

Exploration of the Use of Digital Storytelling in Social Studies Learning: A Bibliometric Analysis Study

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - Digital storytelling as a form of technology integration in education has provided a new way of learning Social Studies in elementary schools. Although its effectiveness has been proven in various disciplines, the literature discussing the specific use of digital storytelling in elementary school social studies is still minimal. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring publication patterns, research trends, and collaborations related to the use of digital storytelling in elementary school social studies learning.

Methodology - This study uses a quantitative method with a bibliometric analysis design to identify publication patterns, research trends, and collaboration networks based on quantitative data from journals and scientific articles. Data were obtained from publications in the 2020–2024 period indexed in Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS).

Findings - This study shows a notable rise in digital storytelling research in elementary schools during the first three-quarters of the analysis period, followed by a decline in the final quarter. Keyword analysis highlighted the dominance of "Digital Storytelling" (465 times), with other frequent terms including "Learner" (52), "Social Science" (40), and themes like motivation, perception, and language learning. These findings reflect a growing interest in digital storytelling for social studies, though the recent decline underscores the need for sustained strategies to maintain its relevance and effectiveness in schools.

Significance - This study's implications indicate that implementing digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools has positively impacted student engagement and understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Studies instruction in elementary schools faces distinct challenges in fostering student interest and engagement. Many students perceive Social Studies as overly theoretical, irrelevant to their daily lives, and lacking in excitement (Mariati et al., 2021). This perception contributes to unsatisfactory learning outcomes

and a limited internalization of the social values that the subject aims to instill. Consequently, there is a growing need for innovative pedagogical approaches to present content in more meaningful, contextual, and engaging ways for young learners (Miguel-Revilla et al., 2020; Russell & Waters, 2020).

One promising approach is digital storytelling, which combines narrative techniques with multimedia elements such as images, audio, and video to deliver instructional content (Kim & Li, 2021; Park et al., 2021). Digital storytelling enables students to grasp abstract concepts better, fosters active participation, and enhances critical thinking and digital literacy skills (Peshevska & Koceska, 2024). This method has demonstrated effectiveness in various learning contexts, including writing instruction in Indonesian language courses and reinforcing social and cultural understanding (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Gachago et al., 2021).

Despite its potential, integrating digital storytelling in Social Studies education at the elementary level remains underexplored—particularly from a bibliometric perspective. Previous studies (Davey & Benjaminsen, 2021; Noble & Gachago, 2022) have not sufficiently analyzed trends, publication patterns, and research gaps concerning digital storytelling within this subject area and education level, representing a significant research gap. A bibliometric approach can help map the landscape of current studies, identify influential scholars and institutions, and reveal under-investigated areas for future research (Tian et al., 2021).

Digital-based pedagogical innovations have been shown to enhance student motivation and accommodate diverse learning styles, especially in today’s digital-native generation (Faridha, 2024; George, 2024). Manganello and Rampulla (2023) highlight that technology-enhanced learning enables more personalized, collaborative, and interactive educational experiences—qualities that align with the nature of Social Studies. Therefore, educators must continuously improve their digital competencies and explore innovative methods like digital storytelling to enrich Social Studies instruction (Suriadi & Akhyar, 2024).

Based on the background above, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of research on digital storytelling in elementary Social Studies education. It examines scholarly publications indexed in databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus to identify prevailing trends, key contributors, dominant keywords, and emerging opportunities for further investigation. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to educational theory and offer strategic recommendations for elementary education practitioners seeking to integrate digital storytelling effectively and sustainably into Social Studies classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative approach with a bibliometric design to examine publication patterns, research trends, and scientific collaboration networks related to digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools. Bibliometrics is a quantitative analysis method of scientific literature through statistical techniques, such as citation analysis, author collaboration, and keyword distribution (Ellegaard, 2018; Passas, 2024). This approach is considered the most relevant for studying the development of a particular topic systematically and objectively because it can map the knowledge landscape, identify influential researchers or institutions, and show research directions and gaps (Ahmid, 2022; Donthu et al., 2021). In social studies learning in elementary schools, bibliometrics allows researchers to trace the extent to which the digital storytelling approach has been applied, discussed, and developed globally.

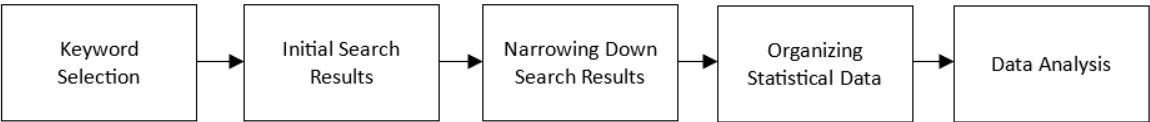


Figure 1. Bibliometric Analysis Procedure

The data in this study were obtained from three primary databases, namely Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS), with a publication period limited to between 2020 and 2024. However, in practice, articles originating from WoS are not detailed separately because this study focuses not on comparing sources but on the overall contribution of literature relevant to the topic. A total of 500 articles were taken based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) published scientific articles (not books, theses, or reports); (2) published in the period 2020–2024; (3) written in English or Indonesian; and (4) relevantly discussing the topic of digital

storytelling in learning, especially elementary social studies learning. Articles not meeting these criteria, such as duplication, articles unavailable in full format, or irrelevant to the topic, are eliminated at the initial selection stage.

The data collection process was carried out with the help of Publish or Perish (PoP) software version 8.0 (Harzing, 2011), using the keywords "digital storytelling," "social studies," and "learning." Data was stored in RIS (Research Information System) format to facilitate the following process. Bibliometric analysis was carried out using VOSviewer software and Microsoft Excel. Initial data in CSV format, such as author names, keywords, titles, and abstracts, was prepared for metadata management. The author used the complete counting method to analyze relationships between keywords and set a minimum threshold for word occurrences in VOSviewer (Bukar et al., 2023).

The data analysis flow in this study began with searching and downloading articles through PoP, followed by filtering based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. Furthermore, article metadata was processed in Microsoft Excel for data verification and refinement. The curated files were then imported into VOSviewer to be visualized in three forms: network visualization, density visualization, and overlay visualization (Wong, 2018). This visualization allows researchers to understand the relationship between topics, identify dominant trends, and map important actors in related literature. The bibliometric approach in this study provides a quantitative overview of the development of digital storytelling topics in social studies learning at the elementary level. It produces a visual mapping that can be used to develop further research and make evidence-based educational policies.

FINDINGS

Publication and Citation Trends

Over the past five years (2020–2024), the trend of publications on the application of digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools has shown positive but non-linear development. Data from Publish or Perish shows 493 publications, a significant increase since 202, peaking in 2022 and 2023 (108 publications each) before decreasing in 2024 to 97. The following table shows the publication trend over the five years.

Table 1. Publication Trends

Year	Publication
2020	79
2021	101
2022	108
2023	108
2024	97

The results of the publication data search using Publish or Perish for five years (2020–2024) show a positive trend. In the early years, publications increased significantly, especially in the first three quarters of the study period. The number of publications increased from 101 to 108, reflecting increasing interest and attention to the studied topic. This increase indicates that digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools continues to receive academic attention and is developing as a relevant field of study. However, at the end of 2024, the number of publications decreased to 97.

The decline in publications in 2024 can be interpreted from two perspectives. First, there is a possibility of a delay in the indexing process of articles, especially those that have just been published. Second, there is the potential for topic saturation or a shift in research focus to other digital learning approaches. Therefore, this fluctuation reflects the dynamics of publications and illustrates the direction of scientific development and the challenges in maintaining the relevance of digital learning methods such as digital storytelling. The trend visualization (Figure 2) confirms this fluctuation and shows that attention to this topic remains relatively high despite the decline.

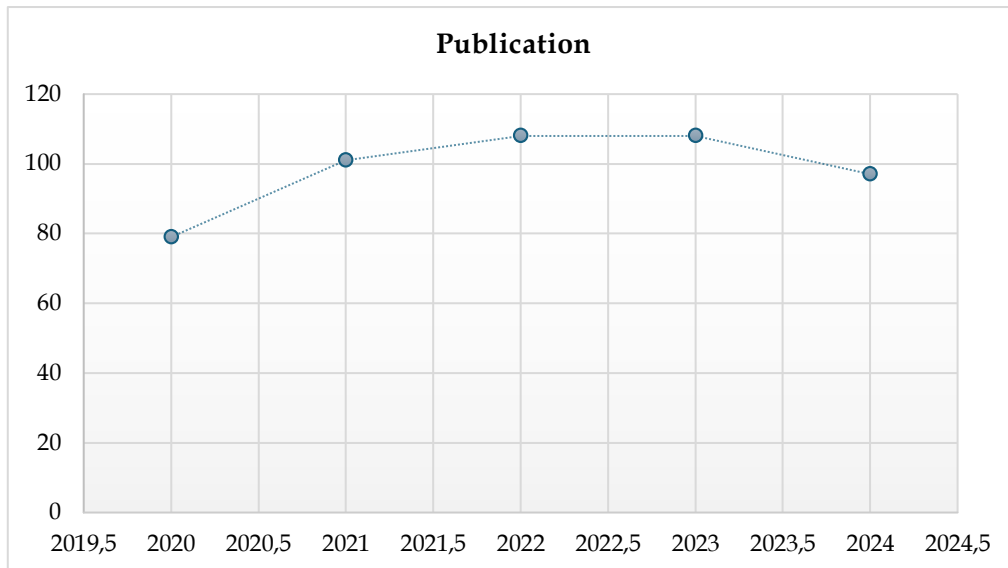


Figure 2. Publication Trend Diagram

Figure 2 shows Citation data showing that the peak of academic influence occurred in 2020. The high number of citations is inseparable from several publications that are the primary references, such as Bond et al. (2020), which reached 9,476. However, there was a sharp decline in 2023 and 2024. This decline generally does not only indicate a decline in relevance but rather more about the time required for new publications to gain exposure and citations. Publication and citation trends are interrelated. The spike in publications in 2022 did not immediately impact citations because citations take time (citation lag). Therefore, the decline in citations in 2024 does not necessarily reflect a decline in the quality or significance of research but is part of the normal cycle in the academic world.

Publication trends will affect the number of citations received in the same period. Therefore, the publication citation trend for five years (2020–2024) is also important in understanding the impact and relevance of research related to digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools. Further details on the distribution of citations during this period can be seen in the following table, which provides a clearer picture of the extent to which these studies are cited and used as references in further studies.

Table 2. Publication Citation Trend

Year	TP	TC	NCP	H	G
2020	194	52812	129	129	194
2021	152	30148	106	106	152
2022	102	28895	90	90	102
2023	37	5271	33	33	37
2024	15	1856	13	13	15

Note: TP: total of publications, TC: total citations, NCP: number of cited publications, H: h-index, G: g-index

Table 2 shows that in 2020, the Number of Cited Publications (NCP) reached its highest number, with 129 cited publications and 52,812 citations. This reflects the high academic impact of the research published in that year. However, this trend gradually decreased in the following years, with the number of cited publications and total citations decreasing. In 2024, the number dropped drastically to only 13 cited publications, with 1,856 citations, indicating that recent publications still need time to gain wider recognition and citations in the academic community. This study presents the five publications with the highest number of citations in 2020, reflecting significant contributions to developing digital storytelling studies in social studies learning. Further details about these publications are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Most Cited Publications in 2020

Author's	Title's	Journal's	Number of Citations
(Bond et al., 2020)	Mapping Research in Student Engagement and Educational Technology in Higher Education: A Systematic Evidence Map	International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education	9476
(Falloon, 2020)	From Digital Literacy to Digital Competence: The Teacher Digital Competency (TDC) Framework	Educational Technology Research and Development	1518
(Kaden, 2020)	COVID-19 School Closure-Related Changes to the Professional Life of a K-12 Teacher	Education Sciences	916
(Teräs et al., 2020)	Post-Covid-19 Education and Education Technology 'Solutionism': A Seller's Market	Postdigital Science and Education	824
(Pencarelli, 2020)	The Digital Revolution in The Travel and Tourism Industry	Information Technology & Tourism	820

Bond et al.'s (2020) research entitled "Mapping Research in Student Engagement and Educational Technology in Higher Education: A Systematic Evidence Map" has been cited 9,476 times, showing its impact on the study of student engagement and educational technology. This study found that digital technology, including digital storytelling, increases student engagement, especially in behavioral aspects. Digital storytelling, as a technology-based learning method, can support affective and cognitive engagement by encouraging interaction, creativity, and critical reflection in learning.

Falloon's (2020) research entitled "From Digital Literacy to Digital Competence: The Teacher Digital Competency (TDC) Framework Map" has been cited 1,518 times, confirming its relevance in developing teacher digital literacy. This study emphasizes that an approach that only focuses on technical skills is insufficient to prepare educators in the digital era. Therefore, a more holistic framework is needed, including aspects of ethics, security, and productive use of technology. This framework in digital storytelling is crucial because this method requires technical skills, a deep pedagogical understanding, and effective technology integration to increase student engagement and learning experiences.

Table 4. Frequently Appearing Keywords

No	Term	Occurrence	Relevance Score
1	Digital Storytelling	472	43.846
2	Study	316	38.377
3	Learner	53	0.5458
4	Social Science	41	0.5481
5	Research	35	0.581
6	Technology	32	0.7553
7	Experience	28	0.5907
8	Storytelling	27	0.7371
9	Context	25	0.4342
10	Motivation	22	0.4932

Previous studies have provided an overview that using digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools has excellent potential to increase student engagement and strengthen conceptual understanding. Falloon's (2020) research highlights the importance of teachers' digital competence in integrating technology effectively, while publication and citation trends show increasing academic attention

to this method. Digital storytelling not only acts as a learning aid but also as a pedagogical strategy that supports experiential learning, digital literacy, and students' critical and creative thinking skills in the digital era. Previous studies that have been analyzed reveal several keywords that often appear related to using digital storytelling in social studies learning in elementary schools. These keywords reflect the research focus, developing topic trends and important aspects studied in related studies. The following table presents the most dominant keywords in the analyzed research.

Table 4 explains the top five keywords frequently appearing, explaining that digital storytelling is dominant in research, especially in Social Science learning in Elementary Schools. The high frequency of keywords in digital storytelling and study shows that this method continues to be the focus of various academic studies. Dominant keywords such as "digital storytelling" and "study" reinforce that this approach is still a significant topic in research. The emergence of "learner" and "social science" shows the pedagogical orientation and discipline of the targeted field. The relationship between these keywords shows that digital storytelling has a cross-aspect role, from technology and motivation to learning experience. However, there is still a research gap in systematic exploration and comprehensive integration with the context of social studies learning, as seen from the low number of keywords such as "systematic review" and "participant." A recapitulation of data regarding the most frequently appearing keywords can be seen in the following diagram.

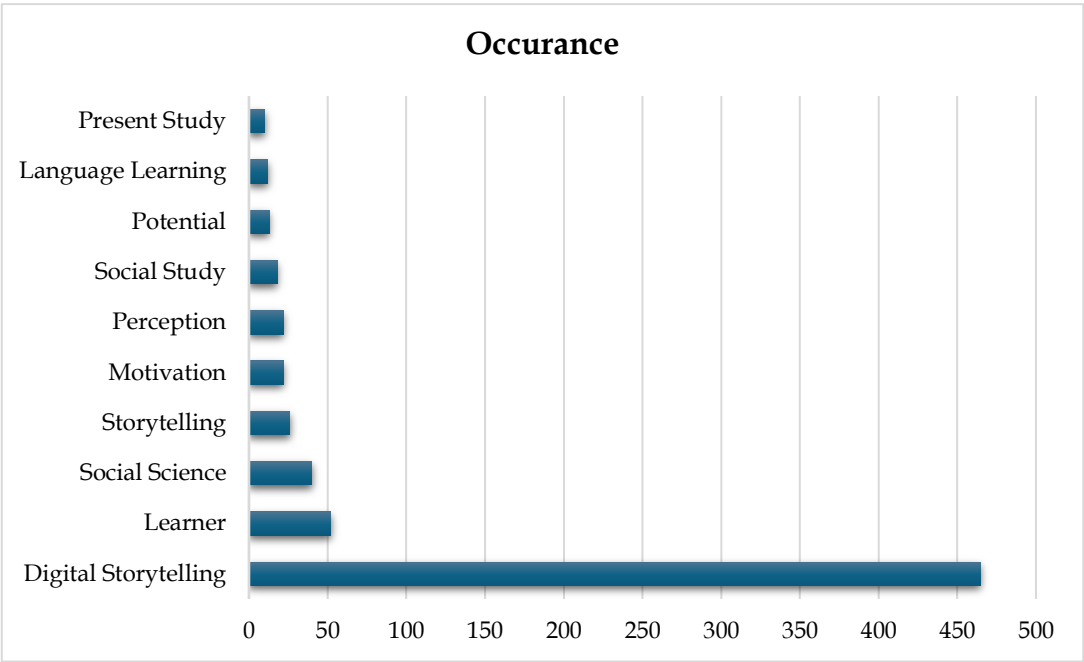


Figure 3. Diagram Frequently Appearing Keywords

Diagram 3 shows the frequency of keywords related to digital storytelling in Social Studies learning in Elementary Schools. Digital Storytelling has the highest frequency of occurrence compared to other keywords, indicating that this method is the main topic in research and discussion related to Social Studies learning. This indicates that digital storytelling is not only focused on learning methods but is also closely related to the subject of learning and its impact on students. The research focus can also be seen from the Network Visualization, which displays 29 keywords used in this analysis. The following is a recapitulation of the Network Visualization image, which provides further insight into the relationship between the keywords in this study.

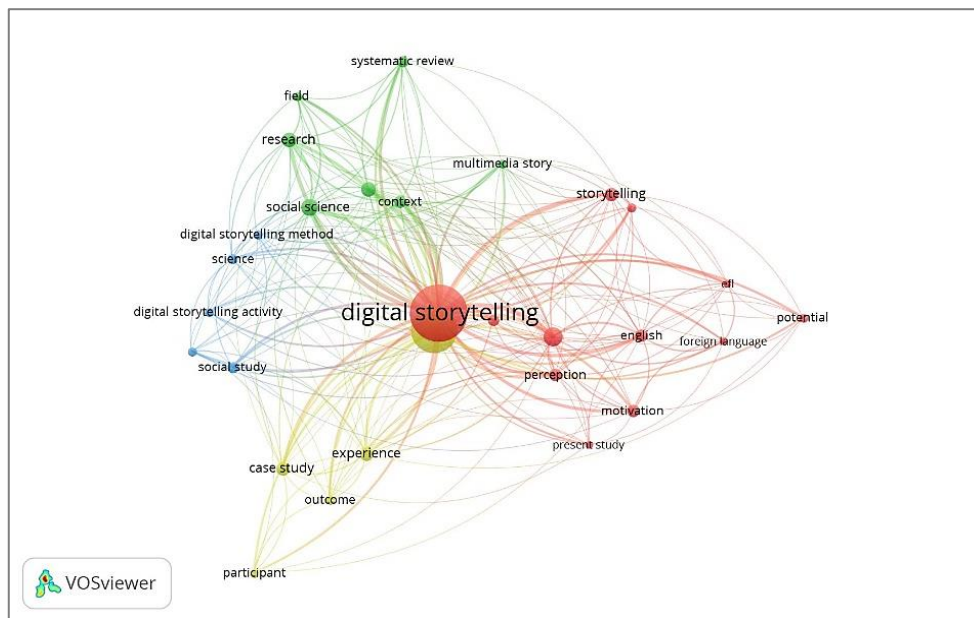


Figure 4. Research Network Visualization

Figure 4 shows the relationship between keywords often appearing in research on Digital Storytelling in Social Studies learning in Elementary Schools. The research focus pattern can be analyzed through clusters marked with different colors in the circle, representing groups of keywords with close relationships. This research is divided into three main clusters based on the relationship between keywords: 1) Red Cluster (14 items) – Focusing on storytelling, perception, motivation, and English, indicating that this research highlights the role of Digital Storytelling in perception, motivation, and language learning. 2) Green Cluster (11 items) – Dominated by education, science, technology, and development, the research is more oriented towards technology-based and science-based education. 3) Blue Cluster (8 items) – Centering on environment and experience, emphasizing how Digital Storytelling creates a more immersive and practical learning experience. Digital storytelling not only acts as a tool for learning Social Studies but also broadly impacts aspects of motivation, technology, and students' learning experiences. The relationship between keywords in this network also indicates that research on Digital Storytelling in Social Studies learning in Elementary Schools is still limited, thus opening opportunities for further research. Further recapitulation results can be seen in the following Research Visualization Overlay.

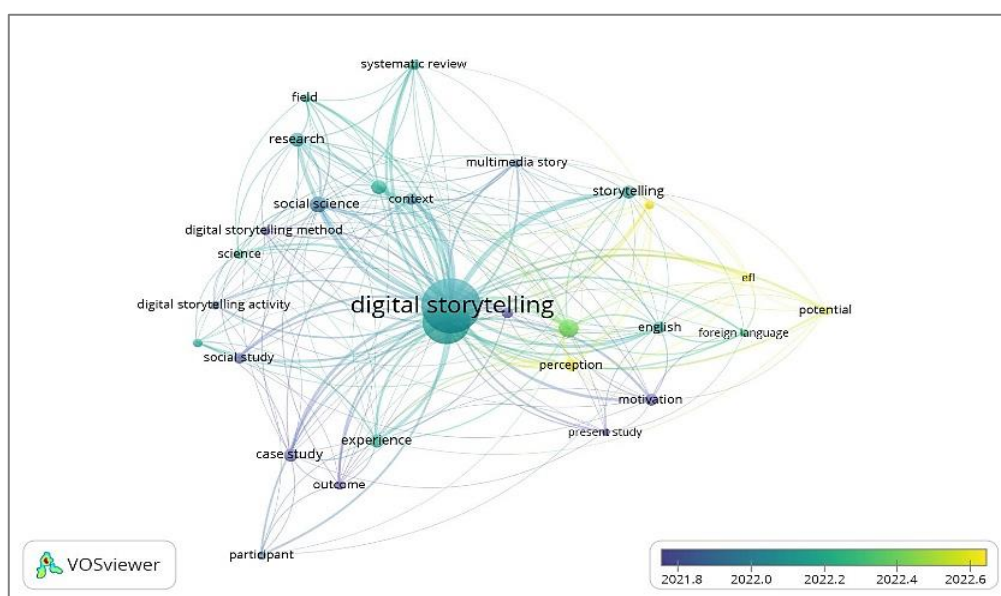


Figure 5. Research Visualization Overlay

Figure 5 (Overlay Visualization) illustrates the development of digital storytelling research themes in social studies learning through color gradation based on publication time. The blue color indicates old themes that focus on basic digital storytelling concepts and methods. In contrast, the yellow color represents the latest research directions that begin to explore more specific and applicable aspects. This visualization indicates that although digital storytelling remains a significant topic, its application in social studies learning is still limited. This opens opportunities for further research to strengthen the integration of digital storytelling in social studies education, both in terms of effectiveness, understanding of social concepts, and application of technology. The dominance and distribution of this topic can be further analyzed through Density Visualization in the following figure.



Figure 6. Density Visualization of Research

Figure 6 (Density Visualization) displays the intensity of keyword occurrences in digital storytelling research. Light colors indicate frequently discussed topics such as "digital storytelling," "social science," and "learner," which emphasize the research focus on the implementation of this method in social studies learning and student engagement. In contrast, dark colors on keywords such as "participant," "systematic review," and "field" reflect the lack of in-depth studies on aspects of student participation and systematic approaches. This finding indicates a research gap that can be further developed in elementary education learning.

DISCUSSION

Integrating technology into the modern educational landscape has opened new opportunities to enrich the learning process, especially at the elementary level (Beazidou et al., 2024). Digital Storytelling, a method combining narrative and multimedia elements, has gained widespread recognition for enhancing student engagement and understanding (Hong & Wu, 2023; Karimian et al., 2024; Tina et al., 2023). Especially in elementary school Social Studies learning, digital storytelling offers an untapped opportunity to deepen students' understanding of the subject (Saritepeci, 2021). Although its effectiveness has been proven in various disciplines, literature discussing its use in social studies learning is still minimal.

Digital storytelling in elementary school Social Studies learning can be a significant tool if appropriately applied. Integrating digital and narrative elements in elementary school social studies allows for a more active learning process, often considered dry and dull (Abimbade et al., 2023). Digital storytelling learning can be presented more interactively and interestingly. This approach is essential because how the material is delivered can significantly affect how well students absorb and understand the lesson (Rose & Detlor, 2021). Through digital storytelling, students hear or read about historical facts or geographical concepts and see and feel the story behind the facts through simulations, animations, and engaging visuals (Putri & Sanjaya, 2021; Ryan & Aasetre, 2021).

The empirical results of this study further support those assumptions. After applying digital storytelling-based instruction for three learning cycles, students' critical thinking skills improved significantly, as reflected in a 21-point average increase in assessment scores (Ana & Handayani, 2023; Fitri et al., 2021). In-class observations also indicated a rise in active participation from 56% to 83%, while post-learning questionnaires revealed that 82% of students reported a better understanding of cultural diversity topics (Nasir et al., 2024; Yasar-Akyar et al., 2022). These findings validate that digital storytelling enhances engagement and fosters a deeper cognitive and affective experience of social studies content.

The use of digital storytelling in elementary social studies education also supports the formation of a strong learning foundation for students (Milano et al., 2023). At a very young age, actively engaging with the subject matter is key to continued cognitive development. Digital storytelling provides a platform for students to receive knowledge passively and interact with the material (Shiri et al., 2022; Simsek, 2020). Digital storytelling helps students understand and apply what they learn in real or hypothetical scenarios (Pordelan et al., 2021). This approach improves their ability to think critically and solve problems, which are essential skills they will carry throughout their academic and professional lives (Gürsoy, 2021). Unlike prior studies, which mainly explored literacy or science content, the current study extends digital storytelling to a new domain—social studies—highlighting its potential to bridge conceptual knowledge and civic understanding at the elementary level.

The relevance of this method becomes even more pronounced when examined in the Indonesian context (Mirza, 2020; Solichah & Hidayah, 2022). By embedding local narratives, traditional wisdom, and regional historical events into digital stories, the learning process becomes culturally responsive and emotionally resonant for students (Morra, 2016; Yuliani et al., 2021). Using locally rooted storytelling helped students better relate to the material, especially in topics like cultural heritage and social harmony (Narawi et al., 2020; Nuroh et al., 2022). This culturally contextualized approach preserves national identity and promotes inclusivity and relevance in a diverse educational setting like Indonesia.

The findings of this study have substantial implications for educators and policymakers. For classroom teachers, digital storytelling offers an effective pedagogical tool that integrates cognitive, social, and digital competencies (Churchill & Barratt-Pugh, 2020). It enables more meaningful classroom interactions and promotes student-centered learning. This study supports revising social studies frameworks for curriculum developers and educational authorities to incorporate multimedia literacy and narrative-based methodologies that address 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, collaboration, and empathy (Ratri, 2022; Shahid & Khan, 2022).

Although this study contributes to filling a significant gap in the literature, several areas remain for further exploration. Future research may investigate how digital storytelling influences students' moral and civic character development, particularly empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility. It would also be valuable to compare the effects of digital storytelling between urban and rural schools in Indonesia or to examine the impact of student-generated stories on knowledge retention and identity formation. These questions can deepen our understanding of digital storytelling's role in character education in elementary social studies.

Investing in digital storytelling is an investment in the future of inclusive and practical education (Humairoh, 2023; Trimboli, 2020). In the long run, this will change how students view and understand social studies and broaden their horizons toward learning in general (Fadli et al., 2024). Digital storytelling paves the way for a more interactive and holistic education, ensuring that students do not just passively receive information but become active participants in the formation of their knowledge.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study provides empirical and conceptual contributions to strengthening the role of digital storytelling as an innovative approach to learning social studies in elementary schools. Integrating visual, narrative, and interactive elements, digital storytelling has been proven to increase student engagement, deepen understanding of social concepts, and encourage the development of critical and

analytical thinking skills from an early age. These findings confirm that digital storytelling is a learning tool and a relevant pedagogical strategy for building meaningful and contextual learning in the 21st century.

This study recommends that teachers and curriculum developers utilize digital storytelling as part of a social studies learning strategy that is participatory, based on local context, and supports learning differentiation. Digital narratives taken from local Indonesian culture and values have been proven to increase students' emotional closeness to learning materials and strengthen the formation of national identity and social attitudes. Further research is recommended to explore the influence of digital storytelling on student character formation, especially in aspects of empathy, tolerance, and social responsibility. Comparative research between regions (urban-rural), as well as experimental studies related to student involvement in the digital story production process, also provide opportunities that can enrich the understanding of the effectiveness of this approach in basic social studies education more broadly.

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