

Exploring the Use of Google Docs for Collaborative Narrative Writing: A Sequential Exploratory Study in EFL Classroom

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Abstract. Among the recent technological tools often used in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL), Google Docs is mostly used. This online media facilitates students' collaborative writing activities, making Google Docs frequently applied in writing classes to construct narrative text. Therefore, this study explores the influence of Google Docs as a medium for collaborative writing among EFL students in higher education, specifically on how it fosters students' collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity as part of 21st-century skills. Through a mixed-method study, the research examines how students perceive Google Docs as it is employed to support collaborative writing. Data were collected from 50 English literature students from a private university in Indonesia. They were asked to describe their experiences in learning diaries throughout the teaching-learning session before being interviewed and asked to answer a questionnaire at the end of the course. The findings indicated that Google Docs provided students with meaningful learning experiences. It facilitates real-time collaboration and enhances peer feedback, which makes the activities beneficial in developing students' collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity as part of 21st-century skills. Therefore, the study emphasizes the need for structured guidance to maximize ICT tools' usefulness for education.

Keywords: Google Docs; EFL classes; collaborative writing; narrative text.

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Introduction

In Indonesia, teaching writing held significant challenges, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Even though it is a crucial skill for academic success and global communication, writing is often perceived as one

of the most challenging competencies for students to master. Indonesian EFL learners face difficulties commonly in generating ideas, organizing their thoughts, and applying appropriate linguistic structures (Kurniasih et al., 2022; Cahyani et al., 2023; Herman et al., 2023). Their struggles are compounded by traditional teaching methods, which often emphasize rote learning and individual assignments rather than fostering creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration (Yulianawati et al., 2022; Jubhari et al., 2022).

Furthermore, limited teacher-student interaction in TEFL hinders personalized feedback and support, which causes a lack of student engagement and motivation to practice English writing (Fitria et al., 2023). Thus, as the demand for 21st-century skills such as collaboration, creativity, communication, critical thinking, and digital literacy grows, innovative approaches to teaching writing, mainly through technology, are urgently encouraged (Indah et al., 2022; Rofi' et al., 2024).

Numerous teaching-learning approaches were invented to help EFL students who undergo various challenges construct cohesive and coherent paragraphs. Collaborative writing appeared as one of the solutions to overcoming these issues in English writing. At best, this approach is richly rewarding, as pupils can discuss their ideas and weave a subtle tapestry of argument to craft the text iteratively (Lingard, 2021). These collaboration activities facilitate communication with their pals, broadening students' writing techniques and helping them become more versatile writers (Ratama et al., 2021).

In addition, to make the collaboration happen smoothly, integrating advanced technologies is the best solution to support writing (Nayman & Bavli, 2022). They are not only supporting students' activities; it also provides personalized challenges that push them to think critically. Moreover, the integration also contributes to foster students' another level of thinking in solving problems, requiring them to collaborate and communicate and find creative solutions (Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, collaborative learning approaches appeared as a solution to promoting EFL student's writing. With compatible technological assistance, the teaching-learning process can be optimal.

Choosing the best media for helping students develop their writing skills and integrating the competence of 21st-century learning will be a breakthrough. It should amplify the engagement and provide interactive multimedia; therefore, it is effectively maintaining students' motivation while protecting the security and academic integrity (Sembiring & Sembiring., 2024).

Various ICT tools have also been created to improve the teaching-learning process for EFL learners, mainly as students perform collaborative writing. Edmodo was found to be impactful in increasing students' writing abilities as they experienced online collaborative writing through this tool (Tasri, 2021). The discussion board provided by Edmodo allowed students to articulate their opinions at any given time.

Synchronous collaborative writing through Google Docs also influenced students' writing performance (Alwahoub et al., 2022). The collaborative activity allowed students to learn from each other, so the Content, Language Use, and Organization of their writing increased.

Google Docs for collaborative writing is also perceived positively by high school students. They implied that enthusiasm, digital literacy, and social skills are

perceived to be better by students as they undergo collaborative writing with Google Docs (Nabhan & Sa'diyah, 2021).

These studies have discovered that collaborative writing, supported by ICT tools, is significant for students' writing proficiency and soft skills. However, plenty of empirical gaps still need to be filled. Thus, this study examined the perspectives and attitudes of EFL students at the tertiary level by investigating how students experience collaborative writing through Google Docs. As it aims to analyse the influence of online collaborative learning in developing students' 21st-century skills, this study delved from the point of view of students themselves, which can be formulated as follows: How do English literature students perceive Google Docs as a medium for collaborative writing in developing 21st-century skills?

Method

This study used a mixed-method approach using an exploratory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). The qualitative data was first collected to acquire vivid information about students' experiences, feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of writing narrative text collaboratively using Google Docs. Moreover, the initial qualitative data was followed by quantitative data to confirm and generalize the findings to a broader group.

This study aims to explore how Google Docs influence students' collaboration during writing projects. It examined the role of Google Docs in assisting them and how it affects the group dynamic in enhancing students' 21st-century skills. The study projected that Google Docs would create an engaging learning atmosphere accommodating EFL students' needs. Therefore, students can collaborate to construct cohesive and coherent English writing, developing the 4Cs through every activity they engage in during class.

By employing a purposive sampling technique, this investigation asked 50 students of the English Literature study program at a private university in Indonesia to participate in this study. They were the students who enrolled in the Creative Writing course, divided into ten teams of 5 students. Students participated in six-session blended classes that were asked to collaboratively develop a fresh nuance of existing folklore in Indonesia imaginatively with their group.

Since it is a mixed method, three instruments were used to collect the data. Those are learning diaries and semi-structured interviews, which are utilized to gather qualitative data, followed by a questionnaire. This research used learning diaries as they helped students verbalize their thoughts while completing the task. Sixty learning diaries from ten different groups were written immediately after each session after completing the writing task. Each group was asked to have one learning journey and continuously recorded their feelings, experiences, and perceptions of the problems they found throughout the online collaborative writing activities.

The semi-structured interview was also used to get in-depth information from the students. It enabled the researcher to examine the participants comprehensively. Moreover, their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs were profoundly and personally obtained to fill the gap from the previous instrument through 10 questions. This research employed a post-study focus group semi-structured interview involving ten students, representing one student from all the groups. They were selected

based on the previous observation that combined each group's most active and quiet members.

The questionnaire was also used to gather numerical data. This instrument confirms students' responses and arguments previously collected qualitatively about the function of Google Docs while constructing a narrative text in collaborative writing. Google Forms was used to distribute the questionnaire, which required all students to answer it at the end of the course. The questionnaire consisted of 20 Likert-Scale items, divided into positive and negative statements to represent the students' perception of using Google Docs as a medium for collaborative writing. Participants were guided to answer the questionnaire through statements as follows.

Table 1. The Scoring of Likert-Scale Questionnaire

The Scoring of Likert-Scale Questionnaire	
Statement	Classification
5	Strongly Agree
4	Agree
3	Neutral
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

This analysis technique was chosen as it helped highlight the data's main features before being coded and themed so it could be analysed profoundly and interpreted thoroughly. Data visualization was also used to analyse the questionnaire. It generalized the findings by providing statistical evidence, making it more applicable and convincing. Therefore, it can strengthen the study's validity and reliability, presenting a comprehensive and robust understanding.

Findings and Discussion

ICT tools utilized to support teaching-learning always leave an impression on students as they either help or hinder their learning process. Several studies have been conducted on similar issues; however, this study has narrowed the empirical gaps in the research design, analysis, and participants. Through learning diaries, interviews, and questionnaires, the responses shown by the English literature students revealed the power of Google Docs for collaborative writing to develop students' 21st-century skills.

Google Docs for Collaborative Writing Enhanced Students' Engagement

Students' engagement is how students show their enthusiasm and investment during teaching and learning. It is a process and a product that combines the interaction between motivation and active learning (Qureshi et al., 2023). Based on the data analysis, using Google Docs for collaboration writing impacts students' engagement, and it is related to three factors: students' collaboration, responsibility, and motivation.

The interview and learning diary results showed that participants perceived that Google Docs allowed them to share, discuss, and collaborate at their own pace.

They can continue to discuss their text, including reviewing the paragraph, revising the plot, and editing the text inside and outside the classroom.

Excerpt 1
The class is already over, and we have to stop the discussion... However, since we do it in Google Docs, we can individually check the document but still collaborate by leaving comments and feedback on our writing.
 (Interview Student 10)

Excerpt 2
One of the group members could not go to the class today...but fortunately, we could still discuss and do our part for the text. Moreover, we can access his review regarding the text simultaneously so the rest of the group can revise it directly. (Learning Diary Group 6)

As noted by Student 10 and Group 6 highlighted that Google Docs is helping them be more productive in collaborating with their peers as the media provides various features that encourage them to do their projects.

Students' responses in the learning diary also showed the positive impact of Google Docs on the sense of responsibility performed by the students, which is crucial to the project's engagement. The learning diary of student 4 acknowledged that idea as he wrote,

Excerpt 3
Our group was slightly surprised that one of our friends who never contributed to our previous work wrote his part of the resolution in Google Docs. Since Google Docs is easy to access, he can do his part whenever possible. (Learning Diary Group 4)

A common challenge in group work is unequal contribution. Group work tends to be completed by one person, and the other mates often do not give the same effort and contribution to the work (Pham, 2021). However, the accessibility of Google Docs helps students overcome this issue.

Students' engagement also resulted positively from all the students, shown through the questionnaire.

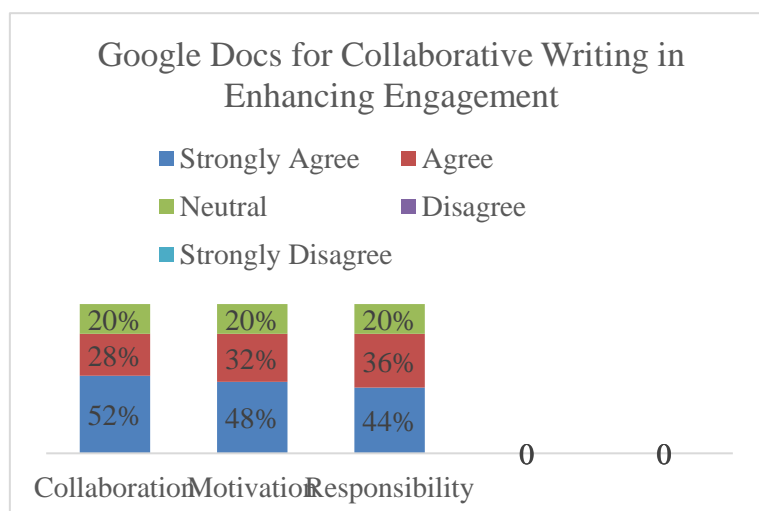


Figure 1. Students' Engagement

The statistical data showed that most respondents strongly agree, 52% and 28% agree, in answering a statement that Google Docs helped them to be more effective in writing their narrative text collaboratively. This total was higher than 20% of students who chose neutral. Since practical activities enhance student engagement, students are more likely to achieve desired outcomes as they are actively involved and interested in the activities. Therefore, it leads to better performance in collaboration and the result of their writing.

In addition, 48% of the respondents strongly agree, and 32% agree that Google Docs successfully influences them to be more responsible for their group work. The rest of the 20% of participants chose neutral on this matter. The highest number of students who strongly agreed with this aspect pointed out the benefits of Google Docs for supporting their collaborative writing. Hence, they become more responsible for group work.

44% of students also strongly agreed, and 36% agreed that they were motivated to do the task as the productivity increased with Google Docs. With a total of 20% neutral, the number did not exceed the total number of students who considered the support made by Google Docs to motivate their discussion and engagement in completing the paragraph.

The study revealed that real-time editing and commenting in Google Docs foster effective digital communication. This aspect is imperative in enhancing students' communication skills, which is crucial in 21st-century education. Fitria et al. (2023) studied a similar topic. They found that online collaborative writing with Google Docs is beneficial for student writing development and essential in fostering students' communication skills. It happened as features provided by Google Docs prompted students to collaborate seamlessly. Furthermore, it allowed students to engage in interactive discussions that mimic real-world digital communication scenarios.

Google Docs for Collaborative Writing Provides Classroom Flexibility

The second theme that arose from the data analysis was classroom flexibility. Classroom flexibility is the ease of accessing class information and engaging with class activities. This aspect is categorized into class accessibility and inclusivity, which support different learning styles.

Students' perceptions of using Google Docs during collaborative writing narrative text supported the concept of classroom flexibility since its use allows students to access the text conveniently. It also allowed students to collaborate anytime and from anywhere as long as they were connected to the internet. In the interview, student 8 stressed the capability of Google Docs as she stated,

Excerpt 4

Google Docs can be accessed through my mobile phone, so it is very convenient when I want to update the text. (Interview Student 8)

In line with student 8, group 9 also perceives the ease of using Google Docs to store files and change them at any moment. In the learning diary, group 9 narrated their concrete example of Google Docs' accessibility,

Excerpt 5

One of our group mates... cannot come to the class Since we write the text with Google Docs, she can contribute to the group work even though we are not in the same place. (Learning Diary Group 9)

Group 9 mentioned that they have benefited from using Google Docs because all their group mates can access the document and update their writing project even though they are in different places and times. This feature supports asynchronous collaboration across time and space.

The questionnaire results also showed similar findings, indicating that Google Docs provided a strong flexibility.

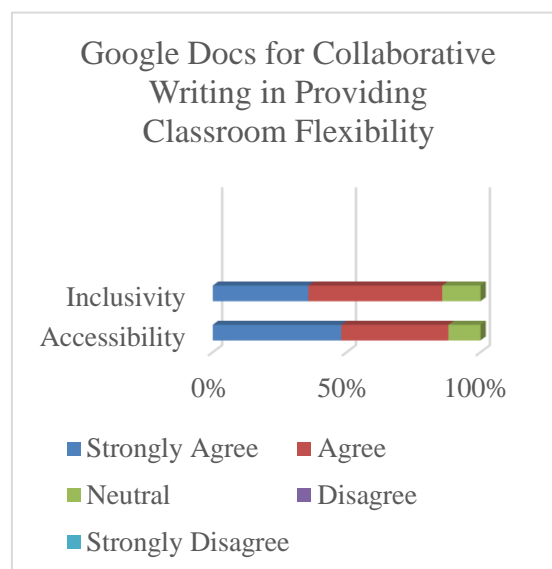


Figure 2. Classroom Flexibility

48% of students strongly agreed, 40% agreed, and 12% were neutral when answering that Google Docs is highly accessible for supporting group writing. Since practical activities enhance student engagement, students are more likely to achieve desired outcomes as they are actively involved and interested in the activities. Therefore, it leads to better collaboration performance and the result of their writing.

A seamless group work provided by features in Google Docs provides user-friendly interfaces for students to collaborate and communicate in various conditions and situations. Therefore, 40% strongly agree and support, with 56% of students agreeing and acknowledging that Google Docs provides features that help students with different needs and learning feel included. The accessibility standards ensure that all team members contribute conveniently. The intuitive design allows students to create, edit, and comment on documents collaboratively, making it all-inclusive for all students.

The analysis also revealed that functioning Google Docs for collaborative writing is significant in cultivating students' 21st-century collaboration skills. Marwa et al. (2024) conducted the same research focus, which showed similar findings. The study found that students' collaboration skills are enhanced as they experience classroom writing projects mediated by Google Docs. This result supported the findings of this study, where Google Docs enabled students to work together efficiently, even when physically apart. This high accessibility provided by features in Google Docs intensified students' collaboration, which is imperative in constructing cohesive and coherent paragraphs.

Google Docs for Collaborative Writing Facilitated Time Efficiency

As students and teachers frequently engage in platforms and websites of digital technologies, it consciously encourages their skills in employing them. Since the assessment process is conducted online and utilizes web-based applications and educational portals to support the assessment model, students and teachers' comprehension and skill in engaging with educational online assistance will increase as they get used to the features. This argument also supported by Altunay (2019), who claimed that repeatedly utilizing digital technology tools and platforms allowed students and teacher to improve their capabilities, which affected their technological skills to be better.

Nowadays, 5.0 society provides hundreds of online resources. Students can roam the internet to find any information and get access to various platforms that could support their learning process. In collaborative writing, Google Docs provide features that allow students to easily locate ideas and inspiration for their group writing. The researcher noted the comment by student 7, who indicated,

Excerpt 6

My group needed more information about the topic because the task was narrative writing about folklore. Thus, we searched for them on the internet, and Google Docs has a search toolbar where I can find so many ideas on the internet and still be on the same page as my document. (Interview Student 7)

Student 7's experience pointed to the efficiency of Google Docs. The students can find any references for the group writing and can still monitor their text. Therefore, Google Docs users can save time and do their work efficiently.

There are a few stages that students have to go through to do collaborative writing, and a more intense organization of the document is needed, particularly for students who do the writing with their friends. However, Google Docs erased this problem by providing a shared document the entire group could access. Group 5 stressed this point in the learning diary, followed by student 8 during the interview as they stated,

Excerpt 7

It used to be so hard to compile all the documents made by my group members and then combine them in one place. However, with Google Docs, we can do it in one link. (Learning Diary Group 5)

Excerpt 8

Google Docs made our work organization easier. In addition to allowing us to access the same document, we can also send the file directly to Google Drive. (Interview Student 8)

The students' perceptions indicated an improvement in the organization of the group writing product. They can conveniently write in only one document and save the file easily on Google Drive connected to Google Docs, ensuring centralized access and streamlined workflow, which is convenient for their task organization.

Numerical data from the questionnaire also supports previous qualitative findings.

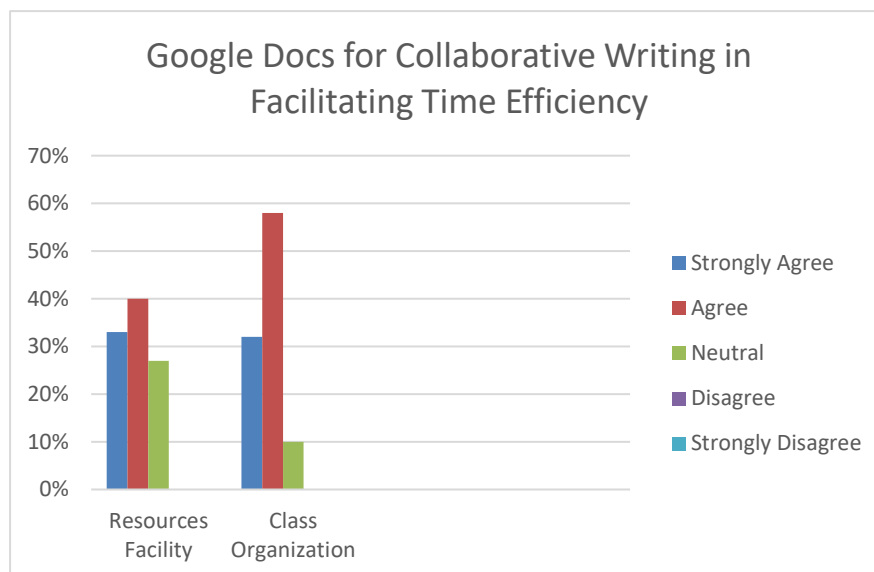


Figure 3. Time Efficiency

This data showed that 33% of students strongly agreed, and 40% agreed that Google Docs helped aid collaborative writing projects. Students can brainstorm ideas by sailing through Explore Tool to expose new ideas, spark their creativity, and find inspiration to construct inventive and imaginative stories. Most students agreed with the statement that Google Docs facilitate group writing with innovative features to support creativity.

Another statement of Google Docs that improves task organization also showed favorable agreement by students. 32% strongly agree, and 58% agree that Google Docs helped them organize the collaborative writing process in only one document. They can effortlessly collaborate by working on a shared document, ensuring all contributions are organized in one place; thus, it makes saving and accessing the file simple and efficient. It also streamlines the writing process and helps students quickly locate the document whenever needed, enhancing productivity and collaboration.

A previous study also supported these findings in which technological-based applications such as Google Docs positively influenced students' creativity through time efficiency. Students' creativity and time efficiency are enhanced through flexible and engaging features that allow them to develop and refine their ideas (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2021).

Google Docs for Collaborative Writing Simplify Students-Lecturer Interaction

Google Docs also supports interaction among students. It also bridged the interaction between students and the lecturer. Since the link for the document can be shared and accessed by the intended person, the document was set to allow the group member and lecturer to view, suggest, comment, and edit the text. Therefore, the lecturer could give feedback to her students. Group 10 mentioned in the learning diary, which was emphasized by student 10 in the interview as stated,

Excerpt 9

We loved it when the lecturer immediately gave feedback on our document. It was constructive for us to revise our work and quickly note the update as it was already written in the same document. (Learning Diary Group 10)

Excerpt 10

Google Docs allowed me and my peers to check comments and input from the lecturer conveniently and then instantly updates and revise our text following the revision. (Interview Students 10)

Through learning diaries and interviews, students underlined the assistance of Google Docs in facilitating students and lecturers to interact, communicate, and discuss more intensively. The simplified interaction through Google Docs constructs dynamic engagement by fostering an ongoing exchange of ideas. Students can receive instant feedback from the lecturer through features like live editing, commenting, and instant feedback. This fosters iterative improvement and deeper engagement, cultivating a fluid exchange of thoughts and encouraging deeper collaboration and critical thinking. Therefore, this empowering learning environment helped create a supportive space, making the collaborative writing process more efficient and cohesive.

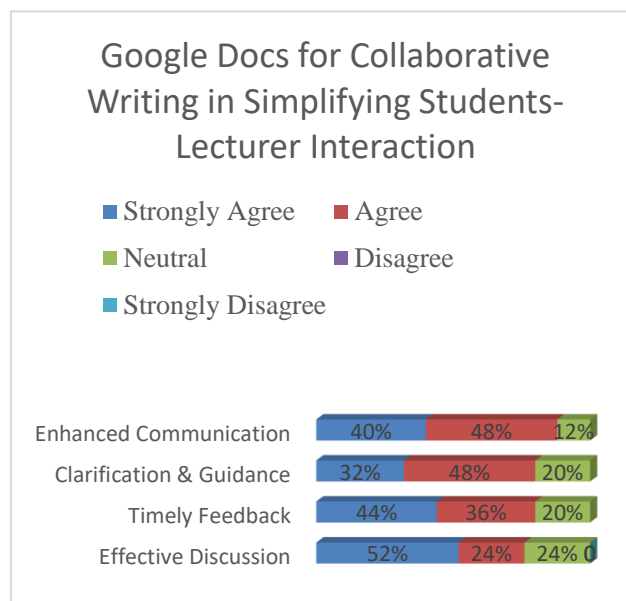


Figure 4. Simplify Students-Lecturer Interaction

The chart indicated that 52% of students strongly agreed, and 24% agreed that practical discussion can be developed using Google Docs. It constructed meaningful, structured conversations between students and lecturers. Thus, the discussion process can be effective as students engage deeply with the content by exploring different perspectives and working collaboratively to develop ideas or solutions.

Moreover, 44% of them also strongly agreed that they received timely feedback from the lecturer, supporting the other 36% who agreed and stood on the same argument. The quick responses and comments on work, as the lecturer does,

maintain the project's momentum. Thus, it ensures alignment with academic standards and supports individual and group development.

Furthermore, Google Docs is also perceived as a technological assistance that helps students comprehend the feedback given by the lecturer easily. With features allowing users to point out specific parts to be revised, students regard lecturers' suggestions and comments as always guided accurately and not misled. Thus, 38% strongly agreed and supported, with 48% of students agreeing that Google Docs made it easier for them to understand the lecturer's feedback.

In addition, 40% of students were strongly agreed that their communication enhanced with Google Docs. 48% of students who chose agree also perceive that Google Docs improves their communication with the lecturer by integrating features that provide real-time interaction, contextual feedback, ongoing dialogue, and transparent document management. Therefore, Google Docs supports effective collaboration, facilitating a more productive and engaging collaborative writing process between students and lecturers throughout the project.

The previous study also aligned with this finding, where real-time feedback features provided by Google Apps cultivated the interaction in the classroom, both students-students and students-teacher (Nabhan & Sa'diyah, 2021).

Google Docs for Collaborative Writing Encourages Students' Digital Literacy Awareness

Google Docs also supports interaction among students. It also bridged the interaction between students and the lecturer. Since the link for the document can be shared and accessed by the intended person, the document was set to allow the group member and lecturer to view, suggest, comment, and edit the text. Therefore, the lecturer could give feedback to her students. Group 10 mentioned in the learning diary, which was emphasized by student 10 in the interview as stated,

21st-century education promotes creativity, innovation, and digital-age collaboration (Saimon et al., 2023). Therefore, students must engage with technological learning media that fosters collaboration, strengthening their tech skills and awareness and ensuring they thrive in a tech-driven world.

Participants in this study mentioned the impact of their digital awareness. In the interview, student 3 indicated,

Excerpt 11

Google Docs helped me immensely during the learning process, especially as I collaborated with my peers. I learned how to manage shared documents better, use online tools efficiently, and be more mindful of privacy and permissions. It has made me more aware of how technology impacts collaboration and communication. (Interview Student 3)

Students gain hands-on experience creating, editing, and collaborating on digital content by integrating tools like Google Docs. Beyond simply using these tools, they are taught to critically evaluate information, navigate online resources, and distinguish between credible sources and misinformation.

Data from the questionnaire supported previous findings. Three interconnected statements asked students about their perception of Google Docs for collaborative writing and how it affects students' digital literacy awareness. The statistical data also showed similar results.

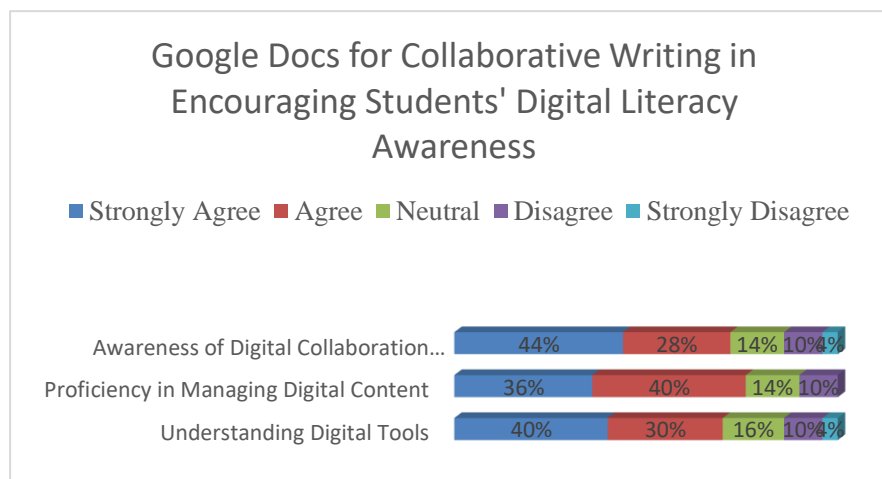


Figure 5. Encourage Digital Awareness

40% of students strongly agreed, and 30% agreed that collaborative writing with Google Docs helped them comprehend utilizing ICT tools. Even though 16% were neutral and 14% of them stood on negative responses, Half of the students positively perceived the statement that Google Docs for collaborative writing has significantly improved their understanding of digital tools and technologies, which highlights a critical educational advantage. Google Docs offers real-time collaboration features that enhance students' digital skills. This practical use helps students grasp digital concepts and improves their ability to manage online documents effectively.

Moreover, 36% of pupils strongly agreed that using Google Docs for collaborative writing improves their proficiency in managing digital content. They found that its collaborative features facilitate efficient management and sharing of digital content. Although 24% stood on neutral, another 34% of students agreed that Google Docs has helped them become more proficient in managing and sharing digital content during collaborative projects. Since Google Docs allows students to share capabilities, it simplifies distributing and accessing documents. They are permitted to control access levels and ensure that everyone involved in a project has the most current version of the document. Thus, it enhances collaborative efforts, reduces version control issues, and promotes efficient workflow. Therefore, incorporating various tools in Google Docs can further enrich students' digital skill sets.

In addition, 44% of students strongly agreed, followed by 28% agreeing that features of Google Docs have increased their awareness of digital collaboration practices. Google Docs boosts digital literacy by immersing students in practical digital collaboration that fosters their problem-solving skills. Furthermore, it increases their familiarity with technology, improving students' digital communication and teaching of digital etiquette. These experiences build a robust understanding of digital technologies and their effective use in various contexts. It helped students understand effective online teamwork and the importance of data

privacy. Hence, it sharpened students' digital literacy by improving their technical skills and grasp of collaborative digital practices, broadening their view of digital collaboration.

These findings connected to the previous one, where ICT tools promoted students' digital literacy skills, which are valuable for their future careers (Wang et al., 2023).

Conclusion

On top of that, students enhance their 4C skills by continuously engaging in these reflective cycles—writing, assessing, questioning, and refining ideas. Since the features allow them to give and receive feedback effortlessly, they encourage students to solve complex problems collaboratively. This continuous exchange of ideas empowers students to collaborate and communicate their ideas. It also encouraged creativity and analysis, which in turn enhanced their critical thinking. Therefore, as it ultimately honed students' ability to navigate complex problems individually and as a team, collaborative writing with Google Docs improved their writing and enhanced their 21st-century skills.

Structured guidance is imperative in maximizing the potential of ICT tools for education. Additionally, providing training or workshops on effective digital communication and collaboration can be beneficial. It enriches students' ability to navigate these platforms confidently and become more digitally literate. Therefore, it will ensure students are well-prepared for future professional environments where digital collaboration is valued. The conclusion should be withdrawn based on research findings, formulated concerns, and research purposes.

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