

The use of Google Docs and collaborative writing to enhance writing skills in Face-To-Face EFL Classes

El uso de Google Docs y la escritura colaborativa para mejorar las habilidades de escritura en clases presenciales de inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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Abstract

Each year, more digital resources are used in classrooms for second language learning, but they are not always applied in ways that truly improve students' skills. This research seeks to find ways to improve the English writing skills of 20 tenth-grade students attending a school in Guayaquil, Ecuador. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods, was used to assess writing skills before and after implementing activities, tasks, and feedback using digital tools such as Google Docs. The study employed a quasi-experimental design, including pre- and post-intervention assessments administered to the same group of students. The results showed that these tools help improve communicative skills in a foreign language, as evidenced in the post-test, which demonstrated improvements in grammar, vocabulary, and content organization. Overall, the results suggest that integrating collaborative digital tools into face-to-face classes can foster the development of writing skills in English as a foreign language contexts.

Keywords: EFL writing, digital tools, collaborative writing, Google Docs, face-to-face classes.

Resumen

Cada año se usan más recursos digitales en las aulas para aprender un segundo idioma, pero no siempre se aplican de forma que realmente mejoren las habilidades de los estudiantes. Esta investigación busca encontrar maneras de mejorar la escritura en inglés de 20 estudiantes de décimo grado que asisten presencialmente a un colegio en Guayaquil, Ecuador. Se utilizó una metodología mixta, combinando enfoques cualitativos y cuantitativos, para evaluar la habilidad de escritura antes y después de implementar actividades, tareas y retroalimentación usando herramientas digitales como Google Docs. El estudio utilizó un diseño cuasiexperimental, que incluyó evaluaciones previas y posteriores a la intervención, aplicadas al mismo grupo de estudiantes. Los resultados mostraron que estas herramientas ayudan a mejorar las habilidades comunicativas en una lengua extranjera, como se evidenció en el postest, donde hubo avances en gramática, vocabulario y organización del contenido. En general, los resultados sugieren que la integración de herramientas digitales colaborativas en las clases presenciales puede favorecer el desarrollo de las habilidades de escritura en contextos de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera, herramientas digitales, escritura colaborativa, Google Docs, clases presenciales.

Introduction

In recent years, the incorporation of digital tools into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has gained increasing attention from educators and researchers, even within face-to-face classroom environments. Writing in a foreign language is widely recognized as one of the most demanding skills, as it requires learners to organize ideas coherently, apply grammatical accuracy, and express meaning clearly. For many secondary school students in Ecuador, writing in English remains a significant challenge, often due to limited opportunities for guided practice, interaction, and timely feedback during the writing process.

Traditional approaches to writing instruction in face-to-face EFL classes frequently emphasize individual work and paper-based final drafts, which may restrict collaboration and delay feedback from both teachers and peers. In response to these limitations, the integration of digital tools such as Google Docs has emerged as a promising alternative. These tools allow students to participate in collaborative writing activities during class time, enabling real-time drafting, revising, and peer feedback, thus supporting a more interactive and process-oriented approach to writing. Previous studies have shown that the use of Google Docs can positively influence students' engagement and collaboration in EFL writing tasks (Ningsih, 2023).

Collaborative writing supported by digital tools encourages learners to negotiate meaning, exchange ideas, and co-construct texts, which are essential components of effective writing pedagogy. Research conducted in secondary school EFL contexts indicates that students perceive collaborative writing through Google Docs as beneficial for improving not only their writing performance but also their motivation and social interaction (Sa'diyah & Nabhan, 2021). Furthermore, recent studies suggest that the structured implementation

of Google Docs can lead to measurable improvements in key aspects of writing, such as content development, organization, and language use, when compared to traditional instructional methods (Kartepe & Atmaca, 2024).

Despite the documented benefits of digital tools in EFL writing instruction, their potential remains underutilized in many face-to-face classrooms. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of using digital tools on the development of writing skills in face-to-face EFL classes among secondary school students in Guayaquil, Ecuador. To achieve this purpose, the research will first diagnose students' initial level of English writing skills through a writing pretest, identifying strengths and weaknesses that inform the design of the instructional intervention. Subsequently, structured writing activities supported by digital tools will be implemented during face-to-face EFL classes, focusing on guided practice, feedback, and revision. Finally, the study will evaluate the impact of digital tool integration on students' writing performance by comparing pretest and posttest results, in order to determine the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing writing skills.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute valuable insights for EFL teachers and educational institutions, supporting informed pedagogical decisions regarding the integration of digital tools into writing instruction within face-to-face learning contexts.

Literature review

Writing is a foundational skill in EFL learning that requires intentional instructional support and sustained practice (Hyland, 2021). Over the past decade, research has increasingly examined how digital tools can support writing development in English language learners. In particular, Google Docs and other collaborative platforms have drawn attention for their potential to facilitate interactive writing processes, real-time feedback, and peer collaboration. These affordances are especially significant in classroom settings where

traditional teacher-centered approaches limit opportunities for revision and learner interaction.

One of the earliest strands of research on collaborative writing in digital environments explored how shared editing platforms impact the quality and engagement of learners' written texts. Sa'diyah and Nabhan (2021) conducted a study with Indonesian EFL secondary school students to investigate the effect of collaborative writing using Google Docs. Through pre-test and post-test assessments and student questionnaires, the researchers found that students who participated in collaborative writing tasks outperformed their peers in writing fluency and organization and showed more positive attitudes toward writing activities. This study highlighted the importance of real-time interaction and negotiated meaning during collaborative drafting stages.

Subsequent research has focused on the affective dimension of digital collaborative writing. Ningsih (2023) examined how university-level EFL students in Indonesia perceived the use of Google Docs for joint writing tasks. Using both surveys and textual analysis of students' written products, the study revealed that learners reported increased motivation and confidence, attributing these changes to the asynchronous and synchronous feedback features afforded by digital commenting. The author concluded that collaborative platforms not only support writing mechanics but also foster psychological factors that encourage sustained engagement with writing tasks.

Studies conducted beyond Indonesia have replicated and expanded these findings. Kartepe and Atmaca (2024) carried out a quasi-experimental study in Turkey, comparing traditional individual writing instruction with collaborative Google Docs-based writing tasks. Their results showed statistically significant gains in grammar accuracy and overall writing quality among students in the collaborative group. Moreover, analysis of revision patterns

indicated that students who worked collaboratively made more substantive revisions than their counterparts, suggesting that peer interaction promotes deeper cognitive engagement with language forms.

In a similar vein, Fathi and Derakhshan (2021) examined the effects of collaborative writing activities supported by digital tools on the writing achievement of Iranian EFL learners. Although this study did not focus exclusively on Google Docs, the researchers used online shared documents to facilitate peer interactions. Their findings showed that collaborative writers demonstrated greater improvement in argumentative writing tasks and were more successful in achieving coherence and cohesion. The study emphasized that digital collaboration allows learners to share and evaluate ideas, improving higher-order writing skills beyond sentence-level accuracy.

Beyond classroom-level interventions, meta-analyses have offered broad insights into trends and the effectiveness of digital tools in writing instruction. Kessler (2023) reviewed over 100 empirical studies on technology-enhanced writing in second language learning. The review concluded that computer-supported collaborative writing environments consistently yield positive effects on writing accuracy, fluency, and complexity, particularly when tasks are structured to include stages of planning, drafting, peer review, and revision. Kessler also noted that effective implementation depends on teacher scaffolding and clear task design.

Motivation and engagement have surfaced as recurring themes in literature exploring digital writing tools. Dörnyei and Ryan (2022) emphasized the crucial role of learner motivation in successful L2 writing pedagogy. Although their work is not specific to Google Docs, it provides a theoretical basis for interpreting why interactive tools may produce better outcomes: learners with increased autonomy, relatedness, and competence tend to invest

more effort in tasks and show sustained engagement. This perspective aligns with findings reported by Huang and Hew (2024), who investigated collaborative writing via web-based tools in secondary EFL classrooms. Their study combined quantitative writing assessments with student interviews and found that learners attributed their improved writing performance to heightened levels of engagement during collaborative activities.

Research focusing on feedback processes in digital writing has also highlighted important pedagogical benefits. For example, Rahimi (2021) conducted a comparative study on the effects of focused and comprehensive corrective feedback on ESL learners' writing accuracy and quality. The findings showed that structured feedback combined with opportunities for revision significantly improved students' grammatical accuracy and overall writing quality. The study also emphasizes that feedback becomes more effective when learners actively engage with it through iterative revision, a process that digital writing environments can facilitate.

Recent studies conducted in Latin America provide contextual support for examining digital tools in EFL classrooms. For example, Arteaga and Valdiviezo (2022) reviewed the existing literature on digital competence among pedagogy students and EFL teacher trainees in Ecuador. Their analysis indicates that although access to digital technologies has increased, effective pedagogical integration depends largely on teachers' digital competence and training. The authors highlight that when educators possess adequate preparation to integrate technology into instructional activities, digital tools can better support collaborative learning and language development. This finding reinforces the importance of teacher preparation alongside technological availability in EFL contexts (Arteaga & Valdiviezo, 2022).

Beyond collaborative writing environments, related research has examined the use of gamified digital platforms to support writing. Zainuddin et al. (2023) implemented a gamified writing intervention using an online platform that incorporated badges, progress tracking, and peer competition elements. The results indicated not only improvements in writing fluency but also increased enjoyment and willingness to engage in revision. Although this study did not involve Google Docs, its findings contribute to a broader understanding of how digital design influences writing outcomes and motivation in EFL contexts.

Finally, mixed-method studies have offered comprehensive insights into both performance metrics and learner perceptions. For example, Hoang and Hoang (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study on the use of Google Docs-based collaboration to support EFL students' academic writing in online learning. By combining quantitative analysis of writing performance with qualitative data from student feedback, the study found improvements in aspects such as organization, coherence, and vocabulary use. Additionally, students reported that the collaborative platform facilitated peer feedback and increased engagement in the writing process. The authors concluded that structured collaborative tasks using digital tools can enhance both writing quality and student interaction (Hoang & Hoang, 2024).

Overall, existing research evidence demonstrates that digital tools, particularly collaborative platforms like Google Docs, can positively influence EFL writing development when embedded in structured instructional designs supported by feedback, peer interaction, and learner engagement strategies. Studies consistently report gains in writing quality, student motivation, and revision practices, suggesting that digital collaborations offer pedagogical advantages over traditional individual writing tasks. These findings provide a strong empirical foundation for the present study, which seeks to extend this line of inquiry to face-to-face EFL classes in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Methods and Materials

Research Approach

This study adopts a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data will allow for objective measurement of changes in students' writing performance, while qualitative data will provide insight into students' experiences and attitudes toward the use of digital tools in the classroom.

A quasi-experimental pretest posttest design with a single group will be employed. This design is appropriate for real school settings where random assignment to groups is not feasible. Students' writing skills will be evaluated before and after the intervention to determine the impact of the digital tools used.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of digital tool integration on students' writing skills. Quantitative data will be used to objectively measure changes in students' writing performance, while qualitative data will provide insights into students' experiences and attitudes toward the use of digital tools in face-to-face EFL classes. The research follows a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design with a single group, which is suitable for real educational settings where random assignment is not feasible. Students' writing skills will be assessed before and after the instructional intervention to determine the impact of the digital tools employed.

The participants will consist of 20 secondary school students (11 girls and 9 boys) aged between 14 and 17, enrolled in 10th grade at a public school in Guayaquil, Ecuador, where English is taught as a foreign language in face-to-face classes. The sample will be selected through convenience sampling based on accessibility, student availability, and

institutional authorization. Most participants come from an urban area and demonstrate a basic to intermediate level of English proficiency according to the school curriculum. Additionally, students generally show a preference for interactive and technology-supported learning activities, such as videos, digital games, and collaborative tasks. All participants have access to a school English laboratory equipped with basic technological resources, including computers and internet access, which supports the effective implementation of digital-tool-based writing activities.

The procedure of this study begins with the administration of a writing diagnostic pretest. At the beginning of the research process, students complete a writing task appropriate to their English proficiency level, such as writing a short paragraph or an opinion text. This initial assessment is used to determine students' baseline writing skills and to identify areas that require instructional support.

Following the pretest, an instructional intervention is implemented over a period of six to eight weeks during regular face-to-face EFL classes. During this stage, students participate in structured writing activities designed to guide them through the stages of the writing process, including planning, drafting, revising, and editing. Digital tools such as Google Docs, word processors, and grammar-support applications are integrated into the lessons to facilitate collaboration, real-time feedback, and revision. Teacher-guided feedback and peer feedback are systematically incorporated to support students' writing development.

At the conclusion of the instructional intervention, students complete a writing achievement posttest. This assessment consists of a writing task similar in format and level of difficulty to the pretest, allowing for a direct comparison of students' writing performance

before and after the intervention. The results of the pretest and posttest are used to evaluate the impact of the digital tools on students' writing skills.

In addition to the writing assessments, perception data are collected through a questionnaire administered after the posttest. This instrument allows students to express their perceptions regarding the usefulness of digital tools in improving their writing skills and their overall experience with technology-supported writing activities in face-to-face EFL classes.

The instruments used in the study included a Writing Pretest and Posttest, which consisted of writing tasks designed to assess students' performance before and after the instructional intervention. These written productions were evaluated using an analytic rubric that focused on specific criteria such as content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics. The rubric was adapted to the Ecuadorian EFL curriculum and secondary education standards, ensuring that the assessment process was aligned with national learning objectives and expected competencies. Additionally, a student questionnaire was administered, including Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to gather students' perceptions regarding the use of digital tools in writing instruction. This instrument provided both quantitative and qualitative data about their learning experience. Finally, teacher observation notes were used, based on systematic classroom observations to record students' engagement, participation, and progress throughout the writing activities, offering complementary insights into the instructional process.

Results analysis

The results of this study are presented based on the data collected through the writing pretest and posttest, the analytic rubric, the student questionnaire, and teacher observation notes. The primary objective was to determine whether the integration of digital tools in face-to-face EFL classes contributed to improvements in students' writing skills. The findings combine both quantitative and qualitative evidence to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' performance and experiences.

The analysis of the writing pretest revealed that most students demonstrated a basic to lower-intermediate level of writing proficiency. According to the analytic rubric, the lowest scores were observed in grammar and organization, where students showed frequent errors in sentence structure, verb tense usage, and logical sequencing of ideas. Vocabulary use was limited, with repetition of simple words and a lack of variety. Content development was generally weak, as many students produced short and underdeveloped paragraphs. These results confirmed the need for targeted instructional support and provided a baseline for comparison with post-intervention performance.

Following the six- to eight-week instructional intervention, the writing posttest results indicated a noticeable improvement in overall student performance. Based on the rubric scores, most students showed progress in all assessed criteria. Improvements were particularly evident in organization and content, as students were able to produce more coherent and structured texts with clearer main ideas and supporting details. Grammar accuracy also improved, although some errors persisted. Additionally, students demonstrated a wider range of vocabulary and greater ability to express ideas more clearly. The comparison between pretest and posttest scores suggests that the use of digital tools had a positive effect on students' writing development.

Qualitative data obtained from the student questionnaire supported these findings. The majority of students reported that digital tools, such as Google Docs and grammar-support applications, helped them improve their writing by allowing them to revise their work more easily and receive immediate feedback. Students also indicated that collaborative writing activities increased their motivation and confidence when writing in English. Open-ended responses highlighted that students valued the opportunity to edit their texts multiple times and learn from their mistakes through guided feedback.

Finally, teacher observation notes provided additional evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention. During the implementation phase, students showed higher levels of engagement and participation compared to traditional writing activities. The use of digital tools facilitated peer interaction and made the writing process more dynamic and interactive. The teacher also observed that students became more independent in identifying and correcting their errors over time. Overall, the combination of quantitative improvements and positive qualitative feedback indicates that integrating digital tools into face-to-face EFL classes can significantly enhance students' writing skills.

Conclusion

The administration of the writing diagnostic pretest allowed the researcher to identify the initial level of students' writing proficiency in English. The results revealed that most participants demonstrated difficulties in key aspects of written production, particularly in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, and organization of ideas. These findings confirmed the necessity of implementing instructional strategies that specifically address these weaknesses. Furthermore, the pretest provided a clear baseline for measuring progress and served as an essential reference point for designing the digital-tool-supported writing activities implemented during the intervention.

The implementation of structured writing activities supported by digital tools during face-to-face EFL classes contributed positively to students' engagement and participation in the writing process. The use of resources such as word processors, collaborative platforms like Google Docs, and grammar-support applications facilitated the stages of planning, drafting, revising, and editing. In addition, the incorporation of teacher feedback and peer review through these tools encouraged students to reflect on their writing and make meaningful revisions. Observational notes indicated that students were more motivated and actively involved in the tasks when technology was integrated into the lessons, demonstrating that digital tools can effectively support writing instruction in a traditional classroom setting.

The comparison between the pretest and posttest results demonstrated an overall improvement in students' writing performance after the instructional intervention. Students showed progress in several evaluation criteria, including content development, organization, vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy. These results suggest that the systematic integration of digital tools in face-to-face EFL classes can have a positive impact on the development of writing skills. Additionally, the responses collected through the student questionnaire indicated that most participants perceived digital tools as useful and supportive for improving their writing abilities. Therefore, the findings of this study highlight the pedagogical value of incorporating technology into writing instruction to enhance learning outcomes in secondary EFL classrooms.

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