

EFL TEACHERS' STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WRITING IN DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Siswana¹; Widi Sriyanto^{2*}; Cahya Komara³

^{1,3} University of Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, Indonesia; ²State Polytechnic of
Creative Media, Indonesia

siswana@uhamka.ac.id; widi.sriyanto@polimedia.ac.id; cahya.komara@uhamka.ac.id

Abstract: This study investigates the strategies employed by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in teaching writing through digital learning environments, with a specific focus on the use of Google Docs as an instructional tool. Adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved ten EFL teachers from various educational levels in the Greater Jakarta area. Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that Google Docs plays a central role in supporting collaborative drafting, structured feedback, real-time revision, and student autonomy. Teachers utilized Google Docs to facilitate both synchronous and asynchronous writing instruction, integrating it with platforms such as Google Classroom and WhatsApp to build a cohesive digital learning ecosystem. Overall, the integration of Google Docs was perceived as effective in enhancing student engagement, improving writing quality, and streamlining the feedback process. The study concludes that digital platforms, when purposefully implemented, can significantly enrich EFL writing pedagogy in contemporary classrooms.

Keywords: Digital Learning, EFL Writing, Technology-Enhanced Instruction, Writing Strategies

INTRODUCTION

English is a foreign language in Indonesia that plays an essential role in preparing learners for participation in global communication. As a global lingua franca, English is embedded not only in cross-cultural interactions but also in educational and professional domains. In daily life, English frequently appears alongside the national language, and the proliferation of digital technologies has made access to English learning more convenient and ubiquitous than ever (Lo, 2023; Hidayat et al., 2022). Through smartphones, learning applications, and web-based platforms, students now have broader opportunities to engage with English content, both formally and informally.

Recognizing its importance, the Indonesian government mandates the inclusion of English in the national curriculum starting from the elementary school level. This policy is aimed at equipping students with the linguistic competence needed to compete at the international level (Fitriani & Irawati, 2024). Despite this early introduction, students continue to face persistent challenges in mastering the language, particularly in the domain of writing. Among the four foundational skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), writing is consistently regarded as the most cognitively demanding. It requires learners to generate and organize ideas, apply appropriate grammar and vocabulary, and structure content with coherence and clarity (Kurniawati, 2022; Cao et al., 2022).

Unfortunately, many EFL teachers report feeling underprepared to teach writing effectively. Prior studies have indicated that insufficient pre-service training and limited exposure to writing pedagogy contribute to teacher insecurity when delivering writing instruction (Bharathi, 2023; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Kent & Brannan, 2016). In some cases, teachers also lack confidence in

applying writing conventions, even in their first language, which further complicates their ability to guide students in composing texts in English (Mali & Salsbury, 2021).

Furthermore, the quality of students' written output is closely tied to their ability to comprehend instructional content and receive appropriate scaffolding from the teacher (Cameron, 2000, cited in Thomson, 2012; Gibbons, 2015; Maybin et al., 1992; Wilson & Devereux, 2014). Therefore, the teacher's role remains critical not only in delivering content but also in selecting instructional strategies that foster student engagement and autonomy. Although various pedagogical innovations exist, their success depends on the teacher's ability to assess student needs and navigate available digital tools (Alwahoub et al., 2022; Kayapinar & Erkir, 2024).

In line with recent trends in educational technology, digital learning has become a prominent feature of classroom instruction across all levels of education. Teachers are increasingly expected to integrate technological tools into language instruction, enabling synchronous and asynchronous communication, multimedia feedback, and collaborative learning (Zhang, 2023; Ocak Kılınc & Yüksel, 2024). In the context of EFL writing instruction, this shift requires teachers to adapt conventional strategies to suit technology-mediated environments. Digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), Google Docs, and mobile-assisted applications have been widely adopted to support collaborative writing, process-based instruction, and real-time feedback (Saleh et al., 2021; Syarifudin & Husnawadi, 2022).

In response to this pedagogical transformation, the present study investigates the strategies employed by EFL teachers in teaching writing within digital learning environments. Specifically, it aims to identify effective practices, challenges encountered by teachers and students, and the pedagogical value of using platforms like Google Docs for writing instruction. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on technology-enhanced EFL writing pedagogy and provides practical insights for improving writing instruction in contemporary classrooms.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the strategies used by EFL teachers in teaching writing within digital learning environments. This design was selected to obtain rich, contextualized insights into teachers' instructional practices and perceptions, particularly regarding the use of digital platforms such as Google Docs for teaching writing. The study focused on capturing the lived experiences of teachers as they integrated technology into their pedagogical routines.

Participants

This study was conducted between May and July 2024, aligning with the final academic term of the 2023–2024 school year, during which digital learning was actively implemented across educational institutions in Indonesia. The target population consisted of English teachers at various educational levels in the Greater Jakarta (Jabodetabek) area, including elementary, junior high, and vocational high schools. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select ten EFL teachers who were known to incorporate digital tools, particularly collaborative platforms into their writing instruction.

Participants were chosen to represent a diverse range of school types (public and private), geographic areas (urban and suburban), and grade levels, in order to ensure variation in teaching contexts and student demographics. All participants met the following selection criteria: a

minimum of five years of experience in teaching English, consistent integration of digital platforms in EFL writing instruction, and willingness to participate in both online interviews and virtual classroom observations

To maintain ethical standards and participant confidentiality, all teacher identities are anonymized using pseudonyms (e.g., T1 to T10) throughout the study.

Instruments and Data Collection

Two main instruments were employed to collect data:

1. Semi-structured Interviews

The researchers conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all ten participants. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions aimed at uncovering teachers' strategies, tools, and reflections related to teaching writing in digital environments. The interview questions included, for example, strategies the teachers apply when teaching writing through a digital platform, whether they use the same strategies as in traditional classroom instruction, and how they utilize Google Docs in their writing instruction.

The interviews were conducted online via Zoom or Google Meet and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. All sessions were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis.

2. Non-Participant Observations

The researchers observed one writing lesson per participant conducted through digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Zoom, or Google Docs. Observations focused on the instructional flow, student engagement, and teacher feedback practices, especially as mediated through collaborative writing tools. Field notes were taken to document the sequence of activities, teacher-student interactions, and use of Google Docs in live or asynchronous sessions.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved six phases: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. Both interview transcripts and observation field notes were coded inductively, allowing categories to emerge from the data. Key themes that guided the analysis included digital writing strategies, collaborative practices via Google Docs, feedback mechanisms in digital platforms, and teachers' reflections on the effectiveness of digital instruction. The use of triangulation between interviews and observations helped validate the consistency of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings obtained through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted with ten English teachers at the elementary, junior high, and vocational high school levels in the Greater Jakarta area. The primary aim of this study was to explore how EFL teachers utilize digital learning platforms to teach writing, with a particular emphasis on the integration of Google Docs as a collaborative and instructional tool.

The study involved six teachers from various schools representing a range of educational levels:

Tabel 1: Respondents of the Research

Teacher Code	Educational Level	Location
T1	Elementary School	East Jakarta
T2	Elementary School	South Jakarta
T3	Junior High School	Bekasi
T4	Junior High School	Central Jakarta
T5	Junior High School	Bogor
T6	Vocational High School	Depok
T7	Vocational High School	Tangerang
T8	Senior High School	South Tangerang
T9	Junior High School	North Jakarta
T10	Elementary School	West Jakarta

Integration of Google Docs in Writing Instruction

One of the most prominent findings of the study is the consistent and purposeful use of Google Docs across all observed classrooms. Teachers reported that Google Docs serves not only as a medium for individual student writing but also as a collaborative space for drafting, revising, and receiving feedback in real time.

a. Collaborative Drafting

Most teachers used Google Docs to facilitate peer collaboration. Students were asked to co-write paragraphs or essays in shared documents. For example, Teacher T3 (junior high) organized students into pairs to write a descriptive text about a historical building. Each pair worked in a shared Google Doc where they brainstormed ideas, divided responsibilities, and edited each other's contributions. Teacher T3 commented:

“It helps the students build a sense of ownership. They learn how to negotiate meaning and work on language accuracy together.”

This approach aligns with Alharbi (2020), who emphasized that Google Docs encourages students to take shared responsibility in composing and revising texts.

b. Real-Time Feedback

Another widely observed strategy was the use of Google Docs' commenting feature for formative feedback. Teachers reviewed students' writing drafts by highlighting errors and giving targeted suggestions on grammar, vocabulary, or coherence. These comments were provided during or after class, allowing students to make revisions directly in the document. Teacher T6 (vocational school) explained:

“I no longer need to collect printed papers or email attachments. All drafts are accessible in one folder. I can monitor progress and add suggestions live while they write.”

Students responded positively to this feedback method, noting that real-time comments allowed them to understand mistakes and improve more quickly compared to traditional written corrections.

c. Scaffolding Through Templates

Several teachers created structured **writing templates** in Google Docs to scaffold learning. These templates included headings (e.g., “Introduction,” “Supporting Ideas,” “Conclusion”), sentence starters, and vocabulary boxes. Teacher T8 (senior high) used a recount text template to help students organize narratives about personal experiences. By following this structure, students were able to focus on content development without being overwhelmed by formatting issues.

d. Asynchronous Revision and Submission

Teachers appreciated that students could **revise and resubmit** their writing asynchronously. Teacher T1 (elementary) shared:

“I give light feedback after the first draft, then let students revise their work before submitting the final version. It helps them reflect.”

This practice supports autonomous learning and mirrors the writing process cycle planning, drafting, revising, and editing recommended in effective writing pedagogy (Harmer, 2007).

Observed Instructional Patterns

The integration of Google Docs was part of a broader digital learning framework composed of the following four instructional stages:

1. Material Delivery

Teachers provided input through video recordings, PowerPoint slides shared via Google Classroom, or live explanations via Zoom or Google Meet. Google Docs was often introduced during this phase as a central workspace.

2. Digital Communication

WhatsApp and Google Classroom were used to manage communication, give reminders, and resolve technical questions. Teachers often shared Google Docs links through these platforms.

3. Writing Tasks and Peer Collaboration

Students were assigned individual or group writing tasks directly in Google Docs. Collaborative documents were monitored by the teacher during live sessions or asynchronously.

4. Feedback and Assessment

Feedback was delivered through Google Docs comments, in-text edits, and—occasionally—audio or video responses embedded within the Google Drive ecosystem. Teachers assessed both process (participation, revisions) and product (final draft quality).

The following table summarizes how Google Docs was used within the digital writing cycle:

Tabel 2: The Use of Google Doc for Digital Learning

Stage	Teacher Action	Student Activity	Tool Functionality Utilized
Pre-Writing	Provide instructions and examples	Brainstorm in shared doc	Shared editable files
Drafting	Monitor writing in real-time	Co-write or individually draft	Real-time typing and auto-save
Revising & Peer Review	Comment on grammar/structure	Respond to comments and revise	Comment, Suggestion mode
Final Submission	Check revised draft	Submit through Google Classroom link	Version history, file sharing

Teachers' Perceptions

In interviews, all ten teachers described Google Docs as an essential tool in their writing instruction. Their perspectives can be summarized as follows:

- **Efficiency and Accessibility:** Teachers can access student drafts anytime and anywhere, without the need for physical submission.
- **Improved Engagement:** Students demonstrate higher levels of participation, particularly during peer-review activities.
- **Enhanced Writing Quality:** Teachers observed noticeable improvements in organization, vocabulary use, and grammar after students engaged in multiple rounds of revision.
- **Autonomy and Accountability:** Students learned to manage their writing progress independently, especially when revision deadlines were clear.

However, some challenges were noted, particularly for younger learners. Teacher T2 mentioned that elementary students often required parental support to navigate shared documents. Nonetheless, all teachers agreed that the benefits outweighed the limitations, especially as students became more digitally literate over time.

The findings of this study reveal that EFL teachers in Indonesia have adapted their writing instruction strategies to align with the demands and affordances of digital learning environments. Among the various digital tools utilized, Google Docs emerged as a central and consistently applied platform across different educational levels. Teachers reported that Google Docs

facilitated collaborative writing, real-time feedback, and flexible task submission, all of which contributed positively to students' writing development.

The integration of Google Docs was not limited to document submission; rather, it played a central role in the writing process itself. Teachers used the platform to support pre-writing activities such as brainstorming and outlining, as well as drafting, peer review, and revising. The platform's features—such as shared editing, comment threads, and version history—allowed teachers to scaffold writing instruction more effectively while maintaining an interactive and student-centered approach. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that Google Docs enhances learner autonomy, promotes collaboration, and improves writing fluency in EFL contexts (Kurniawati, 2022; Saleh et al., 2021; Syarifudin & Husnawadi, 2022).

Teachers also reported that the digital format enabled more responsive and timely feedback. Unlike traditional methods that rely on delayed written correction, digital comments on Google Docs allowed students to reflect and revise almost immediately. This type of formative feedback process has been shown to foster deeper engagement with writing tasks and encourage revision behavior, both of which are crucial for language development (Behrahi et al., 2024; Cao et al., 2022). Moreover, the asynchronous nature of the platform provided flexibility for students who needed more time to compose their work, which proved especially beneficial in contexts with limited access or varying levels of digital literacy.

Despite the advantages, several challenges were identified. Some students faced difficulties in navigating the platform or lacked stable internet connections, which affected their participation and the timely submission of assignments. Teachers also reported the need for additional effort in preparing instructional materials suited for digital delivery, such as editable templates, instructional videos, or guided writing outlines. Nonetheless, most teachers agreed that the benefits of using Google Docs—particularly in facilitating individualized feedback and collaborative learning—outweighed these obstacles.

Overall, this study highlights the increasing role of digital platforms in shaping EFL writing instruction. The findings support previous literature emphasizing the importance of integrating technology into language education not only as a means of delivery but as a pedagogical strategy in itself (Lo, 2023; Kayapinar & Erkir, 2024). The successful implementation of Google Docs in the observed classrooms suggests that digital writing environments, when used purposefully, can significantly enhance students' engagement, autonomy, and writing outcomes. These insights have implications for teacher training programs, which should include practical guidance on the integration of collaborative digital tools in EFL pedagogy. Furthermore, schools and policymakers must ensure the provision of digital infrastructure and ongoing support to sustain effective technology-enhanced instruction.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the instructional strategies employed by EFL teachers in Indonesia when teaching writing through digital learning environments, with particular attention to the integration of Google Docs. Drawing on data collected through classroom observations and interviews with ten teachers across elementary, junior high, and vocational high school levels, the findings demonstrate that Google Docs serves as a highly effective platform for facilitating writing instruction in technology-enhanced settings.

Teachers implemented a range of pedagogical strategies aligned with process-based writing approaches, including collaborative drafting, scaffolded templates, peer review, and formative feedback—each of which was enhanced through the features of Google Docs. The platform's real-time editing, commenting tools, and accessibility enabled continuous interaction between teachers and students, promoting engagement, autonomy, and revision-based learning. Furthermore, the use of Google Docs allowed for seamless integration with other digital tools such as Google Classroom, Zoom, and WhatsApp, creating a cohesive digital ecosystem for teaching writing. Teachers reported that these platforms not only improved the efficiency of instruction but also supported students' ability to produce more structured, coherent, and linguistically accurate writing. While challenges remained—particularly for younger learners with limited digital literacy—the overall perceptions of the teachers confirmed the value of Google Docs as a central tool for fostering writing development in EFL classrooms. The study contributes to the growing body of research that emphasizes the importance of integrating technology meaningfully into language instruction.

In light of these findings, it is recommended that teacher training programs incorporate modules on collaborative digital writing tools and that schools support teachers with access to robust digital infrastructure. Future research may extend this study by examining the impact of such strategies on students' writing outcomes using mixed-method or longitudinal designs.

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