

DIGITAL LITERACY AND LEARNING MOTIVATION: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THEIR IMPACT ON WRITING ABILITIES

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Abstract :

This qualitative study explores the interplay between digital literacy and learning motivation in shaping students' academic writing abilities within an Islamic higher education context. Guided by three research aims, it investigates how students describe the role of digital literacy in their writing processes, how learning motivation influences their writing behaviors, and how both factors interact in their writing development. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, enabling the capture of students' voices and personal narratives. Findings reveal that digital literacy supports efficient research, idea organization, and editing skills, while learning motivation sustains persistence and goal orientation in writing tasks. The interaction between these factors fosters both technical competence and value-driven writing practices rooted in Islamic principles. This study offers practical insights for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and institutional policies aimed at empowering students to write with confidence, purpose, and integrity.

Keywords : digital literacy, learning motivation, qualitative study, writing abilities

Abstrak :

Penelitian kualitatif ini mengkaji keterkaitan antara literasi digital dan motivasi belajar dalam membentuk kemampuan menulis akademik mahasiswa di lingkungan perguruan tinggi Islam. Dengan berlandaskan tiga tujuan penelitian, studi ini menyelidiki bagaimana mahasiswa menggambarkan peran literasi digital dalam proses penulisan, bagaimana motivasi belajar memengaruhi perilaku menulis, serta bagaimana kedua faktor tersebut saling berinteraksi dalam pengembangan kemampuan menulis mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan analisis dokumen, sehingga dapat menangkap suara dan narasi pribadi mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa literasi digital mendukung efisiensi pencarian referensi, pengorganisasian ide, dan keterampilan penyuntingan, sementara motivasi belajar menjaga ketekunan dan orientasi tujuan dalam tugas menulis. Interaksi kedua faktor ini mendorong terciptanya praktik menulis yang tidak hanya kompeten secara teknis, tetapi juga berlandaskan nilai-nilai Islami. Studi ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi perancangan kurikulum, strategi pengajaran, dan kebijakan institusi untuk memberdayakan mahasiswa agar menulis dengan percaya diri, tujuan yang jelas, dan integritas.

Kata Kunci: literasi digital, motivasi belajar, studi kualitatif, kemampuan menulis

INTRODUCTION

Digital literacy refers to the ability to access, evaluate, and use digital information effectively for academic, professional, and personal purposes (Nguyen & Habók, 2024). It involves not only technical competence but also critical



thinking, ethical awareness, and the capacity to create digital content (Bejaković & Mrnjavac, 2024). In higher education, digital literacy has become a foundational skill that shapes the way students search for resources, process information, and present ideas in written form (Panda & Kaur, 2024). This competency is essential for academic writing, where the ability to synthesize credible digital sources into coherent arguments is a key indicator of scholarly competence.

Learning motivation is defined as the internal drive that initiates, directs, and sustains learning behaviors (Kamila et al., 2024). Motivation can be intrinsic, where students engage in learning for personal satisfaction and growth, or extrinsic, driven by external rewards and recognition (Oktadinata et al., 2024). In the context of writing, motivated students are more likely to engage in iterative drafting, seek feedback, and persist in overcoming linguistic and conceptual challenges (Yang et al., 2025). High motivation often correlates with greater self-regulation and deeper engagement in writing activities.

Writing ability in higher education encompasses the capacity to express complex ideas clearly, organize information logically, and adhere to academic conventions (Dhobi, 2024). It is not only a linguistic skill but also a cognitive process that integrates knowledge construction, critical thinking, and audience awareness (Dong et al., 2025). Studies have shown that both digital literacy and motivation significantly contribute to the development of writing skills, as students who are digitally literate and motivated can leverage online tools, access diverse perspectives, and refine their writing with greater efficiency (Temirkhanova et al., 2024). The intersection of digital literacy and learning motivation offers a powerful framework for understanding students' writing development (Shafiee Rad et al., 2024). Digital literacy provides the resources and tools, while motivation determines the extent and quality of their engagement with those resources (Ata & Alpaslan, 2024). Together, they shape how students plan, draft, and revise their academic texts (Lu et al., 2024). However, much of the existing research has relied on quantitative correlations, leaving a gap in understanding the lived experiences of students who navigate these factors simultaneously.

Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, such as Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal Lampung, integrate religious values with academic and professional competencies. This dual focus requires students to not only master subject matter but also to uphold Islamic ethics in their learning and communication practices. Writing assignments in these institutions often emphasize moral reasoning, integration of Islamic perspectives, and the ability to address contemporary social issues from a faith-based standpoint. Field observations and preliminary interviews at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal Lampung suggest that while most students are active users of smartphones and social media, their ability to critically evaluate digital information for academic purposes varies widely. Some students skillfully navigate academic databases, while others rely heavily on unverified online sources. This disparity indicates a need to strengthen formal digital literacy training that aligns with academic writing requirements and Islamic scholarly values.

In the context of writing, students at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal Lampung display diverse motivational patterns. Some are intrinsically motivated by a desire to articulate their ideas and contribute to Islamic scholarship, while others write primarily to fulfill course requirements. Motivational challenges such as limited confidence in English writing, fear of making mistakes, and competing academic workloads often influence the quality and consistency of their written work.

Given this theoretical foundation and observed phenomena, there is a clear need for qualitative research to explore how digital literacy and learning motivation interact to shape students' writing abilities at Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal Lampung. A phenomenological approach is particularly suited to uncovering the lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes of students in this context. The purposes of this study are: (1) to investigate how students describe the role of digital literacy in their academic writing processes; (2) to explore how learning motivation influences their writing behaviors; and (3) to examine how both factors interact in shaping their writing development within an Islamic higher education environment.

This study aims to fill the gap by providing a nuanced understanding that can inform curriculum design, teaching strategies, and institutional policies to enhance academic writing grounded in both digital competence and Islamic values. More specifically, this study seeks to listen to students' voices, understand their journeys in navigating digital tools and sustaining motivation, and capture the stories behind their writing experiences. By doing so, it aspires to uncover practical insights that can inspire educators and empower students to write with confidence, purpose, and integrity in line with the values upheld at Islamic higher education institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was chosen because the research aimed to explore students' in-depth experiences, perceptions, and emotional responses related to the role of digital literacy and learning motivation in shaping their academic writing abilities. The focus was not on statistical generalization but on meaning-making and personal narratives drawn from individual lived experiences.

The research was conducted in 2024 at the English Education Department (Tadris Bahasa Inggris), Faculty of Tarbiyah, Institut Agama Islam Darul A'mal Lampung. Participants were drawn from the second and fourth semester students enrolled in the 2023–2024 academic year. A total of 10 students were selected through purposive sampling. The selection was based on specific criteria: active enrollment in the English Education program, engagement in academic writing courses, and regular use of digital tools (e.g., online writing platforms, digital libraries, or productivity applications) as part of their learning routine. These students were considered appropriate informants due to their

active phase of language development and varied levels of digital literacy and motivation.

Data were collected using two instruments: open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews. The open-ended questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms, allowing participants to freely describe their experiences with digital tools and motivation in academic writing. The interviews were conducted to clarify responses and to explore deeper meanings emerging from students' written statements. Both instruments were designed to capture not only the cognitive and technical aspects of writing but also the emotional and motivational dimensions of students' experiences.

For data analysis, this study applied Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and questionnaire responses, (2) generating initial codes by identifying significant statements and phrases, (3) searching for patterns and grouping codes into potential themes, (4) reviewing and refining themes for coherence and accuracy, (5) defining and naming the themes to reflect their core meanings, and (6) producing the final thematic report. This framework enabled the researcher to systematically interpret complex qualitative data while preserving the authenticity of student voices.

To enhance the validity of the findings, member-checking was conducted by inviting several participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. The researcher also maintained reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis process to minimize bias and ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. The overall aim of the methodology was to uncover rich, meaningful insights into how digital literacy and learning motivation influence both the process and the quality of students' academic writing within an Islamic higher education context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the students' reflections and written outputs revealed three interconnected themes that provide insights into the role of digital literacy, learning motivation, and their interaction in shaping writing development within an Islamic higher education environment. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, these themes were generated through an iterative process of coding, categorization, and interpretation, ensuring that they emerged organically from the data while being informed by the research objectives.

1. Digital literacy as composing ecology (how students describe role of digital literacy in writing)

The interview data revealed that students perceived digital literacy not merely as a technical skill, but as an integrated ecology that supports their writing practices. They described how digital platforms, online resources, and collaborative tools shaped their ability to plan, draft, and refine their academic writing. The concept of "ecology" emerged in the sense that various digital elements such as search engines, grammar checkers, collaborative documents, and social media formed an interconnected

environment in which they composed texts. Students emphasized that digital literacy was not an isolated skill, but a dynamic system where tools, resources, and interactions continuously influenced their ideas, argument development, and writing quality.

Figure 1 : Conceptual model in digital literacy, learning motivation, and writing development

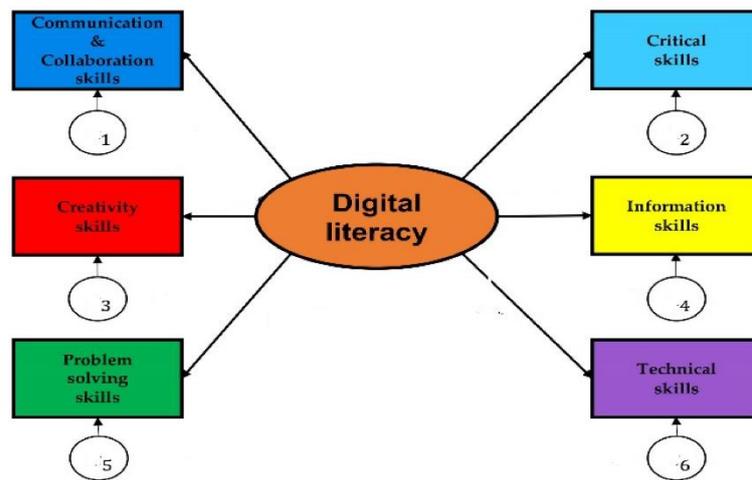


Table 1 : Students perception of digital literacy

| Code | Theme | Representative Quote |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Online Resources for Idea Generation | Access to information | "When I start writing, I always search online articles and journals first. It helps me develop my argument and avoid bias." |
| Digital Tools for Language Accuracy | Writing refinement | "I use Grammarly to check grammar, but I also compare with my lecturer's feedback so I don't just depend on the app." |
| Social Media for Perspective | Diverse viewpoints | "Sometimes I read debates on Twitter or Instagram comments. It gives me different angles to support my writing." |
| Collaborative Writing Platforms | Peer feedback | "Google Docs makes it easy to share drafts with friends so they can give comments before I submit." |
| Integration of Multiple Tools | Composing ecology | "I combine online reading, grammar check, and discussion with peers. These tools work together to make my writing better." |

The findings reveal that students conceptualize digital literacy as an integral component of their writing ecology, where digital tools, online resources, and platform affordances interact with their cognitive and creative processes. This aligns with the ecological perspective of writing (Guichon et al., 2025), in which literacy practices are distributed across material, social, and digital environments rather than confined to individual mental activity. Participants' reflections illustrate how digital literacy enables more efficient access to diverse sources, fosters audience awareness, and supports multimodal composition. For instance, students reported using online dictionaries, grammar checkers, and AI-based writing assistants not merely as correction tools but as scaffolds for language development. This resonates with (J. Chen & Zhu, 2025), who emphasize that digital literacy in higher education increasingly functions as a metacognitive aid that supports both language accuracy and rhetorical sophistication.

Interestingly, the interviews also indicate a shift from perceiving digital literacy as a supplementary skill toward viewing it as a central driver of academic writing. Students described a sense of agency when navigating multiple platforms to collect, evaluate, and synthesize information. This mirrors findings from (Afrilyasanti et al., 2025), who argue that digital literacy fosters a more dialogic and interactive engagement with texts, thereby enhancing critical thinking and audience awareness.

However, the data also point to challenges such as information overload, dependence on algorithmic feedback, and varying degrees of digital resource evaluation skills. These issues reflect earlier observations by (Hamad & Charles, 2024), who cautions that while digital tools expand access to information, they also demand higher levels of evaluative judgment to ensure credibility and academic integrity.

2. Motivational forces shaping writing practice

The findings showed that students' involvement in argumentative writing was shaped by a mix of inner (intrinsic) and outer (extrinsic) motivations. On the inside, many were inspired by a genuine wish to grow personally, express their own thoughts, and make a meaningful contribution to conversations about society. On the outside, factors like course requirements, feedback from lecturers, and even the possibility of getting recognition encouraged them to keep improving. Some students also shared that their motivation came from their religious and moral values especially when writing about viral socio religious issues. This showed how their personal beliefs naturally blended into their academic writing process, making their work not only a learning task but also a form of personal expression and moral responsibility.

Table 2 : "Categories of Motivation in Students' Argumentative Writing

| Code | Theme | Representative Quote |
|--------------------------|----------------------|---|
| Personal Growth | Intrinsic Motivation | "Writing about controversial topics makes me think deeper and improve my ability to express my opinion clearly." (S3) |
| Self-expression | Intrinsic Motivation | "I feel satisfied when I can write what I think, not just what the lecturer asks." (S1) |
| Academic Requirement | Extrinsic Motivation | "I write because it is part of the assignment, but I try to do my best so I can get a good grade." (S5) |
| Feedback from Lecturer | Extrinsic Motivation | "When my lecturer gives positive comments, I feel motivated to write more." (S2) |
| Public Recognition | Extrinsic Motivation | "If my work is published or read by many people, I feel proud and want to write better." (S4) |
| Religious/Ethical Values | Moral Motivation | "I write to show that Islam teaches peace, not violence, and to correct wrong perceptions." (S6) |
| Social Contribution | Moral Motivation | "I hope my writing can influence people to be more tolerant and understanding." (S1) |

The findings align with *Self-Determination Theory* (Choden & Rigdel, 2024), which posits that motivation is shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsic motivation in this study is evident in students' emphasis on personal growth and self-expression, which resonates with previous research indicating that learners engage more deeply in writing tasks when they perceive them as personally meaningful (Apridayani et al., 2024). Extrinsic motivation emerged through academic requirements, instructor feedback, and opportunities for public recognition. These factors function as performance-related incentives, supporting (Aldabbas et al., 2025) argument that external rewards can reinforce sustained engagement, particularly when coupled with constructive feedback.

Interestingly, moral and religious values appeared as a distinct motivational category, reflecting the socio-cultural context of the pesantren-based university. Students framed their writing as a means to uphold ethical principles, promote tolerance, and counteract negative stereotypes. This finding echoes (Liang et al., 2025), who notes that in faith oriented learning environments, religious values often intersect with academic goals to produce purpose-driven writing.

Overall, the interplay between personal, institutional, and moral

motivators suggests that argumentative writing instruction in similar contexts could be enhanced by integrating topics that are both socially relevant and aligned with students’ ethical frameworks. This dual alignment not only fosters deeper engagement but also cultivates critical digital citizenship, as students learn to respond thoughtfully to viral socio-religious issues in online spaces.

3. Reciprocal interaction: tools, motivation, writing development

The analysis revealed a dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship between the digital tools used, students’ motivational drivers, and the development of their writing skills. Data from interviews, observations, and students’ written products indicated that the integration of technological tools not only supported writing processes but also enhanced intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In turn, increased motivation fostered more active engagement with these tools, resulting in measurable improvements in writing performance. This reciprocal interaction suggests that the availability and effective use of tools are inseparable from the motivational forces that sustain writing development.

Table 3 : How digital literacy shapes writing development

| Code | Theme | Quote |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Availability of tools | Reciprocal interaction: tools, motivation, writing development | “I feel more confident writing when I use Grammarly or AI tools. They help me correct mistakes instantly, so I want to write more.” (S3) |
| Peer feedback loop | Reciprocal interaction: tools, motivation, writing development | “When my friends give me comments on my draft, I feel motivated to improve it. It’s like we learn from each other.” (S1) |
| Motivation from visible progress | Reciprocal interaction: tools, motivation, writing development | “After revising with feedback and tools, I can see my sentences become clearer. That makes me happy and want to write more.” (S4) |
| Integrated tool-feedback cycle | Reciprocal interaction: tools, motivation, writing development | “I use AI suggestions first, then show my work to my lecturer. Both help me improve faster.” (S2) |

The data suggest that students’ writing development is significantly shaped by a reciprocal interaction between digital tools, motivational factors, and continuous writing practice. The availability of AI-powered writing assistants (e.g., Grammarly, Chat GPT) provides immediate corrective feedback, reducing cognitive load during drafting and enabling students to focus on idea generation rather than mechanical accuracy. This aligns with (S. Chen, 2025), who found that timely, accessible feedback fosters sustained engagement in

writing tasks.

Peer feedback further strengthens this cycle by offering diverse perspectives and socially embedded motivation. (Pardede, 2024) argues that collaborative dimension of writing not only enhances text quality but also encourages learners to take ownership of their work. In this study, students frequently reported that visible improvements both in grammar accuracy and idea clarity sparked intrinsic motivation, creating a self-reinforcing loop: better tools → better drafts → higher motivation → more writing practice → further improvement.

The findings resonate with (Bamalan, 2024), which posits that learning is mediated by tools and social interaction. Here, digital platforms act as mediational means, while peer and lecturer feedback function as the social scaffolding that sustains learning. The integration of these elements forms a dynamic, reciprocal ecosystem in which writing skills and motivation grow together.

4. Integrate explicit digital literacy instruction

Analysis of interview data revealed that participants consistently emphasized the need for structured and explicit digital literacy training as part of their argumentative writing activities. Three key codes emerged from the data: (a) digital tool mastery, (b) evaluating online sources, and (c) ethical digital practices.

The quotation demonstrated that digital literacy was not merely perceived as a technical skill but as a critical enabler for producing credible, well-supported arguments. For example, one participant noted:

"Sometimes we just copy information from websites without knowing if it is reliable. If the lecturer explains how to check the credibility of sources, our writing can be stronger." (S4, Interview: *Evaluating Online Sources*)

Another participant reflected on the technical aspect of digital literacy:

"I can search on Google, but I don't know how to use digital tools for paraphrasing, citation, or checking grammar properly. If there's training, it will help us write more confidently." (S2, Interview: *Digital Tool Mastery*)

The third dimension concerned ethical and responsible use of digital content:

"We need to learn not just to find information but also to respect copyright and avoid plagiarism." (S5, Interview: *Ethical Digital Practices*)

The findings suggest that explicit integration of digital literacy into argumentative writing instruction addresses a critical gap in students' academic skill set. While participants demonstrated basic functional ability

to navigate the internet, they lacked structured guidance on evaluating credibility, using tools effectively, and adhering to ethical standards skills identified in recent literature as essential for academic success (Bibiana Obiageli, 2024).

In the context of this study, students' writing practice was intertwined with their ability to locate, filter, and ethically use information from digital environments. Without explicit instruction, students tended to rely on surface-level searching, which aligns with previous studies indicating that novice writers often equate digital literacy with basic Google searches (Mulaydinov, 2024). Ultimately, integrating explicit digital literacy instruction is not just a supplementary skill but a core component of developing reflective, critical, and ethically responsible writers particularly in higher education settings where information is abundant but credibility is uneven.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that argumentative writing tasks on socio-religious issues, when contextualized within students' lived experiences, foster critical engagement, language development, and ethical awareness. The reciprocal interaction between digital tools, learner motivation, and writing development demonstrates that technology is not merely a medium but an active catalyst for reflective thinking and idea construction. Furthermore, integrating explicit digital literacy instruction equips students with the capacity to critically evaluate online content, discern bias, and strengthen their rhetorical stance. The findings affirm that digital platforms, when purposefully guided, can serve as collaborative spaces for exploring perspectives, questioning stereotypes, and reinforcing values of tolerance and inclusivity.

These results underline the urgency of designing English writing pedagogy that balances linguistic accuracy with critical and ethical dimensions of learning, particularly in pesantren-based higher education contexts. Future research could explore longitudinal impacts of such integrated approaches, as well as their adaptability in diverse cultural and institutional settings to strengthen critical digital citizenship across broader learner populations.

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