

## THE USE OF VISUAL MEDIA AS A SOURCE FOR DEMOCRATIC LEARNING IN CIVICS EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN BUNTA SUBDISTRICT BANGGAI REGENCY

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 20-01-2026

Revised : 07-02-2026

Accepted : 25-05-2026

### KEYWORDS

Civics and Citizenship Education;  
Democratic learning;  
Learning interaction;  
Student engagement;  
Visual media;

### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the use of visual media as a learning resource in elementary school Civic Education instruction and to examine its implications for learning interaction patterns and student engagement in fostering democratic learning. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation at five elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict. Informants included school principals, teachers, and students. Data analysis utilized interactive model through data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and source triangulation. The findings reveal that visual media have been consistently utilized and are effective in increasing students' attention and initial understanding. However, their use remains largely instrumental and still functions primarily as a medium for delivering information. Learning interactions continue to be dominated by teachers, resulting in limited student participation in dialogic and reflective learning processes. The novelty of this study lies in reconstructing the role of visual media as a source of democratic learning rather than merely as instructional aids. This study emphasizes that visual media can function as catalysts for interaction, value reflection, and the development of students' civic experiences. Therefore, teachers need to integrate visual media with collaborative and reflective learning activities to strengthen meaningful democratic learning in elementary schools.

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### INTRODUCTION

The quality of Pancasila and Civics Education in elementary schools in Indonesia still faces various challenges, particularly in creating a learning process that is democratic, active, and capable of fostering students' awareness as citizens. Amid rapid social changes resulting from the development of digital technology, the global flow of information, and shifts in patterns of social interaction, schools can no longer function merely as places for

imparting knowledge but must also become spaces for shaping a culture of democracy from an early age (Anjelina & Putro, 2026;Kusumawatia et al., 2025) . At this stage, elementary education plays a crucial role because students begin to develop social thinking skills, interpersonal abilities, and values that will shape their future civic character(Wimbawati et al., 2025) . Therefore, Civic Education instruction must not only emphasize content understanding but also provide students with hands-on experiences to learn democracy through discussion, active participation, collaboration, and social reflection within the learning process(Wayan et al., 2025;Rijal et al., 2025) .

In reality, Civic Education instruction in elementary schools still largely relies on a conventional, teacher-centered approach. The learning process generally remains focused on delivering content, memorizing concepts, and meeting curriculum targets, while opportunities for student participation in learning have not yet been fully developed(Tirtoni, 2016;Aulia et al., 2025) . Teachers remain the central figure in the learning process, while students are largely positioned as passive recipients of information. This situation causes Civic Education to lose its practical dimension as democratic education. Values such as freedom of expression, respect for diversity, deliberation, cooperation, and social responsibility are often understood merely as normative concepts without being truly brought to life in students' daily learning experiences.

This situation is problematic because democratic education, by its very nature, cannot be built through an indoctrinatory approach or the mere transmission of knowledge. Democracy is not merely knowledge to be memorized, but a social culture that must be shaped through dialogic, reflective, and participatory learning experiences(Tusriyanto & Karsiwan, 2021;Wantu et al., 2023) . When Civic Education instruction is conducted in a one-way manner, students do not have sufficient opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, argumentative skills, social communication skills, or the courage to express their views responsibly(Aiyub et al., 2025) . Consequently, civic education risks producing students who understand democratic concepts theoretically but lack democratic experience in their social lives.

This challenge is further intensified in the context of 21st-century education, which demands a more humanistic, collaborative, and student-centered approach (Lestari et al., 2025;Cahyaningsih et al., 2025) . The development of modern society requires a generation that not only possesses academic competence but also communication skills, social participation, empathy, tolerance, and an awareness of diversity within democratic life (Judijanto, 2025) . From this perspective, Civic Education instruction must be able to transform the classroom into a social space where students can learn to engage in dialogue, listen to others' opinions, construct arguments, and collaboratively resolve issues in a democratic manner. Therefore, pedagogical innovations are needed that not only improve the delivery of content but also reconstruct learning interactions to make them more democratic and participatory (Pratiwi et al., 2026;Magdalena et al., 2020) .

One pedagogical innovation with great potential to support democratic learning in Civic Education is the use of visual media as a learning resource(Yogi et al., 2025;Pitriani et al., 2025) . Theoretically, visual media possess a visual power capable of presenting social reality in a concrete, contextual, and communicative manner, making it easier for elementary school students who are still in the concrete operational stage of development to understand (Sidiq et al., 2025;Nuralim, 2022) . However, the significance of visual media in democratic learning lies not merely in their visual function but in their ability to foster social interaction and critical reflection within the learning process.

Visual media that represent social phenomena, cultural diversity, deliberative activities, social concern, collective discipline, and civic practices can serve as pedagogical stimuli that encourage students to actively observe, interpret, critique, and discuss social reality(Harahap et al., 2024;Kusumawatia et al., 2025) . In such situations, students do not merely receive information but are engaged in a process of dialogue, negotiation of meaning, and the construction of shared understanding through classroom interaction. Thus, visual media serve a pedagogical function far broader than that of a mere visual aid, as they can become a medium for fostering students' democratic experiences in learning.

From a pedagogical perspective, the use of visual media in democratic learning aligns with Paulo Freire's philosophy, which views education as a dialogic and reflective process aimed at fostering students' critical awareness (Rahma et al., 2025) . Images can serve as problem-posing media that spark students' social reflection on various civic

phenomena they encounter in daily life. On the other hand, this approach is also relevant to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, communication, and collaboration among learners (Nurjamilah et al., 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025). This means that the use of visual media enables learning that is not only cognitive but also social and participatory.

However, the empirical conditions found in elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict indicate that classroom interactions are still dominated by one-way communication and teacher-centered instruction. Students have not yet been given sufficient opportunities to engage in dialogue, express opinions, negotiate meaning, or collaboratively construct understanding during Civic Education learning. This condition reflects the absence of dialogic learning spaces as emphasized by Freire, as well as the limited implementation of socially constructed learning experiences as proposed by Vygotsky. Consequently, the pedagogical potential of visual media to foster democratic interaction and critical reflection has not been optimally realized in classroom practice.

In addition to supporting democratic learning, visual media also has strong relevance to the development of 21st-century competencies, particularly critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Image interpretation activities encourage students to analyze social situations, present arguments, and understand others' perspectives more openly (Zulaichah et al., 2026). This indirectly fosters students' social communication skills and empathy in a democratic context. Visual-based learning also creates a more inclusive space for participation because students with varying academic abilities can still actively engage in the learning process through visual observation and interpretation (Suparyadi et al., 2025; Wahidin, 2025). Therefore, visual media has the potential to serve as a pedagogical tool capable of simultaneously bridging the development of citizenship competencies and social-democratic skills.

Although visual media conceptually hold great potential for supporting democratic learning, existing empirical studies still reveal significant limitations. Most previous research has primarily positioned visual media as learning aids to enhance learning motivation, cognitive learning outcomes, or the visual appeal of learning (Tambunan et al., 2021; Ayuningdyah, 2025; Wora et al., 2023; Bayudi, 2020). Research on how visual media can be used as a source of democratic learning that fosters dialogic interaction, active participation, and students' social reflection remains very limited. Meanwhile, research on democratic learning has predominantly focused on cooperative learning models, discussion methods, or participatory learning strategies without integrating visual media as the primary source of pedagogical interaction (Putri et al., 2025).

This situation highlights a significant *research gap* the lack of pedagogical frameworks that utilize visual media as a source of democratic learning in Civic Education instruction at the elementary school level. This conceptual gap finds increasing relevance in an empirical context. Initial observations at elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict, Banggai Regency, indicate that the potential of available educational resources does not correlate directly with the quality of teaching practices. This region comprises 22 elementary schools including public elementary schools (SD Negeri) and government-assisted elementary schools (SD Inpres) with a total of 202 teachers distributed across all educational institutions. Quantitatively, this situation reflects the availability of adequate resources. However, qualitatively, there is no apparent pedagogical transformation leading to innovative, participatory, and democratic learning. This fact indicates that the quality of learning is not solely determined by the availability of resources, but rather by the teachers' ability to construct meaningful learning experiences that actively engage students.

In-depth observations at five schools SDN Koili, SDN Tuntung, SD Inpres 3 Bunta, SD Inpres Demangan Jaya, and SDN Laonggo revealed a relatively uniform pattern. The use of visual media in Civic Education instruction remains limited, serving primarily as illustrations or supplements to the material. Media have not been utilized as catalysts for dialogue, tools for exploring meaning, or spaces for negotiating students' ideas. The learning process is also still dominated by lecture-based methods and one-way communication, which positions the teacher as the central figure in learning activities. Consequently, students tend to remain in a passive role, with minimal opportunities to express opinions, construct arguments, or openly discuss citizenship issues.

The implications of this situation are evident in the low quality of student engagement in Civic Education learning. Students have not yet gained learning experiences that enable them to interpret social realities, express

personal perspectives, and learn to value the diversity of viewpoints. Yet, pedagogically, visual media holds strategic potential to stimulate critical thinking and open up more inclusive spaces for dialogue. Images representing social phenomena or civic practices can serve as a starting point for students to construct interpretations, highlight differing viewpoints, and engage in reflective discussions. This process has the potential to create learning experiences that are not only cognitive but also social and democratic.

However, the reality on the ground shows that this potential has not been fully realized. Teachers still position visual media as a tool for delivering content, rather than as a pedagogical instrument for fostering democratic interaction in the classroom. This issue points to a more fundamental problem: the lack of a pedagogical orientation that positions Civic Education learning as a process of democratizing students' learning experiences. Consequently, PPKn instruction risks being reduced to merely conveying normative concepts, without providing space for students to develop critical thinking, communication, and participation skills, or to build genuine civic awareness.

Based on these findings, this research holds strong urgency, as it not only fills a gap in conceptual studies but also addresses empirical needs in the field. The research focus is directed toward efforts to reconstruct the utilization of visual media as a source of democratic learning capable of fostering dialogic, reflective, participatory, and collaborative spaces in PPKn instruction in elementary schools. This urgency is particularly relevant given the dominance of previous research, which has remained focused on aspects of motivation and cognitive learning outcomes, while democratic and social dimensions have not been thoroughly examined.

The novelty of this research lies in a paradigm shift in viewing visual media, from merely a visual aid to a primary source of democratic learning. This study develops a pedagogical approach that positions visual media as a catalyst for interaction, reflection, and the collective construction of civic meaning. Beyond measuring effectiveness in cognitive aspects, this study explores how visual media can transform classroom dynamics into a democratic learning space where students can think critically, express opinions, respect differences, and participate actively. Ultimately, this study does not merely offer an alternative use of educational media but provides conceptual and practical contributions to the development of democratic pedagogy in Civic Education at the elementary school level. The findings of this study are expected to strengthen the direction of educational transformation from a normative approach toward a dialogic, participatory praxis oriented toward fostering critical and reflective citizens from an early age.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of the utilization of visual media as a source of democratic learning in Civic Education instruction in elementary schools (Sugiyono, 2018). The research was conducted in Bunta Subdistrict, Banggai Regency, at five elementary schools: SD Inpres 3 Bunta, SD Inpres Demangan Jaya, SDN Laonggo, SDN Tuntung, and SDN Koili. The research locations were selected purposively by considering variations in learning conditions and preliminary findings indicating that visual media had not been optimally utilized to support dialogic and participatory learning.

The research informants consisted of five school principals, five Civic Education or classroom teachers, and ten students selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the learning process. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine directly the implementation of visual media in learning activities, classroom interaction patterns, and students' participation in democratic learning practices. In-depth interviews were used to explore teachers' and students' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in utilizing visual media, while documentation in the form of lesson plans, learning materials, photographs, and classroom activity records was used as supporting data.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from principals, teachers, and students regarding the use of visual media in Civic Education learning. Methodological triangulation was carried out by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation to ensure data consistency. In addition, member

checking was conducted by reconfirming interview results and preliminary interpretations with the informants to ensure that the findings accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives.

Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman Miles & Huberman (1992). consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by selecting, categorizing, and simplifying important information from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation based on themes such as types of visual media, forms of democratic interaction, and student participation. The reduced data were then presented in descriptive narratives, matrices, and thematic categorizations to facilitate interpretation. The process of drawing conclusions was carried out continuously by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the data, followed by verification through repeated comparisons between field findings and theoretical concepts. This interactive analysis process was conducted continuously throughout the study until a comprehensive understanding was obtained regarding the utilization of visual media as a source of democratic learning in Civic Education instruction at elementary schools.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Use of Visual Media in Civic Education Instruction in Elementary Schools in Bunta Subdistrict, Banggai Regency

The use of visual media in Civic Education instruction at elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict, Banggai Regency, reveals findings that confirm visual media has been integrated into classroom teaching practices. Based on observations at five schools SD Inpres 3 Bunta, SD Inpres Demangan Jaya, SDN Laonggo, SDN Tuntung, and SDN Koili teachers consistently utilize digital visual media through devices such as laptops and projectors. The research findings show that the use of visual media is no longer merely supplementary but has become an integral part of the teaching strategies teachers employ to present material in a more contextual manner. The images used generally depict social phenomena, such as community service activities, social interactions, and the values of solidarity and social responsibility. This indicates a systematic effort to link Civic Education material to the daily realities of students' lives.

Furthermore, the results of the observations also indicate a shift in learning patterns from a conventional lecture-based approach toward the use of more varied visual media. The use of visual media provides concrete stimuli that help increase students' attention and understanding of the material presented, while also encouraging active engagement in the learning process. The use of visual media in Civic Education lessons in the classroom can be seen in the following figure



Figure 1. Use of Visual Media in Civic Education Instruction in Elementary School Classrooms in Bunta Subdistrict.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The figure depicts a learning situation where the teacher uses visual media via a projector, while students observe the displayed material. This documentation reinforces the finding that visual media has been consistently used in the learning process, while also indicating that the interactions that occur remain centered on the teacher's presentation of the material.

A deeper analysis of classroom teaching practices reveals that the use of visual media has a significant impact on students' attention and focus during learning. Students tend to show greater interest when material is presented visually compared to verbal explanations alone. Additionally, images help students understand abstract concepts by making them more concrete and easier to grasp. However, student engagement in the learning process remains dominated by passive activities, such as observing and listening to the teacher's explanations. The processes of interpretation, discussion, and reflection on the meanings contained within the images have not yet developed optimally, so the learning experiences students gain are still limited to the initial stage of understanding.

Analytically, these findings indicate that the use of visual media in Civic Education instruction remains at the instrumental level serving merely as a tool for conveying information—rather than as part of a learning strategy that fosters deeper cognitive engagement among students. Media has not been utilized as a pedagogical stimulus capable of triggering higher-order thinking processes, such as analysis, evaluation, and reflection on social phenomena. In other words, the use of media has not been accompanied by an enhancement of the quality of learning interactions, so the prevailing learning patterns remain one-sided and *teacher-centered* ((Tirtoni, 2016) ). This condition indicates a gap between the potential of learning media and the pedagogical practices carried out in the classroom.

When viewed through the lens of *cognitive engagement*, effective learning should actively involve students in the information processing process, rather than merely having them passively receive information (Atamou et al., 2025) . In this context, instructional media should function as a catalyst for students' mental activities, such as observing, interpreting, connecting, and drawing conclusions from the phenomena presented (Nurkamiden et al., 2024) . However, in observed practice, media are utilized only during the information presentation stage and have not been directed toward fostering more complex cognitive activities. This indicates that the use of media has not fully supported a learning process oriented toward developing students' thinking skills.

Furthermore, according to the theory of *meaningful learning*, learning should enable students to connect new information with their existing knowledge structures, thereby fostering deeper and more enduring understanding (Tarmidzi, 2018;Nuriana & Hotimah, 2023) . The images used actually contain representations of social contexts relevant to students' lives, such as mutual cooperation and community interactions. However, without learning strategies that guide students to elaborate on and connect the meanings of these images, the media cannot optimally fulfill its function as a tool for meaningful learning (Nggilu et al., 2026) . Thus, the primary issue does not lie in the presence of the media, but in the quality of its integration into the instructional design.

Compared to previous research, these findings reinforce that the use of visual media contributes to enhancing students' attention and initial understanding of learning materials (Imeldasari et al., 2025;Wahidin, 2025) . However, some studies also indicate that the use of media does not automatically improve overall learning quality. Without being supported by appropriate instructional strategies, media may actually reinforce existing learning patterns, namely teacher-centered learning (Kusnadi & Azzahra, 2024;Inayati et al., 2025) . Thus, this study not only confirms the role of visual media in supporting the learning process but also provides a critical emphasis that such effectiveness heavily depends on how media is integrated into pedagogical practice.

Compared with previous studies, these findings both confirm and challenge earlier assumptions regarding the effectiveness of visual media in Civic Education instruction. Several studies have shown that visual media are capable of increasing students' motivation, attention, and initial understanding because visual representations make abstract civic concepts more concrete and relatable to students' daily experiences. The findings of this study support those conclusions, as students in the five elementary schools demonstrated higher levels of focus and interest when learning materials were presented through projectors and digital images. However, this study also reveals that increased attention does not automatically lead to meaningful participation or deeper civic understanding. In this regard, the

findings contradict more optimistic perspectives suggesting that the integration of digital visual media naturally encourages active and student-centered learning environments.

More critically, the findings demonstrate that the availability of technological facilities alone is insufficient to transform pedagogical paradigms. Although the five schools possessed relatively adequate technological support such as laptops and projectors, classroom interaction patterns remained strongly teacher-centered and transmissive. This indicates that the persistence of transmissive learning is not primarily caused by infrastructural limitations, but rather by the continuity of pedagogical habits and instructional culture embedded in classroom practice. Teachers tended to position visual media merely as instruments for explaining content more efficiently, rather than as dialogic tools capable of stimulating interpretation, reflection, and collaborative meaning-making among students. Consequently, media integration only modified the mode of content delivery without changing the underlying structure of learning interaction.

This finding aligns with studies arguing that educational technology often fails to produce pedagogical transformation when teachers continue to adopt traditional instructional orientations. In many contexts, digital media simply reinforce existing practices by making lectures visually more attractive while maintaining students as passive recipients of information. However, the present study extends these arguments by showing that this phenomenon also occurs in Civic Education learning, a subject that normatively demands dialogic, participatory, and reflective pedagogies. The contradiction between the democratic objectives of Civic Education and the transmissive nature of classroom interaction becomes one of the most important analytical findings of this research.

The implication drawn from these findings is that the use of visual media in Civic Education instruction in Bunta Subdistrict remains in its early stages, serving primarily as a visual aid for presenting content. Media has not yet evolved into a pedagogical tool capable of fostering students' cognitive engagement, the interpretation of values, and reflection on the social phenomena being studied. This situation indicates that the optimal use of learning media is largely determined by teachers' ability to design lessons that encourage interaction, exploration, and active student engagement (Samsuddin, 2025). Therefore, there is a need to strengthen learning strategies that can integrate visual media as part of a deeper, more interactive learning process focused on developing students' thinking skills and civic attitudes.

### **Patterns of Learning Interaction and Student Engagement**

Research findings reveal that the dynamics of interaction in Pancasila and Civic Education lessons at elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict still show a dominance of the teacher's role as the primary controller of the learning process. Teachers maintain full control in directing the flow of learning through material explanations, providing examples, and reinforcing concepts, while students tend to follow along without much room to take the initiative. This pattern is not only evident in conventional learning but also persists when visual media are used as part of the learning process. These findings indicate that innovations in media use have not been accompanied by fundamental changes in the structure of learning interactions, meaning that a significant transformation toward more participatory learning has not yet occurred.



Figure 2. Learning Interaction Patterns in Civic Education That Remain Teacher-Dominated in the Use of Visual Media.

Source: Research Data (2026)

The documentation illustrates a learning situation in which classroom activities are teacher-centered, both in terms of content delivery and the management of interactions. Students are positioned as recipients of information who respond only minimally to the stimuli provided. These visual findings reinforce the observational results that the use of visual media has not yet contributed to changes in the quality of interaction but remains within a transmissive learning framework. Thus, there is an imbalance between the use of media as a learning innovation and the resulting level of student engagement.

Further analysis indicates that while visual media can capture students' attention and enhance learning focus in the initial stages, this engagement has not evolved into active and meaningful participation (Idris & Amin, 2025). Students generally remain engaged only at the level of observation and initial understanding, without subsequent activities such as analysis, discussion, or reflection on the material studied. Learning practices have not provided sufficient space for students to express ideas, ask critical questions, or build understanding collaboratively. This indicates that student engagement remains limited and has not reached a deep level of participation.

Furthermore, the interaction patterns that emerge tend to be linear and one-directional. Teachers serve as the primary source of knowledge, while students function primarily as recipients of information. Although there is interaction in the form of question-and-answer sessions, this pattern does not reflect substantial dialogue but rather serves as a means of clarification or reinforcement of the material already presented. Thus, the interactions that occur do not function as a means to build shared understanding but remain at the stage of information confirmation. Conceptually, this situation indicates that the use of visual media has not been directed as part of a learning design capable of fostering productive learning interactions. Media is still positioned as a tool for conveying information, not as an instrument that activates students' learning processes (Trikesumawati et al., 2025). This indicates that changes in learning remain limited to the use of tools, without being accompanied by changes in the approach to managing learning interactions (Setyarini et al., 2026; Ghazy et al., 2025). Consequently, media does not become a transformative factor in learning but merely reinforces existing learning practices.

When linked to an activity-based learning approach (*active learning*), effective learning requires students' direct engagement in various activities that encourage them to think, interact, and construct understanding (Kusnandar & Muslimah, 2026). Visual media fundamentally has the potential to facilitate this process because it can present concrete representations of social phenomena. However, in observed practice, this potential has not been optimally utilized because learning has not been designed to systematically encourage student activities. Consequently, visual media have not functioned as catalysts for learning activities but merely as visual aids.

Furthermore, from a dialogic learning perspective, the quality of learning is largely determined by the presence of an interactive space that allows for the open exchange of ideas (Rapanta et al., 2023). Visual media should be utilized as a catalyst for dialogue, enabling students to develop interpretations, connect experiences, and build understanding collectively. However, the limited scope of dialogue in learning prevents this function from developing optimally. The interactions that occur are still limited to responses to the teacher's instructions, rather than resulting from students' initiatives in shaping the learning process. Compared to previous findings emphasizing the effectiveness of visual media in enhancing students' attention and initial understanding, this study confirms that the success of media use is not automatic (Handayani, 2023). Media do not possess the power to transform learning independently but depend on the instructional strategies and designs employed. Without proper management of interactions, media will not be able to produce significant changes in student engagement (Nurkamiden et al., 2024).

Compared with previous findings emphasizing the effectiveness of visual media in increasing students' engagement and classroom participation, this study presents a more critical reality. Although visual media succeeded in attracting students' attention during the early stages of learning, the engagement that emerged remained procedural and superficial. Students were visually attentive, yet they were not cognitively or dialogically involved in deeper

learning processes such as questioning, debating, interpreting, or collaboratively constructing understanding. This finding challenges studies that assume media integration automatically creates active learning environments.

The transmissive interaction pattern found in the five schools indicates that the use of visual media has not been accompanied by a transformation in teachers' pedagogical orientation. Teachers continued to dominate classroom communication, while students remained positioned as receivers of information. In practice, visual media only strengthened the explanatory role of the teacher because images and projected materials were mainly used to support lectures rather than stimulate inquiry or collaborative discussion. Consequently, the interaction pattern remained linear and hierarchical despite the visible integration of educational technology.

This condition explains why the quality of student engagement did not significantly develop even though media utilization increased. The main obstacle lies not in students' lack of interest, but in the limited instructional space provided for active participation. Teachers rarely designed reflective or dialogic activities after displaying visual materials, causing learning interactions to stop at observation and clarification stages. As a result, media failed to function as instruments that could activate democratic classroom interaction and participatory learning processes.

Thus, it can be concluded that the main obstacle in optimizing the use of visual media lies in learning interaction patterns that do not yet support active student participation. As long as learning remains one-directional and teacher-centered, the potential of media as a learning tool will not be fully realized. Therefore, a transformation in instructional design is needed—one that focuses not only on the use of media but also on fostering dialogic, participatory, and reflective interactions. This transformation is key to creating Civic Education learning that is more dynamic, contextual, and meaningful for students.

#### **The Gap Between the Potential of Visual Media and Democratic Teaching Practices**

Research findings from five elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict namely SD Inpres 3 Bunta, SD Inpres Demangan Jaya, SDN Laonggo, SDN Tuntung, and SDN Koili indicate that, in terms of facilities, the schools have relatively adequate support for utilizing visual media as part of Civic Education instruction. The availability of devices such as laptops, projectors, and visual materials relevant to the learning content was found to be fairly consistent across all study schools. This situation indicates that, technically, there are no significant obstacles to delivering more varied and contextual learning.

Field findings also show that the use of visual media in these five schools is able to increase students' interest in learning and help clarify abstract concepts, making them more concrete. In some learning situations, students appeared more focused and demonstrated initial positive responses when material was presented visually rather than through verbal explanation alone. However, although media has been used consistently, its utilization has not been directed toward fostering active and deep learning experiences. Students still tend to passively receive information without being engaged in processes that allow them to experience, process, and fully comprehend the material.

Furthermore, the observed learning patterns across the five schools reveal a similar trend: the dominance of teachers in controlling the course of the learning process. Teachers serve as the primary conveyors of content and the controllers of the learning flow, while students follow predetermined steps. Opportunities for students to explore the meaning of the material, ask questions, or offer interpretations of phenomena presented through media remain relatively limited. This situation indicates that although there is variation in the use of media, the basic structure of learning interactions has not undergone significant changes toward a learning approach that is more student-centered.

Analytically, the consistency of findings across the five schools reinforces the existence of a gap between the potential of visual media and its actual use in learning. Media that has the potential to provide rich, contextual learning experiences relevant to students' lives is instead used within a learning framework that remains focused on information delivery. In other words, media has not yet functioned as a tool that encourages the process of exploration and meaning construction; rather, it is still positioned as a visual aid to clarify the material presented by the teacher. This indicates that the main issue does not lie in the availability of media, but in how that media is utilized to build meaningful learning experiences.

From an *experiential learning* perspective, effective learning requires student engagement in a learning experience cycle that includes the activities of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualizing, and applying

knowledge(Sumali, 2025;Anggreni, 2017) . In this context, visual media should serve as a starting point for students to observe phenomena, discuss the meanings embedded within them, and connect them to their personal experiences and social environments. However, based on field findings, these stages have not developed optimally because learning is still dominated by the teacher's delivery of information without being followed by structured reflective activities(Imeldasari et al., 2025) . Consequently, students' learning experiences do not develop into a process of deep meaning-making but stop at the stage of surface-level understanding.

In line with this, within the *value clarification* approach, Civic Education instruction should provide space for students to identify, consider, and determine the values they hold through a process of reflection and dialogue(Muhammad et al., 2020) . Visual media has great potential to support this process because it can depict social situations involving value conflicts or moral dilemmas that can be discussed collectively. However, research findings indicate that media has not yet been utilized to deeply explore and develop students' understanding of values. Instruction remains focused on teachers conveying values in a normative manner, without providing sufficient opportunities for students to independently explore and reflect on those values(Gustian et al., 2025) .

Furthermore, limitations in managing learning interactions also hinder the development of students' critical thinking and argumentation skills. Activities such as group discussions, simple debates, or value reflections—which could be facilitated through the use of visual media—have not yet become a structured component of instruction. This indicates that media has not been integrated into instructional strategies capable of simultaneously fostering students' cognitive and social engagement.

When compared with various findings from previous research, the results of this study reinforce the view that visual media contribute to enhancing students' attention and initial understanding of learning materials(Amanda, 2024) . However, this study also emphasizes that the success of media use is not automatic. The effectiveness of media is highly determined by how it is integrated into the learning strategies designed by teachers(Paskalina et al., 2021) . Without a learning design that fosters learning experiences and reflection on values, media will not be able to produce meaningful and sustainable learning(Herlina et al., 2025) .

The findings from the five elementary schools reveal a paradox between technological availability and pedagogical practice. On one hand, schools already possess relatively adequate visual learning facilities, and teachers consistently utilize them during Civic Education instruction. On the other hand, these technological resources have not succeeded in transforming learning into a democratic and participatory process. This contradiction indicates that the problem is not technological access, but the persistence of transmissive teaching culture within classroom practices.

Critically, this study demonstrates that visual media were predominantly interpreted by teachers as tools for delivering information more efficiently rather than as pedagogical instruments for facilitating reflection, dialogue, and value clarification. As a result, media use remained limited to strengthening teacher explanations and improving classroom attention, without substantially encouraging students to explore social realities critically. This finding contrasts with more technology-optimistic perspectives suggesting that digital media naturally foster collaborative and student-centered learning environments.

Furthermore, the consistency of transmissive learning patterns across the five schools suggests that the failure of pedagogical transformation is rooted in deeper structural factors. Teachers still appear strongly influenced by conventional instructional traditions that prioritize content transmission, classroom control, and completion of learning targets. Civic Education values are delivered normatively by teachers rather than explored dialogically through students' experiences and interpretations. Consequently, although students observe visual representations of social phenomena, they are rarely encouraged to critically interpret, question, or reflect upon the meanings embedded in those phenomena.

This study therefore strengthens arguments from previous research stating that educational technology alone cannot transform learning quality without corresponding changes in pedagogical design and teacher beliefs. However, this research extends the discussion further by emphasizing that such limitations become particularly problematic in

Civic Education learning, where democratic participation, dialogue, and reflective thinking constitute central educational goals

Thus, it is evident that in the five elementary schools in Bunta Subdistrict, the gap between the potential and actual use of visual media remains quite significant. Optimizing media use is not sufficient through merely providing facilities or increasing the frequency of use; it requires a shift in the learning approach that emphasizes learning experiences, interaction, and value reflection. Therefore, future development of Civic Education instruction must be directed toward the integration of media use, learning activity design, and the process of value clarification, so that the learning that takes place is not merely informative but also capable of shaping students' civic character in a deeper, more critical, and reflective manner.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that the use of visual media in Civic Education (PPKn) instruction has not yet fully fostered participatory and meaningful learning. Visual media is still predominantly utilized as a tool for delivering information rather than as a pedagogical instrument capable of encouraging students to think critically, engage in dialogue, and reflect on democratic and civic values. Therefore, the primary challenge lies not in the availability of media itself, but in how the media is integrated into instructional design and classroom learning activities.

The theoretical implications of this study contribute to the development of democratic pedagogy by emphasizing that visual media should function not merely as instructional support, but also as a medium that facilitates interaction, participation, and reflective learning. These findings reinforce the importance of shifting from teacher-centered instruction toward dialogic and student-centered learning approaches that actively involve learners in constructing civic understanding and democratic awareness.

This study is limited by its focus on a relatively small number of elementary schools within one subdistrict, which may affect the broader generalizability of the findings. In addition, the research primarily examined the use of conventional visual media and did not extensively explore the implementation of interactive digital learning platforms.

Future research is recommended to investigate the effectiveness of interactive digital learning models, such as gamified civic learning applications, augmented reality (AR)-based media, or collaborative digital discussion platforms, in strengthening participatory and meaningful Civic Education learning in elementary schools.

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