

## ENHANCING UNDERGRADUATES' ACADEMIC WRITING SKILLS THROUGH A CLINICAL COACHING PROGRAM: A SERVICE-LEARNING APPROACH

Muhammad\*<sup>1</sup>, Nurul Imtihan<sup>1</sup>, Sofyan Mahfudy<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Mataram, Indonesia

\*muhammad83@uinmataram.ac.id

**Abstrak:** Keterampilan menulis karya ilmiah merupakan kompetensi krusial yang mendukung mahasiswa tingkat akhir dalam menyusun skripsi atau artikel yang memenuhi standar akademik yang baik. Namun, mahasiswa sering kali menghadapi tantangan dalam menulis karya ilmiah karena adanya kesenjangan antara teori akademik dan keterampilan teknis yang sesungguhnya dibutuhkan di lapangan. Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman konseptual dan keterampilan teknis mahasiswa tingkat akhir dalam menyiapkan naskah untuk submission pada jurnal. Program pengabdian ini menggunakan pendekatan *Service Learning* (SL) dengan melibatkan 49 mahasiswa semester akhir Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram. Metode pelaksanaan mengikuti empat tahapan SL yang secara sistematis meliputi: *investigation, planning, action, dan reflection & demonstration*. Hasil pengabdian ini menunjukkan adanya transformasi kapasitas akademik yang signifikan pada tiga variabel utama, yaitu: 1) Peningkatan pemahaman terhadap sistematika manuskrip standar IMRAD beserta pergeseran perilaku penggunaan AI secara bijak; 2) Penguasaan keterampilan manajemen referensi digital berbasis aplikasi Zotero dan Mendeley untuk standardisasi sitasi otomatis; dan 3) Kesiapan keterampilan teknis dalam mengoperasikan sistem Open Journal System (OJS), mulai dari registrasi hingga submit manuskrip. Integrasi ketiga aspek ini berdampak konkret pada dihasilkannya produk nyata berupa konversi draf skripsi mentah, dimana dua artikel ilmiah mahasiswa berhasil sampai pada tahap submit di jurnal nasional terakreditasi. Melalui program ini dapat disimpulkan bahwa pelatihan penulisan artikel tidak hanya cukup dengan transfer pengetahuan (kognitif) saja, melainkan juga melalui pembentukan ekosistem sosial (afektif) dan praktik berkelanjutan (psikomotorik) melalui pelebagaan "klinik manuskrip" secara struktural di program studi.

**Kata Kunci:** keterampilan menulis akademis, *service learning*, struktur IMRAD, publikasi ilmiah

**Abstract:** Academic writing skills are a pivotal competence that supports final-year students in preparing their theses or articles that fulfil scholarly standards. However, undergraduate students often struggle to write academic papers due to a gap between theory and the practical technical skills required. This community engagement programme aims to enhance final-year students' conceptual understanding and academic writing skills as they prepare their manuscripts for journal submission. Utilizing a Service-Learning (SL) approach, the program involved 49 final-semester students from the Islamic Education Study Department (PAI) at UIN Mataram. The implementation followed four systematic SL stages: investigation, planning, action, and reflection & demonstration. The outcomes demonstrate a significant transformation in academic capacity across three core variables: 1) enhanced comprehension of the standard IMRAD manuscript structure alongside a behavioural shift towards the ethical use of AI tools; 2) mastery of digital reference management skills utilizing Zotero and Mendeley for automated citation standardization; and 3) technical readiness in navigating the Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform, spanning from registration to submission. The integration of these three dimensions yielded concrete results: the conversion of raw thesis drafts, culminating in the successful submission of two student articles to accredited national journals. This programme concludes that academic writing workshops must transcend mere cognitive knowledge transfer; rather, they necessitate the cultivation of a social ecosystem (affective) and sustained practice (psychomotor) through the structural institutionalization of a "Clinic of Manuscript" at the department.

**Keywords:** academic writing skills, service-learning, IMRAD structure, scientific publications

## Introduction

Within the higher education ecosystem, mastering academic writing is arguably the most critical yet psychologically taxing milestone for final-year undergraduate students. This endeavour extends far beyond merely articulating ideas (Roymon, 2021); it is a sophisticated process of transforming empirical research findings into disseminable knowledge within peer-reviewed journals (Darmalaksana, 2021; Komara, 2014). Currently, scholarly publication serves as both a graduation prerequisite and a benchmark for institutional quality across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes (Fitasari et al., 2019). However, there is a stark contrast between this institutional ideal and the reality on the ground. A significant number of students experience acute academic anxiety, driven by a fundamental lack of familiarity with scholarly standards (Rahmatullah & Inanna, 2019). Observations conducted within the Islamic Education Study Programme (PAI) at UIN Mataram in March 2024 revealed that students frequently feel adrift whilst navigating their final-year dissertations. These challenges range from a deficit in prior academic writing experience and conceptual roadblocks in research design to basic misconceptions regarding research methodologies.

The necessity for structured intervention is well-documented in the literature. Investigations by Hawa et al. (2024) and Hayati and Kartini (2024) demonstrate that intensive, practice-based workshops can enhance students' writing proficiency by an average of 80%. More specifically, Arifianto et al. (2024) illustrate how reference management tools like Mendeley enable students to organise literature in alignment with Scopus-indexed journal standards. Similarly, Suwarni (2024) underscores that training incorporating Mendeley and Turnitin significantly improves students' comprehension of manuscript preparation (Arifianto et al., 2024; Suwarni, 2024). Nevertheless, Vera et al. (2024) caution that successful writing outcomes demand sustained mentorship and systemic support—delivered through clear manuals, protocols, and workflows—rather than one-off training sessions.

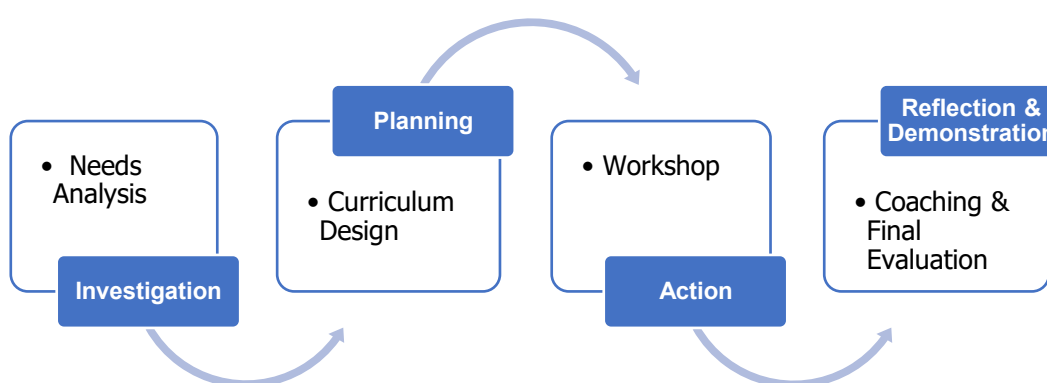
Despite the proven efficacy of such workshops, a distinct gap remains unaddressed, particularly concerning ethical challenges in the digital era. A deficient grasp of literature searching often drives students towards high-risk shortcuts that compromise academic integrity, such as the uncritical reliance on Artificial Intelligence utilities like ChatGPT. Furthermore, technical nuances that constitute the “hidden curriculum”—such as the etiquette of editorial correspondence and navigating Open Journal Systems (OJS)—are routinely overlooked in conventional training, despite being pivotal to publication success (Hurmaini et al., 2024).

In response to these academic anxieties and existing research recommendations, this community outreach initiative adopts a Service-Learning (SL) approach. Crucially, this framework transcends traditional training by bridging structured mentorship with continuous experiential learning. This aligns with Eyler & Giles (1999), who argue that service learning is not merely a training exercise, but a pedagogical process that integrates authentic experience with academic reflection. This programme primarily aims to enhance students' academic writing competencies, encompassing mastery of the standard IMRAD structure, technology-driven reference management (Sinta, Scopus), and practical journal submission simulations. Through

this intervention, students are not only equipped to satisfy graduation mandates but are also empowered to become independent, confident, and ethically sound academic agents.

## Method

This community service program was conducted within the Islamic Education Study Programme (PAI), Faculty of Education and Teacher Training (FTK), UIN Mataram, utilising a Service-Learning (SL) approach. This framework was selected due to its capacity to integrate practical solutions for students with meaningful academic learning (Astin et al., 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Operating within a participatory research framework, the initiative was executed through a systematic four-stage cycle.



**Figure 1.** Flowchart of the Service-Learning Stages

Figure 1 depicts the stages of the service-learning approach employed in this program. The stages comprise investigation, planning, workshop, and reflection & demonstration. The description of each stage is as follows.

### Investigation

As the initial phase, the investigation aimed to identify the root causes and fundamental needs faced by students regarding scholarly publication. To achieve this, the team conducted participant observations and dialogues with final-year undergraduate students. The primary barrier identified was not merely a deficit in motivation, but rather technical constraints in accessing high-quality literature and navigating journal systems. This finding aligns with research by Asiah et al. (2025), which demonstrates that students frequently make citation errors and manage bibliographies manually; consequently, training focused on applications such as Mendeley and Zotero has been proven to enhance academic writing proficiencies.

### Planning

The objective of this stage was to design a training curriculum and materials tailored to the students' specific needs. Drawing on the insights from the investigation phase, the team developed a "Manuscript Clinic" curriculum that blended theoretical insights with practical

application. The primary target audience comprised final-year students currently undertaking their dissertations. The core material focused on utilising reference management technologies, such as Mendeley and Zotero. This is supported by Arifianto et al. (2024), who note that Mendeley effectively assists authors in organising references to meet the standards of Scopus-indexed journals.

### **Action**

This phase aimed to implement the intervention by transferring knowledge, writing skills, and online publication workflows to the participants. An intensive, experiential learning-based workshop was attended by 49 students. In alignment with effective training models (Hayati & Kartini, 2024), the programme was structured into three consecutive sessions:

- a. Digital Literacy: Participants retrieved primary sources from Sinta/Scopus databases and undertook the hands-on installation and configuration of Zotero/Mendeley.
- b. Manuscript Construction: Participants deconstructed their thesis drafts and restructured them to comply with the standard IMRAD format.
- c. Submission Simulation: Participants practiced registering accounts on the Open Journal Systems (OJS) and inputting article metadata.

### **Reflection & Demonstration**

This final stage aimed to evaluate the efficacy of the outreach programme through a two-pronged approach. First, a quantitative evaluation was conducted; upon the conclusion of the workshop, questionnaires were distributed to all participants to gauge their perceived improvement in cognitive understanding (IMRAD structure) and technical skills (Zotero & OJS navigation). Second, a coaching clinic was established for a purposively selected cohort of 6 out of the 49 participants, chosen based on their commitment and the readiness of their drafts. This focused, small-group mentorship represents a deliberate Service-Learning strategy designed to maximise output quality. These six students received one-to-one tutoring to refine the substance of their manuscripts and address reviewer feedback until their papers were ready for formal submission. This approach is corroborated by Hukom et al. (2024), who found that the coaching clinic model is highly effective in equipping students with the technical competencies required for journal publication.

### **Results and Discussion**

The implementation of the Service-Learning approach in this programme successfully channelled students' academic anxiety into productive competencies. Despite minor scheduling conflicts with the Participatory Work-Study (KKP) and Field Work Experience (PPL) timelines, the training served as a crucial catalyst for final-year students progressing with their dissertations. The following sections detail the outcomes achieved across the learning dimensions alongside empirical field data.

#### **Transforming Digital Literacy and Academic Integrity**

During the initial investigation phase, the most prominent hurdles identified were deficient

digital literacy and a tendency to adopt technological "shortcuts". Final-year students experienced disorientation when searching for high-quality primary sources due to limited experience with reputable databases. Through intensive mentorship, students were introduced to, and trained in, reference management software such as Zotero and Mendeley. This intervention proved highly effective in streamlining citation management and minimising technical errors in bibliographies. This outcome resonates with Arifianto et al. (2024) who observed that Mendeley effectively assists authors in organising references according to Scopus-indexed journal standards. Similarly, research by Suwarni (2024) at Universitas Sahid Surakarta confirms that proficiency in Mendeley and Turnitin significantly enhances students' manuscript writing capabilities.

**Table 1.** Comparative Matrix of Competencies Pre- and Post-Intervention

Competency Indicator	Baseline Condition	Final Condition (Post-Training)
Reference Management	Manual entry; inconsistent or incorrect formatting; untraceable citations.	Computerised (Zotero/Mendeley); consistent and fully traceable citations.
Academic Integrity & AI	Raw Copy-pasting from ChatGPT (Passive Plagiarism).	AI utilized as a "Critical Partner" (for ideation and proofreading).

Table 1 illustrates the comparative shift in students' academic behaviours. Post-training, the competency indicators reveal a substantial improvement, with students demonstrating the capacity to operate reference management software independently. This advancement validates the hands-on, practical approach employed, as recommended by Hayati and Kartini (2024), who note that lecture-based delivery combined with direct on-site practice enhances student comprehension by an average of 80%.

Crucially, the programme successfully reshaped students' paradigm regarding Artificial Intelligence (AI). Whilst initial indicators pointed to passive plagiarism—specifically the uncritical use of ChatGPT without verification or attribution—the final data revealed a transition towards ethical utilization. Students began treating AI as a "critical partner" for grammatical refinement and conceptual enrichment. This transformation demonstrates that the intervention succeeded in fostering a renewed sense of academic integrity, confirming that technology can be productively adopted without compromising the originality of the author's voice.

### Evaluating Efficacy and Field Realities

The efficacy of the Service-Learning framework was quantitatively evaluated using a participant satisfaction survey. The data in Table 2 suggests that while the Service-Learning training delivered tangible benefits, it did not fully yield absolute student autonomy. An overall mean score of 3.18 (moderate) reflects the reality that mastering publication literacy is an incremental process rather than an instantaneous outcome.

**Table 2.** Summary of Participant Satisfaction Evaluation

No	Evaluation Indicator	Mean Score (1-5)	Category	Interpretation
1	Relevance of Material to Thesis Needs	3,75	High	Students recognised the critical value of the material but found the volume dense for the brief timeframe.
2	Clarity of Technical Guidance (OJS/Zotero)	2,95	Moderate	Participants grasped the core concepts but faced challenges during unassisted practice.
3	Improvement in Writing Confidence	2,40	Low	The training exposed students to the complexities of scholarly standards, highlighting a need for further guidance.
4	Quality & Competency of Speakers	3,60	High	Speakers were deemed highly competent, though interaction was constrained by the dense curriculum.
	Overall Average	3,18	Moderate	The training successfully raised awareness but fell short of establishing full student autonomy.

The most compelling finding was the low confidence score (2.40). Rather than denoting a program failure, this score provides clear evidence that students began engaging in realistic self-assessment (Andrade, 2019; Brown & Harris, 2014). Exposed to rigorous material, they recognized the true complexity of academic publication standards (OJS/Zotero) and evaluated their own capabilities more critically. This state acts as an antithesis to the Dunning-Kruger Effect (Kruger & Dunning, 1999); instead of remaining trapped in illusory confidence, students became aware of what they had yet to master—a critical cognitive baseline on the path to genuine competence.

The high relevance score (3.75) strongly corroborates Knowles' (1975, 1980), Andragogy Theory, which posits that adult learners are more intrinsically motivated when the subject matter directly intersects with immediate, real-world needs. The students viewed this training not as an institutional burden, but as a strategic solution for completing their degrees.

Nonetheless, the moderate overall average serves as a critique of one-off training models. This aligns with Vera et al. (2024), who argue that manuscript preparation projects require sustained mentorship underpinned by structured, measurable procedures. Consequently, it is recommended that future initiatives evolve from isolated "Workshops" into a continuous "Manuscript Mentorship Clinic" model, ensuring students receive ongoing support throughout the writing and publication pipeline.

### **Demonstrating Competence**

The primary benchmark of success in a Service-Learning cycle—particularly within the action phase—is the generation of tangible outputs through experiential learning. Students were trained to standardise their manuscripts using the IMRAD (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion) structural logic, a global framework designed to streamline scientific thought.

**Table 3.** Transformation of Programme Outcomes

Aspects	Pre-Training	Post-Condition
Scholarly Structure Comprehension	Students struggled to align research typologies; unfamiliar with the IMRAD framework; thesis drafts were raw and unconverted; unverified AI use for core content.	Enhanced comprehension of standard IMRAD manuscript structures; ethical shift towards using AI prudently as a "critical partner".
Reference Management Skills	Difficulties in sourcing high-quality literature; unfamiliar with reference management software.	Clear understanding of Zotero and Mendeley utilities; competent application of scholarly citation standards and bibliographic management
OJS Technical Readiness	Faced persistent technical hurdles in manuscript submission; unfamiliar with standard journal workflows and editor correspondence etiquette.	Proficiency in the technical operation of Open Journal Systems (OJS), including registration, metadata input, and submission protocols.

Table 3 illustrates the programme’s success in bridging theoretical insights with technical skills, ultimately enabling students to convert raw thesis drafts into submission-ready manuscripts. This achievement aligns with Hurmaini et al. (2024) at IAI Yasni Bungo, who observed that intensive faculty-student mentorship is highly effective in helping students adapt their theses into publishable papers.

Furthermore, integrating IMRAD structural knowledge, reference management, and familiarity with OJS yielded concrete results during the reflection and demonstration phase, culminating in two manuscripts that successfully reached the submission stage at national journals. This success confirms the efficacy of the workshop model, a phenomenon explained by Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977; Gagne, 1977), which asserts that individuals learn most effectively by observing and replicating peers' successes (modelling). The successful submissions by some participants generated a vicarious learning effect, boosting the self-efficacy of the remaining cohort by demonstrating that journal publication is an attainable target.

Ultimately, the programme's outcomes demonstrate a powerful synergy between field practice and learning theory. The surge in student motivation reinforces the foundational premises of Knowles' Andragogy (1975, 1980), wherein students are repositioned from passive objects of instruction to self-directed learners. In the context of modern academic writing, this high level of student engagement corresponds with Darmalaksana (2021), who contends that writing classes for final-year undergraduates are most effective when tethered directly to practical publication goals that address immediate graduation imperatives. As added by Vera et al. (2024), manuscript writing demands continuous guidelines and project workflows to systematically foster self-reliance. Academic writing interventions cannot rely solely on cognitive knowledge transfer; they require a supportive social environment (affective) and sustained practice (psychomotor). As recommended by Hawa et al. (2024), evaluation and mentorship must be continuous to ensure steady, long-term development in students' writing proficiencies.

## Conclusion

The implementation of the Service-Learning framework within this mentorship programme demonstrates its efficacy in bridging the gap between institutional academic demands and the practical competencies of final-year undergraduate students within the PAI Study Programme at UIN Mataram. Executed through four structured phases (Investigation, Planning, Action, and Reflection & Demonstration), the initiative successfully transitioned students' scholarly workflows from conventional, manual habits into modern, technology-driven practices.

The primary success of this programme is evidenced by substantial advancements across three core competency dimensions: an enhanced theoretical comprehension of the globally standardised IMRAD structure; technical proficiency in using reference management utilities (Zotero/Mendeley) for automated, consistent citations; and practical readiness in navigating the technical workflows of Open Journal Systems (OJS). Beyond a mere cognitive transfer of knowledge, the integration of these three dimensions yielded a tangible, real-world product: the successful conversion of raw thesis drafts into publishable manuscripts, culminating in two articles advancing to formal submission in national journals.

Consequently, this study strongly recommends that manuscript preparation initiatives move away from being incidental, one-off training events. Instead, they must evolve into continuous, longitudinal programmes that provide a reliable and constant social support system for novice writers. Furthermore, this mentoring framework should be formally institutionalised within structural curricula, underpinned by clear, systematic manuals, standard operating protocols, and project workflows provided by institutional administrators.

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