

Exploring benefits of applying Google Workspace for Education in English as a foreign language classroom

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ABSTRACT

The application of technology in language classrooms is widely believed to benefit learners. In the context of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) for high school students in Vietnam, there are few studies on the benefits of applying Google Workspace for Education (GWE). This small-scale qualitative study seeks to explore the benefits of applying GWE as a technological solution in the EFL classroom with high school students. The participants were eight eleventh graders in the north of Vietnam learning English in evening classes at an English center. To collect data, the students were interviewed. The qualitative data was analyzed based on themes. The results indicated that the benefits of applying GWE were evident in enhanced attitude and motivation for learning and improved learning skills. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that Google tools be utilized for English language learning and instruction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The influence of technology on language learning is expanding internationally. The landscape of language instruction and language acquisition has shifted so rapidly that the traditional classroom is no longer the predominant learning setting. It is unusual to find a language course that does not utilize technology in some way [1] due to the widespread use of technology in language learning and instruction. In the field of English language education, it is widely believed that technology plays a crucial role in assisting teachers to facilitate and mediate learning, improve the learning experience for their students so they can continue to grow, diversify teaching and learning activities, and transform the classroom [2]–[4].

The importance of technology in an English classroom is emphasized by Altun and Ahmad [5]. The authors' main points are focused on three areas: first, using technology in the classroom helps English language learners develop their learning skills; second, technology is a crucial component of instruction and can be used to help students learn; and third, technology gives teachers more options for instruction besides the conventional ones. Arndt [3] provided four justifications for the significance of technology in language training. First, technology makes it possible for teachers to connect with both nearby and distant audiences. Second, students from other countries may have access to it in the classroom, at home, and at their leisure. It encourages collaboration and provides unrestricted access to resources. Lastly, teachers can more effectively motivate students by incorporating fun, interactive activities that complement traditional teaching strategies and improve the learning process.

Researchers have found that incorporating technology into language instruction enhances autonomy, motivation, and learning outcomes. According to Ilter [6], the use of technological aids and tools in English

instruction may boost student motivation and produce more beneficial results. He emphasizes, however, that each course must be built on solid pedagogical principles and expert technical execution; the instructor's main goal cannot be technology. According to Gustad [7], the use of technology during the concept instruction process has improved student motivation. Ahmadi [8] also notes that educational technology tools are attractive to foreign language teachers because they have the potential to increase students' active engagement and stimulate language learning outcomes. Technology can also explicitly support the development of learner autonomy, according to Reinders [9], but few people make this effort. Similar to this, Alsulami [2] claimed that using multimedia, the Internet, and cloud-based resources helps students improve their language skills, motivation, and autonomy in the classroom.

The growing prevalence of technological integration in English education, attributing it to the heightened motivation experienced by students when utilizing computers and other technological tools compared to textbooks [10]. Additionally, Cutter [10] underscores the enhancement of both teachers' and students' skills through technology, as well as the diverse range of teaching and learning possibilities it offers. Technology has the potential to offer various advantages to language learners. There are several advantages associated with online English learning [4]. Firstly, it provides students with a broader exposure to the English language through real-world interactions with other students in an online setting. Secondly, it offers flexibility in terms of learning, as students have the freedom to choose when and where they engage in the learning process. Thirdly, online English learning accommodates different learning styles, catering to visual and auditory learners alike. Fourthly, it supports the development of specific skills, enabling students to concentrate on particular areas of focus. Additionally, online English learning is suitable for students with varying levels of proficiency. Lastly, it fosters a more active learning experience for students.

Google is well-known for being one of the world's technological titans. The company is a leader in providing cutting-edge technologies that will allow anyone, anywhere to study anything. Formerly known as G Suite for Education or Google Apps for Education, Google Workspace for Education (GWE) was officially released in 2021 [11]. Basic education, standard education, teaching and learning upgrade, and education plus are four available packages. For qualified educational institutions, GWE offers a free edition called "Fundamentals." Additional options and advanced technological capabilities are included at an additional cost in the remaining editions. Classroom, Forms, Meet, Sites, Drive, Gmail, Calendar, Documents, Sheets, Presentations, Groups, Tasks, Vault, and Admin are all standard features available in all editions.

Google explains that its GWE products facilitate collaboration, stimulate productivity, simplify classroom procedures, diversify teaching and learning activities, improve educational experience, adapt to the evolving demands of educators and learners, and guarantee a risk-free learning environment [11]. Other scholars also agree on the valuable features and benefits of Google products for education. Chinnery [12] thinks that Google's technologies have high educational values since they foster communication, information sharing, efficacy, and teamwork. Kovalik *et al.* [13] found that using Google tools brings fun to learning and students have positive attitudes towards learning. Rogers [14] and Docrat [15] emphasized the exceptional advantages of Google products for users in education sectors, including ease, simplicity, and collaboration. Similarly, Constantinou [16] highly values the tools' adaptability, creativity, and collaboration, which are ideal for synchronous and asynchronous learning. Amin [17], when reviewing research on separate Google products in areas of English language education, recognizes that students in majority of studies had positive attitudes and acceptance towards Google tools. According to Yeskel [18], there is an increase in the use of GWE to meet the requirements of educators and students worldwide to continue teaching and learning in an environment that is safe, secure, collaborative, optional, flexible, and effective. As of February 2021, more than 170 million educators and learners in the world use GWE [19].

Studies on the application of Google tools in learning English have been found in various settings. Research by Constantinou [16] was done using a package of four Google products (Google Mail, Google Drive, and Google Search) in the context of two blended courses of English for academic purposes for first year students at a language center in the Cyprus University of Technology. The study was based on social constructivist approaches with components of connectivism and student-centered teaching methodologies. The purpose of the research was to understand how students felt about the usefulness of the products, any problems they had with them, and how easy they were to use. Data was collected by giving students an online survey at the conclusion of the semester. The survey included both Likert-scale and open-ended question items. The results show that students had a favorable impression of using GWE tools in their EAP classes, praising their accessibility, and highlighting the tools' usefulness in the classroom.

The use of Google Classroom and Google Docs combined in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Palestine was the subject of previous study [20]. The absence of student exposure to technological learning aids and the use of a flipped classroom method to teaching were the motivating factors for the scholar. In order to determine the efficiency of such apps in fostering a collaborative learning environment and upholding the concepts of a flipped classroom, the study made an effort to collect reactions

from students both before and after they used Google technologies in their grammar classes. Two questionnaires and a semi-structured interview were used to gather information from six EFL university students enrolled in Palestine Ahliya University's Grammar I course in Bethlehem. The results of the study suggested that since Google applications supported teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions, the students believed they helped create a collaborative learning environment. The majority of the participants preferred using such applications for subsequent courses because they could take advantage of the availability of teacher-written feedback and simple access to course materials.

Shimauchi *et al.* [21] did a study on the use of Google Sites, Google Forms, and Google Mails together to establish an LMS-like environment with the goals of encouraging Japanese students to study English outside of class more successfully and reducing instructors' burden of scoring. An English course implemented the intended setting for one semester. The outcome demonstrated that the environment enables efficient assignment scoring. It would be possible for academics to boost their research efforts if the time needed to develop the environment was longer than the time needed to operate it. And the end-of-course feedback showed positive views from both the instructors and the students on the used products.

During the COVID-19 outbreak in Thailand, Chiablaem [22] applied Google tools as a teaching alternative and primary medium in online instruction. The purpose of this quantitative study was to better understand the attitudes of Thai university students toward the use of G Suite tools in a COVID-19-compliant online English course, including Google Classroom, Google Meet, Google Docs, and Google Forms. Participating in the study were students enrolled in an online foundational English course offered by the researcher during the COVID-19 outbreak. Data was gathered utilizing an online 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The findings revealed that students preferred using the tools when studying online. All the students agreed that the application of the tools helped them enhance their English vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, English learning skills, and digital literacy.

The application of technology in education has received a lot of attention in Vietnam. According to Dao [23], initiatives to increase ICT use in the education sector and connect instructors with technology have advanced. The use of technology in teaching and learning has been advocated by educational institutions and educators across the nation [24]. Three main factors inspired this three-month study: first, the government's encouragement to use technology in education; second, the advantages of GWE tools in education; and third, the paucity of studies on the use of GWE in the context of teaching and learning EFL to high school students in Vietnam. In light of this, it is hoped that this study will add to the body of knowledge regarding the advantages of Google products in EFL classrooms worldwide, not just in Vietnam.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study was carried out in the second semester of the school year 2021–2022. The participants were eight high school students learning English in an evening class at an English language training center in a province of the northern region of Vietnam. There were 20 desktop machines with Google Chrome OS Flex installed and internet access were available in the classroom. Each lesson's teaching and learning activities were carried out using the resources at hand. In order to use the Google tools in GWE, the center created Google accounts, through which credentials were created for the course instructors and their students. It is widely believed that Google Classroom is an effective learning management system [25]–[28].

In order to manage the instructing and learning activities for the students, a Google Classroom class was created. The students utilized their provided accounts to enroll in a class where assignments and tasks were regularly distributed and tracked. At the same time, numerous scholars demonstrated that Google Forms is an effective assessment instrument [29]–[32]. In this study, Google Forms were used to create formative and summative evaluations. Google Calendar was used to create a timetable for education. Google Drive servers the storage of quizzes, materials, and resources. Google Slide was used by the teachers to deliver learning contents on the classroom projector.

In order to get information for the study, semi-structured interviews were done with the students. The students were encouraged to answer the question, “What do you think about the application of the Google tools in learning?” The answers were audio-recorded. The data were subjected to content analysis, in which data are gathered and interpreted according to similar concepts and themes [33].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to explore the benefits of applying GWE in the EFL classroom for high school students. The data collected from the interviews was analyzed and categorized based on similar themes. There were two main topics related to the benefits of the application found in the data, which included enhancement of motivation and attitudes and improvement of learning skills.

3.1. Enhancement of motivation and attitudes

Enhancement of motivation and attitudes in learning seemed to be the most evident benefit among the students. Many interviewees shared that learning English with the application of the Google tools was interesting. The students liked learning with the application. Here are several responses:

“I think it’s very interesting. I still remember the first lesson when I was a bit surprised because I often used my window OS laptop. Here, everything is Google. Then, the more I learn, the more I like the application.” (Student 1)

“In my opinion, my learning has become more interesting. I feel like learning English every time I work on computer to do exercises. Thanks to the tools, I think I can learn English easier and more comfortably.” (Student 2)

“I think it is comfortable to learn with the application. I like that feeling.” (Student 4)

“In my opinion, the learning is very interesting with the application. I experienced a new way of learning. Everything is very modern. I love doing tasks on the system like this.” (Student 5)

“I think it is enjoyable. I like going to class and learn English like this.” (Student 7)

“I feel like learning whenever I open the computer and log in with my account and do my learning tasks.” (Student 8)

According to the findings, the use of the Google applications led to beneficial effects on the feelings of the students. The students convey the impression that they have a favorable attitude toward making successful use of the instruments, and they have a high degree of motivation in their pursuit of educational opportunities. This gives the idea that students have a positive attitude toward making efficient use of the tool. The findings appear to be in agreement with the findings that were obtained in the earlier research that was carried out [2], [6], [7], [13], [16], [20], [22]. According to the findings, the incorporation of technology into educational environments led to improved levels of enjoyment among students, as well as favorable attitudes toward the process of learning and higher levels of intrinsic motivation. The findings in this research also provide empirical evidence in support of the assertions made by Richards [4] and Cutter [10] concerning the numerous advantages that may be attained through the utilization of technology in the context of education for international languages. Cutter [10] highlights the motivational reference that students have to technology in comparison to traditional paper learning materials. In addition, Richards [4] highlights the outstanding benefits of applying technology to the process of motivating learners in the process of acquiring foreign languages. The aforementioned discoveries shed light on Google’s [11] explanation of the feature found in GWE Editions that enhances both the teaching and learning experiences of its users.

3.2. Improvement of learning skills

The results from the interviews also revealed that the application helped improve students’ learning skills. Here are the students’ responses:

“It is comfortable in learning with the application. My learning skills get better. For example, I usually check my results. So, I keep track of my learning progress better. Besides, the application helps me understand my learning better. For every exercise, I can see the wrong answers immediately instead of waiting for the teacher feedback. It’s great.” (Student 3)

“The application is great. It helps me to follow the schedule better than before. The automatic notifications from Google Classroom informed me of new assignments. I never miss any homework or classwork. It’s very efficient.” (Student 4)

“I have learned more things. The application helps me become more careful. As a result, I make less spelling mistakes. My typing skills now are improved.” (Student 6)

“My English learning has become more efficient. Learning with the application is really smart. I can type faster and look for information I need better in Google Search and Google Translate.” (Student 8)

It can be seen from the present findings that using Google tools to learn English has positive effects on their computer skills and learning abilities. In other words, the digital literacy of students is enhanced. As presented, Students 6 and 8 say their typing skills have improved, while Student 6 says she is more proficient with the computer and internet. Student 3 makes sure that the learning skills get better. Second, the majority of students also recognize that the use of the tools improves their learning efficiency. Students 4 and 8 acknowledge that the integration of the tools has enhanced the effectiveness of their learning. Student 4 accentuates the effective function of Google Classroom. Student 8 emphasizes the utility of Google Translate in his learning activities. Furthermore, the development of autonomous learning skills is also found among

the students. With the use of the Google tools, the students can keep track of the learning process and take better control of their learning (Students 3 and 4).

It would appear that these findings are consistent with those obtained from previous research [16], [22]. Chiablaem [22] claimed that using Google Forms into the English-learning process helps students advance more quickly and use a broader range of skills. Constantinou [16] calls attention to the positive effects that can result from using the tools. Additionally, the current findings shed light on the potential benefits of technology in developing learner autonomy for students, which were proposed by Reinders [9]. The findings indicate that the students have the ability to exert more control over their own education and are actively participating in the process of acquiring new knowledge.

4. CONCLUSION

The application of GWE in the process of learning English helped students achieve higher levels of motivation and attitudes toward the process of learning English, as the results showed. The students enjoyed what they were studying, and they particularly valued using the application to strengthen their command of the English language. In addition to this, it was demonstrated that the students' learning skills were increased as a result of the incorporation of Google tools into the educational process. This was done so as a result of the incorporation of Google tools into the educational process. Because the students were more capable of exercising control over the activities associated with their education, the students' education was more efficient. According to the findings, the students were able to make better use of their computers for educational purposes, and their capabilities in terms of searching for information also improved. According to the results of this research, the students' attitudes toward the application of GWE were positive. The students felt that when they made use of various tools, it improved their overall educational experience. They took great pleasure in gaining knowledge from the application. They also developed a heightened awareness of the learning and instructive activities thanks to the integration, which was beneficial to them. At the same time, they found that the experience of learning was both meaningful and beneficial to them.

The study acknowledged that it had some shortcomings, including a smaller research sample and a limited number of data collection methods. In spite of this, it is undeniable that the incorporation of the Google tools into the classroom has produced a more productive environment for the instruction of English as a second language within the parameters of the context in question. These findings provide additional evidence for the benefits and effectiveness of using GWE in EFL in high schools in Vietnam. These schools teach English to students who speak a language other than Vietnamese. While this was going on, the findings demonstrated that it is possible to implement GWE in settings involving EFL. It is also encouraged that further research be conducted on the effects of applying Google tools on the development of language learning skills and learning performance.

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