

ADVANCING ESSAY WRITING WITH *DIGLIT*: APPLICATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A DIGITAL LITERACY TEACHING TOOL

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Abstract: Writing an essay is still a challenge for students even for those at the university level. There are many difficulties they find when they try to write it. First, especially in non-English speaking countries, students lack vocabulary, they do not have ideas to write, they are still confused about the mechanics, and they find it difficult to organize the writing. Since the problems are complex, giving only the theories of writing to the students is not adequate. Teachers have to 'arm' the students with tools. There are many tools available today on the internet, yet not many students are able to use them correctly. They need guidance to use them in the correct way. This research aims at developing a digital teaching tool to assist students in writing an essay. The research is done by doing need analysis, designing the digital tool, and finally testing the designed teaching tool. The digital teaching tool is named as Diglit which stands for Digital Literacy. It is named so since the tool guides the students to use their literacy skills for constructing a better essay. The research employed ASSURE design to develop the teaching tool. At the end of the process, the tool is tested for its effectiveness using quasi experimental research and it is found out that there is an effect of the use of Diglit on the students' writing skill. Hence, the result shows that the digital tool created from the research is able to help the students construct an essay.

Keywords: ASSURE; essay writing; English language teaching; teaching tool.

INTRODUCTION

A brief non-fiction work that explains, elucidates, makes an argument, or conducts an analysis is called an essay. It can be a narrative of someone's journey on vacation or a piece of writing containing a complex analysis of scientific processes in graduate school (Noroozi et al., 2021). It is also interpreted as a short piece of writing that is usually written by students to hone a number of skills such as reading, analyzing, comparing, inviting, summarizing, and explaining. The goal of mastering essay writing skills is to encourage

students to develop ideas and concepts in their writing in a direction that is nothing more than their own thinking (Bulqiyah, Mahbub, & Nugraheni, 2021). Therefore, basically, an essay is a concise piece of writing with a clear purpose. In terms of genre, essay writing is divided into at least four types, namely: expository, descriptive, narrative, and argumentative or persuasive essays (Warburton, 2020). However, it is not easy to master the skill. There are various problems faced by students when they try to write an essay.

The problems are among others students' lack of vocabulary (Ahmad, 2022), lack of ideas (Shobah, 2023), lack of creativity (Istiqfaroh & Mustadi, 2020), etc. Writing is a high-level talent that may continue to grow via interactions between students' skills and cognitive capacities, the instructional environment, and the demands of writing assignments, therefore writing effectively and critically is not simple (Deane, 2018). Cognitive abilities, instructional context, and writing assignments are what lecturers in higher education must pay careful attention to help students have good and critical writing skills.

Cognitive abilities can be gained by keep asking the students to read more and connect what they read to what they will write (Rashid et al., 2022) meanwhile instructional context must be developed by the lecturers. They can learn from many sources. There are many websites and teaching tools that can be used to help create interesting and challenging instructions. The same things happen to writing assignments. Lecturers can get some inspirations of writing assignments to be given to the students through accessing the internet. The lecturers' digital literacy in navigating on the internet is challenged here.

In the current digital era, the rapid improvement in technology has helped educators carry out more effective teaching and learning activities with many innovations. There are various teaching tools in innumerable forms, such as computer-aided assessment and computer-mediated communication, intelligent tutoring systems (ITS), computer-based instruction (CBI), and integrated learning systems (ILS). These innovations facilitate interactions among students and make learning more meaningful. They can also cover the shortcomings of the traditional teaching-learning process (Camacho, Alves & Boscolo, 2021; Huertas Abril, 2021). Lecturers can make use of the students' familiarity with technology to help them comprehend lessons. Teaching tool gives new paradigms to the learning process and delivers information in an innovative way.

Huertas Abril (2021) claims that the use of teaching tools can optimize the result of the learning process since it makes use of the students' visual, auditory, and kinesthetic all at once. The use of digital teaching tool has been extremely fruitful in teaching individuals a varied range of subjects. Technology is changing the way people connect. The methods by which messages are given and received are more effectively done and better comprehended when technology is used. A lecture can be informative, yet when a lecture

incorporates pictures or video, images, etc. it can help the students intercept information much more successfully.

Numerous writing experts have been researching the best ways to utilize computers to teach composition since the late 1970s, when computers were first employed in writing classes (Ahmad, 2022; Alakrash, Razak, & Krish, 2021; Bulqiyah, Mahbub, & Nugraheni, 2021; Iskandar, Sumarni, Dewanti, & Asnur, 2022). Surveys have been conducted for multiple years, and the results show that digital teaching tools have been used in every single subject. It is also believed that the use of a digital teaching tool can help students improve their writing quality. The ability to write is essential, especially for those who are students of the English Language Education Study Program since the career paths that they are likely to pursue require them to have a capability of writing. However, students still find it difficult to write (Farooq, Uzair-Ul-Hassan & Wahid, (2020). They consider that getting ideas for writing is not simple (Istiqfaroh & Mustadi, 2020). Not only are ideas difficult to find, but grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation are also elements of language that make the students doubtful about their abilities (Baresh, 2022). There are many tools that can be used by the lecturers

This research aims at developing a digital teaching tool for assisting the students to write an essay better. This study needs to be done since writing skill is still a problematic skill to master. Even though there have been many teaching tools invented, the researchers still find some weaknesses and would try to complete the existing tools with a digital teaching tool which has clear and practical steps.

An essay can be a narrative of someone's journey on vacation or a piece of writing containing a complex analysis of scientific processes in graduate school (Noroozi et.al., 2021). It is also interpreted as a short piece of writing that is usually written by students to hone a number of skills such as reading carefully, analyzing, comparing, inviting, summarizing, and explaining. The goal of mastering essay writing skills is to encourage students to develop ideas and concepts in their writing in a direction that is nothing more than their own thinking (Bulqiyah, Mahbub, & Nugraheni, 2021). Therefore, basically, an essay is a concise piece of writing with a clear purpose. In terms of genre, essay writing is divided into at least four types, namely: expository, descriptive, narrative, and argumentative or persuasive essays (Warburton, 2020).

Selective material, exercises, examinations, and learning activities are often included in digital teaching tools, allowing students to edit them at any moment. With the availability of instructional resources, students may complete their own learning processes at their own pace and in the location and direction that best suit them (Nazari, Shabbir & Setiawan, 2021). It utilizes the internet network, allowing communication and interaction in learning. It also provides a series of solutions to increase knowledge and skills (Abed, 2019). Some popular digital learning tools are *Schoology*, *Google Docs*, *Essay Bot*, *Edmodo*, etc. (Ahmad, 2022)

All types of the digital learning tools above contribute quite well to improving the quality of student writing but each of these media has drawbacks. There needs to be a digital learning tool that can help students find ideas for their writing tasks. It also has to allow interaction between students and between students and lecturers. Another feature expected in a digital learning tool is facilities that are able to provide corrections to grammatical errors, punctuation marks, and word choices. So far, a digital teaching tool that provides complete facilities as above mentioned has not been found.

Diglit is an acronym for digital literacy. It is a digital teaching tool developed to help students write various kinds of essays. It is named so because the creation of the teaching tool is inspired by the definition of digital literacy issued by UNESCO. Law et. al (2018) state that digital literacy is a person's ability to 1) access, 2) understand, 3) integrate, 4) communicate, 5) evaluate, and 6) create information for both personal and work interests. From the definition, a digital teaching tool is created and one of the features is the steps of writing which are in accordance with the steps in the definition: accessing, understanding, integrating, communicating, evaluating, and finally creating. In *Diglit*, after the students have created an account, they have to access some articles whose topics are the same as the topic given by the lecturer. This is done to make the students are used to read first before writing since reading can inspire the students' writing (Alghonaim, 2018).

There have been several researchers investigating the use of digital teaching tools to help students write in the classroom (Bulqiyah, Mahbub & Nugraheni, 2021; Putri & Aminatun, 2021; Fan & Ma, 2022; Lin, 2019). Putri & Aminatun (2021) conducted a study which investigated the effectiveness of the use of social

media as a digital teaching tool in learning to write. The results of this study indicated that the use of social media was able to improve the students' ability to write essays. This means that social media is quite effective to be used in learning to write essays. However, some shortcomings were also found. Hence, it is still necessary to do other research that can find effective learning tool to help students in learning to write essays. Therefore, research to develop effective learning tool to help students master essay writing skills is still required. Another study was done by Reynolds & Kao (2021). The research proved that some digital applications do not work properly because of some reasons such as weak signals, lack of internet quota, etc. It means that the teaching tools which have been invented still have some weaknesses that make students reluctant to use them. This finding was also found by Techataweewan (2018). In his research, he found that young generations used digital applications a lot. They used them quite frequently. Unfortunately, the ability to use technology was not optimized for learning yet. Hence, a teaching tool that can stimulate the students to use their digital literacy for the sake of their learning is needed. AlJarrah (2019) conducted a study by asking the students to use social media to dig for as much information as possible for giving them ideas in writing. The result of the research shows that the use of social media does help students develop the idea for writing. It means that when the ability to use technology is employed in learning, the result is promising. This is also proven by Fan & Ma (2022). He used digital mind mapping to help students write an essay. The result showed that the quality of the students' writing improved after learning to write several times using digital mind mapping.

Regarding the use of digital literacy in learning, Polizzi (2020) stated that currently, schools and universities had been facilitated with various facilities in cyberspace. What is needed is the skill to use these digital-based facilities. So that these facilities can be put to good use, students must be trained to continue to develop their digital skills. This research is in line with the objective of this research and development. Finally, the research discusses whether or not teachers are ready to use digital teaching tools in teaching was conducted by Seraj et. Al (2021). The result of the research suggests that teachers in Bangladesh are ready to use any digital teaching tools to teach English, especially at the tertiary level. This research aims at developing a digital teaching tool that can assist students to write.

This research and development aim at creating a teaching tool that can help students increase their writing quality and conduct an empirical study to investigate whether the teaching tool developed i.e. Diglit affects the students' writing skills. The writing skill here is limited to writing essays. There are three genres of essays taught using the teaching tool. They are descriptive, personal narrative, and argumentative essays. The current study aims to answer the following research question:

How is the process of developing *Diglit Essay* as a teaching tool to teach English writing skills?

METHOD

There are three stages in Research and Development with ASSURE model (Hakim, et. al., 2020). The first is a preliminary stage. Six experts (three English essay materials and three teaching tools experts) were involved in the design stage. In this stage, 30 students were interviewed about their needs and expectations from an essay writing class.

Thirty-three students were also involved in order to find out the practicability of the teaching tool being designed. Finally, the last participants were those involved in experimental research to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching tool. The number of the population was 120. The sample was chosen using simple random sampling. It employed quasi experimental design. 30 students were in the control class and another 30 were in the experimental class. All of the participants had agreed to the informed consent related to becoming a participant in the research.

The data for need analysis were gathered through interview. Questionnaires were used to find out the practicability and the validity of the digital teaching tool. Pre and post-test items were used to find out the effectiveness of the tool.

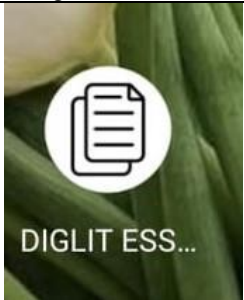

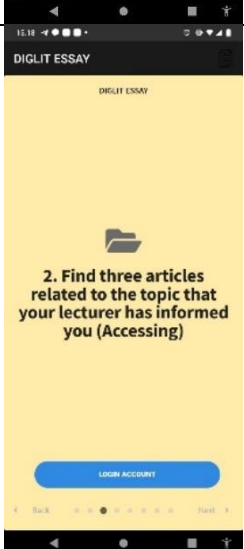
The research method employed was ASSURE model. It contains six parts namely: analyzing learners' characteristics (need analysis), stating objectives, selecting materials, requiring learner participation, and evaluation (Hakim et.al, 2020; Zubaedi & Hakim, 2022). First, the researchers interview 30 students related to their characteristics and needs in essay writing class. After interviewing the students, the researchers talked to the lecturers and stated the objectives of the lesson and selected the materials. The researchers also explained to the lecturers the digital tool that had been designed. When the lecturers agreed to the use of the digital tool in the class, the researchers invited students to participate in the research. The students were divided into two groups: control and experimental. Both of the

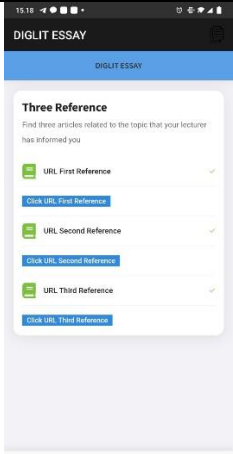
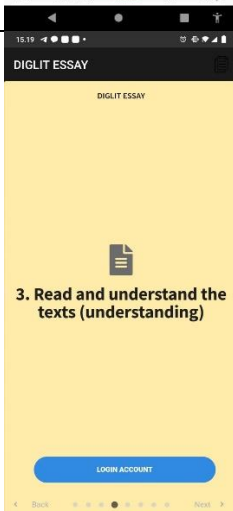
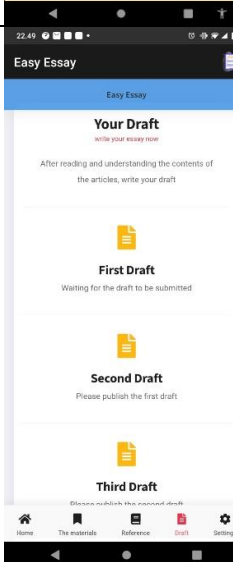
groups took part in the pre-test. After taking the pre-test, they were given two meeting-treatments. The experimental group was treated using Diglit, the digital tool developed by the researchers and the control group was treated using Essaybot®, an existing digital tool for helping students write. Following the treatment, both of the groups joined a post-test. Lastly, an evaluation and revision were done.


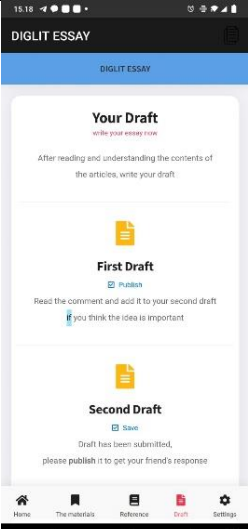
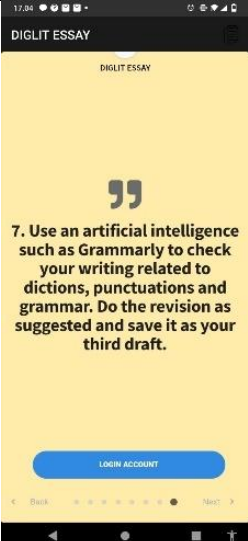
The learning objective of the essay writing course in the fourth semester is that students can write descriptive essays, personal narratives, recounts, and arguments. Students still have poor writing skills due to several factors, one of which is the absence of assistance in the form of teaching tool that can guide students to write an essay more easily.

The second phase is the designing phase Which is the second phase out of three phases in research and development. This phase contains two activities namely selecting the materials and utilizing the media.

The second stage is designing the product. The product here is a digital teaching tool. It is believed that a digital teaching tool is helpful for the students to understand the materials (Huertas Abril, 2021). A digital teaching tool could be pictures from a particular device, audio, audio-visual, etc. The product being developed is a digital teaching tool that combines several texts, visuals, audio, realia, and a model that are used simultaneously and controlled by a computer system (Yaumi, 2018). This digital teaching tool is created and adjusted to help students gain the Course Learning Outcomes (CLO) that have been formulated. The digital teaching tool is named *Diglit*. *Diglit* is the acronym for digital literacy. It is named so since the steps to write an essay guided in it are based on the digital literacy definition proposed by UNESCO. The definition of digital literacy by UNESCO is the ability to: 1) access; 2) process; 3) understand; 4) integrate; 5) communicate, 6) evaluate, and 7) create information (Law et al, 2018). From the definition, the researchers formulate the *Diglit* into several steps for writing an essay. The following table shows the presentation of *Diglit*:

No	Note	Design
1	The logo of <i>Diglit</i>	
2	In the first stage, students, as well as teachers, have to create an account first using the email address	
3	Students are asked to access the internet (accessing) and look for three sources/articles related to the topic given by the teacher.	

4	The URL of the three references is copied and pasted in the folder of "reference".	
5	The three articles have to be read and understood.	
6	The result of the reading and understanding activities is the inspiration for the students to write the first draft.	

7	Students ask a friend or the lecturer to comment on their first draft.	
8	The comments received can be accommodated or not. When it will be accommodated, the students have to write the second draft.	
9	After the second draft has been finished written, use an artificial intelligence such as Grammarly® to check the diction, grammar, and punctuation.	

To help students write an essay, the digital teaching tool asks the user (student) to 1) create an account, 2) access information from three different sources about the topic given by the lecturer, 3) understand the sources, 4) write the first draft of an essay, 5) ask someone else (the lecturer or a friend)

to comment on the first draft, 6) revise the draft, 7) check the grammar, diction, and mechanics using artificial intelligence, and finally 8) create the final essay. Once the students have created an account, they are guided to find three articles from the internet with the same topic assigned by the lecturer. When the three articles have been found, the students have to read and understand the texts. The next step is writing the essay. It is expected that the essay is inspired by the texts that they have read. Once the essay is written, the students are asked to require comments from their peers. After getting some comments from their peers, the students revise their first draft. The revised draft is then checked for the accuracy by using Grammarly®. Finally, the students revise the draft again by following the suggestions given by Grammarly®. After the product has been finished, it was judged by six experts namely the experts on teaching tool, , and English essay materials. The experts judged the product (the digital teaching tool) by trying it out and filling out a questionnaire. The questionnaire had been validated before being used. The following table is the result of expert validation:

Table 2. The qualification of Diglit by experts

No	Experts	Percentage of Eligibility (%)	Qualification
1	Materials	0.95	Very good
2	Teaching tool	0.88	Very good

The third step is formative and summative tests. The formative test is a tryout of the digital teaching tool being designed. The tryouts included an individual tryout, a small group tryout (ten students), and a bigger group (twenty students). These students were asked to try out the digital teaching tool and fill out a questionnaire. The following table summarizes the result of the formative test:

Table 3. The result of the individual tryout

No.	Assessment Indicators	Result
1	The presentation of the <i>Diglit</i>	25% answered very good; 75% answered good.
2	Students find <i>Diglit</i> helpful	85% answered very helpful; 15% answered helpful.
3	Motivating students to write an essay well	85% answered very motivating;

		15% answered motivating.
4	<i>Diglit</i> is related to the content of the Essay Writing course	80% answered very related; 20% answered related.
5	<i>Diglit</i> is user friendly	85% answered as very friendly; 15% answered friendly.

The individual tryout was conducted by three students. They tried the teaching tool and filled out the questionnaire. From the responses, it can be inferred that *Diglit* as a digital teaching tool can be used to help students write an essay (the average score is above 80%). The next was a small group tryout. The small group tryout involved ten students. The previous students involved in individual tryout were not involved again. The ten students tried *Diglit* to create an essay. After trying it out, they filled out a questionnaire. The following is the result of the small group tryout:

Table 4. *The result of small group tryout*

No	Assessment Indicators	Result
1	The presentation of the <i>Diglit</i>	70% answered very good 30% answered good
2	Students find <i>Diglit</i> helpful	90% answered very helpful 10% answered helpful
3	Motivating students to write an essay well	90% answered very motivating 10% answered motivating
4	<i>Diglit</i> is related to the content of the Essay Writing course	90% answered very suitable 10% answered suitable
5	<i>Diglit</i> is user friendly	80% answered very friendly 20% answered friendly

From the result of the small group tryout above, it can be inferred that *Diglit* can be used to help students write an essay. It is proven from the answers that the average score of positive answers is above 80%. The last tryout was a bigger group tryout that involved twenty students. These students were not the participants in the previous tryouts. The following is the result:

Table 5. *The result of bigger group tryout*

No	Assessment Indicator	Result
1	The presentation of the <i>Diglit</i>	25% answered very good 75% answered good

2	Students find <i>Diglit</i> helpful	85% answered very useful 15% answered useful
3	Motivating students to write an essay well	85% answered very motivating 15% answered motivating
4	<i>Diglit</i> is related to the content of the Essay Writing course	80% answered very suitable 20% answered suitable
5	<i>Diglit</i> is user friendly	85% answered very friendly 15% answered friendly

The result of the last tryout which was a bigger group tryout also shows that students believe that *Diglit* can be used to help them write an essay. From this result, the researchers went on to the next step of the research and development procedure which is a summative test. The summative test was experimental research. This was done to discover the efficacy of the teaching tool. The number of the population was 120. The samples involved were 60 students. They were chosen using simple random sampling. The design was quasi experimental research. 30 students were in the control group and another 30 students were in the experimental group. They were given a pre-test, three times treatments, and a post-test. The control group was treated using Essaybot®, an application to help students write an essay and the experimental group was treated using *Diglit*, the digital teaching tool being developed in the research. The following table is the N gain of the experimental research.

Table 6. *Pre-test and post-test scores*

Group	Pre-Test	Post-Test	N Gain	Category
Experiment	68.88	83.11	0.67	Medium
Control	67.93	70.33	0.17	Low

From the experiment, it was discovered that both of the teaching tools used in the two groups were effective. This is shown by the scores of the post-tests which were higher than those of the pre-tests. However, when the N gain was measured, it can be seen that the N gain in the experimental group was 0.67 meanwhile in the control group reached 0.17. From this data, it can be inferred that the teaching tool used in the experimental class worked better than the one used in the control group.

The objective of this study was to develop a teaching tool for helping students write essays. There are many teaching tools developed for helping students to write (Abed, 2019; Nazari, Shabbir & Setiawan, 2021). However, after conducting observations in the research field, the existing teaching tools cannot solve the problems that the students have at one time. . The problems are among all difficulty finding the ideas for writing (Farooq, Uzair-Ul-Hassan & Wahid, 2020), the inadequacy of students' vocabulary mastery (Derakhshan & Karimian, 2020; Malmström et. al., 2023), the lack of students' writing accuracy (Mao & Crosthwaite, 2019), and also difficulty in using punctuation (Baresh, 2022)

The teaching tool was developed by using ASSURE model. In this model, the steps are divided into three (Zubaedi & Hakim, 2022). The first step is called as the preliminary step. This step covers A (analyzing students' characteristics) and S (stating the objectives). The next step is the designing step. This includes S (selecting the materials) and U (utilizing the teaching tool). The last one is the evaluation step. It contains R (revising) and E (evaluating). In analyzing students' characteristics, it is found that 45% of students have difficulty finding ideas for writing; 37% of students have difficulty in organizing writing; 28% of students have difficulty with grammar and 25% of students have difficulty in punctuation and word selection. Almost the same fact was also found by Deane (2018). After finding out the students' characteristics, the lecturers were interviewed for finding out the objectives of the lesson. From the interview, it was stated that the objectives were to teach the students how to write essays with the genres of descriptive, personal recount, and argumentative. The kinds of essays taught are in accordance with text types defined by Warburton (2020). After stating the objectives, the researchers moved on to the next step of research and design which is selecting the materials.

The materials were selected based on the course learning objectives. The compilation of the materials had been validated by the experts of English essay materials. The experts were lecturers from other universities in the same country. Once the materials had been selected, the next step was designing the teaching tool. The teaching tool contains the materials and also the step by step of writing an essay. The steps are taken from the definition of Digital Literacy (Law, 2018). The steps are: accessing, understanding, processing, communicating, evaluating, and creating. The designed teaching tool is then validated by some

experts and tried out by some students. The result of the validation is 80% positive. After being validated by the experts and some students, the next phases are revision and evaluation.

The revision phase was conducted by revising the designed digital teaching tool after being validated by the experts and some students while the evaluation phase was conducted by having quasi-experimental research. The result of the experiment shows that both of the teaching tools utilized in the control and experimental groups had positive effects to the students' writing ability. This is in line with the research done by Chen et. al. (2020) dan Wang (2022) who revealed that the utilization of technology helps the students improve their writing quality. However, from the calculation of the N gain, the improvement happened in the experimental class is a little higher than that of the control class. It means that the use of *Diglit* is more effective than the use of Essaybot®.

CONCLUSION

From the research and development that had been conducted, it can be concluded that the use of digital teaching tool is quite advantageous for the improvement of the students' writing quality. In this research and development, the researcher employed ASSURE model. The model consists of three phases namely preliminary (analyzing students' characteristics and stating the objectives), designing phase (selecting the materials and utilizing the media), and finally the evaluation phase (revising and evaluating). The product designed is a digital teaching tool which is named as *Diglit*. The name is an acronym of Digital Literacy. The tool helps the students write essays by guiding them with several steps. The steps are adapted from the definition of digital literacy issued by UNESCO. The steps are: accessing, understanding, processing, communicating, evaluating, and creating.

The digital tool was designed after the researchers analyzed the students' characteristics and with the collaboration with the lecturers stated the objectives of the lesson. The next phase after the preliminary and designing phases was evaluation phase. In the evaluation phase, the researchers asked some experts and students to try out *Diglit*. After trying it out, they gave some inputs to revise the tool. The last step in the ASSURE model is evaluation. The evaluation was carried out by conducting research with quasi-experimental design. In the research, there were two groups involved: control and experimental. In

the control group, the teaching tool used was Essaybot® while in the experimental group, *Diglit* was used. From the research, it is found out that both of the digital tools have an effect on the students' ability to write essays. However, when the N gain was compared, the score of the experimental group is a little higher than that of the control group. It means that *Diglit* is effective to improve students' ability to write essays.

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