

## THE DISRUPTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the transformation of Social Studies learning in Indonesia in the era of disruption, characterized by rapid digital advancement, complex social change, and the increasing demand for twenty-first-century competencies. Employing a literature review design, the study examines scholarly publications from 2022 to 2025 to map the direction of change, major constraints, and strategic opportunities in Social Studies learning. The findings reveal a significant shift toward student-centered, contextual, project-based, and technology-supported learning that seeks to foster critical, reflective, adaptive, and socially responsible learners. Nevertheless, this transformation is hindered by persistent challenges, particularly unequal digital infrastructure, uneven teacher readiness, resistance to pedagogical change, and regional disparities in access to educational technology. The Merdeka Curriculum emerges as a strategic opportunity to reposition Social Studies learning within a more flexible and competency-oriented framework responsive to local and global contexts. The novelty of this study lies in its multidimensional synthesis of Social Studies transformation through the intersection of pedagogy, teacher readiness, curriculum reform, technology integration, and policy support. This study contributes by offering a sharper conceptual framework for understanding the systemic conditions required for effective and sustainable transformation of Social Studies learning in Indonesia.

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### INTRODUCTION

The rapid changes in digital technology, communication, the economy, and culture have created an educational landscape characterized by disruption, understood as a structural transformation that not only introduces new tools but also reshapes how knowledge is produced, accessed, exchanged, and interpreted in the learning process. In this situation, educational transformation can no longer be seen merely as technical modernization; rather, it involves broader changes in pedagogical relationships, curriculum design, patterns of classroom interaction, and the orientation

of learning outcomes. UNESCO emphasizes that digital technology has strong potential to transform education, while digital competence and the ability to navigate AI-based ecosystems have become essential rather than complementary capacities. Recent studies likewise show that digital technology has changed how learning is designed, implemented, and evaluated across educational contexts (Haleem et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2025)

In the Indonesian context, Social Studies learning holds a strategic position because it does not merely transmit social concepts, but also cultivates civic awareness, ethical sensitivity, critical thinking, and the ability to interpret increasingly complex social realities. As social life becomes more deeply digitalized, Social Studies is expected to help learners understand the connections among local, national, and global phenomena while developing responsible digital citizenship. The OECD highlights student agency, together with the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, as a central orientation for future education, including competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, responsibility, and the capacity to navigate uncertainty. Similarly, UNESCO stresses that global citizenship education in the digital era must promote critical engagement, ethical decision-making, and responsible social participation. In Indonesia, findings also indicate that Social Studies remains highly relevant for strengthening social character and critical thinking, yet its implementation still often relies on traditional learning patterns that are monotonous and insufficiently contextualized (Ixfina et al., 2024; Marcheilla, 2025; OECD, 2025; UNESCO, 2025).

This need for transformation gains stronger institutional support through the Merdeka Curriculum. Normatively, the curriculum is designed to be flexible, focused on essential content and character development, and adaptable to local socio-cultural contexts and students' needs. The government has also emphasized literacies relevant to contemporary developments, including digital literacy, and has formally established the Merdeka Curriculum as the national curriculum framework through Ministerial Regulation of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 12 of 2024. For Social Studies learning, this policy direction is particularly important because it aligns with the need for student-centered, contextual, project-based learning supported by digital media and oriented toward students' active participation in understanding and addressing real social problems. Therefore, the transformation of Social Studies in the digital era should not stop at the adoption of media, but should lead to a more meaningful, reflective, and relevant reconstruction of learning (Aisyah et al., 2024; Handayani et al., 2023; Heryani et al., 2022; Kemendikbudristek, 2024).

Nevertheless, this transformation has not taken place evenly across Indonesia. A number of studies indicate that the major barriers remain teacher readiness, digital competence, internet access, and the quality of institutional support. At the teacher education level, one study found that most pre-service teachers were still at the A2–B1 level of digital competence, and only some reported readiness to integrate a range of digital technologies into learning. At the systemic level, UNICEF reports that many teachers and students from low-income families still lack adequate devices and digital skills; in 2020, 67% of teachers reported difficulties operating devices and online learning platforms, while connectivity problems in rural and remote areas remained substantial. The ITU also points to a gap between the supply of ICT infrastructure and the educational sector's need for school connectivity in Indonesia. In Social Studies learning, similar challenges are reflected in limited access to technology, the need for continuous professional development, and uneven regional support for the implementation of digital learning (International Telecommunication Union, 2023; Ixfina et al., 2024; Maghfiroh et al., 2023; Unicef, 2021).

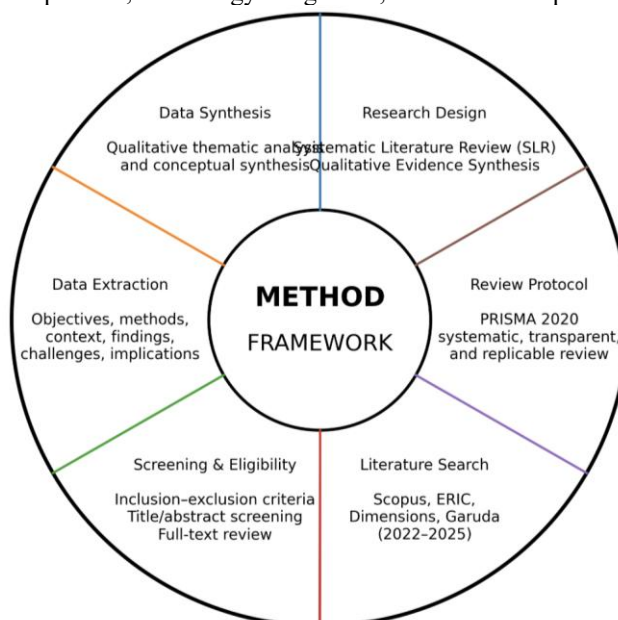
Beyond issues of access and technical readiness, an equally important concern lies in preserving the humanistic dimension of Social Studies amid expanding digital penetration. UNESCO warns that educational technology should not be positioned as a substitute for human interaction, while global citizenship education in the digital era requires learning that promotes critical reasoning, ethical responsibility, sensitivity to diversity, and an orientation toward peaceful and sustainable societies. In this regard, the transformation of Social Studies learning should be understood not simply as media digitalization, but as a broader reconstruction of social pedagogy involving the reorganization of learning goals, content, methods, and values so that learning remains relevant to contemporary life while staying faithful to its mandate of forming citizens who are critical, adaptive, and responsible (UNESCO, 2024, 2025).

However, previous studies in Indonesia have tended to address this transformation only partially, for example by focusing separately on the use of digital media, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, or teachers' strategies in digital spaces. This indicates a clear research gap: there is still limited integrative analysis that examines

disruption in Social Studies learning as an interconnected pedagogical, curricular, technological, and policy issue. Responding to this gap, the present study offers a more comprehensive synthesis of how these dimensions interact in shaping the transformation of Social Studies learning in Indonesia. The novelty of this study lies in its effort to position the era of disruption not merely as a technological challenge, but as a multidimensional framework for understanding the reconstruction of Social Studies learning within the Indonesian educational context. On this basis, this study is directed at answering two main questions: how does the era of disruption affect Social Studies learning in Indonesia, and what strategies are most relevant for optimizing the role of Social Studies learning in responding to ongoing digital and social change? (Marcheilla, 2025; Ixfina et al., 2024; Aisyah et al., 2024; Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2024).

## METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative evidence synthesis approach to examine the transformation of Social Studies learning in Indonesia in the digital era. The review followed the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure a systematic, transparent, and replicable process. Literature searches were conducted in Scopus, ERIC, Dimensions, and Garuda for articles published between 2022 and 2025 using keywords related to Social Studies learning, digital transformation, technology integration, and Indonesia. The inclusion criteria covered: (1) journal articles published between 2022 and 2025; (2) studies focusing on Social Studies learning or closely related civic-social education; (3) studies discussing digital transformation, technology integration, curriculum adaptation, teacher readiness, or policy support; (4) studies situated in the Indonesian context; and (5) full-text articles available in English or Indonesian. The exclusion criteria included duplicate records, non-research publications, articles not relevant to the topic, and studies without sufficient methodological or empirical information. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, a total of [n = ...] articles were included in the final review. Data were extracted systematically to identify study objectives, methods, contexts, main findings, challenges, and implications. The selected studies were then analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis to generate a conceptual synthesis on instructional transformation, teacher readiness and digital competence, technology integration, curriculum adaptation, and policy support.



**Figure 1.** Circular Diagram Of The Research Method Transformasi Pembelajaran IPS di Indonesia pada Era Digital  
Figure 1 illustrates the methodological framework of this study. The diagram shows six main stages: research

design, review protocol, literature search, screening and eligibility, data extraction, and data synthesis. It emphasizes that the review was conducted systematically, beginning with the selection of the SLR design and PRISMA 2020 protocol, followed by database searching, article screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, structured data extraction, and qualitative thematic synthesis. This framework highlights that each stage is interconnected in producing a comprehensive synthesis of the transformation of Social Studies learning in Indonesia in the digital era.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literature synthesis shows that social studies learning in Indonesia is shifting from content-delivery-oriented instruction toward more active, contextual, participatory, and student-centered learning. Approaches such as project-based learning, discussion-based learning, contextual learning, and student exploration are considered more suitable for fostering engagement, creativity, and critical thinking. This shift indicates that social studies is no longer viewed merely as a means of transferring social knowledge, but also as a space for developing competencies that help students interpret social change in a reflective and responsible way (Jannah et al., 2024).

The findings identify teacher readiness as a key factor in the success of this transformation. Teachers are expected not only to use digital tools, but also to strengthen pedagogical capacity, readiness for change, and the ability to manage more flexible learning environments. The literature highlights the importance of continuous training, mentoring, competency development, collaborative learning communities, and school leadership support. At the same time, limited digital skills, resistance to change, and insufficient professional development remain major barriers in practice (Basri & Rahmi, 2023; Silvester et al., 2024; Widiensyah et al., 2025)

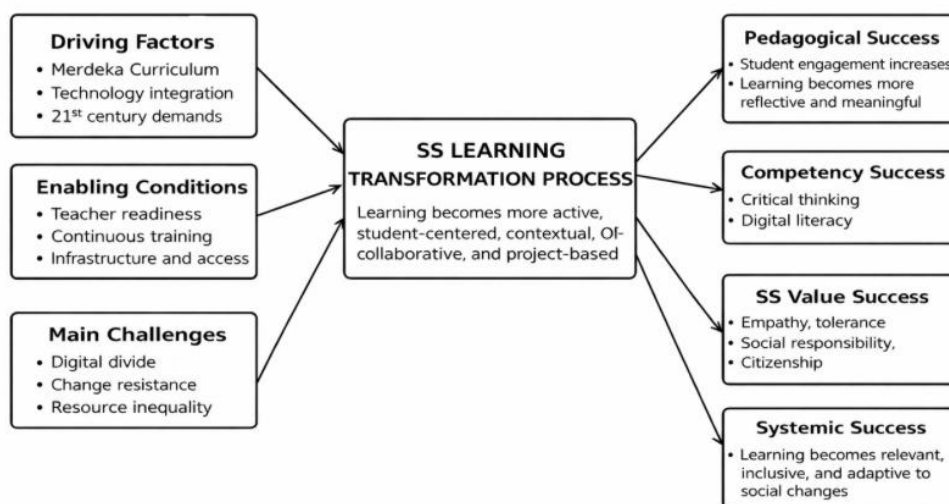
From the curricular perspective, the synthesis indicates that the Kurikulum Merdeka provides a strong foundation for more flexible, contextual, and socially relevant social studies learning. This flexibility creates opportunities to integrate global issues, local wisdom, digital literacy, multicultural education, and learning experiences that are closely related to students' everyday lives. However, the literature also points to continuing challenges in adapting teaching materials, assessment practices, teachers' understanding, and the balance between local and global content. These findings suggest that curriculum transformation in social studies is an adaptive and ongoing process rather than a purely administrative reform (Idha Isnaningrum et al., 2024; Langoday et al., 2024; Saa, 2024)

Digital literacy and technology integration emerge as central components of social studies transformation. Technology can broaden access, increase interactivity, support more personalized learning, and enrich resources through multimedia, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence. However, digital literacy in social studies is not limited to technical ability. It also includes the capacity to evaluate information critically, use digital media ethically, and understand the social consequences of technology use. The findings further show that technology integration is accompanied by challenges related to ethics, digital distraction, infrastructure limitations, and inequalities in access across schools and students (Aisyah et al., 2024; Mustakim et al., 2024; Santoso, 2025).

Amid this digital transformation, the literature consistently emphasizes that the essence of social studies learning remains rooted in the strengthening of social values, character, and citizenship. Social studies is positioned as a medium for fostering empathy, tolerance, social responsibility, multicultural awareness, and the ability to live together in an ever-changing society. A number of studies show that project-based learning, collaborative learning, and contextual learning hold considerable potential for cultivating these values while simultaneously reinforcing the relevance of social studies to students' lives. Thus, the modernization of social studies learning should not displace its humanistic orientation; rather, it should enrich the process of shaping citizens who are critical, inclusive, and responsible (Suyekti Kinanthi Rejeki, 2025).

The synthesis also shows that the transformation of social studies learning is strongly influenced by policy and institutional support. Educational policy, infrastructure investment, teacher training programs, continuous evaluation, and collaboration among stakeholders form the basis for successful implementation. At the same time, disparities in resources, differences in school readiness, and uneven digital access show that this transformation has not been experienced equally across regions. These conditions indicate that innovation in social studies learning must be pursued with attention to equity and sustainability so that digital transformation does not deepen existing educational

inequalities (Abidin, 2025; Azzahra et al., 2024; Idha Isnaningrum et al., 2024; Langoday et al., 2024; Saa, 2024; Widiansyah et al., 2025; Yamin et al., 2025).



**Figure 2 .** Diagram of Success Factors for Social Science Learning Transformation in Indonesia in the Digital Era

The diagram illustrates that the success of Social Studies (IPS) learning transformation is shaped by three main layers. The first layer consists of driving factors, namely the Merdeka Curriculum, technological integration, and the demands of 21st-century competencies. The second layer represents determining conditions, including teacher readiness, continuous professional development, as well as infrastructure support and access. The third layer encompasses the main challenges, such as the digital divide, resistance to change, and resource inequality.

These three layers interact within the process of transforming Social Studies learning, which is characterized by more active, student-centered, contextual, collaborative, and project-based approaches. From this process, four major forms of success emerge. First, pedagogical success, reflected in increased student engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Second, competency success, marked by the development of critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy. Third, value-based success in Social Studies, demonstrated through strengthened empathy, tolerance, social responsibility, and citizenship. Finally, systemic success, indicated by learning practices that are increasingly relevant, inclusive, and adaptive to social change.

### Implications of the Transformation of Social Studies Learning in the Digital Era

Overall, these relationships underscore that the success of Social Studies learning transformation can only be achieved when pedagogical innovation, teacher readiness, curriculum adaptation, digital literacy, and policy support operate in an integrated and coherent manner. Several Key Implications:

#### 1. Pedagogical Implication

The transformation of Social Studies (IPS) learning in the digital era requires a clear shift from teacher-centered instruction toward more active, contextual, participatory, collaborative, and project-based learning. Consequently, Social Studies teachers need to position students as active subjects who engage in discussions of social issues, information analysis, problem-solving, and reflection on social realities, rather than merely as passive recipients of knowledge. Thus, the success of Social Studies learning in the digital era is no longer measured solely by content mastery, but by the extent to which learning fosters student engagement, meaningful learning experiences, and the ability to critically and responsibly interpret social change,

#### 2. Implications for Teacher Competency Development

The synthesis results indicate that teachers are key actors in the success of Social Studies learning transformation. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen teachers' capacities continuously, not only in technical aspects

of technology use but also in pedagogical, psychological, and professional domains. Training programs, mentoring, teacher learning communities, and school leadership support should be directed toward enabling teachers to design flexible, adaptive, and meaningful learning experiences. Without systematic teacher development, digital transformation risks being limited to the use of media without producing substantial improvements in learning quality,

### 3. **Curricular Implications**

The Merdeka Curriculum provides significant opportunities for more flexible, relevant, and context-responsive Social Studies learning. Accordingly, the development of teaching materials and assessments should be more contextual by integrating contemporary social issues, digital literacy, multicultural education, and learning experiences closely related to students' lives. This implies that the curriculum should not be viewed merely as an administrative document, but must be translated into classroom practices that enable students to develop knowledge, critical thinking skills, communication, collaboration, and civic responsibility,

### 4. **Implications for Digital Literacy**

In Social Studies learning, digital literacy should not be limited to the ability to operate devices or use learning platforms. Instead, learning must be designed to equip students with the ability to search, select, evaluate, and use digital information critically, ethically, and responsibly. This is crucial because Social Studies is closely related to the dynamics of public information, democratic life, digital citizenship, and the evaluation of social issues. Therefore, technology should be positioned as a pedagogical tool to strengthen critical reasoning and social responsibility, rather than merely as a symbol of educational modernization,

### 5. **Implications for Educational Equity**

Findings on disparities in infrastructure, internet access, and variations in digital competence indicate that the transformation of Social Studies learning has not been evenly distributed. This implies that educational policies must seriously address the principles of equity and inclusivity to ensure that digital innovation does not widen disparities between schools and regions. Equal access to devices, connectivity, teacher training, and digital learning resources should be viewed as fundamental prerequisites for transformation, not as supplementary elements. In other words, the success of Social Studies transformation in the digital era largely depends on the education system's ability to ensure equitable access for all learners,

### 6. **Implications for Values and Character in Social Studies**

The modernization of Social Studies learning should not diminish its core role as a medium for fostering empathy, tolerance, social responsibility, multicultural awareness, and democratic citizenship. Therefore, every innovation in learning strategies, media, and technology must continue to strengthen the humanistic dimension of Social Studies. Effective digital learning should enhance the development of students' social character, ensuring that they are not only academically and digitally competent but also ethically and socially mature,

### 7. **Policy and Institutional Implications**

The transformation of Social Studies learning cannot be placed solely on individual teachers or schools. It requires policy synergy that includes infrastructure investment, teacher training enhancement, continuous evaluation, and multi-stakeholder collaboration. Consistent institutional support will determine whether learning innovations can be sustained or remain sporadic. Therefore, Social Studies transformation in the digital era should be understood as a systemic agenda that requires integration between policy, curriculum, classroom practices, and institutional support,

### 8. **Implications for Future Research**

This study shows that the transformation of Social Studies learning is complex and multidimensional. Future research should therefore focus on empirical studies that examine the effectiveness of various digital learning models across diverse school contexts. Further studies are also needed to explore the relationships between teacher readiness, policy support, infrastructure quality, and Social Studies learning outcomes, thereby providing a stronger foundation for developing transformation models that are applicable, inclusive, and sustainable.

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of Social Studies learning in Indonesia in the digital era goes beyond the integration of technology; it requires changes in pedagogy, teacher capacity, curriculum practice, and policy support. Its effectiveness depends on how far these elements can work together in an equitable and sustainable way. More importantly, this transformation matters because it determines whether Social Studies can remain relevant in preparing learners who are critical, socially responsible, and capable of navigating complex realities in a rapidly changing world.

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