Exploring EFL Students' Writing Engagement Using Google Docs as a Peer Feedback Platform

by Nanik Sri Rahayu

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Abstract:

This study examines the use of Google Docs as a peer feedback platform. This type of inquiry falls under qualitative research with a case study design. Document analysis, in-depth interviews, and observations were used to gather data. The findings revealed that Google Docs could be applied for peer feedback successfully in three phases: before, during, and after. In the pre-phase, the teacher provided students with instructions on using Google documents, peer feedback, making comments, and what to remark. Then, the teacher asked the students to Google Docs peer feedback during the stage. Finally, in the after step, the teacher asked the students to revise the draft based on the comments they got from their peers. The study revealed that applying Google Docs as peer feedback could improve students' writing achievement. The gained achievements were grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, content, and organization. Overall, the findings show that Google Docs are very effective in being the students' platform for peer feedback toward the EFL writing collaboration. Future research should expand the investigation on teachers' experience of applying Google Docs with different research designs.

Keywords: Google Docs, peer feedback, EFL students, writing engagement.

使用谷歌文档作为同伴反馈平台探索英语作为外语学生的写作参与度

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摘要：

本研究考察了谷歌文档作为同行反馈平台的使用情况。这种类型的调查属于带有案例研究设计的定性研究。文件分析、深入访谈和观察被用来收集数据。调查结果表明，谷歌文档可以在三个阶段成功应用于同行反馈：之前、期间和之后。在前期阶段，老师向学生提供了有关使用谷歌文档、同伴反馈、发表评论以及评论内容的说明。然后，老师要求学生在这个阶段使用谷歌文档同行反馈。最后，在后面的步骤中，老师要求学生根据他们从同龄人那里得到的意见修改草稿。研究表明，将谷歌文档用作同伴反馈可以提高学生的写作成绩。获得的成就是语法、词汇、机制、内容和组织。总体而言，调查结果表明，谷歌文档在成为学生对英语作为外语写作合作进行同伴反馈的平台方面非常有效。未来的研究应该扩大对教师在不同研究设计中应用谷歌文档经验的调查。

关键词：谷歌文档、同伴反馈、英语作为外语学生、写作参与。

1. Introduction

Teaching writing becomes a challenging task for the lecturers in an EFL setting, especially providing feedback to students to improve their writing quality. Giving feedback is provided to help the students realize their strengths and weaknesses to minimize the same errors and, therefore, can achieve the goal of writing. In terms of providing peer feedback, Google Docs offer collaborative features that can be used to facilitate giving peer feedback in collaborative writing in an English foreign language classroom.

Most lecturers admitted the limited time allocation, and many students in the classroom become a barrier to student understanding and producing a good text (Ariyanti & Fitriana, 2017). Good text here indicates that pupils can create a text that fits all the criteria for a good reader, such as unity in the issue being addressed, seamless arrangement of the thoughts, and proper use of language in the context. Correct syntax and punctuation are also used (Graham & Harris, 2010; Syafi'i, 2020). However, it is realized that producing English text is not always easy for most students since writing in English is not the same as writing in their native language for Indonesian students. For example, the English grammar rule has a nervous system that does not exist in Indonesian. That is the reason why writing is still a problem for most students. Hence, Google Docs, a free web-based version of Microsoft Word, offers collaborative features that can be used to facilitate students to produce a good text by doing peer feedback activities outside the classroom time allocation (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Itua et al., 2014). Google Docs allow students to easily connect with their teachers and peers to receive valuable feedback on their writing quickly and provide unlimited chances for the students to collaborate (Stewart, 2017; Zhou et al., 2012). Therefore, Google Docs play a pivotal role in enhancing the students' motivation and involvement (Ishtaiwa & Aburezeq, 2015). Additionally, Limbu & Markauskaite (2015) also state that Google Docs are a collaborative writing platform that enables learners to participate in and form communities that engage in purposeful communication as long as there is an internet connection.

Google Docs is an online platform technology that can be applied nowadays in collaborative writing. By having Google Docs, the students can continue their unfinished face-to-face discussions in peer feedback at home, which can be done anytime. It means that Google Docs can provide an unlimited chance for the students to collaborate with their friends specifically and their teacher. Zhou et al. (2012) state that the use of Google Docs (especially for out-of-class collaborative writing activities) is beneficial, influencing students' learning. Google Docs are saved online and can be viewed from any computer or mobile device with an internet connection, whether at home or at school. Therefore, the students can easily provide peer feedback anytime and anywhere.

Feedback is central to learning to write, the most substantial learning factor, and is advantageous for both the students and teacher (Hyland, 2013; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). If the teacher applies such feedback appropriately, this practice will have significant effects over a long and short time to enhance the students' writing skills. Feedback to learners, whether in written comments, error correction, teacher-student conferences, or peer debate, must be acknowledged as one of the most significant duties of writing educators (Hyland, 2013). Peer feedback is one learning strategy in teaching writing, and teacher feedback and self-feedback provide a fresh understanding of teaching writing in the EFL context.

Nowadays, because of the increasing access to technology, teachers can integrate technology into teaching writing, especially for applying peer feedback, moving away from traditional models (paper-based and face-to-face mode) into internet-based peer feedback. Google Docs, as one of these technologies, can be applied nowadays. By having Google Docs, the students can continue their unfinished face-to-face discussions in peer feedback at home, which can be done anytime. It means that Google Docs can provide an unlimited chance for the students to collaborate with their friends specifically and their teachers too (Stewart, 2017; Chu et al., 2017).

Therefore, this study aims to explore the use of Google Docs as a peer feedback platform to engage students' writing skills in an EFL classroom. This study will provide an insight into how Google Docs can be used to engage students' peer feedback and how much collaboration on written assignments in an online learning environment has on students' writing abilities. If Google Docs can engage students in doing peer feedback, it will be a new choice for language teachers who have limited time teaching and many students in the classroom to conduct peer feedback.

2. Method

This study deals mainly with the investigation of peer feedback mediated by Google Docs in Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Maliki Malang. This study was qualitative since there was no treatment for the subjects. In other words, in this study, the researcher attempted to understand peer feedback mediated by Google Docs in the writing instructions of UIN Maliki Malang in a natural setting.

In this study, some data collection techniques such as interviews, observations, note-taking, document review, audio, and video recording were employed to collect the data from the research subject. Three types of writing classes are provided in the English Department in UIN Maliki Malang: paragraph writing, essay writing, and academic writing. When this study was conducted, the teacher was teaching essay writing.

The participants of this study were selected based on whether the teacher used Google Docs peer feedback successfully (Ary et al., 2018). Additionally, another criterion for the class was that the teacher had high intensity in applying Google Docs peer feedback. Assumptions were made for this criterion because teachers who consistently use Google Docs peer feedback are believed to be well-versed in the technique and have put it into practice in their classrooms. Secondly, the teacher should apply the process approach in her teaching writing in the class chosen. In teaching writing, she asked the students to go through the stages of the writing process consisting of planning, drafting, editing, and final revision entirely.

Therefore, based on this view, her teaching practice should be taught in which students have engaged in their writing tasks through this cyclical process. Third, the teacher should also apply collaborative writing in her teaching practice. She always asks the students to work with the other students to produce the text. To work here refers to the students must help the other peer to create the text in which Google Docs peer feedback is applied. Additionally, this study's participants were the pupils in the classroom where the instructor was chosen as the study's topic. The overall number of participants was 24. The researcher started the data collection through the following procedure: first, she asked permission from the head department to access the study's subjects. Second, she requested the person to participate in this study. Third, she also conducted interviews to get enough information on the deployment of Google documents peer feedback. As the next step, she saw how other people used google documents to peer feedback in real-time. Fifth, she documented any related data such as the students' comments, and peer feedback guidelines (Tracy, 2013).

The data about how she uses Google Docs peer feedback was obtained from interviewing the teacher and direct observation. The writer acted as a non-participant-observer recorded their practices in applying Google Docs peer feedback. This study investigates an EFL writing teacher using Google Docs peer feedback in teaching writing. The researcher would also investigate the teacher's records from some documents needed, such as the teachers' teaching journals and the students' comments in Google Docs peer feedback.

The data analysis in this study is the activity of making meaning from the results of data collection, which includes interview transcripts, observational field notes, videotaped transcripts, and documents. In meaning-making, the researcher would move backward and forth between concrete data and the abstract concepts of conceptual and practices oriented to feedback (Flick, 2014).
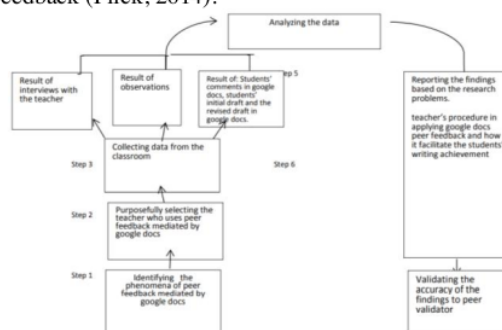

Figure 1. Steps in conducting the study (Adapted from Creswell)

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Before Stage

Google documents peer feedback relied heavily on the previous step (before stage). The first procedure before the stage was forming the group before she gave the training. The following is the explanation about creating the group in Google Docs peer feedback.

3.1.1. Forming a Group in Google Docs Peer Feedback

Forming a group is the first attempt before conducting the training session. Based on the result of the study revealed that in deciding on the group, the teacher considered the following aspects, (1) students' language competence and (2) the number of students in the group. Therefore, the teacher was asked how to form a group member of Google Docs peer feedback, what the criteria used by the teachers, and how many students would be the ideal one. The result of the interview can be seen in the following excerpt:

T: *"Peer feedback groups often consist of a mix of students with varying levels of language proficiency. Peer feedback in Google Docs is more effective if the*

group includes both high and poor performers" (Gr1).

To form such a group, she used a diagnostic test to determine their achievement. Usually, she asked the students to write an essay on a topic she had prepared before. This writing test will be used as a basis to place the students in the group. Furthermore, she also identifies the students from what class they were in the first semester since the students were classified based on their achievements on her campus. This means that the students from class A are high achievers. Having identified students' competence, she placed an intelligent student in every group as the leader, and the others (lower achievers) will be the group members. In this setting, she must be firm in her decision, as students often form groups based on their close friends and try to work out a deal to join them. Students must know that their classmates are friends who will support them through the writing process. Besides the level of achievement, the teachers are also concerned about the group's number for peer feedback because it usually also affects the success of peer feedback. In this context, the teacher found that a small group would be more effective than a big group. It can be seen from the following excerpt:

"For me, a small group is better than a big group but is not in pair because sharing between two persons leads to ineffective results (Gr2). When the team, let's say, can't solve the problem, it can be stuck because they cannot get further information. When it is more than two students, there will be the various answers, and hopefully, they can be used to solve their problems. In contrast, the group should not be too large. Three or four will be fine. They can be "naughty" at this session. It means that some students depend on the others' work or don't do it by themselves".

There is a good chance that the instructor employed certain concepts she considered beneficial in peer feedback when she formed the group. The point is that in choosing the group member, the teacher must select the member based on some criteria. When it came to choosing their best friends, she let her pupils pair up with those similar to them in personality types, such as the clever ones with the smart and the silent ones, etc. The groups' paces will be drastically different if this occurs. The group with competent members will be so fast, while the group with low achiever members will be slow because there is no take and give process among the group members. Additionally, the teacher won't provide special treatment to students with unique characteristics, so all group members should adapt to their mates as a challenge in peer feedback. Finally, the ideal number of the group is not too big or too small, or around four students to avoid being unfocused or lack of information during peer feedback.

3.1.2. Giving Training

Teachers ask their students to sit with other group members once the formation process is complete. The training session that followed covered both how to operate Google Docs and how to conduct peer feedback, making it the most crucial session in Google Docs peer feedback, in her opinion. The following is an extract of the teacher's explanation:

"First, I will give training because it is essential in peer feedback. It determines the success of peer feedback. As the rule of the game, each player must know or understand and follow how they should play the game. To make the training easy to understand, I explain and model how to give comments/respond to the peers and what aspects of writing should be commented. In short, I will try to make the students understand everything as clearly as possible to minimize confusion among the students (Tr1)."

It is clear from the teacher's comment that she must first provide training before using peer feedback. According to my observations, while Google Docs was first introduced at the beginning of the semester, it wasn't used until mid-semester. The instructor used Google Docs for peer feedback on these themes to guarantee that students would have no technical difficulties when the teacher used Google Docs in real practice for the entire essay and its many varieties. Therefore, she intensively applied Google Docs when she taught different types of essays after the middle of the semester. Ideally, the teacher should finish five pieces; classification, exemplification, process, cause and effect, and comparison and contrast; however, the teacher could finish these five essays except circle one. Because the teacher used Google Docs, which can be something new for some students, she first asked whether the students had known or were familiar with it. When most of the students were familiar with it, she asked one to explain how to operate Google Docs as a review of the topic. She only added the missing points and highlighted the essential aspects of Google Docs. When many students didn't get familiar with Google Docs, she would explain everything first, for example, what Google Docs is and how to operate it. Therefore, the role of the teacher in this session was that of the trainer. Having introduced/reviewed the Google Docs itself, the teacher continued explaining some critical points in conducting Google Docs peer feedback, covering what to comment on and how to comment in Google Docs to examine feedback.

3.1.3. How to Give a Comment

The following aspect of peer feedback is giving comments. Sometimes, giving comments is not easy for the students because it is easy to see others' weaknesses, but it is challenging to receive the statement. Here, teachers must train the students so that their comments will be helpful, informed, and constructive. In this aspect, the teacher was asked about the types of words the teacher asked the students to use when they responded/commented on their peer's work. The interview results revealed that the teacher asked to use any form of comments to respond to their friends' drafts as long as it was about writing. Even criticism is allowed because it is more direct so that the students can realize their weaknesses quickly. It can be seen

from the following excerpt:

"In terms of comments for peer feedback, I use any comment form as long as it is about writing. It can be in praise, suggestion, or even criticism. However, it should be direct and to the point so that the students can soon improve their weaknesses in writing" (C1).

From the above excerpts, the teacher emphasized that peer feedback in writing class is not only for the sake of expressing ideas in written form, but also a chance of being open to the peers. They must be honest by telling the truth, e.g., when their partner did a great job, they must praise it. However, when their partner still produces many errors, they should notice or even criticize it.

Additionally, in giving training on how to provide comments, she also explained the language used when commenting on Google Docs peer feedback. The teacher was asked about the language that they instructed for peer feedback. The interview results revealed that the teacher used both the target language and the native language to help the students perform better in peer feedback. In this context, the teacher checked the language achievement of the class first to determine the language used in Google Docs peer feedback. When the students are good at English, the target language will be used because it can also promote other aspects of languages, such as grammar and vocabulary.

3.2. During Stage

After the teacher finished giving the instruction, the next stage she proceeded was during the set. The interview and observation revealed that she also facilitated the students while activity in Google Docs peer feedback. The process is described as follows.

Students were instructed to open Google Docs, and then they were requested to share a piece of writing with the rest of the class and provide feedback on their peers' work (D1).

The activity of reading and giving comments was done in the class. However, they could continue it outside the class when they did not finish it. According to this passage, the teacher kept an eye on objects while pupils read and commented on each other's work.

"Because I apply peer feedback using Google Docs, I used online Google Docs to facilitate the students during peer feedback by joining the group I created. I always remind the students to use the Google Docs facilities, such as crossing the line, the bold/italic font, etc., to make them at ease in expressing their ideas. I also monitored and facilitated this session. Sometimes I also contribute to giving the comment when it was needed" (D2).

The clip clearly shows that the instructor helped pupils get the most out of Google Docs peer criticism. She went over each group's google documents to ensure that everything was running well. The group of kids still generated a few comments when she discovered

there was an issue. When it was necessary, she would also offer feedback to the kids. Additionally, the instructor went around the classroom to see if everything was running smoothly. She made her way around the school, speaking to each group. Being a facilitator is still needed to help the students solve their problems.

It is imperative because the teacher is the director whose strategies significantly influence the class's success. When the students experience a terrible thing, they would be reluctant to do it again in the future. Additionally, the teacher also explained that although it was done online in the class, she also checks all groups all the time, and when it was done outside the class, she also still monitors it.

3.3. After Stage

Having finished giving comments online in the class, the teacher asked the students to continue the discussion of providing statements outside the class because many students usually have not completed giving the comments and revising the draft to submit by the due date. The submission was also conducted via Google Docs too, as the following excerpt:

Every group's communications were monitored for signs of trouble while the session proceeded outside class. However, I'm not going to give the solution outright; instead, I'll leave it up to the other members to assist their friends. I reveal the answer only when they've given up (A1).

From the excerpt above, it can be concluded that after the feedback session in the class is over, she still monitors the students' chats. Since the discussions via Google Docs, the students' debates have been so many, and they can ask their mates directly. They can now confirm, discuss and argue for their position in the following excerpt:

I constantly remind my pupils to correct their work and submit it by the due date after each class session. Additionally, students should continue providing feedback before introducing the new document (A2).

Before the teacher ended the session, she reminded and motivated the students to make as many comments as possible. She emphasized that any statements were welcome as long as it was about writing. Additionally, she also informed me that she would visit the groups outside the class online too. The teacher also emphasized that she would appreciate the students who were active in giving comments because improving the quality of the essay was the responsibility of the groups. Hence, they had to help their friends who had some problems with writing.

Peer criticism in Google documents may be made at any time and from any location, as explained in the previous paragraph. It went on until the deadline for submitting the paper. Thus, there were so many comments. In a nutshell, here's how to summarize the preceding steps:

Table 1. The stages in conducting Google Docs peer feedback

Before	During	After
a. Forming a group of three or four students consisting of high and low achiever students in Google Docs	Ask the students to perform peer feedback (giving comments) in the class and monitor/make sure the process the students understand what "the dos" and "the don'ts" of doing peer feedback	Ask the students to continue doing peer feedback (giving comments) after the writing class
b. Giving training how to operate Google Docs • Explaining/reviewing how to manage Google Docs • Defining and modeling how to comment and what to comment in Google Docs peer feedback		a. Ask the students to revise their draft based on the comments suggested by their peers. b. Upload the revised draft

The results of the students' comments and how the students use these remarks to edit their drafts show how the Google Docs peer feedback helps the students' writing. When a teacher uses a rubric that includes an essay, grammar, mechanics, vocabulary, and organization, their checklist is complete. The comments were divided into the many aspects of writing. Google documents peer feedback, on the other hand, is precious for both students and teachers. Students' writing skills will improve, and teachers will see an increase in their students' writing grades. Teachers of writing in big classes have found that using Google Docs peer feedback has saves them both time and energy. For big classrooms, when it may be impossible for the lecturer/tutor to offer all students thorough and timely comments, the Rubin research found that peer input can be valuable (Rubin et al., 2006).

The teacher was a motivator who always maintained the students' spirit to continue giving comments outside the classroom in Google Docs peer feedback. Because the teacher is the group's creator, she can monitor any activities in the group, and the students tend to be more active because it can influence their grades in writing class (Budianto et al., 2014). From the teacher's action, motivating students are still needed, especially for out-of-class activities. Students will are more serious when the teacher monitors and controls these activities.

Due to the use of Google Docs peer criticism, pupils could enhance their writing skills. The development of getting comments from their peers during the Google documents peer feedback session is to blame for this progress. A plethora of responses indicated that the pupils were enthusiastic about the exercise. People naturally express their opinions with great excitement when they are happy. Additionally, if their peers explicitly respond to this statement, they are pushed to answer further as a response for them. As a result, students can receive immediate feedback from their professors and classmates (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014). When a student's work isn't up to par, their classmates quickly highlight the flaws and provide suggestions for improvement. Because another group member performed the same thing, the comment is more likely to be a series of statements rather than a single one. As a bonus, it can lead to a fresh debate if the commenter has an opposing viewpoint. Collaboration technologies like Google Docs allow students to participate in and perform in communities engaged in purposeful settings, as Limbu and Markaustik (2015) stated. Another measure of better collaboration is how frequently the student makes comments. According to Suwantarathif and Wichadee (2014) research, using Google documents can help non-native speaker students enhance their collaboration skills. Another study by Zou et al. found that students can work together more effectively and achieve better results while using Google Docs in the classroom (Zou, Simpson, Domizi 2012).

4. Conclusion

Google Docs is an internet-based application that is very beneficial for peer feedback practice. It opens some opportunities for advancing the teaching and learning process. Employing three phase strategy in delivering Google Docs peer feedback enables the teacher to assist the students in developing their writing achievements in language grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and content. Additionally, Google Docs peer feedback also brings more relaxed atmosphere for students during the completion of their writing assignments. Instant responses regardless of time and space and ease of operation in Google Docs peer feedback can improve the students' motivation during the teaching-learning process.

Using Google documents for peer criticism can help students improve their writing abilities. Thus, teachers should consider using this method instead. Further research into the study of Google Docs peer feedback should include conducting the same investigation in a new environment, such as a different educational level or study context, to further understand the study of Google Docs peer feedback. Considering the study's limitations, teachers should exercise caution when using Google Docs peer feedback because of the potential for students to cheat. Google documents may be used in various ways by the instructor to limit the application's negative influence on students.

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