APPLYING GOOGLE CLASSROOM AS A BLENDED TOOL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LEARNING MODEL OF ENGLISH WRITING COURSE FOR ENGLISH-MAJOR STUDENTS AT HONG DUC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract: *Applying technology in teaching and learning is inevitable in this current era of rapid development of science and technology. This study is aimed at exploring the application of Google Classroom as a blended tool for the development of the learning model of English writing course for English-major students at Hong Duc University. A survey questionnaire on students' experience of Google Classroom and an analysis of two paragraphs that students wrote were used as the data sources. The results showed the students' positive responses to the program and their considerable improvement in writing skill. The further studies on developing online classroom's materials resources as well as on the effectiveness of using Google Classroom in English teaching and learning need to be continued.*

Keywords: *Google Classroom, writing skill, technology in teaching and learning, tool for the development of the learning model*.

1. Introduction

In the current era of rapid development of science and technology, teaching at college following traditional methods cannot fully meet the learners' needs as well as the increasing demands of the society. Recently, blended learning, which was defined as a combination of "online and face-to-face course delivery" [2, p.137], has been increasingly becoming popular and trendy in the field of academic area in general and in foreign language teaching in particular. It is said to take advantages and make good the shortcomings of both face-to-face and online learning to meet "learners' expectation", "learners' flexibility" and "authority's directives" [3, p.58]. Among a broad range of different methods to apply blended learning, using Google Classroom along with face-to-face classroom has recently been widely used and highly recommended by a lot of teachers throughout the world [4] [6] [7] [8] [10].

In Vietnamese context, many materials and seminars as well as workshops have been frequently given to guide both teachers and students to exploit this application to make students' self-study productive and increase learning effectiveness in language teaching and learning programs [1]. The similar picture is captured at Hong Duc University, where all the language teaching and learning classrooms are well-equipped with computers,

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projectors, loud-speakers a long with Wi-Fi systems. Moreover, the content of English Language Skills Development courses in the English Language Teachers Training Program and English Language Program at Hong Duc University is compatible with using Google Classroom as an effective tool to support teacher-student-material interaction to develop students' autonomy and self-assessment. This seems to be more evitable during the current COVID-19 pandemic period.

This paper, therefore, is aimed at investigating the use of Google Classroom as a blended tool for the development of the learning model of English writing course for English-major students at Hong Duc University. The students' attitude towards Google Classroom as well as the effectiveness of using this platform along with traditional lectures to provide materials and give feedback to students' weekly home assignments uploaded are evaluated after finishing the semester.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction of Google Classroom

Google Classroom is a free web service first launched by Google on May 6, 2014 and officially announced on August 12, 2014 [10]. This is an education-friendly platform, which is integrated with other Google services such as Google Drive, Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides, etc. For teachers and students, Google Classroom brings the benefits of paperless sharing and digital collaboration to classrooms. Tens of millions of teachers and students have used Google Classroom in thousands of schools around the world, making it one of the most popular edtech tools around [5]. The three most important features of Google Classroom are communication, assignment and storage. Learners can join a class with a class code provided by teachers or automatically added by the school administration. After joining the class, a folder named Google Classroom is created by default in that learner's Drive to store all the online assignments that the learner submits to the teacher. Teachers can track the learning progress, mark papers, give comments as well as check the learners' ratings. In addition to the web version, Google Classroom is also available for mobile applications using iOS or Android operating systems [11].

2.2. Advantages of Google Classroom in teaching and learning

Applying Google Classroom in teaching and learning is reported to be considerably advantageous. It helps both teachers and learners organize and manage teaching and learning activities more easily and conveniently without taking too much time and money [4] [8] [10]. That all the documents, assignments and grades are stored in the same place in Google Drive makes it easier for teachers to manage students' participation and assess their learning progress. Likewise, learners do not have to use too much paper when doing exercises and do not have to worry about losing the assignments that they have done before.

In addition, the ability to synchronize with other Google applications is perfectly integrated, providing optimal convenience for users. The variety of web and mobile versions also allows teachers and learners to actively access the classroom quickly and conveniently at any time and in any places. Moreover, the school's Google account has been granted with unlimited capacity, which allow teachers to store all teaching materials, reference videos, class photos, grades, and etc... right on the Drive of this classroom and share it with learners without having to worry about storage space. This is obviously a remarkably effective platform for teachers and students to apply modern teaching methods using technology in teaching in order to catch up with the trend of the industrial revolution 4.0.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The study was conducted with 64 participants studying the course of "Reading and writing 2" at Hong Duc University. Among them, 36 students come from class K23A and 28 others come from class K23B. All of them are English-major freshmen studying English Language Program. The course lasted for 13 weeks from March to June of 2021. This course is for students at upper A2 level under the same curriculum using Google Classroom.

3.2. Procedure of the study

The "Reading and writing 2" course use Richmond's "Achievers B1" and "Effective Academic Writing 1" as the main textbooks.

The teacher applied Google Classroom as a tool for the development of the learning model of "Reading and writing 2" course with several activities:

Creating classes and adding students to the classes

Providing materials (Picture 1): On the "*Stream*" page, the teacher uploaded the curriculum, the syllabus, the PowerPoint lessons, the videos lectures, announcements, instructions and any other materials that needs to provide for students. All members of the class are required to post comments about their understandings and questions about the materials given before the upcoming lessons.
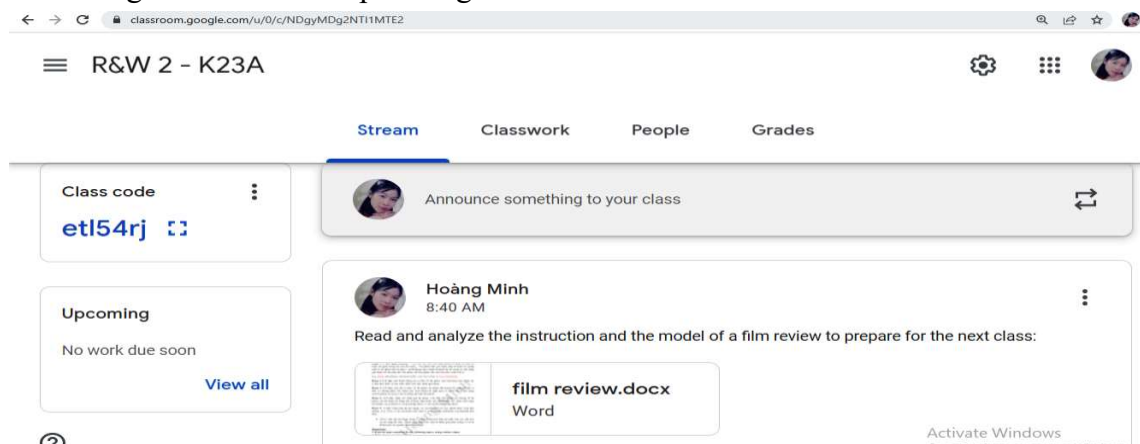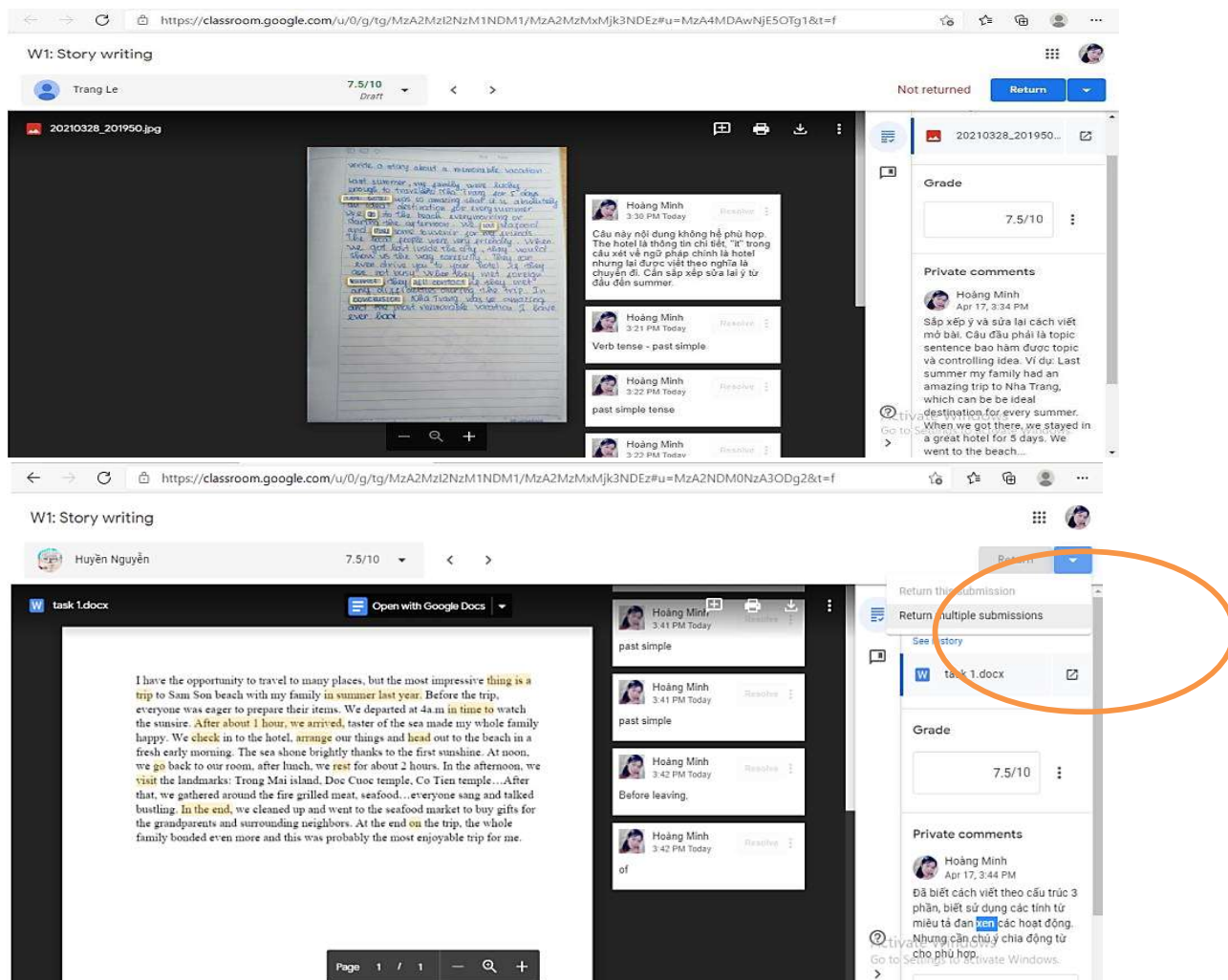

Picture 1. *An example of researcher's class materials uploaded on Google Classroom*
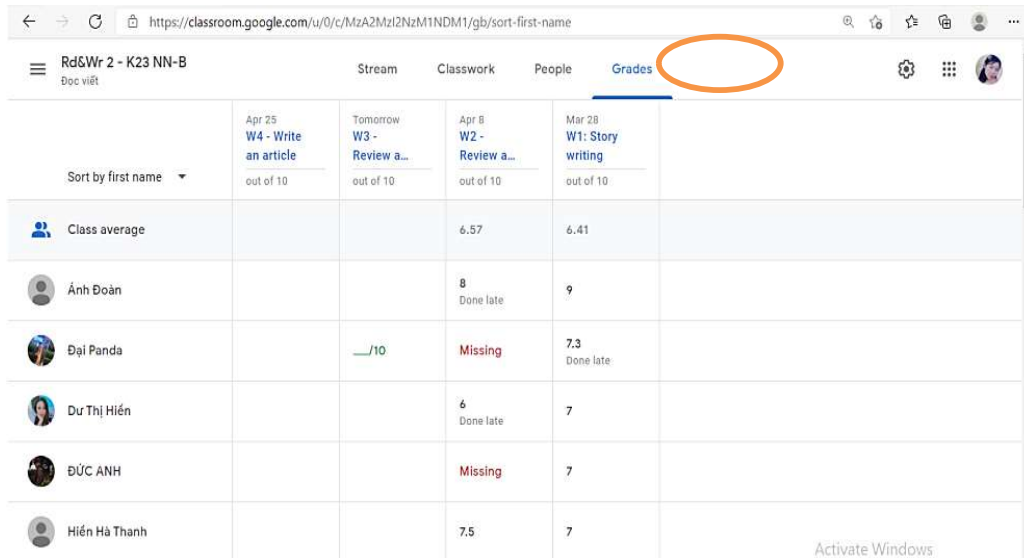
Assigning assignments: On the "Classwork" page, the teachers created different assignments and projects for students and set the due date for each assignment. The assignments were varied with free writings, instructed writings, live worksheets, oral presentations of the writing… With instructed writings, the students were required to write and upload 7 writings including a story, an article, a review and four paragraphs of four different kinds (example, process, opinion and narrative paragraphs) which were to be examined in the final test.

Grading and giving feedback (Picture 2): After the students completed and turned in their work, the teacher graded and returned it to the students. The system will filter and sort separately the group of members who submitted their papers on time, groups of members who submitted their papers late, groups of members who have not submitted their papers, and groups of graded members. Teachers gave students personalized feedback in the Classroom grading tool, left comments on student work and maintained a comment bank to store comments used most often.

Picture 2. *An example of researcher's feedback giving on Google Classroom*

Checking students' participation and grades (Picture 3): The teacher entered the "grades" section. Here the application has systematically sorted out the assignments in chronological order and reported the results of each student's grades as well as the point average of each assignment. Moreover, the application also clearly reports which members submitted their entries on time, which submitted their papers late, which have not submitted their papers, and which have been graded. Therefore, the teacher can easily control and evaluate the participation and learning progress.

Picture 3. *An example of the report of participants' grades on Google Classroom*

Some other activities: In addition to the teaching and managing activities in each class, teachers can also keep track of all classes' work due dates in "*calendar*", all work in progress in "*to review*", archived classes that were done teaching in "*archived classes*" so as to have an appropriate assessment and adjustment if needed. As a part of regular progress test, students are asked to write an example paragraph in week 12, which is similar in type to the one they had done on Google Classroom in week 7. These two pieces of essays were analyzed to investigate the improvement of students' writing skills.

Furthermore, at the end of the semester, an online survey was conducted via Google Form to collect students' feedback regarding the application of Google Classroom as an online learning management system. The survey questionnaire involved 10 questions with 9 multiple-choice and 1 open-ended question. The 9 multiple-choice questions are aimed at gaining students' perception of the familiarity and user-friendliness of Google Classroom, the frequency and the reasons they visited Google Classroom, their opinion about the most interesting and useful activity on Google Classroom, their habits of turning in assignments and their willingness to use Google Classroom in the later courses. The open-ended question deals with the difficulties students encountered while using Google Classroom in the course.

3.3. Data analysis

For the analysis of survey data, the study employs both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods.

For the analysis of survey data, the study employs both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. Concerning quantitative data from multiple choice questions used in the questionnaire, the researcher used descriptive statistics by calculating and comparing the percentage of students choosing different options to comprehensively evaluate the students' experience in using Google Classroom. The quantitative and qualitative data of students' essays were also analyzed and assessed based on the scoring scheme used in the curriculum.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Students' perception of using Google Classroom in learning

When being surveyed, all sixty-four participants sent back their responses. The researcher expected to get only one answer for each question, but a few questions received multiple answers and the open-ended question went unanswered in some responses.

The first question was about the familiarity with Google Classroom. 64/64 students indicated that they had never used Google Classroom in any courses before. That means all the Google Classroom features are completely new to them.

When being asked about the features of Google Classroom, 51% participants affirmed that they are simple and user-friendly, 44% said they are average while only 2% thought they are very simple, 3% stated they are complex and no one considered them very complex. This result shows that the features of Google Classroom themselves hardly cause any problems for students to use.

Answering the third question about the frequency the students visited Google Classroom, majority of them asserted they assessed the platform 2 or 3 times a week (72%). Meanwhile, 17% visited Google Classroom once or less than one a week, 11% visited the site 4 or 5 times a week and no students visited it more frequently. This is a quite positive result because the instructions and assignments were posted weekly before the classes, which took place twice a week. It also indicates that students are pretty serious in combining classwork and online materials with assignments given.

Question 4 about the most common reasons for visiting Google Classroom was the one receiving multi-select answers (Table 1).

Table 1. Reasons students visited Google Classroom

Options	Number of students selected	Percentage of students selected
Reading curriculum and syllabus	0	0%
Watching video lectures or PowerPoint lessons	25	39%
Checking instructions and announcements	35	55%
Uploading homework assignments	64	100%
Checking teacher's writing feedbacks	64	100%

It is obvious that their main purpose in using Google Classroom was for turning in the homework and checking the feedbacks which they are required to do weekly. Many students also pay attention to extra materials like instructions and announcements or video lectures and PowerPoint lessons, but no one care for the curriculum and syllabus provided online.

Question 5 and 6 inquired about students' opinion about the most interesting and useful activity on Google Classroom (Table 2). These questions also got multi-select answers. It is not very strange that all students appreciate the importance and usefulness of checking teacher's writing feedbacks but only 34% of them considered it interesting. On the contrary, a high percentage of learners liked to watch video lectures or PowerPoint lessons and recording oral presentation of their writings (50% and 66% respectively) but only a small number of students think these activities are beneficial. The most dominantly, no students are fond of reading curriculum and syllabus.

***Table 2.** Students' opinion about the most interesting and useful activity on Google Classroom*

Options	The rate of students selected as the most interesting activity	The rate of students selected as the most useful activity
Reading curriculum and syllabus	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Watching video lectures or PowerPoint lessons	32 (50%)	21 (33%)
Checking instructions and announcements	2 (3%)	20 (31%)
Writing and uploading written assignments	5 (8%)	45 (70%)
Recording oral presentations of the writing	42 (66%)	12 (19%)
Checking teacher's writing feedbacks	22 (34%)	64 (100%)

Question 7 and 8 referred to students' habits of turning in assignments. More than two-thirds of them usually turned in home assignments on time while only 13% chose "always", 12% chose "often" and the rest chose "sometimes". No students said they rarely turned in the assignment before the due date. Optimistically, 75% of them did all 7 out of 7 written work assigned, 2/64 (3%) uploaded more than 7 assignments as required and the rest only missed 1 or 2 assignments. This fact indicates students' positive and serious attitude in doing and uploading homework on Google Classroom.

However, there were still some problems with the use of Google Classroom as a tool in managing teaching and learning process. In open-ended question number 9 about the difficulties encountered while using Google Classroom, students listed some of the problems as followed:

Internet connection was not always stable, causing a lot of annoyance.

Sometime students could not attach files.

Sometimes the system did not report that the students' writings were turned in although they had already been submitted and the teachers could still see and open the files to give feedback as normal.

Students could not see others' assignments and feedbacks to learn from peers' strengths and weaknesses.

They also noted that these problems are not frequent and hoped Google Classroom could solve them.

Noticeably, in the last question referring to the students' wishes to continue to use Google Classroom as a blended tool for the development of the learning model, all 64 out of 64 students confirmed that they definitely want to work with this platform for the next courses.

In conclusion, most students express their positive attitude and experience towards using Google Classroom in studying writing. They also hold expectation to tackle all the difficulties caused during the process of teaching and learning.

4.2. Analysis of the two writing papers

The two writing papers are in the same type of an example paragraph examined in week 7 on Google Classroom and week 12 in the progress test. The first writing topic is 'one important quality of a good friend' and the week 12 test's topic is "one important quality of a good teacher". They are assessed based on an analytic scoring rubric with four criteria: task fulfillment, organization, vocabulary and grammar. The results were really positive with a considerable improvement in most students (Table 3).

Table 3. Students' writing marks in week 7 and week 12

Score	≤ 4	5-6	6.5-7.5	8-8.5	≥ 9
Week 7	4	22	26	8	4
Week 12	0	12	25	19	8

It is a good sign that the number of students getting mark 8 or above doubled from nearly 20% to more than 40% while there were no more students getting mark 4 or below. It is also worth noting that the figure of students getting mark 5-6 decreased from 34% to 19%. The number of students getting mark 6.5-7.5 seemed to stay the same, but most of them are the one who had got lower marks before. Another interesting point should be mentioned is that only 15% (10/64) students got the same mark in two writings whereas all others got higher mark.

In term of the specific criteria in the writings, the researcher found that the most noticeable improvement in students' writing is the way they organized the ideas, elaborated their ideas with relevant explanations as well as examples using more appropriate linking devices. In the first test, 8 out of 64 students misunderstood the question by writing about several qualities of a good friend but not one as required. This situation was not repeated in the final test. Furthermore, majority of students still write a lot of unrelated sentences, especially in the opening of the paragraph in the first writing, and just more than one third students could write a paragraph in the expected form with a good topic sentence, a concluding sentence and a range of quite relevant supporting ideas. This figure increased to more than two thirds in the final test in week 12. More noticeably, the way they supported and summarized ideas was much more relevant with better collaborative explanations and examples. All 64 students in these two classes also showed their

improvement in using transitional words devices to connect the ideas in the final test. In the former test, most of the conjunctions used are basic like 'first', 'second', 'third', 'and', 'so', 'but'... However, the teacher found a variety of cohesive devices such as 'the most important quality is that', 'furthermore', 'moreover', 'for instance', 'an example of…is…' in the later one. In addition, they also used broader range of vocabulary and grammar with higher degree of accuracy. The number of complex and compound sentences appeared in the second writing was much more frequent. This was the results of their frequency in writing with the assistance of the instruction and feedback given on Google Classroom.

To sum up, all those positive results presented that students' writing skills improved significantly from the beginning to the end of the course.

3. Conclusion

Using Google Classroom as a blended tool for the development of the learning model in teaching English writing for English-major students at Hong Duc University is preliminarily assessed to be useful and effective to enhance students' engagement and improve their writing skills. All the modules in Reading and Writing Skills can be compatible with Google Classroom's features to help students get acquainted and use the web environment skillfully, learn to share learning databases and links to digital libraries, improve collaborating skills with peers and teachers. The blended learning of online classes with face-to-face classes will give students many opportunities to develop their learning autonomy with their classmates' and teachers' assistance. The future research direction is to build enrichment resources for Google Classroom, especially the Quiz / Assignment bank and to apply Google Classroom to other subjects. More importantly, more studies on the effectiveness of this application under different objective aspects from both teachers and learners need to be conducted in order to really improve the quality of teaching and learning at university.

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