

Contextual Digital History Learning to Strengthen the Social Identity of the Young Generation

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze how contextual digital history learning can strengthen the social identity of the younger generation in the era of globalization. Theoretically, this research is based on the perspective of social constructivism and identity formation theory which emphasizes that learning experiences and social context have an important role in building students' identities. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study design carried out at SMAN 1 Cipongkor, West Bandung Regency. Data were obtained through participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and digital documentation involving history teachers, students, and school principals. Data analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model which included reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions, and was tested for validity through triangulation of sources and techniques. The results showed that the integration of local narratives with digital media—such as virtual museum tours, digital storytelling, and interactive history projects—significantly increased students' empathy, collective pride, and national awareness. These findings show that technology-based contextual history learning is able to foster social character, national spirit, and cultural awareness of the younger generation. This research makes a scientific contribution to the development of technology-based humanistic history pedagogy and offers practical implications for strengthening the history curriculum in the digital era.

Keywords: *contextual history learning, digital pedagogy, social identity of the younger generation, cultural awareness, character education*

INTRODUCTION

The digital age has changed the way young people understand history and build social identities. Rapid access to information and the dominance of social media make the experience of learning history often reduced to the consumption of visual content without reflective meaning (Prensky, 2001; Halimah, 2023). This condition causes symptoms of historical amnesia, where many students know past events only as surface facts without the ability to interpret their relevance in today's life (Wiryawan, 2022). As a result, the sense of nationality and social responsibility is

slowly weakening because history is no longer felt as part of the formation of identity (Handayani, 2023).

In Indonesia, this phenomenon has become a serious challenge for history education in secondary schools. Many teachers still use a narrative approach that is centered on memorizing facts, rather than on the relationship between historical experiences and students' social realities (Hasan, 2019). This kind of learning model tends to make history lessons considered monotonous and less meaningful. In fact, in a global context full of information flows and digital culture, generation Z needs learning that is able to connect local identities, national values, and digital reality (Zulkarnaen, I., & Nuraeni, 2023).

The main problem that arises is the lack of a history learning model that effectively integrates local contexts with digital media to build the social identity of the younger generation. This challenge demands a new approach that not only teaches about the past, but also how history can be used to understand self and community identity in the modern era (Widodo, 2020). The key question is: *how can digital-based contextual history learning strengthen students' social identities in the midst of cultural disruption and digital globalization?*

Several previous studies have shown great potential of contextual learning approaches and the use of digital technologies in history education. (Sulastri, 2023) emphasized that the development of local history as a source of learning is able to foster a sense of pride in regional culture that contributes to the formation of national identity. In addition, (Zahara et al., 2023) found that the use of virtual museums and digital storytelling can increase students' empathy and involvement in understanding historical events. These findings are strengthened by (Permana, Y., Rahayu, D., & Wahyuni, 2024) who show that AI-based learning and deep learning can revive the interest in learning history of generation Z through more interactive digital experiences.

However, most of the research still discusses the theme of digitization or learning local history separately. There have not been many studies that integrate these two approaches in the context of social identity formation of high school students—especially in rural areas that have local cultural richness but also experience digitalization challenges (Halimah et al., 2021 ;(Yuliana, R., & Bahar, 2024). This is the research gap that needs to be studied in depth.

Based on this issue, this study aims to explore how digital-based contextual history learning can strengthen students' social and cultural identities in the era of globalization. The novelty of this research lies in the combination of local historical narratives, digital learning media (such as virtual museums and interactive timelines), as well as community-based history projects designed to develop students' empathy, reflection, and social pride. This study was conducted at SMAN 1 Cipongkor, as an example of a high school that seeks to integrate technology and local wisdom in history learning.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach because it aims to understand in depth how digital-based contextual history learning can strengthen students' social identities in the context of high school. This approach was chosen because it is able to explore the meaning, perception, and learning experience of students and teachers naturally, rather than just measuring variables statistically (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014).

1. Research Location and Context

The research was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Cipongkor, West Bandung Regency, West Java. This school was chosen purposively because it has implemented technology-based learning innovations, including the use of digital media in history learning, but still strives to maintain local cultural values in the learning process. The school environment in semi-rural areas also provides an interesting social context to explore how the integration of technology and local wisdom can affect the formation of students' social identity.

2. Research Subject

The research subjects consisted of teachers of Indonesian History and grade XI students who participated in digital project-based history learning activities. Participant selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, which is to select individuals who are considered to have direct experience and are relevant to the focus of the research (Arfandi & Samsudin, 2021). The number of participants included one history teacher, one principal as a contextual informant, and eight students of class XI Social Studies as representatives of study groups who were actively involved in digital history projects.

3. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is carried out through three main complementary techniques:

- a. Participatory observation is carried out during the history learning process to observe the interaction between teachers and students, especially during the implementation of activities such as *virtual museum* tours, *interactive storytelling*, and digital local history projects.
- b. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, and students to gain an understanding of their perceptions, values, and experiences of the use of digital technology in learning history and its relation to the formation of social identity.
- c. Digital documentation, in the form of student project results, activity photos, field notes, and multimedia products produced in history learning activities.

This triangulative approach in data collection allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of history learning in the classroom and its impact on students' identity awareness (Sri Nuryani Jamilah & Halimah, 2024; Zahara et al., 2023).

4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014), which consisted of three main stages:

- a. Data reduction, which is the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documentation to match the focus of the research.
- b. The presentation of data (data display) is carried out in the form of a thematic narrative that describes patterns and relationships between categories such as learning strategies, the use of digital media, and student responses.
- c. Conclusions and verification are carried out repeatedly to ensure that the findings produced are valid, consistent, and in accordance with the field context.

This approach allows researchers to identify the relationship between digital learning practices and the development of students' social identities in a reflective and contextual manner.

5. Data Validity Test

The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely comparing the results of various methods (observation, interviews, and documentation) and verifying information from several sources (teachers, students, principals). In addition, collaborative reflection is carried out between researchers to maintain objectivity and avoid interpretation bias. This procedure ensures that the data obtained truly reflects the empirical reality in the field and is relevant to the research objectives (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014; Sulastri, 2023).

With this design, the research is expected to provide an in-depth picture of the effectiveness of digital-based contextual history learning in strengthening the social identity of the younger generation, as well as offering a theoretical contribution to the development of historical pedagogy in the era of digital transformation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Application of Digital Media in History Learning

The implementation of digital-based contextual history learning at SMAN 1 Cipongkor was carried out through a combination of virtual museum tours, interactive timelines, and local history projects. History teachers act as facilitators who direct students to retrace the narrative of local struggles through digital sources, documentary videos, and interviews with local community leaders. The learning activities began with the introduction of the virtual museum application, where students could browse artifacts of regional struggles and write down their digital reflections in online learning forums. After that, students create an interactive timeline using digital platforms such as *Timeline JS* or *Canva Education* to sequence regional historical events by linking them to the national context.

Next, students carry out local history projects that focus on collecting folklore, biographies of regional figures, or social changes around them. The final product of the project is in the form

of a digital portfolio that is curated in the form of *digital storytelling* and presented collaboratively in the classroom.

The results of the observation show that the use of digital media encourages enthusiasm and active participation of students during the learning process. They seem to have an easier time understanding the relationship between local and national events because they are presented visually and interactively. The teacher assessed that this activity changed the classroom atmosphere to be more reflective and collaborative. These findings are in line with the research of (Zahro, S. L., & Chusni, 2023) which confirms that virtual museums are able to provide an immersive learning experience and increase student involvement in understanding historical values.

In addition to increasing engagement, the use of technology also fosters critical thinking skills in sorting out valid digital sources. This shows that historical digital literacy is an integral part of effective contextual learning (Wiryawan, 2022).

2. Impact on Empathy and Social Awareness

Field findings show that there is a change in students' attitudes and social sensitivities after participating in contextual digital-based history learning. Through the exploration of local history, students begin to understand that the struggle and cultural values of the region are an important part of national identity. The process of excavating folklore and the stories of local figures fosters a sense of empathy for the struggles of previous generations as well as pride in local culture.

Interviews with some students revealed that the experience of participating in a local history project made them feel closer to the surrounding community and understand the value of social solidarity inherited by local figures. One student said that "we became aware that the struggle in our village is also part of the nation's history, not just what is in textbooks."

History teachers also reported that students showed increased self-reflection and social awareness in class discussions, especially when associating historical values with contemporary social issues such as tolerance, environmental responsibility, and mutual cooperation. This is in line with the research of (Handayani, 2023) and (Sulastri, 2023), which emphasized that history learning based on local contexts can strengthen empathy and national pride through the internalization of regional cultural values.

Reflective activities such as writing digital journals and making narrative videos enable students to express their understanding of history in a creative and meaningful way. From the project documentation it can be seen that most students associate local stories with universal moral values such as courage, hard work, and social solidarity. Thus, the learning of contextual history not only improves cognitive understanding, but also touches on the affective and social aspects that shape their national character.

3. Strengthening Social Identity and Citizenship

An important finding from this study is the strengthening of students' social identity after participating in digital-based history learning. Social identity is measured by indicators such as a sense of belonging to the community, awareness of the role of citizens, and a proud attitude towards local cultural heritage. Observations and interviews showed that students began to display changes in behavior and value orientation—they were more active in culturally sensitive school activities, more respectful of regional diversity, and showed tolerance towards friends from different backgrounds.

The teacher assessed that *digital storytelling activities* and local history projects play a role as a means of reflection on identity. Students not only learn the facts of the past, but also understand the social meaning behind the events. This process reinforces the view that social identity is not something static, but rather is constructed through contextual and meaningful learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978; Tajfel, 1981).

The active involvement of students in digital history projects also shows the emergence of digital patriotism, which is an expression of national pride in the digital space through educational and ethical content. This phenomenon shows that technology-based contextual history learning can form digital citizens who have character, are critical, and have social responsibility (Halimah et al., 2021; Sri Nuryani Jamilah & Halimah, 2024).

Thus, the results of this study confirm that the integration of local narratives and digital media not only improves the quality of learning, but also functions as a vehicle for the formation of social identity that is adaptive to the development of the times. Contextual and humanistic history learning has proven to be able to grow students who are not only digitally intelligent, but also deeply rooted in cultural and national values.

Discussion

1. Transformation of History Learning in the Digital Era

The results of the study show that digital-based contextual history learning is able to overcome the classic challenges of history learning which has tended to be monotonous and memorization-oriented. Through the use of technology such as *virtual museum tours*, *interactive timelines*, and *digital storytelling*, students gain a more active, visual, and reflective learning experience. This marks the transformation of historical pedagogy from an instructional model to a participatory and exploratory model.

This finding is in line with the results of research by (Zahro, S. L., & Chusni, 2023) which affirms that digital media is able to expand students' access to authentic historical sources and foster emotional engagement with learning materials. Similar research by (Permana, Y., Rahayu, D., & Wahyuni, 2024) also shows that the integration of *deep learning* and artificial intelligence (AI) in history learning can improve students' conceptual understanding as well as 21st century skills. At the global level, (Prensky, 2001) emphasized that the digital *natives generation* needs a

learning strategy that combines technology with social meaning so that the learning process becomes relevant to their life experiences.

This transformation shows that technology is not just a learning tool, but also a new cultural space where students interact, create, and negotiate historical meaning. In this context, teachers play the role of *cultural mediators* who bridge historical values with digital dynamics. Contextually and digitally designed learning provides opportunities for students to understand history as a living social process, not just static knowledge of the past.

2. Integration of Local Narratives and Social Identity

One of the main findings of the study is that local historical narratives serve as an effective medium to reinforce students' social identities. Through excavating regional history and the stories of local figures, students develop a sense of belonging to their community and foster pride in regional cultural values. Within the framework of social identity theory put forward by Tajfel (1981), this process describes the formation of identity through social membership and affiliation to a particular group.

When students recognize the role of figures and events in their environment, they not only learn about historical facts, but also experience the internalization of values such as solidarity, courage, and social responsibility. This phenomenon shows that social identity is not an inherited entity, but is formed through social interaction and meaningful learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

The studies of Sulastri (2023) and Halimah (2023) support these results by showing that learning based on local wisdom can strengthen students' national character and cultural awareness. Local narratives are a bridge between personal experience and national identity, so that students understand that Indonesianness is built from regional diversity. With the help of digital media, these local narratives can be packaged in an attractive way and disseminated more widely, encouraging the emergence of digital-based national awareness or digital patriotism (Handayani, 2023).

The integration between local history and digital technology also confirms the importance of a constructivist approach in history education. The learning process is no longer centered on the teacher, but on how students build meaning through social experience and self-reflection. Thus, digital-based contextual history learning not only shapes cognitive knowledge, but also strengthens the affective aspects and social identity of the younger generation.

3. Pedagogical and Social Implications

The results of this study have important implications for the practice of history education and curriculum development. First, history teachers need to play the role of reflective learning designers, not just informants. The integration of digital technology in history learning must be directed to foster historical *awareness* and students' social character, not just increase media

variety. Teachers can use local history projects, digital documentaries, or interactive maps to connect past events with current social issues (Hasan, 2019).

Second, in terms of curriculum, a design is needed that places local history as the basis for strengthening national character and identity. Education policy needs to make room for a transformative approach that emphasizes historical literacy, digital literacy, and cultural literacy in an integrated manner. This is in line with the concept of *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)* which emphasizes the balance between technological progress and the preservation of socio-cultural values (Sri Nuryani Jamilah & Halimah, 2024).

Third, socially, contextual digital history learning has the potential to be a strategy to empower the younger generation to actively participate in community life. Through learning experiences that combine local contexts and technology, students can understand that digital citizenship responsibilities include respecting history, respecting diversity, and utilizing technology ethically (Halimah et al., 2021). Thus, history education not only produces students who understand the past, but also those who are ready to face the future with strong social and cultural awareness.

CONCLUSION AND RECCOMENDATIONS

The results of the study show that digital-based contextual history learning has a strategic role in strengthening the social identity and national character of the younger generation. Through the integration of local historical narratives with digital media such as *virtual museum tours*, *interactive timelines*, and *digital storytelling*, students not only understand past events, but are also able to interpret social, cultural, and national values in the context of their current lives. Learning processes that emphasize hands-on experience, social reflection, and digital collaboration have been shown to increase empathy, historical awareness, and pride in local and national identities.

Theoretically, this research strengthens the perspectives of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) in the context of historical education. These findings show that the formation of students' social identities does not occur passively, but through the process of social interaction, reflection, and technological mediation in learning. Thus, history is not only a subject about the past, but also a medium for the formation of social values and civic character in the digital era.

Practically, the results of this research contribute to the development of technology-based humanistic history pedagogy. Teachers can act as facilitators and *cultural mediators* who connect historical values with students' modern lives. The history curriculum can also be directed to integrate local history, digital literacy, and character education simultaneously to be in line with *the principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)*. Through this approach, history learning has the potential to give birth to a generation that is not only digitally intelligent, but also deeply rooted in the cultural, moral, and social values of their nation.

For further research, it is recommended to expand the study area in diverse school contexts (urban, rural, and digital school) in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture. A quantitative or mixed-method approach can also be used to measure the influence of digital history learning on variables such as historical literacy, national character, or social empathy statistically. In addition, the development of innovative learning media based on AI, AR/VR, and interactive storytelling needs to be further studied so that history learning is more relevant, interesting, and has a wide impact on future generations.

Thus, this study emphasizes that digital-based contextual history learning is not only a pedagogical strategy, but also a strategic effort to build historical awareness, social identity, and cultural resilience of Indonesia's young generation in the era of digital globalization.

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