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EMPOWERING RURAL STUDENTS THROUGH DIGITAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: Based on the problem rural students often face limited opportunities to develop English proficiency due to restricted access to digital resources, low digital confidence, and teacher-centered instructional practices, this study aimed to explore how integrating digital literacy into English Language Teaching (ELT) can empower rural students by improving their English abilities, particularly in speaking, writing, and communication. The study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design conducted in two cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Participants consisted of one English teacher and approximately twenty students at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, Gowa. Data were collected through pre- and post-tests, classroom observations, student and teacher interviews, and observation checklists. The findings indicate notable improvements in students' digital literacy, learner autonomy, creativity, collaboration, and confidence in using English. Digital storytelling and vlogging activities encouraged students to express ideas, practice spoken English, and develop cultural pride, while online collaborative tasks strengthened teamwork and communication skills. Despite challenges such as limited devices, uneven participation, and unstable internet access, students became more engaged and less dependent on teacher guidance over time. Overall, the study demonstrates that context-sensitive digital literacy practices can transform rural ELT classrooms into more participatory, meaningful, and equitable learning environments.

Keywords: *digital literacy, empowering students, English language teaching, rural students*

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INTRODUCTION

In this case, digital technology has become popular issues for an essential component of Indonesian education, particularly for rural students who usually face barriers in learning English such as struggle in connection, limited access to high-quality learning resources and inadequate infrastructure. While in this era, learning English is highly important to mastery. Hence, English Language Teaching (ELT) plays a crucial role in enabling international communication, expanding academic opportunities, and supporting socioeconomic mobility (Hidayat et al., 2025). However, students in rural and urban area have potentials in improving their English but unfortunately, the potential frequently constrained by disparities between urban and rural educational contexts. In this regard, integrating digital literacy into ELT offers a promising approach to narrowing this gap by providing rural students with more equitable access to learning materials, authentic language input, and interactive learning experiences. Through implementing digital literacy, rural students can also reach better positioned to participate actively in both English learning and the wider digital society.

Digital literacy in ELT is more than just knowing how to use a computer. Critical abilities such as creating multimodal texts, using digital platforms sensibly, and assessing online information are required by Pardede (2022). These abilities enable students to create their own texts, presentations, or multimedia projects in addition to consuming English-language content when the language is being taught. The TPACK framework, developed by Mishra and Koehler (2006) and expanded by more recent researchers like Pardede (2022) states that teachers need to have a solid understanding of pedagogy, content, and technology in order to successfully integrate digital literacy into the classroom.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic hastened the global adoption of online and blended learning, the need to incorporate digital literacy into ELT has increased. Based on the preliminary data, many rural students in Gowa need to be more attention of their lack accessibility in English learning particularly in SMA 1 Parigi and SMA 16 Gowa. Basically, some rural students there still lack of ability in English such as speaking, writing, and lack of skill learning with digital tools. Similarly, argument from Pardede (2022) who claims that the pandemic exposed the digital divide between urban and rural schools, with rural students frequently lacking access to devices, internet connectivity,

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and teachers with digital training. This led to disparities in language learning opportunities and brought attention to the necessity of long-term digital literacy initiatives.

However, since COVID-19, a number of issues have emerged, including the fact that many rural students face challenges related to insufficient internet access, a lack of digital devices, erratic electricity, a lack of teacher training in digital pedagogies, and a lack of exposure to real-world English communication. These limitations limit speaking, listening, and interactive language learning opportunities as well as exposure to a variety of English input. Aside from the increase in digital literacy following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a swift movement both locally and internationally to embrace blended and remote learning models. This has brought attention to how important it is for teachers and students to have digital tools and to be literate in their use (Azubuike et al., 2021). However, the significance of ELT is that digital tools such as interactive platforms, online collaboration, feedback tools, and multimedia content help English as a subject and a medium. By providing more avenues for accessing, practicing, and producing English, digital literacy in ELT can help make up for exposure gaps or fewer interactions with native speakers for students in rural areas.

This opinion is supported by recent research from Indonesia and comparable contexts. Teachers in rural areas who received training in digital pedagogy demonstrated greater creativity and confidence in using digital resources to teach English. Hung et al. (2012) explained that project-based digital literacy activities, such as creating digital storytelling projects or English vlogs, help rural students become more skilled and motivated communicators. These arguments show that digital literacy among rural learners fosters not only language proficiency but also critical awareness, self-confidence, and teamwork. Other studies claim that digitally literate students are better able to learn independently. According to Hatlevik and Bjarnø (2021), students' ability to think critically and engage in lifelong learning is strongly linked to their digital competence. Ervianti et al. (2023) further argue that digital literacy increases students' engagement in English language teaching (ELT) by providing multimodal inputs such as videos, podcasts, and online platforms that accommodate different learning styles. Rural learners may not otherwise have access to authentic English input, but these resources help bridge that gap. To reduce inequality, improve instructional

quality, and promote inclusive education, UNESCO in Global Education Monitoring Report (2023) emphasizes that the use of technology in education must be guided by pedagogical goals rather than mere technological availability, highlighting the importance of integrating digital literacy into rural education.

This study explores the role of digital literacy as an empowerment tool in response to the growing demand for meaningful and equitable English language instruction, particularly in rural schools. Globally, the use of digital technology in education has increased rapidly. However, rural students are often left behind due to inadequate infrastructure, limited teacher training, and minimal exposure to technology-enhanced instruction (Iryanto, 2025). Recent research highlights that integrating digital literacy into English language instruction can foster creativity, learner autonomy, and communication skills (Alazemi et al., 2023). Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap between the potential of digital literacy and its actual implementation in rural educational settings.

Employing a classroom action research methodology, this study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, Gowa, and examined how teachers and students interact with, adapt to, and benefit from digital literacy practices in English language teaching (ELT). Based on the background outlined above, this study investigates rural students' perceptions of the integration of digital literacy in English language learning. It seeks to identify how digital literacy activities, such as project-based learning and other digital tasks, can empower rural students to develop autonomy, confidence, and communicative competence, as well as to explore effective strategies for empowering rural learners through the application of specific digital literacy practices in ELT.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptualizing Digital Literacy in Education

Basic technical skills have been replaced by a multifaceted competency that encompasses ethical use, multimodal production, collaborative practices, and information evaluation (Smestad et al., 2023). Rather than merely consuming media, contemporary definitions emphasize the ability to use digital tools intentionally for content creation, communication, and critical evaluation. Digital literacy is now regarded as a set of transformative strategies that support learners in achieving higher-

order learning outcomes, such as creativity, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. Furthermore, Gündoğmuş (2024) explains that digital literacy is essential for children's learning development and synthesis, stressing that it must be pedagogically grounded, as technology alone is insufficient without deliberate instructional design.

Digital Literacy in English Language Teaching (ELT): Pedagogical Affordances

Digital literacy in English language teaching (ELT) has been linked to increased multimodal practices, richer language input, and greater opportunities for authentic communication. Digital storytelling and vlogging have attracted particular attention because they combine language production with multimodal composition, including narration, images, music, and editing. Based on Ndibalema's (2025) framework, these activities enable students to practice speaking, pronunciation, audience awareness, and narrative structure in ways that are personally meaningful. Similarly, Chapelle and Sauro (2017) emphasize that digital technology provides important pedagogical affordances for interaction, feedback, and learner autonomy in language learning. Furthermore, Chapelle and Sauro (2017) argue that technology enhances ELT when it is aligned with pedagogical goals, particularly in the development of speaking and writing skills. Empirical studies further indicate that vlogging can reduce speaking anxiety and offer regular, scaffolded rehearsal opportunities beyond the classroom, while digital storytelling encourages both linguistic and cultural expression. Moreover, both the process and the final products of these activities can be documented and utilized as assessment tools.

Rural Contexts: Constraints and Affordances

Findings from studies on digital literacy in rural contexts are mixed. On the one hand, synchronous or bandwidth-intensive activities are often constrained for rural learners due to infrastructural limitations, such as limited internet bandwidth, unstable electricity, and restricted access to up-to-date devices (Soekamto et al., 2022). On the other hand, recent localized studies in Indonesia suggest that when pedagogical approaches are adapted to local conditions, rural communities may demonstrate pockets of digital competence, strong digital ethics, and socially embedded technology-use practices that can be leveraged for learning (Akbar & Wijaya, 2024). Therefore, the literature indicates that the success of rural ELT interventions depends heavily on

contextual adaptation, particularly in selecting activities and scaffolding strategies that account for device heterogeneity and intermittent connectivity.

Active, Project-Based, and Multimodal Approaches as Empowerment Strategies

It is widely recommended to employ student-generated content, multimodal composition, and project-based learning (PBL) to fully realize the empowering potential of digital literacy. Recent studies indicate that learners demonstrate greater engagement, perseverance, and willingness to revise and improve their work when they create content that is meaningful to their identities and communities, such as digital stories or vlogs about local culture. Gündoğmuş (2024) and Choi (2024) emphasize that digital literacy in education fosters learner autonomy, empowerment, and agency. Additionally, vlogs and digital storytelling function as low-stakes rehearsal environments in which iteration, such as re-recording and peer feedback, is possible, thereby supporting the development of self-regulated learning and oral production skills.

METHOD

By integrating digital literacy into English language teaching (ELT), this study employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design to empower rural students. Classroom action research is widely used because it focuses on improving instructional strategies and student learning outcomes through systematic cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Burns & Edwards, 2025). This study followed the spiral model of Classroom Action Research proposed by Kemmis et al. (2014), which consists of four interrelated stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. These stages enable researchers and teachers to collaboratively identify classroom issues, implement pedagogical interventions, observe their effects, and refine practices through iterative cycles. In the context of this study, CAR was particularly suitable for examining how digital literacy strategies could empower rural students in ELT in a sustainable and context-sensitive manner.

The study was conducted through two action cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection, to integrate digital literacy into English language teaching. In Cycle I, the planning stage focused on identifying students' low levels of digital literacy and designing simple digital-based English activities. The action stage involved implementing digital storytelling tasks using students' smartphones with

teacher guidance. During the observation stage, students' participation, confidence, and use of digital tools were documented through observation notes and analysis of student work. The reflection stage revealed increased motivation in learning English. However, it also indicated students' continued dependence on the teacher and uneven digital skills, highlighting the need for improved scaffolding in the subsequent cycle.

In collaboration with the teacher, the researcher designed online writing, vlog production, and digital storytelling activities, which students implemented using digital tools to create and present English-language outputs. Student participation, engagement, and language use were monitored through structured classroom observations and analysis of students' digital products. In addition, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were administered to provide supplementary data and to explore students' perceptions of learning through digital literacy.

The participants included one English teacher and twenty eighth-grade students from a rural senior high school in Gowa, South Sulawesi, who were purposively selected due to their limited prior experience with digital literacy. Data were collected over a period of eight to ten weeks through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, student projects, and pre- and post-intervention questionnaires. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes such as collaboration, access barriers, and confidence building, while descriptive statistics were used to compare changes in students' digital literacy levels and perceived empowerment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Current Level of Rural Students' Digital Literacy in ELT

Pre-intervention data indicated that students at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, Gowa, demonstrated a limited yet fundamental level of digital literacy in their English language learning. Survey results revealed a clear disconnect between general digital exposure and purposeful academic use: while 78% of students reported regularly watching YouTube, only 25% indicated that they used it to support their English practice. Most students were familiar with digital tools primarily for social purposes, such as social media, video streaming, and smartphone-based messaging.

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This finding was reinforced by the pre-test task in Cycle I. Although almost all students were able to type a basic paragraph in Microsoft Word or on their mobile phones, their use of digital devices remained mechanical and largely limited to simple typing tasks. Only a few students were able to format their texts (e.g., adding images or adjusting layout), and none demonstrated the ability to incorporate multimedia elements. These results suggest that students' digital literacy was primarily functional rather than transformative for creative English language learning.

Further insights were gained from the initial classroom observations conducted in Cycle I. Observation data indicated that when students were asked to use their mobile phones for English-related tasks, they initially showed high levels of excitement. However, many students appeared hesitant and required teacher assistance to complete even basic activities, such as using online dictionaries or adding images to digital presentations. Additional findings from Cycle I showed that only a small proportion of students (approximately five out of thirty-two) were able to use applications confidently or assist their peers. The majority of students preferred conventional pen-and-paper methods, reflecting a lack of confidence in integrating digital resources into English language learning. To clarify the findings from Cycle I, they are synthesized and presented in Table 1.

The data presented in Table 1 were supported by interview findings that confirmed these patterns. Many students reported feeling "more comfortable using social media in Indonesian" and feeling "nervous or unsure" when asked to create digital content in English. One student stated, "*I use WhatsApp every day, but creating a digital story in English feels difficult because I don't know what to write or how to use the app properly.*" This finding highlights that, although digital access is available, its meaningful integration into English language learning has not yet been fully realized.

Based on the interview data, several students shared their experiences and challenges in using digital tools for English language learning. Student A stated that he usually uses his phone to chat with friends and watch TikTok. For English learning, he occasionally uses Google Translate but is not familiar with other applications that could support his learning. Student B explained that although she can type using Microsoft Word, she has never created a presentation that includes images or videos. When asked

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to do so by the teacher, she felt confused because she did not know how to edit digital content.

Table 1. Data for Cycle I about the Current Level of Rural Students' Digital Literacy in ELT

Aspect	Indicators / Data Source	Findings	Interpretation / Level of Digital Literacy
General Digital Exposure	Pre-intervention questionnaire	78% of students reported regular use of YouTube and social media platforms for entertainment.	Students are familiar with digital platforms but primarily for non-academic purposes. Digital exposure is social and recreational, not educational.
Academic Use of Digital Tools	Pre-intervention questionnaire and interviews	Only 25% used YouTube or other online tools to support English learning.	Limited awareness of using digital resources for language development; digital literacy is not yet integrated into learning behavior.
Basic Computer and Mobile Skills	Pre-test writing task	Most students could type simple paragraphs in Microsoft Word or mobile devices but rarely used formatting or multimedia features.	Students demonstrate functional digital literacy basic operational skills without creative or communicative application.
Digital Creativity and Integration	Pre-test and classroom observation	None of the students incorporated multimedia (images, audio, video) in English tasks.	Digital literacy remains mechanical and low-level, lacking creative engagement or multimodal skills.
Confidence and Independence	Classroom observation	Students were enthusiastic but hesitant when using phones for English tasks; only 5 of 32 showed confidence in using apps or supporting peers.	Majority of student's exhibit low digital confidence and dependency on teacher guidance.
Preferred Learning Practices	Classroom observation	Most students preferred pen-and-paper activities and avoided digital integration.	Indicates traditional learning preference and limited readiness to transition to digital-based English learning.

Student C mentioned that he enjoys listening to English songs on YouTube. However, he does not know how to use them as a learning resource and only listens for enjoyment. Student D reported that unstable internet access at home often prevents him from participating in online learning or searching for information on Google, which reduces his motivation to learn. One female student also expressed feeling shy when asked to create a video in English, as she was worried about her speaking ability and did not know how to edit mistakes in the video.

Another male student stated that he has basic knowledge of using PowerPoint, limited to typing text and inserting images, but has never used animations or audio features. Student G, a female participant, explained that she feels more comfortable writing in a notebook than typing on a mobile phone, as typing in English often slows her down. Student H, a male student, reported frequently using Google Translate when

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he does not understand English words. However, he sometimes finds the translations confusing and is unsure which option is correct.

In addition, one female student noted that during group work involving digital tools, she tends to follow her peers rather than take an active role because she lacks confidence. Finally, another student stated that although he enjoys making videos on his phone, he feels comfortable doing so only in Indonesian. When required to create videos in English, he feels nervous and afraid of making mistakes.

Overall, the baseline findings indicate that rural students at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, Gowa, possess rudimentary digital literacy skills that are largely limited to everyday communication. However, their ability to apply these skills to English language learning remains underdeveloped, particularly in terms of creativity, collaboration, and critical use of digital tools. This situation highlights the importance of classroom interventions that transform students' existing digital exposure into empowering practices for English learning.

Digital Literacy Practices Empowering Rural Students in English Learning

The implementation of digital literacy practices across two action cycles demonstrated a significant empowering effect on rural students' engagement and learning in English. For instance, during Cycle I, digital storytelling activities using PowerPoint or Canva initially elicited hesitation among students. However, over time, they became more comfortable narrating short stories in English using images and basic animations. Observation checklist data showed that 70% of students actively participated in group projects, an increase from 35% at the baseline stage. Several students who had previously been passive began to assume leadership roles, such as planning group projects, selecting visual elements, and reading English sentences aloud during presentations. For example, after completing the project, one student who had previously stated a preference for simply following peers commented, "*I feel proud because I can write sentences in English and show them with pictures. Presenting in front of the class gives me courage.*"

In Cycle II, which involved vlogging and online collaborative writing activities, students displayed stronger signs of empowerment through increased agency, creativity, and collaboration. Groups produced two- to three-minute English-language vlogs in which they described their daily routines, personal interests, and local customs.

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Compared to Cycle I, students were more willing to experiment with editing tools, including visual effects, background music, and subtitles. In addition to improved English vocabulary use, the students' products reflected a growing sense of pride and ownership. Peer responses to the vlogs were also positive. For example, one student commented, "*We didn't know we could make something like this in English.*"

Teacher reflections also revealed clear changes in classroom dynamics. The teacher observed that students who had previously been silent in Cycle I began to raise their hands to volunteer, and as participation increased, group discussions became more evenly distributed in Cycle II. Student reflection sessions provided further confirmation of this change. One female student stated, "*I used to be afraid to speak in English, but after making the vlog, I realized that I could keep trying until I got it right. It boosted my confidence.*" Another student commented that working on digital projects in groups was enjoyable, noting, "*My friends taught me more, and we were able to help each other.*"

Beyond language skills, the empowerment observed also encompassed increased self-confidence, collaboration, and digital creativity. Observation notes indicated that students became more proactive in resolving technical issues, such as editing or uploading videos, and less dependent on the teacher for support. As students encouraged one another to appear in front of the camera or contribute ideas to digital texts, peer support emerged as a key component of learner empowerment.

Based on the findings, digital literacy activities, particularly vlogging and digital storytelling, helped rural students shift from passive learning to more engaged, creative, and confident participation in English language learning. These findings confirm the potential of digital literacy as an effective pedagogical tool in rural English classrooms, with empowerment reflected in both tangible outcomes (digital products) and intangible gains (motivation, agency, and peer collaboration). The key findings are summarized in Table 2.

The findings across both cycles indicated a clear improvement and progressive development in students' empowerment. While Cycle I introduced students to digital literacy and helped build foundational confidence through guided digital storytelling, Cycle II further strengthened students' autonomy, creativity, and collaboration through vlogging and online writing activities. Overall, the findings demonstrated noticeable

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improvement in students' English learning from Cycle I to Cycle II. The integration of digital literacy activities transformed rural students from passive learners into active and confident participants in the English language learning process, with previously apprehensive students becoming more willing to engage and demonstrating both measurable academic improvement and meaningful personal growth.

Table 2. Digital Literacy Activities and Key Findings Across Cycle I and Cycle II

Aspect	Cycle I: Digital Storytelling (PowerPoint/Canva)	Cycle II: Vlogs and Online Collaborative Writing
Main Activities	Students created short digital stories in English using pictures and simple animations through PowerPoint or Canva. Activities were highly guided by the teacher.	Students produced 2–3 minute English vlogs and worked on online collaborative writing tasks with reduced teacher guidance.
Initial Student Response	Students were hesitant and lacked confidence at the beginning, especially in speaking English and using digital tools.	Students showed greater confidence and willingness to experiment with digital tools, including editing effects, music, and subtitles.
Participation Level	Active participation increased to 70%, compared to 35% at baseline. Some students began to take initiative in group planning and presentations.	Participation became more evenly distributed across groups, with previously passive students volunteering and contributing ideas more actively.
Language Use and Communication	Students used simple English sentences supported by visuals. Oral participation improved, though still limited for some learners.	Students demonstrated richer vocabulary, clearer pronunciation, and greater fluency in English through vlogs and group discussions.
Empowerment Indicators	Early signs of empowerment emerged, including increased confidence and willingness to present in front of the class.	Stronger empowerment was evident through autonomy, creativity, confidence, and pride in producing English digital content.
Student Reflections	Students expressed pride in being able to write and present English sentences using visuals, gaining courage to speak publicly.	Students reported increased confidence, enjoyment, and persistence, noting that repeated practice and peer support helped them improve.
Teacher Observations	Teacher noted growing motivation but continued dependence on guidance and uneven digital skills among students.	Teacher observed improved classroom dynamics, peer collaboration, and reduced reliance on teacher support.
Peer Collaboration and Support	Collaboration began to develop, though some students relied on more confident peers.	Peer support became a key factor, with students helping each other solve technical and language-related problems.
Overall Outcome	Students shifted from passive to more engaged learners, with emerging confidence and basic digital literacy skills.	Students became active creators, demonstrating agency, teamwork, digital creativity, and improved English proficiency.

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Strategies for Effectively Empowering Rural Students through Digital Literacy in English Language Teaching

The Classroom Action Research conducted in Cycle II revealed that rural students can be effectively empowered when digital literacy strategies are carefully scaffolded, context-sensitive, and integrated with communicative English tasks. Four main strategies emerged as particularly effective: (1) digital storytelling for confidence and voice, (2) vlogging and project-based collaboration for learner autonomy, (3) online collaboration for developing digital and social skills, and (4) scaffolded training and teacher support as enabling factors.

Digital storytelling for confidence and voice

Digital storytelling, in which students used images, videos, and voice recordings to create brief narratives in English, emerged as one of the most empowering techniques. Through this activity, students were able to express themselves meaningfully and personalize their content. For example, one group created a video about their local culture by combining images from their village with English narration. One student stated in an interview that she felt proud to showcase her culture while speaking English, and that presenting in front of others gave her confidence. In addition to enhancing language use, this process increased students' sense of ownership over their learning and strengthened their confidence.

Vlogging and project-based collaboration for learner autonomy

Students' weekly reflections were recorded in English through vlogging assignments, which encouraged independence and responsibility. Using their own smartphones, students planned, scripted, and edited short videos. The autonomy inherent in these assignments was evident in the reflection notes, as several students demonstrated perseverance and self-directed learning by re-recording their videos multiple times until they were satisfied. One student explained that whereas he previously waited for the teacher's instructions, he now attempts to generate his own ideas and practices speaking more frequently. According to classroom observations, vlogging enhanced students' creativity and speaking fluency while reducing their reliance on teacher guidance.

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Online collaboration for developing digital and social skills

The use of collaborative tools such as Google Docs for group writing and Canva for shared visual projects promoted teamwork and problem-solving skills. Despite occasional connectivity issues, students adapted by dividing tasks and later integrating their work. A teacher's reflection noted that students learned not only English but also how to share responsibilities and complete tasks collaboratively. This approach fostered both digital and communicative competence, particularly as students worked together to edit texts and negotiate meaning in English.

Table 3. Improvement and Effective Use of Digital Literacy in Rural ELT

Aspect	Pre-Intervention (Baseline)	Cycle I (Initial Integration)	Cycle II (After Reflection & Adjustment)	Improvement / Effectiveness
Digital Literacy Skills (using apps, editing, online collaboration)	Most students limited to basic phone use (chat, social media); little/no experience with Canva, Google Docs, or video editing.	Students experimented with apps through guided activities but needed constant teacher support.	Majority of students independently used Canva, Google Docs, and video editors; some even assisted peers.	Marked increase in tool mastery; peer-learning fostered sustainability.
Confidence in English (speaking/writing through digital media)	Students hesitant to speak in English; afraid of mistakes in recordings.	Students produced short videos with simple sentences; often relied on scripts.	Students spoke more fluently in vlogs and digital stories, with greater willingness to improvise.	Strong confidence growth; English use became more spontaneous.
Autonomy and Creativity	Students dependent on teacher guidance; minimal self-initiative.	Students followed teacher's step-by-step instructions in tasks.	Students planned, scripted, and edited projects independently; some re-recorded multiple times for quality.	High autonomy developed; creativity visible in culturally relevant projects.
Collaboration	Group work uneven, only digitally skilled students contributed; others stayed passive.	Teacher assigned roles in groups, but participation imbalance remained.	Students shared tasks more equally; negotiated meaning in English during collaboration.	More inclusive teamwork; collaboration improved language and digital literacy.
Attitude toward Learning	Students saw English as textbook-based and difficult.	Students became more engaged during digital tasks but still cautious.	Students expressed pride in combining English with local culture (e.g., digital storytelling).	Positive shift: learning seen as meaningful, enjoyable, and connected to real life.

Scaffolded training and teacher support as enabling factors

In addition to student-centered activities, scaffolded training in the use of digital tools played a key role in strengthening student empowerment. In Cycle I, the teacher provided detailed guidance. In Cycle II, the level of support was gradually reduced. This

progressive transfer of responsibility proved crucial as students developed greater confidence and independence. One student explained that although he did not know how to edit videos at first, he was eventually able to do so independently after practicing step by step. As a result, he felt more competent. Overall, these strategies helped rural students transition from passive learners to active creators, demonstrating that empowerment is achievable even in resource-limited contexts when pedagogy is participatory, creative, and supportive.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that integrating digital literacy into English language teaching (ELT) can foster meaningful linguistic and personal growth among rural students. The findings indicate improvements in students' confidence in speaking English, learner autonomy, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy skills, outcomes that are particularly significant in rural contexts where learning opportunities are often limited by resource constraints and low learner confidence. Digital storytelling and vlogging emerged as especially effective in enhancing students' confidence and language use, particularly in Cycle II. By creating English-language narratives connected to their local culture, students developed both linguistic competence and a sense of identity and pride. This supports Guthrie's (1988) view that digital storytelling promotes cultural expression alongside language development and suggests that contextualized digital tasks can make English learning more meaningful for rural learners.

The study also shows that scaffolded digital projects can promote learner autonomy. Although students initially relied heavily on teacher guidance, gradual scaffolding enabled them to plan, record, and edit their own work independently. This shift aligns with Chai et al.'s (2013) argument that sustainable digital literacy depends on pedagogical designs that encourage learner independence rather than technical mastery alone. Students' persistence in revising their digital outputs reflects a transition from passive participation to active knowledge creation.

Despite challenges such as limited devices, unstable internet access, and uneven participation, the action research cycles demonstrated that these constraints can be mitigated through flexible and collaborative instructional strategies. Similar to findings by Muslimin and Indrawati (2024), infrastructural limitations were evident. However,

adaptive practices, such as task division and gradual technology integration, enabled continued learning. These findings highlight the importance of context-sensitive approaches in rural ELT.

Teacher professional development was also crucial to sustaining digital literacy integration. The participating teacher's shift from a hesitant technology user to a facilitator of student-centered, technology-enhanced learning reinforces the relevance of the TPACK framework and Chai et al.'s (2013) emphasis on pedagogical design. This underscores the interdependence of teacher and student empowerment, particularly in rural settings with limited access to formal training. Overall, the study contributes to discussions on rural education and equity by demonstrating that digital literacy in ELT can empower students academically and personally. When aligned with pedagogical goals and local contexts, digital literacy can function not only as a linguistic resource but also as a means of narrowing educational disparities between rural and urban learners.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study explored the integration of digital literacy into English Language Teaching (ELT) to empower rural students at SMA Negeri 1 Parigi, Gowa. Findings from two cycles of classroom action research revealed improvements in students' digital literacy, confidence, autonomy, creativity, collaboration, and English language use. Despite initial limitations in digital access and confidence, students demonstrated significant progress when digital literacy strategies were implemented in a contextualized and student-centered manner. Digital storytelling, vlogging, and online collaboration proved particularly effective in linking English learning with students' local experiences and promoting active participation. These activities supported a shift from passive learning to active knowledge construction. However, challenges related to infrastructure and digital readiness highlight the need for flexible instructional design and supportive learning environments.

The study also underscores the importance of teacher professional development. Pedagogical support guided by the TPACK framework enabled teachers to design meaningful technology-enhanced learning experiences. Overall, the findings suggest that digital literacy integration can effectively empower rural ELT learners when

supported by appropriate pedagogy, contextual sensitivity, and continuous teacher development.

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