

EMPOWERING FEMALE WRITERS FROM PESANTREN: HARNESSING THE POWER OF DIGITAL LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores women's empowerment through digital literacy within pesantren, focusing on three case studies: Nisaul Kamilah from Pesantren Maslakul Huda Lamongan, Mambaul Atiyah from Pesantren Sabiluth Thoyyib Pasuruan, and Munawara from Pesantren Tebuireng Jombang. Employing a qualitative approach, the research investigates how these female digital literacy advocates utilize technology to enhance students' reading, writing, and access to information. The findings indicate that digital literacy not only modernizes education in pesantren but also creates opportunities for women to work, express themselves, and contribute to da'wah. Nonetheless, challenges such as limited access to technology and concerns about its potential negative impacts remain. Support from pesantren leaders and the implementation of flexible policies are essential for empowering women and advancing education. Furthermore, women's involvement in shaping educational practices has a positive effect on the digital literacy environment, inspiring santriwati to participate in technology-based initiatives.

Keywords: *digital literacy, pesantren, women's empowerment, pesantren female writers.*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi pemberdayaan perempuan melalui literasi digital di pesantren, dengan fokus pada tiga narasumber utama yaitu Nisaul Kamilah dari pesantren Maslakul Huda Lamongan, Mambaul Atiyah dari pesantren Sabiluth Thoyyib Pasuruan, dan Munawara dari pesantren Tebuireng Jombang. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini menyelidiki bagaimana para aktifis literasi digital perempuan ini memanfaatkan teknologi untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca, menulis, dan mengakses informasi santri dipesantren. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa literasi digital tidak hanya memodernisasi pendidikan di pesantren tetapi juga menciptakan peluang bagi perempuan untuk berdaya, mengekspresikan diri, dan berkontribusi dalam dunia digital. Meskipun demikian, tantangan seperti keterbatasan akses terhadap teknologi dan kekhawatiran tentang potensi dampak negatifnya menjadi kendala yang ditemui. Dukungan dari para pemimpin pesantren (Kiai dan Nyai) dan penerapan kebijakan yang fleksibel sangat penting untuk memberdayakan perempuan dan memajukan pendidikan. Oleh karena itu, keterlibatan perempuan dalam membentuk praktik pendidikan memiliki efek positif pada lingkungan literasi digital, menginspirasi para santriwati untuk berpartisipasi dalam inisiatif berbasis teknologi.

Kata Kunci: *digital literacy, pesantren, women's empowerment, pesantren female writers.*

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed various aspects of life, particularly in education and literacy. In the context of pesantren, which are traditionally seen

as educational institutions, digital literacy has gained attention as a means to enhance learning quality and empower students (Fitriyah et al., 2023; Ja'far, 2019; Kariyawan Ys & Juliana, 2020). Pesantren are traditional Islamic boarding schools that originated in early Indonesia. Initially, they were primarily associated with studying traditional texts and employing conventional teaching methods (Arif, 2016; Madjid, 1997). However, they are now beginning to embrace digital technology to meet contemporary demands.. However, integrating digital literacy in pesantren goes beyond merely using technology. It focuses on how this technology can empower students, especially female students (*santrivati*), enabling them to make broader contributions to the literacy world.

Digital literacy in pesantren encompasses not only the ability to operate technological devices but also the capacity to leverage these tools for creating works, communicating, and disseminating information (Ja'far, 2019). Pesantren such as Tebuireng and Maslakul Huda have begun to embrace digital media to enhance learning and preaching activities, utilizing platforms like websites, social media, and writing applications. Nonetheless, the implementation of digital literacy in these pesantren faces several challenges, including limited access, insufficient training, and resistance to change.

Women, particularly Nyai and Ning as female leader in pesantren, Women, particularly Nyai and Ning as female leaders in pesantren, play a crucial role in promoting literacy within these institutions. They not only serve as leaders and educators but also as writers and literacy advocates. Their efforts encourage female students (*santrivati*) to enhance their productivity through digital literacy. (Fitriyah et al., 2024). However, the contribution of women to digital literacy often receives insufficient attention, even though their potential to impact the field through digital writing is significant. Female writers from pesantren, such as Nisaul Kamilah¹ and Mambaul Atiyah², exemplify how digital literacy can empower individuals and help articulate their thoughts

Empowering female students through digital literacy aims to enhance their writing skills and open new opportunities for career and income. Digital platforms like Wattpad, social media, and blogs enable students, especially female students (*santrivati*), to publish their works independently and reach broader audiences (Haryanti et al., 2023). This empowerment can boost their self-confidence and visibility in the literary world. However, despite the opportunities

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presented by digital literacy, female writers in pesantren encounter various challenges. Some pesantren still restrict students' access to digital technology, particularly for female students (In'amurrohman, 2019). Additionally, social stigma surrounding writing as an unproductive activity poses a barrier for female writers seeking to develop their potential.

Support from the pesantren environment, including figures such as Kiai, Nyai, and Gus as the pesantren leaders is crucial for encouraging digital literacy among female students (*santrivati*). Several pesantren have begun offering digital writing training and providing access to digital platforms for their students (Fitriyah et al., 2024). This support not only helps female students (*santrivati*) improve their writing skills but also grants them space to express themselves and be creative. Beyond serving as a means of empowerment, digital literacy acts as a tool for preaching, allowing female writers in pesantren to disseminate Islamic and pesantren values to a broader audience (Karomani et al., 2021). This aligns with the mission of pesantren as educational institutions that prioritize not only religious instruction but also community service. Moreover, digital literacy opens up economic opportunities for female writers in pesantren. By publishing their work on digital platforms, they can earn additional income through royalties, donations, or collaborations with publishers (Ismah, 2023; Nurdiansyah et al., 2021). This financial empowerment also enhances their social standing within the pesantren community.

This study addresses a gap in previous research that has typically focused more on general digital literacy or the role of women in traditional educational settings. By concentrating on the empowerment of female students through digital literacy, this research offers a new perspective on how technology can enhance the presence and contributions of women in pesantren literacy. The study aims to analyze how digital literacy can empower female students in pesantren, particularly regarding writing and publishing their works. Additionally, it seeks to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by female writers in utilizing digital literacy, as well as the supportive roles played by the pesantren environment in these literacy activities.

METHODS

This study employs qualitative methods to gain a deep understanding of how digital literacy empowers female students (*santrivati*) in pesantren, particularly through the experiences and perspectives of female writers. Case studies were chosen because they enable researchers to gather detailed data from informants who are actively involved in digital literacy activities within pesantren (Sudikan, 2001). The research focuses on three main informants: Nisaul Kamilah (Pesantren Maslakul Huda-Lamongan), Mambaul Atiyah (Pesantren SabiluthThoyyib -Pasuruan),

dan Munawara (Pesantren Tebuireng-Jombang). All three informants have experience as writers and literacy activists in their institutions

Data collection will be conducted through in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies (Sudikan, 2001). The interviews will be semi-structured and guided by a list of prepared questions. The aim is to explore the informants' experiences, challenges, and perspectives regarding digital literacy and the empowerment of female students. The interview schedule is planned in stages: Nisaul Kamilah will be interviewed in July 2024, followed by Mambaul Atiyah in September 2024, and finally, Munawara (Rara Zarary) in November 2024. In addition to the interviews, researchers will conduct observations and literature reviews related to digital literacy activities in pesantren. These observations will include the use of social media, writing platforms such as Wattpad, and writing training activities. The goal of these observations is to complement the interview data by providing firsthand insight into how digital literacy is implemented in the pesantren environment.

Data obtained from interviews, observations, and literature reviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The first step in data analysis involves transcription, where the interview results will be transcribed verbatim. Subsequently, the data will be coded based on emergent themes, such as experiences of writing on digital platforms, challenges in utilizing digital literacy, support from the pesantren school environment, and the impact of digital literacy on the empowerment of female students. After coding, researchers will identify patterns and relationships between themes to derive findings relevant to the research questions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Literacy in Pesantren

Digital literacy in pesantren has been rapidly evolving alongside advancements in information technology. These institutions, rooted in religious education, have begun using digital technology to enhance the learning process, facilitate preaching, and develop students' skills (Romdhoni, 2016). Digital literacy not only enables students to access a wider range of information but also serves as a powerful tool for empowering women within the pesantren's environment (Ahmad Farid, 2019). It is defined as the ability of individuals to understand, utilize, and create information through digital technology (Laela, 2022). In the context of Pesantren, digital literacy encompasses the mastery of technology to support religious-based learning, preaching through social media, and the development of digital writing and reading skills. The presence of digital literacy positively impacts students by fostering their creativity and critical

thinking (Shelley et al., 2022). Students learn to produce quality content aligned with Islamic values while also understanding the ethics of technology use. Additionally, digital literacy offers opportunities for students to contribute to society through their published works.

Digital literacy in pesantren also plays a crucial role in women's empowerment. Nyai or Ning, responsible for shaping the educational approach in these schools, actively support digital literacy initiatives for female students (Fabriar & Muhajarah, 2024). They often organize seminars, soft skills training, and writing assistance aimed at improving female students' abilities to utilize technology. The emergence of female writers such as Nisaul Kamilah and Munawara illustrates how digital literacy provides a platform for women to express their ideas and talents.

Despite its numerous benefits, the implementation of digital literacy in pesantren faces challenges. Some institutions still restrict students' access to technology due to concerns about its potential negative impacts. For instance, the use of cell phones may only be permitted at specific times, such as Fridays or during online classes (In'amurrohman, 2019). Additionally, limited technological resources hinder optimal development of digital literacy. To address these challenges, pesantren need to establish policies that balance the restriction of technology access with its positive applications. Structured digital literacy training can assist students in learning how to use technology responsibly (Latif, 2019). Furthermore, support from Kiai and Gus is essential in creating opportunities for Nyai or Ning to innovate in technology-based education (Samsu et al., 2021).

Digital literacy provides pesantren with an expansive opportunity to spread da'wah, or Islamic teachings, to a broader audience. Social media and online platforms serve as effective tools for communicating Islamic values in both written and audiovisual formats. By embracing digital literacy, pesantren can adapt to modern times while preserving their traditional identities. This integration of digital literacy is a crucial step toward modernizing religion-based education (A'la, 2006). Despite facing various challenges, the implementation of digital literacy has positively impacted both students and society. It enhances access to information and serves as a tool for empowering women and offering creative spaces for the younger generation within the pesantren environment.

Many pesantren are leveraging technology to improve their students' digital literacy through various innovative and integrated approaches. For instance, numerous schools now organize writing and digital skills training programs for students (Aziz, 2011). They also incorporate technology into the learning process; the use of online learning platforms such as Google Classroom and Edmodo enables teachers to efficiently distribute learning materials,

collect assignments, and provide feedback (Fakhruddin & Aeni, 2020). This fosters a more interactive learning environment that aligns with the learning styles of today's youth.

Libraries in pesantren play a significant role in enhancing digital literacy. By providing access to e-books, scientific journals, and other digital resources, libraries help students develop their research skills and critically evaluate information. Additionally, computer facilities and internet access in libraries acclimate students to using technology to support both religious education and general knowledge (Prastyo, 2022). Collaborations between pesantren and universities also serve as an effective strategy. In these partnerships, university lecturers provide digital literacy training to students, enhancing their understanding of the responsible use of computers and social media (Setyaningsih et al., 2018). Such programs enrich the students' learning experiences and bridge the gap between formal and non-formal education.

The integration of technology in education within pesantren has increased students' interest and motivation in learning digital literacy. With an interactive and participatory approach to learning, students are more enthusiastic about exploring computer technology. Through various strategies, pesantren are not only preparing students to face challenges in the digital era but also empowering them to contribute positively to society through the responsible use of technology.

Pesantren, Women, and Digital Literacy

The role of female activists in the realm of digital literacy significantly impacts the culture of literacy, especially among female students in pesantren. Interviews with prominent figures in digital literacy, such as Nisaul Kamilah, Mambaul Atiyah, and Munawara, demonstrate their crucial contributions to enhancing literacy within these institutions.

Nisaul Kamilah is a prolific writer and serves as an administrator at a pesantren Salafiyah . She has published several books, including the anthology *Perempuan Tali Jagat* (2019), the novel *DUR: Diary Ungu Rumaysba* (2020), and the novel *Riyadboh Jalur Langit* (2023). Nisaul Kamilah is a graduate of UIN Malang and was an active student during her time there. She held several leadership positions, including Vice Chairperson of HMJ-PAI UIN Malang, Minister of Research and Development for BEM Tarbiyah UIN Malang, member of the Press and Journalism Development Board, and Chief Editor of the HMJ-PAI *Mubasabah* Bulletin. She also received various awards as a student, such as being named Best One Participant of UIN Malang's Main Program, winning 1st place in UIN Malang's PAI inter-class debate competition, placing 3rd in

PMII UIN Malang's LKTI, and winning 1st place in the short story writing competition in Greater Malang.

Despite her school not being fully integrated with digital literacy, she encourages her students to develop a passion for reading through traditional literacy activities, such as reading books and compiling clippings. She recognizes the significant potential of digital technology to enhance learning and facilitate publishing on platforms like Facebook and Wattpad. Nisaul Kamilah's role as a female writer in an pesantren setting demonstrates how digital literacy can broaden perspectives and provide a platform for self-expression.

Mambaul Atiyah, a writer from Lamongan, leverages social media to enhance her influence in the field of literacy. Her published works include the novels *Kamar Gus Yazid* (2020); *Skandal* (2021); *Kencan Kedua* (2021); *Gus Zam-Zam: Sang Menantu Kiayi* (2022). As a santri (pesantren student), Mambaul Atiyah's novels are characterized by their vivid depictions of life in the pesantren from dawn until night. As both a caretaker and teacher at pesantren Maslakul Huda, she promotes digital writing by organizing training sessions that encourage students to write on platforms such as Wattpad. Although the boarding school imposes some restrictions on technology use, Mambaul Atiyah's efforts to wisely introduce digital literacy to her students remain steadfast. She believes that digital literacy is a double-edged sword that can provide significant benefits when managed appropriately.

Munawara, known by her pen name Rara Zarary, is a teacher, lecturer, and writer active at pesantren Tebuireng. In between to his role as a lecturer, he is actively engaged in writing both fiction and non-fiction books. Some of the titles he has authored include: *Menghitung Gerimis* (2013); *Hujan Terakhir* (2014); *Hujan & Senja Tanah Rantau* (2016); *Kita yang Pernah* (2020); dan *Berkarya & Berprestasi untuk Indonesia* (2021). She not only manages the school's social media and website but also founded a writing school for students. The pesantren Tebuireng embraces digital technology as a means of outreach and education. Through platforms such as Tebuireng Online and Pustaka Tebuireng, Munawara empowers students to use technology to create diverse forms of content, ranging from written works to audio-visual productions.

These three figures illustrate that digital literacy in pesantren serves not only as a tool for modernization but also as a platform for women to work and contribute. Support from Kiayi and Gus strengthens the role of Nyai and Ning in shaping educational approaches and guiding students to navigate the advancements of the modern world while maintaining the traditional values of the pesantren. In some institutions, Nyai and Ning even have the opportunity to initiate seminars, conduct soft skills training, and democratically decide on teaching methods for

example, the writing training at the pesantren initiated by Ning and Nyai, where the Kyai provided full support through adequate pesantren facilities for the students.

However, challenges remain. Some pesantren still perceive novel writing as less valuable. Nonetheless, these female activists persist in demonstrating that digital literacy can be a powerful empowerment tool for women in pesantren. They utilize social media to share their ideas and promote their works to a broader audience. Digital literacy also enables students to gain insights into the outside world without abandoning their Islamic identity. With proper guidance, technology can be harnessed for positive purposes, such as seeking information, engaging in critical discussions, and creating innovative works. Nyai and Ning play a crucial role in ensuring that technology is used effectively and beneficially for the development of students.

Furthermore, the presence of digital literacy allows pesantren to expand their reach in spreading da'wah through writing, audiovisual materials, films, and other media. Today, pesantren are not just centers of religious education; they have also become hubs of technology-driven creativity that can connect with the wider community.

Awareness of the importance of digital literacy drives female activists to continue innovating, despite facing various limitations. They believe that with support from all parties, including the Kyai, digital literacy can serve as a bridge between the traditions of pesantren and the advancement of modern technology. With the active participation of Nyai and Ning in the digital literacy movement, pesantren have evolved to become not only places for religious study but also centers for women's empowerment through technology-based education (Samsu et al., 2021). This highlights the potential of women in pesantren to contribute significantly to building a more advanced society while preserving their traditional roots.

Prominent figures such as Nisaul Kamilah, Mambaul Atiyah, and Munawara have greatly influenced the younger generation in the realm of digital literacy. Through innovative and relevant approaches, they have motivated students and young people to use digital technology wisely and productively. For instance, Nisaul Kamilah integrates digital literacy into learning activities at pesantren by encouraging her students to utilize platforms like Facebook and Wattpad. This not only boosts their interest in reading but also helps them learn how to express themselves through writing on digital media. This approach is crucial, as today's younger generation is accustomed to visual and interactive content, making Nisaul's blend of traditional and digital literacy particularly relevant (Dwi Susanti & Alfurqan, 2021).

Mambaul Atiyah also plays a vital role in shaping the younger generation by organizing digital writing training at the pesantren Maslakul Huda. Through this training, he imparts practical

skills, enabling students to write and publish their work online. This initiative not only enhances their writing abilities but also equips them with knowledge on using the internet as a tool for spreading positive ideas. In addition, Munawara has taken further steps by establishing a writing school at the pesantren Tebuireng

He teaches students the importance of digital ethics, online security, and how to produce high-quality content. In this way, he empowers the younger generation to become not just consumers of information but also responsible content producers (Rahayu & et al, 2021).

The influence of these three figures is pivotal, especially considering the challenges faced by the younger generation today, such as the spread of misinformation and addiction to social media. Digital literacy serves as a powerful tool to empower young people to critically filter information and avoid falling prey to hoaxes and other negative content (Tapscott, 1997). Moreover, the digital literacy skills taught by these female activists help the younger generation prepare for the workforce. In today's digital era, proficiency in information technology is one of the primary requirements for job seekers. Therefore, the digital literacy education provided by these figures is not only academically beneficial but also professionally enriching. Their presence exemplifies that women can play a crucial role in education and community development, particularly in the realm of digital literacy (Veranita, 2023). They serve as role models for students and other young people, demonstrating that women can make significant contributions to technology and information.

Beyond merely teaching technical skills, these figures emphasize the importance of ethical values and responsible technology use. They highlight the necessity of critical thinking and accountability regarding the information shared online, enabling the younger generation to become savvy and wise internet users (Hague & Payton, 2010). With support from the pesantren and the community, these initiatives are expected to grow and reach even more young individuals. These efforts align with the government's program aimed at improving digital literacy in Indonesia, which seeks to equip more people with the skills needed to effectively use information technology (Pramadi, 2020). Overall, the impact of Nisaul Kamilah, Mambaul Atiyah, and Munawara in the field of digital literacy is highly significant for the development of the younger generation. They not only provide students with essential technical skills but also foster positive character development in technology use, contributing to a smarter and more responsible future generation.

Empowering Women from Pesantren through Digital Literacy

Women's empowerment through digital literacy in pesantren has made significant strides, particularly in creating opportunities for women to contribute intellectually and creatively. Digital literacy enables Nyai, Ning, and female students to use technology as a means to express ideas, access information, and produce work that can reach a broader audience (Hessler & Rodriguez, 2015). For instance, Nisaul Kamilah, a prolific writer and administrator of a pesantren Salafiyah-based, has been successful in encouraging students to cultivate their interest in reading and writing, even though her school has not fully embraced digital literacy. She utilizes platforms like Facebook and Wattpad to publish her works, demonstrating that technology can empower women in pesantren.

Similarly, Mambaul Atiyah has significantly contributed to digital literacy by facilitating digital writing training at pesantren Maslakul Huda. This training creates opportunities for all students, including female students, to write on platforms like Wattpad. Although technology access in these boarding schools is limited, flexible policies, such as allowing mobile phone usage at certain times, enable female students to remain actively engaged in digital literacy (Degei et al., 2019). This indicates that digital literacy can be an effective tool for empowerment when managed properly.

Munawara, a mentor and writer at pesantren Tebuireng, utilizes digital media, including the school's website and magazine, to support both preaching and education. She founded a writing school that provides female students with a space to develop their literacy skills. In this context, social media and digital platforms serve not just as communication tools but also as resources for women to work and share Islamic values with the broader community. Digital literacy in Tebuireng exemplifies how technology can enhance the roles of women in education and preaching (Eraku et al., 2021).

The roles of Nyai and Ning in empowering women through digital literacy are also crucial. They contribute to shaping educational frameworks and initiate seminars, soft skills training, and other creative activities that support the development of female students (Wahyudi & Kurniasih, 2021). Backing from Kiayi and Gus further reinforces their positions in fostering a democratic and inclusive educational environment. This illustrates that digital literacy is not merely a tool for modernization but also a platform for women to voice their opinions and contribute actively. However, challenges persist in implementing digital literacy within pesantren. Some institutions still restrict access to technology due to concerns over its potential negative impacts. Policies such as limiting cellphone use or internet access can hinder the productivity of

female students in creating digital works. Nonetheless, pesantren have found solutions, such as strict supervision and regulations regarding technology use, to ensure that it remains controlled and beneficial.

Digital literacy has significantly expanded opportunities for women in pesantren, enabling them to work without the constraints of time and space. They can utilize social media not only as a tool for preaching but also as a platform for publishing their creative works, including writing, audio-visual projects, and short films (Fabriar & Muhajarah, 2024). The rise in digital literacy also opens up economic opportunities for female writers through the monetization of their work on digital platforms. Increasing awareness of the importance of digital literacy among women in these institutions highlights its benefits for both personal development and society at large. With access to technology, these women can learn independently, communicate with the outside world, and stay updated with developments while maintaining their Islamic identity (Belshaw, 2012).

Overall, empowering women through digital literacy in pesantren is a strategic move that not only modernizes education but also strengthens women's roles as agents of social change (Hefner, 2022). With full support from pesantren and effective technology management, digital literacy can serve as a transformative tool for women in these institutions. In pesantren, digital literacy has become a key strategy to empower students, particularly women, in navigating the digital era. The incorporation of technology by these schools increases access to information and creates opportunities for students to contribute through their creative works. Notable figures such as Nisaul Kamilah, Mambaul Atiyah, and Munawara demonstrate that digital literacy can be an effective empowerment tool, especially for women in pesantren. They utilize digital platforms to share their ideas, publish their works, and enhance students' skills through writing training and technology-based literacy programs.

Pesantren like Tebuireng and Maslakul Huda have integrated digital literacy into their educational framework. For instance, pesantren Tebuireng employs digital media, including websites, magazines, and film production houses, to disseminate Islamic teachings and support student creativity. Meanwhile, pesantren Maslakul Huda offers digital writing training, allowing students to publish on platforms like Wattpad. Implementing flexible policies regarding technology use, such as time limits for cellphone use in educational contexts, helps ensure that digital literacy remains focused and beneficial. Overall, the impact of digital literacy in pesantren is significantly positive, fostering skill development and empowering women. Technology enables these schools to reach a broader audience to share Islamic teachings and values. With robust

support and thoughtful technology management, digital literacy can indeed be a powerful agent of transformation for students and the larger community.

CONCLUSION

Digital literacy in pesantren serves as a vital link between tradition and modernity, empowering students—especially women—to actively participate in the digital age. Educators like Nisaul Kamilah, Mambaul Atiyah, and Munawara, each with unique backgrounds and approaches, have effectively integrated digital literacy into the pesantren environment. They utilize digital platforms to share ideas, publish their work, and enhance students' skills through various literacy programs. Despite facing challenges such as limited access to technology and concerns about potential negative impacts, pesantren are continuously seeking solutions to maximize the benefits of digital literacy. The essential roles of Nyai and Ning in education, with support from Kiayi and Gus, ensure that digital literacy not only acts as a tool for modernization but also provides a space for women to innovate and thrive. Initiatives such as digital writing training, managing social media for the pesantren, and establishing writing schools offer students—particularly female students—the chance to develop their potential. Thus, digital literacy in pesantren not only enhances students' skills but also empowers them to become agents of positive change in society.

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