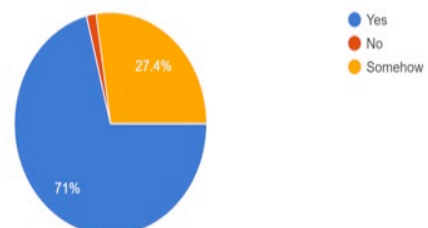

Figure 4: The survey questions from EAP course students

Among all the participants, 78.7 per cent indicated that Google Docs was beneficial in improving their writing skills, and only 21.3 percent of the students thought it was somehow helpful. From the pie chart, it is clear that the majority of the students believe that Google Docs positively influenced the group's collaborative experience.

However, some students had difficulties communicating using the comment section and sharing ideas openly. As for the first impressions of using Google Docs, most of the comments were positive, mentioning its advantages such as encouraging, collaborative,

engaging, time-saving, and most importantly, its efficiency in promoting teamwork. For instance:

> Student: It was easy to use because everyone's writing was visible to everyone.
> Student: Some ideas overlapped. But it was practical to share ideas.
> Student: It saved a lot of time because it was written and edited simultaneously.
> Student: Easy to use and pleasant to work with classmates.
> Student: It was nice because I like working in a good team.

Besides the positive comments, clear instructions and sufficient time were recommended in relation to their first impression, which would result in the completeness of their work:

> Student: It was my first time experiencing collaborative writing. So, it was a little complicated, and the time limit was insufficient.
> Student: Not really used to it at first.
> Student: A little bit complicated.
> Student: Hard to understand each other
> Student: At first, it seemed confusing to use, but later I got used to it.

Challenges that students face when using Google Docs on writing:
Even though students found Google Docs to be effective in their group work, they mentioned some barriers in the survey. Regarding the challenges, some students stated the problems of accepting each other's' ideas and decisions on the final production in their collaborative work. For example, to the question, *"What challenges did you have when using Google Docs in your collaborative writing?"* students answered as follows:

> Student: When using Google docs in our collaborative writing, I faced the problem of my ideas not being accepted by the other members.
> Student: It took a long time to write together, come up with some ideas, and make a final decision.

Another challenge identified from the students' survey was equal participation, as their roles were not clarified and specified clearly. Some students, whose language skills were higher than others, had a more active role in their writing, leaving other students' contributions and ideas ignored:

> Student: Practice beforehand and give good instructions
> Student: Equal distribution according to ability
> Student: Give information promptly.
> Student: Recognize the characteristics of each student
> Student: They need to assign the task and explain that task to the students clearly.

Even though students had previous experience utilizing Google Docs before in their writing assignments, working collaboratively on it was a new experience for them. So, teachers need to be clear in their instructions on how to use this tool in collaboration and assign every student's role taking students' participation and skills into consideration. As Lawrence and Lee (2017) mention, teachers' instruction is critical, particularly for students with lower proficiency.

Concerning the skills that students should develop before working on Google Docs for this task, students mentioned the ability to work in teams online, be comfortable using chat or comment sections, contribute equally by making suggestions, manage their time effectively, and have good prior experience in paraphrasing. Students 'comments were as follows:

> Student: Learn to use tools like chat to communicate with each other.
> Student: Should be able to work in teams in an online environment.
> Student: Everybody has to make sense of and understand their roles.
> Student: Develop the ability to talk to each other, share ideas, and express themselves openly.
> Student: Should be familiar with different paraphrasing techniques.
> Student: Participate equally, contribute and be responsible.

Conclusions and Further Considerations

Based on the review of the literature as well as their students' experiences and perceptions, the authors conclude that Google Docs is an essential tool for developing students' writing performance. Our survey result showed that students were comfortable using Google Docs in their writing due to its advantages such as accessibility, familiarity and collaborative opportunities. Fewer students mentioned some challenges with instructional clarity, equal participation and individual student contributions. However, the authors consider that this study has limitations that further research needs to address. Firstly, the collaborating writing task was assigned when the students did not fully have prior experience using Google Docs in collaboration. Secondly, as students were not fully aware of their roles, assessing their contribution and improvement was challenging. Future research is essential to measure students' progress by allowing them to practice group writing several times during in-class activity until they comfortably use this tool. From the participant students' perspectives, Google Docs is defined as a handy tool in collaborative writing. This study concludes that students feel comfortable using Google Docs collaboratively due to its numerous advantages, such as its availability, editing, commenting options, idea sharing, and collaborative learning opportunities. However, teachers need to be conscious that collaborative writing takes a lot of time to connect through the online system and produce a final paper that considers each group member's ideas and feedback. Also, when assigning group writing, teachers need to consider equal participation of group members by giving clear instructions, defining group members' roles and responsibilities, and allowing them to be familiar with their tasks to complete them comfortably.

Acknowledgements

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