

University of Tartu
Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Education
Curriculum: Educational Technology

Marika Soltys

INTEGRATION OF TECHNOLOGY INTO AN ESL WRITING LESSON AT A LANGUAGE
SCHOOL: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

MA Thesis

Supervisor: Emanuele Bardone

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Abstract

Motivating students to write in English is one of the many challenges of an online, for-profit language school classroom. Course instructors are presented with a wealth of learning approaches to writing, and an even larger selection of technology. This study explores the process of designing a writing lesson for an online classroom using questionnaires to select a learning approach for ESL writing (process-genre approach) and a technological tool (Google Docs and Google Slides) to implement the selected approach. The lesson is then evaluated from the perspective of instructor and students through class observations, one-on-one interviews, and the written products of the class. Themes that are explored include collaboration, peer revision, and “real-life” tasks.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Topic

Writing is an essential skill required in business, academic, and personal situations. Contemporary college students prefer text-messaging over spoken communication, and the ubiquity of texting and messaging apps remains popular even as new generations of students reach maturity (Ishii et al., 2017). Despite the pervasiveness of writing, this skill presents many issues when addressed in the English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. Zhu (2004) states that while most subject faculty agree that “important writing skills are important for career success, particularly in terms of ‘selling ideas,’” neither language instructors or content course faculty seem to want to take responsibility for teaching writing in academic situations. The ambiguity surrounding who should teach writing and how it should be taught is exacerbated by the abundance of theories and approaches that can be applied to teaching this skill, lack of clarity on assessment and how to give feedback, and mundane issues plaguing teachers of all language classes: mixed-level classes, difficulty with motivation, limited or difficult materials, and strict time constraints (Moses & Mohamad, 2019).

The difficulty with teaching writing in the ESL class is compounded by the speed with which new technological developments are implemented, leaving course instructors with the responsibility of choosing which tools are applied in the classroom. Due to the realities of a global pandemic, the format of learning has changed dramatically in the last year, as many language schools have moved to online learning without planning on moving back to their brick-and-mortar classrooms. Course designers and instructors must account for what was lost during this shift, especially as the design of contemporary language learning materials, even those offered through websites, are not yet adapted to teaching situations that are fully online. On the bright side, the abundance in technology and changes in teaching have also brought new possibilities, broadening the field of explorations into the affordances of online teaching. With this shift, many lines of inquiry have been opened regarding the optimal way of teaching specific skills and topics. Research that was relevant before the paradigmatic shift caused by the pandemic may not address the needs of a post-pandemic society. A significant amount of

formalized research needs to be done in this field, as institutions, businesses, and course instructors have not yet developed best practices.

1.2 Research Statement

Considering the changing nature of written communication and the use of modern developments in education, the purpose of this action research project is to examine the process of writing through the prism of educational technology. The problem which inspired this inquiry was my observation that adult students in previous schools and the for-profit language school where I currently work are reluctant about doing writing assignments, even though they ask to be assigned writing tasks for homework. They rarely submit written tasks for feedback. Following from this problem, the guiding research questions for the project were:

RQ1: How should a writing lesson be designed for the commercial non-university ESL classroom in a way that will increase student engagement and help them achieve their writing and language goals?

RQ2: Which tool should be chosen to teaching writing in a commercial, non-university ESL classroom? What affordances does the online teaching tool provide?

The intervention aimed to produce an artifact to address problems that have been observed in current students and educators within a private language school in Warsaw, Poland.

The originality of the study lies in its focus on adult students who have enrolled in a language course at a for-profit business, which means that these learners may have different motivation for taking English courses and completing assignments than those typically observed in research on ESL courses. Typically, research focuses on high school or university students who do not have a choice in whether they are enrolled in a language course.

In the first part of the study, the participants were administered a questionnaire to determine their attitudes towards learning writing. The questionnaire was based on contemporary theories and approaches, as sourced from the literature review. Information from the questionnaire allowed the author of the study to develop a writing lesson based on student preferences and the S

framework, with consideration for the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge of the instructor. After participating in the class, students were interviewed to determine if the writing class aligned with their needs as digital communicators. This allowed the author of the study to develop a list of recommendations for future interventions and subsequent iterations of the tool. The action research in this study required a mixed methods design that included questionnaires and interviews, resulting in qualitative data for analysis:

- i) Needs-analysis questionnaire to measure student attitudes and preferences
- ii) Design of lesson based on questionnaire responses and SECTIONS model for selecting classroom technology
- iii) Implementation of lesson and class observation
- iv) Interviews with students
- v) Analysis of responses and emergent themes

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Issues that need to be understood for the context of the study include the nature of writing (and which processes are involved), which models and approaches to teaching writing have been applied, and what are some obstacles for students and teachers in writing tasks.

2.1 *Challenges of ESL writing*

Writing in any language is regarded as a difficult skill and complex task, but the process of L2 writing is even more complicated as it contains many idiosyncrasies that are not present in L1 writing. Many authors have identified areas of difficulty in this field in different contexts (Adas & Bakir, 2013; Al-Gharabally, 2015; Grabe & Kaplan, 1996); For example, Kormos (2012) approaches the subject from the perspective of self-regulation, stating that states that one of the key challenges of writing is that it requires concentration and determination, and it can a long time to produce, as the production of words orally takes a minute while writing a text of 100 words may take thirty minutes or more. A student may also encounter fewer situations where they have no choice but to answer in writing; oral responses are met more frequently in daily life. For this reason, student's motivation and self-regulatory patterns play an important role in

whether they will participate in a writing tasks, and if so, how much effort will they put into the various phases of the writing process.

Aziz (2019) also notes the cognitive challenges that writing poses, noting that advanced users of English as a second language can “struggle to produce a good writing piece due to lack of knowledge in generating and organizing ideas and to present their writing with good coherence.” Not only does a writer need to generate an idea, but they must also understand the basic systems of a language: the grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and vocabulary with the correct spelling and formatting. These issues are a problem for many students who are at the beginning stages of their ESL path. At a higher level of complexity, a writer needs to understand the style pertaining to a particular form of writing and the understanding of the target audience. Finally, both teachers and students struggle with changes in the conventions of communication, as digital forms of writing have replaced texts which were previously written by hand, typewriter, means that are less flexible and less social. To summarize the variety of issues, Normazidah, Lie and Hazita (2012) indicate that “all ESL students face more complicated problems, which may be either cultural or linguistic.”

The complexity of writing has given rise to several theories and teaching approaches that are in use today.

2.2 Theories of teaching writing

The terminology that teachers use in their educational philosophies is based in theoretical grounding that vary in their view of writing and how they see its development. According to Hodges (2017), writing theory is shifting from “a focus on mechanics and form to a focus on creativity and sociability.” This shift is reflected in the key theories useful for implementation of research-based practices: the cognitive process theory of writing, sociocultural theory of writing, social cognitive theory, and ecological theory.

One of the most pertinent theories that is discussed today is the cognitive process theory of writing. This theory, developed in the eighties by Flower and Hayes (1981), focuses on the mental processes that occur during writing. The emphasis is placed on thinking processes, a higher-order system of organization among these processes, goal setting, and awareness of macro- and micro-goals in the completion of the writing task. Writing reflects the non-linear

nature of cognition, as a writer revisits different steps during composition. Elements include an understanding of audience, purpose, and motivation, perhaps. Strategies that are encompassed by this theoretical model include informal brainstorming exercises to avoid writer's block, graphic organizers, idea banks, and unstructured writing with a focus on generating ideas before revisiting, revising, and editing the writing.

The sociocultural theory, based on the work of Vygotsky (1980), takes a more externalized focus on writing, contrasting to the cerebral focus of the cognitive process theory. The sociocultural theory of writing emphasizes motivation, affect, and social influences. This theory emphasizes writing as a collaborative, social activity where the purpose of writing is to use language for social and cultural interactions. In Vygotsky's terminology, novice writers learn from a more knowledgeable other (MKO), who can be a peer, teacher, or other writer. In this theory, writing is also seen as a way to learn about content knowledge through taking notes, summaries or journal entries. Interaction, rather than the product itself, is prioritized, and strategies based in this theory include collaboration on writing activities using online tools, active participations in all stages of the writing process, and conferencing about feedback. In the social cognitive theory, as described by Bandura (2001), self-efficacy, or a student's belief that they can complete a task even when faced with a challenge, is the foundation for academic motivation. Self-efficacy can be determined by interpretation of previous performance, models and observation of others, social persuasions, and emotional states (Bandura 2001; Pajares 2003). The responsibility of the instructor applying this theory is to change the beliefs of the students in relation to their own writing. Strategies that stem from this theory include modeling writing, along with giving the students a choice in topics and activities to allow greater autonomy. This theory stresses self-regulation, self-belief and emotions as necessary elements of communication.

The Ecological Theory takes a view of writing as an experience that is central to a person's holistic experience as a member of society. This theory, based in both cognitive and social interactions, has been borrowed from research in sociology, psychology, and human development, and applied to the complex process of writing. In this theory, human development is affected by proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner and Evans 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Morris 1998), meaning that in order to develop, a person must interact with other people, objects, and symbols in their environment. As students are influenced by family, friends, local communities

and governments, the writing experience is reflected in these interactions, and students are encouraged to view writing as important and culturally relevant. Some applications rooted in this theory are the building of a writing-conscious environment through research on vocabulary, practicing writing as a daily experience through journals, reporting news, or generating posters based on content learned in class. The expectation is that students write often to normalize writing as a necessary element of social participation. Another application is the development of reading skills to learn from mentor texts through the application of critical analysis, with students mimicking the styles of a text in their own writing.

None of the four theories alone can fully contain all elements of writing. While the cognitive theory addresses the through processes that occur within the students as they write, it omits the outside factors such as motivation and the student's social milieu. Sociocultural theory explains the influence of culture and social relationships on writing, but ignores the processes occurring in the mind. Therefore, a successful English course will focus on combining strategies based in different theories to diversify the learning process through a variety of approaches.

2.3 Approaches to teaching writing

The theories of teaching writing provide schemes and define elements to describe the process of writing, while the approaches discussed in this section show how the theories can be applied in the classroom. There are four main approaches to teaching writing in use today: product approach, process approach, genre approach, and process genre approach (Badger & White, 2000; Klimova, 2014). There have been many studies examining the efficacy of these methods in different learning situations, often in the context of university practice.

Table 1: Comparison of Approaches to Teaching Writing

	PROCESS	PRODUCT	GENRE	PROCESS- GENRE
GUIDING FOCUS	Writing is a thinking process, with many stages which are often repeated.	Create a product.	Create a product	Both process and purpose of writing are considered.

THEORETICAL BASIS	Cognitive process theory	Social Cognitive theory	Sociocultural theory of writing	Cognitive and sociocultural theories; ecological view
ELEMENTS	Prewriting; Peer and teacher feedback; Revision (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2004)	Study of “model” composition; Measure of students’ product against specific criteria (Brown, 2001)	Examine authentic text, analyze grammar or vocabulary patter, consider social context/audience, produce text (Badger & White, 2000)	Combination of writing steps and revision with analysis of text and social context. (Badger & White, 2000)

For a detailed review of contemporary studies, see Al-Hammadi & Sidek (2015), Aziz & Selveraj (2019) or Annamalai (2016).

The process approach sees a text as a resource for comparison, rather than a model. It presupposes that there will be more than one draft, and the process begins with an idea that is developed through collaboration with peers. Care is taken to focus on purpose, theme, and text type, and emphasis is placed on the reader. The process approach has been used more commonly, focusing on the process of composition rather than the form.

The product approach differs from the process approach through its focus on the presentation of a model text, which is then discussed and analyzed to extract the structure, linguistic features and organization of a text. The product approach results in the creation of a single draft, individualized product which imitates the features of the model text.

A genre-based approach views writing as a social and cultural product. Like the product approach, its focus is on the final product. Specifically, this approach emphasizes the reader’s expectations and the social purpose behind the writing by contextualizing the writing for the audience and specific purpose. In this form of instruction, the teacher may also focus on making textual conventions transparent to the student (Hasan & Akhand, 2011).

Hasan & Akhand have compared the effects of product and process approaches to writing on learners’ performance, indicating that the blend of product and process outperformed either product or process approach alone (2011). A limitation in the process approach was that students

faced problems brainstorming and organizing ideas, while the product approach resulted in good imitations, but the success was not reproduced in the exam hall. They recommend a blending of the two approaches, taking elements to ensure independent writing success in students.

2.4 Digital solutions to teaching writing; Examples of previous topics and studies

Digital solutions to teaching writing are a popular topic, especially in research examining the affordances that different technologies may provide for academic writing (Özdemir, 2021; Strobl et al., 2019). Studies in this field have explored student and instructor attitudes towards the technology, and the advantages, detrimental effects and limitations that each tool can have in the teaching and learning of specific writing skills (Joseph & Khan, 2020).

A popular area of research is the analysis of messaging apps, such as *WeChat*, *Whatsapp*, and *Facebook Messenger*. Winet (2016) analyzes all three to show the affordances that such tools can provide in the classroom, claiming that the use of messaging apps can “accelerate the learning process *and* [sic] increase students’ satisfaction with that process.” However, the author’s perspective may be rather optimistic, as it needs further quantitative or qualitative evidence to support its claims. Alahmad (2020) summarizes several studies which examined the use of Telegram, another messaging app, to learn English, especially in its ability to teach English vocabulary. Students are exposed to lexical items by the number of channels. However, the potential of Telegram for learning writing has not yet been explored thoroughly. Although messaging apps are used for everyday communication, their utility for teaching writing remains limited as this form of communication remain unstructured. This limitation may exist due to the lack of strict adherence to rules of grammar or social conventions when sending short messages via these informal pathways of communication.

More complex social media websites seem to have greater potential for writing instruction. Websites such as Facebook, VKontakte or real-time file sharing platforms such as Google Drive are based on lateral structures that allow them to serve as a learning management system for the storage of files, creation of threads and ability to correct one’s own posts or to comment on others. Among these, Google Drive stands out for its ability to collaborate on writing project simultaneously. Slavkov (2015) describes the features and affordances of Google Drive, even providing a template for a writing course based on a sociocultural perspective,

viewing humans as “collaborative social actors.” This study supports the belief that Google Drive has many advantages for teaching writing. In a similar way, Barrot (2016) measured the efficacy of Facebook as an e-portfolio by surveying 171 students and concluding that the e-portfolio had a positive impact on student writing abilities. However, there are several disadvantages to these platforms, such as issues with privacy and “appropriateness” of access to online profile and plagiarism. Certainly, no student should be forced to create a profile and they should participate only if they feel comfortable (Md Yunus et al., 2012).

Another tool category that has been used for writing instruction is translation technology, especially free online machine translation (FOMT) tools. Overreliance on these tools and the potential for academic dishonesty. A study by Niño (2009) states that although most instructors tell their students to avoid using online translators, students still rely on these tools to create quick drafts. However, for instructors who choose to focus on the pre- and post-editing process, raw MT output can be used as input for written production to increase L2 competence. New studies focus on the integration of FOMT tools in the classroom and the creation of guidelines for best practices, as student reliance on online translators seems inevitable (Niño, 2009).

Finally, computer-mediated tools allow opportunities for synchronous and asynchronous feedback on writing. However, there seems to be a lack of consensus on whether technology-supported feedback is superior to face-to-face feedback, with users exhibiting both positive and negative views of this type of interaction (Chen, 2016). Interestingly, in a study by Cunningham (2019), students expressed their preference for video feedback over text feedback, also indicating that less clarification was needed with video feedback. The future of feedback may lie in video rather than text-based technology.

To summarize, various technological tools have been used to teach writing skills in the contemporary classroom. Depending on the affordances of the tool, they can be used to teach lexical elements, pre- and post-editing, and feedback.

2.5 Media Selection: SECTIONS Model

There is no single theory or process that has been developed for media selection yet, probably because the selection of media involves the interaction of a wide range of variables. Bates (2018)

offers the SECTIONS model, an acronym for students, ease of use, cost, teaching and media selection, interaction, organizational issues, networking, and security and privacy.

When choosing media, it is important to consider student demographics, accessibility of the technology, and the question of how individual students learn. The choice of technology should be different based on the profile of the student, and it should be accessible on the devices that the student already has. This is true especially in the context of the for-profit language school, where clients are already paying a significant sum of money for tuition; it is unreasonable to ask a client to pay for equipment. At minimum, the students must have a device that can connect to Zoom: a tablet, computer, or mobile phone. The students should be able to connect to the lessons with webcam. However, the teacher may turn off their camera in cases where the video is lagging because of a weak internet connection. When choosing the media, we must consider all potential scenarios. Ideally, the technology will also be accessible to people who have problems with eyesight or other disabilities, meeting accessibility standards. Finally, in terms of individual differences, the media should accommodate all types of internet users: digital natives, digital immigrants, late adopters, and a wide range of people with different levels of experience with online learning.

Ease of use should also be considered, especially in classes that are short, as teachers and students cannot afford to use time learning how to use software or devices. Orientational training should be provided to make new technology transparent, but it should not obscure the focus of the lesson. The interface design should be intuitive, and the range of features should be limited to relevant features so as not to confuse students with an overwhelming amount of choice. At the language school, language instructors are also responsible for teaching students any new technology that is used in the classroom.

The cost categories of educational media are present in the development (production, instructor, copyright clearance, instructional designer costs), delivery (time spent with students, support, TAs), maintenance, and infrastructure (Bates, 2018). The most critical cost factor is time, as the more complex a technology is, the more time it takes to implement. Online teaching may seem like a more cost-efficient option, but preparation and moderation of online materials in ways that are accessible to a diverse body of students may be too time consuming to be used repeatedly (Rumble, 2001). Cost is important to consider, as it may be a limiting factor in the type of technology that is chosen.

Another crucial element of effective educational technology is the design. By identifying the correct combinations of multimedia, we can provide effective teaching experience that will be cognitively appropriate for students. Mayer's (2002) principles of multimedia learning offer guidelines on how a technology should be designed for optimal utility, such as multimedia, spatial and temporal contiguity, coherence, modality, redundancy, pre-training, signaling, and personalization. Effective design is dependent on all the other variables.

Interaction as an affordance of a digital technology is the fifth element of the SECTIONS model. According to Maier, affordance-based design allows designers to identify affordance factors for an object and establish design strategies. For example, a technological item may be inherently designed for interaction, such as simulations or face-to-face seminars, while other interactions may be designed into the way the tool is used, such as textbooks, online discussion forums or group work. In other instances, interaction is learner-generated, such as in YouTube videos or social media. Even an old tool can be redesigned for the sake of novel ideas. A technology allows participants to interact between each other, some material, or the teacher, and the potential for these interactions should be considered when choosing a technology. The responsibility of the designer is to draw out instances where interaction may occur, especially in terms of giving feedback (Bates, 2018).

Organizational issues related to the choice of technology are considered at the institutional level. For example, some technology may require the help of an expert, and an institution should be prepared to hire a technologists or other support to help with troubleshooting.

Networking is another factor that needs to be considered when choosing a technology. Some instructors may prioritize the opportunities that a technology offers for learners to network and help them benefit from making such connections. This factor is related to the way that social media is used today by erasing the line between private life and professional connections. This element may also be connected to motivation.

Security and privacy are one of the major ethical issues related to technology today, so they should also be considered. The classroom should be a private space that protects students from private companies and government agencies collecting data, bullying, and other risks. Technology should be secure and protected by passwords, and there should be a code of how to behave appropriately. There is also a cultural dimension to privacy, as different cultures may

have different perceptions of what is appropriate. Ultimately, some tools are more open and public than others, so the instructor should consider the level of risk they want to impose on their students.

The SECTIONS model approaches selection of a new technology comprehensively, so I chose it as a way to select the technology used in this study.

3 DESCRIPTION

3.1 Initial Questionnaire

Several research instruments were used in the study to provide a diverse set of perspectives over time. An initial pre-class questionnaire was distributed to all B1-B2 students enrolled in the researcher's classes to determine their attitudes and preferences towards writing. The questionnaire provided insight into the types of activities that students prefer to see when learning how to write, but also how they conceptualize the process of writing (i.e. is it a social activity). This prerequisite information allowed for the design of a writing lesson plan. A link to the questionnaire was shared in class, and also sent by email. The copy of the survey can be found in the appendix.

The questionnaire was sent to 23 adult students participating in B1-B2 level English courses with 13 responses.

3.1.1. Writing Approach Preferences

The questionnaire was developed based on the approaches defined in the literature (product, process, genre, or process-genre), with each question reflecting one of the approaches. For example, a response expressing strong agreement with the question "When I write in English, I always think about the audience" indicates that the student might prefer a genre approach when learning how to write.

Attitudes towards different elements of writing approaches were measured using a Likert scale. The "Writing preferences" section of the questionnaire included ten statements, with which a participant should agree or disagree with on a scale of 1-5 (1-strongly disagree, 2-

disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, 5-strongly agree). The justification for the non-reflective format is because previous researchers have indicated that surveys involving a high number of open-ended questions resulted in a lower response rate (Dheram & Rani, 2008). The data should be approached qualitatively and not quantitatively due to the small sample size.

The following chart indicates the statement and the approach preference if a participant chose “agree” or “strongly agree”, with the calculations of average responses.

Table 2: Results of Pre-Class Questionnaire

APPROACH	SURVEY STATEMENT	AGREEMENT LEVEL
PROCESS	1. Creating many drafts of a text is a necessary element of learning how to write.	53.9% agree or strongly agree
GENRE	2. When I write in English, I always think about the audience.	50% agree
GENRE	3. I always study authentic examples of writing before I write something myself.	61.6% agree or strongly agree
PROCESS	4. Peer feedback is necessary when learning how to write.	69.3% agree or strongly agree
PROCESS	5. Teacher feedback is necessary when learning how to write.	91.7% agree or strongly agree
PROCESS	6. When writing, the process I more important than the product	46.2% agree or strongly agree
PRODUCT	7. When learning how to write, the product is more important than the process.	30.8% agree or strongly agree
PROCESS	8. I always take notes or make a plan before writing.	46.2% agree or strongly agree
GENRE	9. Writing is a social activity.	53.9% agree or strongly agree
PRODUCT	10. The structure of a text is the most important part of writing.	46.2% agree or strongly agree

The questionnaire indicates that students were most enthusiastic about teacher feedback and peer feedback, both which are elements of the process approach. Students also agree that

studying examples and models of writing are necessary steps when writing, indicating a preference for methods used in the genre approach. The question “Writing is a social activity” seems to have effected an inconclusive response, perhaps because the term “social activity” is rather unclear and may have led to different interpretations. Only half of respondents stated that they think about the audience when they create a text (genre approach). Students were also split on what is more important: process or product. However, the responses seemed to show disagreement with the tenets of product approach, as few agreed that the product is more important than process or that the structure of a text is the most important part of writing.

Outtake for lesson preparation: The lesson plan should take the process-product approach to teaching writing because student attitudes aligned most with the elements offered within these approaches. The lesson should include teacher and peer feedback, model examples and multiple drafting processes.

3.1.2 Task preferences

The “Task preferences” section of the questionnaire asked about which tasks a student might want to perform to improve their own writing. Although a participant may be unable to create a task for themselves, they may have some opinions on what writing lessons tasks have been effective for their learning or what may seem attractive to them. This opinion could be considered in the task design for this study in terms of student motivation.

The preferred tasks indicated by students include:

- More reading (9 responses)
- Writing in class (7 responses)
- Perform real-life tasks (6 responses)
- Teacher feedback (2 responses)
- Peer feedback (2 responses)
- Watch films (1 response)
- Repeating grammar (1 response)
- Use visual prompts (1 response)
- Making an outline (1 response)

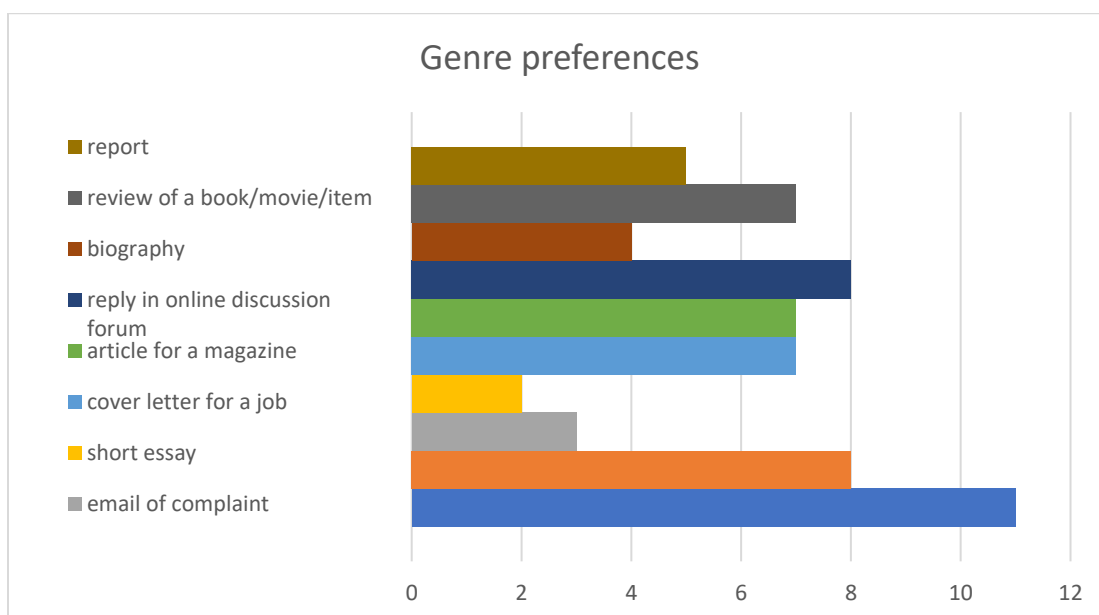
Respondents indicated “more reading” as a task that they believe would benefit their writing skills. This may mean that they would like more external input, such as vocabulary and structure, before trying to produce their own text. “More reading” can also be interpreted as a request for more models.

Outtakes for lesson preparation: The lesson should incorporate class time dedicated to writing.

3.1.3 Genre preferences

The “Genre preference” section of the survey asked about which genre of writing a student might find the most useful when learning English. For example, students may want to focus on formal and informal emails instead of how to write an article or a report if they have no need for this format in their daily life. The genres were selected from a B1/B2 CEFR curriculum. The participants could choose more than one option. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Genre Preferences



The results of the survey indicated that the participants would prefer to learn how to write formal/informal emails and replies in online discussion forums. The responses indicate that student needs are based in modes of writing that have emerged because of online communication. Therefore, Zoom courses may provide an even more authentic context writing

than in-person classes. Most students chose “formal email” as the genre they would find most useful to learn. It should be noted that this category is broad and can contain different sub-categories, such as formal letter of complaint, request, resignation, inquiry, making a claim, acceptance letter, and apology.

3.1.4. Disadvantages of questionnaire

A disadvantage of the questionnaire is that participants who did not fill out the survey may also be least likely to complete additional writing assignments, and their opinions and motivations are omitted from consideration. The information about non-responders would be valuable in the creation of a lesson plan that aims to encourage all students to write. Another disadvantage of the questionnaire may be that students interpreted the statements differently. The questionnaire is also only a measure of attitude towards the subject on a specific day, and may not be representative of student attitudes overall, especially as the sample size is small.

3.2 *Writing lesson design*

In the initial questionnaire, almost all students indicated that they would like to learn how to write a formal email. Therefore, the aim of the class was to learn how to write a formal complaint email. The complaint email was chosen by the instructor as they are rather difficult. In addition to appropriate grammar, vocabulary and spelling, effective letters of complaint demonstrate a courteous and complementary formal tone (Kuimova & Nikiforov, 2016). The learning outcomes were to analyze the elements of an email of complaint and to compose a semi-formal email of complaint.

The results of the questionnaire also showed that the teaching approach that was most in line with the expectations of the students was the process-genre approach. Badger and White (2000) and Yan (2005) define the process genre approach procedure into six steps: preparation, modeling, planning, joint constructing, independent constructing, and revising. The lesson plan was based on these steps:

1) Preparation: Teacher defines a situation requiring a specific type of written text, activating schemata which allow students to anticipate the structures of the text that define the genre. In this section, the text is placed within a specific social context:

- 2) Modeling: The teacher introduces a genre model and discusses who the audience will be, along with the social purpose of the text. The structure and organization of the text is discussed, and this may be where comparisons between other texts or genres are introduced.
- 3) Planning: In this step, the students brainstorm, discuss, and read material associated with the writing task. The aim of this section is to motivate students by developing their interest in the topic, especially by relating it to their experience.
- 4) Joint Constructing: Teacher and students work together to write the text, including the implementation of brainstorming, drafting and revising. The product created in this section may serve as a model for further independent constructing, as the teacher helps generate the text and make it available to all students as an example to follow.
- 5) Independent Constructing: After examining models and constructing a joint text, students can compose their own text based on a related topic. This may happen in class so teacher can monitor, or for homework.
- 6) Revising: The draft that students have created is revised through peer feedback facilitated by the teacher. The teacher may publish the final draft to promote a sense of achievement and authenticity.

As an instructional designer, I used a deductive approach because I already had some idea of what could potentially work in my classroom based on previous experiences with these students and knowledge of resources available. I chose to explore Google Docs and Google Slides, both rather common tools. My aim was to extract as much interactivity as possible and to explore the affordances that these tools could provide in the context of a writing lesson. Table C describes Google Docs and Google Slides in terms of the issues presented for consideration in the SECTIONS model (Table 3):

Table 4: Comparison of Google Docs and Google Slides vis a vis SECTIONS model

ISSUE	GOOGLE DOCS	GOOGLE SLIDES
STUDENTS	The students are adults. Most but not all students possess some digital skills, as it is a preselected demographic who is willing to take online language courses. They are from a	See Google Docs.

	<p>demographic of digital immigrants. Students have laptop, phone or tablet connected to the internet as it is the only way they can connect through Zoom. However, the flexibility with adopting new technological solutions may vary.</p> <p>Expectations and attitudes towards learning were examined in the pre-class questionnaire.</p>	
EASE OF USE	<p>Google Docs mirrors most word processors with basic functions, so students have most likely had experience with similar technologies. Google Docs is reliable as it contains Autosave, so students have access to the updated version as long as they are connected to WIFI and have the link.</p> <p>Google Docs may not be as easy to use on the phone when Zoom is open.</p> <p>A risk may be that the file that a group is working on may accidentally get deleted or lost.</p>	<p>Slides is more complex than Docs as students can switch between slides, which may not be intuitive for some students and they may feel lost. Slides may also not work that well with Zoom, with students who use screenshare having an advantage as they can coordinate to be on the same page.</p> <p>Some students do not know how to use this function in Zoom. Therefore, compatibility of Slides with Zoom may be an issue.</p>
COST	<p>This software is free.</p> <p>Creating a new document takes little effort, but writing the content may be time-consuming, depending on the volume and level of creativity and originality that the author wants to use.</p>	<p>See Google Docs.</p>
TEACHING AND MEDIA SELECTION	<p>In terms of the process-genre approach, the pedagogical characteristics of Google Docs can provide a digital environment with simultaneous access to the document for all of the participants involved.</p>	<p>Google Slides can offer easy access to several images or “pages” at once. Students can view examples posted on different slides and toggle between them for comparison, fulfilling the <i>modeling</i> part of the process-genre approach.</p>

INTERACTION	<p>Google Docs may provide student-student and student-instructor interactions, along with student-content interactions through the ability to access features simultaneously. In combination audio or video, students can work on a file simultaneously and correct each other's writing in real time. They can also leave comments. Therefore, the affordances for interaction can help students with <i>joint constructing</i>.</p> <p>The teacher can also monitor students and leave comments in real time. The teacher can also use the editing mode to show changes.</p>	<p>Google Slides offers similar student-student and student-instructor opportunities.</p>
ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES	<p>Google Docs can be distributed on the classroom level and does not require organizational support from the language school.</p>	<p>See Google Docs.</p>
NETWORKING	<p>Google Docs does not provide many networking features, as users are anonymous. However, students can share their documents with other students or people outside of the class if they wish.</p>	<p>See Google Docs.</p>
SECURITY AND PRIVACY	<p>Google does require the creation of a sign-in, even if the users do not have a Gmail account. Privacy of the files can be modified by the course instructor who either adds users to a list (which may take longer, as the instructor needs to collect the email addresses first) or by sharing a link after setting it to "Anyone with link can view." Users are anonymous when using the Doc.</p> <p>The danger of this software is that as anybody with the link can view, there may be people from outside of the class who can see the works in progress. However, the authors of the</p>	<p>See Google Docs.</p>

text are anonymous, except for the instructor, who is the “owner” of the file.

Students who are insecure about their writing may feel comforted that their files cannot be viewed by other students unless they have a link.

3.3 Class implementation

The lesson was implemented in four classes: B1.2 60 minutes (3 students: 2 female and 1 male, aged between 30 and 50), B2.2 60 minutes (3 students: all female), and B2.2 90 minutes (2 students: 1 male and 1 female). The students of an additional B2.2 objected strongly to a writing lesson. Most classes have a wide range of skills and competencies within the group, so the CEFR levels are not accurate indicators of student level or level of course materials. The classes were all in the same week, with the writing lesson substituting a “Culture” lesson that I plan for my groups every third lesson.

The lesson was followed in accordance with the instructions provided in Appendix D. However, some procedures were modified because of the small number of participants. The class had been originally planned for full groups, so the instructor had more time to monitor students and give instant feedback when observing a moment where students came to a wall.

3.4 Class observation

All classes followed the class plan. The school was reluctant to allow recording for outside purposes, so I took field notes while teaching. The lesson was designed so I had minimal teacher talk time, which gave me the time and space for simultaneous notetaking.

In all the classes, the time for the joint constructing phase was lengthened, and individual constructing was assigned for submission for homework because writing in a group or pairs took more time than expected. When a writing lesson was proposed to the B2.2 C group, where the participants are older (55 and 70), there was strong opposition and the students stated they would rather spend time practicing conversation or working on grammar. The idea of a writing lesson

was abandoned (a phenomenon that may be interesting for further research.) The lesson was implemented in three classes, which typically have a maximum of 6 students enrolled. However, students were missing from almost all the classes, so pair work was modified for groups of three students when necessary. The length and participation in classes were as follows:

B1.2 (90 minutes) 3 out of 4 students

B2.2 A (60 minutes) 3 out of 6 students

B2.2 B (90 minutes) 2 out of 6 students

B2.2 C (Lesson not implemented due to strong protest of participants)

There were several phenomena and critical moments observed during the classes regarding lesson sequence and interaction with technology:

3.4.1 Ease of Use

First, some students in the class needed to take more time with technology. B1.2 took the longest and had the highest number of digital immigrants. The members of this group have probably had more experience with online education because they had been attending university classes online for almost a year. This is a group of digital natives to the ease of use may have been greatest for them. The B2.2 group had the most questions about the structure of the writing assignment, but least questions about technology.

3.4.2 Group Dynamics

Another observation is that group dynamics had a large part in how errors were addressed and how successful the group was in creating a proper email of complaint. For example, B2.2 A, which was a group made completely of women aged 19-21, had the strongest product with the least number of errors. They also completed the assignment the fastest. The B1.2 group had been a class together the longest and had the oldest participants, and the students in this group were more direct in the criticism of each other's ideas.

3.4.3 Understanding context of formal complaint

In terms of prior knowledge of formal complaints, students were unable to effectively give an appropriate example of a formal complaint when I first elicited examples. For example, when I

asked students to elicit examples, some examples that were offered were related to complaining to family members or friends, such as complaining to children about their manners or complaining in a film review. However, after reading the two examples provided in the Slides presentation, students understood the social context, register and form of a formal complaint email.

3.4.4 Joint constructing strategies

All groups adopted a similar method in the joint constructing phase, choosing one person to serve as the person responsible for writing down the text that the group agreed on and then dictated. The lowest CEFR class, B1.2, is also the group with the highest differences between the weakest and strongest students. Notably, they chose the person with the weakest English abilities to write the text, which may have contributed to the excessive length of time spent on this phase. The writer did not have the strongest English abilities in the group, and he made many mistakes. Another participant in the group commented that they are unable write and talk at the same time. In the B2.2 group, the person who was connecting through a computer was chosen to write down the text in Docs while the other participant dictated, connecting through phone. The B2.1 group chose the most confident participant as the person to write down the text in Docs while the rest of the group dictated. In groups B1.2 and B2.2 B, the individual who was placed in charge of writing had the most executive power, which meant that other voices were not always included in the writing. For example, the scribe was too distracted by writing the sentence correctly to hear what other group members were saying. The suggestions of the group members were better than the text, but by the time the scribe had finished writing the sentence, it was too late to go back to change it.

3.4.5 Instructor presence and role

An observed effect was that the presence of the instructor hampered groupwork. As a solution, I quickly moved the students to breakout rooms, even if the whole group was leaving the main session. I would join the Breakout Room after a few minutes as a muted observer, after group leaders had been established and the students were already discussing the assignment. The reluctance to begin groupwork in the presence of the instructor may have been because students were used to receiving instructions from me and relying on me for structure and support. In the

breakout room, the B1.2 group often switched to Polish to confirm instructions or vocabulary among themselves. However, the main language of communication remained English.

An issue that emerged for me as the instructor was when the appropriate moment was to give feedback. For example, as I was observing the students work together, I could also hear when they had reached an impasse in what phrasing to use next or when they were making errors, but I was uncertain if I should address the error immediately or if I should wait until they had finished the assignment. Another uncertainty was that I was not sure in what form the feedback should be given: comments in the document, highlighting phrases where there is an error, or interrupting the workflow of the speakers by giving feedback and information verbally during an impasse. With the B1.2 group, who had the more difficulty than the other groups, I intervened directly verbally by asking leading questions or by indicating which choice of wording is more appropriate for the context. This was because the group was taking a long time to complete the task, and I was worrying there would be no time left for feedback, so giving feedback as needed helped speed up the process. The other groups received my feedback at the end of the lesson.

3.4.6 Additional features

The use of Google Slides as a method of sharing information was successful in all groups, and all students could access these files. However, the students did not explore additional features that are included in Google Docs, such as autocorrect or additional features.

3.5 Interviews

Data for the interviews was collected deductively, as the respondents were presented thematically organized, pre-set questions around themes that were relevant to the research question. The questions were divided into two main themes: teaching approach and technology. In general, the students who were interviewed responded positively to the writing lesson, with one participant stating that she was pleased “*we finally had a writing lesson.*” The novelty of the writing lesson was noted by two participants, one of whom commented that “*it was something different.*” The students had writing assignments in the class, but they had never had a full lesson dedicated to a genre of writing. When prompted, all participants noted that they had never

learned how to write a letter of complaint before. When asked if lesson helped understand social context, participants generally agreed.

3.5.1 Learning approach

Participants felt rather positively about the examples and their function as a source of inspiration in the writing process. Two of the respondents commented that the first example was not as effective as the second example which was “*more authentic*” or “*probably would be successful*” because “*maybe the first sounded like a person complaining to friends.*” They had little to comment about how technology helped with modeling the structure of the letters of complaint, with one participant noting that they did not notice a difference in the way that information was presented from our regular lessons, as we have used slide presentation (PowerPoint) format in class all semester. In terms of lesson content, all participants commented that they found the explanation of greetings (Dear Sir or Madam versus Dear Mr. or Ms.) and signoffs clarifying, as they often find the nuances of communication and hedging, or the use of vague language, confusing. One student noted that this is useful information for all types of formal emails.

In terms of planning, participants responded positively to the template. They acknowledged the ability to save the template for generating future pieces of writing, with one participant saying “*it can be useful in more emails.*” They also felt positively about the images shared but did not comment on the technology. When asked about brainstorming, the question of authenticity emerged, as three participants agreed that an email to the mayor was a “real-life” writing task, while one respondent remained skeptical and questioned the authenticity of the task, claiming that “*I don’t think writing to the mayor is what I would do, maybe writing to someone who is more local government because the mayor wouldn’t read this.*”

Joint constructing took up the majority of the lesson time, so participants had the most to say about this part of the process. In this section, participants mentioned that in general, they enjoyed working on the writing in class. Participant 3 agreed that the joint writing assignment was “*fun and we could be creative*” and that they liked the topic of writing to the mayor of New York City to complain.

When asked about the usefulness of other students’ comments on their ideas, responses were mixed. Participant 1 stated that they would have probably made a better product if she had been working alone. This person said that they were frustrated because their writing partner did

not listen to suggestions and misinterpreted what was said to them. The participant expressed a feeling of impatience with the process. They also stated that they felt a bit like a teacher and expressed both positive and negative attitudes towards this: on the one hand, it was “*good to explain something to someone and repeat. It made me feel I knew things*” (Participant 4). On the other hand, “*my partner needed more help and took a long time*” (Participant 1). Another student said that they spoke a lot, an aspect they evaluated positively. The presence of teacher feedback was also noted,

Another criticism of the joint constructing portion was the timing. In the lower level B1 group, both participants stated that they thought that there was not enough time to practice writing in class and the lesson felt more rushed than normal, and maybe it would be better if the class was split over two class meetings. However, another participant from the same group enjoyed the faster pace.

In terms of comfort with peer-to-peer interaction in the joint constructing sections, students responded rather positively. Most participants indicated that it was not problematic for them, expressing either neutral or rather positive sentiments. However, another participant in a group where the average age of participants was lower stated that they did not want to make the hurt the feelings of other participants in the group, so they were hesitant to criticize their choices.

The participants were asked to do independent construction for homework. The task was to write an email of complaint to a local official demanding change in the neighborhood. By the time of the interview, only one student had completed the homework assignment. This participant, an interviewee, stated that she would like more writing assignments. The rest of the interviewees claimed they were planning on completing the writing assignment by the end of the semester (within a month of the submission of this thesis).

3.5.2 Technology

The second part of the interview addressed how Google Docs and Google Slides were used in the lesson along with student impressions and suggestions.

Three of the older participants stated that they never write in their current class, and the last time they wrote for an English class, they wrote their assignment by hand. Participant 1 stated that they practiced writing for an IELTS exam, but the assignments in the test were usually

uninteresting because “*reports are not useful for daily life*”. However, the fact that the writing was on the computer made the writing assignment “*a little more like real life or a real email.*” Some advantageous themes recognized by the participants include the relevance of technology-based lesson, ease of use, availability of information, simultaneous editing, and instantaneous feedback from the instructor.

All the participants indicated that they had used Google Docs before, in either academic or professional situations, so they were at an advantage in terms of ease of use. However, none of the participants had used Google Slides. All participants who were interviewed stated that they could easily open the Google Docs and Google Slides and access the files without using passwords. Participants noted that the interface of Google Docs and Google Slides is easy to understand and intuitive, and the features were robust enough for the class tasks involved.

Another theme that appeared among the interviewees was the accessibility to lesson material and information. Participants indicated that the ability to switch between slides to access information that was presented earlier in the lesson was very convenient for the writing process. They also valued the ability to return to slides after the lesson was finished. However, Participant 1 stated that the class moved through the presentation too quickly and he would like to have the information presented to him on a single page, because switching between slides and writing on Google Docs at the same time was inconvenient.

Finally, the reaction to teacher feedback was positive. Participants noted that the fact that I left comments on the side of the Word Document with alternate options was helpful. Participants also commented that the presence of the teacher in the breakout room was an advantage, but some time to work alone was also useful.

The response to Google Slides and Google Docs was positive in general, and all participants commented that the use of this technology is becoming easier and that they would like more lessons with this technology. Ultimately, they all commented that the most difficult part of the writing task was the writing itself, such as choosing the right phrases, vocabulary, and grammar. The structure was easier to understand, and technology use was the easiest element.

3.6 Joint constructing submissions

The results of the writing assignment were also considered and analyzed for grammar and vocabulary accuracy to compare with other groups.

3.7 Validity of data collection

The use of two data collection methods, class observation and student interviews, aimed to provide diverse perspectives on the same phenomenon and strengthen the credibility of the data. However, there may be some weaknesses and further study needs to be done.

First, the sampling size is very small for the interviews. The participants who volunteered for the interview tend to be more involved in classes, so their responses may not be representative of all students who participated in the writing classes.

Second, there may have been some critical moments that were missed during the class observation, as I was also leading the class while taking notes. A video recording of the class would be more convenient, but it was impossible to record the class over Zoom. For example, if I was recording and left to join a breakout room, the breakout room session would not be recorded. My computer does have screen recording, but it was proved unreliable in the past with issues such as not recording sound and freezing the computer. Therefore, taking notes by hand proved to be the most reliable method of collecting data for the study.

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Research Questions

The action research project addressed the creation of a writing lesson for a Zoom-based language school classroom. From the results gathered in the classroom observations and interviews, we can conclude that lesson created was effective to some extent. However, there are still some areas that could be improved and affordances that can be explored for a better teaching and learning experience.

In terms of the first research question about increasing student engagement and helping students achieve writing and language goals, the interviews and observations indicate that the writing lesson was successful in promoting engagement. Elements of the process-genre approach, presented in logical sequence, were effective in engaging all of the students in conversation and writing. As indicated in the interviews, participants mostly enjoyed the element of joint writing. They also reacted positively to the aspect of writing a letter to the mayor of New

York, as the participants perceived this assignment as a “real-life” task and had to consider a real audience of the letter instead of their course instructor. From the classroom observation, it was also apparent that students were engaged in analyzing the writing and the creative process through discussion about what is appropriate in the text, discussion of their own experiences with complaint letters, and questions about the examples of text and structure. In this way, the students moved beyond being passive recipients of knowledge, into discussing the social contexts and formal knowledge needed to create a text, to finally creating their own L2 artifacts. Moreover, the students immersed themselves in Badger and White’s (1999) definition of the process-genre approach, by searching for knowledge from “three potential sources: the teacher, other learners, and examples of the target genre.”

The positive attitude towards collaboration and emphasis on social interaction in the responses proved that sociocultural theory and ecological theory remain the best descriptor for what worldview adult learners of languages expect in an ESL classroom today, and lesson designers can appeal to their students and motivate their participation through including activities based in these theories (Bandura 2001; Bronhenbrenner and Evans 2000).

Achievement of writing and language goals was measured in the context of text co-creation, so it is impossible to determine if these goals were achieved at the individual level. However, the pieces of writing that were produced at the group level showed a near-native level of communication at the B2 level, with some minor errors with accuracy of vocabulary. The B1 group also produced a text beyond what is expected on the CEFR scale at this level, with some errors in vocabulary and grammar. In general, the content presented in the lesson (phrases and structure) were used correctly.

At the same time, there are some caveats to the assertion that the lesson could bring repeated success with other groups. Interest in the writing lesson may have stemmed from the novelty of the lesson, as the groups had not had a whole class dedicated to writing and focused solely on a genre in this format. Novelty is a major factor in enhancing motivation (Stockwell, 2013). It is yet to be determined whether the classroom engagement will be translated to the completion of writing tasks for homework. The lesson does not solve the issue of motivating students who are more reluctant to write, such as the group of students who strongly protested the writing lesson. Ultimately, the learners who sign up for a language course in a school are paying customers, and they have to determine for themselves whether learning how to write is

relevant to their language experience. If not, there is probably little a teacher can do to motivate these students.

The second question addressed the effectiveness of the technological tools that were chosen as part of the learning environment, Google Docs and Google Slides. These tools were chosen based on the pre-class survey and analyzed for appropriateness using the SECTIONS model, and their success was measured through class observation by the instructor and interviews with participants. Overall, the participants responded positively to the technology. However, the class observation indicated underutilization of the affordances provided by these tools.

First, the interviewees generally reported being pleased with practicing writing that was based on a digital context. Sometimes, students who are given writing assignments do the assignment by hand and submit a photograph or scan of their written work, even if the assignment is based on an online medium such as email or discussion board. However, this lesson was designed to be fully online, which helped provide a sense of authenticity to the writing. Perceived benefits of using authentic materials include increased motivation and cultural awareness, which are valuable traits in the classroom (Albiladi 2018).

Another positive element of Google Docs and Google Slides was the familiarity that most students had with these tools. Because Google Docs and Slides mirror other word processors and presentation software, they are rather intuitive even to people who had never used this specific tool before. The ease of use was important in allowing equal access to all participants, who had different experiences with technology, access to devices, availability of strong Wi-Fi connections, and other factors that cannot be controlled for in the Zoom-based classroom.

Finally, a positive element that participants reported was that it was easy for them to communicate with other people and to be on the same page with the other students, as the document could be screenshared and changes were made instantaneously. The consolidation of information in one (or two) places was valued by the participants as they did not have to switch between many documents or platforms. Google Slides allowed participants to easily maneuver between sections of the lesson and to view information that had been previously discussed in the lesson as references for writing.

However, the lesson observation revealed some shortcomings in the technology that were not immediately obvious to the participants. First, many of the affordances of Google Docs and Google Slides were underutilized. For example, students could have used the commenting feature to comment on their own work instead of discussing different options for suggestions verbally. One group spent a long time attempting to revise the document, but the person who was responsible for writing could not find the place in the text that was being discussed. The other students could have highlighted the phrases in question, or placed a note, or edited the writing themselves.

Another affordance that was underutilized was the ability to edit the document simultaneously. If one student was sharing their screen and writing, the other students did not need to have the document open. The students who were not the appointed scribe were discussing and dictating, but they were not practicing writing in English themselves. If the students were writing on the document simultaneously and correcting each other, the instructor would be able to see who contributed. Students were also logged in anonymously, which limited the ability of the instructor to track who was contributing which parts to the assignment, curbing the ability to give individualized, personalized feedback.

The affordances of the technology for feedback were also underutilized. As the course instructor, I preferred to give feedback verbally, which could be disruptive to the discussion within the group of students. The feedback was often explicit, which did not leave much responsibility for analysis to the students. Google Docs provides an array of tools to indicate errors, such as highlighting, changing the color of words, crossing out, among others.

To summarize, the lesson was successful, as can be evidenced in the positive feedback from students and the writing responses generated in the class. However, there were some opportunities that were missed that should be considered in further iterations of the writing assignment.

4.2 Recommendations for future practice

- 1) The writing class should be extended over two classes. Although there are limitations because students expect different materials with each class, a better class would extend over two meetings, as the individual writing could be performed in class. In this way, the instructor could

guarantee production from students and provide feedback. It would also give an opportunity for those who do not have time to practice outside of class to get a chance to write.

2) The lesson is missing an element of peer feedback on individual writing. This stage could be incorporated into a longer lesson.

3) Students should be familiarized the features of Google Doc before attempting to write. This would help them navigate through the document as they could use the features to indicate critical moments, give peer feedback and respond to feedback more quickly. Students can also use the autocorrect feature, at least to stimulate discussion about more accurate word choices.

4) Feedback should be given after the students complete their writing, giving them a chance to revise together. My feedback during the class was disruptive to the flow of the task, even when I left comments in the Google Doc and refrained from providing verbal feedback. It would be better to give feedback after the students had submitted their first draft.

5) Students should be informed that they are all required to contribute to the Google Doc, so that they are all involved in the writing process.

6) Students should be divided into groups of similar level. If the pairs or group are at different levels, the stronger students may become impatient with the weaker students, or weaker students may be excluded from the discussion. The group with the biggest disparity between strongest and weakest student created the weakest text.

7) Students should make an outline themselves. In the lesson, the students were given a template of an outline. However, students should take time to brainstorm in the planning stage of the lesson by taking notes and making their own outline to ensure that they understand all elements of the genre.

4.3 Future Directions in Research

Further research may focus in greater detail on the elements that appear as part of the writing lesson. Collaboration is a wide category, and there were some aspects in the lesson that were promoted while others were omitted. For example, while student-student interaction may have increased, reflection on one's own writing may have decreased because the focus of the

activity is directed outwards. Similarly, peer feedback is a wide concept with many elements, so further study can explore this concept in more detail.

Another aspect that can be explored is if other approaches to writing can also be adapted, and which elements of the approach are most necessary. For examples, further studies could do a comparative study to measure the differences between a group who does the lesson and one that is assigned a writing task without the collaborative, brainstorming or peer editing writing section. Such a study could help course instructors who have limited lesson lengths to prioritize the most productive and effective elements in a lesson. A quantitative study in this area could help researchers pinpoint areas that need to be addressed when planning a writing lesson.

As the sample size of students in this study was rather limited, further research could undertake a study on a larger number of students at the language school or across several language schools. Widening the context of research could allow for recommendations for language school policy.

4.4 Limitations of the study:

The study is limited to one iteration of the designed solution, due to the time limitations of the MA program. A longitudinal study of this matter could contribute to further knowledge of the long-term behavior of participants. Moreover, the study is only limited to one technological solution. In the future, a more robust comparative study could be done to determine the efficacy of different methods. Another limitation is that the study addresses only attitudes of the students, and does not examine whether the writing lesson contributes to real-world success, helping students achieve their professional goals. Interviews are limited to the students' own perception of their learning, with no comparative basis due to the small sample size. Additionally, the study is limited as it does not measure participants' academic achievements. It is a study of student attitudes, motivation and willingness of students to perform tasks rather than the results of these efforts.

5 CONCLUSION

Writing remains a challenge in the classroom. The process of creating a writing lesson in the context of a language school requires many compromises, for example in the length of time spent on a topic, the technology used, or how much effort can be asked and required of students. However, with technology, the process of teaching writing can become more relevant to the student through real-world assignments, collaboration and feedback from both peers and teachers, which may act as a motivating factor. This study has shown that with some modification, a combination of Google Docs and Google Slides has the potential to become a useful tool for executing a variety of learning approach in the classroom, including the process-genre approach.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently and that all contributions of other authors and supporters have been referenced. The thesis has been written in accordance with the requirements for graduation theses of the Institute of Education of the University of Tartu and is in compliance with good academic practices.

Name: Marika Soltys

Signature: _____

Date: June 5th, 2021

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Class Questionnaire

6/5/2021

Writing Survey

Writing Survey

Please answer the following questions. It should take you 5-10 minutes.

Writing preferences

Please say if you agree or disagree with these statements: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (agree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), 5 (strongly agree).

1. Creating many drafts of a text is a necessary element of learning how to write.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

2. When I write in English, I always think about the audience.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

3. I always study authentic examples of writing before I write something myself.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

4. Peer feedback is necessary when learning how to write.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

5. Teacher feedback is necessary when learning how to write.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

6. When writing, the process is more important than the product.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

7. When learning how to write, the product is more important than the process.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

8. I always take notes or make a plan before writing.

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

6/5/2021

Writing Survey

9. Writing is a social activity.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

10. The structure of a text is the most important part of writing.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly disagree Strongly agree

Task preferences

11. How do you think you can improve your writing? (more reading, looking at examples, more real-life tasks, writing in class, peer feedback, etc.) You may answer in Polish.

Genre preference

12. What type of writing in English would be most useful to you? You may choose more than one.

Check all that apply.

- formal email
 informal email
 email of complaint
 short essay
 cover letter for a job
 article for a magazine
 reply in online discussion forum
 biography
 review of a book/movie/item
 report

Other: _____

Thank you for filling out my survey!

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Appendix B: Writing Lesson Plan

Writing Lesson Plan		
<p>Class: B1.1-B2.2 # of Students: 2-6 adults Length: 60 min. Platform: Zoom; Google Slides; Google Docs Learning Outcomes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze the elements of an email of complaint. (analysis) 2. Compose a semi-formal email of complaint. (synthesis) 		
Stage of process-genre approach	Task	Procedure
Preparation (5-10 mins)	Discuss to provide social context for writing an email of complaint and to anticipate structural features.	<p>Students discuss in breakout rooms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you complain often? Do you know anyone who complains a lot? 1. What do people usually complain about? 2. Why do people complain? 3. Have you ever complained in a restaurant, hotel, airplane or train? 4. What is your complaining style: polite or aggressive? 5. Do you prefer making a complaint in-person, by phone or by e-mail? 6. Have you ever written an e-mail of complaint? Why? <p>As a class, talk about the difficulties related to email of complaint (being polite, difference between request and demand)</p>
Modeling (15 mins)	Read samples emails of complaint.	<p>In pairs, Ss are instructed to read the two texts and answer:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) What is the author complaining about? 2) How many problems and solutions does each author mention? 3) Do you think the recipient will do what the author wants them to do? 4) What tense is used to begin and end the email? <p>Link to the two texts and structure presentation: https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1sZj0BO1NyKK4w338FCtemtss_s19Teurmv1BjElWnwk/edit?usp=sharing</p>
	Discuss generic structure of text.	<p>After brainstorming as a class, teacher provides the students with the structure of the text via PPT presentation. Teacher guides the class slide by slide and explains nuances (which greetings to use in which situations, etc.), answering and clarifying questions from students.</p>

Planning (5 mins)	Brainstorm topics for their writings.	In breakout rooms, Ss are shown images of dirty New York City and make a list of things they could complain about, along with a list of solutions.
Joint Constructing (10-15 mins)	Write text together using template.	<p>Ss are told their writing task is to write an email of complaint about New York to Bill DiBlasio, the current mayor.</p> <p>Students work in pairs. Each pair is given a template to fill in together:</p> <p>Template 1: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ue2s-oJzTMAJgzB8KKUSaAsFGRkmWttTqg25hwyM5s/edit?usp=sharing</p> <p>Template 2: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ITYmHtb2Dh5ArqbzxoLAuemhXsWD7_ppw0HAN3eXzbs/edit?usp=sharing</p> <p>Template 3: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Ue2s-oJzTMAJgzB8KKUSaAsFGRkmWttTqg25hwyM5s/edit?usp=sharing</p> <p>Teacher monitors all three templates simultaneously and makes comments when necessary.</p>
Independent Constructing (10-15 mins)	Students make outline of text and develop text independently	<p>Ss are asked to brainstorm a problem they had while traveling. They are then instructed to write an email of complaint addressing the problem (also in Google docs)</p> <p>Student 1: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1woFK46iaDRQczRKFM RocKx4DvQaWvB0F9MiKkhFMgFY/edit?usp=sharing</p> <p>Student 2: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1xpv2mMJD b02afk W6cd Ncq n-a-V5m4f3mZzdtX901_kU/edit?usp=sharing</p> <p>Student 3: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D43a-AsANHizLViIps8ryCGdzCjMrDNycKsXFW4PLqg/edit?usp=sharing</p> <p>Student 4: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gAYatrevS3tmWChrE0MBrt4fxOFF4O8gmV9-1c0IKc/edit?usp=sharing</p>

Revising (at home):	Peer Feedback Teacher Feedback	For homework, Ss are required to give peer feedback to their partner. After feedback, Ss email the teacher with their letter of complaint. Teacher responds to the letter saying they will “look into the matter,” to finish the simulation. Teacher feedback is given in next class.

Appendix C: Post-Lesson Interview Guide

Post-Lesson Interview Guide

1) Preparation: Do you think the lesson helped you understand more about writing a letter of complaint? How?

- Had you ever written a formal complaint before?
- Have you ever had a writing lesson on this topic?
- Did the lesson help you understand the social context of writing a letter of complaint?

2) Modelling: Some examples were introduced in the Google Slides. Were those models helpful?

- Were the examples of language helpful for your writing?
- Was the technology helpful in increasing your understanding the structure of the letter of complaint?

3) Planning: In this part, you brainstormed ideas for a letter of complain based on a few images. Was brainstorming together helpful? Why or why not?

- Did the technology used in the class help you with this?
- You were provided a template. Was the template helpful? Why or why not?

4) Join Constructing: In the next part you were placed with a partner and had to create a letter of complaint to the mayor in a Google Doc. Did you find this helpful? Why or why not?

- Is there anything you would suggest being done differently?
- Do you think your writing improved from other peoples' comments?
- How would you describe your comfort level of working with other people in the Google Docs?

5) Independent construction: If you haven't yet, do you plan on doing the homework? Why or why not?

6) Technology: What do you think about using Google Slides and Google Docs as a teaching tool for writing? What are some advantages/disadvantages?

7) Technology:

- Do you think Google Slides and Google Docs are becoming easier or harder for you to use? How?
- Would you recommend using Slides and Docs for writing tasks to others?
- Would you want to participate in more classes using this type of technology?
- What was the most difficult part of the writing task?