# Lack of Student Literacy in the Digital Era

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***Abstract:*** *The ease of access to information through the internet and social media in the digital era should ideally be accompanied by an increase in students' literacy skills. However, in reality, many students still struggle to filter valid sources, comprehend reading materials, and critically evaluate the information they encounter. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through in-depth interviews with students and a literature review on digital literacy. The findings reveal that low reading interest, the dominance of social media as an entertainment tool, limited critical thinking skills, and a lack of support from the educational environment contribute to the low literacy levels among students. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening information literacy as part of the effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 on Quality Education. Therefore, comprehensive literacy education strategies, reading culture development, and critical thinking training are essential to help students become more selective, reflective, and responsible users of information in the digital era*

***Keywords :*** *Student literacy, digital era, digital literacy, critical thinking.*

**Abstrak:** Kemudahan akses informasi melalui internet dan media sosial pada era digital seharusnya sebanding dengan meningkatnya kemampuan literasi mahasiswa. Namun kenyataannya, banyak mahasiswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menyaring sumber yang valid, memahami isi bacaan, serta mengkritisi informasi yang diperoleh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan data yang dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan mahasiswa dan analisis literatur mengenai literasi digital. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa rendahnya minat baca, dominasi media sosial sebagai sarana hiburan, keterbatasan kemampuan berpikir kritis, serta kurangnya dukungan dari lingkungan pendidikan berdampak pada rendahnya tingkat literasi mahasiswa. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya penguatan literasi informasi sebagai bagian dari upaya mendukung Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan (SDGs) poin ke-4, yaitu Pendidikan Berkualitas (Quality Education). Oleh karena itu, diperlukan strategi pendidikan literasi yang komprehensif, pembiasaan budaya membaca, dan pengembangan kemampuan berpikir kritis agar mahasiswa mampu menjadi pengguna informasi yang selektif, reflektif, dan bertanggung jawab di era digital.

**Kata kunci**: Literasi mahasiswa, era digital, literasi digital, berpikir kritis.

## Introduction

Students, as the digital generation, should possess strong information literacy and academic skills to adapt to changing learning patterns in the digital era. However, the reality shows that student literacy levels remain relatively low. Many students tend to rely on instant sources like Google, social media, or artificial intelligence applications rather than reading books or scientific journals in depth (Damayanti et al., 2025).

This phenomenon demonstrates a gap between access to technology and adequate literacy skills. Digital literacy encompasses not only the ability to use digital devices, but also the ability to understand, evaluate, and critically process information. Aida Amalliah et al. (2025) emphasized that students who rely solely on technology without critical literacy skills are prone to information misconceptions and difficulties in analytical thinking. This situation becomes even more concerning when students are unable to distinguish between credible academic sources and unverified popular information. Low student literacy in the digital era is also closely related to changes in learning culture. Isnaniah and Ningsih (2022) explained that student reading habits are shifting from scientific texts to consuming quick information, such as article summaries or AI search results. This shift has a direct impact on the declining quality of scientific writing, critical thinking, and in-depth literature review skills. Therefore, a digital literacy strengthening strategy is needed that focuses not only on technical skills but also on developing academic awareness and ethical information use.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of deeply understanding how today's students interact with digital information sources and the extent to which this affects their academic literacy skills. Previous research has focused more on technological skills, while critical literacy aspects have received little qualitative study (Jaya & Nurqamarani, 2023).

This issue urgently requires serious attention. This is because literacy is one of the foundations for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4, namely quality education. Without students possessing good literacy, their learning, research, and contribution to knowledge development will be hampered (UNESCO, 2019:28). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehensively consider and understand the patterns of student literacy that have developed under the influence of digitalization, and what we can do to construct and strengthen them.

Various studies have proposed alternative solutions, including strengthening a culture of literacy through literate campus programs, increasing access to digital academic resources, and integrating information literacy training into the curriculum. Therefore, this study aims to describe student literacy patterns in the digital era through a qualitative approach that emphasizes their real-life experiences in seeking and utilizing academic information.

## Research methods

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with six student respondents. Data were collected through in-depth interviews to explore students' perspectives on digital literacy. This methodology was chosen because it was considered effective for exploring students' experiences and the significance they attach to reading and writing activities in the digital age. As Creswell notes, a qualitative approach aims to understand the meanings individuals construct regarding events within a specific context.

Qualitative data for this study were collected through three main techniques: interviews, observation, and analysis. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to guide conversations based on participants' experiences of how they search for, interpret, and use academic information. Direct observation was used to directly observe how students interacted with various information sources, both print and digital. Additionally, document analysis was conducted to examine literacy norms, previous research findings, and readings relevant to the research theme.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994:10), which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data presentation was organized in narrative form, quotations, and matrices to facilitate interpretation. Furthermore, conclusions are drawn through a repeated verification process which is useful for ensuring the validation of the findings.

## Results and Discussion

### Student's Primary Source of Information

When studying, students often use various information sources to complete academic assignments more effectively. The results showed that the most frequently used information sources were Google and ChatGPT, followed by Gemini, scientific journals, and social media. These four sources were chosen because they are easy to access, quick to use, and can provide a wealth of references that support students' learning needs (Putra & Rahmawati, 2023).

Most students stated that Google is their primary tool for searching for references such as journal articles, scientific papers, and other online learning materials. This platform provides a wealth of information and helps students understand various perspectives on a particular topic. Meanwhile, ChatGPT is often used because it provides direct explanations, thus helping, students grasp concepts more quickly and save time on assignments (Pratama, 2024).

Some students also use Gemini and social media as additional resources. These platforms provide content in the form of discussions, real-life examples, and material summaries that make learning more engaging and practical. In general, it can be said that students tend to choose information sources that are fast, easy to find, and practical, in accordance with their needs to complete assignments

efficiently. This indicates an increasing use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI)-based platforms in learning habits, reflecting a shift towards technology-enabled self-directed learning.

**The Role of Literacy in Compiling College Assignments**

The research results show that all respondents share a similar view regarding the importance of literacy in supporting the learning process in higher education. Students recognize that the ability to read critically and understand information in depth plays a significant role in helping them develop high-quality academic assignments. However, a gap remains between awareness and reading habits. Many students understand the importance of literacy, but lack a consistent reading routine, particularly for scientific sources such as academic books and research journals. This situation indicates the need for strategies to strengthen literacy practices in daily lectures.

Furthermore, although most students are familiar with the concept of information literacy, its application in academic activities remains relatively low. This limited interaction with scientific literature impacts critical thinking skills and the quality of academic writing produced. In this regard, Nutefall (2015) emphasized that improving literacy is determined not only by the availability of reading resources, but also by the habituation, collaboration, and support of the academic community on campus that can create a literate learning ecosystem.

Furthermore, Wolf (2018) explains that deep reading skills play a crucial role in developing reflective and critical thinking skills, particularly amidst the rapid and shallow flow of digital information. Without these skills, students risk understanding information only superficially without being able to relate it to the broader academic context. Therefore, universities need to strengthen a culture of academic literacy so that students are not merely consumers of information but also capable of acting as processors, assessors, and creators of new knowledge.

**The Impact of Digitalization on Reading Habits**

The development of digital technology has brought about significant changes in the way students read and access information. While previously students primarily read printed books or physical journals, they are now shifting to digital-based reading materials such as e-books, online articles, or artificial intelligence (AI)-based platforms like ChatGPT and Gemini. This shift demonstrates that students' reading habits have adapted to technological advances and the need for time efficiency (Yanti et al., 2021).

Based on various studies, the use of digital technology has a positive impact on increasing access to reading resources. Students can quickly search for information, download references, and read anywhere and anytime. Rini et al. (2022) explain that digital literacy makes it easier for students to access a wide

range of academic information and supports independent learning. Thus, digital technology plays a crucial role in facilitating reading activities in the modern era.

However, on the other hand, this convenience also poses challenges to reading quality. Students tend to skim without delving into the text. Nicholas Carr (2010) explains in his book, The Shallows, that excessive exposure to digital information can change readers' mindsets to become shallower and less reflective. This means that, despite increased reading frequency, the understanding gained can become more superficial.

This phenomenon suggests that students often read for practical and immediate purposes rather than for deeper understanding. Syabaruddin and Imamudin (2022) emphasize the need for critical digital literacy skills so that students can not only access but also evaluate and understand information accurately. Therefore, learning in higher education needs to be directed so that students maintain in-depth reading skills amidst the rapid flow of digital information. Overall, it can be concluded that digital technology has a significant impact on students' reading habits. While offering convenience and speed, students need to be equipped with critical and reflective reading skills to maintain a deep understanding of information, rather than simply consuming data instantly.

**Factors that Cause Low Student Interest in Reading**

Most respondents stated that time constraints and the need for quick access to information are the main reasons students rarely read books or scientific journals. In busy lecture situations, they tend to utilize digital sources such as ChatGPT, Google, or Gemini, which are considered more efficient because they can provide immediate answers to their needs without having to read the entire text. Furthermore, the complex language and academic writing style in scientific journals are often considered difficult to understand, discouraging students from reading these sources in depth.

This finding suggests that today's students' reading is more practical, with students tending to read books or journals less frequently due to time constraints, numerous assignments, and the need for quick and concise information acquisition. Reading is often done solely to obtain information quickly, rather than to deepen understanding. The development of digital technology has also influenced student learning patterns, who now prefer practical information sources such as ChatGPT, Google, or Gemini. These sources are considered efficient because they can provide instant answers without requiring in-depth reading.

This habit indicates a shift in learning culture from an analytical approach to a more instant and efficient approach. This aligns with Wolf's (2018) view that instant reading habits can diminish critical thinking skills because readers focus solely on the end result without truly engaging in a deeper understanding process. Therefore, it's crucial for academic environments to encourage reflective reading

habits so that students become not just consumers of information but also capable of evaluating, interpreting, and critiquing the reading sources they use.

**Student Preferences for AI Use**

Most respondents stated that they frequently use artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT to complete assignments because they consider them faster, more practical, and easier to understand. AI is considered capable of providing core explanations of a topic without the need to read lengthy sources, thus helping students save time when faced with multiple assignments. However, several respondents emphasized that reading original books or journals remains important for deepening and comprehensive understanding of the material.

These findings illustrate that students place greater emphasis on speed and ease of access to information than on in-depth reading. This practice demonstrates a shift in thinking and learning styles in the digital age. UNESCO (2022) emphasizes that the use of technology, including AI, must be accompanied by information literacy skills so that users do not merely passively receive information but are also able to assess and verify its accuracy. Thus, AI can be an effective supporting tool in the learning process, provided it is used critically and does not replace students' analytical thinking skills.

**Efforts to Improve Student Literacy in Higher Education**

Interviews revealed that students held diverse views on how universities could improve literacy culture in the academic environment. Some emphasized the importance of providing attractive and accessible reading facilities, such as reading corners, literacy rooms in each faculty, or digital library platforms that can be accessed anytime. Furthermore, literacy-based activities such as book discussions, scientific writing training, and reading review competitions were deemed effective in fostering reading interest among students.

Beyond providing facilities, the campus environment also needs to foster an academic culture that encourages students to actively read and write. This can be achieved by creating comfortable study spaces, expanding access to e-books and scientific journals, and utilizing digital technology to support literacy activities. Nutefall (2015) emphasized that strengthening literacy cannot rely solely on the availability of reading materials but also requires habits, collaboration, and the ongoing support of the academic community. This is reinforced by OECD findings (2023), which show that integrating digital technology with conventional reading activities can improve critical thinking skills and students' in-depth understanding of academic material.

## Conclusion

Research on the lack of student literacy in the digital era shows that although students recognize the importance of literacy in supporting academic activities, their in-depth reading habits for scientific sources remain relatively low. The majority of students rely more on digital technologies such as Google, ChatGPT, and other AI-based platforms because they are considered more efficient, easily accessible, and able to provide information quickly without the need to read entire books or journals. This low interest in reading is influenced by time constraints, the large number of course assignments, and students' tendency to prefer concise and to-the-point information. Digital technology plays a significant role in changing student reading patterns; on the one hand, it provides easy access to information, but on the other hand, it has the potential to reduce critical and in-depth reading skills. Nevertheless, most respondents still believe that literacy plays a crucial role in helping them understand, analyze, and process information more accurately. Based on these findings, efforts are needed by universities to improve literacy culture by providing attractive digital literacy facilities, reading corners in each study area, and literacy activities such as book discussions, scientific writing training, and awards for active student readers. Furthermore, lecturers are expected to assign assignments that encourage students to read and quote directly from scientific sources. Meanwhile, students need to cultivate awareness of the wise use of digital technology, not only for quick information retrieval but also to strengthen critical and analytical thinking skills. With synergy between students, lecturers, and educational institutions, it is hoped that increased digital literacy in higher education can be achieved, enabling students to become intelligent, critical, and responsible users of information amidst the rapid flow of technological development.

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