El uso de **Google Docs** para incrementar la motivación para la escritura en inglés en un curso de inglés para propósitos específicos en el área de Administración

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Abstract

Google docs to motivate the English writing in an ESP course for Administration

In most classroom settings where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), writing is one of the skills that traditionally lacks a communicative purpose and an audience. Therefore, students might develop negative attitudes toward writing tasks and their motivation decreases. In this research study, Google Docs, which is a 2.0 tool, was used as a collaborative tool to increase motivation in writing tasks. The results show that overall, motivation increased depending on how efficiently students used the tool. Whereas, demotivation happened because of technical issues and the students' inability to use the tool advantageously.

Resumen

En la mayoría de clases de inglés como lengua extranjera, la escritura es una de las habilidades a las que tradicionalmente le falta un propósito comunicativo y un público. Como consecuencia, los estudiantes podrían desarrollar actitudes negativas hacia los trabajos escritos y su motivación podría disminuir. En esta investigación, Google Docs, una herramienta 2.0, fue usada como una herramienta comunicativa para aumentar la motivación en trabajos escritos. Los resultados demostraron que en su mayoría, la motivación incrementó dependiendo de qué tan eficientemente los estudiantes usaron la herramienta. Por otro lado, la desmotivación apareció por problemas técnicos y la poca familiaridad de los estudiantes con el uso de la herramienta.

Learning a foreign language (EFL) at present is indispensable for Costa Ricans because of globalization and the existing employment opportunities in international companies. Therefore, in recent years, great importance was given to developing the four basic skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). However, there has been a shift to developing communicative competences rather than isolated skills. International communication through English now focuses "on the process of achieving mutual intelligibility in whole spoken or written texts" (Nunn, 2005 Introduction section, para. 2). Thus, teaching speaking and writing with a true communicative purpose is fundamental.

On the one hand, different approaches based on meaning and interaction, such as the Communi-

cative Language Teaching (CLT), have been used to exchange relevant information orally between the sender and the recipient so real communication takes place. In addition, writing has still been addressed as a process that results in a product to be judged by the teacher. Because of this lack of communicative purpose, students may be reluctant to perform writing tasks because it is a one-way process with no real audience or clear objective. Therefore, students' motivation is affected. In fact, in early times, writing was conceived as an intentional way of conveying meaning and expressing feelings and ideas. Interestingly, this purpose has not changed throughout time. Human beings still write with a clear objective and for a specific audience. As a result, motivation for writing in the EFL classroom is undoubtedly linked to these two aspects because they encourage students to carry out tasks.

The question is "How effective is the use of Google Docs to increase students' motivation to write in a Business Administration English for Academic Purposes course?" In order to have a clear viewpoint of the topic, there is a need to define some key terms such as motivation and collaboration in the EFL classroom, and the Web 2.0 tool called **Google Docs**.

MOTIVATION

The terms extrinsic and intrinsic motivation belong to a common dichotomy used to explain why students participate actively to reach an outcome. Intrinsic motivation

refers specifically to "engaging in a task for its own inherent rewards whereas extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in a task in order to attain some separable outcome" (Hayenga & Corpus, 2010, 371). In other words, intrinsic motivation happens because the individual feels contentment and satisfaction while completing a task. Conversely, extrinsic motivation is linked to being recognized for the job done, which in education could be getting a good grade or being praised by others. Both types of motivation are equally valid as long as there is a significant improvement in the learning process.

Educational psychology also emphasizes the importance of group motivation in the classroom which may be categorized as extrinsic motivation. Motivation has traditionally been seen as an individual construct; however, when students work collaboratively, a sense of equal responsibility triggers motivation to be equally rewarded (Dörnyei, 2001, 40). As a consequence, the individual tends to feel the need of saving face, and more importantly, the social need of collaborating with others. Thus, the writing process is enriched by a collective exchange of ideas, negotiation of meaning, and peer correction to fulfill the writing task and get group recognition for the outcome.

Other relevant terms used are demotivation and amotivation to refer to the lack of motivation; however, these terms cannot be used interchangeably. Demotivation refers to the "reduction of the motivational basis of behavioral intention... amotivation refers to the lack of motiva-

tion caused by the realization that 'there is no point' or [the task] 'is beyond me" (Dörnyei, 2001, 143). Demotivation is more relevant to this study because it is not permanent and is driven by the lack of motivation due to external forces. These forces may hinder motivation just in specific tasks but not in the overall determination to learn the target language.

Collaborative Writing

Writing individually is essential in the language classroom, but it does not help people to become critical thinkers. When people write on their own, they usually check their writing several times until they think it is accurate. However, when someone else reads it, he or she might notice a variety of errors and ideas that were not fully developed. As a consequence, collaborative writing has become a new trend in second language learning to obtain better results. Experts such as Montero (2005), Elola & Ozkoz (2010), Hadjerrouit (2011), and Brodahl et al. (2011) have done research on this issue looking for a way to improve students' strategies to share information and become successful language users.

Before describing the usefulness of collaborative writing, it is important to define it. Montero (2005) explains that "in essence, it means that the student teams up with one or more peers to go through the writing process of brainstorming, organizing, outlining, editing drafts, and agreeing on the final product" (36). Collaborative writing consists of a thorough process of negotiation between peers to achieve a writing product that condenses the best ideas of the group. In this way, students reach a consensus by sharing thoughts, outlining, searching for relevant information, and selecting the most suitable arguments to achieve the desired goal.

As in any language activity, collaborative writing is not limited to enhancing language learning; it does improve social skills. Hadjerrouit (2011) states that "collaborative writing offer[s] opportunities not only to practice literature review, academic reading and writing, but also to stimulate reflection, knowledge sharing, and critical thinking" (431). Students who usually have a hard time working in groups can be trained so they learn to negotiate, support and refute their thoughts, and come to agreements. In addition, collaborative writing includes developing students' higher levels of cognitive domains such as application, assessing, analyzing, among others.

To help students develop critical thinking, collaborative writing gives the possibility of learning how to give peer feedback since they are used to receiving feedback from the teacher only. This tendency often results on a lack of self-awareness on their own errors. Hadjerrouit (2012) highlights that peer feedback "gives students a possibility to look at the requirements once again, because they

are assessing whether other students followed them" (14). In other words, writing collaboratively promotes critical thinking to check what classmates have done, reconsider if the writing task is being carried out successfully, and reflect about the writing process.

Collaborative writing also enhances the students' final writing outcome. Their continuous interaction and negotiation of ideas lead to an accurate choice of arguments and language use. Elola and Oskoz (2010), who carried out a research study on collaborative writing at a university in the United States, explained the case of Monica and Lauren, who wrote an essay together. The authors described that:

> This example shows how, in their attempt to achieve a common goal, Monica and Lauren directed their efforts to choosing an appropriate argument for the basis of their essay. Through their collaborative dialogue, not only did Monica and Lauren complete the task, but by the exchange of alternative theses (in a kind of scaffolding), they also achieved a result beyond what they would have achieved by working on their own (63).

These results confirm that collaborative writing helps students reach consensus of their best ideas to create an appropriate writing product, which is much better than their separate works. Collaborative writing has proven that even though it may take longer than writing individually, having several points of view enriches the content load and its quality.

However, there are several drawbacks concerning collaborative writing. There might be people who are not willing to give or receive feedback. In a research project carried out by Hadjerrouit (2011) involving the use of Wikis, he mentions that there was some trouble in the process "due to the difficulty of criticizing fellow students or to engage effectively in collaboration because the students did not want to change or modify others' work" (440). Peer correction is not an easy task because it requires effective training. The danger of reluctance to giving feedback will always be present; nonetheless, teachers need to raise students' awareness about the importance of learning from each other.

A second disadvantage of collaborative writing using Web 2.0 tools like Google Docs is that technology sometimes does not work as expected. Connectivity issues or lack of knowledge on the use of a 2.0 tool may hinder communication. Hadjerrouit (2011) summarizes that in some observations of a collaborative project using Wiki products, students found problems uploading information as well as using the discussion tool. Students expressed that the prior training on Wikis was superficial so that they needed more piloting. Due to this lack or experience, students' collaborative work was difficult and it

was often interrupted (439-441). These results show that learners need to be well-trained before performing the collaborative task.

In order to achieve a successful combination between collaborative writing and motivation in the classroom, language teachers can use a variety of Web 2.0 tools such as Wikis, Blogs or Google Docs that are closer to resemble what digital natives use in real-life contexts nowadays.

Information Communication Technologies in the English Classroom

It is undeniable that information communication technologies (ICT) have changed the way language is taught. Traditional teachers have begun to implement new tools which are aimed at engaging a new generation of students from the digital era. Adams (2008) refers to this new generation as "digital natives who have lived their entire lives exposed to current technology" (96). Web 2.0 tools are equipping teachers with a wide variety of resources to motivate this increasing population in the language classrooms. As a consequence, teachers have started to bring technology to class in order to make the learning process more appealing to students who might otherwise get bored in a traditional classroom setting. According to Ping & Issa (2011), "Web 2.0 is a revolution in education, as the principles of Web 2.0 are contribution, collaboration, and creativity".

Among these tools, Google Docs has become a useful pedagogical tool for teachers to increase the level of motivation of the students while improving their performance in the target language. According to Thomson, "Google Docs allows users to create, edit and store their documents online" (as cited in "Using Google docs to facilitate collaborative writing in an English language classroom practice," 2010, 2). Similarly, Brodahl, Hadjerrouit, Hansen & Nils, (2011, 13) highlight the importance of Google Docs claiming that this tool provides opportunities for multiple users to work on the same document. It is clear that this type of online collaboration can help language teachers to approach writing from a new and innovative perspective. Collaborative writing tasks using Google Docs is a way to foster students' active role as language users. Haring-Smith (1994, 360) defines collaborative writing as involving more than one person who contributes to the creation of a text so that "sharing responsibility" becomes essential. In addition, Adams (2008, 98-99), proposes a list of reasons why Google Docs is a useful tool in the classroom:

> The migration of online educational needs to tools like Google applications… forces educators to find ways to use technology to enhance traditional curriculum…. Google affords the students a powerful, free, robust system that

balances synchronous and asynchronous communication in a decidedly twenty-first-century classroom…. Google Docs has a share option that encourages collaboration, peer editing, and instructor grading inside the application…. The commenter feature in Google Docs easily identifies the commenter and includes a time and date stamp, and the revision history retains a copy of all changes on any file in the application…. By sharing documents and keeping them online, students can access them anytime. Google Docs has essentially eliminated all paperwork from our courses (97-99).

Given the advantages of using Google Docs in a language class, researchers have done different studies to determine if Web 2.0 tools may improve students' motivation when writing. For instance, the results of the research study conducted by Brodahl, Hadjerrouit & Hansen (2011, p. 90) reflected students' positive experiences with collaborative writing since 47% percent of their participants liked to comment and edit others contributions to group work. Likewise, Màrques Graells found that the variety of information sources and the horizontal interaction among participants favor students' autonomous and collaborative work, and enhance their interest and motivation (as cited in Thüer & Ferreira, 2011, 5). Despite the list of positive features Google Docs offers, it is important for teachers to acknowledge the fact that this online tool may not always work as expected. Technical problems could become an issue as pointed out by Brodahl et al. (2011), "It follows from the survey that most students encountered a number of technical problems that hindered them from fully performing their collaborative writing tasks" (91). Thus, teachers should be ready to anticipate these technical problems when implementing collaborative writing tasks using Google Docs in class.

In order to analyze the usefulness of Google Docs to promote writing, a research project was carried out with a group of students taking English for Business Administration. It took place in the students' classroom setting within a period of seven weeks. During the first week, the participants were given a workshop on how to use Google Docs. This is workshop included a general description of the tool and a manual to use all the features that it offers. Next, a collaborative writing task using Google Docs was designed to expose the students to this tool. The participants were divided into groups to carry out the task. The topic was "Where do you prefer to live? In the countryside or in the city?" This topic was chosen based on the units they have to cover in the book "*Writers at Work*" (2005) by Jill Singleton which is not business-oriented. The other three writing tasks were carried out using the traditional pen-and-paper technique. One was collaborative and the others were individual.

Table 1

Students' attitudes toward writing before and after Google Docs

Positive Attitudes			Negative Attitudes		
Adjectives	Pre	Post	Adjectives	Pre	Post
Easy	8	6	Complex	11	13
Motivating	9	13	Frustrating	10	6
Interesting	14	15	Boring	5	4
Fast	5	8	Slow	14	11
Fundamental	18	16	Superficial	1	3
Productive	18	18	Unproductive	1	1
Useful	19	16	Unhelpful	0	3

Results

In the semantic differential scale, seven aspects and their corresponding opposites were taken into account to determine the student´s attitudes toward writing before and after using Google Docs (see appendix A). The participants were asked to mark each pair of adjectives along a six-space continuum. In this continuum, the three marks closer to a positive adjective were considered as positive and the three marks that were closer to its opposite were considered as negative. Table 1 illustrates the participants' answers.

n: 19

The adjectives to be rated were classified into two categories: positive or negative. In each category, pre and post attitudes were grouped together. It is important to highlight that after using Google Docs, for some students writing became more complex, superficial and unhelpful according to the adjectives given in the scale. In the case of productivity, their answers did not reflect any change.

Table 1 shows the shift of students' positive attitudes toward writing before and after the writing task with Google Docs.

n: 19.

In relation to the positive attitudes, more students thought that writing was motivating, interesting and fast after using Google Docs.

In the first part of the questionnaire, students reacted to two statements related to collaborative writing using Google Docs. These statements were presented as a Likert Scale. Students rated each statement using one of the following descriptors: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree. Their answers were grouped under two descriptors as shown in Table 2.

It is importantto explain that taken from 17 questionnaires since, two students dropped out by the end of the course.

In general, students' responses confirm that the collaborative nature of Google Docs motivated students during the writing task.

In the second part of the questionnaire, their responses were related to the four tasks performed throughout the course. Figure 3 shows their preferences.

n: 17

Four writing tasks were carried out during the course. Tasks 2 and 3 were the most appealing for students. They liked to write about an important person, their best friend, or their best time of the day (task 2). Similarly, they liked using Google Docs to describe living in the city or in the countryside (task 3). The third place was taken by task 4. Students wrote about future plans, the ideal company, coworkers, or classmates. Finally, the activity that they liked the least was task 1 (an e-mail describing personal information or leisure activities).

Table 2

Students' Perceptions toward Collaborative Writing

Statements	Disagree	Agree
Writing in the same Google Docs document in groups motivates me	3	14
Classmates' performance in the Google Docs task frustrates me	12	5

Table 3

Students' opinions about group writing with Google Docs

Positive	Negative
• Feedback regarding what I write.	• Synchronous writing is difficult to handle (many ideas in the same a document).
• Sharing and exchanging ideas.	• Connectivity issues.
• Immediate peer correction and team work.	• Difficulties to use the tool effectively.
• Convenience of remote access to concentrate better and avoid pressure.	• Messy organization of ideas.
• Innovative and interactive activity.	• Time consuming and slow.
• Collaborative writing enhances motivation.	• No different from writing on paper.
• Chat to organize ideas.	• Distracting element: the text moves as people write.
• Possibility to publish their work.	• Difficulty increases when people have different proficiency level.
• Possibility to work on a single version of the same document.	• Topic or grade are the ones that motivate students.
• Eco-friendly.	
• Entertaining.	
• Negotiation of content.	
• Using computers to write.	
• Active role of the participants to create a final product.	
• Participants´ contributions are marked by colors.	
• Auto-saving feature.	

This section combines the results of open-ended questions from both the third part of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview. Students' answers are classified into positive and negative aspects of writing tasks using Google Docs. Table 3 summarizes the students' responses.

Source: Semi-structured Interviews & Questionnaire. May, 2012

The number of positive aspects overshadowed the negative ones. In fact, the negative aspects were mostly related to connectivity, layout, and lack of mastery of the tool.

Discussion

It is worth noting that using Google Docs for collaborative writing tasks increased the students´ motivation. The results from three different instruments were triangulated and what was salient was that most students highlighted that using Google Docs was motivating and interesting. There are some factors that are relevant to support this idea. The results of this study are coherent with Hayenga & Corpus' claim that students' motivation is triggered extrinsically, in this case, by participating in a collaborative writing task through the use of Google Docs as a web

2.0 tool. On the other hand, the few cases of amotivation happened because there were some problems related to students' mastery of the tool (which would be overcome with more in-class training), connectivity issues and differences in proficiency levels. As a consequence, a few participants stated that the writing process became more complex, superficial and unhelpful.

As mentioned before, extrinsic motivation plays a major role in students' performance. Group motivation is another factor that promoted an active participation in the writing task. Google Docs is a Web 2.0 tool that can be implemented in educational settings to encourage group motivation for writing since its features allow negotiation of meaning, teamwork, and peer correction with the purpose of creating a good final product. Another factor is that working collaboratively provided them with an audience and a purpose for writing. Students participated in the task not just for a grade but to give others opportunities to read their work and comment on it. The process of writing with Google Docs entitles that all group members share ideas with the same sense of group responsibility for the expected outcome as Dörnyei (2001, 40) claims.

Regarding the use of technology, students live in a technological era in which they are constantly exposed to the use of computers in a wide range of activities. In other

words, technology has become embedded in everyday life. Therefore, both digital natives and immigrants are eager to implement technology in the classroom. They benefit from using Web 2.0 tools with educational purposes.

Conclusion

Using technology assisted writing became a powerful strategy to motivate students to work as a team in order to perform a task that required negotiation of meaning, peer correction and collaboration. The relevance of this finding is that motivation was triggered by the collaborative nature of the task, described by psychology and the use of technology as a tool for learning. Writing became relevant, entertaining and motivating because there was a real-life purpose, audience and communication took place in an interactive manner. To sum up, students' responses clearly supported the fact that Google Docs is an innovative Web 2.0 tool which provides opportunities to approach writing from a communicative perspective.

Limitations

Using technology in the classroom can sometimes have a few drawbacks even if the task has been carefully planned. For instance, one limitation to carry out this research study was the quality of the internet connection that was being used by the participants. The internet connection at the institution failed the day when the writing task with Google Docs was going to be carried out in class. Therefore, a decision had to be made and the task was conducted from each student's house; however, when working from ho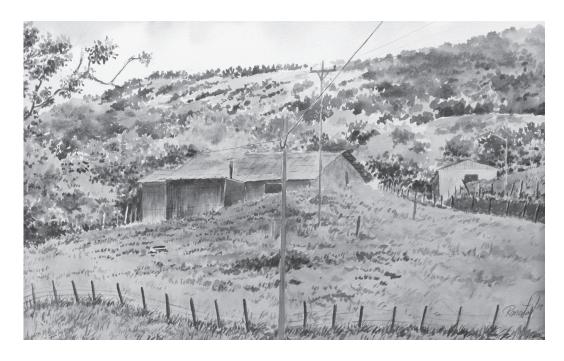me some students still had some connectivity issues depending on the internet connection they had. In fact, this was highlighted by the participants as well, and it is an issue that cannot be neglected.

The second limitation was the difficulty that some participants had to use Google Docs. Even though the team of researchers tried to prevent this situation by providing students with a manual (see supplementary material) and giving a workshop in class, some students still struggled to use all the features that Google Docs offers. It was evident that some of them had not even taken a look at the manual that was sent to their emails. Many times during the writing task, the teacher in charge of the group had to clarify aspects that had been included in the manual to help them use the tool effectively.

Finally, one last limitation that is important to mention is that when different proficiency levels are mixed in a group, collaborative writing tasks might not have the positive outcome that is intended. It was clear that the most proficient students were the ones who did most of the peer correction while the low achievers were trying to keep up. Having different proficiency levels mixed together means that the members of the group will have to adapt to the group's pace, and this could affect the overall performance of the participants.

Recommendations

With the aim of facilitating the writing process using Google Docs, teachers should take into account the following:

a) Students should have a workshop about how to use the tool. But most importantly, the teacher should design practice tasks in which they learn to use all the features in class. Some of them are:

- revision history to track changes (colors are used to distinguish each editor),

- chat for immediate communication,

- comments and replies to comments for asynchronous interaction,

- offline update of documents because they can be edited offline and synchronized later.

b) The teacher ought to implement synchronous and asynchronous tasks. Students can have the chance to work at the same time or have process writing with peer feedback from a remote location at different times. If the teacher chooses to use asynchronous writing, this will prevent demotivation because of connectivity problems. Students will have the opportunity to work conveniently.

c) The topics chosen should be coherent with the students' interests and purpose for learning English. In the case of Business Administration students, it would have been better to have them work on a topic that was related to their major. In that way, they could have worked harder to publish it online.

d) In relation to connectivity issues, teachers need to make sure that a technician will be aiding the students (if the task in done in school). In spite of these problems, teachers should not be discouraged from innovating; it is just a matter of time to make learners get used to a new method of writing collaboratively through the use of 2.0 tools.

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