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Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking Among University Students in Evaluating Indonesian-Language Information in Digital Media: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT
The rapid development of digital media has transformed the way university students access and consume Indonesian-language information. This accessibility is not always accompanied by adequate information evaluation skills, making students vulnerable to misinformation and misleading content. This article aims to examine the conceptual relationship between digital literacy and critical thinking skills among university students, particularly in the context of evaluating Indonesian-language information in digital media. The study employs a narrative literature review approach by collecting and synthesizing relevant scholarly sources including journal articles, undergraduate theses, graduate theses, and academic books. The discussion focuses on four main areas: the concept and dimensions of digital literacy, the concept of critical thinking skills, students' ability to evaluate digital information, and the interconnection between these two competencies in the context of language education. The review suggests that digital literacy and critical thinking are two complementary and inseparable competencies in the information evaluation process. Students with strong digital literacy tend to be better positioned to apply critical thinking when engaging with information in digital spaces. This study is expected to inform the development of Indonesian language learning practices that integrate both competencies in an integrated manner.

Keywords: digital literacy, critical thinking skills, information evaluation, digital media, literature review

Literasi Digital dan Berpikir Kritis Mahasiswa dalam Evaluasi Informasi Berbahasa Indonesia di Media Digital: Tinjauan Pustaka

ABSTRAK
Perkembangan media digital yang pesat telah mengubah cara mahasiswa mengakses dan mengonsumsi informasi berbahasa Indonesia. Kemudahan tersebut tidak selalu diimbangi dengan kemampuan evaluasi informasi yang memadai, sehingga mahasiswa rentan terhadap misinformasi dan konten yang menyesatkan. Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji hubungan konseptual antara literasi digital dan kemampuan berpikir kritis mahasiswa, khususnya dalam konteks evaluasi informasi berbahasa Indonesia di media digital. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka naratif dengan menghimpun dan mensintesis sumber-sumber ilmiah yang relevan meliputi artikel jurnal, skripsi, tesis, dan buku akademik. Pembahasan difokuskan pada empat pokok: konsep dan dimensi literasi digital, konsep kemampuan berpikir kritis, kemampuan mahasiswa dalam mengevaluasi informasi digital, serta keterkaitan antara kedua kompetensi tersebut dalam konteks pendidikan bahasa. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa literasi digital dan berpikir kritis merupakan dua kompetensi yang saling melengkapi dan tidak dapat dipisahkan dalam proses evaluasi informasi. Mahasiswa yang memiliki literasi digital yang baik cenderung mampu memanfaatkan keterampilan tersebut sebagai landasan berpikir kritis ketika menghadapi informasi di ruang digital. Kajian ini diharapkan menjadi bahan pertimbangan dalam mengembangkan pembelajaran bahasa Indonesia yang mengintegrasikan kedua kompetensi tersebut secara terpadu.

Kata kunci: literasi digital, berpikir kritis, mahasiswa, evaluasi informasi, media digital

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INTRODUCTION

The development of information and communication technology has brought fundamental changes to the academic lives of university students. Digital media—particularly social media and information-sharing platforms—have become primary sources for students to access various types of information in Indonesian, ranging from current news and educational content to public opinion. While the ease of accessing such information offers significant benefits to the learning process, it also presents substantial challenges, particularly concerning the quality and veracity of the information in circulation.

The phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation within the digital sphere has become a serious concern globally, including in Indonesia. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics of the Republic of Indonesia identifies thousands of pieces of false content (hoaxes) each year—a figure that tends to rise in tandem with the growing use of social media (Ministry of Communication and Informatics, 2022). This reality leaves students in a vulnerable position if they lack the necessary skills to filter and evaluate the information they encounter.

In this context, digital literacy emerges as a crucial competency. Digital literacy extends beyond the technical ability to operate digital devices; it encompasses more complex skills, such as the capacity to search for, comprehend, evaluate, and utilize information in a critical and responsible manner (Gilster, 1997; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Research indicates that a high level of digital literacy correlates with a student's ability to identify inaccurate information and make wiser decisions when consuming digital content (Arinda et al., 2024; Sudianto et al., 2025).

Critical thinking is an inseparable dimension of digital literacy. Critical thinking is a cognitive process aimed at systematically analyzing information, evaluating the validity of arguments, identifying underlying assumptions, and drawing conclusions based on robust evidence (Paul & Elder, 2020; Facione, 1990). Students with strong critical thinking skills do not readily accept information at face value; instead, they subject it to verification and in-depth analysis.

The issue becomes more specific when considered within the context of the Indonesian language. As a language spoken by over 270 million people, Indonesian serves as the primary medium for the dissemination of information across various digital platforms in Indonesia. However, the unique characteristics of the Indonesian language—including the variation between written and spoken registers on social media, the use of abbreviations, code-switching, and distinct discourse structures—present specific challenges for the evaluation of information (Kusmiatun, 2022). Students in Indonesian Language and Literature Education programs—future educators who will one day guide the next generation—must possess sharp information-evaluation skills within the language they study. Although the topics of digital literacy and critical thinking have been widely explored, most existing studies remain partial or focus on only one of these variables. Research specifically addressing the relationship between these two competencies in the context of evaluating information in Indonesian is still limited. Therefore, this article seeks to bridge this gap through a narrative and analytical literature review.

This article aims to: (1) explain the concepts and dimensions of digital literacy relevant to the evaluation of digital information; (2) outline the concept of critical thinking skills within an academic context; (3) discuss students' abilities to evaluate information on digital media; (4) synthesize the relationship between digital literacy and critical thinking; and (5) explain the implications of these two competencies for students of Indonesian Language and Literature Education.

METHOD

This article was developed using a narrative literature review approach. This approach was chosen because it allows the author to collect,

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organize, and synthesize various relevant scholarly sources to build a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the topic under study, without the need for primary data collection from respondents. The literature search focused on three main themes: digital literacy, critical thinking skills, and the evaluation of information in digital media. Keywords used in the search included "digital literacy," "critical thinking," "information evaluation," "digital media," and "social media." The sources utilized in this study include scholarly journal articles, undergraduate theses, master's theses, doctoral dissertations, and academic books. The selection of literature was based on its relevance—both conceptual and contextual—to the topic at hand. Priority was given to sources that address digital literacy or critical thinking within the context of higher education and the use of digital media. Books serving as primary theoretical references were selected based on their significant influence on the development of concepts regarding digital literacy and critical thinking.

The synthesis process involved categorizing information from various sources into key themes aligned with the objectives of this article, followed by comparing and contrasting existing perspectives to construct a coherent argument. This approach is analytical rather than merely summarizing sources individually, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the conceptual relationships between the variables under examination.

RESULTS

1. Concepts and Dimensions of Digital Literacy

The term "digital literacy" was first popularized by Gilster (1997), who defined it as the ability to understand and use information in various formats from a wide range of sources via a computer. This definition has since evolved in tandem with changes in the information technology landscape. Eshet-Alkalai (2004) expanded upon this concept by identifying five dimensions of digital literacy: photo-visual literacy, reproduction literacy, branching literacy, information literacy, and socio-emotional literacy. These five dimensions reflect the fact that digital literacy encompasses not only technical skills but also the cognitive and social abilities required to interact with digital information.

Hobbs (2010) provided a more operational framework, stating that digital literacy competence includes the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act upon information obtained from various media sources and formats. This framework emphasizes that digital literacy is an active process involving critical engagement with media content, rather than mere passive reception. In a similar vein, Calvani et al. (2008) assert that true digital literacy is an individual's ability to navigate digital environments flexibly while maintaining a critical awareness of the information acquired.

In the Indonesian context, Prayogi and Estetika (2019) describe digital literacy as the ability to use information and communication technology to locate, evaluate, utilize, create, and communicate content or information, requiring both cognitive and technical proficiency. This perspective underscores that, even within a local context, digital literacy is understood as a dual-dimensional competence: technical and critical. Students who are merely able to access information without the capacity to assess its quality cannot be considered to possess adequate digital literacy. The dimension of information evaluation within digital literacy encompasses the ability to examine the credibility of sources, verify the accuracy of facts, recognize potential biases, and consider the motivations behind the content being produced. These skills do not emerge spontaneously; rather, they must be cultivated through structured learning and experience in interacting with various types of digital information (Mossberger et al., 2008). Without deliberate development, students tend to rely on simple heuristics when assessing information—such as trusting sources that appear professional or content that has been widely shared—without giving deeper consideration to aspects of accuracy and credibility.

2. The Concept of Critical Thinking Skills

Critical thinking represents one of the highest-level competencies within cognitive taxonomies and has long been a primary focus in higher education. Facione (1990) defines critical thinking as purposeful, reflective judgment, which includes the processes of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. This definition has become a widely used reference due to its comprehensive nature, encompassing high-level cognitive dimensions that are relevant to academic requirements. Paul and Elder (2020) developed a framework for critical thinking that emphasizes how effective critical thinkers actively challenge existing assumptions, evaluate arguments based on rigorous intellectual standards, and consistently strive to think clearly, accurately, precisely, relevantly, and logically. This framework positions critical thinking not merely as a cognitive ability, but also as a disposition—an intellectual attitude that requires continuous development.

In the context of higher education in Indonesia, Suryanto et al. (2021) note that students' critical thinking skills still require serious attention. Their research indicates that many students are more accustomed to a "reproductive" mode of thinking—receiving and repeating information—rather than a "productive" mode, which demands the analysis, evaluation, and creation of new ideas. This situation is influenced by several factors, including pedagogical approaches that remain dominated by one-way lectures, a lack of practice in argumentative debate, and a scarcity of assignments that require the critical evaluation of information sources.

Ennis (1993) distilled the indicators of critical thinking into observable skills, including: (1) clearly formulating problems; (2) seeking and utilizing relevant evidence; (3) considering diverse perspectives; (4) recognizing the assumptions underlying a claim; and (5) drawing logical, well-justified conclusions. These five indicators are highly relevant to the process of evaluating information in digital media, where students are expected not just to read, but also to question and verify what they read.

METHOD

were then coded according to the categories of cultural hybridity and technological dystopia, while documentation involved compiling the excerpts and supporting sources. Data analysis was carried out by identifying and classifying the excerpts based on the research categories, followed by an interpretation of their meanings within the context of the narrative. Data concerning cultural hybridity were analyzed using the concepts of Homi K. Bhabha, while the technological dystopia was examined through the ideas of N. Katherine Hayles within a posthumanist framework. The results of the analysis are described and summarized in alignment with the research focus, then structured as a discussion within the thesis.

It is important to note that critical thinking is not an innate ability; rather, it can be developed through practice and targeted instruction (Halpern, 2014). Therefore, instructional designs that explicitly foster critical thinking skills should be integrated into higher education curricula, including within language and literature study programs.

3. Students' Ability to Evaluate Digital Information

Research on students' ability to evaluate digital information presents a rather concerning picture. McGrew et al. (2018) found that students at various academic levels consistently struggle to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources of information, even when given ample time to conduct research. Students tend to assess the credibility of a source based on the visual appearance of a webpage, rather than on the author's identity, institutional affiliation, or whether a publication has undergone a peer-review process.

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In the Indonesian context, research by Arinda et al. (2024) indicates that students are generally not in the habit of checking an author's background or the publication date when consuming information on social media. Many students share information without first verifying it—particularly when the information aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. This phenomenon relates to what is known in the literature as "confirmation bias"—the tendency to accept information that confirms one's existing views while rejecting information that contradicts them. The ability to distinguish between facts and opinions also poses a significant challenge for students. In a large-scale study, the Stanford History Education Group (2016) found that most students—at both the secondary and tertiary levels—struggle to recognize when an argument or claim is merely an opinion unsupported by facts. This situation is exacerbated by common practices on social media, where opinions, interpretations, and even misinformation are frequently presented in a format that mimics credible news reporting.

Sudianto et al. (2025) specifically addresses the challenges of digital literacy and critical thinking in the era of social media in Indonesia. They note that the characteristics of Indonesia's information ecosystem—including a high number of social media users, a diversity of dialects and linguistic variations within digital content, and a limited tradition of fact-checking among the general public—create challenges that differ from those found in countries with more advanced digital literacy education.

Kusmiatun (2022) adds a linguistic dimension to this issue. She observes that the varieties of the Indonesian language used on social media are highly diverse, ranging from standard Indonesian and colloquial slang to mixtures of Indonesian with foreign or regional languages. This variation can complicate the process of evaluating information, as individuals must first grasp the meaning of a text within the context of its specific linguistic variety before they can assess the credibility of the information itself. A lack of proper understanding regarding these linguistic nuances can lead to the misinterpretation of the intent and content of the information.

4. The Connection between Digital Literacy and Critical Thinking

The relationship between digital literacy and critical thinking skills has become a topic of increasing interest in educational research. Conceptually, the two share a substantial common ground: both require individuals to go beyond the passive acceptance of information, demanding instead that they actively and reflectively process, assess, and respond to it (Calvani et al., 2008; Facione, 1990).

Hobbs (2010) argues that digital literacy is, in essence, the application of critical thinking within the context of digital media. A digitally literate individual employs critical thinking processes whenever they access information—questioning sources, considering the motivations of content creators, examining presented evidence, and evaluating the consistency of the arguments being constructed. Thus, digital literacy and critical thinking are not separate entities, but rather two sides of the same coin in the effective evaluation of information.

This perspective is reinforced by research from Arinda et al. (2024), which identified a significant link between students' levels of digital literacy and their critical thinking skills. Students with higher digital literacy tend to demonstrate superior critical thinking when evaluating digital information. This relationship is reciprocal: strong digital literacy supports the development of critical thinking, while robust critical thinking skills enable students to utilize digital resources more effectively and responsibly.

Nevertheless, some researchers caution that the relationship between these two variables is neither automatic nor linear. Mossberger et al. (2008) emphasize that access to and use of digital technology do not, in themselves, enhance critical thinking skills. Even students who are highly active

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in using digital media do not necessarily possess better information-evaluation abilities than those who use it less frequently—provided that such usage is not accompanied by an adequate level of critical awareness. This suggests that structured educational interventions are essential to optimize the relationship between these two competencies. Sudianto et al. (2025) reinforce this argument by stating that meaningful digital literacy in the era of social media requires the explicit development of critical thinking skills, rather than merely enhancing technical proficiency in using digital platforms. Students need to be guided to cultivate the habit of questioning the information they receive, tracing it back to its original source, comparing different versions of the information, and refraining from disseminating unverified content.

DISCUSSION

For students in the Indonesian Language and Literature Education study program, the mastery of digital literacy and critical thinking holds multifaceted relevance. As prospective educators, they must not only possess these competencies for their own personal benefit but also be capable of designing and implementing instruction that helps their future students develop the same skills. From the perspective of applied linguistics, the ability to analyze texts critically lies at the core of advanced reading competence. Language education students trained in discourse analysis and pragmatics possess a solid conceptual foundation for understanding how language is employed to shape opinions, influence perceptions, and even disseminate misinformation (Prayogi & Estetika, 2019). Consequently, the integration of digital literacy into the language education curriculum is not merely relevant—it is essential.

Kusmiatun (2022) specifically emphasizes that Indonesian language instruction in the digital era must account for linguistic phenomena emerging within digital spaces, including language usage patterns on social media, persuasive strategies in digital content, and the characteristics of online news discourse. An understanding of these phenomena will enable language education students to become not only critical consumers of information but also educators capable of guiding their own students to navigate the digital information landscape intelligently.

The integration of digital literacy and critical thinking into Indonesian language instruction can be realized through various pedagogical strategies. Halpern (2014) recommends an instructional approach that incorporates tasks such as evaluating authentic information, engaging in argumentative discussions, and practicing metacognitive reflection—all of which are effective methods for fostering both critical thinking and digital literacy. In the context of language learning, these strategies could be implemented, for instance, through the critical analysis of Indonesian-language news articles, the comparison of coverage on the same issue across different sources, or assignments requiring students to fact-check information circulating on social media. Beyond pedagogical aspects, Ennis (1993) also emphasizes the importance of a learning environment that fosters the development of critical thinking—an environment that values inquiry, encourages healthy skepticism, and provides students with the space to question information without fear of reproach. Such an academic culture must be consistently cultivated within language education programs so that students become accustomed to thinking critically, not only when prompted, but also spontaneously throughout their academic and social lives.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital literacy and critical thinking are two competencies that are conceptually interconnected and functionally mutually reinforcing in the process of evaluating digital information. Digital literacy provides the framework and the technical and cognitive skills

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necessary to navigate a complex information environment, while critical thinking serves as an internal mechanism that enables individuals to assess, question, and engage with information in a reflective and responsible manner.

University students—including those in Indonesian Language and Literature Education programs—face significant challenges in evaluating Indonesian-language information within digital media. The diversity of language varieties, the prevalence of misinformation, and the specific characteristics of Indonesia's digital information ecosystem create an urgent need for the integrated development of both competencies within higher education.

A synthesis of the various scholarly sources examined in this article points to several key findings. First, meaningful digital literacy cannot be separated from critical thinking, as the effective evaluation of information requires both simultaneously. Second, the relationship between these two competencies is not automatic; therefore, deliberate and structured pedagogical interventions are essential to optimize their development. Third, within the context of Indonesian language education, the ability to analyze texts critically can serve as an effective bridge for integrating digital literacy into language instruction.

This study does not aim to establish a statistically measurable empirical relationship between these two variables, as it is not based on the collection of primary data from respondents. Nevertheless, by synthesizing existing research and theoretical perspectives, this study provides a robust conceptual foundation for future empirical inquiry. It also serves as a reference for curriculum developers and Indonesian language educators who wish to integrate digital literacy and critical thinking into their instructional design.

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