

Collaborative writing through GoogleDocs: An individual reflection

Yansyah

yansyah.albalangi@yahoo.co.id

University of Muhammadiyah Banjarmasin

Abstract

Communication is one of 21st century skills students need to acquire. The communication skill, of course, covers both oral and written form, especially in this digital era. Therefore, the teaching of writing should become one of our priorities. Writing is a process, not merely a product. However, we commonly neglect the writing process since we cannot observe or accompany students in all stages of writing: planning, drafting, revising, and proofreading. The presence of technology can help teachers to address this issue. This paper will describe in detail what the writer has experienced in an online course while he was doing the collaborative writing assignment. It is a self-reflection on how technology has connection with English language teaching. It will present how GoogleDocs as collaborative software can integrate students, who are from different countries: Taiwan, Croatia, Turkey and Indonesia, to collaboratively do all stages of writing. It will explain how this activity promotes some advantages for the students: the joyful of writing, the collaborative value in work, and technology literacy. It will also share the step-by-step ideas on how to apply GoogleDocs for teaching writing so for those who are interested in utilizing this tool can use it in their classroom. Finally, it is expected that this article can increase teachers' awareness that the use of technology will benefitted both the teachers and the students in learning process.

Keywords: Technology for Teaching, GoogleDocs, Collaborative Writing

INTRODUCTION

The invasion of technology truly affects all aspects of life, including the way our students learn. Today's students are really familiar with the use of gadgets. It is hard to get their attention if we just talk or write on the whiteboard during the lesson. They possibly will secretly play with their smartphones if we just keep talking in front of the classroom. Thus, we need to integrate the technology itself into our lesson to deal with this problem.

State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Palangka Raya Indonesia, 15-16 December 2017

<http://english.ftik.iain-palangkaraya.ac.id>

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Crawford (2002) says that technology offers more choices and flexibilities in teaching and learning process. It helps the students to work not only inside, but also out of the classroom. According to Canning findings (2000), the students who were taught by using technology involvement had better achievement than those who taught using traditional language instruction only. It means that technology should be taken into account to enrich our lesson.

One of the language skills that we to pay attention to is writing. This skill is immensely important, yet it is frequently overlooked. It is important because writing helps our students to express their ideas. Cahyono & Setyaningsih (2014) say that writing connects between a writer and potential readers. However, it seems that writing is the last choice for teachers to teach compared to reading, listening, speaking or grammar. The reason may relate to Widiati's dan Cahyono's (2006) conclusion that writing is the most difficult skill to learn. The difficulties are caused by many factors, including lack of confidence to write in English, limited teaching time, big classes, and monotonous techniques that the teachers use for teaching writing (Mukminatien, 1991). Collaborative writing and technology, then, may offer a help to overcome all those hindering factors.

Collaborative writing refers to an activity in which some students work together to finish a writing task. Collaborative writing provides a chance a cooperative connection between writer and readers and makes the writing assignment more realistic and interactive (Heasley as cited in Supiani, 2012). In this project, all students have the responsibility to accomplish the task, share their opinions, and understand in details requirement of the task (Huett & Koch, 2011). Research findings show that collaborative writing is beneficial in raising the students' confidence in writing and lower their anxiety (Rollison, 2005). It also contributes to increasing the complexity (Sotillo, 2002) and accuracy (Storch, 2005) of the students' writings. Kessler's research (2009) also finds out that collaborative writing help students to be more autonomous and have more opportunities for practice. In his research, Kessler assigned his students to construct a Wikipedia article about culture. It means that collaborative writing nowadays has grown up with the iteration of technology.

One of the technologies that can be used for collaborative writing is GoogleDocs. It is "An online word processor that lets us create and format documents and work with other people" (Google, 2017). GoogleDocs allows us to edit and share our document with others. It provides several functions, such as Google Documents, Google Spreadsheets, and Google Presentations. For the purpose of collaborative writing, we can choose Google Documents since it has

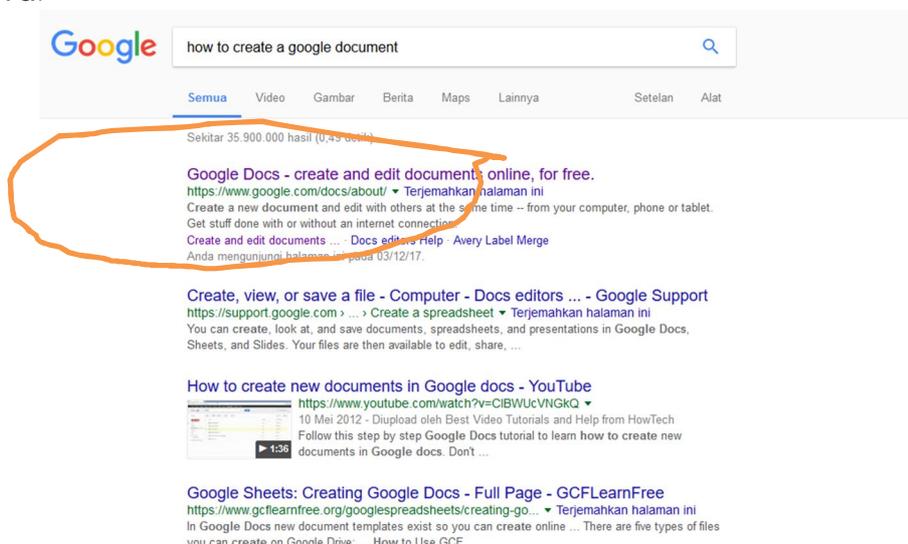
similar function with the most common word processing tool, Microsoft Word. Google Documents are easy to access since to get this tool we just need to sign in by using our google mail. It also has its mobile application so the students can download freely for their smartphones. There is some research which proves the effectiveness of GoogleDocs as a collaborative software. Zhou, Simpson, and Domizi (2012) report that GoogleDocs are useful for students collaborative writing and influence their learning. Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2014) also investigate that this tool increases the student's collaboration and their attitudes toward writing. Next, Woodrich and Fan (2017) add a finding that using the digital tool, GoogleDocs, make the students participate more equally with their peers.

All those research state the benefits of using GoogleDocs as a digital tool for collaborative writing. The present paper, then, will detail the writer's experience in utilizing this collaboration software to accomplish a writing task in an online course with other participants from different countries. It will also elicit a step-by-step idea for a collaborative writing activity.

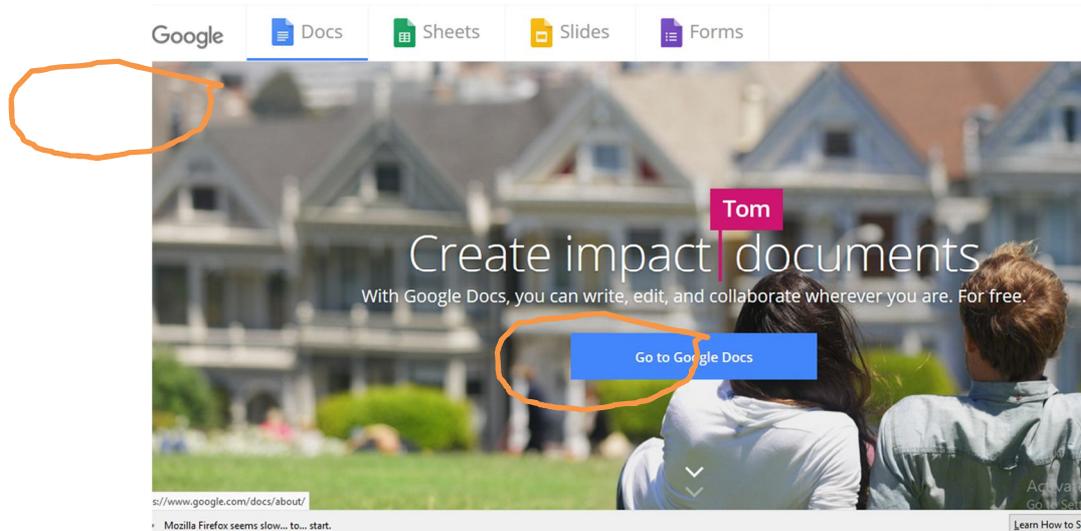
Creating a Google Document

Google Document is very user-friendly. If the students have been familiar with Microsoft Word, it will not be difficult for them to understand the functions of Google Documents since it has almost the same features. The first step you need to take is creating a Gmail account. After that, you can follow this tutorial to create a Google Document:

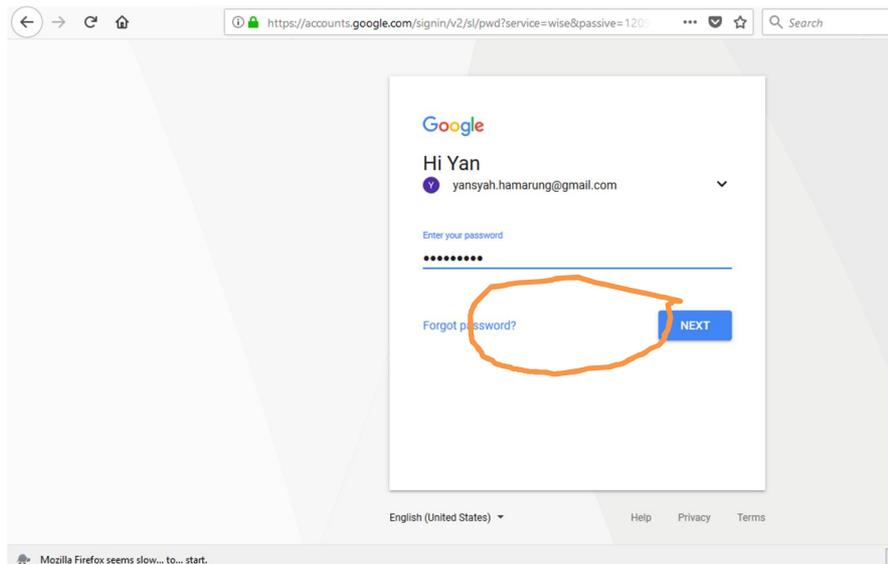
1. The easiest way is to search in the Google by using "Google Docs" as the keyword.



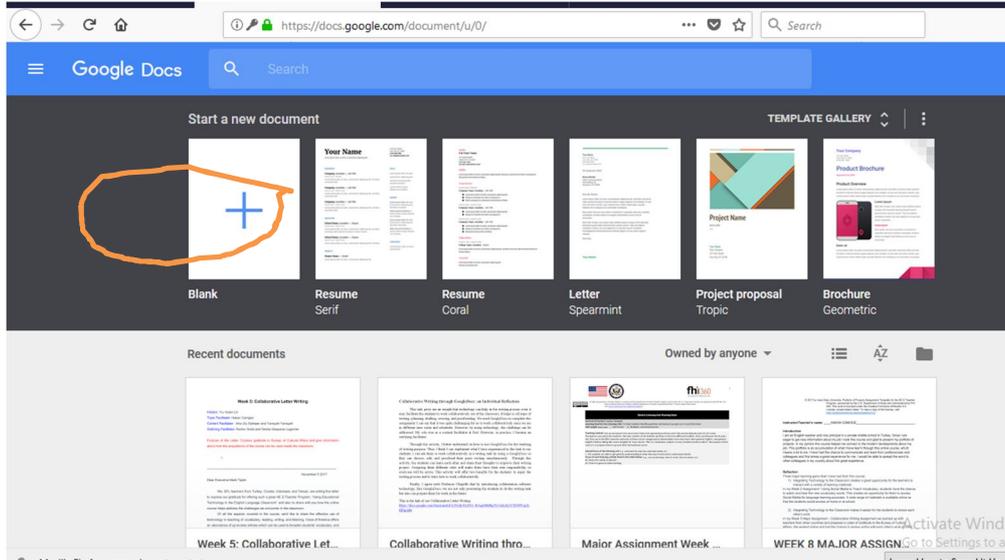
2. On the Google Docs page choose "Docs." After that, click on "Go to Google Doc."



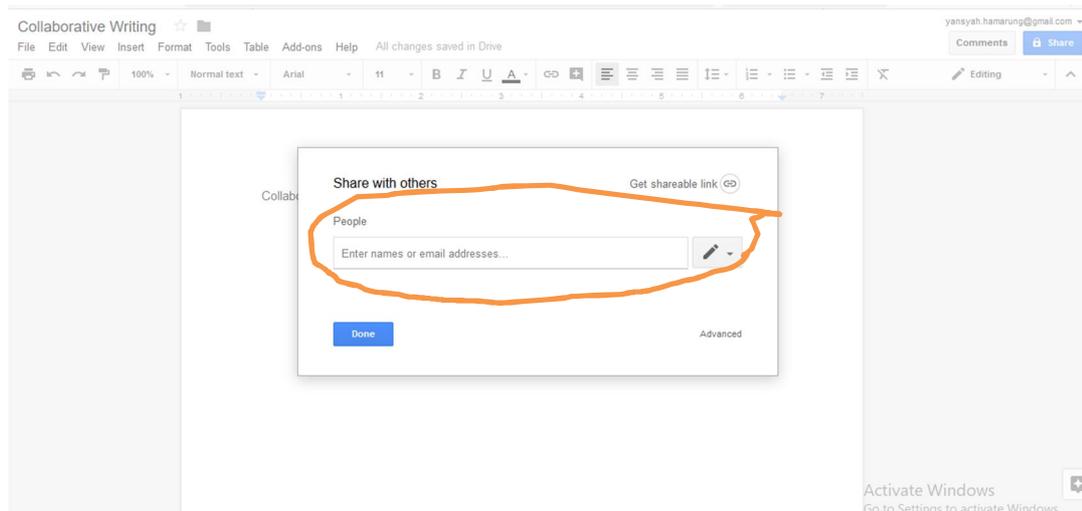
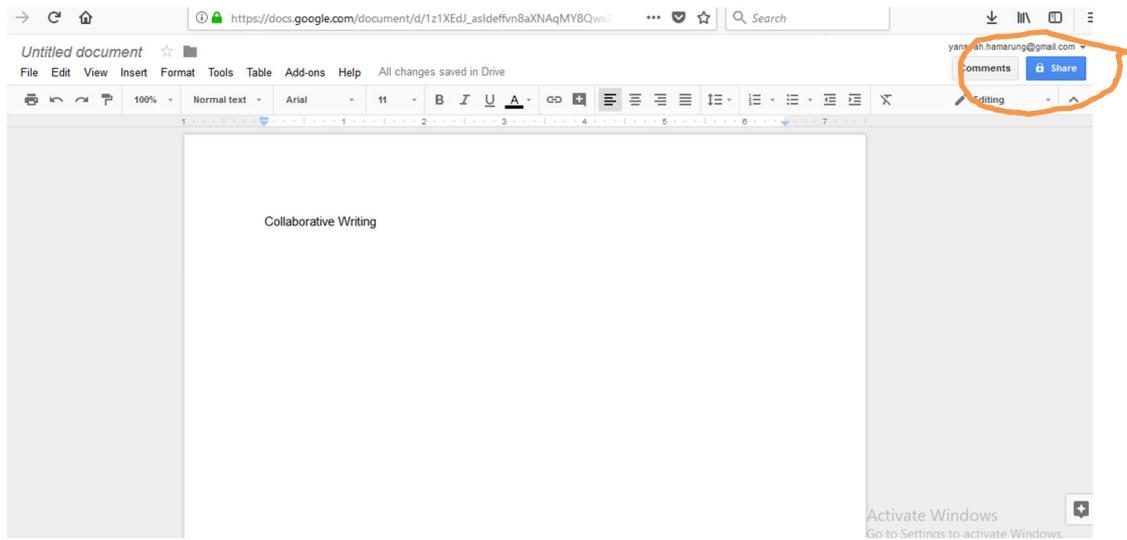
3. You will go to sign in page. Type your Gmail account and its password. Click "Next."



4. Now, you are in the Google Document page. Click on “Blank Document” to start a new document.



5. To start a collaborative writing task, click on "share." Enter the student's email and click on "Done" so they can have access to the Google Document.



Ideas to Teach Collaborative Writing

Writing is different from speaking although these two skills are considered as productive skills. Brown (2007, p. 390) says that human beings universally learn to talk, but we will learn to write if someone teaches us. It means that writing requires different competency compared to speaking. Thus, before we talk further about the ideas to teach writing by using Google Docs, it is better to understand the nature of teaching writing first.

Harmer (2001) states that writing can focus on the product or on the process. He explains that when we focus on the product we are only interested in the purpose of the task and at the end of the product. By using this perspective, writing for teachers is to score the student's work. However, if we see writing as a process, it means that writing is a way for students to learn. Writing is an ongoing process so it should be taught through several stages. Collaborative writing works well with writing as a process. It requires all group members involvement to produce writing in all its stages: planning, drafting, revising, and proofreading. Therefore, to make all students actively participate in the collaborative process, it is very important for teachers to assign a role for each student so they have their own responsibilities.

Here is the example of roles for collaborative writing task:

- a. Initiator (1 student), has responsibility for (1) creating and sharing a document in GoogleDocs, (2) initiating the collaborative works by asking each member of the group to share their opinion about what they are going to write, (3) make sure that everyone is active during the collaborative process.
- b. Topic facilitator (1 or 2 students), has responsibility for (1) finalizing the group consensus about the purpose of the writing, (2) share topic suggestion with the member.
- c. Content facilitator (1 or 2 students), has responsibility for (1) sharing the examples of writing related to the topic, (2) encouraging the other members to share other samples as references, (3) connecting and relating the samples to their writing topic.
- d. Outlining facilitator (1 or 2 students) has responsibility for sharing the outline based on the samples (2) encouraging other members to give comments on the draft, (3) tell each member to write one part of the draft.
- e. Reviewing facilitators (all members) need to share the editing suggestions to improve the accuracy of their writing.

The idea to teach collaborative writing can be seen in the following lesson plan:

Table 1. Lesson Plan for Collaborative Writing using Google Docs

| No. | Activity |
|------------------|--|
| In the classroom | |
| 1. | Explain to the students about collaborative writing and roles of each member of a group |
| 2. | Explore the features of Google Docs and make sure that the students understand how to use it for collaborative writing |
| 3. | Assign students into group and let them to choose their own role |
| 4. | Give examples of task they are going to do. Invite students to ask questions. |
| 5. | Ask the initiator of each group to create the Google Documents and to invite the teacher's email so she/he can observe the collaborative process and give feedbacks on the students' work. |
| Out of classroom | |
| 6. | The topic facilitator starts suggesting a topic and the initiator encourage the other to give comments. |
| 7. | After everyone in the group reaches a consensus for the topic, the content facilitator shares samples of writing and highlight the structures. |
| 8. | After getting a good model, the outlining facilitator writes the outlines and encourages other members to give comment. After reaching a consensus, the outlining facilitator will assign one part of the outlines for one member. She/ he should make sure that everyone gets a chance to contribute their ideas on the content of the writing. |
| 9. | After finish writing the first draft, each member should proofread the writing and give comments to improve the quality. |
| 10. | After the students finish editing their draft, they can share it to the teacher so she/he can give feedback. |
| 11. | Ask the students to submit their final draft. |

Reflection

The task for the assignment was to write a letter to Bureau of Cultural Affairs. The instructor did not determine the topic, but it was the students' decision. There were four students in the writer's group: Hakan Camgoz from Turkey, Senka from Croatia, Yuhsien Lien from Taiwan, and the writer from Indonesia. The writer took a role as a content facilitator at that time. However, because of his misunderstanding, he became an outlining facilitator instead. Based on the discussion, the topic was expressing gratitude to Bureau of

Cultural Affairs. Everyone in the group actively participated to write the letter although all of them were from different time zones. This experience makes the writer believe that collaborative writing really can help students their interaction in the target language (Foster, 1998). Based on the reviewing activity, it can be confirmed that collaborative writing really can increase the complexity and accuracy of writing (Rollison, 2005).

This experience strengthens the theory that technology can offer help for collaborative learning process (Kessler, 2009). By using Google Docs, we can assign the students to work collaboratively out of the classroom. The flexibility of this tool enables students to use it everywhere and every time. It helps in all steps of writing: planning, drafting, revising, and proofreading. It can be said that it was quite challenging for the participants to work collaboratively since they had different time zones and schedules. However, by using technology, this challenge can be addressed.

Through this activity, the writer can better understand how to use Google Docs for the teaching of writing purpose. Thus, teachers can implement this writing strategy to help students improve their writing ability. Teachers can ask students to work collaboratively in a writing task by using a GoogleDocs so they can discuss, edit, and proofread their peers writing simultaneously. Through this activity, the students can learn each other and share their thoughts to improve their writing project. Assigning them different roles will make them have their own responsibility so everyone will be active. This activity will offer two benefits for the students: to enjoy the writing process and to learn how to work collaboratively.

Finally, this activity is in line with what Professor Chapelle says that by introducing collaboration software technology, like GoogleDocs, we are not only promoting the students to do the writing task but also can prepare them for work in the future (IOWA State University, 2017). The presence of technology will benefit both the teacher and students if we can design the integration between technology and lesson creatively.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

There are many advantages offer by the use of Google Docs to facilitate collaborative writing. Google Docs enable students to work separately in different time and space. The teacher also can give feedback although she/he is not in the classroom. Based on this experience, it can be concluded that Google Docs really helps students to increase the accuracy and complexity of writing. Thus, for teachers, this tool is recommended for the teaching of writing. When

we ask the students to do a collaborative writing, it is very important to assign them a certain role so everyone in the group has responsibility and can actively participate.

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Author's Brief CV

Yansyah is currently teaching at English Language Education Department at University of Muhammadiyah Banjarmasin. His main areas of interest include English for Young Learners (EYL), Sociolinguistics, and TEFL.

