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**GOOGLE DOCS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ESSAY
WRITING SKILLS IN GRADE 10**

DIPLOMA PAPER

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SKOLOTĀJU IZGLĪTĪBAS NODAĻA

**GOOGLE DOCS 10. KLASES SKOLĒNU ESEJU
RAKSTĪŠANAS PRASMJU PILNVEIDEI**

DIPLOMDARBS

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged work from any source.

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the main English language skills that the students in high school have to learn in order to function in the society, as writing has an important part in the everyday life of most of the people, especially writing using modern technologies. Even though essay writing is in the 10th grade English curriculum, it is often given little to none attention or even not worked on at all, due to different reasons. The aim of the Diploma Paper was to examine how Google Docs word processor could be used to improve essay writing skills in Grade 10 and to provide practical suggestions on how to use Google Docs for essay writing. A case study was the chosen method of research; it was concluded that Google Docs are a promising tool for English essay writing that the students also approved of.

Keywords: essay writing, Google Docs, process writing approach, writing skills.

ANOTĀCIJA

Rakstīšana ir viena no svarīgākajām angļu valodas prasmēm, ko skolēniem vidusskolā vajag apgūt, lai kā pilnvērtīgi sabiedrības locekļi funkcionētu mūsdienu pasaulē, jo rakstīšanai ieņem svarīgu lomu daudzu cilvēku ikdienā, it īpaši izmantojot mūsdienu tehnoloģijas. Lai arī 10. klases angļu valodas mācību programmā ir iekļauta eseju rakstīšana, dažādu iemeslu dēļ tā bieži tiek aizmirsta vai pat vispār netiek attīstīta. Diplomdarba mērķis bija izpētīt, kā Google Docs teksta procesors var tikt lietots angļu valodas eseju rakstīšanas prasmju uzlabošanai 10. klasē, kā arī sniegt praktiskus ieteikumus, kā izmantot Google Docs eseju rakstīšanai. Par pētījuma metodi tika izvēlēts atsevišķa gadījuma pētījums. Tika secināts, ka Google Docs ir daudzsološs rīks angļu valodas eseju rakstītprasmju uzlabošanai, ko atbalsta arī skolēni.

Atslēgas vārdi: eseju rakstīšana, Google Docs, procesa orientēta pieeja rakstīšanā, rakstītprasmes.

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INTRODUCTION

During the teaching practice as well as in his years as a student in a high school, the author of the Diploma Paper observed that a considerable number of students encounter problems with writing skills and, consequently, with essay writing. In Grade 10 tasks that employ writing skills are widely used and must be done, students are supposed to be able to be sufficient in various writing activities, such as different essays, advert writing, writing a formal letter, a blog post, an article, a report and other similar tasks. Having insufficient writing skills also leads to students that are not prepared enough for the Year 12 State Examination written part, especially the essay part. The exam needs to be passed successfully because every student must get a Certificate of Secondary Education, as well as to have an opportunity to be allowed to enter studies at higher education institutions. Additionally, the English language writing skills are an essential part of many people's lives after high school or even university; therefore, developing good writing habits and cultivating good writing skills help students prepare for their future lives. That is why it is of high interest for students and a significant obligation for teachers to prepare students for State Exams and to help them flourish their writing skills, as those are of high importance to the futures of students' lives and careers.

The data gathered by National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia (2018) shows that the Year 12 State Examination in English writing part is the second lowest scored by students country-wide (55,31% mean completion rate) just above the usage of language (53% mean), however, speaking, listening and reading parts are well over 65% on average. Accordingly, the author of the Diploma Paper believes that improving students' writing skills, especially essay writing skills can determine the success they get on the State exam. Rao and Durga (2018) express the idea that students lately are becoming more dependent on mobile devices, therefore, halting their progress in writing skills, since these devices provide them with readymade answers along with results and students use their valuable time in searching what others are doing or written, thus limiting their own learning of the language skills. They also state that in order to reach successfully their goals and express their ideas, students must learn to write with coherence, an appropriate

grammar structure, and spelling to convey thoughts, ideas and facts in easy and lucid language, both academically and, later in life, professionally.

The author of the Diploma Paper thinks that to write a piece of text properly Process Approach must be used and is something that he thrives for in his studies, as well as his professional work as a teacher. Steele (2004) defined process approach to have eight different stages: brainstorming, planning/structuring, mind mapping, writing the first draft, peer feedback, editing, final draft and evaluation, and teachers' feedback. This approach is learner-centered, meaning that important aspects of learners are taken into consideration, such as their needs, intentions, ambitions, learning differences and styles, skills and previous knowledge (Rao & Durga, 2018).

Considering the above-mentioned authors' ideas as well as the author's of the Diploma Paper own experience, this Diploma Paper is focusing on and is based on ideas of process approach in writing. For this purpose, it is crucial to cultivate skills that Council of Europe emphasizes in Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (2006) and which are essentially what every student thrives for. As for highest C2 level, the CEFR (2006) states that students must "write clear, smoothly flowing text in an appropriate style, presenting a case with an effective logical structure which, as well as write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works." For this intent, Google Docs platform is used as a tool for students to bring to completion aforementioned stages of Process Approach writing. The author of the Diploma Paper considers that these stages are necessary to improve students' essay writing skills, thus, providing them with appropriate knowledge to complete an important part of The Year 12 State Examination in the English language.

The **aim** of the Diploma Paper: to research how utilizing Google Docs word processor can improve students' essay writing skills in Grade 10.

To achieve the aim of the Paper the following **objectives** were set:

- To study theoretical literature on writing skills, process writing approach and collaborative online writing;
- To prepare and organize Process approach based lessons that introduce the process of writing an essay in Google Docs word processor;
- To assist students in giving peer feedback and self-correction in accordance with CEFR guidelines;

- To determine how students' essay writing skills have improved after writing, giving peer feedback and self-correcting using Google Docs word processor;

- To gather data through questionnaires to see students' initial essay writing skills and their self-assessment and feedback after the study.

The **research questions** of the Diploma Paper are:

- What the principal concepts of EFL writing are;
- What the main ideas and strategies of process approach writing are;
- How students' essay writing skills can be improved using Google Docs word processor and Process Approach writing strategies.

The chosen **method of research** is a case study in Agenskalns State Gymnasium; the case study was conducted with Grade 10 students in the beginning of the Spring of 2019.

The **data collection methods** include 2 questionnaires for students, content analysis and students' feedback.

The **outline** of chapters.

Chapter 1 examines the theoretical sources of writing, compares and investigates product and process writing approaches, discusses the peculiarities of essay writing and argumentative essay writing in detail.

Chapter 2 explores collaborative online learning in connection to writing and Google Docs as a tool for collaborative online learning, emphasizing the relevant tools for essay writing.

Chapter 3 displays the findings of the research, the results of two questionnaires responded by the students, an analysis of six process based writing lessons that included Google Docs and an analysis of a case study on the Google Docs usage for essay writing.

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITING

1.1 WRITING AS A PRODUCTIVE LANGUAGE SKILL

Writing is one of the four basic English language skills, which also include speaking, reading and listening. Walsh (2010) expresses the idea that students must realize what the purpose for learning writing is. He emphasizes the importance of writing by stating that it is “used extensively in higher education and in the workplace, [...] if students do not know how to express themselves in writing, they will not be able to communicate well with professors, employers, peers or just about anyone else.” Thus, one can recognize writing as more than the production of graphic signs of written communication.

Writing is extremely different from the spoken language, it is not acquired naturally from the birth by every child; on the opposite, it must be learned consciously, taught by somebody who can facilitate the process of learning. Writing demands the need for mastering different symbols and syntax in written language by learning the system and intricate nature of the English language writing.

Hedge (1988) accentuates several points that are important for the content of writing. First of all, the author believes that the students must use the correct vocabulary for the level of studying they have. Secondly, the same as vocabulary the grammar of the writing piece should consist of grammatical items relevant and correct for the corresponding language level. Thirdly, students must know the correct punctuation. Fourthly, layout used in writing is important; students must recognize different text structures and purposes to accurately use paragraphs and other layout structures. Fifthly, writing is also closely connected to using linking words clearly, making written work more worthwhile and expressional. Finally, students’ understanding of sentence structures is important for a good writing base.

English as a foreign language class usually consists of four language skills that are being taught: speaking, reading, listening and writing; however, the author of the Diploma Paper has observed in his teaching practice that writing is usually the one skill that is forgotten. For example, in the school the author of the Diploma Paper had his teaching practice, students and other teachers expressed the notion that writing tasks and activities are often left out; it is often treated as time consuming or something that students already naturally have the grasp of, which, in the author’s opinion, is not true. Writing is a productive skill, as well as a form

of communication. One of the main reasons for teaching writing skills is to demonstrate how different writing activities and guided exercises for skills development can be produced into a coherent and prosperous writing.

White and Arndt (1991, p. 3) express the idea that the process of writing is not only a “simple matter of transcribing language into written symbols”, but also that it is a process that involves profound thinking and demands conscious intellectual exertion over a considerable period of time, because cognitive skills are required in the process.

Learning to write in EFL classroom means to become apprehensive of the rules of producing a written piece. In order to produce a purposeful piece of text, students must recognize that writing is a system that consists of different criteria and areas; altogether, this all should be performed in a clear manner so that a reader can understand the meaning and purpose of the text. If writing is considered to be a productive skill, it has to be learned. Writing is a process that consists not only of thinking, learning and producing a text, but also of the written result. Certain grammatical, lexical and structural rules have to be followed, if the writer expects the process and the result to be successful; furthermore, the writer must have the skills and knowledge to make a written piece comprehensible for the reader.

1.2 WAYS OF TEACHING WRITING

Byrne (1988, p. 22) differentiate between no less than 4 key ways of teaching writing; those usually include focusing on accuracy, focusing on fluency, focusing on text and, lastly, focusing on purpose. When focusing on accuracy, one tries to write with significant control over the text, with the purpose of eliminating all possible textual and grammatical mistakes. On the opposite, focusing on fluency is done for the purpose of providing students with the freedom to write as much as possible in a certain period of time, thus giving them a chance to experience the pleasure from writing as well as a chance to convey their ideas and thoughts. The two remaining ways of writing closely intervene with the previous two. Focus on purpose helps a student to go from a more controlled writing environment to a less controlled one, also the layout and special phrases are highlighted. However, focus on the text fixates on developing ideas and organizing the written piece.

Furthermore, two more approaches to teaching writing can be recognized: focus on a product and focus on a process. Students are usually already quite familiar with both of them, even though they might now know them by the specific term names. Focusing on the product is quite similar to beforementioned focus on accuracy and or purpose but focus on the process is somewhat similar to focusing on fluency combined with a focus on text). Both of these approaches are of importance to students in order to learn English language writing; however, the educator ought to decide which of them is more suited for a specific piece of writing. The author of the Diploma Paper looks at the differences of the both approaches in the next section of the Diploma Paper in order to determine which of the approaches is to be highlighted and used as a basis for the research part.

1.2.1 FOCUS ON THE PRODUCT

The product-oriented approach to teaching of writing accentuates mechanical aspects of writing: focusing on grammatical and syntactical structures, mimicking models. This approach is more concerned with correctness and form the final written piece. Nunan (1995) says that in product writing the aim and the end product are exclusively emphasized. This type of writing is mostly controlled by the teacher, high importance is paid to grammar and lack of mistakes. When using this approach, no draft or sometimes a single draft is written, thus students follow pre-determined patterns.

Steele (2004) distinguishes between four stages of product approach model. In the first stage students model texts, highlighting different features of the genre. For instance, if students are learning to write a formal letter, paragraphing may be spotlighted as well as the formal language that must be used in such letter. If students read a story, they might focus their attention to how the story is told, what makes it alluring; thus, students try to find in the text where and how the author of the text employs different techniques and ways used for such story telling. The second stage is a controlled practice of highlighted features, commonly done by each student individually. If students are learning to write a formal letter, they may be invited to practice the peculiarities of formal language requests, for example, “I would be grateful if you would...” structure and others. In the third stage students organize their ideas in logical order, discarding of the ideas that are less important,

but highlighting and using the more important ones, for this reason this particular stage is thought to be the most important one in product writing approach; thus, the people who use this approach focus more on the organization of the ideas rather than the ideas themselves. The fourth and final stage is the end product of the learning process. Students have the chance to choose between different analogous writing tasks. Students individually use previously taught skills, vocabulary and sentence structures to produce the product in order to show their fluency and competency of the language.

1.2.2 FOCUS ON THE PROCESS

In the process-oriented approach the destination between writing process and writing product is important. Kroll (2001, p. 220-221) defines process approach as follows:

The process approach serves today as an umbrella term for many types of writing courses. What the term captures is the fact that student writers engage in their writing tasks through a cyclical approach rather than a single-shot approach. They are not expected to produce and submit complete and polished responses to their writing assignments without going through stages of drafting and receiving feedback on their drafts, be it from peers and/or from the teacher, followed by revision of their evolving texts.

For that reason, the process approach is likely to focus more on mixed classroom exercises and activities that bolster the development of language use, such as brainstorming, group discussion and rewriting. Additionally, Steele (2004) proposes that redrafting is characteristic to process writing, teachers are facilitators who function as counselors and guides, but they usually do not emphasize the end product. By cooperative work, such as brainstorming, suggesting changes or other, students do research and help each other with structuring in order to learn to express their ideas distinctly, organize their writing and give feedback to their peers.

Steele (2004) comprises the process approach model of eight different stages:

- brainstorming;
- planning/structuring;
- mind mapping;

- writing the first draft;
- peer feedback;
- editing;
- final draft;
- evaluation and teachers' feedback.

Brainstorming can consciously take advantage of one's natural thinking processes by transforming ideas into written words or diagrams that can lead to a lively, vibrant writing process. Furthermore, it can also often result in mind maps or similar graphs, for example, by starting a simple statement and thinking of arguments against and arguments that support the statement. Brainstorming as a group can also help generating ideas, as students' combined schemata is bigger than the individual's.

In the second stage students are expected to exchange ideas into note or different form in order to judge the quality and versatility of these ideas, these ideas are usually connected and based on what, when, how, where, which questions.

Steele (2004) says that the third stage is for students to organize their ideas into a linear form, a spider gram or a mind map. This stage encourages students to make hierarchical relationship of ideas and concepts for the writing, which helps students with the organization of their texts.

In the fourth stage students write the first draft, Steele (2004) suggests that it can frequently be done in pairs or groups, but the author of the Diploma Paper conducted this for students to do on their own because the author wants the research and the Google Docs usage to emphasize peer-feedback as well as peer-assessment more, letting the students write the drafts individually, but helping in other stages.

Peer feedback is arguably the most important of all stages. In this stage drafts are exchanged between students; thus, they become the readers of each other's work, they can also act as correctors of the drafts. By reacting as readers students cultivate awareness of the fact that their peers are producing a written work to be read by someone, consequently they can improve their own drafts. In this Diploma Paper case, peer feedback plays an important role because it is one of the benefits of Google Docs platform and its design that allows peer-correction, feedback and evaluation based on the fact that students can ask and approve other students to correct them. Zhao (2010) argues that in the last two decades peer feedback has

predominantly helped in developing writing skills in EFL/ESL classrooms, he also proposes that it improves learning achievements. Lin et al. (2001) conducted a study in which they found out that specific peer feedback and also critical peer feedback tremendously helped facilitate students in improving writing skills. Such way of evaluation and giving others feedback helps students participate in class tasks and activities, making them depend less on the teacher, something that is also one of the more important ideas of process approach writing. Peer feedback helps students think critically, improve their overall knowledge and give students a sense of autonomy (Lin et al.,2001).

In the sixth stage students receive their drafts back make improvements based on peer feedback, this stage closely correlates with the previous one, and both must be done properly and accurately.

In the final draft stage, students write/correct their works to the fullest extent, providing as good as possible written text that follows agreed upon criteria and feedback from peers.

Evaluation and teacher's feedback are provided in the last stage. The teacher evaluates students' writings using before discussed and agreed upon criteria and gives feedback.

These stages give students the chance to improve their written work, to initially correct it without teacher's help and to analyze their style of writing. By following these closely connected stages and activities, students focus on developing their writing; thus, these stages assist students in improving their writing skills. In process writing all of the stages are important and must be incorporated in the writing process and the written work; however, the stages do not always have to follow each other in close order. For example, sometimes students might find new ideas or other additional information during writing, thus improving the text later on. Occasionally students might not have enough time to go through the making of a draft, especially if the writing is intended for a single lesson; however, for longer pieces of writing, it is essential not to skip any stages.

To sum up, to differentiate the process approach from the product centered, one can assume that the outcome of the writing, the product, is not preconceived. The process writing focuses on such questions as "how can the text be improved", "how will you write the text" and ways to develop a text. The correct organization of the writing process can generate more successful students' works and the process

of teaching and learning writing more engaging and appealing for the students. Students initially concentrate on conveying a written message, rather than the form. The author of this Diploma Paper also uses process approach for the research part, which is slightly modified in order to use it together with Google Docs for essay writing.

1.3 ESSAY WRITING

In order to comprehend the methods and approaches to teaching essay writing at high school level, the definition of an essay is essential for both, the students and the educator, in order for it to be clear for all the parties involved in teaching. Cambridge dictionary (“Essay”, 2019) defines an essay as “a short piece of writing on a particular subject, especially one done by students as part of the work for a course”.

Encyclopedia Britannica (2004) delineates academic essay as “an analytic, interpretative, or critical literary composition usually much shorter and less systematic and formal than a dissertation or thesis and usually dealing with its subject from a limited and often personal point of view”. Michel de Montaigne can be associated with the literary essay genre; however, Francis Bacon is said to have been the first English writer to create essays (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2004). One must not forget that literary essays are vastly different from academic essays.

Online Writing Lab (Argumentative Essays, n.d.) provides a definition for essays: “Essays are shorter pieces of writing that often require the student to hone a number of skills such as close reading, analysis, comparison and contrast, persuasion, conciseness, clarity, and exposition. These attributes are important to students and there is much to be gained by the student who strives to succeed at essay writing.”

It is also important for Grade 10 students in Latvia to have the before mentioned skills, especially higher thinking skills, such as analysis, contrasting and comparing, as well as other skills that make students write better essays; students in Latvia are required to write several essays throughout the high school years, not only in English, but also Latvian, Latvian literature and History. Essays function as a tool for students to develop ideas and concepts in their writing that involve more than just their own thoughts; many view essays as smaller scale research papers that

often help high school students prepare for the university years. Thus, essays should consistently be concise, with a clear purpose and with an evident direction. Academic essay writing does not allow for much room for students' thoughts to wander or stray from the purpose of the essay, writing is meticulous and thought-provoking.

Academic essay writing often requires precise fact and argument recital, in Grades 10 to 12, students are required to write different academic essays, for example, for and against essays, opinion essays, argumentative essays and others. The essays share a lot of similar qualities, all of them are written in formal English, have 3 parts (introductory paragraph, main body, and conclusion), they all present arguments or viewpoints. The author of the Diploma Paper chose argumentative essays as the one for the research part of the Paper because of the fact that it was, firstly, on the curriculum and, secondly, the author was the most familiar with argumentative essay writing style. It also requires a bit more research and data/argument collection that cannot be done on the spot.

1.3.1 ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAYS

Argumentative essays are a common assignment that educators often use and integrate in their lessons to help students practice persuasion and argumentative skills. Argumentative essays aim to convince the person reading the essay of the opinion of the writer by essential and clear arguments that are hard to be disputed. The argumentative essay writing demands students to collect data, generate and evaluate evidence and establish a position within boundaries of a certain topic. Purdue Online Writing Lab (Argumentative Essays, n.d.) establishes that argumentative essays usually involve literature or other material research, thorough research helps the students to conduct more precisely his or her point of view, and regardless of amount of research done, argumentative essay always “establish clear thesis and follow sound reasoning”.

Argumentative essays have specific structure that it follows:

- “A clear, concise, and defined thesis statement that occurs in the first paragraph of the essay;

- Clear and logical transitions between the introduction, body, and conclusion;
- Body paragraphs that include;
 - Evidential support (whether factual, logical, statistical, or anecdotal) evidential support;
 - A conclusion that does not simply restate the thesis but readdresses it in light of the evidence provided” (Argumentative Essays, n.d.).

The first paragraph must set a clear general idea, explain the topicality and the importance of the issue that is being argued for or against. Students should also provide a thesis statement in the first paragraph. In order for the whole essay to be successful, effective and persuasive, the first paragraph must follow all the mentioned criteria.

The essay is essentially held together by transitions between paragraphs, as well as sentences. These transitions connect ideas expressed in paragraphs. Often for purposes of connecting and making a piece of written text cohesive, transitional adverbs or conjunctive adverbs are used. Transitional adverbs usually start a new sentence (However, therefore, consequently, nevertheless), but they can also connect two independent clauses. Conjunctive adverbs always serve as a division point between two parts of sentences or two independent clauses, such adverbs include therefore, in fact, in addition, on the other hand, moreover and others.

Online Writing Lab (Argumentative Essays, n.d.) suggests that each paragraph should generally discuss one idea, it helps with readability. Additionally, each paragraph must present arguments and a logical connection to the thesis statement. Showing a clear relation between evidence and the thesis is considerably essential. Paragraphs directly support the thesis statement with evidence that students collect during their individual research. The student must also explain how and why the evidence rationally supports the thesis.

Argumentative essays require well-researched, accurate, detailed information to support the thesis statement, for high-school level students the research part is usually not as thorough as, for example, a university student; however, a research still must be done. The evidence gathered should be factual, logical, statistical.

The conclusion must consist of synthesized information from all of the factual, argument paragraphs, no new information should be introduced. The

student should once more restate the importance of the topic, reviewing the main points and the thesis that was presented before.

Common formula for a good essay is five-paragraph essay. It means that an argumentative essay consists of an introductory paragraph, three evidence based argument paragraphs and a conclusion. Chandrasegaran (2008, p. 13) claims that “most students have some ability in argument construction even if they have not been formally taught”. Furthermore, he states that writing an English argumentative essay comprises more than commonsense knowledge. Discourse behaviors in English as a foreign language (EFL) students’ essays have been discovered to differ from those in native speaker essays. These differences contain a different way of presenting counter-arguments, over-use of topic knowledge to develop an essay and others (Hinkel, 1999). Argumentative essays are a valuable asset for every educator that can help them see students’ argumentative skills, their writing skills and also their point of view about different topics. Argumentative essays even though quite precise and clear in the way they are written (paragraphs, arguments, linking), still provide students with their own voice, letting them choose between different arguments and ideas that they have to research and find by themselves.

1.3.2 ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY EVALUATION

In school setting the way essays are evaluated can vary according to the teacher; a lot of the time teachers weigh a particular attribute of an essay differently, for example, some teachers might think that arguments are the most important part of an essay, others that the perfect essay structure and cohesion is important. The same way teachers are adjusting their essay criteria, students have to adapt as well. In EFL writing essays must follow quite a lot of criteria which is usually in close connection to the language level students have obtained, in other words, if students are learning from upper-intermediate level books as in the case of this research, their use of grammar and vocabulary should be of the according level. To earn a passing grade, a student must be able to show deeper understanding of the essay topic by making a claim that is supported by subclaims or so called arguments, all of the arguments must likewise be supported by researched data. Argumentative essays predominantly follow a structure that a student follows, usually it consists

of an introduction, three arguments that each are written in separate paragraphs and a concluding paragraph, that sums up the whole essay and makes a logical connection to the thesis statement.

Argumentative essay writing in high schools usually is the time when teachers start either explaining or reminding what plagiarizing is, making it clear that such content is to be rewritten and considered to be a theft of intellectual property.

For this Diploma Paper the author chose to adapt Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) guidelines for writing, in particular those that are used for evaluating the Year 12 State Examination in English essay writing part. These guidelines are very specific, and their purpose can be clearly seen, meaning that the purpose is to have clear idea on how to evaluate each students' abilities and English written skills. It contains five areas of criteria, each of them is evaluated in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is also corresponding A2 language level, 2 points represent B1 language level, 3 points B2.1 language level, 4 points correspond to B2.2 and, lastly, 5 points equal C1 language level. According to National Centre for Education of the Republic of Latvia (VISC, 2012) The complete table of criteria (See Appendix 1) is attached to the Diploma Paper. First rubric of criteria is concerned with the **contents of an essay**, the exact criteria for evaluation is:

- “1(A2) - The text bears some relevance to the topic;
- 2(B1) – Some main ideas are put forward but incompletely developed, the arguments may appear irrelevant, unclear or repetitive;
- 3(B2.1) – The main ideas are relevant; there may be lack of focus or precision in supporting the material;
- 4(B2.2) – The given arguments are varied, detailed, well highlighted and appropriately supported;
- 5(C1) - The arguments are convincing, relevant, fully extended and well supported.”

It can be seen that arguments and supporting data is one of most important attributes of a well-written essay, which was also mentioned beforehand in the Diploma Paper.

The second criteria rubric in Year 12 State Examination in English is **organization**. As stated before all essays have to follow a concrete pattern that does

not differ a lot, meaning that the organization usually follows a particular pattern. In State Exams it also follows A2 to C1 arrangement.

- “1(A2) – Ideas partly organized, generally intelligible;
- 2(B1) – Links sentences into a connected text with simple connectors like ‘and’, ‘but’ and ‘because’. Ideas may lack coherence and appropriate paragraphing;
- 3(B2.1) – Mostly continuous writing with appropriate connectors and paragraphing;
- 4(B2.2) – Clearly intelligible continuous writing with a variety of connectors to mark the relationships and paragraphs;
- 5(C1) – Clear, smoothly flowing and well-structured text, appropriate organizational pattern, connectors and cohesive devices” (VISC, 2012).

Highest level of organization demands an advanced knowledge of cohesive devices, connectors and paragraph organization.

One of the cornerstones of the English is **grammar**, which is also a vital part of argumentative essay writing and evaluation. To achieve the lowest grammatical level (A2) eligible for testing, one must be able to create simple structures with predominate errors, occasionally reducing the communicate effect. For the second level (B1) those trying to pass exams must use simple structures with errors that are predominate; however, they must not decrease the communicative effect. Third level (B2.1) or 3 points can be obtained by being able to use both, simple and complex sentences, but without many inaccuracies. 4 points are given to those that are able to show a relative high level of grammatical control, only making a few occasional errors. To be graded with 5 points in the aspect of grammar, one must be able to consistently maintain a high level of grammatical control of complex sentences and language.

As mentioned before, the argumentative essay has to correlate with the language level that the students have; it is also true about vocabulary. **Vocabulary** is the fourth criteria that the State Exams in English are evaluated on. To achieve the lowest level for vocabulary and obtain one point (A2 level), one must be able to use limited vocabulary and faulty collocations, as well as word choice that is not always appropriate for the idea that the writer is trying to express. For two points (B1) repetition is allowed, with sufficient vocabulary for the particular task; sometimes wrong word choice can be observed. For 3 points (B2.1) one must be

able to use a good range of vocabulary, although an occasional error in collocations or meaning can be allowed. For highest grades, one must be able to use a good command of broad or very broad lexical repertoire that is used without repetition.

The last area of evaluation in State Exams in English is orthography. For Year 12 Exams to score the highest mark one must have clear intelligible writing, spelling and punctuation consistently accurate; however, a slip of pen may occur. For this particular Diploma Paper only parts of orthography are relevant, mainly because the students are not writing in ink. For the lowest amount of points, one must be able to make and express ideas in a way that can be followed throughout the text; however, spelling can often be inaccurate. For 2 points and B1 level students should spell in a sufficiently accurate manner so that they can be understood throughout the essay. Intelligible writing and spelling that is mostly accurate with a rare error is enough to give 3 points for the essay. 4 points and B2.2 level is given to students that spell accurately with a few mistakes that cannot be easily spotted. The highest level and 5 points are given to those students that have correct spelling and punctuation throughout the whole essay.

The examination board and those responsible for evaluating Year 12 State Examination in English essays are given strict criteria for evaluating written works in State Exams that the author of the Diploma Paper discussed in the previous paragraph.

2. GOOGLE DOCS FOR COLLABORATIVE ONLINE LEARNING

Different internet applications and programs have been developed in order to help students, professionals in several fields to write, share and correct written work, many of these programs can be categorized as tools for collaborative online learning, including writing. Furthermore, technological advancements are in big part responsible for new approaches to teaching EFL. Higley (2018) interprets collaborative online learning as different from traditional classroom learning, emphasizing that eLearning foster additional learning experiences where students can cooperate, collaborate and “take ownership of their own learning”. Collaborative online learning tools help both, students and teachers, for example, by giving students more freedom and an opportunity to consult teachers not only face to face, but also through online and internet tools. Kieser and Golden (2009) argue that collaborative learning is closely related to so called joint effort, and usage of online tools only enhance it. The authors also state that it helps students improve their language fluency and accuracy through what can be described as active learning. Other benefits of collaborative online learning involve the ability to give peer-feedback, share knowledge, it also decreases the time that the teacher takes to get feedback to the students (Ware & O’Dowd, 2008). As this collaborative writing process is highly appraised and seen as valuable, different online based websites for the purpose of collaborative writing have been developed. Such programs include Wordpress, Google Hangout, Workplace by Facebook, Google Docs and others. Although all the before mentioned programs and applications seem to perform a similar function, they are all quite different. Gralla (2010) argued that Google Docs is the best collaborative online learning tool, especially for people who highly regard collaboration and peer-feedback. The author of the Diploma Paper believes that Google Docs is a flexible and practical tool with almost no room for error or shortcomings.

Google Docs as an alternative to other writing applications has dominated for many years; however, mostly in the professional environment, not as much in the academic. Thompson (2008) suggests that Google Docs – a Microsoft Office online program for creating and editing texts – is one of the most recognized and used programs that enable any user or involved party to share, edit, give feedback and otherwise collaborate by using an existing text. Google Docs is free and only

requires an email address to log in, something that almost every student already has because most phones require a valid Google account to run. Accordingly, Google Docs can be considered to be an immense tool for educators for assigning written tasks that need collaboration, interaction and giving feedback. Li, Chu, Ki and Woo (2012) carried out a significant research on the effects of Google Docs, its effectiveness and other factors in relation to writing in EFL classroom. The research proved Google Docs to be a powerful tool that helps students by encouraging their motivation in writing, interaction and writing performance. Furthermore, the research discovered the positive effects on language learning that is enhanced by learners undergoing metacognitive tasks as well as other activities. Another aspect of Google Docs in the research by Li, Chu, Ki and Woo (2012) was said to be its practicality and the prospect of it encouraging non-threatening classroom experience. Google Docs is designed for everyday users, its design is understandable and relatively easy to use.



Figure 2.1.1. The Arrangement of Google Docs Toolbar

Figure 2.1.1 shows the arrangement of Google Docs toolbar. It is comparatively similar to Word; therefore, the interface is more familiar to users, especially students since Word has to be studied in informatics in accordance to the curriculum. The last edit tab that can be seen at the middle shows the edits that the author of the document as well as other people that the author has shared the document with (using the share button seen at the right side of Figure 2.1.1).

The program serves as a collaborative tool for cooperative editing of documents in real-time. Many people can open the documents simultaneously and if given permission by the author can also edit the document. Every change that another user or the main user has made can be seen in the revision history section. If needed, the author can revert changes that have been made, additionally if the task is done at home, but later edited by peers, the teacher can also see what the original draft looked like by viewing document history. Figure 2.1.2 shows five different edits by three users, in order to see the changes made by these users, one of the three time period option must be selected.



Figure 2.1.2. Edit Information in Google Docs

In Figure 2.1.3 edits by two different people can be seen; users are automatically assigned their own colors that stay the same throughout the document. If one clicks on the edited words, the time and date of the edit shows up as well as the name of the editor.

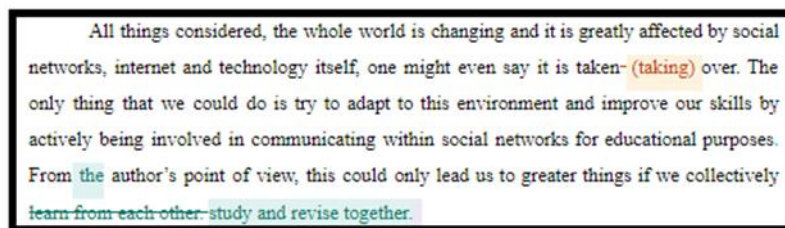


Figure 2.1.3. Edits in Text in Google Docs

Google Docs also allow users to leave comments with the corrections, for example, these are two example comments that the author of the Diploma Paper left on one students' essay. Comments are made by highlighting the word in the document, pressing the right mouse button and choosing comment, it is very straightforward and simple.

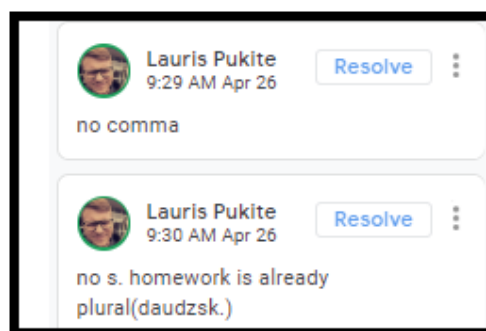


Figure 2.1.4. Comment Made in Google Docs

The author of the Diploma Paper believes that the before mentioned information and examples of Google Docs usage proves the usefulness in Google Docs usage for essay writing, especially emphasizing the advantages that it

provides towards process writing approach that concentrates on peer-collaboration and peer-feedback, which can be easily done in Google Docs.

3. CASE STUDY ON GOOGLE DOCS TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING SKILLS IN GRADE 10

The author of the Diploma Paper considered that incorporating Google Docs word processor based lessons would benefit the students, increasing their level of essay writing skills, also giving them a chance to work on peer-feedback and correction skills, because the carried out lessons and research is done accordingly to process writing approach. The aim of the Paper was to research how utilizing Google Docs word processor can improve students' essay writing skills in Grade 10.

A case study was the selected method of research. It was carried out in Agenskalns State Gymnasium during the author's teaching practice in 2019. The research sample consisted of 12 students from Grade 10. The particular class was selected because of their willingness to partake in such a study, as well as the fact that it is a humanities class, which makes them want to ameliorate their writing skills. Also, after consulting with the class teacher it was evident that the class was struggling the writing part of the English, seeing as the teacher said that the students were more advanced in speaking, listening and reading parts of the English. Additionally, the class teacher stated that she actively avoided longer written assignments, which made this particular class less able to write essays, especially argumentative essays, which they had not done at all.

The research consisted of the following parts:

1. Initial questionnaire to Grade 10 before carrying out the English language lessons connected to Google Docs. This questionnaire was done in order to recognize and see their attitude towards and their experiences with writing essays.

2. Six process approach based lessons that implemented Google Docs in the lessons. The lessons were also dedicated towards preparing students to require necessary argumentative essay writing skills. Furthermore, some of the lessons were carried out to work on students' punctuation, argumentation, organization and other skills that the students were evaluated on.

3. The analysis of the initial and the second essay. The analysis was done to see students' progress in argumentative essay writing. The research part contained analysis of formal language, connectors and cohesive devices, punctuation, arguments, grammar and vocabulary. It also includes several evidential captures

from the essays that both compare the initial essay with the second essay and also show examples of the essays written.

4. The fourth part of the research is students' feedback and the author's of the Diploma Paper self-evaluation.

3.1 THE ANALYSIS OF THE INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE TO GRADE 10 STUDENTS

To recognize and see students' attitude towards and their experiences with writing essays, an anonymous questionnaire (see Appendix No. 2) was carried out. The answers remained anonymous in order to increase the reliability of the questionnaire that contained five questions total. All twelve students that were taking part in the case study filled out the questionnaire. The students were noticeably interested in the research, asking additional questions, such as whether they would have a chance to choose their own topics, whether they would be marked, what did the finished essays mean for the author of the Diploma Paper and others. It was evident that the students were looking forward to a different approach to essay writing.

Before starting the research part of the Diploma Paper, the author consulted individually with the class teacher of the chosen research sample class. The teacher informed that the class did not write essays or any other longer written tasks often; in fact, they write them as rarely as one per year, by the teacher's personal choice. This prompted the question of students' interest in writing longer texts and their enjoyment of it.

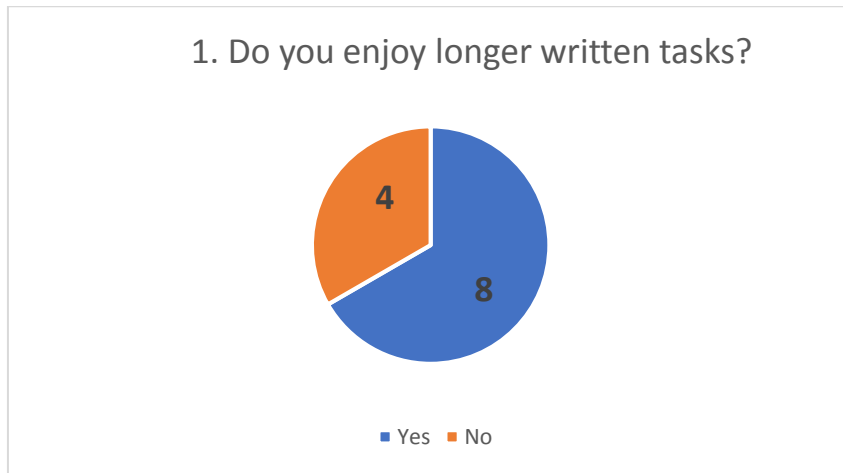


Figure 3.1.1. Students’ Preferences of Longer Writing Tasks

As Figure 3.1.1 shows, remarkably, 8 out of 12 students said that they enjoy longer written tasks, even though they are not often a part of their curriculum. Additionally, after the questionnaire students also mentioned that they enjoy writing stories, essays, and other written works not only in English, but also other subjects. This information helped the author gain confidence about the students’ ability to perform the essay writing task, especially considering that the environment of the research is not a familiar one for them as it is done in Google Docs.

The second question (See Figure 3.1.2) was asked in order to see students’ willingness and gratification for writing essays in English language. The author wanted to find out whether the results would change after the research part, especially if the change would be incited by the use of Google Docs for essay writing.

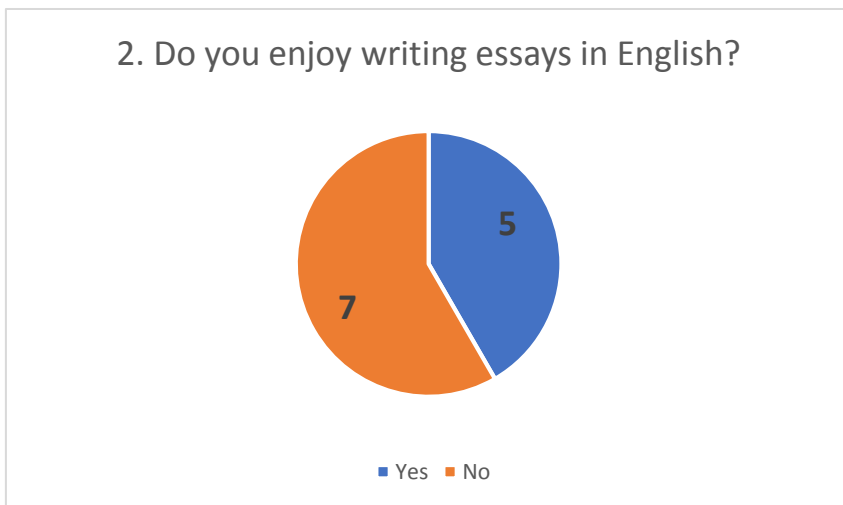


Figure 3.1.2. Students’ Preferences of Essay Writing in English

The majority of students or 7 out of 12 said that they do not enjoy writing essays in English; however, when the author later asked what they find dissatisfying about writing essays, most of the students who answered negatively mentioned the lack of essay writing. Some also said that they enjoy writing essays in Latvian and History; however, the rarity of essay writing in English leaves them with no real ground for appreciation of essays.

The third question (Would you like to write essays in English more often?) was asked to see whether students would like to write essays in English more often since it was previously found out by talking to their teacher that they rarely write essays at all. As the Figure 3.1.3 shows, the answer was split, 6 of the respondents said that they would like to write essays more often; however, other 6 did not. This question was also asked in order to later on in the postliminary stage of the research find out if the students' attitudes towards it changed because of the usage of Google Docs.

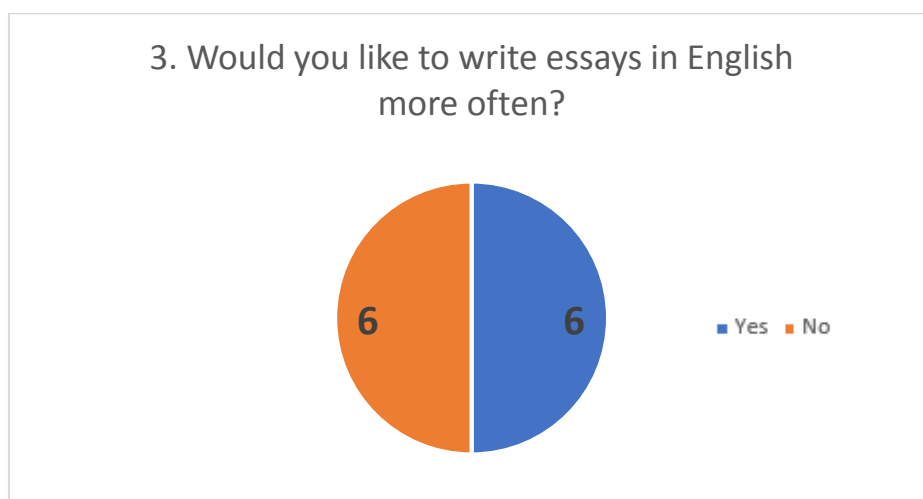


Figure 3.1.3. Students' Willingness to Write Essays in English More Often

The fourth question was asked in order to find out whether students consider their essay writing skills to be at a high level, so that the author of the Diploma Paper can evaluate the students' self-awareness towards their essay writing skills and subsequently whether their attitude towards and essay writing have, in their opinion, improved.

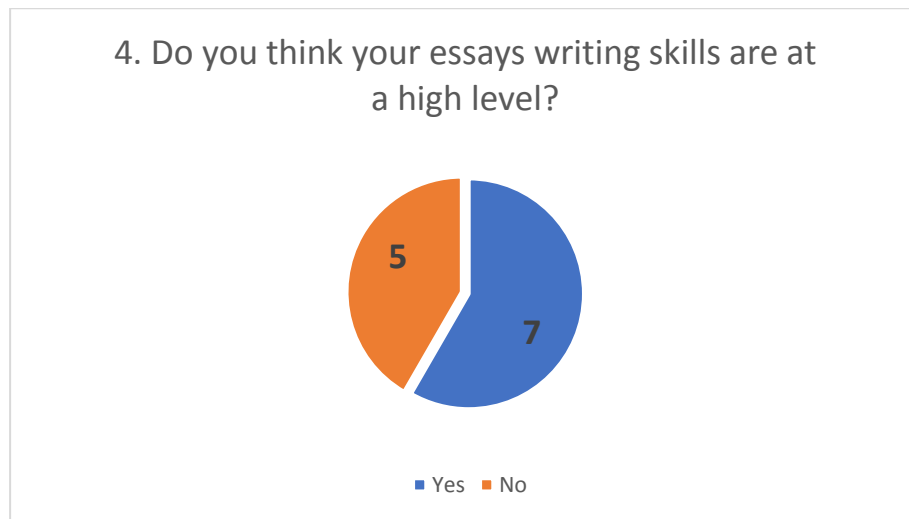


Figure 3.1.4. Students’ Thoughts on Their Essay Writing Skills

As demonstrated in Figure 3.1.4, 7 out of 12 students answered positively, saying that their essay writing skills are at a high level. Since the majority of the students answered positively, the author came to a conclusion that the research sample group might be more open to the idea of mastering their essay level skills, adding English writing skills and practices that are often forgotten about in the high school setting, such as perfect punctuation as well as properly crafted arguments.

The second to last question was asked in order to find out students’ willingness to try writing essays online. The author wanted to find out whether students were prepared to try something unfamiliar. The question also prompts another question after the research, a one where students reflect on their experience with working using Google Docs.

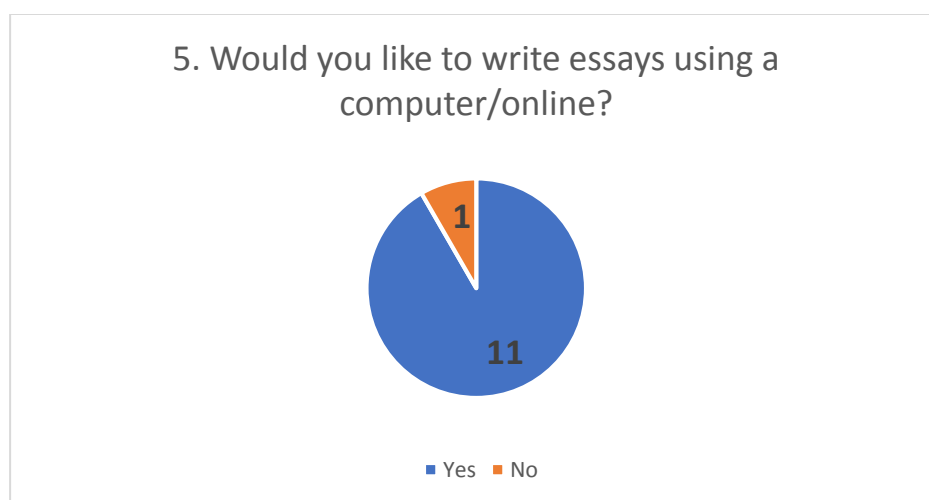


Figure 3.1.5. Students’ Desire to Write Essay Online Using a Computer

Figure 3.1.5 clearly shows that the majority of students or 11 out of 12 show clear interest in writing essays online using a computer; therefore, showing their willingness to try unusual methods instead of those more traditional.

In order to find out the attitudes of the students towards peer-evaluation and peer-correction, the sixth question was asked. The question was asked in relation to the fact that the essay writing part is done using the process writing approach which involves peer-correction and peer-evaluation, something that is not done very often in high school by the observations of the author of the Diploma Paper. The author also wanted to compare and see whether there is some contrast after students write the essays and evaluate and correct each other's works. As the answers in Figure 3.1.6 indicate, 7 out of 12 students did not enjoy peer-evaluation and peer-correction in the beginning of the research; thus, showing that it might be a challenge for the author of the Diploma Paper to properly implement it in the lessons through Google Docs.

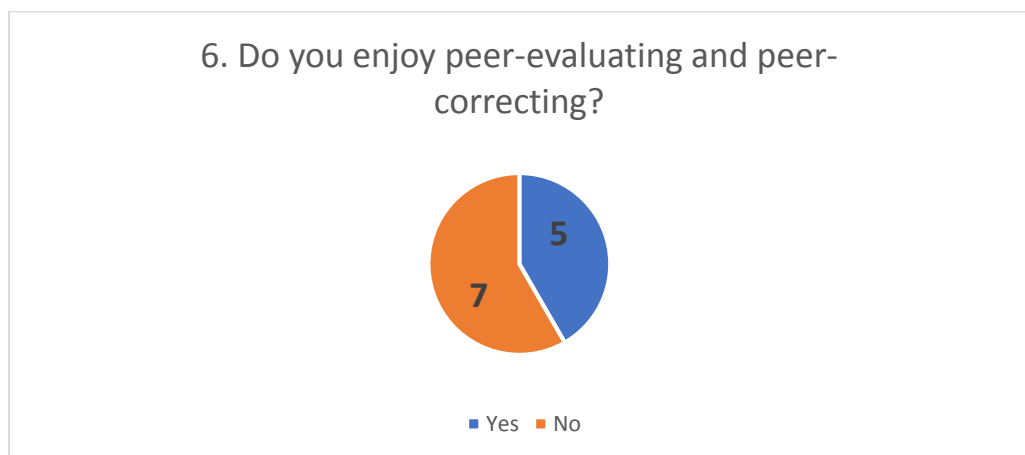


Figure 3.1.6. Students' Attitude Towards Peer-evaluation and Peer-correction

The questionnaire helped the researcher to understand better students' attitude towards English writing, essay writing and peer-evaluation and peer-correction. The findings served as a basis towards manufacturing optimal lessons that implement Google Docs, especially helpful was the answer about the students' thoughts on their written English and essay skills, that prompted the author of the Diploma Paper to come up with lessons that were more in-depth about essay writing, covering a lot more than just the basis.

3.2 SIX PROCESS APPROACH BASED LESSONS TO IMPLEMENT GOOGLE DOCS

The author of the Diploma Paper together with his students devoted six lessons for argumentative essay writing using process writing approach through the usage of Google Docs.

The aim of the first lesson was to introduce students to Google Docs word processor and to come up with evaluation guidelines for the essays. The proposal to think of students' own evaluation guidelines came from the fact that process approach demands a substantial involvement of the students; therefore, the author of the Diploma Paper wanted to let students be more independent early on in the research part already. In order to let students start on their essays almost immediately after the first lesson at home, the basics of Google Docs word processor were also introduced to the students.

The first lesson began with a short introduction to essays and essay writing. The students were presented with the fact that they are to write two essays in a span of two weeks, one initial essay that 3 classmates will correct and evaluate, as well as one additional essay to compare their progress and obtained essay writing skills.

The guidelines were adapted from those that are in Year 12 State Exam (see Appendix No. 1) to more specific ones by consulting students and their wishes and needs. Students together with the teacher concluded that the essays for this Diploma Paper must be evaluated by 7 different criteria: formal language, connectors/cohesive devices, organization, punctuation, arguments, grammar and vocabulary. Students also voted on most important parts for evaluation, which ultimately lead to arguments being the most important part of the argumentative essays. As depicted in Table 3.2.1, the students voted organization, punctuation, grammar as 15% of the essay value each, vocabulary, connectors and formal language as 10%, and arguments as the most important part or 25% of the essay. Students collectively felt like arguments are the most important part, and it was together concluded that it should give most points possible. The author of the Paper later tweaked the point percent/point ratio in order for it to be less confusing. The final result for the evaluation of the essays is shown in Table 3.2.1.

	Formal language	Connectors/cohesive devices	Organization	Punctuation	Arguments	Grammar	Vocabulary
Max points	5(10%)	5(10%)	5(15%)	5(15%)	10(25%)	5(15%)	5(10%)

Table 3.2.1. Evaluation Grid for the Research’s Argumentative Essays

In order to introduce students to Google Docs word processor, the author of the Diploma Paper made a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the main attributes of Google Docs and functions that are needed in order to comment on other students’ essays, correct them and give feedback. The presentation showed the process from the login to a finished product and the functions required. At the end of the lesson students were encouraged to start thinking of a possible title for the essay; a list of possible topics was provided by the teacher. Criteria for formal language, connectors/cohesive devices, organization, punctuation, arguments, grammar and vocabulary developed together by the students and the author of the Diploma Paper can be found in a table in appendices (See Appendix No. 3). The lesson was an overall success that showed the students’ willingness to write essays and also their enthusiasm when provided with the option of coming up with the evaluation criteria of their own work, showing that they are happy to be involved in the process.

The aim of the second lesson was to determine students’ essay writing skills and areas the students wanted to work on and improve from the criteria that they were evaluated on. The lesson began with a short spoken questionnaire that determined students’ desire to more in-depth look at organization, punctuation, formal language and connectors and their usage. The author also made clear that a part of the lesson will be dedicated to argumentation and how to find sources and information for the argumentative part of the essay.

Despite the aim that was initially meant for the lesson, a big part of the lesson was spent concentrating on the design of argumentative essays because the students felt like they are not certain whether they know all the intricate details of how to write one.

The lesson, firstly, concentrated on the argumentative essay form. The students were given two example argumentative essays (See Appendix No. 4). In the essays students were supposed to find the thesis statement, the 2 or 3 arguments

and have a look at the paragraphing, how it is done. Additionally, students were provided with a list of connectors/cohesive devices, some of which they were supposed to find in the text to see how they introduce new ideas, sentences and paragraphs. The lesson ended with a brief insight in the differences between formal and informal language; furthermore, they were provided with a handout that concentrated on formal language in writing and its usage. The lesson was productive; students appeared to be interested in acquiring additional skills in argumentative essay writing. It was also evident that students have a good understanding of essay writing and the basics of its structure.

The third lesson was dedicated to argumentation and plagiarizing, which was done by providing students with different ideas for essays, letting them think of better arguments and to brainstorm why some arguments are better than other. Furthermore, the basics of plagiarizing were explained, showing students the ways to cite different sources and texts; thus, helping them in their essays.

At the end of the lesson it was decided that the students would start brainstorming, planning/structuring and mind mapping the essays and their ideas the next lesson. Although the lesson did not exactly function according to process approach, it went approximately in accordance to it, just taking a few detours.

The aim of the fourth lesson was to as a group develop ideas and possible arguments for the argumentative essays. Students were split together in groups with partners that were assigned to them at the first lesson. They were encouraged to share their respective essay topics with the groups mates and one by one develop arguments and ideas for the essays. Steele (2004) argued that brainstorming as a group helps generating more ideas, as students' combined schemata can help come up with additional opinions. Students noticeably came up with more ideas for each other. Later on in the lesson the students were asked to organize their ideas, judging the quality and the versatility of these ideas. Students had to list them from the most significant to the least significant ones. The last part of the lesson was carried out individually; the students had to write a small introduction to their chosen essays and arrange their arguments in logical order, which was also checked by the author of the Paper to see the logicity and, if needed, give feedback. The lesson ended with the overall feedback of the lesson and instructions to write essays for the next week that the other 3 people from the group have to correct after 4 days; therefore, the essays and the peer-feedback and peer-corrections were supposed to be done in

5 days total. To reflect, the lesson was quite successful judging by the ideas and the quality of the ideas and arguments that the students were able to come up with; the overall results also showed a promising prospect in regard to the essays and their possible value.

The fifth lesson that was connected to the research was done as a part of an everyday lesson. Its aim connected to the research was to highlight the requirements for the argumentative essays. The lesson consisted of reminding the students that evaluation is based on their own developed evaluation grids that they have to consider when writing and peer-evaluating and peer-correcting each other's essays; the criteria of evaluation was also emphasized, going through the important details of the argumentative essay writing. The lesson was also in the middle of the period that the students were assigned for the argumentative essay writing; thus, helping them with some of the details that might not be hundred percent clear. The author of the Diploma Paper also noticed that some students added and corrected some information that were in their essays after this lesson. Additionally, the fact that the Google Docs documents were to be shared with the teacher was mentioned, so that the progress can be followed and the students encouraged to do work if needed.

The aim of the sixth lesson was to provide students with the teacher's feedback and evaluation of the initial essays, and points of discussion for the second essays. The lesson consisted mainly of examples from the students' written argumentative essays in Google Docs with provided images in a PowerPoint presentation form. The author of the Diploma Paper highlighted the overall successes of the argumentative essay writing in Google Docs, for instance, the well-done peer-feedback and evaluation, indicating the well thought out ideas and guidance students provided for each other. The students came to a conclusion that they had corrected their peer work quite extensively; however, the students also agreed that in the evaluation part they were quite anxious to be completely honest, thus not to risk diminishing other students' marks. This aspect influenced the way the author of the Diploma Paper looked at the evaluation of the essays; however, since the author also evaluated the essays himself, it was concluded not to be a considerable drawback; especially considering the fact that many of the students wrote extensive comments and evaluations of the essays (See Appendix No. 5).

Additionally, the students were also encouraged to share their experiences working with Google Docs as a spoken discussion. Some of the highlights of the discussion included the positive non-pressuring atmosphere that the students enjoyed by working at the comfort of their homes. Additionally, the students said that using Google Docs was simple because of the easy-to-use interface. The students also mentioned that the feedback and corrections from the peers help with understanding of various problem areas. After discussing the initial essays, the students were encouraged to choose their next topics for the second essays and finish them in a week's time. The lesson served as a beneficial point in the research showing the students' emotions and attitudes towards the argumentative essay writing in Google Docs. Furthermore, the lesson also helped setting up the last task that the students were to do: the second essay.

3.3 THE ANALYSIS OF THE INITIAL AND THE SECOND ESSAY

As mentioned before, the students had a week to write the initial essay and two more days to peer-correct and peer-evaluate works of three other students. However, the second essay was to be done in 6 days individually without the help of peers. This part of the research thoroughly analyzes the difference between the two essays. The results of both essays are those that were present without the peer-correction and peer-evaluation because those aspects of the Google Docs learning were used more as an attribute to enhance students' argumentative essay writing skills through the help of other students.

The first criteria evaluated is formal language. The exact criteria for points that can be earned was discussed previously and can also be seen in Appendix No. 3. Furthermore, the complete results of both essays, all the points scored for each criterion and the average and total points can be seen in Appendices No. 6 and No. 7. Figure 3.3.1 shows the differences between the first essay and the second essay. 4 out of 12 students increased their point count, 2 students scored lower, but the remaining six did not see any increase or decrease in the points earned. The average points received for formal writing for the initial essay were 4.25; however, for the second essay it increased to 4.5 on average.

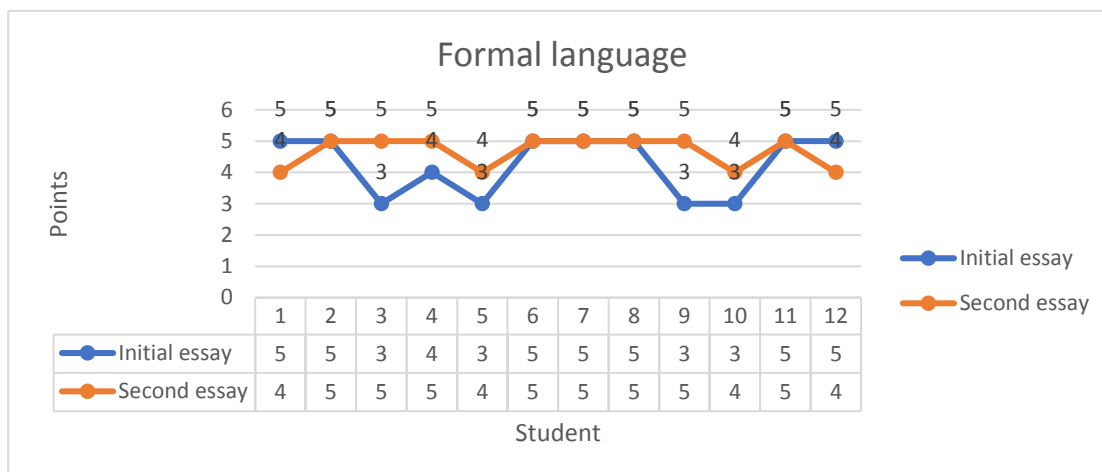


Figure 3.3.1. Points Received for Formal Language in the Initial and the Second Essays

The mistakes were mainly connected with the usage of first person pronouns and contracted forms. The four students that encountered these mistakes the first time around did not make them the second time, showing clear increase in their knowledge that, in author’s opinion, were facilitated by peer-correction and peer-feedback that was done through Google Docs.

short period of time it has become so important and has had a huge impact on our (first person pronoun) lives. Is it even possible for people to ever live without technology like they used to? Or is it too late and we (first person pronoun) are becoming technological zombies?

Figure 3.3.2. Example of Formal Language Mistakes in Student’s Work

In Figure 3.3.2 two mistakes of formal language are presented in the essay of Student 9. The red highlighted is the correction by a classmate done through Google Docs. In total this person had 6 formal language mistakes that resulted in 3 out of 5 points; however, in the second essay the person had only one such mistake (See Appendix No. 8). Overall the increase in formal language quality and the lack of mistakes in the second part points to increased understanding of formal language usage.

The second criteria of evaluation was the organization of the argumentative essays. Figure 3.3.3 shows the data gathered by the author of the Diploma Paper from both essays. Out of 12 research subjects, 11 scored the perfect 5 points both times and one increased the point count from 4 to 5. The author

believes that the students achieved near perfect results because of the class activities that were done in accordance to argumentative essay writing and the essay structures.

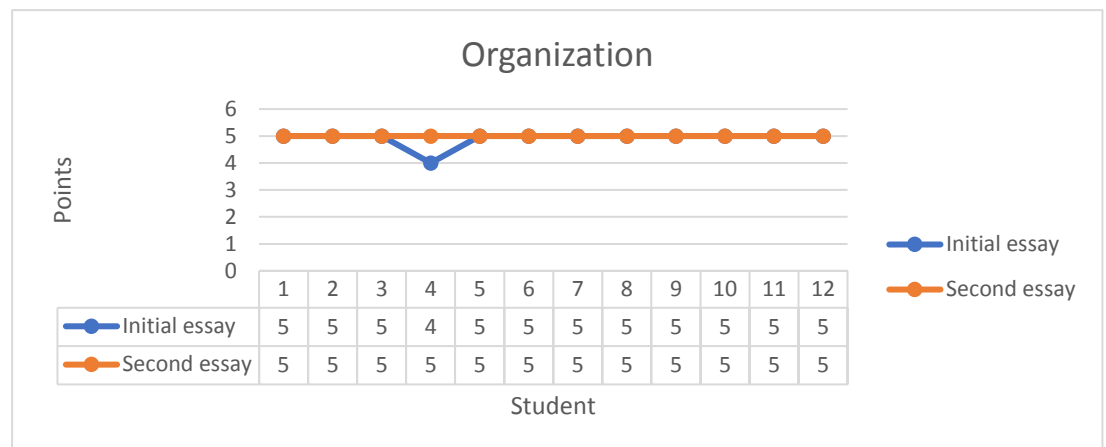


Figure 3.3.3. Comparison Between the Points Received for Organization in the Initial and the Second Essays

The students were presented with essay examples that clearly displayed the generally accepted five-part essay structure: the introduction, the arguments and the conclusion. All of the students had followed the structure, only one student had written two arguments in one paragraph.

The data from Figure 3.3.3 clearly illustrates that students do not have any crucial problems regarding the way an argumentative essay must be organized in.

The third criteria evaluated is vocabulary. The author of the Diploma Paper expected this area of criteria to be high by seeing the results of discussions and other tasks that the students and the author of the Diploma Paper had done in the teaching practice lessons leading up to the research, showing the students' capability in using quite a complex language. As the data shows in Figure 3.3.4, most of the students managed to obtain most possible points for both essays, clearly showing their high level of vocabulary proficiency.

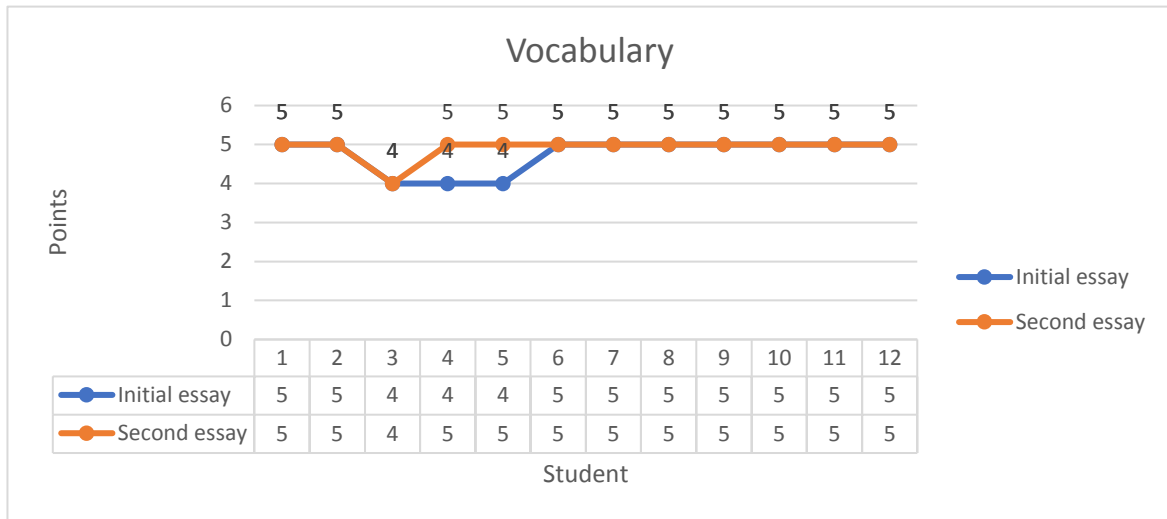


Figure 3.3.4. Comparison Between the Points Received for Vocabulary in the Initial and the Second Essays

Figure 3.3.5 shows one of the paragraphs by Student 12 that clearly indicates a high level of vocabulary efficiency that is way above the intermediate level that is expected of students that attend Grade 10 in Latvia. Other examples of

A point worth noting is that good politicians are well aware of their inherited qualities;they deliberately cultivate and expand them. Intelligent people know that they can never stop learning, developing, growing;born talent will only get you so far. Kevin Durant, one of the highest-earning basketball players, has said:"Hard work beats talent when talent fails to work hard", something politicians live by. Born talent is an advantage amid other, less gifted rivals, but without exercise of talent, a person won't reach their full potential.

Figure 3.3.5. An Example Paragraph from the Essay of Student 12

outstanding vocabulary level can be seen in the essays that are in Appendices section of the Diploma Paper (See Appendices No. 9 & 10). The author determines that vocabulary level in argumentative essay writing is not entirely possible to be changed by using Google Docs; however, there are still a few examples of peer-corrected words in the essay. Some examples of different incorrect or lacking vocabulary items that students have included in their texts corrected by their classmates are illustrated in Appendix No. 11; thus, showing the value of Google Docs in having the ability to correct, improve and peer-correct/evaluate others' work.

The fourth criteria evaluated is linking devices, as previously mentioned the students thought that including linking as a separate category was important, thinking that it is one of the cornerstones of argumentative essay writing. As the Figure 3.3.6 demonstrates, the students struggled with inclusion of proper and enough linking words in the text. Interestingly, in total the points gained by all the students together for the first essay are the same as the second one, meaning that overall an increase cannot be observed. The data also shows that 4 out of 12 students scored less points for the second essay than for the initial essay. The author noticed that it was mainly due to students using less introductory linking words, for instance, first, secondly and to sum up or other such linking word for writing the concluding paragraph, such inaccuracies can be observed in Appendices No. 8 and 9.

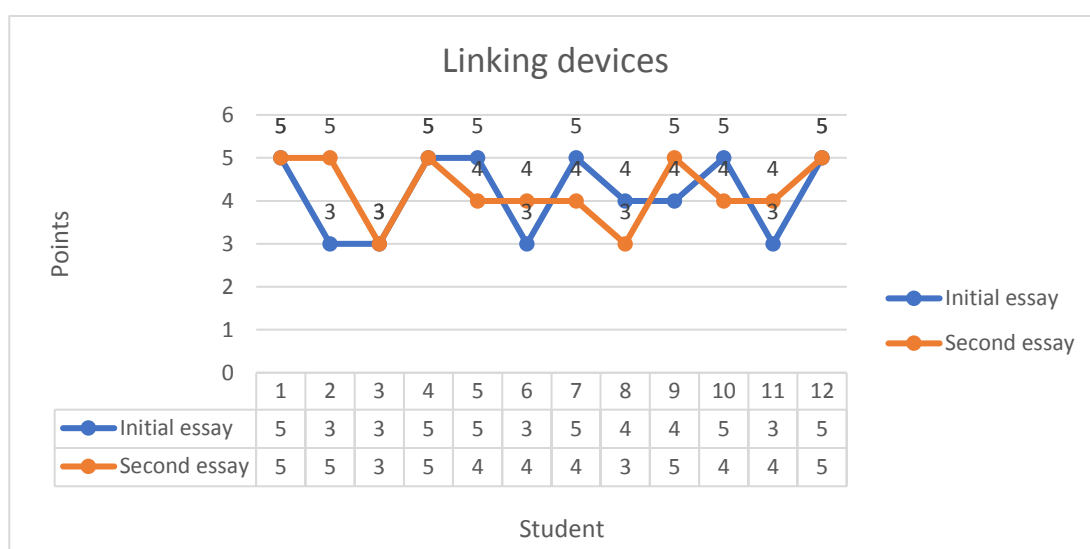


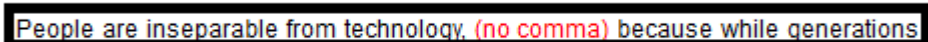
Figure 3.3.6. Comparison Between the Points Received for Linking Devices in the Initial and the Second Essays

The author of the Diploma Paper anticipated linking word usage to increase; furthermore, the accuracy of the words to increase as well, but a real change is not noticeable. The author speculates that not enough attention was paid to teaching of linking words as the students seemed to understand when and how to use them from the lessons that were conducted. Ultimately, the usage of correct linking words in appropriate places did not increase in overall; thus, meaning that it could have been emphasized more. Additional reason for the lack of development in the linking device usage might be connected with the fact that the sixth lesson was dedicated to the evaluation and the discussion of the mistakes, as well as the

feedback; however, it lacked the emphasis on the linking device mistakes and usage; it was barely mentioned.

The fifth criteria evaluated is punctuation, which was adapted from the orthography section in the Year 12 State Exam (See Appendix No. 1). As previously mentioned, the students worked on punctuation in detail by their own request; therefore, the students determined that it would be appropriate including it in the essay evaluation as a separate section. As the data shows in Figure 3.3.8, in the second essay most students scored the maximum possible points for punctuation – 5.

However, what helped them gain such results were the mistakes that were corrected in the initial essays by their peers. One example can be observed in Appendix No. 12. In the selected essay the student has several simple comma mistakes, for instance, not separating introductory words and phrases, such as in addition, in conclusion with commas. Other students' mistakes include simple comma mistakes such as using comma before where, when and because (See Figure 3.3.7) due to the differences between punctuation in the Latvian and English languages.



People are inseparable from technology. (no comma) because while generations

Figure 3.3.7. An Example of Incorrect Punctuation

As anticipated, the students did not make a lot of complex sentence structure mistakes, having no trouble writing complicated, long sentences separated by semicolons. The author believes that extensive insight that was provided in one of the lessons connected to writing helped the students use correct punctuation throughout their work; thus, resulting in greater results.

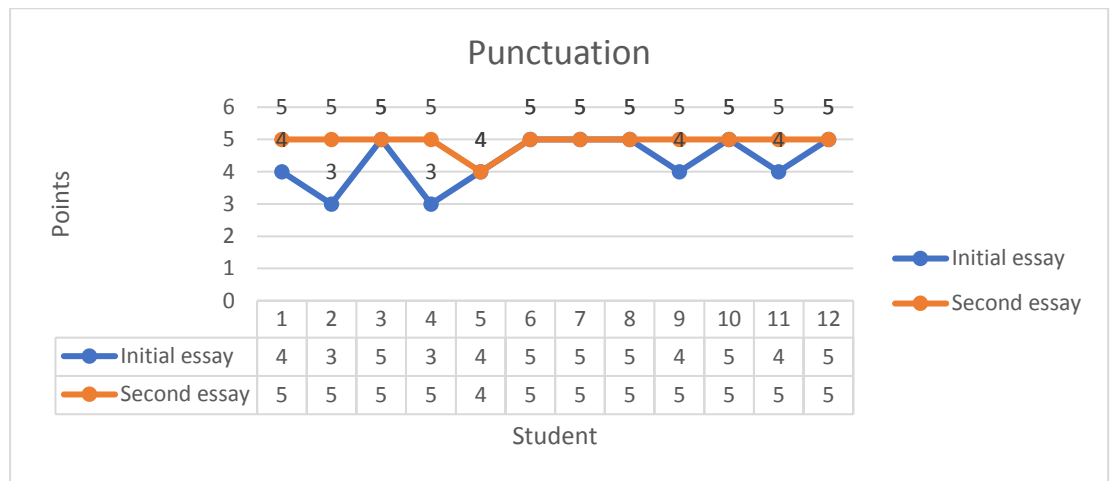


Figure 3.3.8. Comparison Between the Points Received for Punctuation in the Initial and the Second Essays

The sixth criteria evaluated is arguments. In the Year 12 State Exam (See Appendix No. 1) arguments are defined under the content section; yet, it is essentially defined by the quality of arguments and the supportive data. As mentioned previously, the students determined that arguments are of paramount importance in argumentative essay writing; thus, having it contribute 10 out of 40 points possible for the essays.

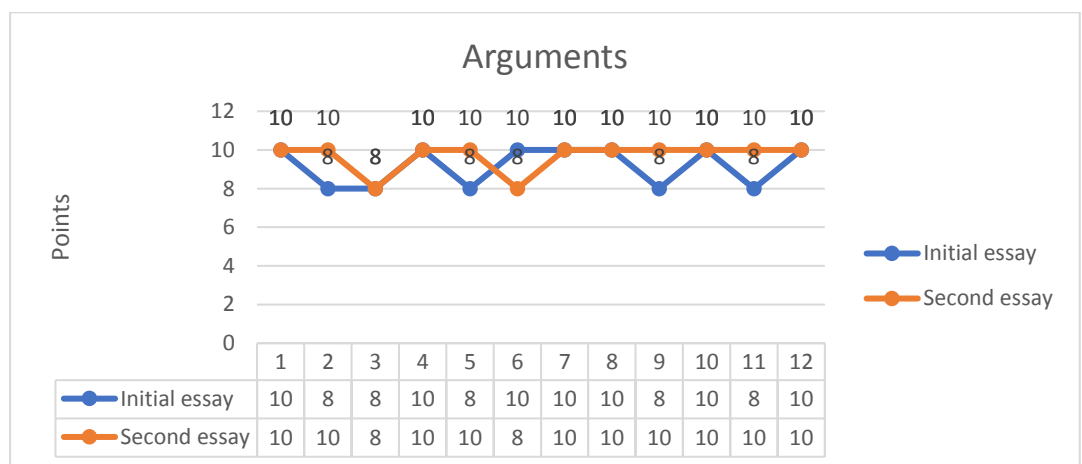


Figure 3.3.9. Comparison Between the Points Received for Arguments

The students paid considerable attention to their arguments, as they were encouraged to work on their arguments with the help of other students as well as at home when doing more thorough research. Furthermore, two essays were analyzed

in the lesson that was dedicated to argumentation in essays, helping students understand what characteristics a well thought out argument must contain.

As the data in Figure 3.3.9 demonstrates, initially five out of twelve students had some minor argumentation errors, that resulted in 8 out of 10 points; however, the second essays were more convincing, netting most students the maximum 10 points. Students displayed a high level of argumentation skills; the arguments are convincing, relevant, fully extended and well supported. One example of an outstanding argument can be seen in Figure 3.3.11, it is supplemented with a relevant quote, quite extended and relevant to the topic that for this student was “To be a politician: art or born talent?”.

In addition, not every person seeks the attention of a public figure. The ability to hold a listener's attention, get a point across and convince is stressful, and can be almost impossible for some. It's important for public figures to have a healthy ego; be confident enough to make people listen. This is why most popular politicians are extroverted, which is an inherited personality trait. Timothy A. Judge, a management professor at University of Notre Dame who has studied personality, has said: "Introversion is a liability for all types of leadership, including political leadership. Extroversion is a social trait, and research we've conducted suggests that extroverts are more popular in both educational and work contexts." Although extroverts have been shown to be better leaders, introverts, such as Barack Obama, have achieved great success within the political world.

Figure 3.3.10. An Example Paragraph Illustrating an Argument

Interestingly, in the evaluation of the essays, the students mentioned the arguments that other students had used, praising them and showing their appreciation for them, as well as the fact that they gained additional knowledge about different topics. The author of the Diploma Paper concludes that students displayed a high level of understanding of argumentation, proving it throughout both of the essays.

The seventh criteria evaluated is grammar, a particularly important part of the English language, which definitively cannot be improved over the course of a few weeks. However, some aspects of grammar were tackled after the initial essays by the students with the help of their peers, their assessments and comments. As the data in Figure 3.3.11 indicates, 5 out of 12 students scored the maximum of 5 points for the initial essays; yet, for the second essays 9 out of 12 students were given the maximum marks. The average points for the first essay were 4,41, but for the second

essay 4,75, which is substantially higher, resulting only in 3 students that did not receive the maximum of 5 points.

Most common mistake seemed to be incorrectly used verbs after person pronouns, using incorrect endings, such using verbs without adding “s” in the third person singular, or doing the opposite and adding it in with plural nouns, for example, royal families “spends” instead of “spend” and similar mistakes.

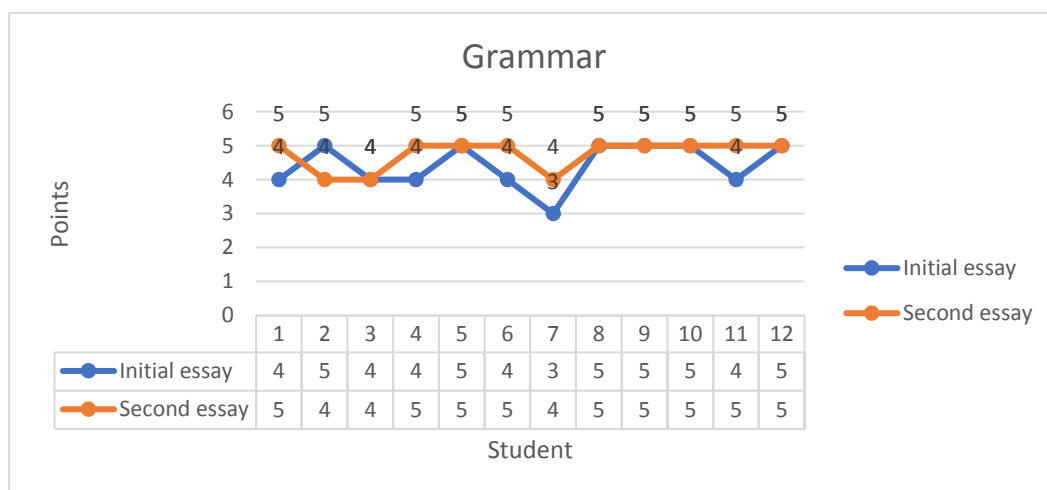


Figure 3.3.11. Comparison Between the Points Received for Grammar in the Initial and the Second Essays

Likewise, other mistakes that resulted from incorrectly using was/were, more than one student used was with the third person plural(they); however, the mistakes did not reoccur in the second essay, which might suggest these mistakes to be connected more to carelessness than anything else. As Figure 3.3.11 suggests, grammatically the students are able to write extended texts with high accuracy, which might be a result of the previously-mentioned fact that their usual teacher is fond of doing tasks more connected to other areas of English rather than writing. Furthermore, the author of the Diploma Paper had previously noticed a quite high level of English grammar in the class that the research was carried out with.

3.4 THE ANALYSIS OF THE SECOND QUESTIONNAIRE TO GRADE 10 STUDENTS

The second questionnaire (See Appendix No. 13) was carried out after the students had written two argumentative essays using Google Docs word processor. The questionnaire served as a tool to identify the students' stance on Google Docs as a means for writing essays, to examine whether the students found using this unusual method as a positive or a negative experience. Additionally, the students' attitude towards the value that Google Docs provide for improving essay writing skills and seeking also the reasons for that. Lastly, to identify whether the students would prefer Google Docs over the traditional ways of writing essays (in class, on paper). Twelve Grade 10 students from the case study research group participated in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of 5 questions, 4 of which were closed questions and 1 open-ended question on the students' attitude towards using Google Docs for writing essays.

The **first question** asked was, "Which of these Google Docs essay writing advantages are true for you?". The question posed as way to determine which of the advantages provided by Google Docs provided advantages for the students.

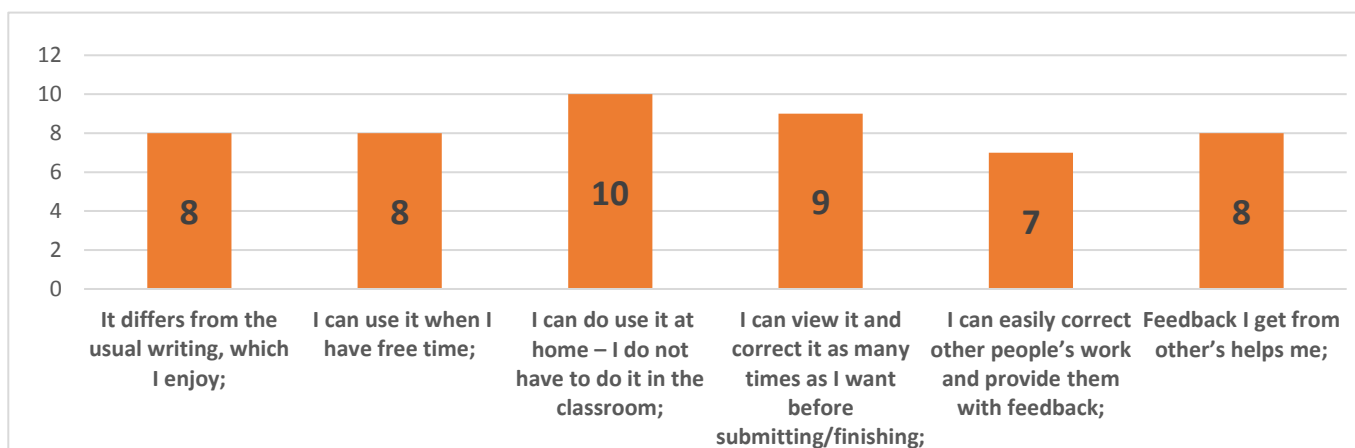


Figure 3.4.1. Advantages of Google Docs for Essay Writing

As depicted in Figure 3.4.1, 8 out of 12 students or 66% of the students disclosed that the fact that using Google Docs for writing differs from the usual writing practices and said that they enjoy it. This validates the idea that students enjoy doing unusual exercises and tasks. 8 out of 12 respondents thought that the fact that Google Docs could be used at their free time is valuable, meaning that the

students enjoy doing school work in their free time, if an opportunity arises as in the case of the research. Almost all students or 10 out of 12 found it advantageous to be able to use Google Docs at home, not having to do it in the classroom. Some explanations why the students think that can be found looking at answers in the fifth question.

Majority of students or 9 out of 12 saw the chance to view and correct their essays written in Google Docs multiples times as an advantage. More than half of the students or 58% felt that being able to correct other students' work and to provide them with feedback to be an advantage. It can be understood that students not only enjoy doing their own work in Google Docs, but also helping others, seeing that as advantage; this is especially essential if one uses process approach to teach writing, as peer-feedback and peer-correction is necessary. 66% of the respondents or 8 students agree that the feedback received from the other students in Google Docs helped them improve their own work. Thus, it is imperative that students are provided with such possibility, especially if it is as accessible and straightforward as it is through Google Docs.

None of the respondents chose the "none of the mentioned" nor "Other" answer. It can be concluded that every student experienced at least one of the advantages of Google Docs. 5 students chose all of the answers, but only 1 person chose a single advantage.

The **second question** (Which of these Google Docs essay writing disadvantages are true for you?) to determine what disadvantages by using Google Docs had the students experienced. The responses to the question are graphically shown in Figure 3.4.2. Most of the respondents or 9 out of 12 circled the answer "None of the mentioned"; thus, stating that they did not experience any real disadvantages with using Google Docs for essay writing. One person said to have experienced difficulties using Google Docs; however, as it was later discussed, other students assisted the student in solving the issue. Additionally, 16% or 2 out of 12 students responded that they lack the option to regularly access a computer with an Internet connection, but despite that all of the students still managed to write their essays and do all the additional work required.

First two questions serve as a basis to conclude that Google Docs for essay writing presented more advantages than disadvantages to the students and

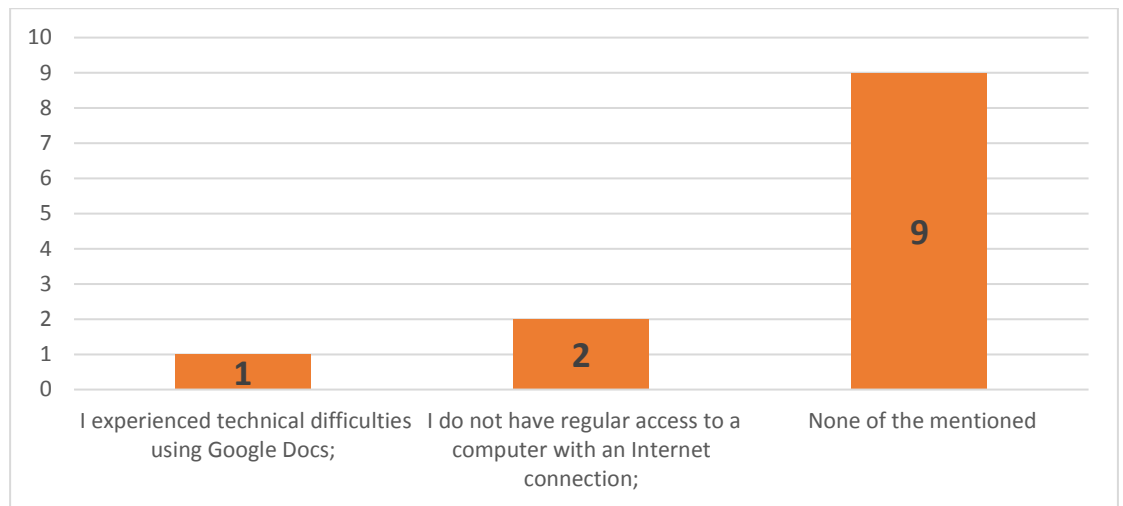


Figure 3.4.2. Disadvantages of Google Docs for Essay Writing

that it can be easily used as tool to teach English essay writing. Additionally, the students showed the ability to comfortably use the technology in their everyday studies.

The aim of the **third question** (see Figure 3.4.3) was to ask the respondents to consider how valuable they found Google Docs for essay writing. It was done using Likert scale with four answers to choose from: “not useful at all”, “acceptable, but not better than writing essays in class on paper”, “a very good way of writing essay”, “a near perfect way of writing essays”.

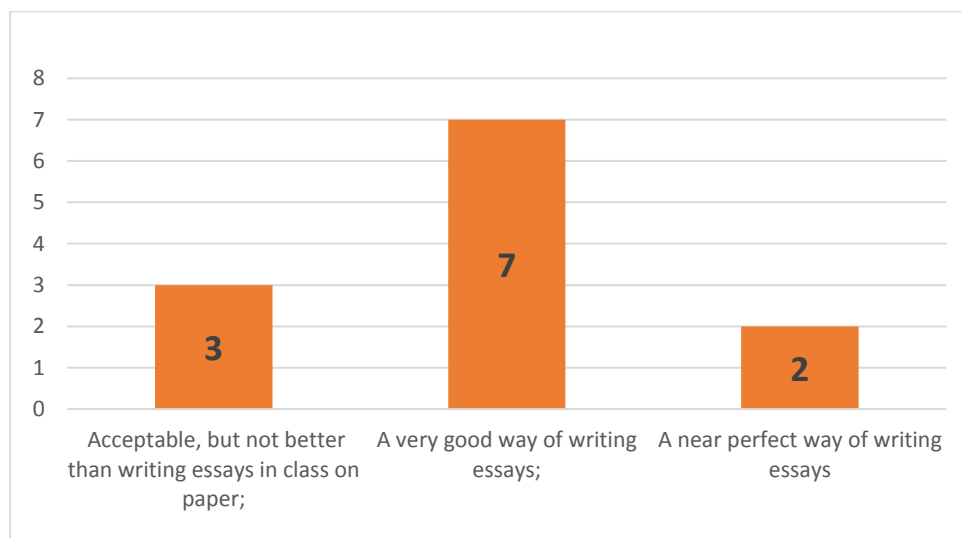


Figure 3.4.3. Students' Attitudes Towards Google Docs as a Way for Writing Essays

None of the respondents chose the answer “not useful at all”, meaning that all of the students found Google Docs at least acceptable for writing essays. 3 out of

12 students or 25% of the students found Google Docs to be acceptable but did not value the approach more than the traditional approach of writing essays in class on paper. 7 out of 12 students or 58% thought that Google Docs for writing essays is a very good way for writing essays, but 2 out of 12 students thought it is a near perfect way of writing essays, meaning that $\frac{3}{4}$ out of the students chose to rate Google Docs as a valuable asset for essay writing, appreciating the benefits provided by this method.

The **fourth question** was “Did you find Google Docs helpful for improving your essay writing skills?” The question was asked in order to determine students’ attitude towards Google Docs and whether the students found it helpful in improving their essay writing skills.

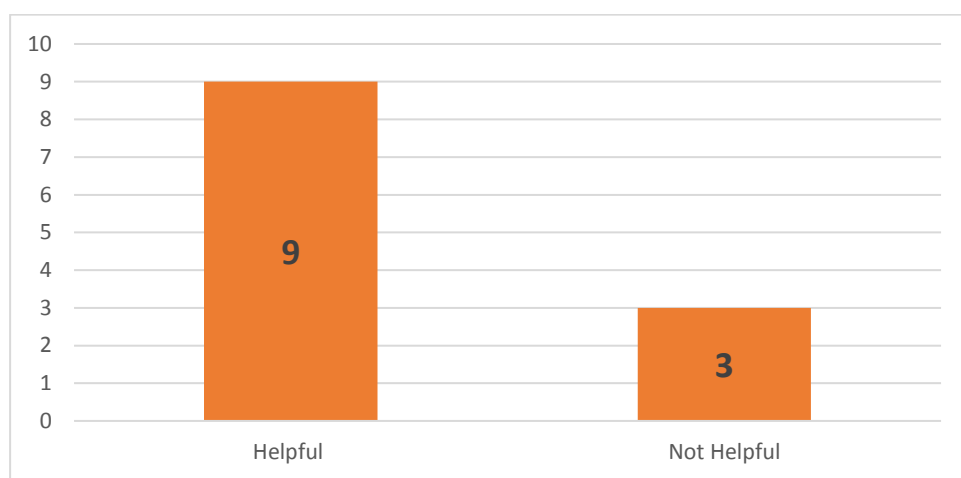


Figure 3.4.4. Students’ Attitudes Towards the Helpfulness of the Google Docs for Improving Essay Writing Skills

As shown in Figure 3.4.4, 9 out of 12 students found Google Docs to be helpful with improving their essay writing skills. As reasons the students accented the help provided by their peers as an advantage that helped them; the fact that it was less stressful working from home without additional pressure that they experience in the school setting. It was also mentioned that the fact that handwriting is not being evaluated can be seen as an advantage, additionally students commented that doing unusual tasks help reduce the boringness of tasks; thus, making them more interesting and engaging.

3 out of 12 students or 25% considered Google Docs not helpful. The reasons given were the fact that the students enjoy writing essays in school in the traditional

setting; they found the fact that other people from their class had to be corrected and evaluated as a “waste of time”.

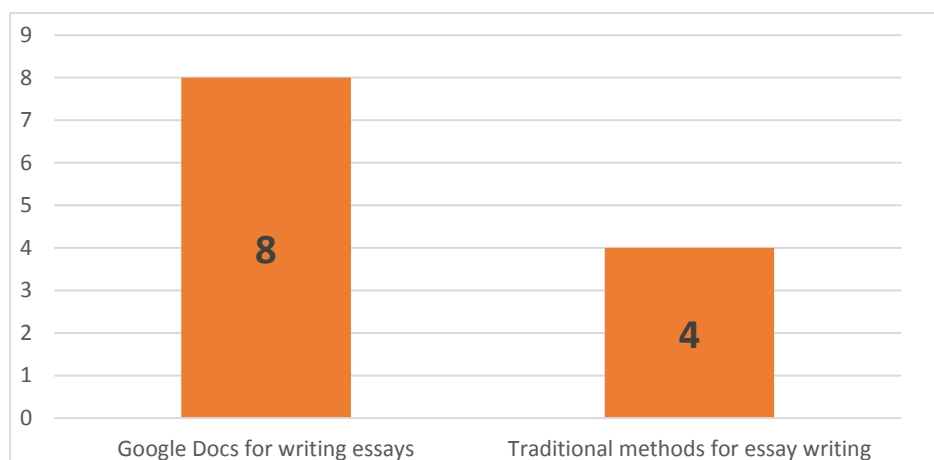


Figure 3.4.4. Students' Preferences Towards the Essay Writing Methods

The **fifth question** was asked for the respondents to choose between traditional methods for essay writing (in class, on paper) and Google Docs for writing essays; the students also had to state why they chose either of the answers. 4 out of 12 or 33% of the students chose traditional methods for essay writing. As reasons for such choice the students mentioned the fact that using Google Docs at home takes additional time out of their schedule; however, it could be solved by devoting a double lesson for writing essays in the computer class. Additionally, students felt like essay writing alone on Google Docs might be beneficial for them, but correcting other work they found as an extra difficulty that they not want to carry out.

To summarize, the questionnaire and the findings served as a basis to conclude that Google Docs word processor is an appropriate alternative in the English language lessons to improve students' English essay writing skills. Even though this particular method was not chosen as the better alternative by all of the students, the majority of them did choose Google Docs for essay writing over the traditional methods. The respondents believe that Google Docs help them be more flexible, being able to write essays in their free time, at home, without the pressure of the classroom setting. Furthermore, the students also argued that peer-feedback and peer-correction served as a means of improvement for their own essays. It was

also revealed that the majority of students find Google Docs to be a helpful tool for improving essay writing, stating various reasons.

CONCLUSION

The English language writing in this age of globalization is a fundamental part of most people's lives, especially the ones entering universities or the job market now. It is essential to acquire proficient English writing skills already in high school.

The improvement of the language for the students is mainly assisted by the educators, who nowadays are required to adapt to the new age of teaching, developing their own techniques and styles of teaching, especially ones that include technology. Longer writing task have become overused, repeating the same style of teaching in most of the subjects, a piece of paper and a pen, no real communication between the student and the teacher and neither between the student and other students. Thus, the Diploma Paper has been written with the aim of examining the impact Google Docs word processor can have for the improvement of English language essay writing skills for students in high school, Grade 10. Additionally, the Diploma Paper gives practical examples and recommendations on how to properly use Google Docs in order to achieve satisfactory results.

It was discovered in the theoretical literature research that writing in EFL can be defined as a system where students recognize that writing is a purposeful process which requires performing in a clear manner and consists of different criteria and areas altogether. The writer of the text must have the skills and knowledge to make a written piece comprehensible for the reader. The author of the Diploma Paper analyzed two approaches of English writing (product and process), the steps and involvement of the students and the educator in them. The process approach was determined to be the more suitable one for the study as it characterizes the properties needed for the research, such as cooperation between the students and the freedom the students can have in order to write their written works.

Essay writing was researched in the theoretical part of the Diploma Paper, researching argumentative essay writing in-depth. It was found out that argumentative essay writing consists of clear and established stages and parts that need to be included. Argumentative essays provide students with their own voice, but still need to be researched properly. For the purposes of this Diploma Paper, the author proposed Google Docs as a means to write argumentative essays, involving

all of the students in the correction and evaluation process; thus, helping themselves and also each other.

In order to verify the impact of Google Docs to essay writing skills, the author of the Diploma Paper carried out 6 lessons connected to process approach writing methods and Google Docs for essay writing, the students wrote 2 essays, and responded in two questionnaires to show their attitudes and the specific impact Google Docs had on the improvement of their English writing skills.

The research of the two essays written by the students confirm that students improved their essay writing skills after getting peer-feedback and corrections after the initial essays; thus, proving the importance of correctly used Google Docs tasks for improving English language essay writing in Grade 10, confirming the hypothesis of the Diploma Paper.

Feedback that the students provided through the second questionnaire showed that the most crucial advantage of Google Docs for them was the ability to write their written assignment outside the classroom setting; therefore, making the whole writing process more flexible and less stressful. The majority of students also appreciated the fact that corrections can be made as many times as wanted until the deadline. All of the students found Google Docs for essay writing advantageous in at least one aspect; only drawbacks being minor computer difficulties and the lack of internet connection to use their computers, but all of the problems students solved without the intervention of the educator; thus, showing their appropriate communication and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Ultimately, the majority of students expressed that traditional essay writing methods might be less suitable for them in comparison to Google Docs for essay writing.

The author of the Diploma Paper believes that further research could provide better results, as this was the first time such exact research has been carried out. Furthermore, if more lessons were carried out and more than two essays written, the results would be more beneficial, as this method would become less unfamiliar for the students; thus, resulting in them being more open to peer-correction and peer-evaluation, providing each other with better solutions for mistakes through cooperation.

Other possible further research topics using Google Docs could include applying it to more age groups, for example, secondary level education, seeing how

ICT could improve their written work. Although this research was limited to essay writing, Google Docs can be used for different types of written assignments, meaning that the author of the Diploma Paper could research these types of applications of Google Docs in the future, as a teacher and as a researcher.

THESES

1. Writing is a productive English language skill that incorporates different criteria in order to make it into a system that consists of various criteria and areas that connect in order to make a text purposeful and meaningful.
2. To teach writing differentiating between the point that is to be focused on must be done; teaching writing can focus on accuracy, fluency, focusing on text and focusing on purpose. All these four can be narrowed down to two approaches to teaching writing: focus on a product and focus on a process.
3. Process based writing approach focuses on the fact that the text is not preconceived beforehand, letting students influence the process and their involvement in the development of ideas and approaches, making them more engaging.
4. Argumentative essays are a valuable asset for educators that help improve students' argumentative and writing skills; the essays are quite precise and clear in the form they are written in but pose an opportunity to express students' own voice through arguments and ideas done by their research.
5. Argumentative essay evaluation differs between educators; however, it always follows certain criteria. Essays must follow certain form, correlate with the language level the students have, and be adequately punctuated and the correct academic voice used.
6. Google Docs word processor is an alternative way of teaching the English language essay writing that allows student collaboration through the platform; it is straightforward, and the interface is easy to use, which is crucial for students in order not to be apprehensive of using unusual methods.
7. The most essential aspects of Google Docs are the ability to write assignments outside the classroom setting, the flexibility and the reduced stress.

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APPENDICES

Appendix No. 1

Year 12 State Exam essay evaluation grid

	Contents	Organisation	Grammar	Vocabulary	Orthography
5 C1	The arguments are convincing, relevant, fully extended and well supported.	Clear, smoothly flowing and well-structured text, appropriate organizational pattern, connectors and cohesive devices.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical control of complex language.	A good command of a very broad lexical repertoire, consistently used, good command of idiomatic expressions.	Clearly intelligible writing, spelling and punctuation consistently accurate. May occur a slip of the pen.
4 B2.2	The given arguments are varied, detailed, well highlighted and appropriately supported.	Clearly intelligible continuous writing with a variety of connectors to mark the relationships and paragraphs.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control, minor flaws may occur, but they are difficult to spot.	A good command of a broad lexical repertoire, appropriately and flexibly used to avoid repetition.	Spelling accurate, writing intelligible, may contain a few mistakes which are difficult to spot.
3 B2.1	The main ideas are relevant; there may be lack of focus or precision in supporting the material.	Mostly continuous writing with appropriate connectors and paragraphing.	A mix of simple and complex sentence forms is used with occasional inaccuracies.	A good range of vocabulary, appropriate for the task, occasionally faulty collocation or meaning.	Intelligible writing, spelling mostly accurate, occasional or non-systematic errors may persist.
2 B1	Some main ideas are put forward but incompletely developed, the arguments may appear irrelevant, unclear or repetitive.	Links sentences into a connected text with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'. Ideas may lack coherence and appropriate paragraphing.	Simple structures with errors predominate; errors and inappropriacies do not reduce the communicative effect.	Sufficient vocabulary to complete the task, there may be inappropriate word choice, frequent simplifications or repetition.	Spelling is sufficiently accurate to be understood most of the time.
1 A2	The text bears some relevance to the topic.	Ideas partly organized, generally intelligible.	Simple structures with errors predominate, occasionally reduce the communicative effect.	Limited vocabulary with faulty collocations and word choice occasionally reduce the communicative effect.	Spelling is often inaccurate but the ideas can be followed throughout the text.
0	Not enough to evaluate.				

Appendix No. 2

The initial questionnaire to find out students' attitude and experience with essay writing

Dear Student,

My name is Lauris Pukite, I am a fourth year student at the University of Latvia and I am doing a research about Google Docs for essay writing. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out your attitude and experience with essay writing.

The questionnaire is anonymous; the data will be summarized and used in the Diploma Paper. Please, answer the questions below choosing the most appropriate answer and/or writing the information required.

1. Do you enjoy longer written tasks?

- a. Yes;
- b. No.

2. Do you enjoy writing essays in English?

- a. Yes;
- b. No.

3. Would you like to write essays in English more often?

- a. Yes;
- b. No.

4. Do you think your essay writing skills are at a high level?

- a. Yes;
- b. No.

5. Would you like to write essays using a computer/online?

- a. Yes;
- b. No.

6. Do you enjoy peer-evaluation and peer-correction?

- a. Yes;
- b. No.

Appendix No. 3

Criteria for essay evaluation, created by the students

	Formal language	Connectors/cohesive devices	Organization	Punctuation	Arguments	Grammar	Vocabulary
5	A single or no mistakes related to formal language.	Wide range of various connectors and cohesive devices that mark the relationships and paragraphs.	Clear, smoothly flowing and well-structured text, appropriate organizational pattern.	Consistently accurate sentences that often use more complex sentence structures.	The arguments are convincing, relevant, fully extended and well supported.	Consistently maintains a high degree of grammatical control of complex language	A good command of a very broad lexical repertoire, consistently used, good command of idiomatic expressions.
4	One or two simple non-repeating mistakes to formal language.	Wide range of various connectors and cohesive devices that mark the relationships and paragraphs.	Clearly intelligible continuous writing with a variety of connectors to mark the relationships and paragraphs.	Often used complex sentence structures with one or two inaccuracies that do not deter the meaning.	The given arguments are varied, detailed, appropriately supported.	Shows a relatively high degree of grammatical control, minor flaws may occur, but they are difficult to spot.	A good command of a broad lexical repertoire appropriately and flexibly used to avoid repetition.
3	Some non-repeating inaccuracies in formal language that do not interfere with the reading of the essay.	Limited range of connectors and cohesive devices that show the relationship between paragraphs and ideas.	Mostly continuous writing with appropriate connectors and paragraphing.	Correct simple sentences with some complex sentences that may have some non-repeating mistakes.	The main ideas are relevant; there may be lack of focus or precision in supporting the material.	A mix of simple and complex sentence forms is used with occasional inaccuracies.	A good range of vocabulary, appropriate for the task, occasionally faulty collocation or meaning.

2	Several formal language mistakes.	Simple connectors such as 'and', 'but', 'because'; lack of introductory devices; some relationship between paragraphs and ideas noticeable.	Links sentences into a connected text with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'. Ideas may lack coherence and appropriate paragraphing.	Simple sentences with occasional comma mistakes.	Some main ideas are put forward but incompletely developed, the arguments may appear irrelevant, unclear or repetitive.	Simple structures with errors predominate; errors and inappropriacies do not reduce the communicative effect.	Sufficient vocabulary to complete the task, there may be inappropriate word choice, frequent simplifications or repetition.
1	Various formal language mistakes, clear lack of understanding of the concept.	Simple connectors such as 'and', 'but', 'because' used periodically; relationship between paragraphs and ideas not noticeable.	Ideas partly organized, generally intelligible.	Very simple sentences	The text bears some relevance to the topic.	Simple structures with errors predominate, occasionally reduce the communicative effect.	Limited vocabulary with faulty collocations and word choice occasionally reduce the communicative effect.
0	Not enough to evaluate.						

An example argumentative essay shown to students

Argument Essay

Sample Argument paper:

Arranged Marriages

Many cultures believe in arranged marriages. Arranged marriages usually exist in the country of these cultures, such as India and Japan. Furthermore, many of these cultures bring this practice of arranged marriages to the United States, and they force their American raised children into marriages with people whom the children do not love. There are many people who are against arranged marriages, especially in the United States. On the other hand, there are many people who believe that arrange marriages should exist in America. I believe that arrange marriages should not exist in the United States because it is a free country, depression could occur, and it prevents true love

First, I am against arranged marriages in the United States because it takes away the freedom that America has to offer. Every person in America has the right to choose what he/she wants to do and whom he/she wants to be with. If people are forced into marriages, regardless of their culture, then it goes against everything that America stands for, which is freedom of choice. For example, I have a friend who is part of the Indian culture, but he is American raised. Although his parents live in America, they still forced my friend into a marriage against his free will. Well, the freedom that America offers did not apply to his parents, and my friend did not have the chance to experience the freedom that my other friends and myself got to experience. As you can see, America is a land of freedom, but arranged marriages take that freedom away, and everyone who lives here should be able to experience that freedom.

Furthermore, I believe that arrange marriages should not exist in America because it could cause depression. When you are with someone who you do not naturally love, you become unhappy. When you are unhappy, you become depressed. Depression prevents you from living a normal mental and physical healthy life. To illustrate, my next-door neighbors have an arranged marriage. The wife explained to my mother that she is very depressed because she did not marry someone she loved, and she was never depressed before this marriage. As a result, she never leaves the house, and she always looks frail when we see her. Perhaps if my neighbor did marry someone she loved, she would not be depressed.

A final reason why I am against arranged marriages in America is because true love is prevented. When true love is prevented, it becomes challenging to find or be with your soul mate. When a person does not have a soul mate, he/she tends to feel alone and incomplete. For instance, I watched a movie a long time ago, which was about a family who immigrated to America with another family. These two families arranged it that their kids would be married when they grew up. When the kids got married, they were not truly in love; they both loved other people. They lost their true soul mates, and they spent their entire marriage feeling alone, lost, and incomplete. Life is more fulfilling when you marry the one you love.

In conclusion, there may be specific reasons why arranged marriages exist; however, I am fully against them existing in America. Arranged marriages prevent freedom of choice, cause depression, and they prevent you from finding your true soul mate. My close friend never got a chance to experience the freedom that America offers because his parents forced him into an arranged marriage. Furthermore my family and I always feel bad for my neighbor's wife, who suffers from deep depression because of her arranged marriage. Finally, if the two characters in the movie that I saw would not have had an arranged marriage, then they would have been able to marry their soul mates and feel more fulfilled and complete in life. America offers many choices, and one of those choices should include being with the person who you want to spend the rest of your life with. Arranged marriages should not exist in America.

Retrieved and adapted from:

https://www.academia.edu/36354409/Argument_essay

Appendix No 5.

An example of a peer-evaluation/comment

Formal language - 6%

- The author used complex sentences without contractions. Even though there were no slangs or abbreviations, I feel like the author was not fully informed about the usage of first person pronouns; however, it did not ruin the language nor the experience this essay brought me.

Linking words - 12%

- The essay was not full of linking words, yet it wasn't noticeable.

Organization - 15%

- Very well-structured essay.

Punctuation - 10%

- I am sure that the author of this essay didn't understand clearly the way commas and semicolons have to be used; nonetheless, it didn't ruin the essay as I would have made the same mistakes in such complex sentences because latvian and english use punctuation in different ways.

Arguments - 25%

- Arguments were very well thought out, and it made me think about the significance of technology in our lives.

Grammar - 15%

Vocabulary - 15%

- Used all kinds of synonyms and appropriate vocabulary.

The essay was written very well and arguments were very clear. Final result - 9.

Appendix No. 6

Students' points earned by category, essay 1

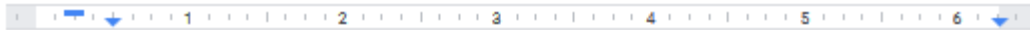
Student	Formal lg(5p max)	Linking words(5p max)	Organization(5p max)	Punctuation(5p max)	Arguments(10p max)	Grammar(5p max)	Vocabulary(5p)	Total	Mark
Student 1	5	5	5	4	10	4	5	38	10
Student 2	5	3	5	3	8	5	5	34	9
Student 3	3	3	5	5	8	4	4	32	8
Student 4	4	5	4	3	10	4	5	35	9
Student 5	3	5	5	4	8	5	5	35	9
Student 6	5	3	5	5	10	4	5	37	9
Student 7	5	5	5	5	10	3	5	38	10
Student 8	5	4	5	5	10	5	5	39	10
Student 9	3	4	5	4	8	5	5	34	8
Student 10	3	5	5	5	10	5	5	38	10
Student 11	5	3	5	4	8	4	5	34	8
Student 12	5	5	5	5	10	5	5	40	10
	4,25	4,17	4,92	4,33	9,17	4,42	4,92	36,17	9,17

Appendix No. 7

Students' points earned by category, essay 2

Student	Formal lg(5p max)	Linking (5p max)	Organization(5p max)	Punctuation(5p max)	Arguments(10p max)	Grammar(5p max)	Vocabulary(5p)	Total	Mark
Student 1	4	5	5	5	10	5	5	39	10
Student 2	5	5	5	5	10	4	5	39	10
Student 3	3	3	5	5	8	4	4	32	8
Student 4	5	5	5	5	10	5	4	39	10
Student 5	4	4	5	4	10	5	4	36	9
Student 6	5	4	5	5	8	5	5	37	9
Student 7	5	4	5	5	10	4	5	38	10
Student 8	5	3	5	5	10	5	5	38	10
Student 9	5	5	5	5	10	5	5	40	10
Student 10	4	4	5	5	10	5	5	38	10
Student 11	5	4	5	5	10	5	5	39	10
Student 12	4	5	5	5	10	5	5	39	10
	4,50	4,25	5,00	4,92	9,67	4,75	4,75	37,83	9,67

An example of the initial and the second essay of a student.



Are people becoming technological zombies?

It is not a secret that the world in the past years has changed drastically, especially when talking about technology. It is all around us (first person pronoun), and it is impossible to even think about spending a day without technology, even though it was absolutely normal only a hundred years ago and nobody could even imagine that there would exist such things as television, cars (,) or computers and that they would be such a big part of everyday life. It is interesting that people have lived for thousands of years without technology, but in such a short period of time it has become so important and has had a huge impact on our (first person pronoun) lives. Is it even possible for people to ever live without technology like they used to? Or is it too late and we (first person pronoun) are becoming technological zombies?

People are inseparable from technology, (no comma) because while generations are changing, a lot of everyday activities are made easier by technology, and the latest generation grows up doing these things only using technologies technology. For example, if somebody from my (first person pronoun) generation decides to boil some water for tea, this person is going to use an electric teapot. If not teapot, then the boiler is going to be used, but only if the induction stove (which most likely is going to replace the gas stove soon) is available. If all of a sudden there was no technology, this person probably would not get to make some tea, because almost every item you can find in a kitchen nowadays is some sort of an electronic device, invented in the past century.

People can be called technological zombies, (no comma) because there is no way how they could move around or travel without technology anymore. Every morning there happens to be a traffic jam, because everybody is driving to school, job or other places using a car or public transport. Walking instead of driving is only possible, (no comma) if there is less than a kilometer to go, and sometimes even in that case the transport is used. Our grandparents' stories about travelling 10 kilometers to school seem like a nightmare, nowadays it is not possible. Everybody is travelling using transport, which negatively affects their health, especially younger kids' and teenagers' health, because they do not physically move and inhale oxygen as much as they would if they walked more. That is why word combination "technological zombies" is very accurate, (no comma) when talking about people.

The main reason why people are becoming technological zombies is because (that instead of because) they communicate using technology most of the time. Sending actual letters through the mail is extremely rare, the only way how to exchange information is using such technology as cellphones, computers, television or talking to people in real life. Nowadays everybody has a cellphone, which is taken absolutely everywhere. A person is considered available only if he or she can answer to phone calls or messages. And it is not just about communicating, for example, to listen to music, people use certain applications in their phones (Spotify, iTunes etc.), to educate themselves, their first solution is to use the Internet. What if suddenly all of the technologies would be gone? How would people work, listen to music, communicate with anybody who is not around? That is why people now are inseparable from technology.

In conclusion, the author of the essay has to say that people really are becoming technological zombies, because without technology people (or at least next generations) would be helpless, our lives cannot be imagined. In the author's opinion, it is crazy how a hundred years ago none of the issues written above existed, and people lived the way the next generations will not be able to. Does the author think it is bad? No, because living in "the age of technology" gives a lot of advantages, but she does think that people should be more aware of the consequences of this life, being "under control" of technology. But as long as people do not do harm or make technologies our enemies, everything should be fine.

People these days buy more products than they need.

Nowadays people live in a society that depends on consumerism. One of the most popular ways to spend time with friends is shopping. People do not think about clothes or electronics, or even food as a necessity, it has become a way to express your personality not means of survival.

Firstly, let **us** take a deeper look at shopping. The amount of new stores and shopping malls opening every month can get overwhelming. The biggest problem with most of these clothing stores in particular is what people call "fast fashion". This means that most inexpensive clothes are unethically manufactured by poor women and children in third world countries. People there work at unreasonable hours of the day, and after all of the struggle that these people go through for only a few dollars per hour, paying more than 3 times above the amount of money it took to produce.

Another point worth noting is the amount of clothes and food people buy even when they don't **do not** need them. Since people have started to go shopping as a hobby, they buy more and more without thinking about if they actually need the items. Because of this, a lot of food and clothes are thrown out and are now in garbage dumps, even though many people could use them.

All things considered, the author of this essay does not think that people should stop shopping entirely, despite the fact that we already own enough items. The author does understand the need for new clothes, but people should think before buying something; thus, resulting in some change in the prospective future.

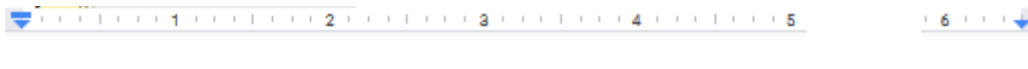
An excellent essay with clear arguments and a nice final conclusion.

Formal lg - 10%
Linking words - 10%
Organization - 15%
Punctuation - 15%
Arguments - 25%
Grammar - 15%
Vocabulary - 10%

100/100

Appendix No. 9

An example essay of a student, emphasizing good vocabulary.



Society is turning over-regulated

Winston Churchill once said, "if you make 10,000 regulations you destroy all respect for the law." Over-regulation usually happens whenever there is a legitimate goal to have national laws (or other regulation) about some topic, but the regulation is outdated or spins out of control. There are many areas where this can happen. Author of the essay considers just 3 examples: over-regulated copyright, child welfare regulations and labor laws that cause over-regulated job market.

It is necessary to regulate copyright because authors often invest considerable time and resources to record new songs, create new movies and other similar things. However, authors are often not the main beneficiaries. The largest amount of money is usually earned by big publishing companies and producers - various middlemen between the author and the paying customer. These middlemen usually want to limit the availability of interesting content. Therefore, copyright is usually extended until 70 years after the death of the authors. This means that all songs, movies and other things that were published before 1949 (and in some cases even before that year) is limited. Copyright limits the freedom of creative souls and the ability to express themselves.

It is important to regulate child welfare because some parents may be abusive; therefore, there are some laws that do not allow to neglect children. Some regulation might seem to be in the best interests of the child - for example we can enforce that every child who is 6-10 years old should not spend too much time at school. But this implies that parents or grandparents need to take him or her home at, say, 2PM in the afternoon. This may lead to unusually high expenses for the parents (or prevent their mother to work at all). Some child welfare regulations in countries like Germany have contributed to very low birth rate. The children become a big burden to their parents; child welfare regulations may harm children themselves and their parents.

Some labor unions (in particular, in South European countries) are prone to have very restrictive laws that prohibit firing (ending the job contract) unionized workers - employees who belong to the labor union. This has led to very high youth unemployment (near to 40%) in countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece. If it is very complicated to fire somebody, then the businesses are unwilling to give permanent job contract to anyone. Some other countries that have less restrictive labor laws have easier hiring practices - nobody is afraid to hire new employees, because either side can end the job contract for whatever reason. Labor laws cause over-regulated job market.

Although, regulations are important and makes our lives much more peaceful, our personal freedom is being infringed. Copyright restrict our ability to express ourselves. Some child welfare regulations determine the everyday life of parents and children. Labor laws in some countries cause over-regulated job markets. We are being regulated excessively, but regulations anyway are necessary.

Appendix No. 10

An example essay of a student, emphasizing good vocabulary.

The role of communications in social networks for modern education.

People are social creatures that are in need of communication at all times, we learn best from each other when we listen and voice out our opinions. The way people learn today has drastically changed. Most of it has to do with (the) internet and social networks. It has been (is, present tense) greatly used every day in modern education, but how does it affect our lives? Are there any significant benefits of communicating through social networks?

Firstly, let's take a look at how using social networks in everyone's day to day lives creates an easier and more convenient position for them to be in. When it comes to modern education, multiple social network applications and sites have replaced the typical student diary. For instance, *E-klase*, is a latvian(Latvian) electronic school management system, that is being used by every school and family in Latvia. It provides parents and pupils with instant information about upcoming school events, homeworks, tests, as well as has become the main contact service between school staff and family members. Another useful, widely known site in Latvia is *Uzdevumi.lv*. Its available content (,) and easily understandable information has helped students of (from) latvian(Latvian) schools catch up to works they have missed. This site also has a wide variety of tests that are automatically corrected and graded after they have been submitted. As a result, teachers do not have as heavy of a workload as they used to have before, and children are always informed about their results and mistakes.

Another point worth noting is the enormous quantities of data that are (is) available to the public eye. Since of lately, many homework assignments have started including information gathered from all kinds of sources which are not available in traditional school books. To which students use the internet as it is the quickest and most efficient way to find the answers they're (they are) searching for. They independently create and join discussion groups in social networks (not a mistake, but could be called social media applications) like *Facebook* or *WhatsApp* in order to share and obtain information that they consider important for their studies, since it is almost impossible to keep up with the plethora of data that is available on the internet. Communication in social networks being a component in modern education has led to a quicker and more precise answer obtainment, otherwise it would be time consuming.

Nonetheless, many studies show that using social network as a learning platform can also have a negative influence on a student's body and personality development. It affects their sleep, their health and their ability to communicate, making them more introverted. It increases chances of poor performance at school, internet addiction and social isolation. Students become less active, and less interested in finding the solutions themselves, because social networks provide all the answers to all the questions. They do not engage into finding and creating solutions by using creative methods, and they do not train their memory, just because it is not necessary anymore.

All things considered, the whole world is changing and it is greatly affected by social networks, internet and technology itself, one might even say it is taken (taking) over. The only thing that people could do is try to adapt to this environment and improve their skills by actively being involved in communicating within social networks for educational purposes. From the author's point of view, this could only lead people to greater things if they collectively study and revise together.

Appendix No. 11

Examples of vocabulary mistakes

unique story; for instance - unwanted baby in married women household can **brake up** (**break up**) the family, but a baby of a teenage girl can make her life in school impossible.

For instance(,) in sports, certain people have a genetic advantage. Individuals born to athletic families tend to have a higher **indurance** (**endurance**) and are

think the way that person thinks. A few decades ago the women in the relationship **did not have very much freedom** (**their freedom was limited**) and were very oppressed, but it has changed and nowadays freedom for women has **grown** (**increased**). One of the reasons for such growth is

In the end, to sum it all up, **equal** division of roles in family and relationship is the best because it is almost flawless, however achieving **equal** distribution of roles is hard, partly because everyone has different views on what is an **equal** relationship, so it is up to every couple to make their own kind of **equal** relationship and maybe later make a family which has **equal** distribution of roles. In the end, I want to quote someone who once said: " If the feelings are mutual, the effort will be equal."

Appendix No. 12

An example of a student's essay.

Are tests like SAT effective?

According to an American higher education seeking organization "College board" the SAT is a globally recognized test that shows the knowledge of college applicants and how effectively that knowledge is put to use. For many American high school students, the result of this examination determines a great deal in their following education. In my point of view, this test is not an effective way of defining one's knowledge or intelligence due to several reasons. In this essay I am (formal language) going to explain my (formal language (their)) reasoning to this opinion in three arguments.

One's SAT score determines future college and university application possibilities which is crucial for further education. Education is a huge factor for future employment possibilities which more or less determines upcoming life quality and privileges. The average SAT taking demographic is around the age of 17 to 18 years. For a mere teenager taking this test and having these high expectations of applying to a prestige and /or qualitative further education, (an/the) institution is nerve-racking, to say the least. The average duration of the examination is about 3-4 hours long (information resources differ about this fact) which adds up to the already overly vast amount of pressure. Due to these factors, it is very intricate to pass this test with a good score even for those who have a high potential and wide set knowledge. The SAT is not an effective way to examine students because of the immense pressure and stress levels during the test.

In addition to my (formal language (their/ authors)) (can use "the", not "my") previous point, (Introductory phrase) the SAT determines a great deal to one's upcoming possibilities and achievements regarding life's advantages and comfort. This educational evaluation is usually taken at a relatively young age when the majority of life's lessons are about to be experienced yet its result regulates a considerably large part of one's success. The problem is that the stakes on this one test are excessively high making it be despised by the actual test takers and having negative associations which result in receiving a not so satisfactory outcome.

Last but not least my (formal language (authors)) (can use "the", not "my") last argument is concerning diversity. A regular SAT consists of 2 parts: a math test and several tasks including a paragraph to read. Our (formal language) society is remarkably diverse, and so is intelligence. People can have various opinions and tremendous knowledge on different subjects. Since there are so many spheres where people can be intelligent, it is merely impossible nor objective to "measure" one's wit by a single test. It actually could be more of a coincidence and pure luck which leads to an acceptable final score than the actual knowledge itself. For example, it is not objective to rate a duck by its ability to climb trees or grade a fish by its ability to fly because they are destined and programmed to fulfill their purpose, not the one we (formal language) want them to. The same with humans - some are great at physics and others have great musical skills. The SAT is not effective because it does not tolerate diversity and individuality without whom the society could not exist and function properly.

In conclusion, (Introductory phrase) this way of examination is not really effective due to high-stress levels and pressure which leads to an inaccurate result that does not present the actual potential. Furthermore, the stakes at a single test should not be that high for a mere youngster. Lastly, intelligence is a wide spectrum term which cannot be defined by a single test.

Appendix No. 13

The second questionnaire to find out students' knowledge and attitude towards
Google Docs

Dear Student,

My name is Lauris Pukite, I am a fourth year student at the University of Latvia and I am doing a research about Google Docs for essay writing. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out your knowledge of and attitude towards Google Docs.

The questionnaire is anonymous; the data will be summarized and used in the Diploma Paper. Please, answer the questions below choosing the most appropriate answer and/or writing the information required.

1. Which of these Google Docs essay writing advantages are true for you?

- a) It differs from the usual writing, which I enjoy;
- b) I can use it when I have free time;
- c) I can do use it at home – I do not have to do it in the classroom;
- d) I can view it and correct it as many times as I want before submitting/finishing;
- e) I can easily correct other people's work and provide them with feedback;
- f) Feedback I get from other's helps me;
- g) Other _____.

2. Which of these Google Docs essay writing disadvantages are true for you?

- a) I lack the necessary technical skills to use Google Docs properly;
- b) I experienced technical difficulties using Google Docs;
- c) I do not have regular access to a computer with an Internet connection;
- d) None of the mentioned
- e) Other _____.

3. Please, rate how good you think Google Docs is:

- a) Not useful at all;
- b) Acceptable, but not better than writing essays in class on paper;
- c) A very good way of writing essays;
- d) A near perfect way of writing essays

4. Did you find Google Docs helpful for improving your essay writing skills?

- a) Yes, because _____.
- b) No, because _____.

5. Would you prefer Google Docs for essay writing over traditional essay writing (in class, on paper)? Why/ why not?

Dear Student,

My name is Lauris Pukite, I am a fourth year student at the University of Latvia and I am doing a research about Google Docs for essay writing. The aim of the questionnaire is to find out your knowledge of and attitude towards Google Docs.

The questionnaire is anonymous; the data will be summarized and used in the Diploma Paper. Please, answer the questions below choosing the most appropriate answer and/or writing the information required.

1. Which of these Google Docs essay writing advantages are true for you?

- a) It differs from the usual writing, which I enjoy;
- b) I can use it when I have free time;
- c) I can do use it at home – I do not have to do it in the classroom;
- d) I can view it and correct it as many times as I want before submitting/finishing;
- e) I can easily correct other people's work and provide them with feedback;
- f) Feedback I get from other's helps me;
- g) Other _____.

2. Which of these Google Docs essay writing disadvantages are true for you?

- a) I lack the necessary technical skills to use Google Docs properly;
- b) I experienced technical difficulties using Google Docs;
- c) I do not have regular access to a computer with an Internet connection;
- d) None of the mentioned
- e) Other I get easily distracted by other things on the internet

3. Please, rate how good you think Google Docs is:

- a) Not useful at all;
- b) Acceptable, but not better than writing essays in class on paper;
- c) A very good way of writing essays;
- d) A near perfect way of writing essays

4. Did you find Google Docs helpful for improving your essay writing skills?

- a) Yes, because the feedback from others helped.
- b) No, because _____.

5. Would you prefer Google Docs for essay writing over traditional essay writing (in class, on paper)? Why/ why not?

Yes, because I like the flexibility

_____.

Diplomdarbs „Google Docs 10. klases skolēnu eseju rakstīšanas prasmju pilnveidei” izstrādāts LU Pedagoģijas, psiholoģijas un mākslas fakultātē.

Ar savu parakstu apliecinu, ka pētījums veikts patstāvīgi, izmantoti tikai tajā norādītie informācijas avoti un iesniegtā darba elektroniskā kopija atbilst izdrukai.

Autors:

(paraksts)

(vārds, uzvārds)

Rekomendēju/nerekomendēju darbu aizstāvēšanai

Vadītāja:

(zin. grāds, vārds, uzvārds) (paraksts) (datums)

Recenzents:

(zin. grāds, vārds, uzvārds) (paraksts)

Darbs iesniegts Skolotāju izglītības nodaļā (datums)

Dekāna pilnvarotā persona: metodiķe Inese Ranka

(paraksts)

Darbs aizstāvēts valsts pārbaudījuma komisijas sēdē 11. 06. 2019. prot. Nr. 2

Komisijas sekretāre: Mg.izgl.zin. Anita Auziņa

(paraksts)