

IMPACT ON STUDENT MOTIVATION OF INTEGRATING GOOGLE DOCS WITHIN A REMEDIAL ENGLISH WRITING CLASS

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Abstract

Integrating Communication Technology is invading the classroom in the new education era. New teaching approaches, especially those focusing on constructivism, stress the positive impact technology has on student motivation, which in return enhances their achievements and abilities. This inquiry, a qualitative research study conducted in a private university in Lebanon, deals with the integration of Google Docs in an English writing class. The results show that, by introducing Google Docs, there was great impact on the students' motivation, writing skills, and attitude towards the English language in general. Students using Google Docs gained higher confidence and scores when they started reading the teacher's feedback on the Docs and working accordingly and had positive attitudes towards the collaborative writing process that used Google Docs.

Background of the Study and a Brief Literature Review

As strain increases in the private and public higher educational sectors in Lebanon, several nonprofit organizations have expanded access to education to enhance the education system and support the sectors with Integrating Communication Technology equipment. However, there are very few studies in Lebanon on whether teachers are integrating computer technology in the classroom and whether the students are benefiting and being motivated in the new learning process.

During the last few years, the use of online collaborative writing tools has been integrated within educational settings. Research shows that the advantages of such tools, specifically in higher education settings, include enhancing the learning process and motivation of the students. Thus, classrooms that lack technology are considered to be boring and classified as being old school. Undergraduate students in one of the private Lebanese universities are required to take remedial courses in English if they do not score a specific average in their entrance exam. Each course consists of essay writing, and the indications are that students often feel unmotivated because of the repetitive teaching methodologies the English teachers adopt while explaining the writing steps.

Among several technologies available at present, Google Docs is a tool used in the learning process, which enhances applying the student centered approach in an environment full of collaboration and motivation. According to Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014), when the documents are shared in classrooms and commented on collaboratively, students have the chance to work on the feedback provided by their teacher or their classmates directly. When doing so, connections between the students' prior knowledge, personal experience, and course content are reflected. Cattafi and Metzner (2007, p.18) argue that collaborative tools can serve as a *knowledge platform*

where the members (teachers and students) can share their knowledge with each other and post information, work together, and critically discuss feedback issues. Students can work in the classroom or from home since Google Docs is stored online. This is a fact that increases their motivation. Comments in Google Docs appear as they do in any other application for chatting; thus, the students are encouraged to reply to their teachers' comments and discuss with them points related to their writings. Ghosn Chelala and Al-Chibani, (2013) explain that it is very important to find an effective approach for providing feedback on students' writing, which on the long run enhances the students' motivation and becomes challenging.

In many cases, some of the students barely read the teacher's comments and feedback upon receiving their graded and corrected papers. However, Google Docs gives these students the opportunity to read the teacher's comments clearly and reply to him/her on the spot if they have problems analyzing them. In the collaboration among students and the teacher creativity plays a role, and the students find it interesting (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014). Lamb and Johnson (2010) believe that using Google Docs in order to provide students with feedback and work with them collaboratively allows the students and the teacher to think, create, and share at the same time as addressing subject areas in the classroom. When it comes to motivation, students seem to be satisfied when they work collaboratively with someone else from the classroom, especially when it is the teacher. Their learning motivation improves respectively (Kowal & Swain, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Pea and Kurland (1987) emphasize that a personalized and more readily available feedback through technology is also not new as is using such technologies to help introduce new strategies and enable the writers to enhance their strategies. Thus, In general, the use of digital computing and networking tools is in line with student preferences (Ghosn Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2012; Al Chibani, 2011). This study moves from individual learning to web-based applications.

It is not negotiable that the importance of feedback on student outcomes is part of the learning process. Yet, it is very important to choose the best and most reliable approach. Instructors always search for new approaches for providing feedback on students writing assignment in their English writing class (Ghosn Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2012). Writing has become one of the most important tasks people rely on while communicating with each other whatever the need is, email, letters, memos, or academic essay. Writing requires steps to be followed, and writers can always benefit from readers' feedback no matter what the strategy used was (Al Chibani, 2014). English achievement is important to be taken into consideration because research has verified that success in English classes helps students in their future studies and future academic life (Al Chibani, 2014; Dillon, Patthey-Chavez, & Speigel, 2000).

There are several feedback procedures. Some instructors used the traditional ways of scoring such as rubrics and keywords and others moved to a non-traditional approach such the use of the screen-capture and audio recording software (Ghosn Chelala & Al-Chibani, 2012). Yet, other instructors that are more aware of new technology and are motivated to integrate communication technology in their English classroom, started using a new tool in technology - Google Docs.

Thus, among several technologies, Google Docs is a tool used in the learning process, which enhances applying the student centered approach in an environment full of collaboration and motivation.

Thus, this study moves from individual learning to web-based applications. Since very little research has been carried out in Lebanon concerning this issue, the researcher sought to be able to draw conclusions from examining undergraduate students' reflections and reactions as a result of using Google Docs for collaborative writing in a remedial English course and to investigate their attitudes towards collaborative writing activity using Google Docs.

The Study

The purpose of the study was to promote integrating communication technology, mainly Google Docs, in the remedial writing English language classes in order to enhance the students' motivation and encourage them to attend more of these kind of classes and take them more seriously.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the undergraduate students' reflections and reactions, as part of interacting with the instructor's' feedback, towards integrating the Google Docs in their writing sessions
2. To investigate the impact of Integrating Information Communication Technology on undergraduate students' motivations.

Research Questions

1. Was there an enhancement in undergraduate student motivation to attend English remedial writing classes which integrate technology such as Google Docs in the writing reflections?
2. How did the undergraduate students reflect on collaborative writing activities using Google Docs?
3. Was there any difference between the undergraduate student reactions and reflections at the beginning of the semester and at the end of it?

Research Design

This was a qualitative case study.

Participants of the study. The study was carried out in a private university in Lebanon. Two sessions (60 minutes each) were designed to introduce the students to Google Drive and Google Docs and how they work. One-to-one work was conducted in order to make sure that the students knew how to work with the new teaching tool.

Twenty five undergraduate students had to work closely with the researcher throughout the semester where they had to submit their writing journal on the Google Docs account the researcher had created and shared with them. Reflections on the writing were carried out collaboratively by the researcher, teachers, and students. Continuous collaboration was conducted where feedback was given online via the Google Docs the students had to work with.

The choice of participants was a convenience sample, and this was done for two reasons. Firstly, the participants were directly accessible to the researcher, and they were his students. Secondly, the undergraduate students were expected to fill out several

semi-structured interview questions twice: once at the beginning of the semester and again at the end of it.

Instruments used to collect the data. Two semi-structured questionnaires were to be filled by each student on Google forms. Both questionnaires were in the form of a semi-structured interview in which the students had to answer the questions in about 100 to 150 words per question.

The first questionnaire's questions concentrated on how much students liked to integrate technology into their writing classes and how much they knew about Google docs. The questions were: (1) Do you use Gmail? (2) Do you have Gmail account? (3) Have you used Google Docs to complete a course assignment? and (4) Did you find Google Docs helpful?

The second questionnaire contained questions stressing on collecting as many responses as possible that answered the three research questions. The questions were: (1) Was it easy to use Google Docs throughout the semester in group work? (2) Was it effective to use Google Docs throughout the semester in group work? (3) Was Google Docs easier to use than traditional tools such as paper and pen? (4) Did you like the teachers' comments on the essay? In what way? (5) Did you benefit more from the comments on the writing provided by the teacher using Google Docs than the traditional method? and (6) Do you suggest any further comment?

Data Analysis

Procedure of data analysis. After collecting the data from both Google forms, the semi structured interviews were grouped under each research questions and were cross-analyzed in a narrative diary form. The interviews were coded and common answers were highlighted in order to be analyzed and in order for conclusions to be drawn from them.

Findings

Research question 1. Was there an enhancement in undergraduate student motivation to attend English remedial writing classes which integrate technology such as Google Docs in the writing reflections?

The results of the findings show that introducing Google Docs within the writing process as a means of communication between the teacher and the student had a great impact on the students' motivation, writing skills, and attitude towards the English language in general. Students using Google Docs gained much confidence and higher scores when they started reading the teacher's feedback and working accordingly. In addition, students reported that they had positive attitudes towards the collaborative writing process using Google Docs, and nearly all of them agreed that this learning tool is easy to use.

These are two examples of student feedback.

Student a: "When the teacher first introduced Google Docs, I was not familiar with it. I started teaching myself how to open the document and how to type on it directly. Later on, I started getting more excited to read the teacher's comment on the document directly and responding to it on the spot. Sometimes the teacher used to comment directly on the essay and this made it a kind of chatting which we all liked."

Student b: “Even though we had trouble at the beginning to learn how to use the Docs, it became fun every time we used it to comment on each other’s text on the Docs and fix our mistakes.”

Research question 2. How did the undergraduate students reflect on collaborative writing activities using Google Docs?

The majority of students showed interest in working collaboratively using Google Docs. Due to integrating this technology within the classroom, as well as PowerPoint and Prezi, the students were more interested and cared to work better and more. They agreed that being made to open Google Docs and read the teacher’s comments allowed them to read carefully the comments and correct their writing, which was the opposite of what they used to do when using pen and paper.

Student c, for example, said: “Last semester, when the teacher used to return our essay writings, I used not to bother about it and read her comments. She used abbreviations that I did not understand. However, this semester, I made sure to read carefully the clear comments the teacher was providing for me in writing via Google Docs, especially since I had the ability to go back to the chat or conversation history saved in Google Docs and see my changes.”

Moreover, the findings show positive attitudes students had towards collaboration on writing assignments out of class using Google Docs. All but one of the students, agreed that using Google Docs simplified their writing process and helped them make progress throughout the semester.

Student d said: “My grades are much better than last semester and now I know my mistakes more.” This is probably because Google Docs makes collaboration easier.

The last question of the post-evaluation form asked for further comment. There were suggestions that the adoption of such technology as Google Docs and Google forms in other courses might increase the learning process. In addition to that, almost 85% of the students liked the concept of sharing ideas with other students using such a tool that promotes collaborative learning. Importantly, 78% of the students suggested that the teacher should take more time to explain and help students work with Google Docs, especially if they are clearly not used to the technology.

Student e wrote: “At the beginning, it was hard for me to learn how to upload the essay, but later on I had to ask my classmates and it worked out well. This made me stressed.”

Research question 3. Was there any difference between the undergraduate student reactions and reflections at the beginning of the semester and at the end of it?

In this study, Google Docs was seen as an easily used medium for activity which increased the students’ learning motivation and made them happy to read the teacher’s feedback. From the 25 who participated in the study 72% showed interest and agreed that they were familiar with Google Docs as a content management tool (in much the same way that they would normally use a USB stick), but not as a tool for collaborative writing. However, by the end of the semester, their feedback changed and they showed more interest in integrating such tools in the learning process.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to promote Integrating Communication Technology, and particularly Google Docs, in remedial writing English language in order to enhance student motivation and to encourage them to attend more of this type of class.

Ghosn Chelala and Al Chibani (2013), Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014), and Cattafi and Metzner (2007) argue that Google Docs is a tool used in the learning process to enhance applying the student centered approach in an environment full of collaboration and motivation. They add that students can work in the classroom or from home. Students feel comfortable to work anytime they feel like it as Google Docs will provide them with this opportunity. This is in line with the findings of this study in which it is shown that students were motivated using Google Docs. They considered the learning tool to be a new addition to their way of learning, and it made them eager to write more, accepting the new technology and desiring to integrate it in their classes and study routines. For example, students can work on their laptops from the library, and the teacher can be working from home with them. When it comes to learning motivation, Ghosn Chelala and Al Chibani (2013), Kowal and Swain (1994), and Swain and Lapkin (1998) write that students seem to be satisfied and show learning motivation improvement when they work collaboratively with someone else from the classroom, especially when it is the teacher.

The findings of this study on the collaborative work impact on student interest indicates that the majority of the students showed interest in working in this way using Google Docs and especially in integrating the technology within the learning process. The findings also show positive attitudes students had about collaboration on writing assignments out of class using Google Docs. This is in line with the review of this study. Ghosn Chelala and Al Chibani (2013), Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014), and Lamb and Johnson (2010) agree that collaboration among students and the teacher is an interesting method where creativity plays a role, and the students benefit in a way that amuses them. They believe that using Google Docs in order to provide the student with feedback and work with him or her collaboratively allows the student and the teacher to think, create, and share at the same time as addressing subject areas in the classroom. When the documents are shared in classrooms and commented on collaboratively, students have the chance to work on the feedback provided by their teacher or their classmates directly. When doing so, connections between the student's prior knowledge, personal experience, and course content are reflected. Collaborative tools can serve as a knowledge platform where the members (teachers and students) can share their knowledge with each other and post information, work together, and critically discuss issue feedbacks.

Conclusion and Recommendation for Future Research

This study is the first of its kind in Lebanon. It explores a shift from a traditional way of giving feedback on the students' papers in remedial writing classes to a collaborative way of giving direct feedback on Google Docs. There are several recommendations that can be implemented in future studies.

Research should not be limited to only one classroom from one university but conducted throughout different universities and in several classes. This study can be

considered a pre-pilot study for future studies in order to see the impact on student motivation as a first step of integrating Google Docs within foreign language writing classes and then to study its impact on the students' achievement.

Also, it is worth taking into consideration that the students come from different cultures and are at different grade levels and social and economic backgrounds. Some have been previously exposed to technology in the classroom and others have not been. More orientation sessions should be held in order to prepare students for an advanced integration of technology in the course syllabus. Moreover, teachers, in turn, should be trained on such learning tools in order to integrate them in their lesson plans.

Further research studies can be conducted to compare the impact on student writing motivation in collaborative writing between face-to-face and the Google Docs methods.

Wider research should be conducted in the classroom to study student interest in technology. If students are satisfied with learning through technology, students could be assigned to work together outside class. This can help the teacher save time and facilitate the learning process.

This study suggests that Integrating Communication Technology engages students with the lessons and helps them collaborate with their peers to develop their writing skills. By allowing this to happen, teachers are preparing their students for a new 21st century learning phase.

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