
Collaborative Online Writing: Students' Perspectives and Their Actual Writing Performance

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Abstract

Background:

This study explores a topic that has not received enough attention in the literature: the relationship between EFL students' perceptions of online collaborative writing and their actual writing performance. Few studies have specifically looked at how learners' self-assessments match quantifiable writing outcomes, despite prior research emphasizing the advantages of collaborative writing for language development.

Methodology:

91 Indonesian EFL undergraduate students took part in this study by working together to write an argumentative essay while receiving online instruction. Open-ended surveys, self-perception questionnaires, documentation of online collaborative interactions, and student essays were used to gather data.

Findings:

According to both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the majority of students had favorable opinions about collaborative writing and thought it improved their speaking and writing confidence. Statistical analysis, however, revealed no meaningful relationship between students' assessments of themselves and their actual writing abilities.

Conclusion:

These results underline the need for more reflective and feedback-rich writing instruction in EFL contexts by indicating that students may misjudge their own writing abilities.

Originality:

The originality of this study lies in its dual focus on EFL students' self-perceptions and their actual writing performance within an online collaborative writing context. Unlike previous research that typically examines these aspects separately, this study uniquely correlates self-assessment with quantifiable writing outcomes, particularly in the demanding genre of argumentative writing. Conducted in an Indonesian EFL setting during remote learning, it highlights important cultural and technological influences often overlooked in similar studies. Thus, it provides a novel perspective on the gap between students' perceived and actual writing abilities in online collaborative environments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Collaborative writing has drawn a lot of attention in the field of second-language (L2) education during the past 20 years. Collaboration promotes interaction, mutual support, and deeper cognitive engagement in writing tasks, according to numerous studies ([Chao & Lo, 2011](#); [Shehadeh, 2011](#); [Kang & Lee, 2019](#)). When properly implemented, collaborative writing can improve students' motivation, attitudes toward writing, and produced written work of a higher caliber ([Deveci, 2018](#); [McDonough, et al., 2018](#)).

Students' perceptions and their actual writing performance are the two main factors that drive the current conversation about collaborative writing. The first is about how students feel about the process, and a lot of research shows that they feel good about it. For example, students typically value the chance to exchange ideas and negotiate meaning, which promotes writing confidence and a sense of ownership ([Deveci, 2018](#); [Zhang, 2019](#)). Although less studied, the second dimension looks into the linguistic results and caliber of texts created through collaboration ([Teng, 2021](#); [Winarti & Cahyono, 2020](#)). Collaborative prewriting produces more accurate and coherent texts, according to studies like those by [McDonough, et al., \(2018\)](#).

Nevertheless, perceptions and performance are frequently examined separately. The relationship between students' perceptions of collaborative writing and their actual performance on these assignments has not been thoroughly studied. This disparity is especially pertinent in online learning settings, where collaborative writing is being utilized more frequently but its true effects are not always fully recognized ([Pham, 2021](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic's quick transition to digital platforms hastened the adoption of online collaborative tasks even more, but there are still few empirical studies on their efficacy ([Huang, et al., 2021](#)).

Furthermore, argumentative writing—a genre that requires higher-order thinking, clear organization, and logical coherence—has received less attention in prior research than descriptive or narrative tasks. This brings up significant issues regarding the linguistic and cognitive difficulties that students encounter as well as whether or not their assessments of their abilities are accurate in such demanding situations ([Du, 2018](#); [Winarti & Cahyono, 2020](#)).

Given these gaps, this study examines how students' opinions about collaborative writing relate to how well they actually write in an online argumentative writing assignment. It specifically aims to respond to the following research inquiries:

1. How do students feel about collaborative writing exercises conducted online?
2. How do students feel about the way they write in English?
3. Could students' perceptions and their actual writing performance be related?

By tackling these issues, this study adds to the expanding corpus of research on collaborative writing by looking at quantifiable results in a digital setting in addition to student engagement. It seeks to influence curriculum design and pedagogical practice, especially for online or hybrid writing courses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Collaborative Writing Foundation

Sociocultural theory, which holds that learning is a socially mediated process, has been the subject of much research on collaborative writing (CW). When it comes to learning a second language (L2), CW gives students the chance to interact meaningfully, co-create knowledge, and hone their linguistic skills through social negotiation ([Storch, 2005](#); [Shehadeh, 2011](#)). Higher-order thinking abilities like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are developed through this cooperative process and are critical for academic writing.

The importance of CW in improving students' writing abilities has been highlighted in recent research. For example, [McDonough, et al.](#) (2018) discovered that group prewriting exercises increased students' compositions' accuracy and cohesiveness. Likewise, [Deveci](#) (2018) observed that CW exercises boosted students' confidence and motivation for academic writing assignments. These results imply that students interact more fully with language use, structure, and content when they co-construct texts.

2.2 Collaborative Writing's Advantages in EFL Settings

Numerous educational advantages have been linked to the use of CW in EFL contexts. According to [Anshu and Yesuf](#) (2022), online collaborative writing (OCW) in an EFL writing course increased students' writings' lexical complexity and fluency while having no discernible impact on syntactic complexity. This suggests that CW can improve some writing skills, especially vocabulary use and idea flow. [Nissa, et al.](#) (2023) examined the impact of collaborative writing and blog online learning on the writing abilities of EFL learners at varying levels of motivation in the Indonesian context. Regardless of the students' starting motivation levels, the study found that this method was successful in improving their writing abilities. This research highlights how CW and technology integration can help diverse learners.

Additionally, [Hutabarat and Herlinawati](#) (2025) investigated the effects of OCW activities on the writing abilities of English language learners at Universitas Lancang Kuning

through a quasi-experimental study. The findings demonstrated the value of group dynamics in CW by showing that group activities improved students' writing skills more than pair activities.

2.3 Implementing Collaborative Writing Difficulties

Notwithstanding its advantages, CW has a number of drawbacks that may reduce its efficacy. Unequal participation is a significant concern, as some students may be passive while dominant students take over the task ([Mozaffari, 2016](#); [Winarti & Cahyono, 2020](#)). Cultural norms can make these dynamics even more complex, especially in collectivist societies like Indonesia where students may shy away from conflict and show deference to peers who are seen as more experienced ([Hofstede, 2011](#)).

In an online writing class, [Kumalasari](#) (2023) investigated how EFL female students perceived CW. She discovered that although students' attitudes toward CW were generally positive, they also encountered difficulties like disagreements and unequal contributions from group members. In order to reduce disagreements and improve teamwork, the study suggested offering particular subjects and evaluation criteria for peers.

In OCW, technical problems are another major obstacle. According to [Purwaningtyas, et al.](#) (2023), students' lack of cooperation, lack of readiness for learning, erratic internet connectivity, and incompatible devices caused problems for teachers. These results imply that in order to participate in OCW activities successfully, teachers and students alike require sufficient planning and assistance.

2.4 Metacognitive Awareness's Function in Collaborative Writing

For CW to be successful, metacognitive awareness is essential. Learners' engagement with language learning opportunities during CW is directly impacted by their understanding of themselves as learners, the tasks they are performing, and the strategies at their disposal ([Wang, et al., 2024](#)). According to [Chen and Hapgood](#) (2021), students who knew more about CW demonstrated greater equality and mutuality in their interactions, which resulted in more episodes involving language and self-resolving behaviors. [Teng and Huang](#) (2023) looked more closely at the ways that metacognitive instruction in CW aids in the development of L2 writing. According to their research, learners who receive metacognitive instruction are better able to organize, track, and assess their writing processes, which leads to better writing outcomes. These results highlight how crucial it is to incorporate metacognitive techniques into CW exercises in order to promote learners' independence and self-control.

2.5 Technology Integration in Group Writing

The way students collaborate and write has changed as a result of CW's incorporation of technology. The writing process is improved by online tools like blogs, Google Docs that enable real-time collaboration, feedback, and revision. According to [Grami](#) (2012), the implementation of blogs and feedback checklists in CW enhanced students' capacity to recognize target audiences, fostered a legitimate peer review culture, and fostered critical thinking. [Al-Yafaei and Mudhsh's](#) (2023) study revealed that online collaborative learning improved the writing abilities of EFL students. When compared to traditional methods, the use of online collaborative learning effectively facilitated instructional and educational endeavors, resulting in higher levels of accomplishment. Additionally, the writing performance, motivation, and self-efficacy of Chinese EFL learners were greatly enhanced by the use of Tencent Docs in an online CW course ([Li, 2023](#)). Writing results were improved by the real-time collaboration, editing, and feedback opportunities offered by the technologically enhanced writing environment.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

In order to examine the connection between students' opinions of online collaborative writing and their actual writing performance, this study used a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design ([Creswell & Clark, 2017](#)), combining quantitative and qualitative data. This strategy is justified by the intricacy of the research questions, which call for both descriptive and numerical data in order to fully comprehend student viewpoints and perform correlation analysis.

3.2 Participants

Ninety-one second-year undergraduate students, ages 19 to 21, who were enrolled in Mulawarman University's Advanced Writing course in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, participated. The course is taught in English and is required for English education majors. During the same academic semester, the students received instruction from three different teachers. Informed consent was acquired, and participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Students from three distinct class sections were included to guarantee a range of writing skills. Institutional placement tests had been used to evaluate students' general English proficiency before the collaborative writing exercise, but the results were not directly utilized in this investigation.

Because hierarchy and deference to authority are valued in collectivist cultural values,

students in Indonesian schools, particularly those attending state universities, frequently view their teachers as important figures in the classroom ([Hofstede, 2011](#)). The dynamics of collaborative writing may be impacted by this cultural background, as students are typically more reserved when voicing opposing opinions or critiquing peer contributions. Interpreting students' perceptions and engagement patterns requires an understanding of this cultural dimension.

3.3 Research Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection: open-ended perception survey, self-assessment of writing proficiency survey, and student writing samples. The purpose of the first survey was to gather students' opinions about the collaborative writing process. It was adapted from [Shehadeh](#) (2011). It was disseminated using Google Forms and included eight open-ended questions. Since the activity did not last a full semester, one of the original items was removed, and another was added to gauge perceived progress.

Ten statements taken from [Ismail](#) (2011) were used in the second survey, which used a five-point Likert scale (1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree). Self-perceived English writing proficiency was the main focus of this survey. To ensure contextual relevance, item 9 was changed to eliminate any mention of the Arabic language.

Two senior lecturers with backgrounds in applied linguistics and EFL pedagogy evaluated the surveys' content validity. Twenty students from a different cohort participated in a pilot test to determine reliability, and the Likert-scale items' Cronbach's alpha was 0.82.

3.4 Procedure

The data collection process followed several structured stages:

1. Preparation Stage: Jitsi Meet was chosen as the primary platform for the online collaborative writing exercise, which was co-designed by instructors and researchers. The platform was selected because it is easily accessible and adaptable to low-bandwidth conditions, which is important in areas like East Kalimantan that have uneven internet infrastructure.
2. Orientation Session: Teachers' dual roles as mentors and assessors in Indonesian classrooms were reflected in their facilitative yet authoritative role. They presented the idea of collaborative writing and highlighted its educational advantages during the first online session. Students were urged to listen intently, respect each other's contributions, and strike a balance between individual accountability and teamwork—skills that were not always stressed in their previous educational experiences.

3. **Pairing and Prewriting:** Although students were paired at random, teachers made sure that the partners had a range of writing skills. Students' reluctance to assert themselves, particularly when paired with higher-achieving peers—a dynamic shaped by cultural norms of modesty and harmony—made this decision difficult, even though it is consistent with the scaffolded peer interaction principle. During the collaborative prewriting, instructors encouraged students to participate critically and constructively. Even though they had compelling counterarguments, some students were reluctant to disagree with their partners' opinions out of cultural deference. When assessing the level of their engagement and the caliber of their output, this behavior should be taken into account.
4. **Individual Essay Writing:** Following the group discussion, students composed essays on their own using the conclusions from the group discussion. A standardized rubric was used to evaluate the digitally submitted essays. **Student Autonomy and Responsibility:** The culture shifted from teacher-led to student-centered learning, even though students were supposed to work independently during the essay writing phase. At first, some students found it difficult to organize and articulate their ideas independently enough to write argumentative essays. For those who needed clarification or feedback, instructors offered online consultation hours through Jitsi Meet or WhatsApp.
5. **Post-Writing Surveys:** Students used Google Forms and WhatsApp to complete perception surveys. The process was facilitated by the instructors, who also encouraged candid answers. Students filled out two perception surveys after turning in their individual essays. The researchers admitted that cultural norms could sway students to provide socially acceptable answers, particularly if they thought their lecturers would see them. In order to remedy this, students were reminded that their grades would not be impacted by the findings, and anonymity was rigorously preserved.

3.5 Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to answer the research questions.

1. Quantitative

Using SPSS software, Likert-scale survey responses were examined to produce correlation analysis and descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations). Since the data did

not meet the assumption of normalcy (as confirmed by the Shapiro-Wilk test), Spearman's rank-order correlation was used to evaluate the relationship between students' self-perceptions and actual writing performance.

The five dimensions of content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics were evaluated in each student's individual essay using a rubric modified from [Hedgcock and Lefkowitz](#) (1992). The final score was calculated by averaging the scores of each component, which ranged from 0 to 100. Two trained raters independently evaluated the essays, and a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.79 indicated inter-rater reliability.

2. Qualitative

Thematic analysis was used to examine the open-ended perception survey responses ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). To guarantee consistency, two coders worked together to identify themes following the first round of coding. Student engagement, perceptions of learning, partner dynamics, and difficulties with online collaboration were among the emerging themes. Five students participated in member checking to ensure that the interpretations were accurate.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Students' Perceptions of Online Collaborative Writing Activities

The online collaborative writing (CW) activity was overwhelmingly viewed favorably, according to an analysis of the open-ended survey responses. Out of the 91 students, 75 (82.4%) said that CW was "enjoyable" and "useful," and 68 (74.7%) said that it gave them more confidence when writing in English.

At first, students had trouble expressing themselves and coming up with ideas during the online discussions. A number of students (including S4, S16, and S22) expressed unease about striking up a conversation, citing a lack of experience speaking English naturally and trouble coordinating their ideas with those of their partner. This is consistent with research by [Teng](#) (2021), who found that early on, digital collaboration affects learners' oral fluency and self-efficacy.

But as the exercise went on, students realized how beneficial it was for teamwork. "I usually write alone and don't know if my arguments are strong," wrote participant S3. I could ask my partner directly for this task. S7 also highlighted the motivational element, saying, "I tried to write better because I didn't want to let my partner down." These statements demonstrate not only the pedagogical benefits of CW but also its affective benefits in increasing student engagement, which are corroborated by [Pham](#) (2021).

Additionally, students reported that CW improved their critical thinking, speaking, and

listening abilities. S11 observed that sharing his thoughts with a partner compelled him to think more carefully. This is consistent with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which holds that knowledge is jointly created via interaction.

Five students, however, reported having neutral or unfavorable experiences. They brought up unclear expectations, unequal participation, and technical difficulties. "My partner was passive," S6 wrote. According to [Mozaffari](#) (2016), "I had to do all the planning," underscoring the difficulty of accountability in peer collaboration, particularly in an online environment without synchronous monitoring. This confirms earlier research showing that group dynamics have a major impact on CW task success ([Winarti & Cahyono, 2020](#)).

At first, many students acknowledged that the activity was new to them. Students found the transition to peer-driven collaboration to be both stimulating and challenging because they were used to individual assignments in teacher-centered classrooms. Their comments reflected what [Pham](#) (2021) called the adaptive phase in students' digital collaboration trajectory, which is characterized by initial hesitancy followed by growing engagement. This change is essential because, particularly in collectivist societies like Indonesia, students' readiness to adjust is a key factor in the success of online group projects.

The study's findings regarding the varied values students placed on teamwork are especially noteworthy. They reported improvements in critical thinking, oral communication, and confidence in addition to content creation. Students reported improving their ability to express, defend, and discuss ideas with peers, demonstrating that these learning outcomes go beyond writing. Learner agency, a critical competency in post-pandemic educational settings where students are expected to navigate learning semi-independently, is linked to such cognitive and communicative gains, as [Huang, et al.](#) (2021) explains.

However, despite the general upward trend, worries regarding unequal participation surfaced, particularly in pairs with different skill levels. This worry is supported by [Winarti and Cahyono's](#) (2020) research, which discovered that unequal power dynamics in peer writing pairs frequently cause less dominant partners to become frustrated and disengaged. Students like S6 and S22 expressed concerns in this study about being paired with unprepared or passive partners. According to these answers, random pairing might not always promote the best teamwork, even though it is administratively feasible.

Technical restrictions, such as erratic internet connections and restricted device availability, also presented difficulties, especially during synchronous discussions. Similar to findings by [Rahiem](#) (2020), digital platforms such as Jitsi Meet revealed existing digital divides

even though they offered a workable substitute for in-person instruction. These infrastructure issues highlight how crucial it is to adapt online CW pedagogies to the technological realities of students.

All things considered, these conflicting answers highlight the necessity of scaffolding and more precise instructions when creating online CW activities. Several students asked for more structured roles to prevent uneven workloads, even though they valued the autonomy. According to students' perceptions, well-facilitated collaborative tasks foster not only language development but also interpersonal and emotional development. These advantages, however, largely rely on how the activity is organized, how roles are assigned, and how interpersonal and technological difficulties are resolved.

2. Students' Perceptions of Their English Writing Performance

Students' opinions of their English writing abilities were the subject of the second research question. The overall mean scores after analyzing the data varied between 2.21 and 3.43 (see Table 1). This variation might be a reflection of how the survey question was understood by the students. Many students thought they were successful and hoped to write more English-language assignments for their other classes. They did, however, add that some teachers failed to give them feedback on their writing, which may have caused them to evaluate their writing skills incorrectly.

Students thought they wrote well when it came to the statement about not liking writing (mean scores ranging from 2.19 to 3.21). They did, however, add that they didn't like writing in English. They gave writing assignments in class a mean score of 3.05. This unfavorable impression might result from prior unpleasant writing assignment experiences. However, when asked about CW, some students stated that they would prefer writing with a partner because they felt that teamwork produced better outcomes. This result is consistent with studies by [Storch](#) (2011) and [Ismail](#) (2011), which found that when given the chance, students frequently choose collaborative writing because it results in better work.

With a mean score of 2.86, the majority of students stated that they did not think of themselves as good English writers. Their confidence in writing in English was probably impacted by their perception of themselves as poor writers, even in their mother tongue, which may be related to their general language skills. This demonstrates how writing skills in a second language can be influenced by language experience ([Speck, 2002](#); [Ismail, 2011](#)).

Table 1: Students' Perceptions of Their English Writing Performance

Statements	Mean
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I would like to learn all the language skills except writing.	3.43
Writing is not a very important skill for me.	3.23
I hate writing in English because I do not know how to write.	3.21
I do not enjoy writing in English because it is a very difficult skill for me.	3.26
I cannot write because my English is not very good.	2.74
I hate writing in English because I had some bad experiences in the past.	2.19
I get lost when I start writing in English.	2.18
I do not practice writing in English because it is not very important for my academic study.	2.80
I am not a good writer in English.	2.86
I do not feel comfortable during a writing activity.	3.05

According to the Likert-scale data, students had varying degrees of confidence in their ability to write in English. Some reported improvements after finishing the CW exercise, even though many admitted that writing was challenging and anxiety-inducing. A transitional identity as L2 writers—caught between low confidence and growing competence—is reflected in this mix of anxiety and optimism.

According to [Ismail](#) (2011) and [Winarti and Cahyono](#) (2020), EFL students frequently internalize their limitations as a result of inadequate practice, a lack of feedback, and unfavorable prior experiences. According to the students' comments, CW assisted in redefining these experiences in a more positive way. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which holds that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding, is consistent with S8's observation that "I never realized how writing could be developed step-by-step until I explained my ideas to someone else."

Students' opinions of themselves, however, continued to be unrelated to their actual writing abilities. A lack of metacognitive training could be the cause of this misalignment. Many students lack the resources to properly assess their learning, particularly in environments where teacher-centered paradigms predominate and self-reflection is underdeveloped, as [Simkin, et al.](#) (2012) and [Huang, et al.](#) (2021) point out.

Additionally, some students expressed unease with the solo writing portion that came after the group discussion. Although there was a lot of peer support during the prewriting phase, the essay writing itself was done alone. Students may have unintentionally experienced cognitive dissonance as a result of this design decision, which was intended to isolate individual ability, since their sense of support did not correspond with the isolation of performance. Their self-assessment scores were probably impacted by this dissonance.

3. Relationship Between Perception and Writing Performance

The relationship between students' perceptions and their actual writing performance is shown in Table 2. Students' perceptions and their actual writing performance do not

significantly correlate, according to the Spearman's correlation coefficient of -0.152 and a significance value of 0.150 (greater than 0.05). Additionally, the weak negative correlation implies that students' assessments of their writing skills did not match their performance.

Table 2. Correlation between students' perceptions and their actual writing performance

			Students' Perception	Students' Scores
Spearman's Rho	Students' Perception	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.152
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.150
		N	91	91
	Students' Scores	Correlation Coefficient	-.152	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.150	
		N	91	91

The lack of correlation highlights how difficult it is for students to evaluate themselves. According to [Teng](#) (2021), collaborative tasks frequently cause learners to lose sight of the distinction between their own individual accomplishments and the results of group synergy. It's possible that some of the students in this study underreported their abilities because they credited the group rather than themselves for their success. Second, the nature of the task is important. This study's use of argumentative writing necessitates logical development, evidence use, rebuttal of counterarguments, and genre-specific conventions. Students are less able to see whether their performance has improved as a result of these demands. Argumentative writing requires abstract reasoning, which is more difficult to assess oneself, in contrast to descriptive writing, where vocabulary and fluency are more readily apparent ([Storch, 2021](#)). Thirdly, students may have understated their perceived level of competence due to cultural norms surrounding deference and modesty. Public self-praise is generally frowned upon in Indonesia's collectivist culture. Because of this, even students who wrote well-structured essays evaluated themselves as "not good" writers, reflecting what [Hofstede](#) (2011) called cultural humility in self-reporting. Lastly, the intervention's brief duration also matters. Longer exposure to CW is required for students to internalize their progress and acquire accurate self-assessment skills, according to research by [Deveci](#) (2018) and [Pham](#) (2021). Short-term or one-time interventions are helpful for instructional snapshots, but they rarely result in perceptual changes unless they are combined with ongoing reflection and feedback.

5. CONCLUSION

The perceptions and writing abilities of ninety-one undergraduate students participating in an online collaborative writing exercise were investigated in this study. The results showed that although students' attitudes toward collaborative writing were generally positive and they saw a number of advantages, including better communication skills and more confidence, these

views did not substantially match their actual writing performance. The absence of a significant correlation raises the possibility that students' assessments of their own writing skills may not be accurate. This emphasizes how important it is for writing teachers to give students ongoing, helpful criticism so they can adjust how they see themselves. Furthermore, considering the writing task's argumentative nature, future studies could look into the effects of various genres on the relationship between perception and performance.

There were various restrictions on this study. First of all, there was only one argumentative topic covered in the writing assignment, which might not accurately reflect the range of students' writing skills. Second, the time constraints and all-online nature of the collaborative process might have had an impact on student engagement and interaction. Third, even though inter-rater reliability was guaranteed, more varied evaluation instruments and longitudinal designs to track writing development over time could be advantageous for future research. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the study offers useful advice for teachers. Online collaborative writing has the potential to be a successful teaching tool, but careful execution is required. In addition to explicitly teaching collaborative strategies, teachers are encouraged to scaffold collaborative activities and provide opportunities for peer feedback and reflection. By doing this, it might be possible to close the gap between students' perceived and actual performance, promoting the growth of their writing skills and sense of autonomy. Future research might examine the effects of various collaboration styles (such as peer-to-peer, small group, and cross-level pairing) on results in a range of writing genres and educational settings. The impact that digital tools have on improving or impeding collaboration in remote learning settings could also receive more attention.

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