Journal of Education, Religion, and Humanities
Published by Kalijaga Institute
p-ISSN: [0000-0000] | e-ISSN: [0000-0000]
Vol. 01, No. 01, Juli 2026

The Use of Google Docs for Collaborative Writing among EFL Learners: A Literature Review

Alfin Fahmi
Universitas Jambi, Indonesia
* Corresponding author: alfinfahmi77@gmail.com

ARTICLE
Research Article

DOI

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received: 03-08-2026 | Accepted: 17-09-2026

ABSTRACT

Writing is widely regarded as one of the most challenging language skills for EFL learners, and collaborative writing supported by digital tools such as Google Docs has been proposed as one way to address these difficulties. This literature review examines how Google Docs has been used to support collaborative writing among EFL learners and identifies the pedagogical benefits and limitations reported in previous research. A narrative literature review was conducted by searching Google Scholar between 2018 and 2019. Nine empirical studies and theses, published between 2014 and 2019, were identified that investigated the use of Google Docs for collaborative writing among secondary school and university EFL students. The reviewed studies consistently report that Google Docs improves students' writing performance, increases learner engagement and motivation, strengthens peer-feedback practices, and supports the development of learner autonomy. Limitations such as internet dependency, a learning curve for new users, and a narrower feature set compared to conventional word processors are also noted. Google Docs can be an effective and accessible tool for collaborative writing instruction in EFL contexts when its limitations are properly anticipated; further comparative and longitudinal research is recommended to strengthen this evidence base.

KEYWORDS Collaborative Writing, Google Docs, EFL, Literature Review

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a language skill widely regarded as difficult because it requires sustained attention throughout the writing process. A writer needs to understand the mechanics of writing and to develop this skill effectively and efficiently (Depari, 2017). Writing skill can be defined as an individual's ability to express ideas, opinions, and feelings to others through written language (Abbas, 2006; Depari, 2017), and skilled writers rely on strategies of planning, drafting, and revising to produce a well-organised text. Students commonly face obstacles related to limited knowledge of the writing process, difficulty generating topics and ideas, insufficient planning strategies, and problems with writing mechanics (Deppari, 2017; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Limited classroom time compounds these problems and often pushes writing practice into homework rather than guided in-class instruction (Depari, 2017).

Classroom conditions also influence students' writing performance. An unfavourable or noisy classroom atmosphere can reduce students' concentration and motivation to write meaningfully (Davis, 1999; Depari, 2017). Teachers are encouraged to treat writing not merely as an assignment but as an authentic communicative activity (Depari, 2017).

Among the technologies proposed to support writing instruction, Google Docs has been widely adopted as a tool for learner-centred, collaborative writing. Document sharing and commenting features allow students to receive immediate feedback from peers and teachers, to revisit their work when they know it will be reviewed by others, and to track revisions as highlighted text changes colour once an issue has

(c) 2026 Alfin Fahmi. Published by Kalijaga Institute.

been addressed (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017). Google Docs is cloud-based, so students can access and edit documents both in and outside the classroom, supporting a shift from individual, in-class writing tasks toward collaborative, web-based assignments. These affordances make Google Docs a relevant tool for examining how technology can support EFL learners' collaborative writing performance and attitudes.

Previous studies suggest that Google Docs can support collaborative writing in various educational settings, but most of them examine a single context, either secondary schools or universities, in isolation, and few studies bring these findings together across educational levels within EFL settings. Existing discussions of Google Docs for collaborative writing also tend to describe individual studies rather than critically synthesising their reported benefits and limitations. A literature review that draws together findings from both secondary and tertiary EFL contexts can provide a clearer picture of when and how Google Docs is most effective for collaborative writing instruction. This review synthesises previous research on the use of Google Docs for collaborative writing among EFL learners, focusing on its reported effects on students' writing performance and attitudes as well as the benefits and limitations associated with its use.

2. METHODS

This study employed a narrative literature review design, following the approach described by Green, Johnson, and Adams (2006), who define a narrative review as a qualitative synthesis of literature retrieved through database searches and organised around themes rather than statistical meta-analysis. This design suited the present study because previous findings on the use of Google Docs for collaborative writing vary widely in method, context, and educational level. Synthesising and interpreting these findings thematically was more appropriate than pooling them statistically, given the heterogeneity of the studies reviewed.

Relevant studies and theses were identified through Google Scholar using combinations of keywords such as "Google Docs," "collaborative writing," and "EFL writing." The search was conducted between 2018 and 2019. Studies were included if they examined the use of Google Docs as a tool for collaborative writing, involved EFL or English-language learners at the secondary or tertiary level, and were published in English. Studies unrelated to writing instruction, or that discussed Google Docs outside an educational context, were excluded.

Following the best-evidence synthesis procedure outlined by Green, Johnson, and Adams (2006), nine studies and theses met the criteria above: Depari (2017), Widyastanti (2019), Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014), Kyeong (2016), Sholihah and Setyandari (2018), Alsubaie and Ashuraidah (2017), Rahayu (2016), Alharbi (2019), and Brodahl and Hansen (2014). Findings from each study were extracted and organised thematically into four areas: effects on students' writing performance, student engagement and attitudes, collaborative and social benefits, and practical limitations. These themes structure the Results section below.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Effects on Students' Writing Performance

Several studies report measurable improvements in students' writing performance following the use of Google Docs. Widyastanti (2019) found that students' descriptive-text writing improved after they used Google Docs to draft and share texts collaboratively. Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014) reported that students who wrote collaboratively using Google Docs achieved significantly higher writing scores than those who worked face-to-face in groups, and that most students perceived the tool as easy to use. Alharbi (2019) showed that instructor and peer feedback delivered through Google Docs, covering both global and local writing issues, led to observable revisions in students' texts across several rounds of editing. The real-

time commenting and editing features of Google Docs appear to enable more immediate and targeted feedback than conventional paper-based writing instruction.

3.2 Student Engagement, Motivation, and Attitudes

Several studies also point to positive shifts in student engagement and attitudes. Kyeong (2016) found that students held affirmative perceptions of Google Docs as a cloud-based collaborative writing platform, reporting increased autonomous participation and more dynamic classroom interaction. Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014) found that students expressed positive attitudes toward collaborative writing activities using Google Docs. Sholihah and Setyandari (2018) added that students appreciated being able to review and comment on peers' work at any time, which reduced the time pressure typically associated with in-class writing correction.

3.3 Collaborative and Social Benefits

Google Docs has also been reported to support broader collaborative and social benefits. Alsubaie and Ashuraidah (2017) found that students perceived Google Docs as useful for both individual and group writing tasks, with notable score gains after collaborative use. Rahayu (2016) concluded that Google Docs was an acceptable innovation for collaborative writing instruction in an English course. Brodahl and Hansen (2014) noted that collaborative writing tools such as Google Docs encouraged students to engage in reflective peer commentary, supporting the development of shared knowledge within a learning community. Such findings fit the view that collaborative writing in Google Docs reflects a socially constructed learning process, in which peer feedback and shared authorship help learners operate within their zone of proximal development (Kyeong, 2016; Hadjerrouit, 2013).

3.4 Practical Limitations and Challenges

Several theoretical and empirical accounts help explain why Google Docs also presents practical limitations as a collaborative writing tool. The Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) proposes that a person's willingness to adopt a new technology depends on its perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, and that unfamiliar or effortful tools face greater resistance from users. This framework helps explain several difficulties documented in the empirical literature on Google Docs. Zhou, Simpson, and Domizi (2012) found that most students in their study were unfamiliar with Google Docs before the activity began, and that using the platform required a Google account, produced uneven contribution among group members, and was constrained by connectivity issues that limited student access outside class. (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014) noted that students and instructors can feel uncomfortable sharing their writing openly with peers online, while Coyle (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014) found that students often consider it inappropriate to directly edit a peer's written work, which can limit the depth of collaborative revision even when the technology itself functions well.

Drawing on these theoretical and empirical accounts, the practical limitations most commonly reported are as follows.

- It requires a stable internet connection, and connectivity issues can restrict students' access to shared documents outside the classroom (Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012).
- Students unfamiliar with the platform face a learning curve before they can use its collaborative features effectively, consistent with the role of perceived ease of use in technology adoption (Davis, 1989; Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012).
- Access to shared documents depends on all participants having and using a Google account (Zhou, Simpson, & Domizi, 2012).
- Group members do not always contribute equally to a shared document, and some students consider it inappropriate to edit a peer's writing directly (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014).

- Sharing writing openly with peers online can cause discomfort for both students and instructors (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014).
- It offers a narrower set of formatting and editing features compared with conventional word processors such as Microsoft Word.

Taken as a whole, these accounts suggest that using Google Docs effectively for collaborative writing depends not only on its technical features but on how comfortable and prepared students are to write and be evaluated in a shared, visible space.

4. DISCUSSION

The reviewed studies suggest that Google Docs supports collaborative writing among EFL learners because it operationalises principles of social-constructivist learning. Allowing students to comment on, edit, and revise each other's texts in real time creates conditions similar to those described in sociocultural theories of learning, particularly the Zone of Proximal Development (Kyeong, 2016), in which learners advance their writing ability through guided interaction with more capable peers.

The effectiveness of Google Docs still appears conditional rather than automatic. Studies reporting the strongest gains, such as Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014) and Alharbi (2019), combined Google Docs with structured feedback practices, including assigned peer-review roles or teacher-guided commenting, rather than using the platform merely as a document-sharing tool. Pedagogical design, rather than the technology itself, appears to be the primary driver of the learning gains reported across studies.

The limitations identified in Section Practical Limitations and Challenges, including internet dependency, a learning curve for unfamiliar users, and a narrower feature set than conventional word processors, show that Google Docs is not a universal solution. Its effectiveness is likely to vary depending on students' digital literacy, access to reliable internet, and the extent to which teachers scaffold the collaborative writing process. Google Docs functions best as a facilitating tool embedded within a well-designed collaborative-writing pedagogy rather than as a stand-alone intervention.

5. CONCLUSION

This literature review examined how Google Docs has been used to support collaborative writing among EFL learners. Three main conclusions emerge from this synthesis. First, the reviewed studies consistently indicate that Google Docs is associated with improvements in students' writing performance, greater engagement in the writing process, and stronger peer-feedback practices, particularly when paired with structured collaborative-writing tasks.

Second, Google Docs appears most effective under specific conditions: when students have reliable internet access, when they receive some guidance on using its collaborative features, and when teachers design tasks that require genuine peer feedback rather than passive document sharing.

Third, the main limitations of Google Docs, including its dependence on internet connectivity, a learning curve for inexperienced users, and a narrower feature set than conventional word processors, should be anticipated by teachers before implementation, for example through a brief technical orientation session for students.

Comparative and longitudinal studies are needed to determine whether the benefits of Google Docs for collaborative writing are sustained over time and how they compare across educational levels and language-proficiency groups. Studies examining which specific pedagogical designs maximise the benefits of Google Docs, rather than evaluating the tool in isolation, would also make a valuable contribution to this line of research.

REFERENCES

Alharbi, M. A. (2019). Exploring the potential of Google Docs in facilitating innovative teaching and learning practices in an EFL writing course. Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, 14(3), 227–242. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2019.1572157

Alsubaie, J., & Ashuraidah, A. (2017). Exploring writing individually and collaboratively using Google Docs in EFL contexts. English Language Teaching, 10(10). https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n10p10

Brodahl, C., & Hansen, N. K. (2014). Education students' use of collaborative writing tools in collectively reflective essay papers. *Journal of Information Technology Education*: Research, 13, 1–30.

Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. MIS Quarterly, 13(3), 319–340. https://doi.org/10.2307/249008

Depari, R. O. (2017). The use of Google Docs as media for collaborative writing activity to improve skill on writing descriptive text of eighth grade students of SMPN 15 Bengkulu. *Southeast Asia Journal on Open and Distance Learning*, 11(1).

Ebadi, S., & Rahimi, M. (2017). Exploring the impact of online peer-editing using Google Docs on EFL learners' academic writing skills: A mixed methods study. Computer Assisted Language Learning, 30(8), 787–815. https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2017.1363056

Green, B. N., Johnson, C. D., & Adams, A. (2006). Writing narrative literature reviews for peer-reviewed journals: *Secrets of the trade. Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, 5(3), 101–117. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0899-3467(07)60142-6

Hadjerrouit, S. (2013). A framework for assessing the pedagogical effectiveness of wiki-based collaborative writing: Results and implications. *Interdisciplinary Journal of e-Learning and Learning Objects*, 9, 29–49.

Kyeong, S. (2016). A study on the integration of Google Docs as a web-based collaborative learning platform in EFL writing instruction. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 9(39). https://doi.org/10.17485/ijst/2016/v9i39/103239

Mahmoudzadeh, M., Alborzi, M., Ghazinoori, S., & Khalili Shavarini, S. (2015). Evaluating efficiency of collective learning in innovation networks: Simulation based experiments in SKIN. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology*, 8(27), 1-6.

Srirahayu, E. (2016). Using Google Docs On Collaborative Writing Technique For Teaching English To Non English Department Students. 11. *In Proceedings of the Fourth International Seminar on English Language and Teaching* (ISELT-4).

Sholihah, U., & Setyandari, A. (2018). The use of "Google Docs" in teaching writing: An alternative way of collaboration in writing. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Technology, Education, and Social Science (ICTESS 2018). Widya Dharma University, Klaten, Central Java, Indonesia.

Suwantarathip, O., & Wichadee, S. (2014). The effects of collaborative writing activity using Google Docs on students' writing abilities. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 13(2), 148–156.

Widyastanti, M. (2019). Using Google Docs on collaborative writing activity in SMPN 1 Driyorejo–Gresik [Skripsi, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya].

Zhou, W., Simpson, E., & Domizi, D. P. (2012). Google Docs in an out-of-class collaborative writing activity. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 24(3), 359–375.

Zimmerman, B. J., & Risemberg, R. (1997). Becoming a self-regulated writer: A social cognitive perspective. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 22(1), 73–101. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1997.0919