

Google Classroom in TEFL for Basic School Students amid the COVID 19 Pandemic: Teachers' Reflections

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Received: May 18, 2022

Accepted: July 4, 2022

Online Published: August 20, 2022

doi:10.5539/ies.v15n5p13

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v15n5p13>

Abstract

This paper exposed TEFL basic schoolteachers' reflections on the use of Google Classroom amid the COVID 19 pandemic. It is a qualitative descriptive field research that tackled 82 TEFL teachers who responded to a reflection instrument which includes four questions tackled: (1) demographic general information, (2) uses of google classroom, (3) challenges teachers faced and ways they use to address these challenges, and (4) suggestions for best uses. The participants' responses were qualitatively collected and analyzed. The findings showed that most TEFL teachers used Google Classroom for three purposes: evaluating students' work using various assignments and tests, assigning useful homework and determining the participants in the course. The most common challenges that faced TEFL teachers were the weak e-learning skills they possess and the lack of suitable infrastructure, the huge number of students, thick textbooks and the negative psychological impact of the COVID 19. Several suggestions for the best uses related to lesson presentation, practice stage, follow-up and giving feedback on students' work, and synchronous meetings were presented by TEFL teachers. The researcher recommended the officials in the Ministry of Education conduct specialized training courses for TEFL teachers to help them use Google Classroom for developing EFL students' skills. Besides, it is essential to present general standards that guide EFL teachers to construct effective EFL courses.

Keywords: google classroom, TEFL, secondary schools, the Covid 19 pandemic, reflection

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

Because of COVID 19 acceleration of dangerous spread, all countries closed all life institutions and imposed a curfew. Thus, the students were unable to go to school, which made consequent of the interruption of students from school for long periods and causes a loss of study (Shahzad et al., 2020). Accordingly, Ministry of Education and around the world turned to distance learning and resorted to Google Classroom due to its permanence and freeness. In Palestine, as in some other countries, it is used as a safe free teaching and learning environment with social distancing to replace face-to-face classes. Therefore, it has affected techniques and methods of presenting TEFL learning materials.

It is worth mentioning that teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the Palestinian schools is a very difficult task, because most Palestinian students suffer weak English proficiency level (Shaat, 2017). In addition, Shaat and Khader (2010) recorded that most of the Palestinian parents' English proficiency does not help them to follow up their children's EFL learning.

During social distancing, the teachers began to implement Google Classroom in teaching without having specific standards for creating suitable digital content. Most TEFL teachers have no previous experience in e-learning platforms and tools. As this method of teaching has been implemented in all schools for an academic year and a half, it is essential time to expose the uses of this platform in TEFL and show up the most common challenges faced by this work. The evaluation and analyzing of these uses have come to draw the road map for better use in order to facilitate students' virtual learning and reduce the learning and education loss. The present study aimed at finding out the most common uses of Google Classroom in TEFL classes at Palestinian Basic Schools. Moreover, it aimed at listing the most common challenges that face teachers in using these classes and the best methods of their uses.

1.2 Questions of the Study

The recent study tackled the following four questions:

- 1) What are the uses of Google Classroom among Palestinian Basic School TEFL teachers?
- 2) What are the challenges that face Palestinian Basic School TEFL teachers in using Google Classrooms?
- 3) How do Palestinian Basic School TEFL teachers address the challenges they face in using Google Classrooms?
- 4) What are the Palestinian Basic School TEFL teachers' suggestions for best uses of Google Classroom?

2. Literature review

2.1 Google Classroom

Google Classroom is one of the most popular tech tools in the modern classroom because it is a sophisticated free service and a tool of collaboration for teachers and students. Since it launched in 2014, it becomes a part of online Google Apps for Education (GAFE). Through Google Classroom, teachers can achieve specific educational goals and create an effective class period that includes a variety of materials (Sudarsana et al., 2019; Azhar & Iqbal, 2018). It includes a learning management system and a location for communication between teachers and students (*About Classroom*, 2021). Google Classroom can be easily set, as it has good characteristics such as flexibility, security and saving time. It, also, allows opportunities for collaboration among students (Harjanto & Sumarni, 2019 & Mafa, 2018). Naija Varcity (2020) recorded that Google Classroom makes teaching more productive and meaningful by streamlining assignments, boosting collaboration, and fostering communication. The teacher can create classes, distribute assignments, send feedback, and see everything in one place. Moreover, the teacher can join a class as a student; add materials to the classwork page, grades students' works, and view students' quizzes and assignment submissions. "Classroom also seamlessly integrates with other Google tools like Google Docs and Drive" (*WAWG Uses Google Classroom*, 2012-2021).

2.2 Benefits of Using Google Classroom in Teaching

Before COVID19, Google Classroom was used as a kind of blended and supportive education for teaching in regular classes over the globe. In this regard, it found interest among researchers in showing the uses and benefits of exposure to Google Classroom and other tools of Google Apps in teaching. For example, Osman (2017) and Fonseca and Peralta (2019) have recommended that Google Classroom should be existing in the educational process and they also pointed out that the experience of using Google Classroom was more satisfactory than other platforms. Other researchers suggested that Google Classroom enhances students' engagement through providing interactive learning tools (Shaharane, Jamil, & Rodzi, 2020, p.2). Muslimah (2018) added that shy and weak students can feel free to ask and comment on the teaching tasks tackled via Google Classroom without restrictions from other students, and teachers can provide satisfying feedback to them. According to Muslimah, Google Classroom enables teachers to follow-up students' learning progress, and it allows students to accomplish their tasks effectively. Andini, Muchlas, and Jumintono (2018) mentioned that Google Classroom can be used for submitting assignments, doing quizzes, and completing forums and announcements. So, teachers can create and distribute assignments and attach different types of documents to students; monitor the state of the students' submissions; provide feedback to students once the assignment is submitted, and manage the grades using Google Spreadsheets (Martínez-Monés et al., 2017; Lalabegyan, Martirosyan, & Sarkisyan, 2017; Masterson, 2016). Fallon (2016) pointed out that Google Classroom allows teachers to view and check the students' duties on their screen simultaneously, so students receive immediate feedback; it increases students' self-confidence by reducing frustration and being less afraid of writing spelling mistakes through spell checker. The students can see all attachments and posts by the teacher. It also empowers students to write comments and ask questions (Mafa, 2018). Learners found that the free online resources valuable tools for learning English in relation to reading, conversation, and vocabulary and also free online resources help promote free learning norms in learning the English language (Krishnan et al., 2020). Harjanto and Sumarni (2019) and Azhar and Iqbal (2018) mentioned that through Google Classroom the teachers manage students' tasks, organize the classroom, and accommodate students' interaction. Google Classroom enhances and promotes student participation and learning, and improved classroom dynamics (Abdelwahed, 2020; Heggart & Yoo, 2018).

2.3 Challenges for Using Electronic Platforms

Despite all the many benefits offered by electronic platforms, some studies have proven many challenges that students and teachers may face while using them. Mardiah (2020) pointed out that the success of e-learning is affected by many common factors such as the unavailability of internet access/WIFI, the lack of motivation among

students and their poor engagement in online teaching activities. Aljuaid (2021) argued that the inadequate level of knowledge and skills among teachers about how to use IT to deliver e-content badly affect their online teaching methods. Alimin and Saad (2019) added other common challenges of using Google Classroom such as some students do not have smartphones and Gmail accounts which urges those students to submit their assignments using their friends accounts. In addition, there is a lack of actual social and interactions between teachers and students and a lack of support from officials during the COVID-19 pandemic. Hartshorn and McMurry (2020) tackled the psychological challenge of the pandemic and the level of stress for both students and teachers because of new changes in their lives especially the use of distance learning for all subjects at the same time. In this regard, Harjanto and Sumarni (2019) mentioned that the teachers do not explore all features of Google Classroom, which minimized their use of its tools.

2.4 English for Palestine

It is worth mentioning that English is learned as a foreign language in Palestine. *English for Palestine* is the title of the Palestinian English curriculum which is taught at general education to students from grade one to twelve. It was built by a team consisting of 12 expert professors from different Palestinian universities and the ministry of education, and there are four professors on the authorship supervisory committee. Each textbook is divided into two parts one for each semester; each part includes 8-9 units. The contents of each unit are divided into eight classes which include varied listening, speaking, reading and writing teaching activities that aim at developing Palestinian students' English language proficiency.

2.5 Teachers' Reflections

People reflections show their beliefs and alignment about a specific experience they faced. Cambridge Dictionary (nd) defined reflection as something that makes other people have a particular opinion about someone or something. In addition, Cambridge International Education (nd) suggested that reflection is a systematic reviewing process, which allows teachers to make links from one experience to the next, while Boud, Keogh, and Walker (2005) mentioned that reflection motivates people to explore their experiences for new understandings and appreciations. In the recent study, the researcher defined teachers' reflections as their opinion about Google Classroom that was used in a TEFL course during COVID19 Pandemic. Loo, Krahmer, and Amelvoort (2019) revealed the effect of reflection on different instructional methods. And Khalid et al. (2015) analyzed the students' reflections in their learning about computers in education. In addition, Awwwad, Nofal, and Salti (2013) conducted a study to find out the impact of electronic portfolio on developing reflective thinking and self-directed learning readiness. This indicates that revealing teachers' reflections about the new methods and applications used in the teaching and learning process is vital as the results of such studies positively affect the outcomes of the teaching and learning process.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Research Design

The researcher implemented a qualitative descriptive research design to show up TEFL teachers' reflections on their experience of using Google Classroom. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined it as research that is used to describe a phenomenon with concern to what rather than how and why something has happened by using different tools such as observation and survey. Such a research design suits the purposes of the recent study.

3.2 Sampling Procedures

The researcher informed the whole Basic School TEFL teachers who work at West Gaza Directorate about the aims of the study. She distributed a copy of the reflection instrument for them. Ninety-three copies were returned to the researcher, and just 82 ones were valid to be analyzed, because 11 copies were not completed correctly.

3.3 The Study Participants

Eighty-two TEFL teachers participated in the recent study. They included 43 female teachers and 39 male teachers. They have several years of experience ranging from (5-20) years. They work at 12 schools for female students and 10 schools for male students. Eighty teachers have a bachelor's degree in TEFL while two teachers have a master's degree. Most teachers, 59 teachers, have no previous knowledge about e-learning, but only 23 of them have previous knowledge about Google Classroom. Seventy-nine out of the 82 TEFL teachers mentioned that they received training on how to use Google Classroom during the COVID19 Pandemic.

3.4 The Study Instrument

The reflection form used as the instrument of the recent study consisted of four sections: Part one includes general demographic information; information about gender, years of experience, school gender, qualifications, previous

knowledge and experience in using e-learning tools and environments. Part two includes a question about the uses of Google Classroom. Part three includes a question about the challenges teachers faced and how did they overcome them. Part four asks TEFL teachers to suggest ideas for the best uses of Google Classroom in TEFL classes related to the uses for lesson presentation, practice stage, following up and giving feedback on students' work and synchronous meetings. A panel of three TEFL supervisors from the Palestinian Ministry of Education and four professors from different Palestinian Universities reviewed the instrument of the study and assured its validity.

4. Results

The following summarizes the results of the study.

4.1 The Uses of Google Classroom among TEFL Teachers

The Ministry of Education distributed a handout for all teachers to use as a guide in presenting the learning material by using Google Classroom for specific practices as minimum uses. As mentioned before, 59 TEFL teachers have no previous experience in using e-learning and Google Classroom. As a result, they restricted themselves to the uses advised by the Ministry of Education. They mentioned that the main screen of the course includes three basic icons which are: (1) evaluation icon which includes discussion, tests and assignments which are presented by the teacher to all students; (2) homework icon which includes tasks and exercises with a specific dateline to submit; and (3) participants icon which includes the names of students who enroll in the course. Fifty-four TEFL teachers mentioned that they depended on using WhatsApp and Facebook groups to communicate with students and their parents as additional communication tools. While 28 TEFL teachers mentioned that, they used Google Classroom only as the main platform. As a result of no previous experience with Google Classroom among TEFL teachers, only three EFL teachers mentioned that they used Google Classroom for lesson presentation by uploading videos for explaining lessons, presenting worksheets and answers for textbook activities and worksheets, sending evaluations for students writing the announcement and conducting synchronous meeting weekly.

4.2 The Challenges Palestinian TEFL Teachers Face

As most TEFL teachers and students use Google Classroom for the first time in unusual circumstances, many challenges have arisen. Seventy-eight TEFL teachers mentioned that the lack of online infrastructure such as computers, electricity power shortage, unavailability of internet access, the weak level skills of using the Google Classrooms among the teachers and students, the huge number of students; 39-55 students in each class, the huge amount of teaching material included in English textbooks, and the lack of training courses on how to use e-learning platforms in TEFL are among the serious challenges that they faced during using Google Classrooms amid COVID 19 Pandemic. In addition, seventy-one TEFL teachers recorded that the lack of technicians for technical support and solving electronic problems, the poor level of teachers' motivation due to the psychological effect of the pandem, the Palestinian students' weak level of English proficiency, and family duties which in most time contravened with e-learning activities and had to be completed at the same time are among the challenges that they faced while using Google Classrooms amid COVID 19 Pandemic. Fifty-five TEFL teachers mentioned other challenges they faced during using Google Classrooms amid COVID 19 Pandemic such as the lack of clear agreed standards for successful use of Google Classroom in TEFL, the scarcity of publications and brochures, which include successful practical experiences and general guidelines for optimal use, the distractions in the learning videos such as sounds of sellers, cars, and family members and the negative attitudes towards e-learning among the teacher, students and parents.

4.3 Palestinian Basic School TEFL Teachers Ways for Addressing the Challenges

Very few TEFL teachers have taken some steps to work on solving some of the challenges that hinder teachers' performance and students' achievement. For instance, they collaborate with other teacher/s who teach/es the same grade or the same textbooks to solve the problems of designing the educational material electronically and motivating and evaluating students' work. They, also, tried to conduct several online workshops with parents by using Zoom or Skype to raise their awareness of e-learning and to help them in guiding their children to learn and use Google Classroom. About 63 TEFL teachers mentioned that they adopted self-improving techniques, as they attended online courses and watched YouTube videos to know how to create Gmail and use Google Classroom. Fifty-nine TEFL teachers said that they use WhatsApp or Facebook groups to communicate with parents and send links for videos prepared by specialists in the Ministry of Education to encourage their children to do and benefit from related learning activities.

4.4 Suggestions for the Best Uses

Throughout the poor use of Google Classroom during the pandemic, Palestinian TEFL teachers at Basic Schools suffered from many challenges. They felt of low level of achievement which increases the educational and learning losses. This was reflected in the TEFL teachers' suggestions that may help improve the use of Google Classroom in TEFL classes. The researcher presented the suggestions mentioned by more than half of the TEFL teachers who participated in the recent study and summarized them in the following lists.

4.4.1 Suggestion for Lesson Presentation Use

- Writing lessons objectives
- Presenting materials for prerequisites
- Posting questions for brainstorming
- Showing attractive picture/s and questions related to the lesson
- Viewing self-recorded videos for explaining the lessons
- Presenting written materials for more explanation
- Put links for extra related videos
- Showing practical and active situations for the target lesson
- Present a list of the target vocabulary for each lesson
- Conducting synchronous meetings for explaining lessons
- Flipping classes by writing questions/assignments for the next lessons
- Posting announcements for different purposes
- Showing studying guidelines for each lesson

4.4.2 Suggestion for Teaching Practice Use

- Sending worksheets
- Assigning homework
- Answering students' questions
- Presenting education EFL-related games
- Selecting some books activities to be conducted and reviewed
- Uploading extensive short material to develop receptive skills
- Presenting different types of vocabulary activities such as: look and write, re-write, complete, use the words in writing sentences, etc
- Designing different types of activities that encourage students to benefit from their structure in real meaningful situations

4.4.3 Suggestion for the Follow-Up, Feedback and Synchronous Meeting

- Sending model answers
- Sending scores
- Giving quizzes/tests
- Sending written/voice feedback or comments on students' work
- Emailing students individually or in groups
- Getting feedback from students and parents
- Joining students with students from different classes or schools for interaction and communication purposes

5. Discussion

The current study aimed at revealing the common uses and challenges of Google Classroom among TEFL middle Palestinian schools teachers and exploring their suggestions for best uses. The results of TEFL teachers' responses to the reflection instrument confirmed that they were not able to use Google Classroom sufficiently and creatively in developing English language skills among basic school students. They mentioned several challenges that are congruent with the challenges recorded by Hartshorn and McMurry (2020), Harjanto and Sumarni (2019), Alimin

and Saad (2019) and Mardiah (2020). Palestinian TEFL teachers at basic schools addressed specific steps to tackle the challenges. Several best uses related to lesson presentation, practice, follow-up, feedback, and synchronous meetings were mentioned by those TEFL teachers. Evidently, TEFL teachers were not satisfied with their use of Goggle Classroom, and they felt that they were not able to help students to develop their language skills and achieve the objective of the curriculum. This promoted them to provide and adopt various suggestions that help them to use Google Classroom more effectively in teaching EFL to Palestinian basic school students which positively affects their English language proficiency. The suggested uses indicated an increase in TEFL teachers' awareness of e-learning. They might have read more about the best uses of Google Classrooms or attended workshops that aim at improving their ability to use these virtual classes which help them to improve their students' language skills and achieve the objective of the curriculum.

6. Conclusion

This study showed the Palestinian TEFL teachers' reflections on their experience of using Google Classroom at basic schools. Most of them are based on using Google Classroom to evaluate students' responses to tests and assignments, present homework and knowledgeable participants in the course. Several challenges were presented and some ways for addressing them were followed by TEFL teachers. A set of suggestions were mentioned for the best uses of Google Classroom.

The limitation of the study focused only on TEFL basic school teachers who work at the West Gazza Directorate Schools. The officials in the Ministry of Education are recommended to conduct several training courses for TEFL teachers to help them use Google Classroom effectively. Besides, it is essential to present general standards that help teachers to construct suitable EFL courses. Moreover, it is necessary to create workshops that aim at exchanging experiences among teachers and publishing successful stories of designing and implementing e-courses via Google Classroom among basic school TEFL teachers. Furthermore, research should include the uses of Google Classroom to enhance each language skill individually.

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