International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching
Volume 11 • Issue 2 • April-June 2021

Students' Attitudes and Preferences Towards Google Docs as a Collaborative Writing Platform

Kok Yueh Lee, Universiti Teknologi Brunei, Brunei
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8836-6135

David Geraint Hassell, University of Bath, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings on the application of Google Docs as a collaborative writing platform for a research report assignment. Based on a mixed method study, 34 first year students were put into eight groups of four to five and tasked with writing a research report. Four groups adopted Google Docs to discuss and develop the assignment whilst the other four groups adopted a more traditional face-to-face approach. Two sets of questionnaires, pre and post to the assignment, were distributed to investigate students' attitude and preference towards both approaches. Findings indicate that students shared mixed feelings towards Google Docs where students without prior experience found it a positive experience and useful for their learning. Students preferred the real-time accessibility and time-saving features of the platform as compared to face-to-face, with results indicating that a blended approach of online and face-to-face meetings is the best approach to maximise student learning.

KEYWORDS

Collaborative Writing, Google Docs, Higher Education, Online Collaboration, Report Writing

INTRODUCTION

The integration of technology in higher education institutions has gained increasing popularity over recent years (Jeong, 2016), and recent events surrounding the global COVID-19 pandemic have illustrated Universities willingness to utilise technology to meet pedagogical needs. Teaching and learning in higher education has transformed from the conventional pedagogical approach to embedding technology-enhanced methods into classroom teaching (Echenique, 2014; Jeong, 2016; Said, Lee, & Tan, 2011). Technologies are further enriching teaching and learning experiences in the classrooms through the implementation of mobile electronic devices, introducing the concept of mobile learning or e-learning (Ali, Salleh, & Shahrill, 2015) and immediate staff/student interaction and feedback through software such as Kahoot!

The implementation of internet technology in language classrooms has allowed language tutors and learners to adapt and cater to the different students' learning needs and motivate students to achieve more. Earlier research by Yamauchi (2009) showed that the integration of internet technologies such as YouTube, Google, Blogger or Google Docs into language classrooms led to an increase in learners' confidence skills to express themselves more effectively. Through the use of mobile applications, students developed better language skills such as improving vocabulary acquisition and comprehension,

DOI: 10.4018/IJCALLT.2021040101

written and oral skills, pronunciation and grammar (Yamauchi, 2009). Subsequent work by (Jeong, 2016) found that the use of online learning tools such as Edmodo, Moodle, wikis, or Google Docs improve and strengthen communication skills, collaborations and participation amongst peers. Whilst these previous literatures have highlighted advantages of implementing technological approaches to student learning and collaboration, there is limited work investigating its impact within South East Asia and specifically within Brunei Darussalam.

This study explores the use of Google Docs in an undergraduate degree level module in a higher education institution in Brunei Darussalam. It compares this approach with more conventional face-to-face sessions during collaborative writing, with empathise on student experience, communication and collaboration. With the limited research on the use of Google Docs in Brunei's higher education settings, the present study set out to answer the following two research questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes and perspectives towards the integration of Google Docs on report writing?
2. What is the impact of Google Docs on students' collaboration in group work?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Use of Technology in Classrooms

In today's education environment the prevalence of computers is widespread and students are expected to work with them as a matter of routine. As a result students are expected to accept technology as part of their education and learning experience (Pinto-Llorente, Sánchez-Gómez, García-Peñalvo, & Casillas-Martín, 2017). Technologies which are currently in use in classrooms include online learning management systems, blogs, discussion forums, chats and Google classroom (Reyna, 2013). The integration of technology in learning environments provide alternative means for students and tutors to work collaboratively in a virtual, online environment (Mader & Smith, 2009; Reyna, 2013) as compared to the conventional face-to-face classroom teaching, and can be utilised to improve student engagement with important facets of learning such as feedback (Caruso, Fraschini & Kuuse, 2019).

The implementation of technologies can bring both positive and negative impacts to students. In a University in Catalonia, Echenique (2014) studied first year students' opinions and experiences towards digital technologies in the classroom. They found that students valued the use of digital technologies in higher education particularly for communication but that they also have high preference for face-to-face communication. In a study carried out in the United Kingdom investigating university students' perceptions towards mobile applications for learning in the study of different languages, Niño (2015) found that students recognised the potential advantages of language learning through mobile applications. Apart from fostering communication, interaction and engagement amongst peers, other benefits identified included the promotion of autonomous learning. In other work, Akçayır and Akçayır (2018) interrogated 71 studies and reported that 52% showed improvement in students learning performance, satisfaction and engagement in learning when evaluating the effectiveness of technologies in flipped classroom sessions.

The above are examples of the positive impact on technology on student experience, but elsewhere studies have found negligible impact on student performance when comparing podcast delivery against chalk-and-talk lectures in Universities (Hassell, Hewakandamby, & Lee, 2018). Negative impacts have also been observed in a Canadian University study (Sana, Weston & Cepeda, 2013) where they found that the general use of laptops during lectures, particularly whilst multitasking, could hinder learning, affect lecture comprehension and act as a distraction. They found that' students who performed multiple tasks simultaneously on a laptop performed lower on assessment than students who did not. These studies indicate that the use of technology and its effects on students' learning differ depending on the technique employed, learning context and individual learner.