

EFL Students' Perception on the Use of Google Classroom to Improve Writing Ability

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Abstract

It has been a few years that the pandemic of Covid-19 was over. It was an era when most of the educational activities were conducted using online platforms. One of the most frequently used platforms during the pandemic was Google Classroom. Nowadays, many schools have transformed back to a face-to-face mode of teaching and learning in combination with online learning. This research aimed to probe students' perceptions of the use of Google Classroom as an online platform for blended learning in teaching and learning. It involved 25 English as a foreign language (EFL) students of a public university in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. They attended an Essay Writing course in blended learning, combining face-to-face sessions and the use of Google Classroom as the virtual classroom. After six consecutive sessions, they were asked to complete a Likert-scale questionnaire. The findings showed that the students had positive perceptions of the teaching and learning of writing essays conducted in blended learning by using Google Classroom. Due to the students' positive responses in terms of meaningfulness, engagement, and preference, it is suggested that Google Classroom be used as an alternative platform in blended learning to enhance students' writing ability in the contemporary educational context.

Keywords: *Blended learning, Google Classroom, online platform, writing ability*

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the first quarter of 2020, teaching and learning have transformed from the commonly used face-to-face (F2F) mode to online mode due to the pandemic of Covid-19. Since then, most of the teaching and learning activities have been conducted using online platforms. One of the most frequently used platforms is Google Classroom. Before the pandemic, in a qualitative research, Fallon (2016) analyzed the effects of Google Classroom on third-grade students' motivation, engagement, and narrative writing skills. The results showed that the implementation of Google Classroom in the teaching of narrative writing could increase the students' skills in writing narrative texts. However, during the pandemic, although Google Classroom was used extensively, the process of using the platform did not always run well. For example, Ginting's (2021) study focusing on Indonesian students' perceptions on the use of Google Classroom during the pandemic showed that the students have positive

perception in terms of effectiveness, ease of use, and satisfaction. However, Annisa and Friatin (2024) found that the application of Google Classroom in the teaching of writing during the 2019 pandemic could not engage the students optimally due to problems of Internet connection.

Currently, in the normal situation, schools and other educational institutions have transformed back to face-to-face mode of teaching and learning only or occasionally combine it with online learning either through hybrid learning (combination of F2F mode and synchronous online mode) or blended learning (combination of F2F and asynchronous online mode). In the English as a foreign language (EFL) writing classroom in particular, time allocation for writing classes is limited. Due to the limited time to learn and practice writing, students may have difficulties in writing. In this case, teachers should not force themselves to deliver all the writing materials and conduct all the writing activities in the classroom. They can keep using

technology to conduct blended learning by having an online learning outside the classroom in addition to face-to-face teaching and learning process done in the classroom. Blended learning is mixture of classroom and online learning embracing some of the advantages of online learning without the absence of face-to-face contact (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). Hence, the materials, exercises, and activities conducted in online learning complement those of the classroom learning.

In selecting the online platform to conduct blended learning, teachers can keep using various asynchronous platforms such as *Edmodo*, *Facebook*, *Google Classroom*, and *Moodle* in addition to the use of synchronous media such as *Google Meet* or *WhatsApp*. The use of Google Classroom, in particular, is addressed in the present study as it has been introduced before the pandemic (Fallon, 2016) and during the pandemic (Annisa & Friatin, 2024; Ginting, 2021). One of the reasons is that Google Classroom has features that fit the needs of educational purposes. A review of the efficacy of Google classroom showed that the applications of Google Classroom in blended learning situations tended to be positive and its usefulness was emphasized in teaching and learning (Ni, 2020).

Another consideration in choosing the use of Google Classroom for this research is that research in the English Language Teaching (ELT) context is still rare, especially with regard to the EFL students' perceptions on the use of Google Classroom in the teaching of EFL writing. A study which was conducted by Solihin et al. (2024) found that Google Classroom was considered to be a helpful tool for in turning in assignments and in facilitating tasks management. Huljannah et al. (2024) found that EFL students have positive response toward the use of

Google Classroom platform in teaching and learning English. Nevertheless, it was not clear whether in those studies the researchers used the Google Classroom platform to improve their reading, writing, speaking, or listening ability. Thus, this research aimed to find out the students' perceptions on the use of Google Classroom as an online platform for blended learning to improve writing ability.

Google Classroom was launched by Google in 2014 as a part of G Suite for Education package and it has been used since then and, more particularly, it was quite popular during the pandemic. To use Google Classroom, teachers need to make sure that their schools have already signed up for a free G Suite for Education account. If their schools have done it, then they have to create the classroom by signing up using their G Suite for Education accounts set up by their schools. Besides the teachers, the students also need to sign up using those accounts to join the classrooms by using a class code. This earlier procedure to access Google classroom seemed to be a complex process. Nonetheless, starting from March 2017, Google allows users to create, manage, and join classrooms just by using their personal Google accounts (Li, 2017).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Nowadays, everyone can connect to Google Classroom by using computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones. For iOS and Android users, they can download this application for free in Android Market, Google Play Store, and Apple Store. This online platform is convenient since users can access it easily whenever and wherever they want to. There are several things that teachers can do with it since it is combined with some applications from Google, Gmail, Google Drive, Google

Docs, Sheets, Slides, YouTube, and Calendar (Keeler, 2014). First, they can directly send an email through Gmail to a student, a group, or an entire class at once to communicate with and send feedback or notification to them. In addition, they can also automatically put all students' works and assignments into folders easily accessible from Google Drive. Furthermore, they can ask the students to create and edit documents, spreadsheets, and slides either individually or collaboratively with others simultaneously since every change can be saved automatically. Moreover, they can directly send YouTube videos containing learning materials to the students. Besides, they can also help the students to keep track of their assignments since its due dates will appear in the calendar.

In its earlier version, there used to be three tabs in a Google Classroom front page. Those tabs were labeled as stream, students, and about (Keeler et al., 2015). Currently, there are four tabs in Google Classroom front page: stream, classwork, people, and grades. The stream tab is the class main page. It displays the upcoming assignment and its due date. The teachers can post questions and announcements and the students can comment and post something (depending on the stream setting) and all of those will be displayed here by the order of date and time they are posted. In the classwork tab, teachers can post the assignments for the students. The classwork can be organized into some modules or units. It also displays class assignments set in the calendar. People tab shows the teacher and lists of the students joining the class and the class code after being invited by the teacher. The teachers can invite the students to join their class by using name or email address and send them email. They can also set whether they will allow the students to post or comment or

not. The grades tab is used to list the scores the students get from the assignments.

In fact, Google Classroom offers many great advantages. First, it supports the students to communicate and collaborate with others. By having discussions about topics posted by the teachers, students can be encouraged to have an online conversation, talk over the problems, share ideas to look for the solutions (Pappas, 2023a). Furthermore, they can also collaborate in doing the assignments at the same time. Second, it offers immediate feedback. After submitting the assignments, they can receive feedback right away, whether it is from their classmates or teachers. Pappas (2023b) adds that they can also get clarification soon after there are some misconceptions occur. The last, it provides them with a personalized learning setting. They can choose assignments and resources suiting their needs and preferences because their teachers sometimes post various kinds of tasks and materials.

METHODOLOGY

This research applied a survey design which was used to describe the students' perceptions of the use of Google Classroom as an online platform in blended learning to improve writing ability. The participants were 25 third semester EFL students of a prominent state university in Malang, East Java, Indonesia. The students were taking an *Essay Writing* course presented in blended learning class in 6 meetings where the online learning outside the classroom was carried out by means of Google Classroom as the virtual classroom. The Essay Writing course is aimed at enabling the students to write essays of various types which include exemplification, comparison and contrast, classification, process analysis and cause and effect analysis essays.

When the research was conducted, it was the time for the students to learn how to write a classification essay. In the classroom sessions, the students were taught how to develop a five-paragraph essay which was divided into three parts: introduction (1 paragraph), body (3 paragraphs), and conclusion (1 paragraph). The materials were based on “The Classification Essay,” a book chapter from Smalley et al. (2001, pp. 183–211). In the online learning, the students were provided with additional materials, exercises, and activities related to classification essay as supplementary materials for the lessons which were studied by the students in the classroom. They were also required to fill out a learning log which was used to record and measure their self-learning.

A Likert-scale questionnaire was used to collect data of the students’ perception of the use of Google Classroom as an online platform in blended learning to improve their writing ability. The questionnaire was adapted from Yujing’s (2015) and Afrilyasanti et al.’s (2017) research. Nonetheless, only some items in the meaningfulness category from the two sources were included in the questionnaire. Moreover, we added some items related to learning engagement and preference for activities conducted in Google Classroom. A total of 17 items were presented in the questionnaire (see the Questionnaire in the Appendix). The seventeen items of the questionnaire were grouped into three categories: Meaningfulness of activities (6 items), Learning engagement through Google Classroom, and Preferences for activities conducted in Google Classroom.

Each of the items in the questionnaire was given four options ranging from “strongly agree” (4 point), “agree” (3 point), “disagree” (2 point), and “strongly disagree” (1 point). Four options were chosen to clearly determine

the tendencies of the students in the direction of the perception either into the favorable (agreement) or unfavorable (disagreement) poles. Thus, the deletion of the option “neither agree nor disagree” could avoid the unclear point of perception. In addition to the data collected from the questionnaire, an interview was conducted to ten of the participants to clarify their responses to the questionnaire and to give more explanation of the students’ responses in the questionnaire.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The findings included data on students’ perceptions of the meaningfulness of activities, learning engagement through Google Classroom, and preferences for activities conducted in Google Classroom, drawn from the questionnaire and interview results.

Meaningfulness of Activities

The results of the students’ perception on the meaningfulness of activities conducted in Google Classroom taken from the results of the questionnaire after the application of blended learning using Google Classroom are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Students’ Perceptions on the Meaningfulness of Activities Conducted in Google Classroom*

No	Statement Item	N	Score
1.	The things I learn in Google Classroom are useful.	25	3.24
2.	The works that I do in Google Classroom are valuable to me.	25	3.16
3.	The activities conducted through Google Classroom improve my understanding of the topics learned.	25	3.04
4.	The activities conducted through Google Classroom improve my writing ability.	25	3.00
5.	Watching video lectures and reading materials given in Google Classroom prepare me for the class activity.	25	3.20
6.	Watching video lectures and reading materials given in Google Classroom make me easily understand the teacher’s explanation.	25	3.16

Total	18.8
Average	3.13

Table 1 showed that the students had a positive perception on the meaningfulness of activities conducted in Google Classroom. For the first item, the students agreed that the things they learned in Google Classroom were useful. They said that all the materials, exercises, and activities given in Google Classroom made them understand more about classification essay. For the second item, they agreed that the works they did in Google Classroom were valuable to them. They argued that the tasks they performed in Google Classroom helped them to reach their learning objective in the form of writing classification essay properly. For the third and fourth items, they agreed that the activities conducted through Google Classroom improve their understanding of the topics learned and writing ability. They stated that learning the given materials, having online consultation, and conducting online peer feedback assisted them in comprehending the concept and enhancing their ability in writing classification essay. For the fifth and sixth items, they agreed that watching videos and reading materials given in Google Classroom prepare them for the class activity and made them easily understood the teacher's explanation. They declared that doing those activities made them come to the class without feeling like a blank sheet of paper and ask more questions related to classification essay to get deeper understanding. However, since not all of them watched the videos and read the materials due to technical and personal problems, they thought that having classroom discussion of things they learned online was still needed. It could also help clarify the misunderstanding as a result of self-learning.

Learning Engagement

The results of the students' perception on the learning engagement through Google Classroom taken from the

results of the questionnaire after the application of blended learning using Google Classroom are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. *Students' Perceptions on the Learning Engagement through Google Classroom*

No	Statement Item	N	Score
1	Google enhances interaction between teacher and students.	25	3.16
2	Google enhances interaction between students and students.	25	3.04
3	It is easy to use Google Classroom.	25	2.96
4	I understand how to use Google Classroom.	25	2.88
5	I do not have any problem in getting involved in activities conducted in Google Classroom.	25	2.80
Total			14.84
Average			2.97

Table 2 demonstrated that the students were inclined to have a positive perception on the learning engagement through Google Classroom. For the seventh and eighth items, they agreed that Google Classroom enhances interaction between teacher and students as well as students and students. They said that they could interact and collaborate more with their classmates and teacher by means of online consultation, online discussion, and online peer feedback. For the ninth and tenth items, they were inclined to agree that it was easy to use Google Classroom and they understood how to use it. They argued that since they had training in using it, they could understand how to use it easily through their laptops or smartphones. Nevertheless, few of them said that they were accustomed to use *Edmodo* as the virtual classroom and not really familiar with Google Classroom. Therefore, they thought that longer period of training was needed to make them get used to and understand how to use it. For the

eleventh statement item, they were inclined to agree that they did not have any problem in getting involved in activities conducted in Google Classroom. Nonetheless, few of them stated that they could not actively participate there because they had poor internet connection and many other assignments from other teachers. The application of Google Classroom in their smartphones sometimes crashed when opened because of incompatibility.

Preference

The results of the students' perception on their preference for activities conducted in Google Classroom taken from the results of the questionnaire after the application of blended learning using Google Classroom are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Students' Perceptions on their Preference for Activities Conducted in Google Classroom*

N	Statement Item	N	Score
0			
1	I like using Google Classroom to have a discussion with classmates.	2 5	2.9 6
2	I like using Google Classroom to have a consultation with teacher.	2 5	2.9 2
3	I like using Google Classroom to give comment and feedback.	2 5	2.9 6
4	I like using Google Classroom to receive feedback on my writing assignment.	2 5	3.0 4
5	I like using Google Classroom to submit my writing assignment.	2 5	2.9 2
6	I like having online class by means of Google Classroom.	2 5	2.8 0
Total			17. 6
Average			2.9 3

Table 3 disclosed that the students were inclined to have a positive perception on their preference for activities conducted in Google Classroom. For the twelfth until the fifteenth items, they were inclined to agree that they liked using Google

Classroom to have a discussion with classmates and consultation with teacher, give comment and feedback, and receive feedback on their writing assignment. They said that they did not need to wait until they had face-to-face classroom to answer their questions, clear up their misunderstanding, correct their mistakes, and so on. However, few of them argued that they preferred to do those kinds of activities inside the classroom since they sometimes did not understand the comment and feedback given by both their classmates and teacher and needed direct explanation to make it clearer.

For the sixth item, they were inclined to agree that they liked using Google Classroom to submit their writing assignment. They stated that having paperless assignment could save their money and minimize the number of trees cut down to make paper which in turn saved earth and prevented global warming. The last, for the seventeenth statement item, they tended to agree that they liked having online class by means of Google Classroom. They declared that it was delightful to try and experience something new and interesting like Google Classroom. Nevertheless, few of them commented that they preferred using *Edmodo* because they were used to it.

In short, all of the students' responses to the items in the three aspects are close to 3, meaning that they "agree" to the indicator specified in each of the items. Based on each aspect of the questionnaire items, the average score shows that the responses were also positive. More particularly, the average scores were 3.13, 2.97, and 2.93 for meaningfulness of the activities in Google Classroom, learning process, and preference, respectively. Thus, the students' responses to the use of Google Classroom in blended learning for the improvement of their ability in writing essays were positive both in each item and each aspect.

Discussion

This section covered the discussion related to the findings of the research to depict the students' perceptions on the meaningfulness, the learning process, and the preference for activities conducted in Google Classroom.

Students' Perception on the Meaningfulness of Activities Conducted in Google Classroom

Based on the finding of the research, students perceived the meaningfulness of activities conducted in Google Classroom positively. According to Barron and Darling-Hammond (2008), the meaningfulness of learning experience perceived by the students is an important measure of learning outcomes. Yujing (2015) relates meaningfulness to value of tasks perceived by the students in relation to their own beliefs and standards. Additionally, meaningfulness is also defined as the degree to which the tasks are perceived to have impact on the students themselves (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008). Since they got more exposure by having materials, exercises, and activities given in Google Classroom related to the topics learned, they felt that those were useful for making them more prepared and able to accomplish the learning objectives in terms of increasing their understanding the concept and enhancing their writing ability. In fact, the additional materials given online were mostly in the forms of videos, reading materials, and *PowerPoint Presentation*.

The use of various media can make the online learning more interactive and help students focus and feel interested in the lesson (Rybushkina & Krasnova, 2015). Those media can also cope with their diverse learning styles and make them feel enthusiastic which in turn improve their writing

ability. In addition, Google Classroom facilitating activities like online discussion, online consultation, and online peer feedback to enrich the students' interaction and collaboration with their peers and teacher beyond the classroom. These interaction and collaboration could make the learning experience more meaningful. As stated by Fakunmoju et al. (2016), to make learning meaningful, instructors need to make sure that the instructional strategies fulfill the students' expectations, knowledge obtained is effective in solving practical real world problems, teaching strategies correspond to the students' learning styles, sufficient support is given to encounter learning challenges, collaborative teaching and learning are provided, students' voice in delivery and development of content is granted. Besides, by dealing with technology, the students would be able to develop their technological skills required for their professional jobs in the future and acquire one of 6's C of education in terms of Connectivity included in 21st century skills.

Students' Perception on the Learning Engagement through Google Classroom

In accordance with the result of the research, students also perceived the learning engagement through Google Classroom positively. Pan and Hawryszkiewicz (2004) describe learning engagement a process of learning activities done by students to realize learning objectives. In reaching the goals, the students had more opportunities to have interaction and collaboration with their peers and teacher outside the classroom through online discussions and online peer feedback. They responded to the questions posted by the teacher and interacted with their classmates by answering questions and giving comments online. DiCicco (2016) states that Google platform permits the

students to talk over topics discussed in the classroom and post comments. Especially for the shy students and low achievers, it motivates them to participate and interact more on online discussion since they will not receive criticism directly (Geta & Olango, 2016).

The ease of using Google Classroom makes students understand how to use it and access it whenever and wherever they want. Perceived ease of use of technology is depicted as the extent to which one believes that technology can be easily used and understood (Davis, 1989). It was in line with the finding of Wijaya's (2016, p. 66) research showing that the students felt that all the features and facilities offered by Google Classroom were "easy to use and easily accessible" to simplify the task completion. By having training at the beginning of the research, it helped them to get used to this online platform. As argued by Erben et al. (2009), teachers should introduce new technology to the students slowly to make them more familiar with it. Hence, longer period of training in using Google Classroom is needed to make them able to do the online tasks given there. The unfamiliarity with the online platform might lead to low internet self-efficacy. According to Eastin and LaRose (2000), internet self-efficacy is one's belief that she/he is able to complete online assignments and internet-related activities. Low internet self-efficacy leads to low motivation for engaging in online learning activities which in turn affect the achievement (Kuo et al., 2014).

Only few students encountered problems in getting involved in activities conducted in Google Classroom. They sometimes did not submit the assignment and actively participate in the online classroom because they sometimes had poor Internet connection and many other assignments other than assignments

given in *Essay Writing* course. In the same vein, findings of Afrilyasanti et al. (2017) research exposed that the students had problems related to the facilities, internet access, and too much workload. Additionally, one student faced problem due to the incompatibility of the smartphone with the mobile application making it crashed when opened. On top of that, when installed in smartphones or tablets, some features of Google Classroom did not appear in the mobile application just like in *Edmodo* (Purnawarman et al., 2016).

Students' Perception on their Preference for Activities Conducted in Google Classroom

In conjunction with the finding of the research, students also perceived their preference for activities conducted in Google Classroom positively. Preference refers to tendency to reckon that something is desirable or undesirable (Warren et al., 2010). The students liked using Google Classroom to conduct additional activities beyond the classroom since it gave instant feedback synchronously and was convenient. As said by Shaharane et al. (2016), Google Classroom eases teacher to create and arrange assignments swiftly, offer feedback efficiently, and communicate effectively. Nonetheless, few of them said that they preferred having consultation, discussion, and peer feedback face-to-face in the classroom to avoid misunderstanding or misconceptions, obtain clearer explanation, and get more engaged in the teaching and learning process. Kemp and Grieve (2014) state that by having face-to-face activities, the students feel more involved and get direct feedback.

Regarding the assignment, the students liked submitting it online as paperless work. They wanted to be more economical and environmentally friendly by going paperless. In this sense, Google

Classroom facilitates teachers to create and collect the students' works in a paperless environment (Iftakhar, 2016). This was in accordance with the result of Dalgarno et al. (2007) depicting that the students favored paperless approach since it reduced the time delays and printing fee and provided convenient storage for the previous assignments. More importantly, they liked having online class using Google Classroom since it was interactive. It was in line with the result of research conducted by Blackmon (2017) demonstrating that the students felt connected to their peers and teacher due to the interactive opportunities provided by Google Classroom outside the class. The positive responses of the students were in line with the effect of the application of blended learning using Google Classroom in improving their ability writing essays as reported in our earlier research (Sujannah et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results of the research divulged that the students had positive perceptions on the meaningfulness, learning engagement, and preference for activities conducted in Google Classroom. The students also gave their positive response to each item in the aspects of the use of Google Classroom. For English teachers, in the post-pandemic context, it is suggested that they implement blended learning by means of Google Classroom to enhance students' writing ability, make sure that the students and universities or schools have a good internet connection, and conduct longer period of training in using Google Classroom to make the students get used to it. For future researchers, it is recommended that they investigate the use of platforms other than Google Classroom for blended learning to improve writing ability or

other language skills in the post-pandemic context.

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