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THE CORRELATION BETWEEN DIGITAL LITERACY AND ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research investigated the association between digital literacy and English reading proficiency among senior high school students within a technology-supported learning context. Using a quantitative correlational approach, the study involved 59 eleventh-grade students from a public high school in East Kalimantan who were selected through simple random sampling. Data collection employed two instruments: a digital literacy survey and an English reading comprehension assessment. The collected data were processed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques with IBM SPSS Statistics. To satisfy the requirements for parametric testing, normality and linearity analyses were conducted beforehand. The Pearson correlation test identified a moderate yet significant positive relationship between the variables ($r = 0.412$, $p = 0.001$). These results indicate that students who demonstrate stronger digital literacy skills are more likely to achieve higher levels of English reading comprehension. The findings reinforce the value of incorporating digital literacy development into English instruction to support reading achievement in contemporary, technology-enhanced educational settings.

Keywords: digital literacy; English reading comprehension; digital learning

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi keterkaitan antara tingkat literasi digital dan kompetensi membaca bahasa Inggris siswa sekolah menengah atas dalam lingkungan pembelajaran yang memanfaatkan teknologi digital. Penelitian menerapkan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan rancangan korelasional dan melibatkan 59 siswa kelas XI dari salah satu SMA negeri di Kalimantan Timur yang dipilih melalui teknik simple random sampling. Pengumpulan data dilakukan menggunakan angket literasi digital dan tes membaca bahasa Inggris. Analisis data dilakukan melalui statistik deskriptif dan inferensial dengan bantuan perangkat lunak IBM SPSS Statistics. Sebelum pengujian korelasi, data terlebih dahulu diuji normalitas dan linearitas untuk memastikan kesesuaian dengan persyaratan analisis parametrik. Hasil uji Pearson menunjukkan adanya korelasi positif yang signifikan antara kedua variabel (r = 0,412; p = 0,001) pada kategori sedang. Temuan tersebut menegaskan bahwa penguasaan literasi digital berpotensi mendukung peningkatan kemampuan membaca bahasa Inggris siswa pada era pendidikan yang semakin terdigitalisasi.

Kata kunci: *literasi digital; kemampuan membaca bahasa Inggris; pembelajaran digital*

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INTRODUCTION

For high school students, the ability to read and comprehend texts in English plays an important role in supporting access to academic knowledge, developing critical thinking, and facilitating engagement with information globally.. In the digital era, reading activities have shifted beyond traditional printed texts to digital resources, including online articles, e-books, and various digital learning platforms. This change has been reinforced by the rapid development of digital and blended learning systems, which have made the ability to comprehend English texts increasingly dependent on students' digital literacy skills (Li et al., 2025; Ningsih et al., 2023; Vongsawath et al., 2025).

As this change continues, being able to use digital tools becomes more and more important for students' success in school. It's more than just having the right technical skills. It also includes being able to find the right information, figuring out if online content is reliable, using digital tools the right way, and talking the right way in digital spaces. In education, digital literacy is widely recognized as a multidimensional competence that helps students critically and ethically access, process, and understand digital texts (Rochanaphapayon, 2023; Smith et al., 2020). These competencies are particularly relevant to English reading comprehension, as digital texts often require readers to navigate non-linear structures, integrate multimodal information, and assess the reliability of online sources (Frima & Putri, 2022; Putrayasa et al., 2024).

Researchers are learning more and more about the connection between digital literacy and English reading comprehension. The results of this research consistently suggest a positive relationship between these variables. Studies in secondary schools and higher education institutions show that students who are better at using digital tools tend to do better on reading comprehension tests, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes (Marsanah et al., 2023; Tursunov, 2024; Usman M et al., 2025). These studies suggest that digital literacy skills are important for understanding English texts. (Hidayat et al., 2024; Ningsih et al., 2023; Pradita & Ningsih, 2024; Tinmaz et al., 2022)

Researchers have found that Indonesian high school students who are better at using digital tools tend to do better in English classes, especially at the high school level. Some studies have found that students' digital literacy (the skills they have when it comes to using digital devices) is closely related to their English reading comprehension (the ability to understand what you read) in high school. (Lestari & Astrid, 2025; Marsanah et al., 2023; Usman M et al., 2025). Nevertheless, a more detailed review of these studies highlights several limitations. Many studies depend primarily on students' self-reported assessments of digital literacy rather than direct measures of reading comprehension outcomes, involve relatively small sample sizes, or concentrate on specific instructional interventions without evaluating the overall strength of the relationship between the two variables. (Belingga et al., 2025; Yolanda et al., 2025). In addition, contextual factors such as access to digital resources and students' actual engagement with digital reading materials are not consistently addressed (Azzahra & Badruddin, 2024; Khanal et al., 2023; Smith et al., 2020).

Moreover, previous studies vary considerably in how digital literacy is conceptualized and measured. While some research emphasizes technical skills and frequency of technology use, others include critical evaluation, problem-solving, and communication as core components of digital (Smith et al., 2020). This variation creates inconsistency in research findings and highlights the need for studies that employ comprehensive digital literacy instruments aligned with reading comprehension outcomes, particularly at the senior high school level where students increasingly rely on digital texts for learning (Asia et al., 2024; Khanal et al., 2023).

We are living in an age where technology plays a significant role in our lives. Digital literacy means being able to access, understand, evaluate, and communicate information using digital technologies. It is widely supported as being essential for student learning**.** In language education, learners increasingly encounter English texts through screens and online platforms. Studies often report that digital tools can aid comprehension: For example, one recent study found that teaching high school students how to use digital tools improved their reading comprehension. Another study of ninth-grade students in the Philippines found that students who

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were better at using digital tools also did better on English reading tests. Similarly, students themselves report that online dictionaries, e-books, and other digital resources make English texts easier to understand and more engaging. Nevertheless, concerns remain about whether typical "digital natives" truly have the skills for deep comprehension of online text. A research note that many young people raised on fast-paced digital media often struggle with deep, sustained reading, so it is unclear whether increased digital access translates into better comprehension (Dang & Habók, 2026). Overall, it's clear that digital literacy can play a key role in helping students read English more successfully, but more research is needed to fully understand how.

Research on digital literacy and reading comprehension has shown different results and has had problems with its methods. Some smaller studies have found links that are very likely to be important. For example, a study found a strong connection between digital literacy and English reading comprehension among Indonesian high school students ($p = .04$). However, that study relied on a very small sample ($n=32$) and self-designed questionnaires (Agustiani Ks, 2022). Another researcher studied 99 Indonesian teachers training to teach English. The researcher found a weak, insignificant link between these teachers' digital literacy and reading comprehension (Belingga et al., 2025). This suggests the relationship may not always be strong or direct. Critically, most prior studies (including these) have relied on self-report instruments or ad-hoc tests rather than on validated measures. A researcher emphasize that in the digital reading literature "assessment instruments comprise both objective measurements (e.g. reading comprehension tests) and subjective measurements (e.g. self-assessments)", and they call for more process-oriented, theory-driven tools beyond traditional tests (Dang & Habók, 2026). In other words, existing evidence often comes from simple surveys or researcher-made tests, so the true strength of the digital literacy–reading link is uncertain. Moreover, most studies have used limited, homogenous samples (e.g. one class or cohort), leaving generalizability open. Even qualitative work finds that while students *view* digital literacy as supportive of reading comprehension, they also report challenges (connectivity issues, source credibility, etc.) that can offset those

benefits. Thus, prior research points to a positive role for digital literacy, but the scope and reliability of that effect, especially in Southeast Asian high school contexts remains unclear.

What is not yet known, then, is how strongly and reliably digital literacy predicts English reading comprehension when both are measured rigorously in real digital-learning environments. In particular, no study to date has directly assessed both digital literacy and English reading comprehension in senior high schools in East Kalimantan using validated instruments. Existing Indonesian studies tend to use convenience samples and self-report scales, and they do not situate measurement within an authentic technology-enhanced learning context. As argue a research, cohesive theoretical frameworks and robust, process-oriented assessments are needed in this field (Dang & Habók, 2026). By focusing on the Indonesian senior high school level and employing validated digital literacy questionnaires and standardized English reading tests administered in a digital learning environment, the present study aims to fill this gap. In doing so, it will provide more accurate empirical evidence about whether and to what extent digital literacy is a meaningful *supporting factor* in students' reading performance, beyond what previous, more limited studies could show.

METHOD

The study adopted a quantitative correlational approach to investigate the association between students' levels of digital literacy and their performance in English reading comprehension. A correlational design is a good choice for a study if the goal is to find out how strong the relationship is between two things and the direction it goes in, without changing the values of those things (Belingga et al., 2025; Marsanah et al., 2023). This design allows researchers to investigate how variables naturally coexist within an educational context and is widely used in studies examining literacy-related constructs and language learning outcomes.

In this study, the population is all 11th-grade students at a public senior high school in East Kalimantan. We used simple random sampling: a complete roster of eligible students (the sampling frame) was compiled, each student was assigned a

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unique ID, and 59 IDs were drawn using a random-number generator, giving every student an equal chance of selection. This process, including the frame compilation and random selection, was documented step by step. The sample size (n=59) was justified as adequate: although the population size is unspecified, educational research guidelines suggest ~30 participants as a practical minimum for survey studies. Our n=59 exceeds this guideline, aligning with recommendations for sufficient power in correlational research (Besekar et al., 2024).

The digital literacy questionnaire consisted of 20 Likert-scale items across four dimensions: information searching, digital information evaluation, use of digital tools, and digital communication/collaboration. Items and wording were adapted from validated instruments (Avinç & Doğan, 2024; Chang & Kuo, 2025) and tailored to the local context. Responses used a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Content validity was established via expert review: all items met the acceptable criteria (e.g. I-CVI ≥ .78 or Aiken's V > .80) for relevance and clarity. In similar work, a research report that their 20-item digital literacy scale achieved strong content validity and high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha \approx .85$) after expert revision (Avinç & Doğan, 2024).

The English reading comprehension test was a researcher-developed multiple-choice test (approximately 20 items). It covered key reading skills: identifying main ideas, locating specific details, making inferences, and understanding vocabulary in context. Test passages were selected or written to match 11th-grade reading level (following curricular standards). The difficulty was vetted by experts: readability analyses (e.g. Flesch–Kincaid) and pilot testing ensured most items were of moderate difficulty (typical facility indices ~60–80%). For example, a researcher developed a similar EFL reading test with 52 items and confirmed its texts were appropriate for the target level (Börekci & Yavuz, 2025). Our items were likewise reviewed by content experts for relevance to the English curriculum.

Both instruments underwent psychometric evaluation. Content validity was assessed via expert panels (calculating item-level CVI or Aiken's V) to ensure alignment with the constructs (e.g. literacy skills). Construct validity was examined using exploratory/confirmatory factor analysis (or Rasch modeling as appropriate)

on pilot data. For instance, a researcher used Rasch analysis and confirmed unidimensionality for their 20-item scale (Avinç & Doğan, 2024). We will report these validity indices (e.g. CVI values, factor loadings) in detail. Reliability (internal consistency) will be quantified by Cronbach's α (or KR-20 for the test). A research found KR-20 ≈ .91 (pilot) and .81 (final) for their reading test; similar high alphas (≈.80–.90) are expected (Börekci & Yavuz, 2025). We will report the exact α values for each dimension of the digital literacy scale and for the reading test. The study was approved by the appropriate authorities. All study participants (and their parents) gave written permission to take part.

The data was collected in two stages. To start, students took the digital literacy questionnaire online. Second, they took the English reading comprehension test under controlled classroom conditions to ensure consistency and minimize external interference. We collected all the responses and put them into a data format for further analysis. The data was then analyzed using statistical methods, which involved the use of SPSS software. Before proceeding with correlation analysis, preliminary tests were conducted to verify the appropriateness of parametric statistical approaches.

The researcher checked the data for normal distribution using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which is a statistical method. When a significance value (p) above 0.05 was found, it meant that the data followed a normal distribution.

A linearity test was administered to determine if the association between digital literacy and English reading comprehension adhered to a linear pattern. A significance value surpassing 0.05 for the deviation from linearity pointed to a linear relationship between the variables.

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed only once these prerequisites were satisfied. This statistical method was chosen as both variables were quantified on an interval scale, with the dataset adhering to the assumptions of normality and linearity. (Li et al., 2025). The Pearson correlation coefficient is calculated using the following formula:

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$$r = \frac{N\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}} \quad \text{.....(1)}$$

Data were collected in two stages. First, students completed the digital literacy questionnaire, followed by the English reading comprehension test under standardized classroom conditions to ensure consistency and minimize external interference. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with IBM SPSS Statistics. Before testing the hypothesis, we checked if the data followed a normal or linear pattern using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and the Test for Linearity. We used a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ for the whole analysis. The data met the assumptions of normality ($p > .05$) and linearity ($p > .05$ for deviation from linearity). So, the Pearson Product–Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between digital literacy and English reading comprehension. The researcher used the following criteria to understand the strength of the correlation coefficient (r): 0.00–0.19 is very weak. 0.20–0.39 is weak. 0.40–0.59 is moderate. 0.60–0.79 is strong. 0.80–1.00 is very strong. We considered a result to be statistically significant if the p-value was less than 0.05. If the assumptions of normality had not been satisfied, Spearman's Rank Correlation would have been used as the appropriate non-parametric alternative.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of data analysis obtained from the digital literacy questionnaire and the English reading comprehension test. The data were analyzed descriptively and inferentially using SPSS.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of research variables

Variable	N	Mean	Std.Deviation
Digital literacy	59	76.54	6.439
English reading comprehension	59	63.12	5.766

As presented in Table 1, the descriptive statistics summarize the students' digital literacy and English reading comprehension scores. The results indicate that

the mean score for digital literacy was 76.54 (SD = 6.439), based on data collected from 59 participants. This finding suggests that students generally demonstrated relatively consistent levels of digital literacy, as reflected by the moderate spread of scores around the mean.

Table 1 also shows that the mean score for English reading comprehension was 63.12 (SD = 5.766). Compared with digital literacy, the reading comprehension scores exhibited a slightly smaller variation among participants. These descriptive results provide an overview of the distribution of both variables and serve as the basis for subsequent inferential analyses examining the relationship between digital literacy and English reading comprehension.

Table 2 Normality test results

Variable	Sig. (monte carlo)	Distribution
Digital literacy	0.061	Normal
English reading education	0.220	Normal

As shown in Table 2, the normality of the data was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test with the Monte Carlo approach. The results revealed that the significance value for digital literacy was 0.061, while the significance value for English reading comprehension was 0.220. Since both values exceeded the 0.05 significance level, the data for both variables were considered normally distributed.

In addition, a linearity test was conducted to determine whether the relationship between digital literacy and English reading comprehension was linear. The results indicated that the deviation from linearity was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the relationship between the two variables was linear. Therefore, the assumptions required for Pearson Product–Moment Correlation analysis were satisfied, and further inferential analysis could be conducted.

Table 3 Correlation Between Digital Literacy and English Reading Comprehension

Variabel	R	Sig. (2-tailed)	N

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Digital literacy-Reading comprehension	.412	0.001	9

As shown in Table 3, the Pearson Product–Moment Correlation analysis revealed a positive relationship between digital literacy and English reading comprehension. The correlation coefficient was r = 0.412, indicating a moderate positive correlation between the two variables.

The obtained p-value (0.001) was substantially lower than the accepted significance criterion of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant relationship between the variables under investigation. The findings revealed that students possessing greater digital literacy competencies were more likely to attain higher levels of English reading comprehension. These results further suggest that proficiency in digital literacy can facilitate the development of reading skills in English, especially in learning environments where technology is extensively integrated into instructional practices.

The results of this research reveal a positive and statistically significant correlation between digital literacy and English reading comprehension among senior high school students. These outcomes corroborate earlier studies, which observed that students exhibiting higher levels of digital literacy are inclined to perform better in reading comprehension tasks, particularly in English as a Foreign Language environments. (Agustiani Ks, 2022; Belingga et al., 2025; Marsanah et al., 2023)

From a theoretical perspective, digital literacy enables students to effectively search for information, evaluate the credibility of digital texts, and use digital tools to support comprehension. Digital literacy facilitates students' critical engagement with digital reading materials, allowing them to better understand text content and structure. Similarly, (Rochanaphapayon, 2023) emphasized that digital literacy skills enhance students' ability to process English texts presented in digital formats.

One explanation is that reading comprehension depends on multiple language skills beyond just digital fluency. For example, recent research shows that vocabulary depth is a much stronger predictor of comprehension than digital skill:

in one large study, vocabulary knowledge was the only significant predictor of students' reading scores, underscoring that solid word knowledge is fundamental to understanding text (Abellanosa & Mendoza, 2026). Likewise, explicit reading strategies must accompany digital tools for maximum benefit. For instance, a study of university learners found that students improved their comprehension most when digital reading activities (using e-books, interactive apps, Facebook/WhatsApp groups, etc.) were structured and guided by the instructor; just giving students technology without strategy instruction did not boost comprehension as much (Asia et al., 2024). In short, our moderate correlation may reflect the fact that students needed strong vocabulary and guided reading strategies alongside digital skills to really excel at comprehension.

Contextual factors at students' schools and homes also likely shaped the results. For example, a research report that even when students have access to online tools, real-world issues like unreliable internet, distractions, and difficulty judging credible sources can blunt the benefits of those tools for comprehension (Amaliah et al., 2026). In under-resourced or rural schools these challenges are amplified. Another researcher emphasize that improving access to devices and internet in rural classrooms along with making digital reading materials culturally relevant – dramatically increased students' motivation to read (Usman M et al., 2025). They found that once laptops and broadband were available and lessons incorporated familiar local content, students engaged more and their reading scores rose (Usman M et al., 2025). Thus, differences in school resources, teacher support, and students' technology environment likely moderated how strongly digital literacy translated into comprehension in our study.

Finally, the literature stresses that digital literacy must be intentionally integrated into instruction to have a strong impact. In one intervention, Thai EFL students who received a ten-week program of digital-literacy reading instruction showed significantly higher comprehension gains, especially in extracting and evaluating text information than students without that intervention (Rochanaphapayon, 2023). Other scholars likewise argue that technology alone isn't enough: digital tools need to be woven into reading curricula with clear guidance.

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As a researcher note, integrating digital-literacy activities directly into reading courses is essential to optimize comprehension outcomes (Amaliah et al., 2026). Together, these studies imply that our finding of only a moderate correlation likely stems from a lack of full integration: digital skills do help reading, but mainly when teachers scaffold them with explicit strategy instruction and support.

Overall, the results confirm that digital literacy plays an important supporting role in English reading comprehension, particularly in technology-rich learning environments where students increasingly engage with digital texts.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that students with stronger technological competencies generally achieve better outcomes in English learning, particularly in reading comprehension. The Pearson Product–Moment correlation test identified a statistically significant association between digital literacy and reading performance, yielding a correlation coefficient of 0.412 and a p-value of 0.001, which is below the 0.05 significance threshold. Based on conventional interpretation guidelines, this coefficient reflects a moderate positive relationship. In other words, higher levels of digital literacy are associated with improved performance on English reading assessments. Nevertheless, the moderate magnitude of the correlation implies that digital literacy is only one of several elements influencing reading achievement. Additional factors, including linguistic competence, learning motivation, instructional practices, and prior educational experiences, may also play an important role in shaping students' reading comprehension outcomes.

These findings show how important it is to help students improve their digital literacy skills, especially in areas such as searching for information, evaluating digital content, and using digital tools effectively. Integrating digital literacy into English language instruction can help students develop better reading skills and learn to navigate technology-rich learning environments more proficiently.

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