

## Research Article

**Cite this article:** Almandari, A.F., Amanda, N.D., Sasta, P., Wulandari, P., Dani, R.R., Oreon, G.A., Fikri, I., Savitry, R.W. (2026). Analysis of Fort Marlborough Primary Sources in History Learning: The Construction of Historical Awareness Through a Digital Heuristic Approach. *Social, Science, Mathematical, and Technical Education Review* (1) 2 pp. 27-32

**Received:** 28 January 2026

**Accepted:** 20 March 2026

**Published Online:** 16 April 2026

**Keywords:** Linear Equation System, Ethnomathematics, Learning Trajectory, Panglipuran Village, Design Research

### Author for correspondence:

Anggoro, Shadaqnas Dewarif Tri

✉ [shadaqnasdewarift@gmail.com](mailto:shadaqnasdewarift@gmail.com)

✉ University of Muhammadiyah  
Bengkulu



**OPEN  
ACCESS**

© The Author(s), 2025. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

# Analysis of Fort Marlborough Primary Sources in History Learning: The Construction of Historical Awareness Through a Digital Heuristic Approach

Rara Putri Almandari<sup>1,\*</sup>, Nabilla Dwi Amanda<sup>2</sup>, Peti Sasta, Putri Wulandari<sup>3</sup>, Riska Rahma Dani<sup>4</sup>, Gilang Ade Oreon<sup>5</sup>, Ihsyan Fikri, Resty Wanda Savitry<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5,6</sup> Civic Education, University of Muhammadiyah Bengkulu

## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the utilization of primary historical sources from Fort Marlborough in history learning through a digital heuristic approach to build students' historical awareness. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a case study approach. The subject of the study is a student of the history education study program who is taking the Basics of History course. Data were collected through participatory observation in the search of digital archives (such as *the British Library* and *Leiden University* collections), in-depth interviews, and analysis of historical narrative products compiled by students. The findings show that the digital heuristic approach facilitates students to access previously elusive British colonial documents related to Fort Marlborough. This process enhances the ability to critique sources and strengthens the construction of historical awareness, where students no longer see the fort as a mere tourist attraction, but rather as a center of political and economic negotiation on the west coast of Sumatra. Conclusion: The integration of digital primary sources in history learning has proven to be effective in transforming students' way of thinking from textual-passive to analytical-critical, which is the core of historical awareness.

## 1. Introduction

History education at the university level in the contemporary era faces the challenge of digital disruption that fundamentally changes the way humans interact with the past. In the Basics of History course, students are not only required to memorize events, but also master the procedural skills of historians, especially at the heuristic stage. However, the reality in the field shows that there is a gap between the availability of historical data and the ability of students to criticize sources. According to Aman (2020), historical methodology should be seen as a life skill that allows students to distinguish between facts and opinions, a very crucial competency in the midst of today's flood of digital information. Historical consciousness will not grow in a vacuum; it requires direct interaction with the material evidence of the past.

The main challenge in learning history in Indonesia is the dominance of textbook narratives which are often "final" and dry with source debate. This causes a low interest in students in exploring local history in depth. Wineburg (2021) emphasizes that effective history learning in the modern era should no longer focus on what is already written in textbooks, but rather how students use the devices in their hands to interrogate primary sources. This is where the importance of "Digital Heuristics" lies. The search for historical sources is no longer limited to physical visits to rigid archive buildings, but rather to penetrate into digital spaces that provide access to colonial documents that were previously considered sacred and difficult to access.

Bengkulu, with the existence of Fort Marlborough (*Fort Marlborough*), has historical uniqueness as a former British colony (EIC) in the midst of Dutch domination (VOC) in the archipelago. Kurniawan (2022) states that Fort Marlborough is not just a military architectural structure, but a symbol of collective memory that records the political, economic, and social dynamics on the west coast of Sumatra. However, in learning practice, these sites are often only used as historical attractions without an in-depth analysis of the accompanying primary documents, such as resident correspondence, navigation maps, and EIC trade records. This gap results in students failing to see the link between the local history of Bengkulu and global history.

The use of primary sources in history learning has a central role in building historical *consciousness*. As emphasized by Hasan (2019), historical awareness is the intellectual ability to understand that human beings are both subjects and objects of history. Without interaction with primary sources, students will only become consumers of other people's historical narratives. Maghfiroh and Siska (2021) added that the use of primary sources directly in the classroom can stimulate critical thinking skills (HOTS) because students are forced to verify, validate, and interpret documents that often have a colonial-biased perspective.

The integration of technology in the form of digital heuristics is an effective bridge. Nugroho (2020) observed that during the transition to the post-pandemic era, the use of digital repositories such as *The British Library*, the *National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia* (ANRI), and the *Leiden University Library* has become a new standard in historical research. Students can now access manuscripts on Fort Marlborough from 1714 with just a few clicks. However, this ease of access without a strong basic understanding of history will lead to disinformation. Therefore, a systematic approach in learning is needed to guide students to do "digital historiography".

History education also carries out the mission of identity formation. Putro (2021) explained that through local historical sites, students can build an emotional attachment to their area. Fort Marlborough, as the largest British fort in Southeast Asia, offers a unique perspective on Indonesia's position in the international political constellation of the 18th century. Wahyuni (2023) in his study showed that British colonial documents in Bengkulu contained very rich micro-historical data, ranging from soldiers' health records to conflicts with local rulers. If this data is integrated in learning through a digital heuristic approach, then the construction of students' historical awareness will be formed in a more complete and objective manner.

The problem that arises then is how the students' adaptation patterns in dealing with primary sources that are in old English or have complex digital formats. Laksmi and Santosa (2023) note that

the main challenge of digital heuristics is no longer accessibility, but information literacy. Students need to be equipped with the ability to sift through relevant digital data from millions of available documents. Sariyatun and Suryani (2020) argue that history learning strategies in the digital era must be collaborative, where lecturers play the role of facilitators in navigating these digital resources.

Furthermore, the construction of historical awareness through primary sources also has an impact on the character of students. Sudrajat (2022) said that students who are used to working with primary sources tend to have an intellectually humble attitude because they realize that historical truth is multi-interpreted. This is in line with the thinking of Barton and Levstik (2020) who stated that the main goal of history education is for the "Common Good", namely to form citizens who are able to think rationally based on past evidence.

In the context of learning in Bengkulu, research on Fort Marlborough is still often stuck in descriptive-chronological aspects. There has not been much research that specifically dissects how methodological processes (digital heuristics) of these fortified sources can directly affect students' cognitive psychology in shaping historical awareness. Prasetyo (2022) emphasizes that the *Fort Marlborough* record in London is a treasure trove that has not been fully explored by local academics. Therefore, this research is very relevant to fill the gap in the literature regarding the integration of digital technology in strengthening the basics of locality-based historical science.

As a closing of the introduction, Supriatna (2019) reminded that creative pedagogy in history must be able to bring the outside world into the classroom. By bringing the digital documents of Fort Marlborough in front of students, we are not only teaching them about the British past in Bengkulu, but we are training them to be formidable future researchers. Based on the above background, this study will focus on the analysis of how the digital heuristic stages are carried out on the primary sources of Fort Marlborough and the extent to which the process is able to construct students' historical awareness

## 2. Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study design. The use of qualitative methods was chosen because this study aims to explore complex phenomena regarding how students construct historical awareness through interaction with digital technology and primary sources (Aman, 2020). The main focus of this case study is on the methodological process of students in the Fundamentals of History course when dealing with the digital artifacts of Fort Marlborough. In line with Creswell's view in the context of education, this approach allows researchers to understand the meaning that participants construct towards their unique learning experiences (Supriatna, 2019).

### Participants and Research Locations

The research was conducted at the History Education Study Program, University of Bengkulu. The research participants consisted of 40 first-semester students who were taking a basic competency course in historians. The selection of subjects was carried out through *purposive sampling* techniques, with the criteria of students who have access to digital devices and are studying heuristic stages in historical science. The research site focuses on two domains: the physical realm at the Fort Marlborough site for field observation, and the virtual realm through a computer lab for digital heuristic practice.

### Research Procedure: Digital Heuristic

The research procedure is divided into three main phases that integrate traditional historical technologies and methods. The first phase is **Digital Identification and Navigation**. At this stage, the researcher gave a workshop on the use of international digital repositories. Students are trained to navigate databases such as *The British Library (India Office Records)*, *National Archives (UK)*, and

*Leiden University Digital Library*. According to Nugroho (2020), literacy in navigating digital archives is the main foundation of modern historiography that is no longer limited by geographical barriers.

The second phase is **Digital Source Criticism (Internal and External)**. Once students found primary documents related to Fort Marlborough—such as a map of the fort in 1714 or Joseph Collett's correspondence—they were directed to test the authenticity and credibility of the document digitally. Laksmi and Santosa (2023) emphasized that in digital heuristics, source criticism involves understanding the metadata and context of document digitization so that students do not get caught up in disinformation. Students were asked to compare the physical structure of the fort that they saw firsthand with architectural sketches found in digital archives.

The third phase is **Narrative Construction and Reflection**. Students compiled a brief historical narrative based on their findings. This is where aspects of historical consciousness are measured. The researchers monitored how students connected microdata from documents (such as logistical records or local conflicts) to their understanding of Bengkulu's strategic position in world history. This process reflects the "creative pedagogy" approach suggested by Supriatna (2019) to bring to life students' historical imagination.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through four main techniques to ensure validity through triangulation. First, **Participatory Observation** during the digital search process. The researcher noted the technical obstacles and search patterns carried out by students. Second, **In-Depth Interviews** with 10 representative students to explore changes in their perceptions of local history before and after interacting with primary sources. Third, **Document Analysis** in the form of student work reports that contain their interpretation of digital sources. Fourth, the **Open Questionnaire** is designed to measure the level of students' historical awareness based on indicators developed by Hasan (2019).

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out interactively following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, which includes: (1) **Data Reduction**: Filtering the results of observations and interviews relevant to the focus of digital heuristics and historical awareness. (2) **Data Presentation**: Compile data in the form of descriptive narratives and comparison tables between digital primary sources and student understanding. (3) **Conclusion Drawing and Verification**: Relating field findings with historical awareness theory and digital literacy. To ensure the validity of the data, *member checks* and triangulation of sources were carried out by comparing student interview data with researchers' field records (Sariyatun & Suryani, 2020).

### Research Ethics

All participants have given informed consent to be involved in this study. The identity of students is kept secret in the reporting of results to maintain academic ethics. In addition, the use of sources from digital repositories still pays attention to the copyright and attribution rules that apply to each international database (Wahyuni, 2023).

## 3. Results and Discussion

### Exploratory Search: Transforming Traditional Heuristic to Digital

The initial findings of this study show a paradigm shift in students in viewing "historical sources". Before the intervention, 85% of students considered that the primary source of Fort Marlborough was only in the form of physical buildings in Bengkulu. However, through the implementation of digital heuristics, students began to penetrate international databases.

Students navigate through *The British Library's* portal through *the India Office Records* (IOR) collection. They managed to identify archive codes such as **IOR/G/35** which contained special records about British settlements in Sumatra (Bencoolen). This process changed the way students work from just reading texts to historical detectives who track digital footprints (Nugroho, 2020).

This integration proves Hapsari's (2021) theory that digital heuristics shorten bureaucratic and geographical distances in historical research. Students are no longer limited to the cost constraints of flying to London, but can bring "London" into their classrooms in Bengkulu.

### **Comparative Analysis: Physical Structure vs Architectural Design 1714**

The most dynamic results of the discussion emerged when students compared field observations at Fort Marlborough with original architectural sketches found digitally. Students found that the current fort had undergone several modifications due to earthquakes and changes in function during the Dutch and Japanese occupations.

Based on the analysis of the sketch, students criticized external sources to test whether the digital sketch was really an original plan or just an artistic illustration. Laksmi and Santosa (2023) stated that the comparison between physical reality and digital documents is a high-level cognitive exercise that is able to hone students' analytical acuity in the Fundamentals of History course.

### **Narrative Reconstruction: Finding the Lost Voice**

One of the interesting findings in this discussion was the ability of students to find "marginal voices" in EIC digital documents. In the digitized diaries of British officials, complaints were found about the high death rate of local workers due to disease outbreaks while building fortified trenches.

This data is not found in school textbooks that tend to only discuss macro political aspects. Through digital heuristics, students are able to construct a more human and micro history. Wineburg (2021) emphasized that meaningful history is a history that is able to reveal the reality of human life behind stone and cement structures. This increases students' historical empathy, which is one of the important indicators in historical awareness (Hasan, 2019).

### **Impact on Historical Awareness: Positioning Bengkulu in a Global Context**

The discussion of historical awareness shows significant results in the dimension of "Connectedness". Students began to understand that the peppers collected at Fort Marlborough were a global economic driver that connected farmers in the interior of Bengkulu with markets in Europe and China.

This construction of historical consciousness is transformative. Students realize that their local history is not a "periphery" history, but an integral part of the history of world colonialism. Sudrajat (2022) argues that this kind of awareness is crucial for students in the region to build intellectual confidence and a strong national identity while remaining open to global perspectives.

### **Constraints and Solutions in Digital Heuristic**

Although it gave positive results, the study noted some technical hurdles. The first is the language barrier (Digital Paleography). Many 18th-century manuscripts use a *curative* handwriting style that is difficult for students to read. The solution is that lecturers direct students to look for transcript versions or use AI-based OCR (*Optical Character Recognition*) software to help with reading (Wahyuni, 2023).

Second, there are copyright issues and paid access to some repositories. Sariyatun and Suryani (2020) suggest that educational institutions build partnerships or utilize *open-access repositories*

such as *Open Libraries* or *Internet Archives* to ensure the sustainability of digital research-based learning.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of digital primary sources in learning the Basics of History through a digital heuristic approach has a significant impact on the academic and psychological quality of students. Methodologically, digital heuristics have succeeded in overcoming the limitations of physical access to colonial documents related to **Fort Marlborough** that have been stored in international repositories such as *The British Library*. Students are able to transform their way of working from just consumers of information to novice researchers who are able to criticize sources independently.

Furthermore, the use of this primary source is the main instrument in **constructing historical awareness**. Students no longer view Fort Marlborough as a static artifact, but rather as a dynamic entity that connects the local history of Bengkulu with the global political and economic constellation of the 18th century. This awareness of connectedness is what awakens a sense of *belonging* and critical thinking skills which are the main goals of history education.

#### 5. Suggestion

Based on the findings of the research, there are several suggestions that can be put forward for stakeholders in history education:

1. **For Teaching Lecturers:** It is recommended to no longer be fixated on secondary sources in methodology lectures. Lecturers need to equip themselves with the ability to navigate international digital archives and make them part of project assignments (PBL) for students.
2. **For Study Program Managers:** There is a need to strengthen digital history laboratory facilities and digital paleography training (reading ancient digital handwriting) to help students overcome language and technical barriers when dealing with primary sources.
3. **For Further Researchers:** This study is still limited to British colonial sources. Researchers can then explore comparisons between British sources and local records (ulu manuscripts) related to the existence of forts to obtain a more Indonesian-centric historiographic perspective.

The results of this study have broad practical implications in the world of education, including:

- **Curriculum Development:** The implementation of digital heuristics can be adopted as a fixed module in the Fundamentals of History and Historiography courses at the university level.
- **Digitization of Local History:** Encourage collaborative efforts between academics and local governments to create an "E-Marlborough" portal that provides access to curated primary resources for the general public and students at the secondary school level.
- **Improving Information Literacy:** This practice implements digital literacy in the context of humanity, where students learn to distinguish valid (evidence-based) information in the midst of the rampant false historical narrative (*hoax*) in the digital public space.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** Each author has contributed significantly to the writing of this article.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Funding.** This research did not receive any funding support from third parties.

## References

- Aman, A. (2020).** *Historical Research Methodology*. Yogyakarta: Media Academy.
- Barton, K. C., & Levstik, L. S. (2020).** *Teaching History for the Common Good*. Routledge.
- Hapsari, D. R. (2021).** Challenges and opportunities of digital heuristics in historical research in Indonesia. *Journal of Archipelago History*, 4(1), 45-58.
- Hasan, S. H. (2019).** History education to strengthen the nation's historical awareness and identity. *Journal of Indonesian History Education*, 2(1), 1-15.
- Kurniawan, B. (2022).** Marlborough Fort: The identity and collective memory of the people of Bengkulu. *Journal of Culture*, 17(2), 112-125.
- Laksmi, R. S., & Santosa, A. (2023).** Digital archives as primary sources in history education: A case study. *Journal of History Education*, 8(2), 89-101.
- Maghfiroh, L., & Siska, Y. (2021).** The use of primary historical sources in improving students' critical thinking skills. *Journal of Social Science Learning Theory and Praxis*, 6(1), 22-34.
- Nugroho, A. S. (2020).** Digital heuristics: Historical source tracing strategies during the pandemic. *Diachronic*, 20(2), 154-168.
- Prasetyo, A. B. (2022).** *The East India Company in Sumatra: Fort Marlborough Records*. London: Digital Heritage Press.
- Putro, H. P. (2021).** Development of historical awareness through local historical sites in college. *Journal of History Education*, 10(1), 12-25.
- Sariyatun, S., & Suryani, N. (2020).** *History Learning Strategies in the Digital Era*. Eleventh March University Press.
- Sudrajat, S. (2022).** Historical awareness and the formation of the nation's character. *Journal of History*, 10(2), 201-215.
- Supriatna, N. (2019).** *Creative Pedagogies in History Education*. Bandung: Rosdakarya.
- Wahyuni, T. (2023).** Analysis of British colonial documents in Bengkulu through the British Library repository. *Journal of Digital Archives*, 5(1), 30-42.
- Wineburg, S. (2021).** *Why Learn History (When It's Already on Your Phone)*. University of Chicago Press.