

## INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL LITERACY IN SOCIAL STUDIES LEARNING TO ENHANCE THE CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS OF PGMI STUDENTS

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### Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan integrasi literasi digital dalam pembelajaran Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial (IPS) serta kontribusinya terhadap pengembangan keterampilan berpikir kritis mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (PGMI). Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam terhadap mahasiswa yang mengikuti pembelajaran IPS berbasis literasi digital. Data dianalisis melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa integrasi literasi digital dalam pembelajaran IPS mendorong mahasiswa untuk lebih kritis dalam mengakses dan mengevaluasi informasi digital. Mahasiswa menjadi lebih selektif dalam memilih sumber informasi, mampu membandingkan berbagai sumber digital, serta membangun argumen berdasarkan analisis yang logis dan reflektif. Pembelajaran IPS berbasis literasi digital juga menciptakan pengalaman belajar yang lebih kontekstual dan bermakna. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa literasi digital tidak hanya berperan sebagai keterampilan teknologis, tetapi juga sebagai pendekatan pedagogis yang efektif dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berpikir kritis mahasiswa. Oleh karena itu, integrasi literasi digital perlu diterapkan secara sistematis dalam pembelajaran IPS untuk meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran di perguruan tinggi.

**Keywords:** literasi digital, pembelajaran IPS, berpikir kritis, mahasiswa PGMI.

### Abstract

This study aims to describe the integration of digital literacy in Social Studies (IPS) learning and its contribution to the development of critical thinking skills among students of the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education (PGMI) program. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews with students who participated in digital literacy-integrated IPS learning. Data were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings indicate that the integration of digital literacy in IPS learning encourages students to critically access and evaluate digital information. Students became more selective in choosing information sources, capable of comparing multiple digital references, and able to construct logical and reflective arguments. Digital literacy-integrated IPS learning also created more contextual and meaningful learning experiences. This study confirms that digital literacy functions not only as a technological skill but also as an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing students' critical thinking skills. Therefore, systematic integration of digital literacy is essential to improve the quality of social studies learning in higher education.

**Keywords:** digital literacy, social studies learning, critical thinking, PGMI students.

## INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is known as the age of modern technology, where all activities are available and communication technology is very affordable. Information can be accessed anywhere easily and quickly (Rahmi & Safrida, 2023). This study seeks to investigate the correlation between digital literacy and critical thinking competencies among college students (Putranto et al., 2025a). The evolution of digital technology has triggered substantial transformations in various dimensions of existence, especially in the realm of higher education. Learners are now mandated not only to acquire academic knowledge but also to develop adequate digital literacy competencies to access, evaluate, and utilize information effectively in a critical and responsible manner in an ever-evolving information landscape. Digital literacy has emerged as an essential competency in responding to the extraordinary influx of digital information, which often includes inaccuracies, biases, or misleading content, especially in the contemporary age of information disruption. The expertise and skills required to assess the quality of digital information go beyond mere technical proficiency; they include higher-order cognitive skills that are fundamental to the university learning environment. Within the framework of Social Sciences (SS) education, digital literacy plays a vital role, as SS is intrinsically linked to the exploration of social, economic, cultural, and dynamic citizens. Social studies education goes beyond the mere acquisition of conceptual knowledge, requiring students to engage in critical analysis of the evolving social realities that permeate society. The incorporation of digital literacy into social studies education empowers students to access a wide range of digital information sources, compare different perspectives, and develop a more contextual and reflective understanding of social issues (Darmawan dkk., 2025a)<sup>1</sup>.

In the domain of Social Studies (IPS) education, digital literacy plays an important role due to the intrinsic relationship between IPS and the exploration of diverse and dynamic social, economic, cultural, and civic phenomena. The pedagogical approach to IPS education goes beyond mere conceptual understanding; it requires the development of critical thinking skills among students as they engage in the analysis of the ever-changing social realities that exist in society. Digital literacy equips students with the competencies necessary to access diverse digital information sources, compare various perspectives, and foster a more contextual and reflective understanding of social issues that manifest on a global and local scale. In social studies learning, the ability to critique digital information sources and see various perspectives on information is fundamental for students to think critically. (*Self-Directed Learning and Digital Literacy in Social Studies Learning: Efforts to Improve Students' Critical Thinking | Pedagogika*, t.t.).

Students enrolled in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Program (PGMI) occupy an important position as future educators at the elementary level, tasked with the critical responsibility of nurturing the character of future learners. As a result, the acquisition of critical thinking skills emerges as the most important competency that

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<sup>1</sup> (Darmawan dkk., 2025a)

must be cultivated from the beginning of their academic journey. Such critical thinking skills are essential for prospective educators to effectively facilitate learners in understanding information in a logical, rational, and evidence-based manner, rather than simply passively receiving information. The challenges faced by PGMI students in today's digital context are not only about finding information, but also the ability to filter, interpret, and use that information to solve social and learning problems. (Darmawan dkk., 2025b)<sup>2</sup>.

Digital literacy is very important for developing students' critical thinking skills. Through digital literacy, they can learn to analyze online sources, reflect on information, and discuss using data. If students are proficient in digital literacy, they will be able to assess the quality of the information sources they use, compare their strengths and weaknesses, and make appropriate decisions based on the available information. Therefore, digital literacy is a fundamental skill that is not only technical but also involves thinking and critical analysis, aligning with the challenges of modern education that require higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, idea generation, evaluation, and reflection. (Darmawan dkk., 2025c)<sup>3</sup>.

However, the reality in the field shows that digital technology for learning social studies has not been fully utilized to develop students' critical thinking skills. Many students only use this technology to find information quickly, without really checking how accurate and reliable the information is. Because there is no clear learning method for combining digital literacy, students' ability to evaluate information, connect information to broader social contexts, and construct strong critical arguments is lacking. This situation highlights the gap between the ideal expectation of digital literacy as a higher-order thinking skill and the reality of social studies classroom learning practices. (Pratama dkk., 2025)<sup>4</sup>.

Many studies say that digital literacy is related to students' critical thinking skills when studying. From a literature review, it appears that good digital literacy greatly helps improve students' critical thinking skills, especially in analyzing, evaluating arguments, and solving complex problems in this digital age. Therefore, digital literacy is not just about being able to use digital tools, but also about being able to evaluate, organize, and integrate information from various digital sources. (Darmawan dkk., 2025d).

In addition, several empirical studies indicate that integrating digital literacy into learning can improve students' ability to assess the validity of information, construct logical arguments, and understand social issues in greater depth. These findings show that digital literacy can enrich students' learning experiences by encouraging them to engage in a more reflective and contextual learning process. However, most of these studies use quantitative or mixed approaches, so more in-depth qualitative studies are needed to describe students' experiences in applying digital literacy as part of critical thinking, especially among PGMI students (Fadli dkk., 2024)<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> (Darmawan dkk., 2025b)

<sup>3</sup> (Darmawan dkk., 2025c)

<sup>4</sup> (Pratama dkk., 2025)

<sup>5</sup> (Fadli dkk., 2024)

Based on the above description, this study aims to describe the integration of digital literacy in social studies learning and its contribution to the development of critical thinking skills among PGMI students. This qualitative study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of digital literacy and critical thinking studies, as well as practical contributions to lecturers and educators in designing social studies learning that is more critical, contextual, and relevant to the demands of the digital era.

## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the implementation of digital literacy in Social Sciences (IPS) learning and its contribution to the development of critical thinking skills among students in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI). A qualitative approach was chosen because this study focuses on revealing the meanings, experiences, and thought processes of students in digital literacy-based learning, rather than on quantitative measurements or testing the relationships between variables. Qualitative research allows researchers to explore phenomena contextually and holistically based on the perspectives of the research subjects (*Using thematic analysis in psychology: Qualitative Research in Psychology: Vol 3, No 2, t.t.*)<sup>6</sup>.

The research subjects were determined using purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The criteria for informants in this study were PGMI students who had taken integrated social studies and digital literacy courses for at least one semester. These criteria were established so that informants would have sufficient experience in utilizing digital resources and be able to reflect on the changes in critical thinking patterns that occurred during the learning process. The number of informants in this study ranged from 5 to 10 students, which was considered sufficient to obtain an in-depth picture of the phenomenon under study.

Data collection techniques in this study were conducted exclusively through in-depth interviews (Patton, 2014)<sup>7</sup>. (Moleong, 2017)<sup>8</sup> Interviews were chosen as the main technique because they allowed researchers to explore students' experiences, perceptions, and reflections directly and in depth regarding the integration of digital literacy in social studies learning. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and online, adjusting to the conditions and availability of informants. The interview guide used was semi-structured, providing flexibility for researchers to develop follow-up questions based on the informants' answers.

The interview questions focused on several key aspects, namely: (1) students' experiences in using digital resources during social studies learning, (2) how students evaluate the credibility and accuracy of digital information, (3) forms of learning activities that encourage critical thinking, and (4) changes in students' thinking patterns after participating in digital literacy-based learning. The entire interview process was conducted with the informants' informed consent and recorded to ensure data accuracy.

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<sup>6</sup> (*Using thematic analysis in psychology: Qualitative Research in Psychology: Vol 3, No 2, t.t.*)

<sup>7</sup> (Patton, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> (Moleong, 2017)

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985)<sup>9</sup>. The interview recordings were then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model, which included three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, researchers selected and focused on interview data by identifying statements relevant to the research objectives. The data was then coded to identify key themes, such as evaluation of digital sources, critical thinking reflection, changes in learning patterns, and challenges in applying digital literacy.

The next stage is data presentation, which is carried out in the form of a systematic and structured descriptive narrative. Data presentation is reinforced with direct quotes from informants to maintain the authenticity of meaning and increase the credibility of the research findings. In the conclusion stage, researchers interpret the research findings by relating them to the concepts of digital literacy and critical thinking skills. The conclusions are provisional and continue to be verified during the analysis process to ensure the validity of the findings.

## **FINDINGS**

Based on in-depth interviews with students of the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Program (PGMI) who participated in digital literacy-based social studies (IPS) learning, a number of key findings were obtained regarding students' experiences in developing critical thinking skills. (Rokhman dkk., 2025)<sup>10</sup> The findings of this study describe how students interpret the use of digital literacy in the learning process and its impact on how they access, process, and evaluate information. In general, the research findings are grouped into four main themes, namely: (1) increased evaluative awareness of digital information sources, (2) increased analytical skills regarding social issues, (3) changes in student learning patterns, and (4) challenges in applying digital literacy in social studies learning.

### **1. Evaluative Awareness of Digital Sources**

The first finding shows that students experienced an increase in evaluative awareness in assessing the credibility of digital information sources. Before participating in social studies learning integrated with digital literacy, most students admitted that they tended to accept information from the internet directly without verifying the source. Information obtained from social media, blogs, or popular websites was often used as the main reference without considering the validity and reliability of the source.

After engaging in learning activities that emphasized the analysis of digital sources, students began to show a more selective attitude. Students became accustomed to comparing information from various websites, checking the accuracy of data, and paying attention to the identity of the author and publishing institution. One student said that he no longer immediately trusted information obtained from social media, but

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<sup>9</sup> (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

<sup>10</sup> (Rokhman dkk., 2025)

instead sought comparative references from more credible sources before drawing conclusions. (Gilster, t.t.)<sup>11</sup> These findings indicate that digital literacy contributes to shaping students' critical attitudes and caution toward widely circulated digital information.

## **2. Ability to Analyze Social Issues**

The second theme shows that the integration of digital literacy in social studies learning encourages students to analyze social issues in greater depth and comprehensively. Students not only understand social issues descriptively, but also begin to relate the information obtained from digital sources to a broader social, economic, and cultural context. This analytical process is evident when students are able to identify the causes and effects of a social problem and compare various perspectives that emerge from different digital sources. (Manggopa & Kumampung, 2023)<sup>12</sup>.

Students stated that the use of digital resources such as online scientific articles, current news, statistical reports, and official publications helped them construct more logical and fact-based arguments. Learning activities involving digital data search, issue-based discussions, and critical reflection encourage students to not only consume information, but also interpret and evaluate it critically. These findings indicate that digital literacy plays an important role in supporting the development of students' analytical and argumentative thinking skills in social studies learning.

## **3. Changes in Student Learning Patterns**

The next finding shows a significant change in student learning patterns. The integration of digital literacy encourages students to be more active and independent in the learning process. Students no longer rely solely on the material presented by lecturers, but begin to take the initiative to seek additional information from various digital sources relevant to the learning topic.

In addition, the learning process has become more collaborative through online discussions and data-based exchanges of opinions. Students feel more confident in expressing their views because they are supported by digital information that has been analyzed beforehand. This change in learning patterns shows that digital literacy not only contributes to the improvement of critical thinking skills, but also encourages the formation of reflective, independent, and responsible learning attitudes towards the learning process (Eshet, 2004a)<sup>13</sup>.

## **4. Challenges in Implementing Digital Literacy**

Despite its positive impact, this study also found a number of challenges in implementing digital literacy in social studies learning. Some students still have difficulty sorting out valid and relevant information, especially when faced with a large

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<sup>11</sup> (Gilster, t.t.)

<sup>12</sup> (Manggopa & Kumampung, 2023)

<sup>13</sup> (Eshet, 2004a)

amount of information on the internet. Provocative or sensational information often poses a challenge in the source evaluation process.

In addition, students' limited initial experience in using digital academic sources, such as scientific journals or online databases, is an obstacle to conducting more in-depth analysis. Students also emphasized that the role of lecturers is crucial to the success of digital literacy integration. When guidance and assistance are unclear, students tend to revert to passive learning patterns and use less credible digital sources. These findings indicate that the integration of digital literacy requires consistent pedagogical support in order to function optimally.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the integration of digital literacy in Social Sciences (IPS) learning contributes positively to the development of critical thinking skills among PGMI students. These findings confirm that students not only use technology as a tool for searching for information, but also as a medium for critically evaluating, comparing, and reflecting on information. This change is clearly evident in students' thinking patterns, which have become more selective and reflective towards the digital information sources they use in the learning process.

In the context of digital literacy theory, the findings of this study are in line with the framework of thinking. (Eshet, 2004b)<sup>14</sup> which states that digital literacy encompasses the ability to think critically and evaluatively about digital content, not just technical competence in using digital devices. Effective digital literacy will encourage learners to logically filter, analyze, and synthesize information—skills that are at the core of critical thinking. (Eshet, 2004b)<sup>15</sup>. The interview results show that students involved in integrated digital literacy social studies learning demonstrate a shift from passive acceptance of information to a selective and critical attitude in responding to digital-based learning materials.

The findings of this study also support empirical studies that show a positive relationship between digital literacy and students' critical thinking skills. Salisa and Iskandar, through a meta-analysis study, found that digital literacy is significantly correlated with students' critical thinking skills in various learning contexts, indicating that the integration of digital literacy needs to be prioritized in the education curriculum to strengthen students' higher-order thinking skills. (Salisa & Iskandar, 2025)<sup>16</sup>. This is consistent with the experiences of PGMI students, who stated that the use of academic digital resources, discussions based on current issues, and digital information analysis assignments helped them construct more logical and data-based arguments, thereby making their thinking process more critical and evidence-based.

In addition, literature also shows that the development of critical thinking skills through digital literacy does not occur automatically, but rather through systematically designed pedagogical strategies. (Nugraha dkk., 2024)<sup>17</sup>. By (Warizal dkk., 2023)<sup>18</sup> In their research, they explain that learning-based digital literacy can shape students' critical and creative thinking if it is designed with a learning approach that supports

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<sup>14</sup> (Eshet, 2004b)

<sup>15</sup> (Eshet, 2004b)

<sup>16</sup> (Salisa & Iskandar, 2025)

<sup>17</sup> (Nugraha dkk., 2024)

<sup>18</sup> (Warizal dkk., 2023)

active student involvement in evaluating information and solving problems digitally. This statement is in line with the findings that show a change in students' learning patterns, where students have become more active and independent in the learning process. They no longer rely solely on information from lecturers, but also search for and evaluate data independently through various credible digital sources.

In addition, digital literacy integration also helps students improve their ability to relate social studies concepts to actual social phenomena. This can be seen when students consistently use digital sources such as scientific articles, statistical data, and news reports in class discussions. The emphasis on evidence-based sources not only broadens students' horizons, but also encourages them to think reflectively and critically evaluate the relationship between social theory and practice. The use of technology in this context is not merely as a tool, but as a learning medium that changes the way students think, connect information, and develop a more mature academic perspective.

However, this study also reveals important challenges in the implementation of digital literacy. Some students still find it difficult to sort valid and relevant information from abundant digital sources. This shows that digital literacy is not just a technical ability to access information, but also requires a deep understanding of source evaluation, credibility assessment, and the social context of the information. This is in line with the findings of Putranto et al., which show that digital literacy and critical thinking skills are interrelated in responding to online news; a high level of literacy enables individuals to identify bias, filter misinformation, and make better information decisions. (Putranto dkk., 2025b)<sup>19</sup>. In the context of social studies learning, this skill is important for understanding social dynamics objectively and not getting caught up in invalid information.

In addition, another challenge identified was the limited initial experience of students in using digital academic resources such as scientific journals and research databases. Many students still feel unfamiliar with how to access, read, and evaluate scientific articles as academic references. This has an impact on the depth of analysis they can perform in academic discussions and assignments. One student stated that without proper guidance and assistance from lecturers, they tend to revert to using information that is more accessible but less credible, such as blogs or social media. This finding emphasizes the importance of the role of educators in guiding the process of digital literacy—not only in technical aspects, but also in evaluative and critical aspects.

In line with this, another study states that students' critical thinking skills are greatly influenced by how learning strategies are applied by educators. The integration of approaches such as the case method and problem-based learning based on digital literacy has been proven to improve students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and solve problems critically because this learning requires students to evaluate digital information as part of the thinking process. (*Digital Literacy- Based Case Method Lecture Model for Strengthening Student Critical Thinking* | Sari | *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, t.t.)<sup>20</sup>. Education that combines a digital literacy-based learning model with critical thinking activities can accelerate the development of higher-order thinking skills in PGMI students, especially when supported by clear instructions from lecturers.

Overall, this discussion confirms that the integration of digital literacy in social studies learning not only improves students' critical thinking skills but also shapes reflective, selective, and responsible attitudes in dealing with complex digital

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<sup>19</sup> (Putranto dkk., 2025b)

<sup>20</sup> (*Digital Literacy- Based Case Method Lecture Model for Strengthening Student Critical Thinking* | Sari | *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, t.t.)

information flows. Effectively integrated digital literacy enables students to become not only users of information, but also mature evaluators and constructors of knowledge. With appropriate learning designs and strong pedagogical support from lecturers, digital literacy can become an important foundation in developing the competencies of future educators in the digital age, especially in the context of social studies learning, which requires contextual and analytical understanding of social phenomena.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of digital literacy in Social Studies (IPS) learning contributes positively to the development of critical thinking skills among students in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Program (PGMI). Through digital literacy-based learning, students become more selective in accessing information, able to evaluate the credibility of digital sources, and accustomed to constructing arguments based on logical and reflective analysis. The results of this study indicate that digital literacy functions not only as a technological skill but also as an effective pedagogical approach in encouraging higher-level thinking processes. Social studies learning integrated with digital literacy is capable of creating a learning experience that is more contextual, meaningful, and relevant to the social dynamics of the digital era. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of the role of lecturers in designing social studies learning that systematically integrates digital literacy. Lecturers need to provide targeted guidance so that students are able to utilize digital sources critically and responsibly. Thus, the integration of digital literacy can be a sustainable strategy in improving the quality of social studies learning and preparing future educators who are adaptive to developments in technology and information.

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