



## Reflections on Critical Education in the Practice of Primary School Teacher Professionalism in Surakarta

Elina Intan Apriliani<sup>1</sup>, Kartika Belannisa<sup>2</sup>, Nur Lina Fauziyah<sup>3</sup>, Musfiroh<sup>4</sup>, Pipuk Zainita Choirun Nisa Al abdillah<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Institut Islam Mambaul Ulum Surakarta, Indonesia



[arifahhanafiah@gmail.com](mailto:arifahhanafiah@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This research explores the role of digital technology, critical education, and the practice of professionalism of grade 3 teachers in the digital era, focusing on the context of SD Djamaatul Ichwan Surakarta. Through a qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews with grade 3 teachers and observation of learning activities. The results showed that digital technology positively impacts student learning, but needs teacher supervision so that students are not exposed to negative content. Critical education is integrated in the curriculum with diverse approaches, creating a holistic learning environment. Challenges in implementing critical education were identified, requiring teacher awareness in the presentation of materials. School institutions provide physical support and regular training. Integrating technology and critical education creates a learning environment supporting the development of students' critical skills. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of education in the digital era.

**Keywords:** Critical Education, Teacher Professionalism, Primary School

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### INTRODUCTION

Reality shows that withdrawing from the development of digital technology and using digital tools is increasingly difficult (Human & Cech, 2021). Digital tool use is increasing significantly (Hillmayr, Ziernwald, Reinhold, Hofer, & Reiss, 2020). In other words, people have become drastically dependent on digital tools and are increasingly connected and active in the digital space. Under the current circumstances, it is difficult for one not to engage in or avoid using digital technologies, as the overall use of digital tools is experiencing a marked increase. As people depend on and actively use digital technologies, an important question arises about what will happen to those who actively use digital tools in difficult situations such as data shortages, signal problems, or loss of smartphones. Humans will usually feel anxious and stressed (Kristianto, Susetyo, Utama, Fitriano, & Jannah, 2023). When people face these situations, they become uneasy (Grahn, Ottosson, & Uvnäs-Moberg, 2021). However, people will not sit still or accept the state of anxiety.

In the global era, according to a famous futurologist, Alvin Toffler, the world is moving into a new world known as The Third Wave, which is a wave of civilization with the spread of information technology, computerization, biological revolution, the technology of war and terrorism, and others that are global (Jiang, 2023). In that era, the development of technology and digital devices is increasingly sophisticated and continues to be developed and updated. The wave of civilization makes humans inseparable from digital products. Everything is increasingly connected, open and interdependent (Muchtar, Noviani, Islamic, & 2022, 2019). Although they still have territories and clear geographical dividing lines, these boundaries do not become a curtain to interact, communicate and share information openly by the digital society (Ansorida, 2022).

Massive support for digital devices has made it easier for people with diverse backgrounds to interact in cyberspace (Virat, 2023). Cyberspace has become a tangible manifestation of the openness of individuals in various parts of the world. The emergence and presence of the digital era today cannot be avoided by any country in the world, including by Islamic education itself. Islamic education, which is normatively seen as an ideal education by combining the concept of worldly and ukhrawi balance based on the foundation of revelation (al-Quran and hadith) and ijihad (creation of thought in Islam), in fact increasingly requires the presence of digital devices (Ramli, 2022). The goal is to facilitate various educational activities and programs at the planning, implementation and evaluation level. As a necessity for the presence of the digital era, Islamic education is required to be able to adapt or adjust so as not to be left far behind from other education models (Jaenullah, Ferdian Utama, 2022). Islamic education with all its resources is expected to take advantage of the opportunities of the digital era to strengthen its existence as a pioneer of superior and quality education, both in the context of Indonesia and in the arena of global civilization (Kristianto et al., 2023).

In facing the digital era, educational institutions need a paradigm shift, especially in the field of education, teachers minimize their duties as providers of learning materials and fostering the growth of student creativity. A teacher must prepare five competencies when training students in today's digital era. Relevant competencies include the competency to encourage learners to use technology for entrepreneurship (technology commercialization competency), online learning competency (education competency), the skill to predict the future and develop strategies to deal with it (future strategy competency), the competency to react to various changes in the globalization era (globalization competency) and the competency to understand students' psychological problems as a result of time.

Permendiknas RI Number 16 of 2007 concerning Teacher Qualification Standards states that "teacher professional competencies are: (1) mastering the material, structure, concepts, and scientific mindset that support the subjects taught, (2) mastering learning standards in schools. This time, we have entered the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 or the 21st century, which requires the world of technology education (Purwanto, Hartono, & Wahyuni, 2023). Therefore, teachers must have high qualifications to face the increasingly high technological developments. Learning in the 21st century requires skills, technology skills, media and information literacy skills, learning and innovation skills, life skills and professional skills (Chu, Reynolds, Tavares, Notari, & Lee, 2016). In the Indonesian education system, teachers are one of the many elements determining students' success in achieving predetermined learning objectives (Irviana, 2020). This results in the demand that teachers deliver the material well and should not be left behind with the current developments. The requirements that teachers must fulfill to improve their skills are the main reason for the importance of mastering teachers' professional skills. Teachers' knowledge in teaching is crucial in achieving learning objectives. This knowledge includes Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge to improve professional skills commonly called TPACK. A professional teacher is a teacher who sees himself as a person

who is called to help students learn and who constantly needs to think about how students should learn (Gore & Rosser, 2022).

Based on the importance of education above, education is one of the main pillars in the development of a nation, which relies on the critical role of teachers in shaping the next generation of quality (Jayadi, Abduh, & Basri, 2022). Teacher involvement in the education process is the main key in determining the quality of education in an area (Sumardi, Rohman, & Wahyudiati, 2020). This research aims to explore a deeper understanding of the role of critical education in the practice of professionalism of primary school teachers in Surakarta. As the research location, Surakarta is the center of attention because of its dynamics as an educational center with unique challenges in developing critical education practices. Critical education emphasizes teachers' ability to actively engage students in the learning process, build critical thinking, and develop analytical skills needed to deal with the complexity of the contemporary world.

A number of previous studies have made valuable contributions to the understanding of the concept of critical education, the practice of teacher professionalism, and the dynamics of education at the primary level. In the context of the current research, analysis of the implementation of critical education on a local or national scale has provided a foundation for understanding the extent to which this practice is integrated in the curriculum and teaching methods in Surakarta. In addition, studies on teacher professional development, including influencing factors such as training and institutional support, can be used as comparative material to assess the educational context in Surakarta. Studies on the implementation of critical education in primary schools and its impact on students can also provide valuable insights into the challenges, successes and positive impacts of this approach. By analyzing previous findings, this research is expected to complement the understanding of critical education practices and teacher professionalism in Surakarta and constructively contribute to improving the quality of education at the primary level.

This research will explore how primary school teachers in Surakarta understand and apply critical education concepts in their professional practice. Reflection on critical education approaches in the context of teacher professionalism is crucial to identify successes, obstacles, and opportunities that may arise in efforts to improve the quality of education (Bergmark, 2023). The research results are expected to make a real contribution to the development of education policy, curriculum improvement, and teacher professionalism. Thus, this research is directed to open a wider discussion on the role of critical education in facing the challenges and transformation of education in Surakarta and can serve as a foundation for continuous improvement in teacher education practices at the primary level.

## **METHOD**

This research adopted a qualitative approach with a focus on case studies to explore the reflection of critical education in teachers' professionalism practices in primary schools in Surakarta (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, 2018). The main research participants were grade 3 primary school teachers in Surakarta, carefully selected to cover a range of ages, levels of teaching experience and educational backgrounds. A case study approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the context and complexities of implementing critical education in teachers' practices in the region. The data collection process involved in-depth interviews with teachers, allowing them to share their views, experiences and understanding of the concept of critical education and how it is reflected in their daily practice. In addition, direct observations were made on classroom learning activities to provide a contextualized view of the implementation of critical education in real situations. The collected data were analyzed using a thematic approach, which involved identifying patterns, themes and key trends. This approach was supported by the use of qualitative data analysis software to gain a deeper understanding of the findings. The

validity of the research findings was strengthened through data triangulation, which combined results from various data sources such as interviews and observations to ensure the robustness of the results. In addition, member-checking was conducted, involving teachers as participants in the verification process of the findings to ensure accurate interpretation. The ethical aspects of the research were also considered by obtaining permission from the local education authority and maintaining the confidentiality of the participants' identities and the information provided. By using this method, it is hoped that the research will be able to provide an in-depth and contextual understanding of the role of critical education in the practice of teacher professionalism in Surakarta, which can make a significant contribution to the development of educational policies and the improvement of educational practices at the primary level.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Professionalism of Educators in the Digital Era**

Teacher professionalism and the development of digital technology have a significant role in transforming or evolving the education system in the current era. Teacher professionalism highlights the quality and competence of teachers in leading and guiding the learning process. Meanwhile, the digital era refers to the development of information and communication technology that has entered various aspects of life, including education. The foundation that results from teacher professionalism and the digital era is crucial because they complement each other. Teacher professionalism emphasizes teaching expertise, classroom management, and understanding student needs. On the other hand, the digital age brings significant changes in teaching methods, allowing open access to information, increasing learning flexibility and creating more interactive learning tools (Munifah & Purwaningrum, 2022).

By embracing digital technology, teachers can improve their teaching effectiveness and create more engaging learning experiences. Digital tools can help meet the challenges and opportunities that arise in the ever-changing world of education. Therefore, the combination of teacher professionalism and the digital age is a crucial foundation to achieve an evolution in modern education, delivering learning that is more relevant, adaptive and in line with the demands of the times. Teacher professionalism requires ever-evolving education and skills and a commitment to ethics and integrity (Agustina & Saxena, 2022). At the same time, the digital age has brought fundamental changes in the approach to learning. Professional teachers in the digital era utilize technological advances to improve teaching methods and pay attention to the latest developments and innovations in education. The use of technology in learning includes open access to information, online learning, and interactive learning tools. Teachers must be able to integrate these tools into the curriculum wisely, creating a more engaging and practical learning experience. Distance education and online platforms allow for greater flexibility, allowing students to learn without being limited by geographical boundaries.

Digital skills are becoming increasingly important, and professional teachers must ensure students master technology well to prepare them for future demands. Meanwhile, teachers face data privacy challenges and need to take steps to keep student information safe. Through the thoughtful integration of teacher professionalism and the digital age, education systems can evolve to provide learning experiences that are more dynamic, inclusive and relevant to the needs of an increasingly technologically connected global society. This synergy is about adopting technology and preparing students for success in an ever-changing world.

Teachers or educators in the digital age have several significant opportunities to shape a more innovative and relevant education. First, open access to information via the internet allows teachers to continuously enrich their knowledge with the latest and most up-to-date educational resources. Teachers can access courses, webinars and other

educational resources that help improve their qualifications and skills by utilizing various online learning platforms. Furthermore, the opportunity to host online classes allows teachers to provide learning that is more flexible and accessible from various places. This not only opens doors for students who are in remote locations but also creates a learning atmosphere that adapts to individual needs. The use of interactive learning tools such as simulations, learning videos, and educational games is another aspect of the digital age that teachers can utilize. These help create a more interactive and engaging learning experience for students, increasing their involvement in the learning process. Personalization of learning also becomes possible with digital technology. Teachers can use adaptive learning systems and educational apps that can tailor learning materials to students' individual needs and level of understanding. This helps create a more inclusive learning environment and takes into account the diversity in student learning styles. Online collaboration is another feature that teachers can utilize in the digital era. They can collaborate with their peers from different locations, exchanging ideas, experiences and learning resources. This not only enhances teacher professionalism but also creates a vast learning network. Real-time monitoring of student progress is made easier with the use of digital learning management systems. Teachers can provide faster feedback, identify areas for improvement, and design learning strategies that better suit students' needs.

Opportunities for distance education allow teachers to reach students in different locations and provide access to education to those who may have mobility limitations or are in remote areas. In addition, educational social media gives teachers an additional platform to communicate with students, share information and foster learning communities. Teachers can use social media to strengthen relationships with students and parents and share useful educational resources. Finally, teachers can develop students' digital skills, including digital, critical and collaborative literacy. Teachers can help students prepare for success in an increasingly technologically connected world by introducing them to positive and productive uses of technology. By taking advantage of these opportunities, teachers can be catalysts in shaping education to be more adaptive, inclusive and timely in the digital age.

### **Critical Education in the Professional Practices of Elementary Surakarta's School Teachers in the Digital Era**

Critical education in the practice of professionalism of primary school teachers in Surakarta in the digital era is an important aspect that involves various elements. Elementary classroom teachers in Surakarta can utilize digital technology as a tool to improve the quality of learning. However, the application of critical education in this context is not without challenges. Teachers are responsible for deeply understanding the concept of critical education, assessing the reliability of digital information, and activating student participation in learning. The integration of critical education in the curriculum is a crucial step. Teachers must create learning content that stimulates students to question, analyze, and develop critical thinking. Regarding the impact of digital technology, evaluating students' problem-solving ability in understanding critical concepts also needs to be considered. Facilitating a learning environment that supports the development of students' critical skills involves teachers' efforts in providing adequate technological infrastructure and creating interactive learning. In addition, empowering teachers to develop their own critical skills and engaging students in exploring learning content are essential aspects.

It is also essential for teachers to understand and integrate student diversity in the context of critical education. This approach should be accessible and beneficial to all students, regardless of background or learning style. Thorough assessment and evaluation should reflect students' achievement of critical skills. Teachers need to use assessment methods that focus not only on material mastery, but also on students' abilities in analysis, problem solving, and reflective thinking. In addition, support from school institutions is a determining factor in the successful implementation of teacher professionalism practices

oriented towards critical education. Schools need to provide support in the form of resources, training, and guidance to ensure critical education can be effectively integrated in learning in the digital era. With the synergy between technology, teacher awareness, and institutional support, critical education can be a strong foundation in shaping the quality of education in Surakarta in the digital era.

The results of the research show that critical education in the practice of professionalism of grade 3 elementary school teachers in Surakarta in the digital era brings a number of dynamics and challenges that need to be overcome. One crucial aspect is the role of digital technology in improving teacher practice. Although technology has a positive impact on student learning, it needs to be emphasized that teacher supervision of the use of digital technology is crucial. Grade 3 teachers in the digital era are expected to guide students so they are not distracted by the negative impact of digital technology content that may appear unintentionally. The main challenges teachers face are internal factors and advertising factors in applying digital technology to student learning. In overcoming these obstacles, teachers should be more careful in presenting and downloading the content before displaying it to students.

The importance of critical education should also be effectively integrated in the curriculum of grade 3 teachers at SD Djamaatul Ichwan Surakarta. This school implements the national curriculum with local content, including Arabic, religion, and English subjects and deepens Nahwu and Shorof. Integrating these various curricula is key to providing critical education to students. The impact of using digital technology in learning on students' ability to understand critical concepts in certain subjects is very positive. However, the use of technology should be directed wisely to provide meaningful exercises to students. Grade 3 teachers in the digital era are also responsible for facilitating a learning environment that supports the development of students' critical skills. SD Djamaatul Ichwan Surakarta, for example, provides technology such as tablets and computers and ensures access to books and educational resources from the school.

The importance of the school institution's support for the development of grade 3 teachers' professionalism practices in supporting critical education in the digital era is also highly emphasized. Physical facilities such as wifi, laptops and computers are provided by the school, while teachers receive regular training and support to improve their ability to use technology. Concrete strategies that grade 3 teachers can implement to improve students' problem-solving skills through critical education include the use of HOTS (High Order Thinking Skill) questions. Teachers can create questions that encourage students to solve everyday problems, developing problem solving skills early on.

Assessment and evaluation reflect the achievement of students' critical skills measured through the use of technology, such as the use of gadgets and laptops. In addition, the school's assessment of teachers and students also includes how teachers use laptops in teaching and learning, the extent to which synergy has been achieved between teachers, students, and guardians, and this is assessed regularly every 3 months. Thus, critical education in the digital era becomes a collaborative effort involving teachers, students, and schools to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, the analysis and discussion results show that at SD Djamaatul Ichwan Surakarta, the role of digital technology in the professionalism practices of grade 3 teachers in the digital era is recognized as a positive factor that enhances student learning. Teachers play a crucial role in supervising technology use to prevent negative impacts. Diverse approaches in the curriculum, including the national curriculum, Ministry of Religious Affairs curriculum and special content, create a holistic learning environment. Challenges in implementing critical education are identified and teachers are expected to be more careful in presenting materials. School institutions provide support through facilities and regular

training, with periodic evaluations to monitor teachers' and students' progress in dealing with the digital age. Overall, integrating digital technology and critical education creates a learning environment that supports the development of students' critical skills, provides positive learning outcomes, and fits the demands of the digital era.

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