

Google Docs

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1 LITERATURE REVIEW GOOGLE DOCS

This paper demonstrates a number of practical applications in which the Google Docs suite is currently being used within a university ESL program in Tokyo. Specifically, it gives examples of the scope and limitations of the free online software on four levels: [1] the program level – management of teaching assignments and reporting of grades; [2] special program management – online book reports for extensive reading; [3] course management – homework production and submission, and self and peer assessment; and [4] project work – collaborative writing and student-generated questionnaires. “Google Docs” is a suite of free browserbased productivity software offered by Google. These web applications are a good example of the current trend that can be observed in many aspects of computing where documents, and the software used to create them, are both hosted online (i.e. in the cloud). Google Docs applications include a word processor, a spreadsheet, a presentation package and a form designer. In addition to the applications themselves, Google Docs offers a space on the server for storing documents created in Docs, which is currently limited to 1GB of free storage space, upgradable for a fee. Applications from any computer connected to the Internet. This provides a high degree of flexibility for content creation and sharing. The range of features and customization offered by each of the applications in the suite does not rival those available in full-fledged packages such as Microsoft Office or Oracle’s OpenOffice. Nevertheless, most of the basic features of each application type are present, usually in a form that makes them user-friendly for those already familiar with other packages.

The package is not without shortcomings. It should be noted that while it is possible to grant read-only access to everyone, users wishing to author and/or edit Google Docs need to create an account with Google. This does, however, allow the user to have universal access to additional free tools, such as Gmail, Blogger, YouTube, Picasa photo hosting, etc. The large number of free tools accessible within a single account, and the possibility of their integration with one another, makes Google Docs a very powerful toolkit for the language classroom. There is an issue with the conversion into Google Docs of files created in Microsoft Office. Documents containing heavily formatted elements are usually stripped of a large amount of formatting to match the reduced feature-set available in Google Docs. Examples of this include limited font set,

non-conversion of complex charts and tables, and the lack of slide transitions and animations in presentations. For the most part, the conversion in the opposite direction (i.e. from Google Docs to Office) was found to be trouble-free. In addition, it is important to remember that both the Google Docs package and the documents created/stored with it are online and, as such, are subject to the potential speed and accessibility issues linked to this type of technology. This problem can be partially avoided by using the offline access feature of the Docs, which however does prevent simultaneous editing/syncing of shared documents. With all of this in mind, we believe these shortcomings are greatly outweighed by the practicality and flexibility offered by Google Docs.

2 References

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