Students' Awareness towards Using Google Docs in Promoting Writing Skills in EFL Classes: TIU-Northern Iraq

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Abstract

Google Docs is one of the free suite and browser-based program. It mostly includes a word processor. It also allows users to store documents for free as well as to upload files to the storage area. In addition, it enables users to backup wanted files online also provides access to the documents from any computer with a browser and internet connection at the same time. Additionally, using Google Docs helps learners to enhance their writing performance while they are having writing activities. Moreover, since GDs is a technology-enhanced technique therefore, students can establish a collaborative learning environment to improve students' writing skills. This study aims to find out to what extent EFL university students use Google Docs in writing skills such as academic writing, general writing, and essay writing at Education Faculty of Tishk International University. The informants of the study were 90 EFL university students from faculty of Education, particularly English Language Teaching at Tishk University in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The data were collected through a questionnaire in quantitative approach. The data were analyzed through Google form approach to reach the result. The study revealed that the majority of the students who learned writing skills are aware of Google Docs, but they don't use it in developing writing skills. Based on the results of the study, there were some recommendations like opening educational technology courses for university students and teachers. Also providing facility to implement it easily.

Keywords: Goggle Docs, Collaborative Writing, Writing Skills, EFL classes

Introduction

Word processing is central to writing skills since it is regarded as one of the two productive language skills (Reyna, 2010). Writing assignments is a multi-step process that includes; drafting, revising, editing, and proofreading. In each of these steps, technology can be used differently (Muthia, 2018). Nowadays, technology plays a vital role in the process of writing. It also helps writers and students to put their ideas and thoughts into the meaningful form of words. It interacts mentally with the messages they intend to convey

(Wenger, 1999).

Therefore, teachers can encourage students to work collaboratively by utilizing internet- based applications and programs effectively (Perry & Rangu, 2020). For instance, using Google Docs as it is a web-based program can facilitate the process of writing among English language learners, and it makes teaching writing classes fun and enjoyable (Ali, 2019). As a result, students can feel relax, and they will be able to share more ideas with class fellows easily and collaboratively (Donnelly, 2009). Accordingly, making use of technology information has influenced the process of learning and teaching languages effectively. It has given significant contributions to this fundamental process to be improved in and out of the classroom.

In recent years, Google Docs has become an essential and beneficial tool for English language learners. It helps expressing ideas and comments on the classmates' writing assignments (Perry & Rangu, 2020). English language learners write collaboratively via utilizing the Google Docs software program. It progresses students writing skills, advances their level of writing performance (Hairuddin, 2020).

Furthermore, the attempts to utilize technology in teaching English writing classes have obtained significant popularity in higher education. Therefore, one of the currently developed trends is Technology-Enhanced Learning and Teaching (TELT), as a result of the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Mahmoudzadeh et al., 2015).

Consequently, teaching the English language and learning in most higher education classrooms has converted from traditional face-to-face classroom settings to technology-enhanced online or blended settings. The constant evolution of web-based or cloud-based online learning and teaching environments has made more sophisticated m-learning or e-learning viable due to the availability of innovative technologies (Donnelly, 2009).

Google Docs, as a web-based or cloud-based online teaching, learning platform, enables English language learners to communicate, participate, and collaborate on the assignments that they have to do in the classrooms more meaningfully (Hairuddin, 2020). As web-based online learning participation and collaboration are encouraged by the current pedagogical model of technology-enhanced writing, peer –editing as well as peer feedback in English writing instruction have been recognized as one of the advanced and the most powerful classroom teaching techniques which consequently enables learners to be empowered to learn (Fuccio, 2014).

To better realize the significance of using Google Docs in teaching writing skills. It is necessary to define the term even though it has been defined differently. According to Muthia (2018), Google Docs as a collaborative writing platform has been added to be utilized in instructional settings. It has been revealed that it is an effective online collaborative platform for implementing English language writing courses. Fuccio (2014)

has defined Google Docs, as a free web-based platform. It allows students to write their assignments, documents, edit, and comment on each other's works. It also helps for submitting their writing assignments with their teachers. Furthermore, it assists teachers in requiring their students to work on their writing assignments collaboratively and in real-time with ease and fun (Jeong, 2016). Moreover, several researchers like (Donnelly, 2009; Ramet, 2007 & Dornyei, 2005 as cited in Ali, 2019) stated that collaborative writing instruction has various benefits in teaching EFL classes. It creates self-confidence within individual learners as well as developing cooperation among the students. It was one of the reasons to choose this title and investigate GDs in the Education Faculty of TIU.

The Problems of the Study

Implementing Google Docs can assist EFL university learners in improving collaborative writing skills. But the problem is that EFL University learners' have a lack of awareness towards utilizing this application. They also do not have enough knowledge about using it actively in EFL classes. This problem occurs because EFL university learners are not introduced to recent educational technology tools. They don't have enough training about making use of this tool. Based on problems, this study investigates obstacles for learners who are not able to create and provide an active and collaborative learning environment for the writing classes they learn via this platform.

Research Questions

The primary research questions were scanned to find the aim of the study.

1. To what extent learners in Tishk University in Kurdistan region are aware of using Google Docs to develop their writing skills?

2. Do English language learners in Education Faculty of TIU in Kurdistan region implement Google Docs to enhance their writing performance while they are having collaborative writing activities in the writing classes?

Research Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that EFL learners who aim to promote writing skills in Education Faculty of Tishk University in Kurdistan region are aware of Google Docs. It is also hypothesized that they do not use it very often.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out whether learners in Faculty of Education at Tishk International University in Kurdistan Region are able to utilize GDs in the writing

classes. It also aimed to explore whether students work on their writing activities collaboratively.

The Importance of the Study

The present study will be a significant resource for English language learners (EFL) to recognize the importance of using Google Docs in improving writing skills. It also encourages the learners to integrate Google Docs in the writing process for developing collaboratively in the classes, especially during this pandemic. As it is clear, the learning process is mostly online over the world, and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is not far from it. It is a kind of help for researchers and policymakers to design curriculum based on the technological tools.

Literature Review

The second chapter delivers the general introduction about using Google docs in the teaching writing and the availability of literature review. Then, it also offers integration GDs in teaching writing collaboratively.

Background Information about Using Google Docs in Teaching Writing

During the last few years, technological tools have assisted educators and learners in providing a collaborative learning environment for the students obtained much popularity among them. Google Docs is a free ad web-based platform that allows students to write their writing assignments, documents, edit, and comment on the works as well as share ideas. Furthermore, Google Docs, as one of the web-based collaborative platform for teaching and learning writing activities, assists language teachers to be able to encourage their learners as well as enable them to have this self-reflection on their collaborative learning works and learning outcomes. It also helps teachers to assign students to work on their writing assignments collaboratively in real-time with ease and fun (Jeong, 2016).

One of the significant features of Google Docs as a web-based version of Microsoft word processor is allowing the language instructors to view and check their students' writing process history besides seeing their final submitted assignments (Goodale, 2019). Online tools for writing are helpful because they offer real-time collaboration and working on documents together with peers in various settings.

There are several advantages of utilizing Google Docs in teaching and learning writing. For instance, Google Docs platform is a saving time tool as it automatically saves all editing works and revisions. It shows the names of the team members while they add content to the documents, along with seeing the revision history. This platform also allows users to collaborate on a writing project via the web from any computer with the availability of internet access. In addition, it creates communicative environment among the users such

students and with their teachers. It enables everyone to take part in the authentic interactions and work on the projects collaboratively. Furthermore, it increases students' reading input potentially due to re-read their friends' writing. (Fuccio, 2014; Muthia, 2018; Perry & Rangu, 2020; & Renya, 2010).

Using Google Docs as a Collaborative Writing Platform

Recently, many studies have been conducted with regard to integrating those types of collaborative writing technological tools into the practice of teaching and learning English as a foreign language in order to meet the planned educational and pedagogical objectives, like class and teamwork activities. Collaborative teaching and learning are regarded as one of the crucial parts for providing a meaningful teaching and learning environment for English language learners (EFLL). It enables educators and learners to provide opportunities for students to have self-reflection on their learning outcomes and their knowledge accumulation journey (Jeong, 2016). The process of collaborative writing activities derived from its concept (Mahmood, 2017).

Collaborative learning framework is most meaningful and significant when it is based on the context of a learning community of practice (Wenger, 1999). Students can submit them draft. It has a peer review to their written assignments as well as sharing their writings with classmates and the members of the same learning community with GDs. Google Doc has been added to be utilized in the instructional settings, as its potential has been revealed to be an effective online collaborative platform in the English language writing courses (Perry & Rangu, 2020). Nowadays, collaborative writing is considered to be a crucial part of team- working writing projects. Google Docs is one of the most used tools by a large number of people who work on documents with coworkers and peers. Several researchers like (Donnelly, 2009; Ramet, 2007 & Dornyei, 2005 as cited in Ali, 2019) claimed that collaborative writing instruction has many benefits in teaching EFL classes. A supportive and enjoyable environment is built; it creates self-confidence within individual learners as well as developing cooperation among the students.

Limbu and Markauskaite (2015) conducted a study, and they found out Google Docs enables learners to take part in assigned works by their instructor so that they finalize the writing tasks successfully. As a result, they gain new skills as well as a positive point of view towards collaborative writing and interaction in their learning process.

Methodology

Research Design

The process of gathering data is essential in conducting studies, since its contribution is effective to achieve detailed understanding of a theoretical framework

(Bernard, 2002). In conducting a research, sampling as one of the issues needs to be taken into consideration. The purpose of this study has urged the researcher to utilize purposive sampling to collect accurate data for this research. Purposive sampling which is a technique to select informants intentionally for the qualities they own (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009), is possibly used within the process of collecting and gathering data in conducting quantitative research. It is sent through email address, social media and academic application. Due to pandemic corona virus, the researcher was obliged to send the survey through online application. A fundamental feature to the quality of the data collection process is using the purposive sampling method, because knowledgeable and expert informants are chosen to provide necessary information and related data to the study, for this reason, the informants reliability and competence must be gathered (Tangco, 2007).

Participants of the Study

The study's participants were 90 EFL learners at Tishk International University in Kurdistan Region/Iraq. They study writing in the EFL classes in faculty of education. The data were based on the participant's responses which were analyzed. 25 items were analyzed quantitatively; the results were analyzed through Google forms which is online application. As it is indicated in Table 1, the majority of the participants were female (percentage71) while the male were (%19).

Table 1: Genders

Gender	Number of frequency	Percentages
Male	19	79%
Female	71	21%
Total	90	

Table 2 demonstrates respondent's grades. Most of them from were fourth graders (%31) while first and second grade were (%20). First graders, the lowest number of participants, were (%19).

Table 2: Participants grade

Stages	Number of frequency	Percentages
First	20	22%
Second	19	21%
Third	20	22%
Fourth	31	34%

Table 3 illustrates that the majority of the respondent's language was Kurdish (%71) while Turkish language was spoken by (%10) and Arabic (%5). Other languages were only (%4).

Table 3: Participant's language

Native Language	Number of frequency	Percentages
Kurdish	71	79%
Arabic	5	6%
Turkish	10	11%
Other	4	4%

Table 4 demonstrates that most of the participants were from ELT department (%54), biology department were (22%), and math (% 12), computer education (% 2) and finally other departments were only (% 1).

Table 4: Departments

Departments	Number	Percentages
ELT	54	57%
Physics	0	0%
Math	12	13%
Biology	22	26%
Computer Education	1	2%
Other	1	2%

Instruments

The instrument that is used to collect the data required for conducting this study is the questionnaire for being cheap, quick, and practical data collection tool that enables the researcher to collect a large amount of data within a short period of time (Bell, 2011; Oliver, 2010). To collect and gather quantitative data, close-ended as well as open-ended questions were used in this study. The questionnaire was composed of 25 items. Nominal scale was used. This questionnaire was validated by giving to the participants. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher. In this paper, data were collected quantitatively via the distribution of the questionnaire to EFL university students through google forms (online application). The survey link via many platforms like Viber or email has been sent to the participants to fill up the survey. Before distributing or sending the questionnaire, the researcher has explained the purpose of the study to the participants.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained full consent from the head of the department at faculty of education at Tishk University and from the participants before the study. The privacy of the participants was ensured and the responses shall not be shared. The results of the study will be used for scientific purposes only.

Data Analysis

The majority of the participants who answered the elements of the questionnaire have heard about Google Docs before, but they were not familiar with utilizing it in developing their writing skills. From table 5, it can be seen that the majority of the participants who responded to the questionnaire (%66) have heard about Google Docs before, likewise they were aware of the tool but they have not made use of it for improving writing. This may be because of that fact that there is lack of educational technology training course at the university level. Technology offers a variety of new ideas and possibilities for teaching and learning English language as a foreign language. Furthermore, not providing needed equipment such computers, internet access in the classrooms in universities in Kurdistan region can be some of the main reasons for not having sufficient self-motivation to surf and learn about these beneficial educational technological tool.

Table 5: Student's awareness towards Google Docs

N.	Item	Number	Percentages
6	I have heard about (Google document) before.		
	Yes	66	73%
	No	24	27%

Table 6 showed that the majority of the respondents were satisfactory with using Google Docs as it creates self-confidence and encourages communication among students although some of the students were hesitant about using it as they face difficulty in using the tool in their learning process. Most of the respondents agreed with utilizing google document in their leaning process as it encourages them to share and create sheets among each other and learn new skills. Moreover, based on the responses, it can be concluded that the students liked Google Docs as it saves time, and allows them to receive feedback from their teachers. However, a small number of participants still hesitate using Google docs to improve their writing skills.

Table 6: Average responses of utilizing google document in learning process

N.	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7	I can use Google document for writing skills while having a collaborative writing activity.	5	4	33	39	9
		6%	4%	37%	43%	10%
8	Google document saves time.	3	10	24	37	16
		3%	11%	27%	41%	18%
9	I can submit and share my draft easily through Google documents.	4	8	21	42	15
		4%	9%	23%	47%	17%
10	I can review writing assignments with my colleagues through Google documents.	2	5	21	47	15
		2%	6%	23%	52%	17%
11	Google document encourage me to have self- learning on collaborative learning works.	3	8	21	41	17
		3%	9%	23%	46%	19%
12	I can receive instant feedback from my teacher as well as peers.	5	8	29	35	13
		6%	9%	32%	39%	14%

Table 7 shows problems which students encounter while using Google docs. Utilizing Google Docs will be somehow difficult for the students especially for new learners. For instance, a great number of participants stated that engaging with Google Docs is very difficult for them. Also, some of them stated that Google Docs is a complicated platform for them. Another problem of some of the participants is that they cannot work on Google Docs neither individually not in groups. Based on the responses, it is possible to conclude that learners need to be introduced how to use Google docs in details for improving their writing skills. If learners have a good command of using Google Docs, the problems they face will be less. Also, if learners know how to benefit from Google Docs, they will use it more effectively.

Table 7: Average responses to the problems of using google document

| N.	Items	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
15	I face an online problem while using Google document to share my works.	2 2%	20 22%	23 26%	31 34%	14 16%
16	Engaging with Google document is very difficult.	3 3%	25 28%	19 21%	27 30%	16 18%
17	Google document is a complex platform for learning and sharing files with my colleagues.	5 6%	19 21%	27 30%	24 27%	15 17%
18	I cannot practice writing through Google document in a collaborative way	8 9%	22 24%	20 22%	28 31%	12 13%
19	It is difficult for me to do writing activity through Google document.	5 6%	21 23%	19 21%	30 33%	15 17%
20	I do not enjoy working through Google document individually or in peers.	6 7%	16 18%	26 29%	24 27%	18 20%
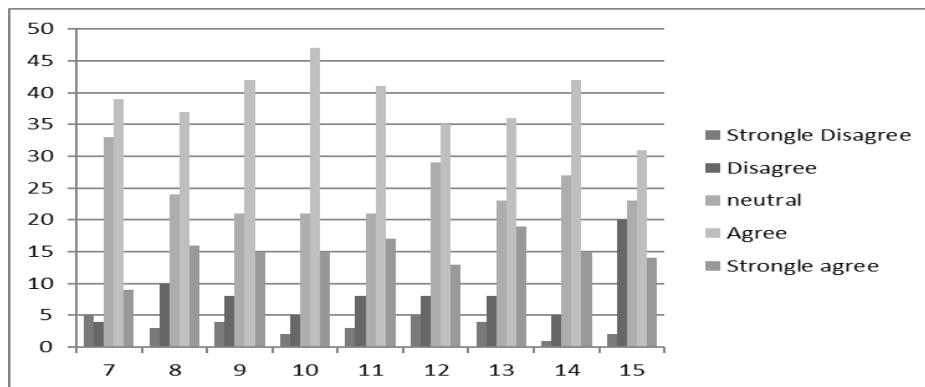
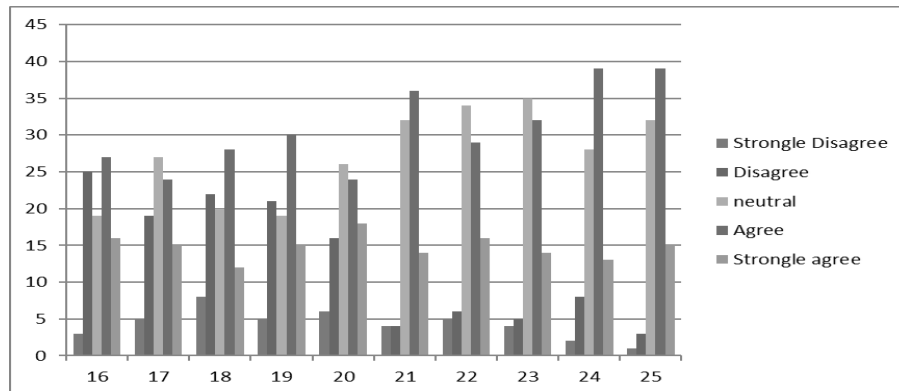Figure 1: Average responses of the items regarding using google documents

Figure 2: Average responses of the items regarding issues of using google document

Discussion

To what extent, learners in Tishk University in Kurdistan region are aware of using Google Docs to develop their writing skills?

This study obtained the data from the respondent's point of view regarding utilizing google documents in learning process and whether it affects students learning in Tishk university or not? There are many students who were interested in participating in this field. Google documents have a positive effect on student's progress although some of the learners were not aware of using this tool and face difficulty of sharing sheets or documents with their peers. This tool is easy for learning writing skills and raising the awareness of the students on technology sector. This program will be complex for some students at the beginning of using it, but by the time, it will be easy by practicing them especially with their peer or in groups. As one of the researcher identified that "Google Docs is a powerful collaborating tool. Traditionally, collaboration can be done by attaching documents to e- mail and sending them to collaborators. By using Google Docs, one needs to have only one copy of document which is kept in the web. To collaborate, one needs to create a Google document and invite others as collaborators." (Ahmed, 2012, p.412). It is clear that google documents is an online approach that most academic staff uses for strengthening students learning through online approach which is a trend nowadays in every sector.

Do English language learners in Tishk University in Kurdistan region implement Google Docs to enhance their writing performance while they are having collaborative writing activities in the writing classes?

Most of the students in Tishk University agreed with using google document in enhancing writing skills while they work collaboratively by sharing and send sheets among each other. The activity that is provided by the teacher for writing skills will empower their learning as they practice and exchange ideas with their peers. Based on the current result,

some students were hesitant about utilizing google document due to some issues regarding technology such as not having enough facilities regarding devices and the program is somehow difficult for new learners so they need to practice more to apply Google Docs in their learning process. Students need to practice this sort of tools especially for writing skills as they need to reflect and share their drafts with their peers then they can comment and exchange ideas and assess the weak points regarding their works. Furthermore, some students were not motivated by using this tool, there were problems sharing sheets and issues of reflecting. One of the advantages of using this tool is that students work collaboratively and learn new skills from their colleagues. It can be concluded that google document can enhance students writing skills at Tishk University although there are some issues which will be a barrier in learning process. For instance, lack of progress and skills in learning will cause frustration for students generally.

Conclusion

This section of the study contains the conclusion and the summary of the findings from the university student's response of the questionnaire. The research was an attempt to find out university learners awareness towards utilizing Google Docs in developing writing skills, especially in learning collaborative writing instruction. The obtained results from the survey illustrates that the majority of university students who try to develop their writing skills were ware of Google Docs; they have heard it before. But they have heard it as a tool for data collection not as a tool to use for improving writing skills.

Based on the results it can be concluded that, some recommendations need to be taken into consideration. It might be a need to provide educational technology courses for university students to be aware of and familiar with the current developed educational technology tools to develop their writing abilities.

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