

Research Article

Effectiveness of “Sumut-History” Website Platform on Digital Literacy and Cultural Awareness of Elementary School Students

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Abstract: This study investigates the effectiveness of the “Sumut-History” website platform in enhancing digital literacy and cultural awareness among elementary school students. Employing a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, the research involved 124 fifth-grade students in Medan, North Sumatra, divided into experimental and control groups. Data were collected using digital literacy tests, cultural awareness questionnaires, and classroom observations. The findings reveal that students who utilized the platform demonstrated significant improvement in digital literacy, particularly in critical thinking, information evaluation, and digital ethics. In addition, the integration of local cultural content through digital storytelling and interactive multimedia significantly increased students’ cultural awareness, including their understanding of local heritage and sense of identity. The study also highlights a positive synergy between digital literacy and cultural awareness, suggesting that both competencies can be developed simultaneously through contextualized digital learning. These results indicate that web-based platforms integrating local cultural narratives can serve as effective educational tools in primary education. The study contributes to the advancement of technology-enhanced learning and supports the promotion of culturally responsive digital education.

Keywords: Cultural Awareness; Digital Literacy; Elementary Education; Local Culture; Web-Based Learning.

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1. Introduction

The emergence of Society 5.0 has positioned technology not merely as a supporting tool but as a transformative catalyst in education systems worldwide. In this context, educational paradigms are shifting toward the development of comprehensive digital literacy, which encompasses not only technical competencies but also cognitive, social, and ethical dimensions of digital engagement. Digital literacy is increasingly recognized as a foundational skill in 21st-century education, particularly at the elementary level, where it contributes to the development of critical thinking, creativity, and active participation in learning processes (Dorris et al., 2021; Shyshak et al., 2023). Consequently, integrating digital competencies into early education has become a global priority.

At the elementary school level, digital literacy plays a crucial role in shaping students’ academic and social development. Empirical studies indicate that the integration of digital technologies in primary education can enhance literacy, numeracy, communication, and collaboration skills when implemented through well-designed pedagogical approaches (Dorris et al., 2024; Nair & Yunus, 2021). Moreover, digital literacy is closely linked to student motivation, engagement, and self-determination in learning environments (Sanchez et al., 2024). However, the effectiveness of such integration varies depending on contextual factors, instructional design, and the availability of supporting infrastructure.

Beyond functional skills, digital literacy must be understood as a multidimensional construct that includes information literacy, media literacy, and ethical digital behavior. Students are expected not only to access and use digital information but also to critically evaluate its credibility, engage responsibly in digital environments, and understand cultural

contexts embedded within digital content (Ekhaeva et al., 2023; L. Fitria & Romadin, 2023). This broader perspective highlights the importance of fostering digital empathy, ethical awareness, and responsible participation as part of holistic digital literacy education.

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain, particularly concerning the relationship between digital literacy and cultural identity. The rapid flow of global information often leads to cultural homogenization, where local values and traditions are overshadowed by dominant global narratives. In Indonesia, including North Sumatra, this phenomenon has contributed to a decline in local cultural awareness among younger generations (Purwantoro et al., 2022; Putra et al., 2023). Without deliberate educational interventions, students may become digitally proficient yet culturally disconnected from their own heritage.

The issue is particularly evident in elementary education, where history learning is often perceived as monotonous and disconnected from students' digital experiences. Traditional teaching methods tend to emphasize memorization rather than meaningful engagement, resulting in limited understanding of local cultural heritage. At the same time, there is a noticeable gap between the availability of digital infrastructure and the development of culturally relevant digital learning content (W. Fadilah et al., 2023; Tirtawati & Wulandari, 2023). This gap underscores the need for innovative approaches that integrate technology with local cultural knowledge.

Web-based learning platforms offer significant potential to address these challenges by providing flexible, interactive, and contextually relevant learning experiences. Such platforms enable the integration of multimedia, digital storytelling, and collaborative learning environments that enhance students' engagement and conceptual understanding (Ahmad et al., 2024a; Alharbi, 2023). Furthermore, the effectiveness of web-based learning depends on the alignment between technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge, as emphasized in the TPACK framework (ÇAM & Yilmaz, 2023). When properly designed, web-based platforms can support both cognitive and affective learning outcomes.

In response to these challenges, the "Sumut-History" website platform was developed as an innovative educational tool that integrates digital storytelling and interactive multimedia to promote local cultural understanding. This study aims to examine the effectiveness of the platform in improving elementary students' digital literacy and cultural awareness simultaneously. By providing empirical evidence, this research contributes to the advancement of technology-enhanced learning and supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in ensuring inclusive and quality education.

2. Literature review

Digital Literacy in Elementary Education

Digital literacy is a fundamental competency in 21st-century education, particularly at the elementary level, where it supports the development of critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. It encompasses not only the ability to use digital tools but also the capacity to access, evaluate, and create information (Dorris et al., 2021; Dwipayana, 2021). Empirical studies show that integrating digital technologies into primary education can improve literacy, numeracy, and communication skills, although the impact varies depending on instructional design and context (Dorris et al., 2024).

Moreover, digital literacy is closely linked to student engagement, motivation, and self-directed learning. Students with strong digital competencies tend to participate more actively in learning activities (Sanchez et al., 2024). Therefore, digital literacy should be implemented through comprehensive and context-sensitive pedagogical approaches.

Cultural Awareness in the Digital Era

Cultural awareness is essential in shaping students' identity, values, and social cohesion. In elementary education, it involves understanding and appreciating local cultural heritage as part of character development (Aritonang et al., 2023; Nashuddin, 2020). However, globalization and the widespread use of digital media have contributed to declining local cultural awareness among younger generations.

In Indonesia, this issue is evident as students are increasingly exposed to global content while having limited access to local cultural narratives (Purwanto, 2022; Putra et al., 2023). Without intentional integration of cultural content into education, students risk becoming digitally competent but culturally disconnected.

Web-Based Learning and Digital Pedagogy

Web-based learning provides flexible, interactive, and student-centered learning environments. It enables the integration of multimedia, collaboration, and personalized learning experiences, which are particularly relevant for digital-native learners (Ahmad et al., 2024b; Alharbi, 2023). These platforms can enhance students' understanding through visual and interactive representations of knowledge.

However, the effectiveness of web-based learning depends on the alignment between technology, pedagogy, and content, as emphasized in the TPACK framework (ÇAM & Yılmaz, 2023). Teachers' competence, infrastructure readiness, and instructional design play crucial roles in ensuring successful implementation (Le et al., 2021).

Integration of Digital Literacy and Cultural Awareness through Digital Platforms

Recent studies highlight the importance of integrating digital literacy with cultural education to create meaningful and contextual learning experiences. Digital storytelling and interactive multimedia have been shown to enhance students' engagement and understanding of cultural content (Nair & Yunus, 2021; Shyshak et al., 2023).

By embedding local cultural narratives into digital platforms, educators can simultaneously develop students' digital competencies and cultural awareness. This integrated approach not only addresses the challenges of cultural disconnection but also aligns with the goals of holistic education in the digital era. Therefore, web-based platforms such as "Sumut-History" have strong potential as innovative tools to bridge the gap between technology use and cultural preservation.

3. Proposed Method

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design, specifically the nonequivalent control group design. This design enables a comparison between two groups: an experimental group that received treatment through the "Sumut-History" website platform and a control group that was taught using conventional narrative methods. Such a design is appropriate for examining the effectiveness of educational interventions in real classroom settings where random assignment is limited.

The population of this study consisted of fifth-grade elementary school students in Medan, North Sumatra. A total of 124 students were selected using random sampling techniques. These participants were chosen based on their developmental stage, as they are considered capable of processing digital information while simultaneously developing social and emotional connections to historical content. This makes them suitable subjects for examining both digital literacy and cultural awareness outcomes.

Data were collected using three primary instruments: a digital literacy test, a cultural awareness questionnaire, and classroom observations. The digital literacy test measured six indicators, namely time management, cyberbullying awareness, cybersecurity (data protection), privacy, critical thinking, and digital empathy. The cultural awareness questionnaire was adapted from Balcazar et al., and Liu et al., framework, assessing levels from basic data and information understanding to cultural knowledge and competence (Balcazar et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2021). Classroom observations were conducted to monitor students' interactions with platform features such as interactive maps and virtual tours. Data analysis was performed using SPSS, including prerequisite tests for normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and homogeneity (Levene's test), followed by hypothesis testing using the Independent Sample T-Test for partial effects and the F-Test for simultaneous effects.

4. Results and Discussion

Improvement of Digital Literacy Among Elementary Students

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the "Sumut-History" platform significantly enhances students' digital literacy. Based on the comparison between pre-test and post-test results, the experimental group demonstrated a substantially higher increase than the control group. This finding supports previous studies showing that integrating digital technology into elementary education improves literacy and numeracy outcomes, although the magnitude of the effect depends on instructional design and context (Dorris et al., 2024). The platform's interactive features, such as multimedia content and inquiry-based learning activities, play a crucial role in facilitating this improvement.

Furthermore, digital literacy in this study is conceptualized as a multidimensional competence that includes technical, cognitive, and ethical aspects. Students showed notable improvement in critical thinking, information evaluation, and responsible digital behavior. This aligns with the perspective that digital literacy involves the ability to assess information credibility and engage ethically in digital environments (Ekhaeva et al., 2023; T. N. Fitria, 2023). The platform's design, which integrates interactive tasks and real-world contexts, contributes to the development of these higher-order skills.

Another important finding is the increase in students' learning motivation and engagement. Students in the experimental group were more actively involved in learning activities compared to those in the control group. This supports research indicating that digital literacy is closely associated with student motivation and self-determination (Sanchez et al.,

2024). The interactive nature of the platform encourages students to explore content independently, thereby fostering active learning.

In addition, digital storytelling embedded in the platform contributes significantly to literacy development. The combination of narrative elements and multimedia enhances students’ comprehension and retention of information. Previous studies have shown that digital storytelling can improve language skills and literacy outcomes in elementary students (Nair & Yunus, 2021). Therefore, the integration of storytelling within the platform is a key factor in its effectiveness.

Table 1. Comparison of Digital Literacy Scores.

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain Score
Experimental	65	85	+20
Control	66	72	+6

The table above shows that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher gain score compared to the control group. This indicates that the “Sumut-History” platform provides substantial added value in improving digital literacy. The difference in gain scores reflects the effectiveness of interactive digital learning compared to conventional teaching methods. These findings are consistent with studies demonstrating that ICT-based learning enhances students’ competencies when supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies (Dorris et al., 2021).

Enhancement of Cultural Awareness Through Digital Platforms

The results also demonstrate a significant improvement in students’ cultural awareness following the use of the “Sumut-History” platform. Students showed better understanding of local historical narratives, cultural values, and regional identity. This finding emphasizes the importance of integrating local cultural content into digital learning environments. Previous studies indicate that cultural awareness can be strengthened through culturally relevant educational materials (Purwanto, 2022; Putra et al., 2023).

The use of digital storytelling and multimedia features contributes to students’ emotional engagement with cultural content. Unlike traditional teaching methods, which often rely on memorization, the platform provides immersive learning experiences. This aligns with research highlighting that emotional involvement is essential for internalizing cultural values (Nashuddin, 2020). By combining cognitive and affective learning processes, the platform enhances students’ cultural understanding.

Moreover, the findings indicate that students developed a stronger sense of cultural identity. This is particularly important in the context of globalization, where exposure to global content can reduce local cultural awareness. Studies have shown that digital media may lead to cultural homogenization if local content is not adequately represented (N. Fadilah, 2023). Therefore, integrating local culture into digital platforms is crucial for preserving cultural identity among young learners.

Another important finding is the increase in students’ interest and motivation to learn about local culture. Students expressed greater enthusiasm when interacting with culturally relevant digital content. This is consistent with research showing that culturally responsive learning materials enhance student engagement (Tirtawati & Wulandari, 2023). The platform thus serves as an effective tool for promoting cultural awareness and active participation.

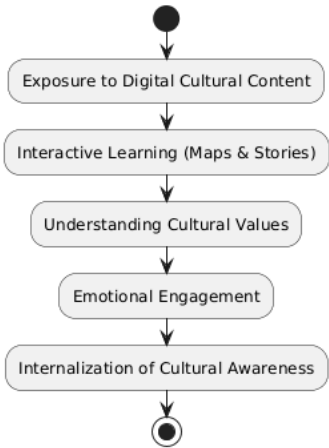


Figure 1. Cultural Awareness Development Process.

The diagram above illustrates the process through which students develop cultural awareness using the platform. It highlights the sequential progression from exposure to internalization, emphasizing the role of interactive and immersive learning experiences. This confirms that digital platforms can effectively support cultural education when designed with relevant local content.

Integration of Digital Literacy and Cultural Awareness

One of the key findings of this study is the simultaneous improvement of digital literacy and cultural awareness. This suggests a strong relationship between technological competence and cultural understanding. Students who engaged with culturally enriched digital content demonstrated higher levels of both skills. This supports the idea that digital literacy should be integrated with cultural literacy to achieve holistic learning outcomes (Ekhaeva et al., 2023).

The integration of these two competencies creates a contextual learning environment that enhances student engagement. When students interact with content that reflects their cultural background, they are more likely to connect new knowledge with prior experiences. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes meaningful learning. Therefore, the “Sumut-History” platform provides a contextually relevant learning experience that supports both cognitive and cultural development.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that this integration contributes to character development. Students develop values such as empathy, respect, and cultural appreciation alongside digital skills. This is consistent with research emphasizing the role of education in fostering moral and cultural values (Nashuddin, 2020). The inclusion of digital empathy as part of digital literacy further strengthens this aspect.

Another implication is that integrating digital literacy with cultural awareness helps address the challenges of globalization. By embedding local culture into digital learning environments, educators can counteract cultural homogenization. This ensures that students remain connected to their cultural roots while developing digital competencies. Therefore, the platform represents an innovative solution for balancing global and local educational needs.

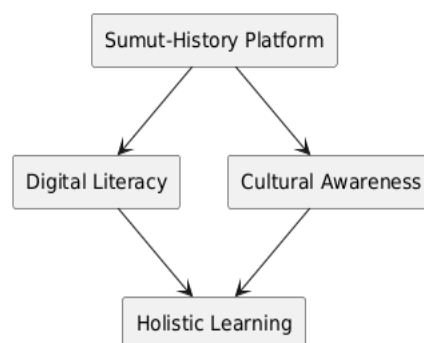


Figure 2. Integration Model.

The diagram above illustrates how the platform integrates digital literacy and cultural awareness to produce holistic learning outcomes. It highlights the platform’s role as a bridge between technological and cultural competencies.

Discussion and Educational Implications

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on digital learning in elementary education. Studies have shown that ICT-based learning improves literacy, numeracy, and student engagement when supported by appropriate instructional design (Dorris et al., 2021; Shyshak et al., 2023). This study extends these findings by demonstrating that digital platforms can also enhance cultural awareness when integrated with local content.

However, the results also highlight several challenges. The effectiveness of digital learning depends on factors such as infrastructure, teacher competence, and instructional design. Previous research has emphasized that variations in these factors can significantly influence learning outcomes (Dorris et al., 2024). Therefore, careful planning and contextual adaptation are necessary for successful implementation.

Another important issue is teacher readiness. Teachers need to possess not only technical skills but also pedagogical knowledge to effectively integrate technology into the classroom. The TPACK framework emphasizes the importance of aligning technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (ÇAM & Yılmaz, 2023). Without adequate training, the potential benefits of digital platforms may not be fully realized.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of ethical and health considerations in digital learning. Excessive use of digital devices may negatively affect students' health, particularly in terms of eye strain and posture (Filkina et al., 2020). Therefore, digital literacy education should include awareness of healthy technology use. A balanced approach is essential to ensure that digital learning contributes positively to students' overall development.

5. Comparison

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research indicating that digital learning platforms significantly improve students' digital literacy in elementary education. Studies by Dorris et al. (2021) and Dorris et al. (2024) demonstrate that the integration of digital technologies positively affects literacy and numeracy outcomes, although the effect size may vary depending on instructional design and context (Dorris et al., 2021, 2024). Similarly, this study found a substantial increase in digital literacy scores among students who used the "Sumut-History" platform compared to those who experienced conventional learning. The improvement in critical thinking, information evaluation, and digital ethics aligns with findings from Ekhaeva et al., and Shyshak et al., which emphasize the importance of multidimensional digital literacy in modern education (Ekhaeva et al., 2023; Shyshak et al., 2023).

In terms of cultural awareness, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating the effectiveness of integrating local cultural content into digital platforms. Prior research has highlighted that cultural awareness among students can decline due to globalization and exposure to dominant global media (Purwanto, 2022; Putra et al., 2023). While earlier studies often focused on traditional or community-based approaches to cultural education (N. Fadilah, 2023; Nashuddin, 2020), this study introduces a digital approach that combines storytelling and interactive media. The results indicate that such integration not only improves students' understanding of cultural values but also enhances their emotional engagement and sense of identity.

Furthermore, this study offers a novel contribution by highlighting the synergy between digital literacy and cultural awareness within a single learning platform. Previous studies have typically examined these variables separately, either focusing on digital competence or cultural education. However, this research demonstrates that combining both aspects can produce more holistic learning outcomes, including cognitive, affective, and ethical development. This finding supports the argument that digital literacy should be integrated with cultural literacy to prepare students for the challenges of globalization while preserving local identity (T. N. Fitria, 2023). Therefore, the "Sumut-History" platform represents an innovative model that bridges the gap between technological advancement and cultural preservation in elementary education.

6. Conclusions

This study concludes that the "Sumut-History" website platform is effective in enhancing both digital literacy and cultural awareness among elementary school students. The findings demonstrate that students who engaged with the platform showed significant improvements in digital competencies, including critical thinking, information evaluation, and ethical digital behavior. In addition, the integration of interactive multimedia and digital storytelling contributed to higher student engagement and motivation. These results confirm that well-designed web-based learning environments can support not only cognitive development but also meaningful and active learning experiences in primary education.

Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of integrating local cultural content into digital learning platforms to address the challenges of globalization and declining cultural awareness. The "Sumut-History" platform successfully fostered students' understanding of local heritage, strengthened their cultural identity, and promoted emotional engagement with historical content. The simultaneous improvement of digital literacy and cultural awareness suggests that both competencies can be developed synergistically through contextual and culturally responsive digital learning. Therefore, this study recommends that educators and policymakers adopt integrated approaches that combine technology, pedagogy, and local culture to create holistic and sustainable learning environments for future generations.

Author Contributions: The author was solely responsible for all aspects of this study. This includes conceptualizing the research framework, designing the methodology, conducting data collection and analysis, and interpreting the results. The author also developed the theoretical foundation, reviewed relevant literature, and wrote the entire manuscript. In addition, the author carried out revisions, editing, and ensured the overall coherence,

accuracy, and compliance of the article with academic standards. This work reflects the independent effort and scholarly contribution of the author in producing this research.

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Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this research. All stages of the study, from data collection to analysis and interpretation, were conducted independently without any external influence that could affect the objectivity of the results.

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