

Student Digital Literacy in the Age of Technology: A PRISMA-Based Systematic Review

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Abstract: Digital literacy is an essential competency that students must possess in an era of rapidly advancing information technology. Digital literacy is not only related to the ability to use devices but also encompasses the skills to access, understand, evaluate, and utilize digital information in a critical, ethical, and responsible manner. This study aims to examine students' digital literacy levels, the factors influencing them, the use of digital media in learning, the challenges in its development, and the urgency of digital literacy for students based on previous research findings. This study employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method using the PRISMA approach. The research process was conducted on 104 articles from various national and international journal databases from 2020 to 2025. After undergoing title and abstract screening, full-text eligibility checks, and the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, 18 articles were selected for thematic analysis. The results of the study indicate that students' digital literacy levels generally fall into the low to moderate categories. Factors influencing students' digital literacy include the availability of technological resources, teacher competence, parental support, the school environment, and curriculum policies. The use of digital media in learning has been shown to improve students' digital literacy when accompanied by appropriate guidance. However, various challenges remain, such as limited access to technology, low understanding of digital ethics, and digital divides between regions. Therefore, digital literacy needs to be developed systematically and sustainably within the education sector.

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INTRODUCTION

Advances in information and communication technology (ICT) have brought significant changes to education and made digital literacy an essential competency to be acquired starting in elementary school. In the digital age, it is not enough for students to simply be able to operate technological devices; they must also be able to access, evaluate, analyze, and use digital information ethically and responsibly. Digital literacy plays a role in improving the quality of learning by fostering a love of reading, critical thinking skills, collaborative abilities, and an understanding of the diverse digital information sources that are now integral to the learning process (Solih & Julianto, 2025). The importance of digital literacy for elementary school students is also demonstrated by its role in shaping students who are independent, creative, and capable of actively participating in an increasingly complex digital society.

However, several studies indicated that the level of digital literacy among Indonesian students, particularly in elementary school, remains low. One contributing factor is the predominant use of digital devices for entertainment—such as games and social media—rather than academic activities. Students still struggle to assess the credibility of information, making them vulnerable to hoaxes and misinformation. Additionally, students' digital ethics are also relatively low, particularly regarding privacy protection, understanding copyright, and interacting safely online (Bejiman, 2025). This situation is further exacerbated by low reading interest, which serves as the primary foundation of digital literacy. Research indicates that the reading literacy skills of elementary school students in Indonesia remain at an alarming level, ranking among the bottom two in UNESCO and PISA reports, pointing to a weak national literacy

culture (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

Amid these conditions, digital media actually holds great potential to enhance students' literacy skills. The appropriate use of digital media can foster reading interest, expand access to information, and improve text comprehension. However, its utilization in learning remains suboptimal due to various constraints, including limited infrastructure, uneven internet access, and inadequate digital resources, particularly in schools located in 3T regions. In many elementary schools, teachers also face difficulties in integrating technology due to a lack of training, outdated digital competencies, and minimal policy support that encourages technology-based learning innovation (Inayah et al., 2024).

In addition to teachers, the curriculum also poses a challenge. A curriculum that has not yet fully and comprehensively incorporated digital literacy makes it difficult for schools to instill structured digital skills in students. On the other hand, rapid technological changes demand a curriculum that is adaptive and relevant to the needs of the times, underscoring the need for curriculum enhancement and more targeted learning so that students can develop their digital skills comprehensively.

Digital literacy also plays a strategic role in supporting the achievement of sustainable development goals, particularly regarding quality education and the inclusive use of technology. Students with strong digital literacy will be better prepared to seize future economic opportunities, understand environmental issues, and utilize technology for lifelong learning (Widiyanti et al., 2024). Therefore, digital literacy education starting in elementary school is important not only for academic needs but also for fostering responsible digital citizens who are adaptable to global change.

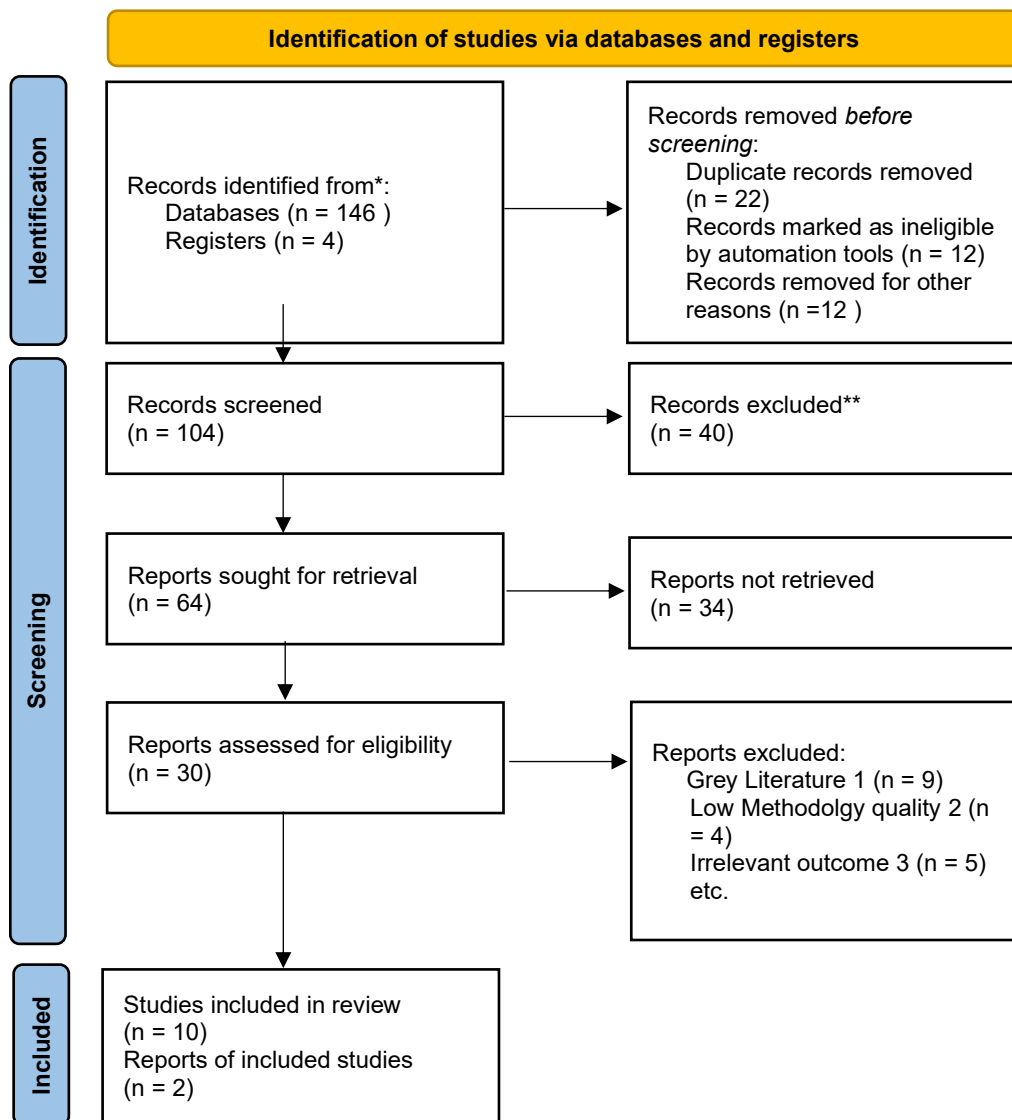
Nevertheless, the implementation of digital literacy in elementary schools is not without various social, economic, and environmental challenges. Inequalities in access to technology, low parental involvement in digital guidance, and resistance to change lead to uneven progress in improving digital literacy. Some schools still ban cell phone use due to concerns about disruption, even though these devices can be effective learning tools when used appropriately (Wijayanti et al., 2025).

Based on these findings, it is evident that digital literacy among elementary school students is a critical issue that warrants further in-depth study. While various studies have been conducted, the results remain inconsistent, covering students' digital literacy proficiency levels, learning strategies, the role of teachers, implementation challenges, and the impact of digital media on literacy development. Therefore, a systematic review in the form of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is needed to comprehensively map the state of students' digital literacy, the factors influencing it, and the most effective strategies for improving digital literacy in elementary schools. This review is essential to providing a scientific foundation for developing policies, curricula, and teaching practices that are more relevant and aligned with students' needs in the digital age.

So, the research questions are: how a systematic, sustainable, inclusive, and ethical intervention model can be developed and implemented to improve students' digital literacy in schools? What are the effects on students' ability to access, evaluate, and use digital information responsibly? Students' digital literacy levels are typically low to moderate, and prior research has not yet produced a comprehensive model integrating teacher competence, parental support, school environment, curriculum policies, and effective use of digital media.

METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), a scientific review method conducted in a systematic, structured, and transparent manner to identify, select, evaluate, and synthesize relevant studies on student digital literacy. The SLR was chosen because it provides a comprehensive overview of research trends, key findings, and research gaps in the field of student digital literacy. Articles were collected by searching various national and international journal databases, including Google Scholar, Garuda Kemdikbud, DOAJ, Sinta, ResearchGate, and Semantic Scholar. This study adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines.



*Consider, if feasible to do so, reporting the number of records identified from each database or register searched (rather than the total number across all databases/registers).

**If automation tools were used, indicate how many records were excluded by a human and how many were excluded by automation tools.

Figure 1. Article Selection Process Diagram (PRISMA Model)

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the literature synthesis presented in Table 1, the studies analyzed demonstrate variations in research focus, methods, and context across systematic literature reviews (SLRs). In general, these articles indicate that the SLR approach is used to map research developments, identify trends, and evaluate key findings in the fields under study. The results show a relatively consistent pattern of findings, though differences in focus and methodological approaches still exist across studies. Overall, this table provides a comprehensive overview of the direction of research development and the gaps that still need further exploration in SLR studies.

Students' Digital Literacy Levels Based on Previous Research

An analysis of the collected articles indicates that elementary school students' digital literacy levels remain low to moderate, particularly in information evaluation, use of technology for learning, and digital ethics.

Bejiman (2025) said that research reveals that elementary school students predominantly use digital devices for entertainment, such as playing games (63%) and watching videos (25%), while only 5% use them for academic activities. These findings indicate that their digital literacy has not yet developed to the point of using technology as a productive learning tool.

Students' ability to assess the credibility of digital information remains low. As many as 68% of students have difficulty distinguishing between true and false information, and only 32% can critically evaluate digital information. This low level of critical thinking regarding digital information indicates that students do not yet possess sufficient functional digital literacy to cope with the proliferation of hoaxes and misinformation on the internet.

A similar point is raised in an article in *Cahaya Edukasi* (Solih & Julianto, 2025). They explained that although students are accustomed to using mobile devices, their digital literacy skills—particularly in information evaluation, responsible digital communication, and understanding digital ethics—remain uneven. Many students do not yet understand how to distinguish educational information from entertainment content or content that is unsafe for children.

Another article Wijayanti et al., (2025) added that low reading literacy, as the foundation of digital literacy, is one of the main causes of students' weak digital literacy. Their research showed that elementary school students' interest in reading remains low, thereby affecting their ability to understand digital information and critically analyze content. Low digital literacy ultimately makes students more vulnerable to harmful or age-inappropriate content.

Even in the context of digital learning, research has found that students tend to use digital media solely for passive consumption, rather than for exploring information, collaborating, or searching for learning resources. This suggests that although access to technology is becoming more widespread, the quality of its use for developing digital literacy has not yet reached its full potential (Durodolu et al., 2025).

Thus, most studies confirm that the digital literacy levels of elementary school students fall short of expectations, particularly in using technology for learning, evaluating information, understanding digital ethics, and practicing safe digital practices. This situation highlights the need for systematic interventions through the curriculum, teacher training, and the promotion of a culture of literacy to improve students' digital literacy in today's digital age.

Table 1. 12 Selected Articles Relevant to the Discussed Topic

No	Author & Year	Article Title	Research Objectives	Method	Key Findings
1	(Bejiman, 2025)	Analysis of Digital Literacy Among Elementary School Students	Analyzing students' digital literacy levels	Quantitative	Students' digital literacy remains low, with the use of mobile devices primarily for entertainment.
2	(Solih & Julianto, 2025)	Digital Literacy in Elementary School Education	Examining the role of teachers in digital media	Qualitative	Teachers have not yet fully integrated technology
3	(Wijayanti et al., 2025)	Students' Reading Literacy and Digital Literacy	Exploring the Relationship Between Reading Literacy and Digital Literacy	Qualitative	Low interest in reading affects digital literacy
4	(Inayah et al., 2024)	Strengthening Digital Literacy in Elementary Schools	Reviewing policies and implementation	Qualitative	Support from the curriculum and school policies is needed

No	Author & Year	Article Title	Research Objectives	Method	Key Findings
5	(Widiyantti et al., 2024)	Digital Literacy and the SDGs	Linking Digital Literacy and the SDGs	Literature Review	Digital literacy supports sustainable education
6	(Mardiana et al., 2025)	Implementation of Digital Literacy at SDIT	Analyzing digital literacy practices	Qualitative	Digital media is effective when accompanied by guidance
7	(Kurniawan & Sarah, 2023)	Students' Digital Literacy & Critical Thinking	Measuring the impact of digital literacy	Quantitative	Digital literacy enhances critical thinking
8	(Lubis et al., 2025)	Students' Digital Literacy Challenges	Identifying barriers to digital literacy	Qualitative	Digital ethics and security remain low
9	(Heru Setiyawan et al., 2023)	Digital Literacy and Misinformation	Assessing Information Evaluation Skills	Qualitative	Students are vulnerable to misinformation due to low literacy
10	(Arman et al., 2019)	A6S Information Literacy Model	Developing an information literacy model	Mixed Method	The A6S model effectively improves literacy
11	(Resti Yanita et al., 2025)	Digital Literacy for Learning	Assessing students' digital readiness	Quantitative	Digital literacy influences academic success
12	(Santos, 2023)	Information Literacy as Social Innovation	Examining information literacy and social innovation	SLR	Digital literacy has a broad social impact

Factors Affecting Students' Digital Literacy Skills

The findings of this study indicate that digital literacy transformation in education should not be understood merely as technological adoption, but as a systemic shift involving institutional readiness, pedagogical capacity, and socio-cultural support. Persistent disparities in digital infrastructure remain a major barrier, particularly in schools with limited access to technological resources. This condition reinforces the notion that the digital divide extends beyond access to include disparities in the quality of technology use in educational processes (Hargittai, 2021).

From the perspective of educators, the results reveal that teachers' digital competence remains in a transitional stage, moving from basic operational use to deeper pedagogical integration. This limitation undermines the effectiveness of digital learning practices expected to foster students' critical thinking and collaborative skills. In this regard, teacher professional development is a crucial determinant of successful digital education reform (Falloon, 2021).

Furthermore, students' digital literacy exhibits a paradoxical pattern: high levels of technology exposure do not necessarily translate into strong digital literacy competencies. This suggests that technological access alone is insufficient without structured pedagogical scaffolding that supports critical evaluation and responsible use of digital information. Prior research emphasizes that digital literacy development requires intentional instructional design rather than incidental exposure to technology (Ferrari et al., 2020).

At the institutional level, the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum remains fragmented and incremental rather than systematic. Many schools still position technology as an auxiliary tool rather

than an integral component of the learning process. However, competency-based digital curriculum frameworks emphasize the importance of cross-curricular integration to ensure sustainable development of digital literacy competencies (Häkkinen et al., 2021).

In addition, the social dimension highlights the significant role of the family environment in shaping students' digital behavior. Limited parental digital literacy reduces effective supervision of children's online activities, increasing their exposure to unverified and non-educational content. This reflects the ecological nature of digital literacy, which is influenced by interactions across individual, familial, and environmental contexts (Kardefelt-Winther, 2021).

Overall, the findings confirm that digital literacy is a multidimensional construct shaped not only by technological factors but also by human capacity and the readiness of the educational system. Therefore, a holistic approach is required, involving teacher competency development, infrastructure equity, curriculum integration, and family digital literacy enhancement to ensure sustainable digital transformation in education.

The Use of Digital Media and Learning Technologies to Improve Students' Digital Literacy

The use of digital media in education has been shown to significantly improve students' digital literacy. Various studies cited in the article indicate that digital media serves not only as a means of delivering content but also as a tool for developing students' ability to access, evaluate, understand, and use information responsibly (Yoesrina Novia Vini Syafitri et al., 2025).

In a study conducted at SDIT Madani Cilegon, the use of digital tools such as YouTube, blogs, video conferencing apps (Zoom and Meet), and social media was found to help students understand the material and improve their ability to find relevant information. The digital literacy activities carried out over a three-month period made students better able to use the internet safely, understand age-appropriate content, and use smartphones for positive purposes (Mardiana et al., 2025). This indicates that digital media can serve as a tool for enhancing digital literacy when accompanied by appropriate guidance and education.

In addition, research Kurniawan & Sarah (2023) found that integrating technology into learning can improve students' critical thinking skills, analytical abilities, and understanding of digital ethics. Through surveys and interviews, it was found that students who frequently interact with digital media are better equipped to assess information credibility and prevent the spread of misinformation. They also emphasized the importance of integrating digital literacy into the school curriculum and providing teacher training to ensure digital-based learning is effective.

Strengthening digital literacy is also linked to the provision of adequate digital facilities, such as computers, internet access, and learning applications. Research findings indicate that students' digital literacy improves significantly in schools that provide adequate library facilities and technological access, including computers, internet access, and digital resources. (Ileri & Ocholla, 2025). This underscores that the success of digital media use is heavily influenced by the availability of technological resources in schools.

Based on these studies, it is clear that the use of digital media directly affects students' ability to navigate digital information, both technically and ethically. Learning that consistently integrates digital media enables students to develop critical thinking skills, manage information, and use technology to support their learning.

Challenges and Obstacles in Developing Students' Digital Literacy

The findings indicate that digital literacy development in educational contexts is still constrained by structural and pedagogical limitations. One of the most dominant issues is the unequal access to digital infrastructure, particularly in rural schools where internet connectivity, hardware availability, and teacher competence remain insufficient. This condition creates a digital divide that directly affects students' opportunities to develop higher-order digital competencies (UNESCO, 2023).

In addition, the lack of teacher readiness in integrating digital literacy into instruction remains a critical barrier. Many educators still focus on basic technology usage rather than embedding critical digital thinking, information evaluation, and ethical digital behavior into classroom practices. This aligns with

recent findings that teacher digital competence significantly determines the effectiveness of digital literacy integration in learning environments (Redecker, 2020; OECD, 2023).

Another important issue is students' limited ability to critically evaluate digital information. Although students frequently use digital devices, their skills in distinguishing credible from non-credible information remain weak. This highlights that exposure to technology does not automatically translate into digital literacy competence without structured pedagogical intervention (Rohim et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the integration of digital literacy into the curriculum remains fragmented and inconsistent. In many cases, digital literacy is treated as an additional component rather than an embedded learning outcome across subjects. Recent studies emphasize that a holistic curriculum approach is required to ensure sustainable development of digital literacy, integrating cognitive, technical, and ethical dimensions (Martin & Grudziecki, 2021; Ng, 2023).

Finally, parental support and socio-cultural context also play an important role in shaping students' digital literacy development. Limited parental guidance and digital awareness often lead to unregulated digital exposure, which may increase risks, including exposure to misinformation and unsafe online behavior (Livingstone et al., 2022).

The Importance of Digital Literacy in Improving Student Learning Outcomes and Readiness in the Digital Age

The importance of digital literacy among students has become increasingly prominent as technology advances and reliance on digital devices in the learning process grows. A review of various articles indicates that digital literacy is no longer an additional competency but a core skill that students must possess to learn effectively, safely, and critically in the 21st century.

Research Arman et al., (2019) showed that digital literacy directly improves student learning outcomes, particularly in technology-based learning. Students with strong digital literacy skills can grasp material more quickly, search for information effectively, and work independently across various digital learning platforms. The study's findings confirmed that digital literacy is positively correlated with learning motivation and academic achievement.

Furthermore, digital literacy is a fundamental necessity for students because most academic activities—such as accessing journals, self-directed learning, and collaboration—rely on digital platforms. The study indicated that students lacking adequate digital literacy face difficulties in participating in online learning, verifying information, and making optimal use of digital resources. This indicates that digital literacy not only supports students' cognitive development but also influences their readiness to meet the demands of modern education.

The urgency of digital literacy is also linked to students' ability to select and evaluate information. The study found that students are often exposed to misinformation and invalid content due to limited critical-thinking skills for filtering digital information. This study emphasized that digital literacy must encompass digital security, media ethics, and the ability to assess source credibility.

Digital literacy has social implications beyond academic outcomes. Research indicates that digital literacy is a foundational competency that contributes to the empowerment of individuals and communities. It supports critical thinking, social participation, and informed decision-making. (Santos, 2023). When students have strong digital literacy, they are not only able to learn more effectively but are also better prepared to deal with social risks such as misinformation, digital scams, and media polarisation.

Other research also indicates that a lack of digital literacy leads to low levels of productive use of technology. Although students are familiar with using devices, most use them only for entertainment rather than for learning. This gap demonstrates that digital literacy is not synonymous with the ability to use gadgets, but rather with the ability to use them meaningfully for learning (Nalaila & Frank, 2024).

By synthesizing the overall findings from the articles, researchers can conclude that the urgency of digital literacy lies in its role in:

1. Improving the quality of learning outcomes, particularly in technology-based learning
2. Preparing students to face digital information challenges, such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and data theft.

3. Developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills through the ethical and responsible use of digital information.
4. Supporting students' readiness for the workforce and higher education, which requires proficiency in digital platforms.
5. Promoting social empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 20 selected articles on student digital literacy, it can be concluded that digital literacy is a crucial competency for students in today's era of information technology development. In general, digital literacy is not merely the ability to use technological devices. Still, it encompasses the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, produce, and utilize digital information in an ethical, safe, and responsible manner.

First, the synthesis results indicate that students' digital literacy levels remain in the low-to-moderate range, particularly in information evaluation, the use of technology for learning, and understanding digital ethics. Students primarily use devices for entertainment rather than academic activities and struggle to distinguish between valid and invalid information. Low reading literacy also significantly contributes to weak digital literacy.

Second, the factors influencing students' digital literacy are complex and interrelated, including access to digital devices and the internet, teachers' competence in integrating learning technologies, parental support, the family environment, students' interest in reading, school infrastructure conditions, and curriculum policies that have not yet fully established digital literacy as a core competency.

Third, the research also confirms that the use of digital media and learning technologies plays a significant role in improving students' digital literacy. The integration of digital learning media, such as educational videos, online learning platforms, digital libraries, and learning applications, has been proven to enhance students' skills in searching for, understanding, and producing digital information. However, the effectiveness of this utilization depends heavily on teacher guidance, the availability of facilities, and the implementation of technology-based curricula.

Fourth, there are various challenges in developing digital literacy, including limited digital facilities in schools, insufficient competencies among teachers and parents in guiding students, low student awareness regarding digital ethics and security, and the technology access gap between urban areas and 3T regions. These challenges demonstrate that digital literacy cannot be built solely through technology but also requires support from schools, families, and educational policies.

Fifth, all the articles conclude that digital literacy is of the utmost urgency for improving the quality of learning, learning outcomes, and students' readiness to navigate modern digital life. Digital literacy has been shown to increase motivation for technology-based learning and to provide self-protection against digital risks such as misinformation, scams, and privacy violations. Thus, digital literacy is a core competency that must be taught in a structured and sustained manner within the education system.

Overall, this SLR emphasizes that improving students' digital literacy requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including teachers, schools, parents, and the government, as well as effective integration of curriculum and technology. This study also opens the door to further research on the most effective learning models, strategies for improving digital ethics, and ways to strengthen digital literacy in areas with limited access to technology.

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