Learners Perceptions of Using Google Classroom (GC) in Learning English at a High School in Vietnam

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https://doi.org/10.54855/paic.2216

ABSTRACT

Keywords: Covid-19, online study, Google Classroom, perceptions, online learning quality

Google Classroom (GC) is a popular application used during the pandemic. To examine students' perceptions at a high school in Vietnam of using GC in learning English, the authors carried out a qualitative-and-quantitative study in the 1st semester of the school year 2021-2022. The online study was a must for students at almost all levels in Vietnam to ensure their course completion throughout the Covid-19 waves. A 19-item questionnaire was delivered to 179 participants, followed by structured interviews with eight questions for 12 randomly-selected students. The study results indicate that there is a general consensus in students' perceptions of exploiting GC as a tool to learn their target language. Most students felt satisfied with employing the application because it is easy to use and useful for their language learning despite the fact that they got little technical assistance from their parents. This paper is expected to enhance the beliefs of teachers and researchers in general and those of languages in particular in utilizing GC to improve their students' online learning quality.

Introduction

According to Adeva Jane Esparrago Kalidas et al. (2022), the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a new norm of online learning. Pham & Vo (2021) claim that all levels of education, from primary schools to universities in Vietnam, in this scenario, ran the e-learning program to keep the education moving in response to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education's motto "Learners stop going to school, but not stop learning". Thanks to this, students could access different online learning tools, including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and GC. Among the three platforms, GC seems preferable to both our teachers and learners due to its versatility which allows students to find their homework, submit their assignments, view their grades, and communicate with their classmates and teachers. To sign in to GC, all students and teachers need to do is have a personal Gmail account to sign in to GC. Our students perceive apparently that GC does not have limitations in terms of time allowance, space, or cost like the other two. GC allows students to stay in the cyber class until their teacher ends the room.

Literature review

Perception

Different scholars have different definitions of perceptions. Some focus on its components, while others emphasize its importance. Here are some typical definitions on which the study is based.

As for Montague (1997), learners' perception is how they feel about something. Students' perception assists the instructor in seeing something or making a decision based on what they observe. According to Chen and Hoshower (2003), students' perception is essential for substantial learning achievement or a good learning approach.

Quick and Nelson (1997) state that three primary traits influence our perception of others, including perceiver-specific characteristics (familiarity with the object of perception, the perceiver's attitude, mood, self-concept, and thought process), target-specific characteristics, and situation-specific characteristics. This means the perception mechanism is affected by both internal and external factors.

Google Classroom (GC)

Overview of GC

GC, before the COVID-19 pandemic, has been popularly applied among schools. It is a free set of Google tools for educators that includes Gmail, Drive, and Docs and is designed to help teachers collect tasks without using paper, as well as create Drive folders for each task and students to keep everything organized. Pradana and Harimurti (2017) define it as a product from Google for education that is very special because it has a lot of functions, such as giving announcements or assignments, collecting assignments, and checking assignments. Despite differences in definitions of GC, there is a consensus that GC makes it easier for teachers and students to create, share, collect, access, and store their files and folders digitally.

Scholars also agree that GC brings a wide range of benefits. It is easy to use and accessible from any device and promotes collaborative learning. In addition, GC allows teachers to provide online support to their learners immediately, which means that feedback becomes more effective because new comments and remarks have a greater impact on learners' minds. Furthermore, it makes the assignment process faster and more effective as teachers can easily see who has submitted their assignment and who is still working on it as well as students' feedback.

Functions of GC

As part of the Google Apps for Education suite, which aims to make Classroom learning less paper-intensive, GC has the following functions:

- Combining Google Docs, Google Sheets, Google Slides, Gmail, and Google Calendar to create a unified platform for managing student-and-teacher communication.

- Creating private classes that students can join with a private code or that are automatically imported from a school domain.

- Enabling teachers to create, distribute, and grade assignments within the Google ecosystem. Each class creates a separate folder in each user's Google Drive where students can submit work to be graded by a teacher. Assignments and due dates are added to Google calendar, where each assignment can be assigned to a specific category or topic.

> Teachers can track each student's progress by reviewing a document's revision history, and after grading, teachers can return work with comments and grades.

Teachers can create and invite students to join online classrooms and create and distribute assignments. Students and teachers can interact about assignments on the site, and teachers can effectively track their progress. In short, GC is a free online collaboration tool that assists students in becoming more effective learners in the Classroom.

Previous related studies

Research findings from prior studies, both internationally and domestically, have provided some useful comparisons for this study. According to Shaharanee and Rodzi (2016), Muslimah (2018), and Peter Ong et al. (2020), students found GC beneficial to their learning process and were happy with its use as an online learning tool. Besides, as for Pratiwi (2019), thanks to GC as a learning medium, they could repeat lessons, access the materials at any time, and get their learning process facilitated. Similarly, in a study on evaluating GC's functionality as a Learning Management System (LMS) and a means of promoting collaborative learning through assignments, Espinosa et al. (2017) concluded that it was extremely efficient for increasing student engagement. Shibuya, T. F. (2018) conducted a study by utilizing Classroom as an LMS to support a blended learning strategy in a Pengantar Linguistik Umum class for a semester. This study showed that Classroom was a satisfying LMS for blended learning in PLU courses because of its features, user-friendliness, and appropriateness in higher education programs. In Viet Nam, Hung (2021) used a descriptive survey design with questionnaires to investigate learners' perceptions of Online learning during the Covid 19 Pandemic at English Center at Can Tho University and found that students there reluctantly accepted online learning due to the epidemic.

With respect to prior studies, anyway, it's safe to assume online learning in general, and GC, in particular, fits well into the learning process. Since no one has investigated the perceptions of students about the application of GC in the English learning process at Tan Lap High school, this study is therefore of the essence and expected to be of great help in determining the amount of student acceptance of GC as well as in providing decision-makers with a better understanding about learner's perceptions of adopting GC in their learning.

Research Questions

To thoroughly comprehend learners' perceptions towards the use of GC in learning, researchers decided to carry out a study on Learners' perception of using GC in learning English. The study was implemented with the informant students at Tan Lap High School, where the authors are working at. Specifically, the study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How do learners evaluate GC in terms of ease of access and usefulness in English learning?
2. How do learners satisfy GC in supporting them to learn English?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

The study was carried out with 179 participants (92 grade 11 and 87 grade 12 students) from Tan Lap High School - a school in Dan Phuong district, Hanoi, Vietnam, in semester 1 of the academic year 2021-2022. English is a compulsory subject according to the national curriculum of the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training. They have mixed levels of English. Especially all of the participants had 1-2-year of experience studying with GC. They used GC

to get assignments and documents from their teachers, submit their homework/assignments, and receive feedback/comments and grades from their teachers.

Design of the study

The combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches helps understand the research problem better than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this study, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach with the qualitative phase used to explain and interpret the quantitative findings were exploited in this study to address the research questions. The study has two phases: (1) quantitative data collection and analysis through a survey questionnaire in late March 2022, (2) qualitative data collection and analysis through interviews around April 2022 to provide a richer explanation of the quantitative data collected and analyzed. In the quantitative phase, the online survey questionnaires focusing on students' perceptions of using GC for ESL were created to gather data from Tan Lap High School students. This tool allows researchers to gather students' feedback on the effectiveness of using GC for online English learning. For the qualitative phase, whose aim is to enable researchers to get more insight into students' feelings about using GC to learn English during the online period, students were randomly selected to join the interview.

Data collection and analysis

As mentioned above, questionnaires and interviews were employed to discover the findings. The questionnaires with five questions about the ease of access to GC, seven questions examining the usefulness of GC, four questions dealing with students' satisfaction, and three questions investigating parents' support designed for 179 participants is adapted from Shaharanee et al. (2016). A Likert scale is used to grade the responses to each question from very favorable to highly negative. The 8-question structured interviews were carried out with 12 randomly-selected students about the current use of GC, the ease of using GC, the effectiveness of employing GC for English learning, learners' satisfaction, and learners' parents' support in language learning.

In the first phase, the researchers gave the questionnaires to students through online classes with a clear and detailed explanation about the objective of the surveys, the purpose of each statement, and how to complete them. The students received the questionnaire through Google Forms, answered them, and sent it back to the researcher within 30 minutes. The researcher then based on learners' responses to sort and analyze the data. The findings are examined using the information gathered from the questionnaires and then entered into statistical software.

In the second phase, twelve students were selected by systematic random sampling for interviews around April 2022. The interviews took place in an online classroom. Students answered eight questions related to the research questions, which helped them better understand their feelings and perceptions towards the use of GC in learning English, thereby contributing to support and confirming the results through questionnaires.

Findings and discussion

Overall, there is hardly a contradiction between the results of the survey questionnaires and interviews. Findings from survey questionnaires on students' perceptions of the use of GC in English learning can be classified as the following figures:

Table 1. Students' perceptions of the ease of access to GC

Indicator	Questions	(strongly) Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	(strongly) Disagree (%)
The ease of access	It is easy to sign in Google Classroom because it is integrated with my gmail.	82.3	13.3	4.4
	It is easy to access the materials of the English course.	65.9	28.9	5.2
	It is convenient to receive and submit my assignments.	63.7	28.1	8.2
	Google Classroom has a user-friendly interface.	74	23	3
	Google Classroom is easy to use.	74	21.5	4.5
Average		71.9	22.8	5.3

Table 2. Students' perceptions on the usefulness of GC

Indicator	Questions	(strongly) Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	(strongly) Disagree (%)
Perception of usefulness	Google Classroom makes the English learning be conducted easily.	46.7	45.2	8.1
	Google Classroom is suitable for learning interaction in English lessons between teachers and students.	51.1	40	8.9
	Google Classroom reminds me to complete my English assignments on time.	54.1	32.6	13.3
	Thanks to Google Classroom, the exercises that I do and submit through the system are received and given feedback by the teacher, helping me to understand and apply the knowledge I have learned in doing the exercises.	57.4	46.7	5.9
	The teacher's feedback through Google Classroom is beneficial.	74.8	19.2	6
	The Google Classroom's grading system assists me in keeping track of my progress in English and comprehending the current topic.	58.5	32.6	6.2

	Thanks to Google Classroom, the topic objective, assessment, and content were all uniform.	54.8	37.8	7.4
Average		56.3	36.3	7.4

Table 3. Students' perceptions of satisfaction

Indicator	Questions	(strongly) Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	(strongly) Disagree (%)
Students' satisfaction	Through Google Classroom, my own goal in English learning is met.	40	42.2	17.8
	I would urge that this platform for learning be used in other relevant subjects.	53.4	37.8	8.8
	In comparison to other platforms of active learning, Google Classroom is my first choice.	50.3	37.8	11.9
	Google Classroom appeals to me as a learning endeavor and incentive booster.	31.9	48.9	19.2
	Average	43.9	41.7	14.4

Table 4. Students' perceptions on their parents' support

Indicator	Questions	(strongly) Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	(strongly) Disagree (%)
Parents' support	I receive a lot of support in using Google Classroom from my parents	27.4	38.5	34.1
	My parents help me solve technological problems	14.8	25.2	60
	My parents buy me high quality devices and good Internet connection.	63.7	31.8	4.5
Average		35.5	31.8	32.7

It can be seen from the above tables that, on average, most students found it easy to access GC (71.9% strongly agree or agree). Besides, more than half of the students found it useful to use GC for their learning. The average perception of students' satisfaction with agreeing was a little higher than the neutral perception (43.9% and 41.7%, respectively). The proportion of

participants getting parents' support in terms of equipment investment was almost five times as much as that of getting assistance in terms of technical problems (63.7% in comparison with 14.8%). Only a small proportion of the students had difficulty accessing to GC, denied its usefulness, and were dissatisfied with the use of GC (5.3%, 7.4%, and 14,4 %, respectively).

Similarly, when interviewed, most students claimed that they started using it in 2020 when the first Covid-19 pandemic happened, and it was easy to access. They can use GC almost anywhere and at any time just with a google account, a smartphone or a computer to register. The researchers also found out from the interview that students used GC to receive and retain lectures and materials from their teachers, submit homework, take part in regular tests and get teacher's feedback on their work. One student shared: *"GC helps me study better because it enables me to remember my deadlines apart from allowing me to review my lessons, get assignments and submit my homework"*. Interestingly, before using GC, all of the interviewed students answered that they had used Zoom and a majority of students admitted that it was more suitable, user–friendly, and effective for English learning because they were not kicked out of the room in the middle; instead, they were able to interact directly with their teachers, post their recorded presentation, practice listening through e-books or slides shown by their teachers, get homework immediately, do online test as required, complete and submit their products and get feedback from teachers, and got their English skills improved quite a lot. Students also shared that GC enabled them to become more productive and efficient in terms of time, thanks to real-time reminders provided by their teachers. Only two interviewed students complained that GC lacked some interactive functions like Zoom and one of them emphasized that teachers should combine using GC and other tools to make lessons more interesting. In addition, almost all students were satisfied with GC and wished to continue learning online with it in case of a prolonged epidemic because GC proved helpful to them. In terms of parents' support, the researchers found out that students hardly got assistance when they were unable to log into the Classroom, their microphone or camera did not work, and so on and so forth, but they got an investment in Internet-connected devices.

In short, the findings, despite not being in line with the study result by Hung (2021) in which students reluctantly accepted online learning, are consistent with those from previous studies by Shaharanee and Rodzi (2016), Muslimah (2018), Peter Ong et al. (2020), and Pratiwi (2019). A majority of the students, despite getting little help with technical problems, found it easy and efficient to use GC in learning English thanks to its user-friendly interface with cyber class. Not only does GC help them interact with their teachers smoothly without interruption, approach materials in a blink of an eye, and retain materials, but it also enables them to join games, do online tests, submit their assignments and get their teachers' feedback easily. This made them have fun, love learning English, and comprehend the subject better. They were especially willing to continue learning online if the epidemic was prolonged.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study mentioned four criteria of students' perceptions of GC, including accessibility, usefulness, students' satisfaction, and parents' support. Overall, findings from the questionnaire relatively match those from the interview, and they show that almost all students hold positive perceptions of employing GC for English learning. Therefore, GC should be widely applied in online teaching and learning at high schools. More importantly, to make full use of the digital tool, high schools and teachers need to provide students with training sessions on how to use the digital tool and solve malfunctions occurring in the process of learning

beforehand in case they lack parents' assistance in dealing with technical problems when learning online at home. Also, teachers can combine GC with other mediums of online learning to facilitate their students' learning in accordance with their potential, learning styles, and diverse learning needs through the use of the platform.

Though the worst time of the Covid-19 pandemic seems to be over worldwide, the study is still expected to be helpful to teachers, students as well as researchers wishing to exploit GC for different educational models such as blended learning or distance learning during disadvantaged circumstances such as natural disasters, extreme weather, an outbreak of some other disease, tough locations, or even war.

Further study should focus on the perceptions of teachers of English as well as other subjects and parents on using GC to have a more comprehensive view of the matter.

Acknowledgment

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Biodata

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