

USING GOOGLE DOCS FOR COLLABORATIVE REVISION IN EFL ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract

This study explores the use of Google Docs as a collaborative tool to support the revision process in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) academic writing. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, the study involved six EFL university students enrolled in an academic writing course at a private university in Indonesia. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that Google Docs facilitated continuous and multi-stage revision through features such as commenting, suggestion mode, and real-time editing. Peer feedback played a central role in shaping students' revisions, particularly in improving clarity, organization, and language accuracy. Students also perceived several benefits, including increased awareness of writing weaknesses, greater participation, and reduced anxiety during revision. However, challenges such as unclear feedback, unequal participation, and technical issues were also identified. The study concludes that Google Docs supports a process-oriented and interactive approach to revision and has the potential to enhance collaborative academic writing when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical guidance.

Keyword: Collaborative Revision; Google Docs; EFL Academic Writing; Peer Feedback; Qualitative Study

1. Introduction

In recent years, the integration of digital technology into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction has become increasingly prominent, particularly in the teaching of writing. Among various digital platforms, Google Docs has gained attention due to its collaborative and interactive features, which allow multiple users to write, edit, and provide feedback on a shared document in real time. In writing instruction, especially academic writing, such features are highly relevant because writing is not merely a product-oriented activity but a recursive process involving drafting, revising, and refining ideas through feedback. Academic writing requires learners to demonstrate clarity, coherence, and adherence to formal conventions, making revision a crucial component of the writing process.

For many EFL students, academic writing remains one of the most challenging skills to master. Learners often struggle with organizing ideas, maintaining grammatical accuracy, and expressing arguments clearly. These difficulties are intensified in academic contexts, where students are expected to follow specific rhetorical structures and conventions. Revision plays a central role in addressing these challenges, as it enables writers to reconsider content, organization, and language use. However, in traditional classroom settings, revision activities are frequently constrained by limited instructional time and minimal peer interaction. As a result, students tend to focus on surface-level

revisions, such as correcting grammar or vocabulary, rather than engaging in deeper revisions related to meaning, structure, and argument development.

The emergence of collaborative digital tools has offered new possibilities for supporting the revision process in writing instruction. Google Docs, in particular, provides features such as real-time collaboration, commenting, suggestion mode, and revision history, which facilitate continuous interaction among students and between students and teachers. These features allow learners to exchange feedback, negotiate meaning, and reflect on their revisions throughout the writing process. Consequently, writing is viewed not as a one-time task but as an evolving process of development supported by collaboration and reflection.

Previous studies have reported positive outcomes regarding the use of Google Docs in EFL writing classrooms. Research has shown that Google Docs enhances collaboration, promotes peer feedback, and increases student engagement in writing activities (Saleh et al., 2021; Hoa & Lap, 2021; Wahyuningsih et al., 2023). Other studies have also indicated improvements in writing quality, particularly in areas such as organization and grammatical accuracy, as well as increased student participation through commenting and suggestion features (Albeshir, 2024; Dehghanzadeh, 2024). Despite these findings, much of the existing research has primarily focused on writing performance outcomes and students' perceptions of collaborative writing, while the revision process itself has received relatively limited attention.

This gap in the literature suggests a need for more in-depth investigation into how EFL students engage in revision when using collaborative digital tools. Specifically, there is limited understanding of how students interpret feedback, negotiate revisions with peers, and make decisions during the revision process in an online collaborative environment. Since revision is a key component of academic writing development, examining this process is essential to understanding how technology-supported collaboration contributes to meaningful learning.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore the use of Google Docs as a collaborative tool in supporting the revision process in EFL academic writing. This study seeks to examine how students collaboratively revise their drafts, identify the types of revisions they make, and explore their perceptions of using Google Docs during the revision stage. By focusing on students' revision practices and experiences, this study intends to provide qualitative insights into how digital collaboration influences their approach to academic writing and self-reflection.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both theoretical and practical perspectives. Theoretically, it adds to the body of research on technology-assisted writing by offering a closer examination of revision practices in a collaborative digital context. Practically, it provides insights for EFL teachers on how Google Docs can be effectively integrated into writing instruction to promote meaningful revision, peer collaboration, and reflective learning in academic writing classrooms.

Therefore, this study is guided by the following research questions:

(1) How do EFL students engage in collaborative revision practices using Google Docs in academic writing?

(2) How do EFL students respond to peer feedback during the revision process when using Google Docs?

(3) What benefits and challenges do EFL students perceive when using Google Docs for collaborative revision in academic writing?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how EFL students experience and engage in collaborative revision using Google Docs in academic writing. A qualitative descriptive approach is suitable for studies aiming to provide a comprehensive summary of participants' experiences using everyday language without imposing abstract theoretical interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000). This design aligns with the purpose of the study, which focuses on understanding students' revision practices and perceptions within a natural instructional context.

The study was conducted in an academic writing course offered to undergraduate EFL students at a private university in Indonesia. The course was taken in the middle semester of the program and focused on developing students' academic writing skills, including drafting, revising, and peer feedback. As part of the course, students completed a collaborative writing task using Google Docs over a period of approximately three weeks. During this task, students worked in small groups consisting of two to three members.

Google Docs was used as the main platform for collaborative revision. Students revised their drafts both synchronously and asynchronously, allowing them to provide comments, suggest revisions, and edit texts at different times. The teacher introduced the use of Google Docs at the beginning of the task and provided general instructions on peer feedback and revision expectations. However, the revision process itself was primarily student-centered, with the teacher acting as a facilitator rather than actively intervening in each revision stage.

2.2 Participants

The participants consisted of six undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the academic writing course. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who had direct experience with collaborative writing and revision using Google Docs (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All participants were in their second or third year of study and had completed several prior writing courses as part of the curriculum. In terms of English proficiency, the participants were considered to have intermediate to upper-intermediate proficiency based on course placement and previous writing performance. All participants had prior experience using Google Docs for basic writing tasks; however, their experience with collaborative revision features such as commenting and suggestion mode was limited before taking this course. The selection of six participants was considered sufficient for this qualitative descriptive study due to the depth and richness of the data obtained. Rather than aiming for generalizability, the study prioritized information power, where a smaller sample can yield meaningful insights when participants have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation and provide detailed responses. The focused research

aim, homogeneous participant group, and in-depth open-ended questionnaire responses supported the adequacy of the sample size.

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used, and no identifying information was collected.

2.3 Instrument

Data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of questions designed to elicit students' experiences with collaborative revision, including:

- a. How They Revised Their Writing Using Google Docs,
- b. How They Responded To Peer Feedback,
- c. Perceived Benefits Of Collaborative Revision,
- d. Challenges Encountered During The Revision Process.

The open-ended format allowed participants to express their views freely and provide detailed descriptions of their revision experiences.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire link was distributed through the class communication platform after the completion of a collaborative writing task using Google Docs. Participants completed the questionnaire individually at their convenience. All six responses were fully completed and included in the analysis. Conducting the data collection online allowed participants to reflect on their experiences without time pressure.

2.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes. The identified themes were used to describe patterns in students' revision practices and perceptions of using Google Docs for collaborative revision.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and completion of the questionnaire indicated informed consent. All data were treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes.

3. Result

This section presents the findings of the study regarding EFL students' experiences in using Google Docs for collaborative revision in academic writing. The results are organized based on patterns that emerged from the thematic analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses. Three main themes were identified: (1) collaborative revision practices, (2) responses to peer feedback, and (3) perceived benefits and challenges of using Google Docs during the revision process.

3.1 Collaborative Revision Practices Using Google Docs

The findings showed that students actively engaged in collaborative revision through various features provided by Google Docs. Participants reported revising their drafts by editing content directly, adding comments, and using the suggestion mode to propose changes. Real-time access to shared documents enabled students to observe revisions made by peers and to make immediate adjustments to their own writing.

Several participants indicated that revision was conducted in multiple stages rather than in a single session. Initial revisions focused on content clarity and organization, while subsequent revisions addressed grammatical accuracy and word choice. The revision history feature was frequently used to track changes and review previous versions of the text, allowing students to compare drafts before and after revision.

3.2 Responses to Peer Feedback

The data revealed that peer feedback played a significant role in students' revision processes. Participants reported reading peers' comments carefully before deciding whether to accept, modify, or reject suggested changes. Most feedback was related to sentence structure, clarity of ideas, and language accuracy. Students indicated that the commenting feature facilitated clearer communication during the revision process. Feedback was often responded to through follow-up comments, resulting in short written exchanges among group members. These interactions reflected negotiation during revision, as students discussed alternative expressions or structural changes before finalizing revisions.

3.3 Perceived Benefits of Collaborative Revision

The results showed that students perceived several benefits from using Google Docs for collaborative revision. Participants reported increased awareness of their own writing weaknesses after receiving feedback from peers. Exposure to peers' writing styles and revision strategies also contributed to students' understanding of academic writing conventions. Additionally, students noted that collaborative revision encouraged more active participation compared to traditional revision methods. The ability to revise documents outside class time allowed students to engage in revision flexibly and continuously. Participants also reported that the collaborative environment reduced anxiety during revision, as feedback was provided in written form rather than face-to-face.

3.4 Challenges in the Revision Process

Despite the reported benefits, the findings also indicated several challenges encountered during collaborative revision. Some participants experienced difficulty interpreting peer feedback, particularly when comments were unclear or lacked specific explanations. Differences in language proficiency among group members also affected the quality of feedback provided. Technical issues, such as unstable internet connections, were mentioned as occasional obstacles during the revision process. In addition, a few students reported unequal participation, where some group members contributed fewer revisions or comments than others. These challenges were noted as factors influencing the effectiveness of collaborative revision using Google Docs.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to explore how Google Docs supports collaborative revision in EFL academic writing by examining students' revision practices, responses to peer feedback, and perceptions of the collaborative revision process. This section discusses the main findings in relation to the research purpose, interprets their meaning, and connects them with relevant literature.

4.1 Summary of Major Findings

The findings indicate that Google Docs facilitated an interactive and continuous revision process among EFL students. Through features such as commenting, suggestion mode, and real-time editing, students engaged in collaborative revision in multiple stages. Peer feedback emerged as a central component in shaping revisions, particularly in improving clarity, organization, and language accuracy. In addition, students perceived several benefits from collaborative revision, including increased awareness of writing weaknesses, greater participation, and reduced anxiety. However, challenges related to unclear feedback, unequal participation, and technical issues were also reported.

To enhance transparency and support the trustworthiness of the findings, representative excerpts from participants' responses are presented in relation to each theme.

4.2 Collaborative Revision Practices Using Google Docs

Students reported actively revising their writing by editing shared drafts, adding comments, and proposing changes using suggestion mode. The ability to view peers' revisions in real time encouraged continuous engagement with the text rather than one-time correction. One participant noted:

"I could see my friends' revisions directly, so I revised my part again after reading their suggestions" (P2).

Another participant explained that revision occurred in stages:

"First we focused on content and organization, then later we corrected grammar and word choice" (P4). These responses indicate that Google Docs supported revision as a recursive process, allowing students to revisit and refine their writing over time. This finding aligns with process-oriented writing theory, which views revision as an integral and ongoing part of writing development.

4.3 Responses to Peer Feedback

Peer feedback played a significant role in students' revision decisions. Participants reported carefully considering comments before accepting or modifying suggested changes. Written feedback enabled students to reflect and negotiate meaning asynchronously.

As one participant stated:

"I didn't directly accept all comments, but I read them first and chose the ones that matched my ideas" (P1).

Another participant highlighted the value of written interaction:

"Commenting made it easier to discuss revisions without feeling nervous" (P5).

These findings suggest that peer feedback through Google Docs fostered metacognitive awareness and collaborative decision-making. The asynchronous nature of feedback also reduced pressure, allowing students to engage more thoughtfully with revision.

4.4 Perceived Benefits and Challenges of Collaborative Revision

Students perceived several benefits from using Google Docs for collaborative revision. Increased awareness of writing weaknesses was frequently mentioned, as students became more conscious of errors and organizational issues after receiving peer input.

One participant reflected:

“I realized my writing problems after my friends gave comments on my sentences” (P3).

However, challenges were also reported. Some students experienced difficulty interpreting vague feedback or noted unequal participation within groups. Technical issues such as unstable internet connections were mentioned as occasional obstacles.

As expressed by one participant:

“Sometimes the feedback was too general, so I was not sure what to revise” (P6).

These challenges highlight the need for pedagogical guidance to support effective peer feedback and balanced participation in collaborative revision activities.

4.5 Theme Overview

To summarize the findings, Table 1 presents the main themes, subthemes, and sample evidence derived from participants’ responses.

Table 1. Themes, Subthemes, and Sample Evidence

Theme	Subtheme	Sample Evidence
Collaborative revision practices	Multi-stage revision	Multi-stage revision
	Use of Google Docs features	Use of Google Docs features
Responses to peer feedback	Responses to peer feedback	Responses to peer feedback
	Negotiation of meaning	Negotiation of meaning
Perceived benefits and challenges	Perceived benefits and challenges	Perceived benefits and challenges
	Revision challenges	Revision challenges

4.6 Reflection on Triangulation

Although this study primarily relied on self-reported questionnaire data, the findings were supported by students’ references to Google Docs features such as revision history and real-time editing. While revision logs were not systematically analyzed, participants’ descriptions of observing changes and tracking revisions suggest the potential value of document-based data for future research. Incorporating revision history analysis could provide additional insight into actual revision behavior and strengthen data triangulation in subsequent studies.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the use of Google Docs as a collaborative tool to support the revision process in EFL academic writing. By examining students’ revision practices, responses to peer feedback, and perceptions of collaborative revision, the findings indicate that Google Docs facilitates an interactive and process-oriented approach to revision. The use of features such as commenting, suggestion mode, and real-time editing enabled students to engage in multiple stages of revision and to participate actively in peer-supported writing development. Collaborative revision through Google Docs encouraged reflection, negotiation of meaning, and greater learner engagement,

particularly during the revision stage of academic writing. Despite these benefits, the study also identified challenges related to unclear peer feedback, unequal participation, and technical constraints. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of collaborative revision depends not only on the digital tool itself but also on the pedagogical guidance provided to support meaningful interaction. Overall, this study highlights the potential of Google Docs as a pedagogical tool for enhancing collaborative revision in EFL academic writing contexts. While limited by a small sample size and reliance on self-reported data, the study provides insights into how technology-mediated collaboration can support students' revision processes. Future research involving larger samples, multiple data sources, and analysis of revision logs may offer a more comprehensive understanding of collaborative revision practices in digital writing environments.

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