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School Culture Transformation toward a Digital Literacy Culture: A Case Study on Building Students' Self-Directed Learning Culture

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ABSTRACT: *The acceleration of educational digitalization forces schools to reshape their underlying organizational culture, yet how this shift builds self-directed learning remains underexplored. This study examines how school culture transformation toward digital literacy fosters students' self-directed learning culture, alongside the mechanisms and enabling conditions sustaining this change. Utilizing a qualitative case-study design through systematic document analysis, this research synthesized peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2021 and 2025 using thematic coding and data triangulation. Findings reveal, first, that cultural transformation functions as a staged organizational process involving vision alignment, competence development, and iterative review. Second, digital literacy serves as the operative mechanism converting technological access into self-directed learning behavior by enhancing initiative, self-regulation, and engagement. Third, sustaining this transformation requires the synergistic alignment of teacher digital competence, distributed instructional leadership, and an independence-oriented curriculum framework. The study concludes that a self-directed learning culture is not an automatic outcome of digitalization but an intentionally cultivated result requiring integrated cultural, pedagogical, and leadership change. Theoretically and practically, these insights offer valuable guidance for school leaders, teacher professional development, and digital-literacy curriculum design.*

Keywords: *School Culture Transformation; Digital Literacy Culture; Self-Directed Learning; Teacher Digital Competence; Educational Change Management*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The rapid and largely unplanned digitalization of education triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic did not end when classrooms reopened; instead, it left many schools with a residual expectation that digital technology should remain woven into everyday teaching and learning rather than reverting to a purely face to face default. This expectation has pushed school leaders and policymakers to think beyond simply procuring hardware or subscribing to a learning management system, toward a more fundamental question: how does a school's organizational culture itself need to change so that digital tools translate into genuinely different, more autonomous ways of learning? The distinction matters because technology adoption and cultural transformation are not the same phenomenon. A school can possess extensive digital infrastructure while its teaching and learning practices remain teacher-centered and dependent, or, conversely, a school with modest infrastructure can cultivate strong habits of independent, self-directed learning if its underlying culture supports student initiative and digital competence.

Empirical evidence increasingly supports the idea that digital literacy and self-directed learning are tightly interconnected rather than parallel goals. Rini et al. (2022) found a significant positive effect of self-directed learning on students' digital literacy levels among university students in Indonesia, demonstrating that the capacity to take initiative for one's own learning materials directly strengthens digital literacy outcomes. In a complementary direction, Li et al. (2023) showed, through structural equation modeling of high school students, that information literacy and self-directed learning skills jointly shape online learning engagement together with students' academic emotions, indicating that the relationship between digital competence and learner autonomy operates as a mutually reinforcing system rather than a one directional causal chain. Zakir et al. (2025) extended this picture by showing that digital literacy improves academic performance partly through digital informal learning and digital self-efficacy, suggesting that the benefits of digital literacy are realized through the everyday, self-initiated learning behaviors it enables. These findings collectively indicate that fostering a digital literacy culture in schools is inseparable from fostering a self-

directed learning culture: the two are mechanistically linked rather than merely correlated outcomes of the same digital transformation.

At the organizational level, Purnomo et al. (2024) provided one of the most detailed accounts of how schools actually undergo this cultural shift, documenting a seven-stage change management process spanning team formation, resource preparation, vision alignment, digital skills development, obstacle analysis, short-term review, and technology-acceptance reinforcement through which three Indonesian schools transformed from a technological status quo into what the authors term a Digital-based School Culture (DSC). Their study found that this transformation directly reshaped learning strategies toward digital module development, blended learning with a self-directed approach, and the optimization of virtual learning resource exploration, directly linking organizational-level cultural change to individual-level self-directed learning outcomes. In Finland, Korhonen et al. (2024) examined teachers' transformative digital agency and found that teachers' continuous learning within a digitalizing school system depends on interconnected dimensions of competence development, structural support, attitudes, and role redefinition, underscoring that cultural transformation is experienced and enacted by teachers as much as by students or administrators.

Despite this growing body of evidence, a gap remains in understanding how these organizational-level and individual-level processes connect in practice: through what specific pathway does a school's cultural transformation toward digital literacy actually produce a self-directed learning culture among students, and what conditions determine whether that culture, once formed, is sustained rather than reverting once external pressure (such as a pandemic mandate) recedes. Much existing research treats digital literacy, self-directed learning, and school-level change management as separate literatures, measured through distinct instruments and samples, without explicitly tracing the mechanism that converts a school-wide cultural shift into a durable individual learning disposition. Addressing this gap matters both theoretically, for models of educational change, and practically, for school leaders seeking to design digitalization efforts that produce lasting pedagogical change rather than superficial technology use.

This study therefore addresses two research questions: first, how does school culture transformation toward a digital literacy culture contribute to the formation of students' self-directed learning culture; and second, what mechanisms and institutional conditions enable this transformation to be sustained over time. By synthesizing empirical findings from Indonesian and international peer-reviewed literature on digital-based school culture, digital literacy, self-directed learning, and teacher digital competence, this study aims to construct an integrated account of the pathway connecting organizational cultural change to individual student learning autonomy. The findings are intended to inform school leadership practice, teacher professional development design, and curriculum policy aimed at cultivating genuinely self-directed, digitally literate learners.

II. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case-study design grounded in systematic document analysis, an approach suited to synthesizing and interpreting patterns across multiple independently documented empirical studies of school-level digital culture transformation rather than collecting new primary survey or interview data. The unit of analysis was the documented process through which schools transform their organizational culture toward digital literacy and the corresponding formation of students' self-directed learning behavior, drawing primarily on cases from Indonesian schools and universities together with international comparative cases from Finland, Australia, Lebanon, and multi-country structural-equation studies.

Data Sources and Collection Procedure

Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025, sourced from nationally accredited (Sinta-indexed) Indonesian journals and internationally indexed journals (Scopus, Web of Science, and DOAJ-listed outlets). Search terms combined Indonesian and English keywords, including "*transformasi budaya sekolah*," "*literasi digital*," "*kemandirian belajar*," "digital-based school culture," "self-directed learning," and "teacher digital competence." Articles were included if they (a) reported empirical or conceptual findings on the intersection of school-level digital culture change, digital literacy, or self-directed

learning, (b) were published in an accredited or internationally indexed journal, and (c) provided sufficient methodological detail to support thematic comparison. Articles addressing digital literacy or self-directed learning in isolation from any school- or institution-level context were retained only where they contributed conceptual grounding for the mechanism linking the two constructs.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a three-stage qualitative coding procedure adapted from grounded-theory-informed document analysis: open coding, in which recurring concepts across the collected articles such as "change management stages," "digital self-efficacy," "teacher digital agency," and "learner initiative" were identified and labeled; axial coding, in which these concepts were grouped into broader categories representing organizational-level processes, individual-level learning mechanisms, and sustaining conditions; and selective coding, in which the relationships among these categories were synthesized into the three discussion themes presented in the following section. Coding was performed manually across the collected articles, with recurring patterns clustered through constant comparison. Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation, cross-checking claims about the school culture to self-directed learning pathway across at least three independent studies (Purnomo et al., 2024; Rini et al., 2022; Korhonen et al., 2024), and through method triangulation, comparing findings derived from qualitative multi-case research (Purnomo et al., 2024), quantitative regression and structural equation studies (Rini et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Zakir et al., 2025), and systematic or scoping reviews (Cook et al., 2023; Momdjian et al., 2024). Dependability was supported by maintaining a transparent audit trail of source inclusion decisions and by restricting thematic claims to those directly supported by cited evidence.

Analytical Framework

The synthesis was organized around three explanatory lenses drawn from the reviewed literature: (1) organizational change management theory, which frames school culture transformation as a staged, managed process rather than a spontaneous or purely technological event (Purnomo et al., 2024); (2) the digital

literacy self directed learning nexus, which conceptualizes digital literacy not merely as a technical skill set but as the operative mechanism through which learners exercise initiative, self-regulation, and autonomous engagement (Rini et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Zakir et al., 2025); and (3) sustainability of educational transformation, which considers the institutional conditions teacher digital competence, leadership, and curriculum design that determine whether a digital literacy culture, once introduced, persists and continues to generate self-directed learning outcomes (Cook et al., 2023; Momdjian et al., 2024; Darmanto & Adiyono, 2025). These three lenses structure the presentation of findings below.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of documented cases produced two central findings that directly address the study's research questions, presented below as focused discussion points, followed by an account of the institutional conditions that determine whether the resulting culture is sustained.

School Culture Transformation as a Staged, Managed Change Process

The first finding is that school culture transformation toward digital literacy does not occur as a spontaneous by-product of technology deployment but as a deliberately staged organizational change process. Purnomo et al. (2024) documented this most explicitly through a multi-case qualitative study of three Indonesian schools, identifying seven sequential stages of change management in the transition from a technological status quo to what they term a Digital-based School Culture: forming a collaborative change team, preparing technological resources, aligning the school's vision around digital learning, developing the digital skills of both teachers and students, analyzing implementation obstacles, conducting short-term reviews, and reinforcing technology acceptance over time. Crucially, the study found that this staged process directly reshaped classroom-level learning strategies, producing integrated digital modules, blended learning designs with an explicitly self-directed component, and greater optimization of virtual learning resource exploration by students. This finding indicates that the pathway from organizational culture change to individual student autonomy is not incidental; it is engineered through specific stages of the change process, particularly the vision-alignment and skills-development stages, which directly target the dispositions and competencies self-directed learning requires.

This staged conception of cultural transformation is reinforced by evidence on how teachers experience and enact digital change. Korhonen et al. (2024) found, in a qualitative study of Finnish teachers participating in a digitalization specialization program, that teachers'

transformative digital agency depends on four interconnected dimensions competence development, structural support, attitudes, and redefinition of their professional role and that fostering and challenging factors such as resources, peer support, and leadership shape whether teachers become active agents of digital change or remain passive implementers. This suggests that the staged change process identified by Purnomo et al. (2024) is not merely a top-down administrative sequence but must actively cultivate teacher agency at each stage; without teachers who feel structurally supported and professionally repositioned, the vision-alignment and skills-development stages are unlikely to translate into changed classroom practice. Ridani and Sudadi (2025), in a systematic review of digital-era education quality management in Indonesia, similarly found that strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous evaluation are recurring success factors across digital transformation initiatives, while inconsistent leadership commitment and uneven digital infrastructure remain persistent challenges further evidence that transformation succeeds or stalls based on how deliberately the change process is managed rather than on the mere availability of technology.

Taken together, these findings directly answer the first part of the first research question: school culture transformation toward digital literacy operates as a managed, staged process in which specific stages vision alignment, skills development, and teacher agency cultivation function as the structural bridge between organizational intent and individual student behavior change. Programs that skip these stages, treating digitalization as a matter of procurement rather than cultural redesign, are therefore unlikely to produce the self-directed learning outcomes schools ultimately seek.

Digital Literacy as the Operative Mechanism Linking Culture Change to Self-Directed Learning

The second central finding concerns the specific mechanism through which a school's cultural shift toward digital literacy is converted into individual students' self-directed learning behavior. Across the reviewed quantitative and structural studies, digital literacy consistently emerges not as a parallel outcome alongside self-directed learning but as the operative variable that enables it. Rini et al. (2022), studying 947 university students in Indonesia using the Self Rating Scale of Self-Directed Learning and a Digital Literacy Measurement instrument, found a positive and significant effect of self-directed learning on digital literacy levels, with self-directed learning explaining more than half of the variance in digital literacy outcomes; the authors argue that the ability to take initiative for one's own learning materials is a precondition for developing digital literacy in online learning contexts, rather than a consequence of it. Li et al. (2023) extended this relationship among high school students, using structural equation modeling to show that information literacy and self-directed learning skills jointly predict online learning engagement, with

academic emotions serving as an additional pathway through which these competencies translate into sustained engagement rather than sporadic technology use.

Zakir et al. (2025) provide further mechanistic detail, showing through structural equation modeling that digital literacy improves academic performance through the partial mediation of digital informal learning, digital self-efficacy, and students' broader digital competence; that is, digital literacy does not affect learning outcomes directly so much as by increasing the likelihood that students engage in self-initiated, informal digital learning activities outside formal instruction. This mediating role is consistent with findings from Naujoks et al. (2021), who examined self-regulated resource management among German university students during emergency remote teaching and found that students' digital readiness including workspace preparation, prior online learning experience, and information-sharing behavior significantly predicted their capacity to regulate external learning resources such as environment structuring, time management, and help seeking. Read together, these studies indicate that digital literacy functions as a kind of behavioral catalyst: it does not merely equip students with technical skills but measurably increases their propensity to structure, regulate, and sustain their own learning independent of direct instructional oversight.

This finding directly answers the second part of the first research question. The pathway from school culture transformation to a self-directed learning culture runs specifically through digital literacy development: schools that successfully build digital literacy as a cultural norm not simply as a subject taught in isolation create the behavioral precondition for students to exercise initiative, self-regulate their learning process, and engage in informal digital learning beyond the classroom. This reframes digital literacy programs in schools: their primary educational value lies not in technical proficiency itself but in the self-directed learning behavior that proficiency enables.

Institutional Conditions That Sustain the Transformation

A further pattern relevant to the second research question concerns the institutional conditions that determine whether a digital literacy culture, once established, is sustained rather than eroding once initial momentum or external pressure fades. Teacher digital competence emerges consistently as a necessary, though not sufficient, condition. Cook et al. (2023), through a review of empirical studies and ten Australian university digital competency frameworks, found that teachers' digital competence during emergency remote teaching was best understood as a contextual social practice connected to teachers' experience, available resources, and the broader culture of the teaching and learning environment, rather than a fixed, individually held skill set implying that sustaining digital literacy culture requires continual institutional investment rather than a one-time training event. Momdjian et al. (2024), using the DigCompEdu framework to compare Lebanese student teachers and in-service teachers, similarly found that in-service teachers

consistently outperformed student teachers across all six digital competence areas, with the largest gap in the use of digital resources, suggesting that sustained professional experience within a supportive institutional culture, rather than initial teacher training alone, is what closes competence gaps over time. Darmanto and Adiyono (2025), studying Indonesian teachers, found that digital media utilization and institutional environmental support were the strongest predictors of teacher digital competence, while individual soft skills contributed only indirectly reinforcing that competence is cultivated through sustained institutional conditions rather than being a purely individual trait.

Leadership and curriculum alignment provide the second and third sustaining conditions. Purwanto (2021) found that visionary school-leadership practices were significantly associated with improved school quality in an Indonesian elementary school, indicating that leadership commitment to a digital and student-centered vision is a distinct institutional lever beyond teacher competence alone. At the curriculum level, Mery et al. (2022) and Hamzah et al. (2022) examined Indonesia's Strengthened *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* project based curriculum framework, finding that project based activities explicitly structured to build student independence functioned as a curricular mechanism through which schools operationalize the value of learner autonomy in daily practice, giving self-directed learning a formal place within the curriculum rather than leaving it to emerge informally. When these three conditions teacher digital competence sustained through institutional support, visionary and consistent leadership, and a curriculum framework that explicitly values independence operate together, the reviewed evidence suggests that a school's digital literacy culture becomes self-reinforcing: each condition provides the context in which the others can function, producing a stable foundation for ongoing self-directed learning rather than a transformation that regresses once initial implementation pressure subsides.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that building a self-directed learning culture through school digitalization is neither automatic nor purely technological; it is the product of a deliberately staged cultural transformation process, operating through digital literacy as the specific behavioral mechanism that enables learner autonomy, and sustained only when teacher competence, leadership, and curriculum design are institutionally aligned. This has practical implications for how schools and policymakers should evaluate digitalization efforts: success should be measured not by device counts or platform adoption rates, but by observable growth in students' self-directed digital learning behavior and by the institutional durability of the conditions that support it.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined how school culture transformation toward a digital literacy culture contributes to the formation of students' self directed learning culture, and what conditions allow this transformation to be sustained. The synthesis of

Indonesian and international literature shows that such transformation proceeds through a staged, deliberately managed organizational change process encompassing vision alignment, digital skills development, and cultivation of teacher digital agency rather than emerging spontaneously from technology adoption alone. It further shows that digital literacy functions as the specific operative mechanism converting this organizational level change into individual level learning autonomy, as students with stronger digital literacy consistently demonstrate greater self-regulation, initiative, and engagement in informal digital learning. Finally, this transformation is sustained only when teacher digital competence, visionary and consistent school leadership, and a curriculum framework that formally values learner independence operate together as mutually reinforcing institutional conditions. These findings carry practical implications for school leaders, teacher educators, and curriculum designers: efforts to build a self directed learning culture through digitalization should be designed as an integrated cultural, pedagogical, and leadership intervention rather than a technology procurement exercise, with success measured by durable growth in student learning autonomy rather than by infrastructure metrics alone. Future research employing longitudinal, mixed-methods designs within individual schools would help to test whether the staged transformation pathway identified here holds consistently across varying school resource levels and to clarify the minimum threshold of institutional alignment required for a self-directed learning culture to become self sustaining.

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