

---

## FROM DIGITAL LITERACY TO LEARNING TO WRITE IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

Ista Maharsi

*English Language Education Department  
Universitas Islam Indonesia Yogyakarta  
ista.afandi@gmail.com*

### Abstract

The issue of digital literacy has raised concern of teachers as students have more opportunities to participate in the digital world writing. Not only does it embed extensive scope of impacts, but also it is gaining more popular yet little attention is fairly given. This paper is aimed to address such issues on the digital literacy skills and investigate students writing in the digital media (Twitter and Facebook). Data were taken from two courses (Material Development and Theory and Practice of Online Learning courses) assigning students to compose short types of writing in response to teachers' instructions. Results indicate that students should be made aware of the types of writing they have to write, the content, the length of the writing, and the register they should use in writing. It is recommended that teachers set up clear learning objectives, give clear instructions, and provide feedback for the students' writing.

**Keywords:** digital literacy, genre, writing media

### A. INTRODUCTION

Students of any ages nowadays could never be separated from their digital native nature. Digital world has been parts of their blood and flesh, and so have the ways they give meanings to the world. Classrooms are now filled with digital learning of any kinds—ranging from the simplest device such as computer to synchronous discussions conducted using a particular online learning platform. Both teachers and students can use those media as resources for teaching and learning, self-existence, personal or professional development. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to become self-aware, self-motivated, and self-empowered to better perform their duties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education.

In relation to the aforementioned issue, there are several important skills to be acquired both by teachers and students. Digital literacy, technology, and language discourse. Those three skills are necessary for both students and teachers in order to be able to use the digital media effectively and appropriately to communicate ideas, to interact with people, to share knowledge and information, and to extend their personal as well as professional development.

Literacy is extensively coined to ICT (Information and Communication Technology) literacy, digital literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, and many others. However, the use of those terms usually refers to ICT-related matters. Literacy can be defined as an individual as well as social act in which meaning and language are formed by the social identity such as ethnic and culture (Kucer, 2005: 5-6). It also means obtaining information effectively by understanding the process of how texts are formed (Brindley, 2000). ICT literacy is defined as “using digital technology. Communication tools, and/or networks to assess, manage, integrate, evaluate, and create information in order to function in a knowledge society” (International ICT Literacy Panel, 2002). When literacy is related with media of any kind, it is commonly known as media literacy. Therefore, digital literacy concerns with gathering information, constructing meaning and knowledge effectively and appropriately of how various texts are formed through any digital media such as internet, Smartphone, blogs, You Tube, twitter, *Facebook*, Instagram and so forth.

There are four literacy resource model when people are interacting using varied types of texts—code breaking, meaning-making, text-using, and text-analyzing. Code-breaking refers to “the ability to break codes of written texts by recognizing and using the fundamental architecture of written language.” Meaning making, in addition, refers to “the ability to understand and

---

compose meaningful written, visual, spoken, digital and multimodal texts.” Text-using is “the ability to use written, spoken, visual, digital and multimodal texts in functional ways within and outside the school setting.” Text-analyzing can be defined as “the ability to critically analyze written, spoken, visual, digital and multimodal texts and understand that texts represent particular points of view and influence people’s ideas” (NSW Education & Training, 2010).

Technology, which refers to new media for communication and interaction, requires particular skills to operate it effectively. It has been long known as the sword with double sides—the good and the bad. With the vast influence it can reach, technology seems to be the fastest, the most effective, and the most powerful tools for communicating ideas.

This paper aims to describe the digital literacy skills related to writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and beyond, investigate students writing in the digital media, and how students can learn to write in the digital world as a means to develop their personal competence as well as to prepare for future career development.

## **B. WRITING GENRE AND LEARNING TO WRITE IN THE DIGITAL MEDIA**

Why digital writing is important is because it is the digital world that we are living in. Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not as simple as that in the previous history. Writing in the digital age may take many kinds of forms and use various types of multimedia such as writing blogs, *Facebook* statuses, online news updates, tweets in Twitter, video podcast, You Tube, instant messaging, Whatsapp, Blackberry Messages, and many others. Texts can be in the forms of written texts, audio, video, animation, presentation, and so forth. Many writing activities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is personal writing—a writing piece that belongs to its writer—and is aimed to participate and interact with people all around the world (Brandt, 2004). This kind of writing is mostly individual and personalized, flexible following contexts, and free. In terms of genre, many types of writing remain what have been available in the tradition such as folk tales, personal narratives, fiction, fantasy, and others. However, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where many types of multimedia are available, all those genres can be converted into the digital forms. In addition, new types of writings emerge such as blogs, posts, statuses, and tweets.

Utilizing digital media as a means to develop students’ writing skills is not impossible at all. However, there are several important things to note to make writing in the digital media effective, appropriate, and meaningful. Students and teachers should be able to understand and use digital literacy, to properly use technology application or software, and understand how language is used appropriately in the digital media.

The new skills in the digital or participatory culture may include the capacity to experiment, the ability to adopt, interpret, sample and remix media, scan an environment, interact meaningfully, pool knowledge, evaluate the reliability and credibility of different information sources, search for and synthesize information, travel across diverse communities, and create data presentations (DeVoss, Eidman-Aadah, & Hicks, 2010: 11-12). It now seems clearer that the 21<sup>st</sup> century writing demands more extensive and complex skills.

A changed context for writing brings consequences on a changed tool. There could be several ways to train students to align with the new types of writing—using the digital writing tools, establishing digital library that enables students to search information, encourage students to work individually and collaboratively, establishing digital ecology, enforcing ethical and policy and regulation for digital writing (DeVoss, Eidman-Aadah, & Hicks, 2010). In term of language discourse, teachers and students should acquire sufficient understanding on the language they use in the digital media. Both formal and informal language can be used in writing in the media but their usage may depend on the types of tasks, types of writing, topics, and criteria.

## **C. STUDENTS’ WRITING IN THE MEDIA**

In this part, students’ various writing products are analyzed in relation to their language use. The language components that become the focus of investigation are limited to identifying characteristics that lead to certain genre group, reference, and grammatical components. Sources of students’ writing are Twitter and *Facebook* of undergraduate students majoring in English education. Each sample is discussed and analyzed as an attempt to reveal types of online writing, how they may fit in the genre, and how teachers should give feedback.

One sample activity for writing in the digital world is by using Twitter for cool tweets (kultwit). Students taking Material Development course were required to tweet a lesson they

thought was important and meaningful. As posts in twitter are limited to 120 characters, students are forced to summarize, paraphrase, and extract information into manageable and understandable tweets. This task is indeed not easy because very often important information is described in details.

The following are students' cool tweets in Twitter discussing about several topics such as nativism, behaviorism, cognitivism, corpora, topic based syllabus. The tweets should be posted after the class sessions on particular topics. All students tweeted about the same topic but different expressions.

Madev today: corpus = a bank of authentic texts ( words, expressions )

Matdev today: using corpora data in classroom

Those tweets have several issues to consider. First, punctuations are not correctly used. Second, the use of abbreviation (Madev) may confuse readers without sufficient knowledge or born in different contexts. Third, typing technique issues such as spacing (after the colons, after and before brackets) needs editing.

Corpus= diperlukan oleh Material Developer u/ pembaharuan

This tweet needs editing in terms of punctuation, language switch, and abbreviation. The use of (=) is inappropriate; colon should be used instead. The language used in the tweet is inconsistent (English and Bahasa Indonesia). In this case, language consistency (English only, Bahasa Indonesia only) may help to transfer better information. The abbreviation of u/ (untuk/for) may not be understandable for everyone. Although in certain community the abbreviation is familiar, it would be better if such abbreviation use is avoided. Depending on the goal of the tweet writing, messages can be better transferred when correct language is appropriately used.

Clarks conceptualized the set of game are educational simulations as the media within Highly Virtual Environments infrastructure.

This tweet contains three issues to be corrected—ambiguous meaning due to incorrect sentence structure, referencing or citation, and grammar. First, the tweet is a run-on sentence because it has three clauses and only one connector. The sentence should be rewritten using noun clause. Second, the sentence is originally extracted from a textbook. A proper referencing or citation strategy should be used. It means that source of information should be made clear by referring to proper citation. Third, the issue of grammar may be considered as secondary. However, it may be a good idea to address students' sentences in term of grammar.

Kata "I love you" tu udah biasa, biar lebih fresh bilangny "You're the apple of my eyes" 😊

This tweet uses two languages, English and Bahasa Indonesia. However, the meanings can be quite well understood. The use of double quote ("") clarifies that the phrases within the quote is one entity. A little mistake is made in term of punctuation in which space should be applied after the comma.

The assignments show that the language used in writing the tweets is both formal and informal. More than one language (English and Bahasa Indonesia) is also used. There are still several important issues related to writing techniques that need to be improved. Teachers should explain to students about digital literacy prior to assigning this kind of task. The goal of the task, the audience, the language, and referencing should be taught. What is special when writing in the digital social media is the use of emoticon which is "a group of keyboard characters (as :-)) that typically represents a facial expression or suggests an attitude or emotion and that is used especially in computerized communications (as e-mail) (Merriam Webster). In this case, teachers should also clarify whether the use of emoticon is allowed or set limit to what extent emoticon is allowed to be used.

The following are the samples of another type of students' writing in *Facebook*. This task is embedded in Theory and Practice of Online Learning course, a compulsory course for students of English language education program. The type of task is summarizing and making important notes. Students are asked to read a textbook and make a summary on what they have read.

### 1. Online learning is easy for learning process

Using online for teaching will make the students have many times to learn something. They can access all the materials anywhere and anytime they want. If in the classroom they do not understand about the materials, they can ask the teachers via online. Using online learning is also easier for teachers to send assignment with upload the file by online learning like Klasiber, Edmodo, Facebook, Twitter and Gmail application. Learn do not only in the classroom because the time is limited. Online learning can makes the relationship between teachers and students better. The teachers can know the development progress activity from the students. When the students discuss about materials that the teachers that have uploaded it on the Gmail. From that, the teachers can pay attention to the students about their cooperation and understanding the materials. (FB#1)

The word “learn” should be replaced by “learning” as it should function as a noun phrase as Subject. This grammatical error may confuse readers in that it may be referred to as “learn” which is a verb. Double verbs can be found in “can makes.” Overall, the sample contains main points but it may need a little bit more explanations.

### 2. My gadget is my learning tool

In this 21st century, technology has rapidly developed. This advance gives influence on every sector in our life like economic, culture and education. For education aspects, it offers Blended Learning as a new way or strategy of learning process which is integrating technology into a classroom as one of example. In blended learning, a learning process becomes flexible and students are more engaging in class. Learning is not always has to be in the classroom and from book now. Knowledge does not have to be from thick book but it is available wherever and whenever when we access to internet. Teachers are no longer become main resource. A Gadget like computer, laptop and smartphone provides an access to internet which there is a lot of sources of knowledge in internet that helps us mastering lesson in our learning. Students can access them directly and have knowledge about everything without teachers' help by using a gadget. Technology through internet connection in our computer or laptop helps us to learn something in easy and fast way. We don't have to read newspaper or hundred pages of book to know some important information anymore which some people used to do in the past. Applying blended learning in class it means that we also have online class by using online learning platform like [www.edmodo.com](http://www.edmodo.com) or [www.wizIQ.com](http://www.wizIQ.com) in example. Although technology is really helpful, we have to be a wise and smart user. Too many resources for learning on internet make both teacher and students should have good technology or digital literacy. Using technology is accessible and it offers a quick and helpful way in learning for us. Causes of it, sometime students tend to be lazy or open social media while studying. Teachers have to aware about this. (FB#2)

The FB#2 contains ambiguity on the use “For education aspects, it offers Blended Learning....” The reference “it” refers to “technology”, but when it is connected with the phrase “for education aspects” the meaning becomes ambiguous.

### 3. Online learning is not “Only Learning”

Ally as cited by Farani (2015) defines online learning as the use of the Internet to access learning materials; to interact with the content, instructor, and other learners; and to obtain support during the learning process, in order to acquire knowledge, to construct personal meaning, and to grow from the learning experience. The definition shows that interaction is one of the most prominent aspects in online learning. In this writing, we would like to highlight interactions happen among learners in online learning.

From what we had experienced, online learning gives us more opportunity to interact collaboratively with other learners. Since online learning put more responsibility in learner's shoulder, working collaboratively can make the responsibility lighter. In our class, Lecturer gave us material to be accessed and comprehended on our own. We first tried to understand the materials as individuals, but then we discussed it with friends to examine, confirm, clarify, and elaborate our understanding on the materials. In our online class, we helped one another to construct comprehension on the materials given by the lecturer. We think that it is what makes our learning in online class become much more meaningful.

To sum up, online learning provides more space of interactions among learners in their learning process. In our humble opinion, learners do not only learn in online learning, they also interact collaboratively with other learners simultaneously. (FB#3)

The phrase “learner’s shoulder” reveal connotative meaning which is “become one’s burden.” The second and the third sample summary are good examples of summary as they use reference, shows good coherence as well as cohesion. The first sample, in comparison, is lack of coherence and cohesion in a way that the idea moves forward and backward. Inappropriate use of transitional signals and unfinished sentences make it more unclear and messages may not be well-delivered.

#### 4. Using technology for learning needs

Technology *nowdays* can help us in many ways, especially for learning. By using technology all information is accessible in our hands. We as a student can catch up with most up to date information *quicket* and easier than before. The use of technology as a source of information is also cheap, rather than have to buy a heavy book.

‘Anytime learning, anywhere learning’, that’s what we like the most about technology. Going to library and searching for books is no longer applicable for us as a student, as our nation become a technology-dependent person. With technology we can access a variety of learning resources. Okay, finding resources. This is what help us the most, technology allow us to find any kind of reference and it’s so easy, as a students, this is really helpful. It’s reduce the time to spend for many routine task.

Talk about technology, i think online learning is what all the teacher now apply in their class, whether it’s easy to use or it helps them to deliver a hard material, and simplify it so the student can easily *understan*.

We can also submit an online task even when we are not present in the class. This is neat; i mean online task is fun, because we can do the task wherever we want it, at home, at friend’s house, outside, or even in the toilet.

Okay so to conclude, technology brings many benefit for us as a student, it helps in many ways, finding information it’s easy. So, technology is rules. (FB#4)

Sample #4 has many grammatical errors including spelling (*nowdays*, *quicket*, *understan*, *becauese*), capitalization (“i” instead of “I”), punctuation (the inappropriate use of period and comma), run-on sentences *his is what help us the most, technology allow us to find any kind of reference and it’s so easy, as a students, this is really helpful*), singular/plural problems (*a students*), and incomplete sentence components (*so technology rules*). More importantly, this extract contains ideas expressed in spoken language rather than formal and written language such as the use of the word “okay” and several extracted forms (*it’s easy, I mean, that’s*). Overall, the fourth’s samples were modified to accord with the learning components being investigated. It can generally be indicated that students are required to understand the features for formal written texts and informal spoken ones. Sample #4 clearly shows that students may not understand the types of appropriate texts they had to use when posting on Facebook. Different expressions and words should be considered because they influence the tone of the sentences they created. It is, therefore, necessary to teach students how to create both formal and informal sentences and discourse so that they know which ones suit a context.

Those four summary samples are good practices for students. There are at least three reasons why writing a particular genre on *Facebook* is necessary. *First*, students are made familiar with the type of writing. Students learn how they write the summary and post it on the digital medium. *Second*, students practice using digital media as the tools for communicating ideas and share knowledge. *Third*, students learn how to appropriately make citation for their writing so that it is not categorized into plagiarism. From the extracts, only the third sample (FB#3) uses reference as the source of information. However, the reference is not properly written as part of the summary writing elements. The first (FB#1) and second sample (FB#2) elaborates their thought on the topic by giving examples.

From the discussions and illustrations, it can be recommended that several crucial skills are required for students to understand what they had to do when dealing with posting materials onto a website. Some of those skills are types of genre, computer and internet literacy, reading and writing skills both macro and micro, academic skills, plagiarism, and internet ethics. The media that the students use for their writing should also be pre-determined as it involves the way to write and how people are going to react. In term of learning goal accomplishment, teachers have to make the instruction for the assignments crystal clear including the genre, topics, length, scope, and other mechanical matters that can be formulated through a rubric. It

is, therefore, expected that students are able to meet the assignment requirements so that optimum results can be obtained.

#### D. CONCLUSION

Digital literacy is an important skill to be acquired by both teachers and students. With the understanding, both personal and professional skills can be developed through digital writing tools—social media, blogs, online journals, citizen journalism, etc. It enables teachers and students to get involved and actively participated in the digital culture and community appropriate with our profession and competencies.

Teachers should teach students about ethics in the digital world, what types of writing they can post, how they should react with online information, and what type of language they should use for a particular medium. Feedback always plays an important role in learning. It can be given either prior to posting activities or when materials are already online. However, prior posting activities seem better because the materials have not been published yet.

#### E. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brandt, D. 2004. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brindley, S. 2000. ICT and Literacy. In N. Gamble, & N. Easingwood, *ICT and Literacy: Information and Communication Technology, Media, Reading and Writing* (pp. 11-18). London & New York: Nikki Gamble, Nick Easingwood and the contributors.
- Cruse, A. 2000. *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- DeVoss, D. N., Eidman-Aadahl, E., & Hicks, T. 2010. *Because Digital Writing Matters*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- International ICT Literacy Panel. 2002. *Digital Transformation: A Framework for ICT Literacy*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.
- Kucer, S. B. 2005. *Dimensions of Literacy: A Conceptual Base for Teaching Reading and Writing in School Settings* (2nd ed.). New Jersey & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Merriam Webster. (n.d.). Retrieved January 5, 2016, from [www.merriam-webster.com: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emoticon](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emoticon)
- NSW Education & Training. 2010. *Literacy learning and technology*. NSW Department of Education and Training.