JOLLS: Journal of Language and Literature Studies
Website: https://journal-center.litpam.com/index.php/jolls/index
Email: jolls@litpam.com
DOI: https://doi.org/ 10.36312/jolls.v5i1.2635

March 2025 Vol. 5, No. 1
e-ISSN: 2808-1099
pp. 216-225

Strengthening Multimodal Literacy through Digital Literary Text Learning: Enhancing Students' Achievement in the Age of Disruption

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Received: January 2025; Revised: February 2025; Published: March 2025

Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology necessitates a transformative approach to literary education that extends beyond verbal literacy to embrace multimodal competencies (visual, auditory, interactive). This study aims to analyze the potential of digital literary texts as a medium for enhancing multimodal literacy amidst the challenges of the disruptive era, while identifying the enabling and constraining factors in its implementation within Indonesian educational contexts. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through case studies of literature instruction in three urban-based senior high schools, participatory observation of digital platforms (interactive e-books, literary webtoons, and short-story podcasts), and in-depth interviews with teachers and students. The analysis utilized Kress & van Leeuwen's multimodal literacy theory and Paul Gilster's digital pedagogy framework. Findings reveal that integrating multimodal elements—such as animated illustrations in poetry, hyperlinks in interactive narratives, and dramatic audio effects—significantly enhances students' critical deconstruction of textual meanings and fosters learning motivation. However, disparities in digital infrastructure access and teachers' limited technological proficiency emerge as primary barriers. The study recommends training programs for teachers in designing digital literature lessons using accessible tools (e.g., Canva, Book Creator) and fostering school-community partnerships with digital literacy initiatives. This research contributes to developing disruption-responsive literacy strategies and enriches Indonesian literary heritage through digital adaptation.

Keywords: Multimodal literacy; Digital literary texts; Digital pedagogy; Literature education

How to Cite: Fradana, A.N., Suwarta, N., & Sotlikova, R. (2025). Strengthening Multimodal Literacy through Digital Literary Text Learning: Enhancing Students' Achievement in the Age of Disruption. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies, 5*(1), 216-225. doi: https://doi.org/10.36312/jolls.v5i1.2635

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INTRODUCTION

In an era where social media algorithms curate the stories people read and artificial intelligence (AI) begins composing poetry, Indonesia's literary education stands at a crossroads of crisis and opportunity (Putri, 2023; Naqsyabandiyah & Dehghanitafti, 2023). UNESCO's 2023 report reveals that 71% of global adolescents now prefer literary content in digital formats—such as webtoons, interactive novels, or TikTok storytelling—that blend text, audio, and visuals. Yet, in Indonesian classrooms, literature pedagogy remains trapped in an antiquated dichotomy: preserving the "purity" of printed texts versus addressing the multimodal cravings of a digital-native generation (Kress, 2019; Balki et al., 2022). A 2023 survey by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek) underscores this irony: while 94% of teachers acknowledge the importance of digital literacy, only 12% routinely integrate digital tools

into literature instruction (Christiani et al., 2022). Consequently, Indonesian students' literary engagement has plummeted to 62nd out of 70 countries in the 2022 PISA rankings—a clear emergency demanding urgent redress.

The revolution in multimodal literacy is not merely a trend but an inevitability. A 2023 Pew Research Center study of 5,000 adolescents across 23 countries found that 68% of respondents comprehend complex narratives—such as metaphors or allegories—more effectively when delivered in hybrid formats (text + visuals + audio). In Brazil, for instance, research by Gomes & Lima (2022) demonstrates that digital poetry enhanced with animation boosts students' grasp of literary symbolism by 41%. Meanwhile, in South Korea, platforms like Naver Webtoon have become gateways for 79% of adolescents to engage with classics like Shin Saimdang through fresh, interactive formats (Lee & Park, 2023). Tragically, Indonesia's adaptation to such innovations remains stifled by two barriers: rigid curricula and myths of textual sanctity. A 2022 study by Nugraha et al. across 30 Indonesian high schools reveals that 80% of teachers resist digital literature, fearing it "dilutes textual depth"—a myth debunked by Hayles (2021), who argues that hyperlinks and multimedia in digital texts can, in fact, enrich interpretative possibilities.

Several developing nations have proven that multimodal literacy and digital literature are not exclusive to advanced economies. In Malaysia, Abdullah & Tan (2020) designed an interactive graphic novel adaptation of *Hikayat Hang Tuah*, embedding interactive maps and traditional storytellers' audio recordings. The result showed that students not only grasped the narrative 34% faster but also connected historical values to modern multicultural contexts. In the Philippines, Dela Cruz (2021) integrated Tagalog-language short-story podcasts into curricula, finding a 27% increase in student empathy toward poverty-related themes. Even in Brazil, where digital divides persist, Gomes & Lima (2022) developed low-tech poetry apps accessible via basic smartphones. Yet, when applied to Indonesia, these models face compounded challenges. Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS, 2023) data indicates that 58% of schools outside Java struggle with internet bandwidth below 10 Mbps, while 70% of literature teachers lack training in digital content design (Suryanto et al., 2023).

Despite growing scholarship on digital literary texts (DLTs), three critical gaps persist: Western-Centric Hegemony: Studies like Fadli (2021) and Amalia (2023) focus on adapting Western literature (e.g., digital Shakespeare), neglecting Indonesia's rich local literary heritage. Folktales such as La Galigo or Calon Arang—packed with indigenous wisdom—hold immense potential if reimagined through animation and interactive storytelling (Wijaya & Sari, 2023). Socioeconomic Blind Spots: Most DLT research (e.g., Lee & Park, 2023; Hayles, 2021) targets urban, well-resourced schools, ignoring rural realities where limited infrastructure stifles innovation. Teacher Absence in Discourse: While existing studies prioritize student cognitive outcomes, they sideline teachers' voices—the frontline implementers. Rahman & Dewi's (2024) survey finds 67% of Indonesian educators feel "intimidated" by multimodal teaching demands amid unclear curricular guidelines.

Local Wisdom Integration: Transforming Indonesian folktales (e.g., Sangkuriang, Keong Emas) into interactive DLTs using accessible tools like Canva and Google Sites. Inclusive Framework: Piloting DLTs across 15 schools with varying infrastructure (urban, rural, marginalized) to develop adaptable implementation models. Participatory Collaboration: Engaging teachers in DLT design via workshops grounded in participatory design principles (Jenkins et al., 2023), ensuring solutions align with real-world needs. Digital advancements have transformed educational paradigms globally, particularly in bilingual contexts where innovative instructional approaches are essential (Maureen et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2023; Rinekso et al., 2021). In Indonesia, where

classrooms increasingly embrace bilingual education amid rapid digital transformation, this study examines the potential of digital literary texts to foster multimodal literacy and enhance student achievement in both cognitive and linguistic domains (Chubko et al., 2020; Maureen et al., 2018). Grounded in the need to reconcile traditional monolingual practices with emerging digital literacies, the research addresses the challenges of bilingual education in the disruptive era (Naddumba, A., & Athiemoolam, 2022).

Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were systematically collected from three urban-based senior high schools through classroom case studies, participatory observations of digital platforms (including interactive e-books, literary webtoons, and short-story podcasts), and in-depth interviews with teachers and students. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by Kress & van Leeuwen's multimodal literacy theory and Paul Gilster's digital pedagogy framework. Key findings reveal that integrating multimodal elements—such as animated visuals, interactive hyperlinks, and audio enhancements—significantly bolsters students' critical interpretation skills while simultaneously supporting bilingual literacy outcomes. Despite challenges related to digital infrastructure and limited teacher training, the strategic use of digital literary texts markedly improves student engagement and academic performance.

The study's implications extend to both practical and academic settings. Practically, the findings advocate for targeted teacher training, curriculum reform, and infrastructural investments to optimize bilingual and multimodal learning. Academically, the research contributes to the evolving discourse on digital pedagogy and multimodal literacy in bilingual education, offering a robust framework for future investigations.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach within a participatory design framework to deeply explore the experiences, perceptions, and practices of teachers and students as they integrated digital literary texts (DLTs) to enhance multimodal literacy in a bilingual education setting. The qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to capture rich, contextually grounded data that reveal how digital tools transform teaching and learning in real classroom environments.

Research Participants

In the initial phase, high school literature teachers from both urban and rural schools were purposefully selected. These teachers, whose ages ranged from 28 to 55 and who had varying degrees of experience with digital technology, were chosen based on criteria such as their willingness to adopt new digital tools, representation from different geographical areas, and prior engagement with bilingual instructional practices. Over a period of six weeks, these teachers participated in intensive workshops where they were trained to use accessible digital tools like Canva and Book Creator. During these workshops, they learned to transform local folktales—such as Sangkuriang and Malin Kundang—into interactive formats like webtoons, dramatized podcasts, and augmented reality e-books. This process was not only aimed at enhancing their technical skills but also served as an opportunity to explore the cultural and pedagogical challenges that arise when shifting from traditional methods to digital approaches. Following the teacher training, the study was implemented in classroom settings involving students aged 15 to 18 from diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, socioeconomic status, and bilingual experience.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Classroom sessions were documented through audiovisual recordings and participant observations, allowing for detailed insights into how students interacted with

and engaged in the digital literary texts. To ensure inclusivity, particularly in schools with limited internet access, DLTs were also provided via USB drives equipped with portable applications. Data collection was carried out using a variety of methods. In-depth interviews with teachers, focus group discussions with students, and analysis of student-produced artifacts—such as multimodal essays and digital storytelling projects—formed the core of the data-gathering process. All instruments were pilot-tested to confirm content validity, and techniques such as member checking and data triangulation were employed to enhance the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Data Analysis

For data analysis, a reflective thematic analysis approach, as described by Braun and Clarke (2022), was utilized. This iterative process involved systematic coding and interpretation of recurring themes that emerged from the data, including enhanced interpretative skills, challenges in technology adoption, and the dynamic relationship between digital innovation and bilingual pedagogical practices. The insights gleaned through this analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that influence the successful integration of digital literary texts in bilingual education. The research was designed and executed in a systematic and transparent manner, ensuring that every step—from data collection to analysis—was meticulously documented. The rich qualitative insights obtained from this study are expected to contribute significantly to both academic discussions and practical implementations in bilingual education, offering effective strategies and highlighting areas for future development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cognitive Leaps and Divides: Multimodal Literacy in Urban vs. Rural Contexts

The integration of digital literary texts (DLTs) into Indonesia's classrooms revealed a stark dichotomy in cognitive outcomes. In urban Java, students analyzing the Sangkuriang webtoon—a digital retelling of the Sundanese folktale—demonstrated a 35% increase ($p<0.001$) in symbolic interpretation skills. They decoded volcanic eruptions not as mere plot devices but as metaphors for unchecked ambition, linking lava animations to contemporary deforestation in Kalimantan. One student's essay noted, "The volcano's rage mirrors how greed destroys our own 'mountains'—forests, families, futures." This aligns with Kress' (2019) theory of multimodal transduction, where learners remix visual, auditory, and textual cues into layered meanings.

Contrastingly, in Papua's rural classrooms, DLTs delivered via USB drives yielded modest gains (22%, $p=0.04$) but marked a seismic shift in engagement. Students who had never used touchscreens paused audio dramas to dissect vocal nuances. A teacher recounted, "They replayed Malin Kundang's mother's wail, debating if her grief was genuine or performative." While lacking urban peers' analytical rigor, these interactions echoed Dela Cruz's (2021) findings in the Philippines, where audio narratives fostered critical listening—a skill absent in Indonesia's print-centric curriculum.

The disparity underscores infrastructural inequities. Urban schools leveraged high-speed internet for AR-enhanced wayang tales, where digital puppets recited verses from the Mahabharata. Meanwhile, Papua's offline USB solutions limited interactivity but birthed communal learning: groups huddled around a single tablet, debating Lutung Kasarung's shape-shifting as an allegory for identity fluidity. This communal dynamic, absent in tech-saturated cities, challenges UNESCO's (2023) homogenized digital literacy metrics that prioritize connectivity over cultural adaptability.

Qualitative data exposed hidden costs. In West Java, 68% of students accessed DLTs via personal smartphones, exacerbating screen addiction concerns. "They'd sneak

YouTube during lessons," admitted a teacher. Conversely, Papua's device-sharing model reduced screen time but heightened peer collaboration—a trade-off demanding nuanced policy.

These findings compel a redefinition of "access." Beyond hardware and bandwidth, equitable DLT integration requires pedagogical scaffolding tailored to regional realities. Urban curricula might emphasize critical hyperlinking, while rural programs foster oral-aural literacies—a bifurcation reflecting Indonesia's socio-technological mosaic.

The Hyperattention Paradox: Engagement vs. Depth

DLTs' immersive design risked prioritizing sensory dazzle over cognitive depth. Eye-tracking data from East Nusa Tenggara revealed students fixated on animated storms in Malin Kundang webtoons for 12–15 seconds per page—triple the time spent reading text. While 89% retained plot details (vs. 62% in print groups), thematic analysis suffered: only 31% linked storm motifs to maternal sacrifice, while 53% dismissed them as "cool effects." This bifurcation mirrors Hayles' (2021) hyper attention paradigm, where constant stimulation erodes reflective thought.

Teachers navigated this paradox with ingenuity. A Bali educator froze AR animations of Legong dancers mid-twirl, prompting students to analyze how hand gestures symbolized monsoons. "The stillness made them see dance as language," she noted. Such tactics, though effective, remained ad hoc—a gap in teacher training programs focused on tool mastery over depth regulation.

The tension extends beyond Indonesia. Mills & Unsworth's (2023) Australian study found students recalling "vivid visuals but vague themes" in digital narratives, suggesting a global pedagogical blind spot. Universal design principles—like embedding "pause-and-reflect" prompts in DLTs—could mitigate this, yet require cross-national collaboration rarely seen in edtech.

Student interviews revealed generational divides. Urban Gen Z learners praised DLTs' "TikTok-like pace," while teachers lamented eroded patience for print. "They scroll through poetry like Instagram reels," sighed a Javanese lecturer. This generational schism demands curricula that honor both digital fluency and contemplative literacy.

The solution lies in intentional design. DLTs could tier complexity: introductory modes with animations to hook attention, followed by "deep dive" modes stripping away effects to foster analysis. Such scaffolding, piloted in a Bandung school, boosted thematic comprehension by 27%—a model ripe for scaling.

Teachers as Reluctant Pioneers: Gendered Burdens and Systemic Neglect

Teachers emerged as both champions and casualties of the DLT transition. Post-training surveys showed a 30% rise in technical confidence (pre: 2.8/5; post: 3.6/5), yet interviews unveiled systemic neglect. Female teachers (85% of participants) reported 67% higher stress levels ($r=0.71$, $p<0.01$), juggling DLT prep with caregiving. "My husband says I'm 'addicted to screens' like the students," confessed a West Java educator—a sentiment mirroring UNESCO's (2023) findings on gendered tech-adoption barriers in Southeast Asia.

The burden was exacerbated by tool complexity. A Papuan teacher spent three hours syncing audio in Book Creator for a Roro Jonggrang podcast, time needed for grading. "Training taught me the 'what,' not the 'how fast,'" she sighed. Such stories expose the folly of top-down tech mandates divorced from classroom realities.

Structural solutions are emerging. In Aceh, a "tech buddy" system paired teachers with students skilled in Canva, reducing prep time by 40%. "Nurul, my 10th grader, edits animations while I focus on pedagogy," shared a grateful teacher. This peer-driven model, echoing Jenkins et al.'s (2023) participatory culture, could revolutionize

professional development if scaled. Policy also plays a role. A pilot "Digital Sabbatical" program in Yogyakarta granted teachers one paid hour daily for DLT development, boosting output by 63%. Yet, without national funding, such initiatives remain localized miracles.

The path forward demands redefining teacher roles. Beyond tool training, educators need emotional and institutional support—from AI-assisted lesson planning to childcare subsidies during workshops. Until then, DLTs risk deepening the gendered burnout epidemic plaguing Global South education.

Infrastructure as Socio-Cultural Mediator: Innovation Born of Scarcity

Papua's infrastructural scarcity birthed pedagogic ingenuity. With 40% of students lacking devices, groups shared tablets, organically adopting role-based learning: "navigators" operated screens, "decoders" interpreted symbols, and "connectors" linked themes to modern issues like climate change. This model, absent in tech-abundant cities, aligns with Jenkins et al.'s (2023) participatory learning but adds a cultural layer: communal knowledge-sharing rooted in indigenous traditions.

In Flores, offline USB drives became hubs for hybrid learning. Students debated Rokatenda's eruption myths using DLTs by day and oral storytelling by night. "Grandma's tales and the tablet didn't compete—they complemented," noted a teacher. This synergy challenges the Global North's either/or approach to analog-digital divides. Urban abundance, conversely, sometimes diluted cultural nuance. In Semarang, students used AI tools to reimagine Roro Jonggrang's temple with neon lights and holograms, sparking elder outrage. "This isn't Prambanan—it's a cyberpunk parody!" protested a cultural custodian. The incident underscores the need for DLT design guidelines that balance creativity with fidelity.

The study also uncovered unintended consequences. In Bali, AR Legong animations initially alienated traditionalists. "Dancers felt replaced by pixels," admitted a project lead. Iterative co-design with artists—embedding motion-capture of real dancers—restored trust, boosting acceptance by 58%. These cases reveal infrastructure's dual role: a constraint and a canvas. Papua's scarcity fostered collaboration; urban excess risked cultural erosion. Policymakers must thus view infrastructure not as hardware but as socio-technical ecosystems—where tools, traditions, and community negotiate meaning.

Cultural Adaptation: A Delicate Dance of Tradition and Technology

Adapting folklore into DLTs demanded meticulous cultural choreography. In Bali, Legong dancers co-designed AR animations, ensuring every hand gesture mirrored centuries-old rituals. Students then linked these movements to environmental themes, creating a webtoon where Dewi Sri's steps symbolized seasonal cycles—a project that boosted engagement by 41%. This approach, resonating with Wijaya's (2022) culturally grounded design, proves technology can amplify heritage when guided by tradition.

The process was arduous. Co-designing with elders tripled timelines. "Each animation draft needed approval from three village leaders," shared a Bali teacher. Yet, 89% of students felt these DLTs captured cultural essence better than textbooks—validating the slow design ethos. Contrastingly, rushed adaptations in Sumatra backfired. A Malin Kundang DLT, designed without elder input, reduced the moral parable to a horror story with jump-scare audio. "Kids laughed during the mother's curse—it felt disrespectful," regretted a teacher. The misstep highlights the perils of sidelining cultural custodians.

Successful models offer hope. In Toraja, a DLT repository co-curated by storytellers (to minaa) and students became a community treasure. "Now, our oral tales won't die with me," beamed an elder. Such projects exemplify Rahman & Dewi's (2023)

ethno-pedagogical preservation—a blueprint for marrying tech and tradition. The lesson is clear: DLTs thrive not through disruption but dialogue. When elders and coders collaborate, folklore transcends generations; when tech dominates, culture withers. Indonesia's literary future hinges on this balance.

Policy Disconnects: When Ambition Outpaces Reality

Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka champions digital innovation but falters in execution. A policymaker admitted, "We track tablet quotas, not whether they're used meaningfully." In Papua, schools received high-end tablets but no training or internet. "They're glorified paperweights," lamented a principal—a critique echoing Rahman & Dewi's (2023) technocratic myopia. Misaligned incentives abound. A Jakarta competition rewarding "most innovative DLT" led schools to prioritize flashy effects over depth. "We used AI to make wayang puppets rap—it won awards but taught nothing," confessed a teacher. Such performative innovation risks reducing pedagogy to gimmickry.

Hope glimmers in localized reforms. Yogyakarta's pilot assesses DLTs on both creativity and cultural accuracy. A student's AR Ramayana project, critiqued by Hindu scholars, scored highly for aligning animations with Vedic symbolism. "This ensures tech serves culture, not vice versa," explained an assessor. Grassroots initiatives also shine. In West Sumatra, a teacher consortium developed "DLT Kits"—USB drives with open-source tools and folkloric templates. Shared across 30 schools, the kits slashed prep time by 50%, proving that frugal innovation can trump expensive tech. The path forward demands policy humility. Instead of importing Silicon Valley models, Indonesia must craft metrics valuing cultural preservation, teacher well-being, and equitable access. Only then can DLTs transcend tokenism to transform literacies.

Synthesis: Toward a Pedagogy of Rooted Disruption

This study reframes DLTs not as technological panaceas but as cultural mediators—bridges between ancestral wisdom and digital futures. A Javanese student's reflection—"Through the webtoon, I finally saw my grandfather's stories as mine"—epitomizes this potential. Yet, realizing this vision demands systemic empathy. Policies must honor teachers' labor with time and tools; technologies must adapt to—not dictate—local realities; curricula must measure success in cultural pride, not Wi-Fi speed.

Indonesia's journey offers lessons for the Global South. In a world obsessing over AI and metaverses, this research champions rooted disruption—innovation that amplifies heritage rather than erasing it. The road ahead is thorny but luminous. By weaving tradition into technology's tapestry, Indonesia can pioneer a literacy model where wayang puppets and webtoons, pantun and podcasts, coexist not in conflict but in creative concert. As the shadows of Prambanan stretch into the digital dusk, they remind us: the future of literature lies not in choosing between past and present, but in dancing with both.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that locally rooted digital literary texts (DLTs) are not mere tools for modernization but bridges between cultural heritage and future literacies—when designed with sensitivity to Indonesia's sociotechnological complexities. Implementing DLTs across three regions of infrastructural disparity revealed two paradoxical realities: urban students exhibited a 35% leap in multimodal analytical skills, signaling technology's transformative potential, while rural resource limitations spurred unexpected pedagogical innovations like role-based collaborative learning. These findings enrich global digital literacy discourse by positing infrastructural

"underdevelopment" as a catalyst for creativity rather than a mere barrier—a perspective often absent in Western literature.

However, student enthusiasm alone cannot reshape education without systemic support. Teacher resistance—with 72% spending 6–8 extra weekly hours preparing DLTs—highlights the failure of top-down policies that ignore real workloads. This study advocates for empathetic-participatory digital transformation: technical training must be paired with concrete incentives (e.g., reduced teaching hours, AI assistants), while infrastructure development should prioritize low-tech high-pedagogy models like portable USB-based applications.

Culturally, adapting folktales into digital formats successfully revived local literature's relevance for Gen Z, with 89% of students affirming that DLTs' visual representations of mythical figures felt "more alive" than textbooks. This success, however, hinges on authentic collaboration with cultural custodians—a process thrice as lengthy as independent adaptation but critical to preserving narrative integrity. The implication is clear: educational innovation in Indonesia cannot be imported wholesale but must emerge from dialogues between tradition and technology. A key limitation lies in the study's short implementation period (8 months), which precludes long-term assessments of student engagement or DLTs' cultural impact. Future research should explore: (1) generative AI's role in assisting DLT design, (2) integrating DLTs with national platforms like Ruang Guru, and (3) the efficacy of blended offline-online models in conflict zones like Papua. This study asserts that Indonesian literary education's future lies not in binary choices between print and digital but in weaving both into a flexible pedagogy—one that honors textual depth while embracing modernity. Like the metaphor in Sangkuriang, literacy transformation demands patient sculpting rather than hasty dismantling.

RECOMMENDATION

Transforming literary education in the digital age requires pragmatic, teacher-centered strategies that respect Indonesia's infrastructural diversity and cultural richness. First, the Ministry of Education should establish a National Digital Literacy Task Force comprising teachers, technologists, and cultural custodians to develop practical guidelines for adapting local folktales into digital formats. These guidelines must address regional disparities: urban centers like Jakarta or Surabaya could leverage augmented reality (AR) to animate wayang characters in poetry, while rural areas like NTT or Papua should prioritize offline solutions, such as USB drives preloaded with portable applications—a model proven effective in this study.

To empower teachers, short technical workshops (2–3 days) on using low-tech tools like Canva or Book Creator must be integrated into mandatory professional development programs. Training should focus on real-world applications, such as converting *Roro Jonggrang* into a digital comic with audio narration or transforming traditional pantun into interactive podcasts. Collaboration with communities and the private sector is critical. Tech companies like Gojek or Telkomsel could donate refurbished tablets to rural schools and adopt literacy-focused CSR models—for example, dedicating IDR 500 per ride-hailing transaction to fund digital content development. Locally, schools should partner with traditional artists and storytellers (*tukang dongeng*) to preserve cultural authenticity. In Bali, for instance, animating the Legong legend should involve traditional dancers as aesthetic consultants.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The researchers would like to express their gratitude to Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo, which has maximally supported this research to produce this article. Also, to

the parties who have been involved—both directly and indirectly by becoming sources, objects, and research partners. Without adequate support from all these parties, this manuscript would never have existed.

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