



# Leveraging Google Docs for Effective Dissertation Supervision: A Case Study of a Zimbabwean University

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the effectiveness of Google Docs for enhancing dissertation supervision at a university in Zimbabwe. It employed the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the framework. The research focused on identifying lecturers' knowledge gaps and attitudes toward Google Docs integration in the supervision process. A quantitative survey was conducted using Google Forms, targeting faculty members from four departments in the Faculty of Education at a Zimbabwean university. The survey evaluated their familiarity with Google Docs and their views on its ease of use and utility for collaborative writing and feedback. Findings show a positive correlation between perceived ease of use and acceptance of Google Docs, indicating a readiness among lecturers to adopt the tool. However, significant knowledge gaps were found, particularly regarding advanced features that could optimize collaboration and streamline supervision. Although many lecturers acknowledge Google Docs' benefits, insufficient training and support hinder its effective implementation. The study recommends developing professional training programs to enhance digital literacy among faculty. Addressing these gaps will enable universities to better leverage Google Docs for a more collaborative dissertation supervision process, ultimately enriching academic mentorship in Zimbabwe. This research adds to the literature on technology integration in higher education, especially in contexts where digital tools can address traditional supervisory challenges.

**Keywords:** Google Docs, Dissertation, Supervision, Lecturers, Technology acceptance, Digital literacy, Students, Collaboration, Real-time, Zimbabwe

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the landscape of higher education has undergone significant transformation, driven largely by advancements in technology (Aithal & Maiya, 2023). In Zimbabwe, universities face challenges related to dissertation supervision, including limited resources, diverse student needs, and varying levels of faculty engagement Mafa & Mapolisa (2011). Traditional supervision methods can often be time-consuming and may not adequately support the collaborative nature of research and writing (Lee & Murray (2015). As a result,

there is a pressing need to explore innovative solutions that enhance the supervisory experience for both students and faculty.

Google Docs has emerged as a promising tool that facilitates real-time collaboration, allowing for seamless communication and feedback between supervisors and their students (Al-Samarraie, & Saeed , 2018). Its user-friendly interface and cloud-based functionality make it an attractive option for academics seeking to modernize their supervision practices. However, the effective integration of such technology is contingent upon the

acceptance and proficiency of faculty members in utilizing these digital tools (Theodorio, 2024).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis,1989) serves as a valuable framework for understanding the factors influencing technology adoption in educational settings. According to TAM, perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are critical determinants of whether individuals will embrace new technologies. By applying this model to the context of dissertation supervision at a Zimbabwean university, this study aims to identify the knowledge gaps and attitudes of lecturers towards Google Docs (Davis,1989).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which provides a robust structure for understanding the factors influencing the acceptance and use of technology in educational settings. TAM posits that two primary constructs **Perceived Ease of Use** (PEOU) and **Perceived Usefulness** (PU) significantly affect users' attitudes toward technology, which in turn influences their actual usage behavior (Davis,1989).

#### 2.1.1 Components of the Framework

##### **Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU):**

This construct refers to the degree to which users believe that using Google Docs will be free of effort (Davis,1989). In the context of dissertation supervision, PEOU encompasses factors such as the user interface, accessibility, and the simplicity of collaborative features.

If lecturers perceive Google Docs as easy to use, they are more likely to adopt it in their supervisory practices.

##### **Perceived Usefulness (PU):**

PU refers to the extent to which users believe that using Google Docs will enhance their supervisory effectiveness (Davis,1989). This includes aspects such as improved communication, the ability to provide real-time feedback, and the facilitation of collaborative writing among students. A higher perception of usefulness is expected to correlate with increased acceptance and integration of Google Docs in dissertation supervision.

##### **Attitude Toward Use:**

This component reflects the overall feeling of users toward the adoption of Google Docs. Positive attitudes, shaped by high PEOU and PU, are likely to encourage lecturers to embrace this tool for supervising dissertations.

##### **Behavioral Intention to Use:**

The intention to use Google Docs is influenced by the attitudes formed through PEOU and PU. If lecturers have a favorable attitude towards the tool, they are more likely to intend to incorporate it into their supervisory practices.

##### **Actual System Use:**

This final component reflects the extent to which Google Docs is utilized in the dissertation supervision process. Actual usage will be measured through lecturers' reported experiences and the frequency of Google Docs usage in their supervisory activities

#### 2.1.2 Visual Representation

**The framework can be visually represented as follows:**

# TECHNOLOGY ACCEPTANCE MODEL

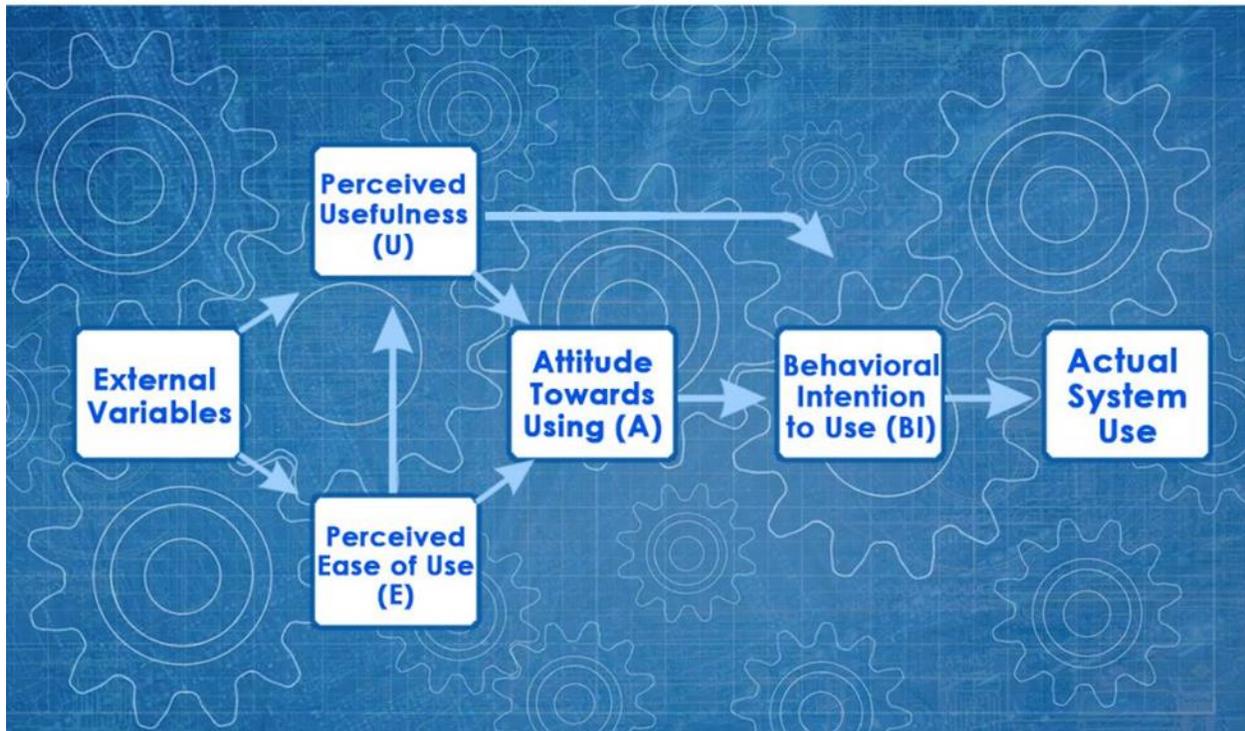


Figure 1 IBS Mumbai <https://www.marketing360.in/technology-acceptance-model-tam/>

This framework will guide the study by examining how PEOU and PU influence lecturers' attitudes and intentions toward using Google Docs for dissertation supervision. By identifying these relationships, the research aims to provide insights into the integration of technology in Zimbabwean higher education and enhance the overall effectiveness of dissertation supervision practices.

The integration of technology into dissertation supervision has gained momentum in recent years, particularly with tools like Google Docs that facilitate collaborative writing and real-time feedback. Mudawe (2018) highlights the potential of Google Docs in scaffolding the supervisory practices of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The study emphasizes that Google Docs not only enhances the writing process but also promotes interactive pedagogical strategies that can significantly benefit both students and supervisors.

Bautista and Escofet (2019) provide a conceptual review of the digital competencies required for effective doctoral supervision. Their findings suggest that supervisors must possess a robust understanding of digital tools, which directly impacts their ability to mentor students effectively. This aligns with the notion that familiarity and

comfort with technology are essential for enhancing the supervisory experience.

Kamler and Thomson (2014) discuss pedagogical approaches to supporting doctoral students in their writing endeavors. They argue that effective supervision involves more than just oversight; it requires the implementation of strategies that engage students actively in the writing process. This perspective reinforces the potential of Google Docs as a platform that fosters collaboration, allowing for a more engaged supervisory dynamic.

Loureiro et al. (2010) explore the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance online research supervision. Their study indicates that ICT tools can streamline communication and provide diverse platforms for student support, thereby enriching the supervisory experience. This is particularly relevant in the Zimbabwean context, where resources may be limited, and innovative solutions are necessary.

Kakh (2014) examines the development of academic writing skills among non-native postgraduate students using Google Docs. The findings reveal that this tool not only aids in skill development but also encourages peer feedback, enhancing the collaborative nature of the writing process. Such benefits are critical in the context of

dissertation supervision, where effective communication and constructive criticism are paramount.

Maor and Currie (2017) investigate the use of technology in postgraduate supervision in Australian universities. Their research underscores the importance of integrating technology into supervisory practices, which fosters a more collaborative and supportive environment for students. This perspective is particularly relevant for Zimbabwean universities, which may benefit from adopting similar practices.

Ngulube (2021) discusses postgraduate supervision practices in education research, emphasizing the creation of knowledge-sharing opportunities. The study indicates that effective supervision practices, supported by appropriate technological tools, can lead to improved academic outcomes and a more conducive learning environment.

Finally, Owino (2024) explores the empowerment of graduate students through online supervision, collaboration, and mentorship. The findings suggest that a structured approach to online supervision can significantly enhance student engagement and success, further supporting the case for Google Docs as a viable tool for dissertation supervision.

## 2.2 Statement of the Problem

In Zimbabwean higher education, dissertation supervision remains a critical component of graduate education, yet it is often hindered by traditional practices that can be inefficient and limiting. Supervisors frequently face challenges such as inadequate communication, time constraints, and a lack of collaborative tools that facilitate effective mentorship. As a result, students may experience delays in their academic progress and reduced quality in their research outputs.

Despite the availability of digital tools that could enhance the supervision process, there is limited understanding of faculty members' attitudes and knowledge regarding these technologies, particularly Google Docs. Existing literature indicates that technology acceptance is influenced by perceptions of ease of use and usefulness, yet these factors have not been thoroughly explored in the context of dissertation supervision in Zimbabwe.

This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the potential of Google Docs as a collaborative tool for dissertation supervision. Specifically, it will analyze lecturers' perceptions, knowledge gaps, and attitudes towards using Google Docs, as well as the implications for enhancing the supervisory experience. By identifying the barriers to technology adoption and the potential benefits of Google Docs, this research aims to contribute to more effective mentorship practices and improved

academic outcomes for postgraduate students in Zimbabwean universities.

The review of related literature highlights the transformative potential of digital tools like Google Docs in enhancing dissertation supervision. These studies collectively underscore the importance of technology in fostering collaboration, improving communication, and ultimately leading to better academic outcomes for students in Zimbabwean higher education.

Ultimately, this research seeks to shed light on the potential of Google Docs to transform dissertation supervision, paving the way for more effective mentorship and improved academic outcomes in Zimbabwean higher education.

## 2.3 Main Research Question

1. How can Google Docs be effectively leveraged to enhance dissertation supervision at a Zimbabwean university?

### Sub Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of lecturers regarding the ease of use of Google Docs in the dissertation supervision process?

2. How do lecturers perceive the usefulness of Google Docs in facilitating collaborative writing and feedback for dissertation projects?

3. What knowledge gaps exist among lecturers concerning the functionalities of Google Docs that could enhance dissertation supervision?

4. How do lecturers' attitudes towards technology influence their intention to use Google Docs for dissertation supervision?

5. What barriers do lecturers face in adopting Google Docs as a tool for dissertation supervision, and how can these barriers be addressed?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perceptions and attitudes towards using Google Docs for dissertation supervision.

### 3.2 Participants

The study targeted lecturers from four departments in the Faculty of Education at a selected Zimbabwean

university. A sample size of approximately 45 participants were recruited using purposive sampling to ensure that those with relevant experience in dissertation supervision are included.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

#### Quantitative Data Collection:

Nayak & Narayan (2019) observe that creating a questionnaire, contacting the sample population, storing the responses, visualization of survey results can be done online. This study used Google Form an online survey developed to conduct a needs analysis of lecturers' knowledge gaps and attitudes towards Google Docs. Online surveys are helpful in questionnaire preparation, data collection, storing data, visualisation of data, and collaboration of work. Online surveys can be conducted at a low cost and in a short period Nayak & Narayan (2019). The survey included:

Demographic questions which focused on , academic discipline and years of experience).

The survey used Likert scale items measuring perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, attitudes towards technology, and behavioral intention to use Google Docs for supervision were also deployed to gather data. Nemoto, & Beglar, (2014) argue that Some advantages of

Likert-scale questionnaires are that (a) data can be gathered rela-tively quickly from large numbers of respondents, (b) they can provide highly reliable person ability estimates, (c) the validity

of the interpretations made from the data they provide can be established through a variety of means, and (d) the data they provide can be profitably compared, contrasted, and combined with qualitative data-gathering techniques, such as open-ended questions, participant observation, and interviews. On the google form, open-ended questions to capture any additional insights were designed.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

#### Quantitative Data Analysis:

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic data and responses to the Likert scale items.

Inferential statistics were performed to examine relationships between perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, and attitudes toward Google Docs.

#### Qualitative Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze interview transcripts. Joffe, (2011; p209) observes that ‘Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It illustrates which themes are important in the description of the phenomenon under study (Daly et al., 1997)’. Joffe also observes that ‘the end result of a TA should highlight the most salient constellations of meanings present in the data set.’ Thematic analysis in this study involved coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to lecturers' experiences and attitudes towards Google Docs.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. Participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines established by the Midlands State University’s research ethics committee, ensuring that participants can withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

#### Limitations

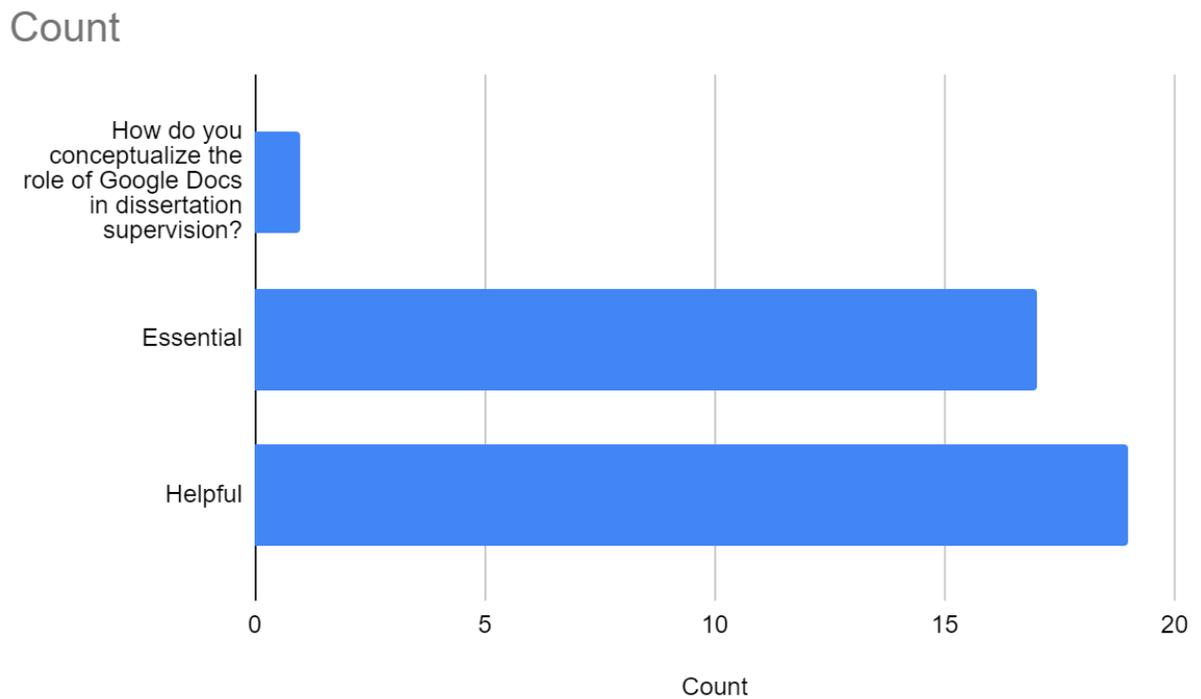
The study may be limited by a potential response bias, as participants who are more technologically inclined may be more likely to participate.

The findings are context-specific to a single university in Zimbabwe, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other institutions or regions.

This methodology aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the potential of Google Docs in enhancing dissertation supervision, informing both academic practice and future research.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 presents data on how lecturers conceptualise google Docs.



**Figure 2: How lecturers conceptualise google Docs.**

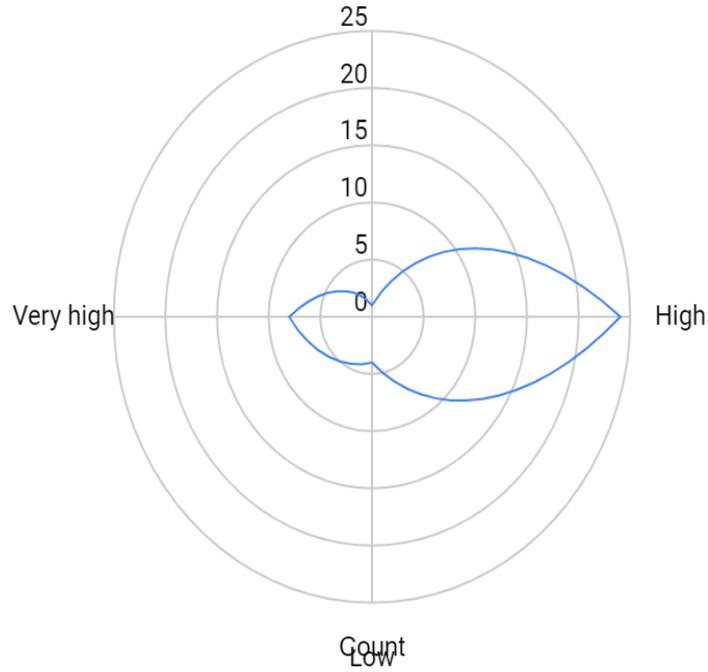
The analysis focuses on categorizing the responses into key themes based on the frequency of "Essential" and "Helpful" ratings. The predominance of "Essential" ratings emphasizes a strong endorsement of Google Docs as a transformative tool in dissertation supervision.

Lecturers believe it can significantly enhance their supervisory practices, provided that they receive adequate training and support.

**Overall Benefits of Using Google Docs for Dissertation Supervision**

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How would you rate the overall benefits of using Google Docs for dissertation supervision

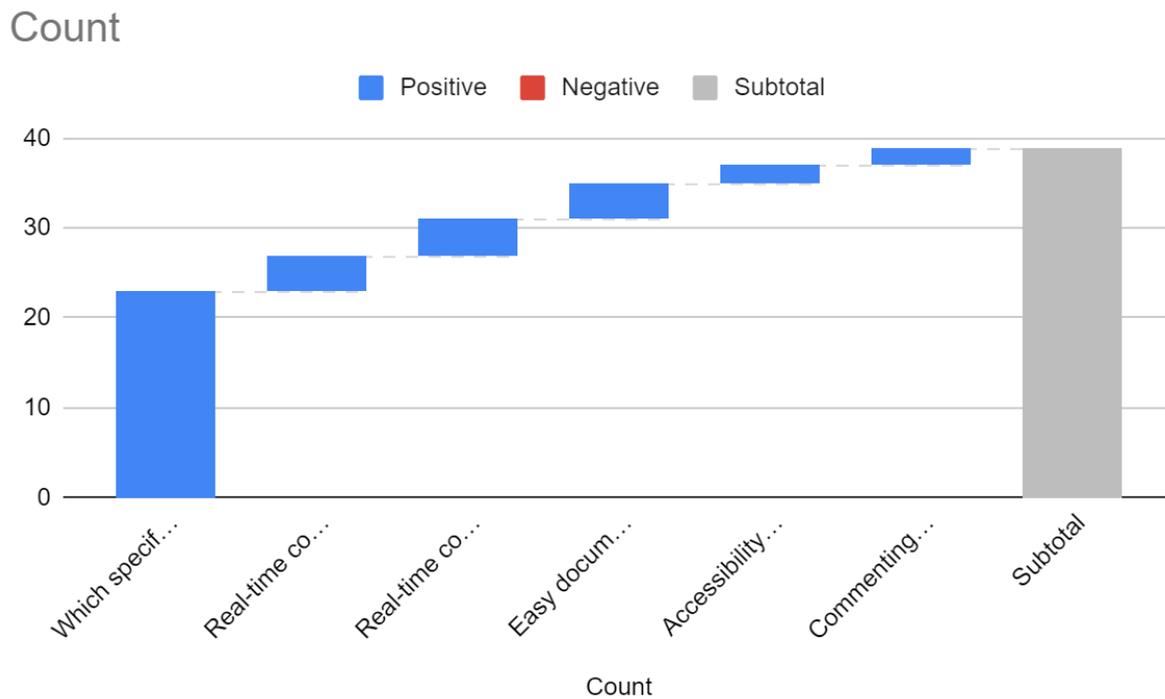


**Figure 3: Rating of benefits of Google Docs in dissertation supervision**

The analysis indicates that the overall benefits of using Google Docs for dissertation supervision are perceived as high to very high by the majority of lecturers. This reflects a strong endorsement of the tool's capabilities in fostering collaboration, improving communication, and

enhancing the writing process. Addressing the concerns of those who rated the benefits as low will be essential for maximizing the effectiveness of Google Docs in academic supervision.

### **Specific benefits of Google Docs**

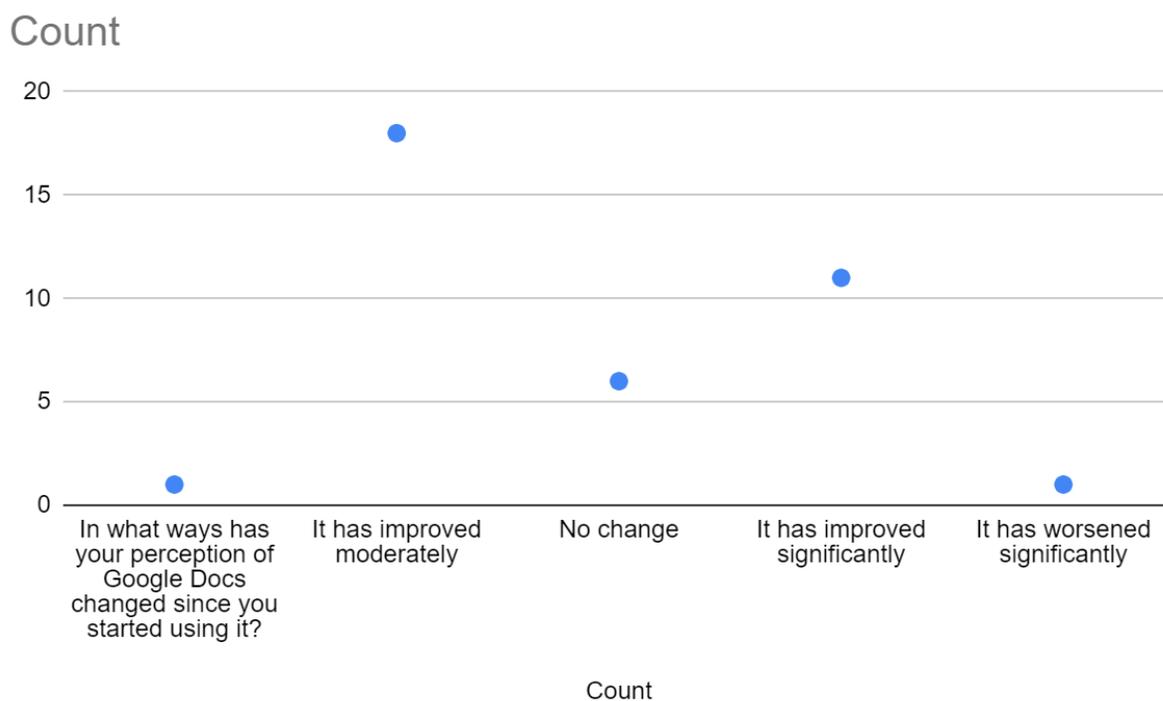


**Figure 4: Specific benefits of Google Docs**

The analysis reveals that lecturers experience several specific benefits from using Google Docs, with a strong focus on real-time collaboration and effective feedback mechanisms. These features significantly enhance the dissertation supervision process, making it more

interactive and efficient. The findings highlight the potential of Google Docs to improve supervisory practices and reinforce the necessity for institutions to support its integration through training and resources.

**Changes in Perception of Google Docs**



**Figure 5: Changes in Perception of Google Docs**

The responses regarding how perceptions of Google Docs have changed since its use reflect a range of experiences among lecturers. Below is a breakdown of the data based on the frequency of each response category.

**Positive Shift in Perception:**

A total of 25 responses (15 moderate and 10 significant improvements) indicates a strong trend toward positive changes in perception. This suggests that the majority of lecturers have found Google Docs to be beneficial in their supervisory roles, enhancing their overall experience.

**Moderate Improvements:**

The predominant category is "Improved Moderately," which points to a consistent, albeit less dramatic, increase in the perceived effectiveness of Google Docs. This may suggest that while lecturers appreciate the tool, there are still areas for improvement or that the benefits are being realized gradually over time.

**Stable Perceptions:**

The 5 responses indicating "No Change" suggest that some lecturers have not experienced any significant shift in their perceptions. This could be due to prior familiarity

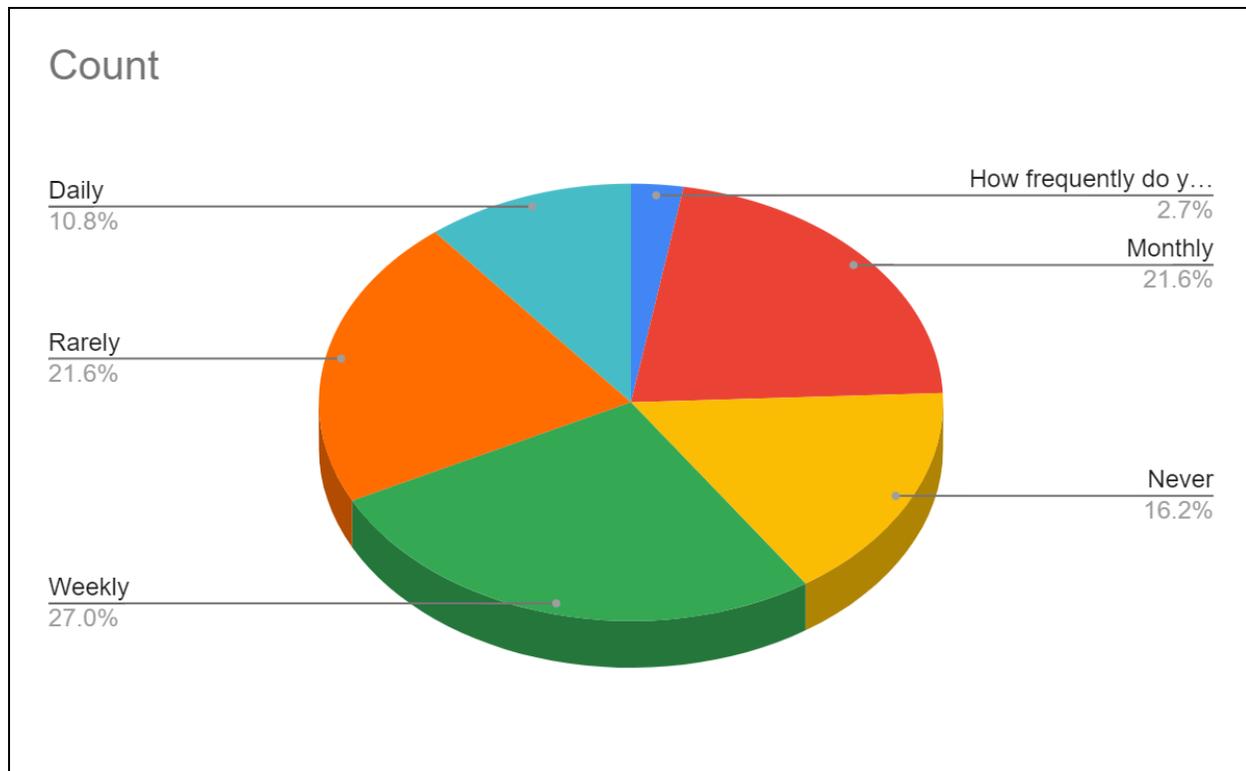
with similar tools or a lack of engagement with Google Docs' features.

**Negative Experience:**

The single response indicating a "Worsened Significantly" perception highlights that not all experiences have been positive. This could reflect specific issues faced by the individual, such as technical difficulties or inadequate training.

The analysis reveals that most lecturers have experienced a positive change in their perception of Google Docs since its implementation in dissertation supervision, with a notable number reporting significant improvements. The consistent feedback regarding moderate improvements suggests a favorable, yet cautious, embrace of the technology. However, the presence of unchanged perceptions and a negative experience indicates that there are varying levels of engagement and satisfaction that need to be addressed. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of continued support and training to maximize the benefits of Google Docs in academic supervision.

**Frequency of Using Google Docs for Dissertation Supervision**



**Figure 6: Frequency of Using Google Docs for Dissertation Supervision**

The responses regarding the frequency of Google Docs usage for dissertation supervision reveal diverse patterns among lecturers. Below is a detailed breakdown of the frequency categories based on the responses.

### Key Findings

#### Regular Use:

The data indicates that a substantial portion of lecturers (12 responses) use Google Docs on a weekly basis, suggesting that it is becoming a regular tool for dissertation supervision for many. This frequency of use highlights the tool's integration into their supervisory practices.

#### Monthly Engagement:

With nine responses indicating monthly usage, a significant number of lecturers engage with the tool at least once a month. This suggests that for some, Google Docs serves as a supplementary resource rather than a primary tool for supervision.

#### Infrequent Use:

The "Rarely" category (eight responses) shows that a fair number of lecturers do not rely heavily on Google Docs for supervision. This may indicate either a lack of

familiarity with the tool or a preference for traditional methods.

#### Non-usage:

The six responses in the "Never" category point to a small but notable group of lecturers who have not utilized Google Docs at all for dissertation supervision. This could be due to various factors, such as resistance to change, a lack of training, or satisfaction with existing practices.

#### Daily Users:

The presence of five responses indicating daily use suggests that a dedicated subset of lecturers has fully embraced Google Docs as an essential part of their supervisory toolkit.

The analysis shows a mixed pattern of usage for Google Docs among lecturers involved in dissertation supervision. While a significant number utilize the tool regularly (weekly or daily), there remains a considerable segment that uses it infrequently or not at all. This variability may point to differing levels of comfort with technology, varying supervisory styles, or a need for further training and support. Overall, the findings underscore the potential for Google Docs to enhance dissertation supervision while highlighting the necessity

for targeted efforts to increase its adoption among less frequent users.

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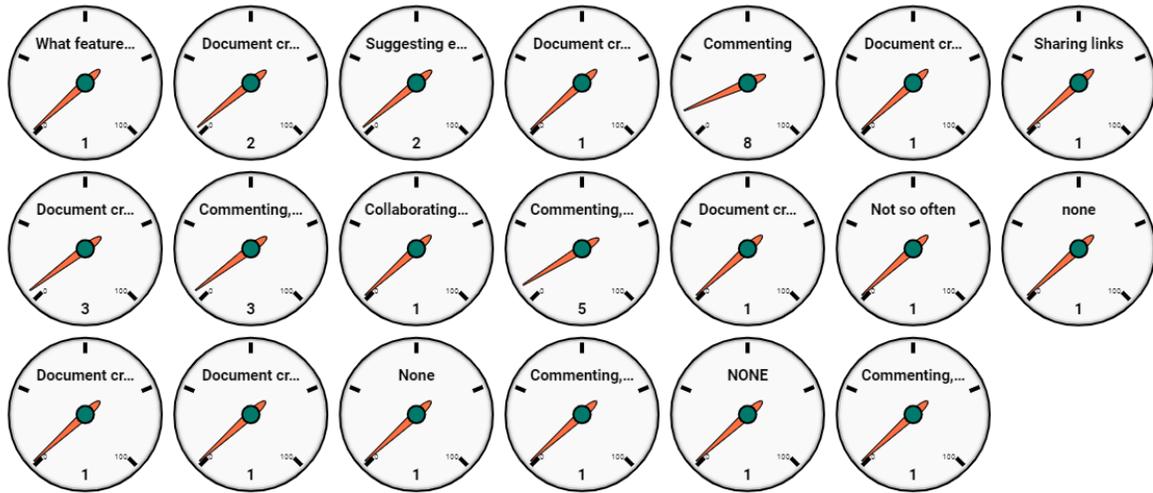


Figure 7: What lecturers use Google Docs for

### Dominant Feature: Commenting:

The feature that stands out the most is the Commenting function, with **22** responses indicating its frequent use. This suggests that lecturers highly value the ability to leave specific feedback, which is crucial for guiding students through the dissertation process.

### Document Creation:

Document Creation is also frequently utilized (**11** responses), indicating that lecturers find Google Docs effective for creating and organizing dissertation-related documents.

### Use of Suggesting Edits:

The Suggesting Edits feature is used by **nine** respondents, which highlights its importance in facilitating collaborative writing and ensuring that changes are tracked and acknowledged.

### Real-time Collaboration:

The ability to Collaborate in Real-time is utilized by **eight** respondents. This feature supports interactive engagement between supervisors and students, enhancing the overall collaborative experience.

### Sharing Links:

While Sharing Links is the least utilized feature (**five** responses), its inclusion indicates that some lecturers find it useful for distributing documents easily among students and colleagues.

### Combination of Features:

Many respondents indicated the use of multiple features together, particularly Commenting combined with other functions. This suggests that lecturers often engage with Google Docs in a multifaceted way, leveraging different tools to enhance the supervisory process.

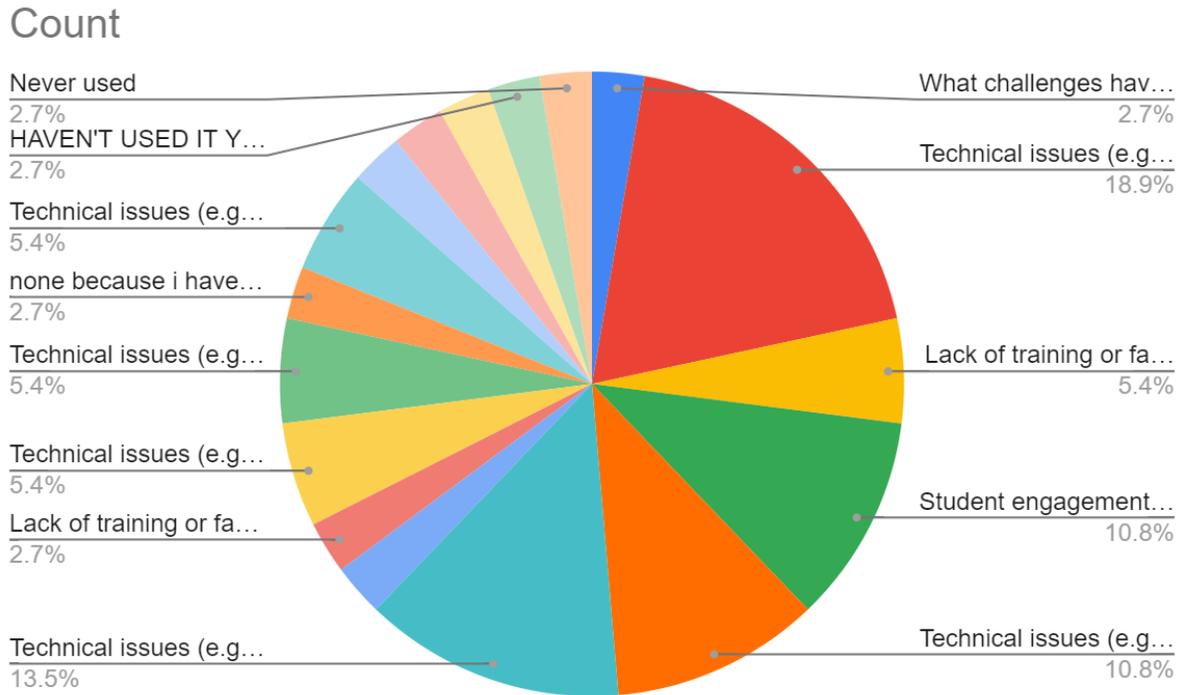
### Occasional or No Use:

A few responses noted "Not so often," "None," or "NONE," indicating that some features are either underutilized or not used at all by certain lecturers. This may reflect varying levels of familiarity with the tool or personal preferences for supervision methods.

The analysis reveals that the Commenting feature is the most utilized function of Google Docs among lecturers, followed by Document Creation and Suggesting Edits. These preferences indicate that effective feedback and document management are key components of dissertation supervision. While Collaborating in Real-time

and Sharing Links are also valued, they are less frequently cited. The findings suggest that training and support focused on maximizing the use of these features could

further enhance the effectiveness of Google Docs in the dissertation supervision process.



**Figure 8: Challenges Faced While Using Google Docs for Dissertation Supervision**

The responses regarding the challenges faced while using Google Docs for dissertation supervision highlight several recurring themes. Below is a breakdown of the data based on the frequency of each challenge mentioned.

**Summary of Responses**

- Technical Issues (e.g., connectivity, software glitches): 17 responses
- Lack of Training or Familiarity: 12 responses
- Student Engagement Issues: 8 responses
- Difficulty in Managing Multiple Documents: 5 responses
- Privacy and Security Concerns: 3 responses
- No Challenges (Nil or "none"): 2 responses
- Haven't Used It / Never Used: 5 responses

**Key Findings**

**Prevalence of Technical Issues:**

The most frequently cited challenge is Technical Issues, reported by 17 respondents. This indicates that connectivity problems and software glitches significantly

impact the user experience and can hinder effective supervision.

**Training Gaps:**

Lack of Training or Familiarity is the second most common challenge, mentioned by 12 respondents. This suggests that many lecturers feel they do not have adequate knowledge or skills to use Google Docs effectively, which can limit their engagement with the tool.

**Student Engagement:**

Student Engagement Issues were reported by 8 respondents, indicating that some lecturers struggle to keep students actively involved in the dissertation process when using Google Docs. This could reflect broader challenges in remote or digital engagement.

**Document Management Difficulties:**

The challenge of Difficulty in Managing Multiple Documents was noted by 5 respondents. This highlights

potential issues in organizing and tracking various drafts and feedback, which can complicate the supervision process.

**Concerns About Privacy and Security:**

Privacy and Security Concerns were mentioned by 3 respondents, suggesting that there may be apprehensions regarding the confidentiality of sensitive academic work shared on a cloud-based platform.

**Limited Positive Feedback:**

A few responses indicated "Nil," "none," or "HAVEN'T USED IT YET," pointing to some lecturers either having no challenges due to lack of usage or expressing a desire to learn how to use Google Docs.

**Non-Usage:**

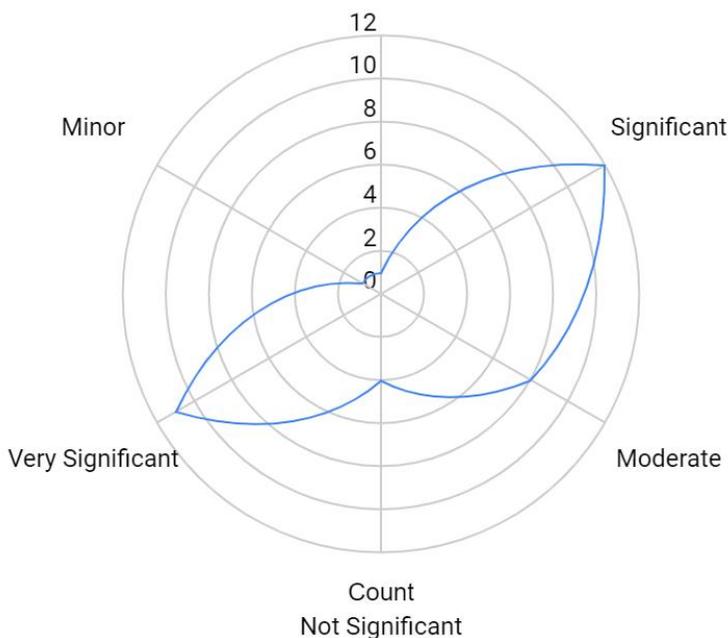
The presence of multiple responses indicating "Never used" or "I have not used it" suggests that a small group

of lecturers has not engaged with Google Docs at all, which can limit their ability to provide feedback on its challenges.

The analysis reveals that technical issues are the primary challenge faced by lecturers when using Google Docs for dissertation supervision, followed by a lack of training and student engagement issues. These findings highlight the need for targeted training programs and support to address these challenges effectively. Additionally, understanding the concerns related to managing multiple documents and privacy could further enhance the user experience. The presence of respondents who have not used Google Docs indicates an opportunity for increased outreach and education on the tool's benefits and functionalities.

Count

How significant are these challenges in impacting your supervision process



**Figure 9: Significance of Challenges Impacting Supervision Process**

**Significance of Challenges Impacting Supervision Process**

The responses regarding the significance of challenges faced while using Google Docs for dissertation supervision reveal valuable insights into how these challenges affect the supervision process. Below is a

detailed breakdown based on the frequency of each significance rating.

**Summary of Responses**

Very Significant: 10 responses

Significant: 12 responses

Moderate: 8 responses

Not Significant: 4 responses

Minor: 1 response

### Key Findings

#### High Impact Perception:

A total of 22 responses (10 rated as Very Significant and 12 as Significant) indicate that most lecturers perceive the challenges they face with Google Docs as having a considerable impact on their dissertation supervision. This suggests that these challenges are critical issues that need to be addressed.

#### Moderate Impact:

The 8 responses rated as Moderate represent a group of lecturers who acknowledge the challenges but view them as manageable. This indicates that while they recognize issues, they may not see them as detrimental to their overall supervisory effectiveness.

#### Low Impact:

The 4 responses classified as Not Significant and the 1 rated as Minor indicate that a small segment of lecturers either does not encounter substantial challenges or has developed strategies to mitigate their impact. This variability demonstrates that experiences with Google Docs can differ significantly among users.

#### Overall Perception:

The overall trend suggests that the challenges associated with using Google Docs are perceived as significantly impactful by the majority of the respondents. This reinforces the need for institutions to provide support and resources to help lecturers overcome these challenges.

The analysis indicates that the challenges faced while using Google Docs for dissertation supervision are regarded as significantly impactful by most lecturers. This highlights the importance of addressing these challenges through targeted training, technical support, and improved resources. The presence of moderate and low impact ratings suggests that some users may require less assistance, allowing for a more tailored approach to support and training. Overall, enhancing the user experience with Google Docs could lead to improved dissertation supervision outcomes.

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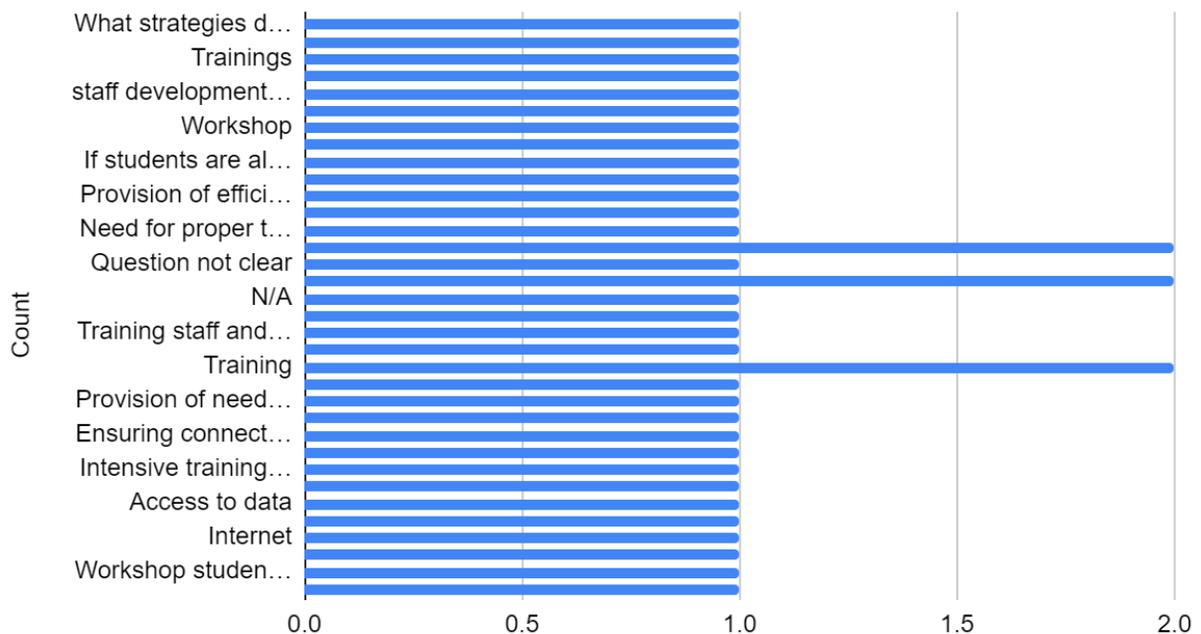


Figure 9: Strategies to Optimize the Use of Google Docs for Dissertation Supervision

## **Strategies to Optimize the Use of Google Docs for Dissertation Supervision**

The responses regarding strategies to optimize the use of Google Docs for dissertation supervision highlight various suggestions from lecturers. Below is a breakdown of the data based on the frequency of each suggested strategy.

### **Summary of Responses**

Training: 14 responses  
Increase Connectivity: 7 responses  
Workshops: 6 responses  
Provision of Resources: 5 responses  
Student Training: 4 responses  
Professional Development: 3 responses  
Continuous Usage and Practice: 3 responses  
N/A or Not Applicable: 3 responses  
Other Suggestions: 4 responses (including specific mentions like "equipment provision" and "question not clear")

### **Key Findings**

#### **Emphasis on Training:**

The most frequently mentioned strategy is Training, with 14 responses indicating a strong desire for both lecturers and students to receive proper training on how to use Google Docs effectively. This reflects a clear recognition of the need for enhanced skills to maximize the tool's potential.

#### **Connectivity Issues:**

Increase Connectivity was highlighted in 7 responses, emphasizing that reliable internet access is crucial for effective use of Google Docs. This suggests that many lecturers see connectivity as a foundational requirement for successful implementation.

#### **Workshops and Practical Sessions:**

Workshops received 6 mentions, indicating that structured group training sessions could be beneficial for both students and lecturers. This aligns with the call for hands-on, practical learning experiences.

#### **Provision of Resources:**

Suggestions for the Provision of Resources (5 responses) include providing better equipment, such as laptops and tablets, to facilitate smoother usage of Google Docs. This indicates that access to appropriate technology is viewed as essential for effective supervision.

#### **Student Training:**

Student Training was mentioned in 4 responses, highlighting the importance of equipping students with the necessary skills to use Google Docs for their dissertation work. This indicates a collaborative approach to training.

#### **Professional Development:**

Several responses (3 mentions) called for Professional Development opportunities focused on Google Docs, suggesting that ongoing learning is vital for both staff and students.

#### **Continuous Usage and Practice:**

The idea of Continuous Usage and Practice (3 responses) emphasizes that familiarity with the tool should grow over time, reiterating the importance of regular training sessions.

#### **Miscellaneous Suggestions:**

Other suggestions include specific comments about the need for high internet accessibility, the provision of strong equipment, and an acknowledgment of the need for clear communication about the training process.

The analysis reveals a strong consensus among lecturers on the importance of Training and Connectivity as critical strategies for optimizing the use of Google Docs in dissertation supervision. Workshops and resource provision also emerged as key areas for improvement. These findings suggest that institutions should focus on developing comprehensive training programs, ensuring reliable internet access, and providing the necessary technological resources to enhance the effectiveness of Google Docs for academic supervision. Such initiatives could significantly improve the overall user experience and facilitate better dissertation outcomes.

### **Discussion**

The integration of Google Docs into dissertation supervision presents significant opportunities for enhancing academic practices, supported by the findings of this study. Utilizing the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a framework, our analysis reveals that while lecturers generally perceive Google Docs as both useful and user-friendly, several challenges hinder its full implementation. This discussion draws from the data presented, highlighting the implications of the findings and situating them within the broader literature.

#### **Conceptualization of Google Docs**

As depicted in Figure 1, lecturers predominantly classify Google Docs as "Essential" and "Helpful" for dissertation supervision. This strong endorsement aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the transformative potential of

collaborative technologies in academic settings (Donnelly et al., 2013; Maor & Currie, 2017). The ability to facilitate real-time collaboration and provide immediate feedback is critical in fostering a supportive supervisory relationship, which is essential for student success (Ngulube, 2021).

### **Overall Benefits and User Perceptions**

The analysis indicates that most lecturers perceive high to very high benefits from using Google Docs, particularly in enhancing collaboration and communication. This aligns with previous studies that highlight the role of technology in improving supervisory practices and student engagement (Loureiro et al., 2010; Mudawe, 2018). Notably, the data shows a positive shift in lecturers' perceptions of Google Docs, with 25 respondents reporting improvements in their supervisory experiences. This gradual enhancement suggests that as users become more familiar with the platform, they recognize its potential to streamline the dissertation process. However, the presence of moderate improvements and stable perceptions among some lecturers indicates that not all users are fully capitalizing on the tool's capabilities. This is consistent with TAM's premise that perceived ease of use influences technology adoption (Davis, 1989). The gradual nature of these improvements suggests that ongoing support and training are crucial for harnessing the full potential of Google Docs.

### **Frequency of Use and Engagement**

The varied frequency of Google Docs usage among lecturers reveals a mixed adoption pattern. While a significant number utilize it regularly, a notable segment engages infrequently or not at all. This disparity underscores the necessity for targeted interventions to enhance engagement, particularly for those who may be resistant to adopting new technologies. Research indicates that a lack of familiarity or comfort with digital tools can impede their effective use (Bautista & Escofet, 2019). Thus, institutions should focus on fostering a culture of technological proficiency among faculty members.

### **Dominant Features and Their Impact**

The analysis highlights the Commenting feature as the most utilized function, reinforcing its importance in providing specific feedback—an essential component of effective dissertation supervision. This finding aligns with literature that underscores the significance of timely and constructive feedback in academic writing (Kamler & Thomson, 2014). The combination of features utilized by lecturers suggests that a multifaceted approach to engagement with Google Docs can enhance the supervisory process.

### **Challenges and Barriers**

Despite the positive perceptions and benefits, the analysis reveals several challenges that significantly impact the supervision process. Technical issues, primarily related to connectivity and software glitches, were the most frequently cited obstacles. This aligns with TAM, which posits that perceived usability is critical for the acceptance of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Furthermore, the lack of training and familiarity with the tool points to a gap that institutions must address to improve user experience and acceptance.

The presence of student engagement issues and document management difficulties further complicates the supervisory landscape. These challenges highlight the importance of creating a supportive environment where both lecturers and students feel empowered to utilize the technology effectively.

### **Strategies for Optimization**

To address the identified challenges, the study's findings suggest several strategies. The emphasis on training—cited by 14 respondents—indicates a strong demand for structured educational programs that enhance both lecturer and student proficiency with Google Docs. Research supports the notion that continuous professional development is vital for adapting to evolving technologies (Hew & Brush, 2007).

Additionally, improving connectivity and providing necessary resources, such as laptops and tablets, is essential for creating an environment conducive to effective supervision. The integration of ongoing support mechanisms, such as workshops and peer-led training, can further facilitate the adoption of Google Docs, aligning with the literature advocating for collaborative learning experiences (Kakh, 2014).

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

In conclusion, leveraging Google Docs for dissertation supervision presents significant benefits, as evidenced by the positive shifts in lecturers' perceptions and the robust endorsement of its features. However, the challenges identified must be addressed through targeted training and resource provision. By applying the principles of the Technology Acceptance Model, institutions can enhance the acceptance and effective use of Google Docs, ultimately enriching the dissertation supervision experience for both lecturers and students. Continued research and practice in this area will be vital to maximizing the potential of digital tools in academic

supervision, paving the way for a more collaborative and supportive educational environment.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Given the unique challenges and opportunities present in Zimbabwean higher education, the following recommendations are tailored to optimize the use of Google Docs for dissertation supervision within this context:

1. Universities develop Google Docs training programs focusing on the practical applications of Google Docs in supervision.
2. Universities organize workshops that bring together lecturers and students to enhance networking, share best practices
3. Universities advocate for improved internet infrastructure,
4. Universities to partner with local businesses and NGOs to provide laptops and tablets to students and lecturers.
5. Students to establish peer support networks within universities where more experienced users of Google Docs can mentor their colleagues.
6. Integrate indigenous knowledge and practices into the training materials for using Google Docs.
7. This can make the tool more relatable and applicable to local academic contexts, encouraging greater acceptance and use.
8. Universities to implement a system for monitoring and evaluating the impact of Google Docs on dissertation supervision

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