

Culturally Responsive Digital Learning in Social Studies: An Integrative Review and the MOSAIC Model for Integrating Local Diversity into Classroom Innovation

Armawati Hidayati¹ (Institut Agama Islam Al-Fatimah Bojonegoro, Indonesia)

Iif Aisyah² (Institut Agama Islam Al-Fatimah Bojonegoro, Indonesia)

Thorida Nur Asih³ (Institut Agama Islam Al-Fatimah Bojonegoro, Indonesia)

Muhammad Asyroful Mujib⁴ (Universitas Jember, Indonesia)

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Abstract

Digital technology can widen access to information and multimodal expression, but it can also reproduce cultural exclusion when classroom innovation ignores learners' languages, identities, places, and community knowledge. This integrative review examined how culturally responsive digital learning can incorporate local diversity into social studies education. The review followed five stages: problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, thematic analysis, and synthesis. Peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and August 2026 were identified through publisher databases, ERIC, DOAJ, institutional repositories, and reference chaining. Sixteen core empirical studies were retained because they addressed culturally responsive or sustaining pedagogy, technology-supported learning, local history or wisdom, digital storytelling, multicultural inclusion, or student cultural authorship. Five findings emerged. First, local diversity functioned as disciplinary knowledge that connected social studies concepts with identity, place, memory, institutions, and power. Second, digital storytelling, interactive e-books, digital history texts, and collaborative platforms enabled multimodal cultural representation. Third, outcomes were stronger when students became researchers and authors rather than passive technology users. Fourth, critical examination of representation, platform bias, missing voices, and cultural ownership was necessary to prevent tokenism and stereotyping. Fifth, teacher competence, community partnership, equitable access, consent, and reflection determined whether innovation became culturally meaningful. The review proposes the MOSAIC model: Map diversity, Open the curriculum, Source and safeguard knowledge, Author multimodal inquiry, Interrogate representation, and Circulate through dialogue and action. Technology should therefore support locally grounded social inquiry rather than merely digitize conventional instruction.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Teaching; Digital Learning; Social Studies Education; Local Diversity; Digital Storytelling; Classroom Innovation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social studies education is expected to help students understand society, interpret relationships between people and places, examine continuity and change, and participate responsibly in diverse communities. These purposes cannot be achieved fully when curriculum materials present social life through a single dominant perspective. Students enter classrooms with different languages, regional identities, religious traditions, migration histories, family occupations, social-class experiences, abilities, and relationships to local places. Local diversity is therefore not an obstacle to standardized instruction; it is a substantial source of knowledge through which social studies concepts can become meaningful.

Culturally responsive teaching uses learners' cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and communicative practices to make academic learning more relevant and effective (Gay, 2018). Culturally relevant pedagogy further emphasizes academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness (Ladson-Billings, 1995), while culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to support the continued development of plural cultural and

Corresponding Author: E-mail: armawatihidayati@iai-alfatimah.ac.id

linguistic practices rather than temporarily accommodating them (Paris, 2012). The funds-of-knowledge perspective similarly recognizes that households and communities possess historically accumulated knowledge that can enrich classroom inquiry (Moll et al., 1992). In social studies, these perspectives require teachers to move beyond festivals and cultural symbols toward investigation of how identities, institutions, livelihoods, environments, histories, and power relations shape local life.

Digital technology offers significant opportunities for this work. Students can record oral histories, create digital stories, develop interactive local-history e-books, map cultural landscapes, curate family and community archives, construct podcasts, annotate photographs, produce virtual exhibitions, and collaborate with peers from different backgrounds. These formats enable text, voice, image, music, maps, video, and hyperlinks to be combined in ways that make several forms of knowledge visible. They also allow learners whose experience is rarely represented in textbooks to become authors and interpreters of social knowledge rather than only consumers of content.

Research has identified important foundations for culturally responsive technology use. Chuang et al. (2020) validated five dimensions of culturally responsive teaching in technology-supported environments: cultural values, culturally relevant curriculum, cultural scaffolding, multicultural collaboration, and the integration of technology with multicultural perspectives. Cheng et al. (2021) found that preservice teachers could connect local cultural examples and technology in marine education, although technology was used more frequently as a teacher presentation aid than as a student learning tool. A later study showed that teachers' personal and pedagogical technology experiences, together with interactive school technology, were positively associated with perceptions of culturally responsive teaching (Cheng et al., 2022). These findings suggest that access to devices is insufficient without pedagogical knowledge and purposeful cultural design.

Studies of digital storytelling and local history demonstrate more learner-centered possibilities. Digital storytelling has supported engagement, dialogue about diversity, cultural competency, inclusion, identity reflection, and social-justice awareness (Gachago et al., 2014; Grant & Bolin, 2016; Manganello & Baldacci, 2024). In Indonesian social studies and history education, value-based digital stories, interactive local-history e-books, local-wisdom teaching materials, and digital history textbooks have been associated with character learning, digital literacy, cultural understanding, and historical empathy (Apdelmi et al., 2025; Darmawan et al., 2025; Saripudin et al., 2021, 2022). Culturally informed digital storytelling has also positioned students as active interpreters of local narratives and multimodal meaning makers (Handayani et al., 2026).

However, digital innovation is not automatically culturally responsive. Technology can reproduce standardized curricula, privilege dominant languages, turn living communities into decorative content, or circulate personal and cultural materials without appropriate consent. Jackson et al. (2022) showed that one-to-one laptop access did not guarantee culturally sustaining learning. Niu and Niranjana (2025) similarly found that teachers' basic digital competence did not necessarily produce transformative or culturally responsive integration. Digital tools can expand expression, but they can also intensify inequity through differences in access, connectivity, language, technical confidence, and platform visibility.

Three gaps require synthesis. First, studies of culturally responsive technology, digital storytelling, local history, and social studies innovation are often discussed separately. Second, many digital-media studies emphasize engagement or product feasibility without explaining how cultural content becomes disciplinary and critical knowledge. Third, teachers need practical guidance for representing local diversity without tokenism, stereotyping, cultural extraction, or uncritical celebration. This review therefore asked: (1) How does culturally responsive digital learning integrate local diversity into social studies education? (2) Which pedagogical mechanisms and outcomes recur across the evidence? and (3) What ethical and design principles should guide classroom innovation? The review contributes the MOSAIC model as a structured framework for locally grounded, multimodal, critical, and dialogic social studies learning.

2. METHOD

This study used an integrative literature review because the relevant evidence included quantitative studies, qualitative case studies, mixed-method research, research-and-development projects, classroom interventions, and instrument-development studies. The procedure followed five stages: problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The search focused on educational studies combining at least two of the following domains: culturally responsive, relevant, or sustaining pedagogy; digital technology or technology-supported learning; social studies, history, citizenship, or multicultural education; local diversity, community knowledge, local history, identity, or cultural inclusion. Searches were conducted in August 2026 through publisher databases, ERIC, DOAJ, institutional repositories, and backward and forward reference chaining. Search combinations included “culturally responsive digital learning,” “technology-supported culturally responsive teaching,” “digital storytelling cultural competency,” “local history interactive e-book,” “local wisdom digital social studies,” “culturally sustaining technology,” and “multicultural classroom digital storytelling.”

Studies were included when they were peer reviewed, described an educational implementation or empirical investigation, provided sufficient information about participants and procedures, and reported outcomes or challenges related to cultural relevance, identity, inclusion, engagement, empathy, historical understanding, digital literacy, collaboration, or teacher practice. Studies were excluded when culture appeared only as a demographic variable, technology was discussed without pedagogical implementation, or the publication lacked adequate methodological information. Sixteen core empirical studies published between 2014 and August 2026 were retained. Foundational theoretical works were used to frame the analysis but were not counted as core empirical studies.

Data extraction recorded the educational context, participants, research design, digital form, cultural resource, learning process, outcomes, and implementation challenges. Evidence quality was evaluated through clarity of purpose, methodological alignment, transparency of data collection, contextual detail, and correspondence between findings and conclusions. Statistical meta-analysis was not appropriate because the studies differed substantially in participants, technologies, measures, and duration. The review therefore used iterative thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial codes included cultural relevance, local

knowledge, identity, student voice, multimodal authorship, cultural scaffolding, critical representation, collaboration, teacher competence, access, consent, and ownership. These codes were refined into five themes.

The review has limitations. The studies represented several disciplines and educational levels, so some implications for secondary social studies are interpretive. A substantial proportion of local-diversity research came from Indonesia, while research on technology-supported culturally responsive teaching included Taiwan, the United States, New Zealand, South Africa, Italy, and study-abroad settings. Several studies relied on short interventions, self-reports, or product feasibility rather than long-term changes in classroom participation or civic behavior. The findings should therefore be understood as a synthesis of recurring pedagogical mechanisms and design principles, not as a universal causal claim.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Characteristics of the Evidence Base

The selected studies covered social studies, history, diversity education, teacher education, language and multimodal literacy, multicultural primary education, technology-rich middle schools, marine sustainability education, and intercultural study-abroad learning. Digital forms included web-based collaboration, laptop-supported learning, digital storytelling, interactive e-books, multimedia teaching materials, digital history textbooks, and shared online artefacts. Across contexts, culturally responsive digital learning was most substantial when cultural experience shaped the inquiry question, source selection, interpretation, production process, audience, and reflection.

Table 1. Core empirical studies included in the integrative synthesis

Study	Context and Design	Contribution to the Synthesis
Gachago et al. (2014)	South African teacher education; narrative inquiry	Collective digital stories connected personal experience, social division, empathy, agency, and social-justice reflection.
Grant & Bolin (2016)	United States diversity course; survey evaluation	Digital storytelling supported engagement, technology use, dialogue about diversity, and cultural competency.
Chuang et al. (2020)	257 Taiwanese teachers; instrument validation	Identified cultural values, relevant curriculum, cultural scaffolding, multicultural collaboration, and technology-multicultural integration.
Cheng et al. (2021)	19 preservice teachers; qualitative practicum study	Local examples and technology supported cultural scaffolding, but technology remained mainly teacher controlled.
Saripudin et al. (2021)	Indonesian social studies teacher education; R&D	Value-based digital storytelling integrated inquiry, reflection, technology, project learning, and character development.
Belda-Medina (2022)	244 teacher candidates; multi-year study	Digital storytelling promoted inclusiveness, creativity, critical thinking, and openness to educational technology.
Cheng et al. (2022)	257 teachers; multilevel quantitative analysis	Teacher technology experience and interactive school technology predicted perceptions of culturally responsive teaching.

Study	Context and Design	Contribution to the Synthesis
Jackson et al. (2022)	Three middle schools; multiple-case study	One-to-one laptops did not ensure equity; culturally sustaining TPACK was necessary to challenge missed opportunities.
Saripudin et al. (2022)	West Java secondary schools; R&D and experimental work	Interactive local-history e-books supported local wisdom, contextual history learning, and digital literacy.
Hudak et al. (2024)	Three study-abroad projects; case study	Interviewing, editing, and reviewing digital stories supported intercultural identity awareness and reflection.
Manganello & Baldacci (2024)	Italian multicultural primary class; intervention	Digital stories strengthened narrative participation, communicative competence, inclusion, and cultural exchange.
Apdelmi et al. (2025)	120 Indonesian students; Four-D development study	Interactive Kenduri Sko materials improved cultural understanding, engagement, and appreciation of local wisdom.
Darmawan et al. (2025)	471 participants; ADDIE-based R&D	Living History supported by digital textbooks developed perspective-taking and historical empathy.
Niu & Niranjana (2025)	New Zealand primary schools; qualitative study	Digital competence supported engagement, but equity, professional learning, and culturally responsive integration remained underdeveloped.
Handayani et al. (2026)	Grade 12 classroom; qualitative case study	Culturally informed digital storytelling supported multimodal literacy, identity, motivation, collaboration, and reflective viewing.
Chuang (2016)	Preservice teachers; online collaborative projects	Web-based project design increased awareness of culturally responsive teaching and collaborative application of cultural knowledge.

3.2 Local Diversity as Disciplinary Knowledge

The first theme was the repositioning of local diversity from supplementary content to a source of disciplinary knowledge. Social studies concepts become more meaningful when students examine how local identities, livelihoods, institutions, landscapes, memories, and conflicts are connected to wider social processes. A local market can be studied through economic exchange, migration, gender roles, transport, land use, and public policy. A community ritual can be examined through history, authority, belonging, environmental knowledge, and generational change. Local diversity therefore supports conceptual learning when teachers ask analytical questions rather than treating culture as a list of customs.

Interactive local-history resources illustrate this potential. Saripudin et al. (2022) connected West Java history with local wisdom and digital literacy, while Apdelmi et al. (2025) developed interactive materials around the Kenduri Sko tradition. These studies indicate that culturally contextualized materials can increase relevance and cultural understanding. Their wider implication is that local content should be selected for its capacity to illuminate historical and social relationships, not only because it is familiar or visually attractive.

Local diversity also includes internal differences. Communities contain disagreements shaped by age, class, gender, occupation, language, mobility, and access to authority. Culturally responsive learning should avoid sentences that present a community as homogeneous or timeless. Students can compare sources, identify contested meanings, and study how traditions

respond to tourism, markets, regulation, environmental change, or digital circulation. This critical treatment preserves cultural respect while maintaining the analytical purpose of social studies.

3.3. Digital Multimodality, Voice, and Cultural Authorship

The second theme concerned multimodal representation. Digital stories, e-books, podcasts, maps, photographs, video, music, and archival documents allow students to communicate cultural meaning through several modes. Digital media can make oral knowledge, place-based experience, and family memory visible within school learning. Handayani et al. (2026) found that culturally grounded digital narratives supported multimodal communication, cultural identity, motivation, and collaboration. Manganello and Baldacci (2024) similarly connected digital stories with increased participation and inclusion in a multicultural classroom.

The educational value was strongest when students became authors. Story planning, interviewing, scripting, selecting media, mapping places, editing, and presenting require decisions about evidence, perspective, audience, and meaning. Grant and Bolin (2016) showed that student-created digital stories generated dialogue around diversity, while Gachago et al. (2014) demonstrated how collective sharing connected personal narratives with social justice and agency. These processes transform technology from a delivery channel into a tool for knowledge construction.

Authorship also creates opportunities for multiple ways of demonstrating learning. Students may communicate more effectively through spoken narration, visual composition, maps, music, performance, or bilingual text than through conventional essays alone. However, multimodality should not reduce academic rigor. Products need evidence, source attribution, conceptual explanation, and explicit links between personal experience and wider social structures. Technical quality should support meaning rather than dominate assessment.

3.4. Dialogue, Identity, and Perspective-Taking

The third theme was the importance of dialogue surrounding digital production. Story circles, peer review, interviews, classroom screenings, online collaboration, and reflective discussion enabled learners to compare interpretations and reconsider their assumptions. Hudak et al. (2024) found that interviewing, editing, and reviewing self-representations encouraged intercultural identity reflection. Darmawan et al. (2025) showed that digital history textbooks combined with Living History activities could support contextual thinking, perspective comparison, and historical empathy.

These findings are directly relevant to social studies because identity is relational. Students understand their own experiences more critically when they encounter other accounts and consider why perspectives differ. A digital project on migration, for example, may include the voices of migrants, long-term residents, local government, employers, and family members. Dialogue helps students identify both common concerns and unequal positions. It also provides a space for authors to correct misunderstandings and recognize unintended meanings in their digital representations.

Teacher facilitation is essential. Dialogue should be structured around listening, evidence, clarification, respectful disagreement, and the right not to disclose personal experience. Students should not be required to represent an identity group simply because they belong to

it. The classroom must distinguish voluntary cultural contribution from forced cultural performance. Culturally responsive digital learning values student voice while protecting privacy, complexity, and emotional safety.

3.5. Critical Digital-Cultural Literacy

The fourth theme was critical literacy. Digital platforms do not represent all cultures equally. Search results, recommendation systems, dominant languages, media templates, and copyright databases influence which stories become visible and how they are framed. Students should therefore ask who created a digital source, whose perspective is centered, what has been omitted, and how platform design shapes interpretation. Cultural representation must be evaluated alongside the factual reliability of online information.

Critical literacy also prevents tokenism. A digital lesson is not culturally responsive merely because it includes traditional clothing, food, music, or a local photograph. Students should investigate context, history, function, internal variation, and changing meaning. They should examine power and ask who has the authority to explain, preserve, adapt, or commercialize cultural knowledge. Sacred, private, or collectively owned material may be inappropriate for open online publication even when it is technically accessible.

Jackson et al. (2022) demonstrated that technology access can coexist with missed opportunities to challenge inequity. The same risk appears when interactive media reproduce a conventional one-way curriculum. Culturally responsive digital learning therefore requires learners to critique both cultural content and technology itself. They should recognize that digital innovation can amplify local voice, but it can also extract, simplify, rank, or commodify that voice.

3.6. Teacher Capacity, Equity, and Community Partnership

The fifth theme concerned implementation conditions. Chuang et al. (2020) and Cheng et al. (2022) showed that culturally responsive technology use includes several distinct competencies and is associated with teachers' technology experience. Cheng et al. (2021), however, found that preservice teachers frequently used technology as a presentation tool rather than enabling student collaboration or authorship. Professional development must therefore address cultural inquiry, instructional design, critical media literacy, and ethics in addition to technical operation.

Equity is also broader than device distribution. Students differ in connectivity, digital confidence, language, disability access, recording space, and time available outside school. Niu and Niranjana (2025) identified infrastructure, professional learning, and cultural responsiveness as continuing constraints, while Jackson et al. (2022) warned against assuming that one-to-one laptop programs are inherently equitable. Schools can respond by providing class production time, shared equipment, low-bandwidth formats, accessible captions and transcripts, multilingual options, flexible roles, and assessment that prioritizes inquiry over technical polish.

Community partnership improves accuracy and reciprocity. Parents, cultural practitioners, local historians, community organizations, and residents can help identify significant questions, interpret sources, review representations, and decide how products may be circulated. Consent should address recording, editing, storage, audience, and future reuse.

Students should return copies or useful products to community contributors where appropriate. This approach changes the relationship from extracting local culture for a school assignment to co-producing educational knowledge.

3.7. The MOSAIC Culturally Responsive Digital Learning Model

The synthesis produced the MOSAIC model, a six-phase framework for integrating local diversity into digital social studies learning. The model treats cultural relevance, disciplinary inquiry, digital production, critique, and dialogue as connected processes rather than separate additions to a lesson.

Table 2. The MOSAIC Culturally Responsive Digital Learning Model

Phase	Learning Function
M - Map diversity and positionality	Identify learners' languages, experiences, identities, local places, community resources, prior knowledge, and relationships to the topic without assuming that group membership determines perspective.
O - Open the curriculum to local perspectives	Connect required social studies concepts with locally significant questions, multiple histories, community practices, and voices that are absent or simplified in standard materials.
S - Source and safeguard community knowledge	Collect interviews, maps, documents, observations, photographs, and digital sources ethically; evaluate reliability, obtain consent, and respect privacy and cultural ownership.
A - Author multimodal social inquiry	Create a digital story, interactive e-book, podcast, map, archive, exhibition, or video that combines evidence, conceptual explanation, and several modes of communication.
I - Interrogate representation and technology	Examine stereotypes, missing voices, power relations, platform bias, language dominance, editorial choices, accessibility, and possible unintended consequences.
C - Circulate through dialogue, revision, and action	Share products with structured audiences, invite peer and community feedback, revise inaccuracies, reflect on learning, and connect findings with civic or cultural action.

The model can be implemented through a short inquiry unit or a longer project. A class might investigate the changing cultural landscape of a neighborhood, local responses to environmental risk, migration histories, traditional and contemporary livelihoods, public-space use, or contested heritage. Students first map their relationship to the issue, then collect and compare sources, produce a digital interpretation, test its cultural and factual accuracy, and engage an audience in dialogue.

Assessment should combine process and product. Suggested dimensions are social studies conceptual understanding, evidence and source evaluation, cultural contextualization, recognition of multiple perspectives, critical analysis of power and representation, multimodal coherence, accessibility, ethical practice, collaboration, and reflection. Student journals, source logs, interview protocols, digital artefacts, peer feedback, and community responses can provide evidence that a product is not only attractive but intellectually and culturally responsible.

4. CONCLUSION

This integrative review found that culturally responsive digital learning can transform local diversity into a meaningful context for social studies inquiry. Local languages, histories,

places, institutions, cultural practices, and community experiences can help students understand disciplinary concepts while strengthening identity, participation, perspective-taking, and cultural understanding. Digital stories, interactive e-books, digital history texts, collaborative platforms, and other multimodal tools expand the possibilities for representation and student authorship.

The review also showed that technology does not become culturally responsive through access or visual attractiveness alone. Innovation remains superficial when teachers merely digitize a conventional curriculum, treat culture as a celebration of fixed traits, or use community knowledge without context and consent. Strong implementation requires culturally relevant curriculum design, student-centered technology use, critical digital-cultural literacy, teacher competence, equitable access, ethical safeguards, and community partnership.

The proposed MOSAIC model - Map diversity, Open the curriculum, Source and safeguard knowledge, Author multimodal inquiry, Interrogate representation, and Circulate through dialogue and action - provides a practical structure for social studies classrooms. Future research should test the model through design-based, quasi-experimental, and longitudinal studies; develop measures of culturally responsive digital learning; compare learning across diverse school contexts; and examine whether classroom products generate sustained dialogue, cultural reciprocity, and civic participation beyond the completion of an assignment.

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