

THE USE OF DOCUMENTARY FILMS AS A HISTORY TEACHING MEDIUM FOR 11TH GRADE STUDENTS AT MADANI PALU INTEGRATED MODEL HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implementation of documentary films as instructional media in history education by examining their pedagogical contributions, the challenges encountered during implementation, and their implications for improving the quality of history learning. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Purposive sampling was used to select one history teacher and six Grade XI students at SMAN Model Terpadu Madani Palu who had direct experience with documentary film-based instruction. The findings reveal that documentary films significantly enhanced students' learning motivation, classroom participation, concentration, and understanding of historical concepts by providing authentic visual representations that facilitated comprehension of historical chronology and context. The integration of documentary films also promoted a more interactive and student-centered learning environment through reflective classroom discussions. Nevertheless, several implementation challenges were identified, including limited instructional facilities, unstable internet connectivity, classroom noise, and the lengthy duration of documentary films, all of which affected instructional effectiveness. These findings suggest that documentary films represent an effective pedagogical tool for history education by fostering meaningful learning experiences and strengthening students' cognitive engagement with historical content. The study further highlights the importance of adequate technological infrastructure and careful instructional planning to optimize the integration of documentary films into history teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of education today indicates that the use of effective and engaging learning media has become one of the important factors in improving the quality of the teaching and learning process. The use of effective and attractive instructional media is one of the primary factors in enhancing the quality of learning activities in the modern educational era. One of the media proven to be effective is documentary film, which is capable of presenting information visually and narratively based on real facts, thereby facilitating students' understanding of learning materials (Firmansyah et al., 2022). History learning plays an important role in shaping students' character and national insight. However, in

practice, history learning is often considered boring and less engaging by students because the methods used are still conventional, such as lectures and textbook reading (Ayu, 2025).

This condition causes low student motivation and understanding of historical materials. Therefore, more innovative and engaging learning media are needed to improve the effectiveness of history learning. One potential medium is documentary film, which is able to present historical facts visually and narratively, making it easier for students to understand the context and chronology of historical events (Ramli & Fatmala, 2023).

Documentary films not only increase the attractiveness of learning but also help students develop critical and analytical thinking skills through discussions conducted after the film screening (Ayu, 2025). In addition, the use of documentary films as a medium for history learning can bridge the gap between historical theory and reality, allowing students to gain more authentic and contextual learning experiences (Ramli & Fatmala, 2023).

Teachers also need to conduct careful planning in utilizing this medium, such as selecting films that are appropriate to the learning material and providing guidance before and after the screening so that learning objectives can be achieved optimally (Ayu, 2025). In the current digital era, the integration of technology in learning has become increasingly important to improve the quality and effectiveness of education, including the utilization of audiovisual media such as documentary films (Putra & Rahman, 2023). Research conducted by Hidayat also demonstrated that the use of documentary films can significantly improve students' learning motivation in history subjects (Hidayat, 2020).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive approach to explore the use of documentary films as a medium for history learning at SMAN Model Terpadu Madani Palu. Qualitative descriptive research is considered appropriate because it focuses on describing social phenomena and understanding participants' experiences through written and spoken data obtained directly from the field (Sugiyono, 2022). Through this approach, the researcher sought to provide a detailed description of the implementation of documentary films in history learning without manipulating the research setting or participants' behavior.

The research was conducted at SMAN Model Terpadu Madani Palu, located on Soekarno Hatta Street No. 45, Mantikulore District, Palu City, Central Sulawesi. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study (Sugiyono, 2022). The participants consisted of one history teacher and six Grade XI students who were directly involved in the learning process using documentary films. The history teacher was selected because they were responsible for designing and implementing documentary film-based instruction, while the six students were chosen because they had direct experience participating in the learning activities and were able to provide rich descriptions of their learning experiences. In qualitative research, the adequacy of the sample is determined by the richness and relevance of the information rather than by the number of participants. The seven informants were considered sufficient because they represented the key participants involved in the phenomenon under investigation and provided repetitive and comprehensive information, indicating that the data had reached sufficient depth to address the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data in this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation activities involving the history teacher and students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Observations were conducted to identify classroom conditions, student participation, learning motivation, and the teaching strategies applied during the use of documentary films. Interviews were carried out to gain deeper insights into participants' perceptions and experiences, while documentation was used to support observational and interview data through learning materials, photographs, and classroom records.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing as proposed by Miles et al. (2014). Data reduction was conducted by selecting and focusing on important findings related to the research objectives. The reduced data were then presented in descriptive narrative form to facilitate interpretation and understanding. Finally, conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the research process to identify patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the field data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Documentary Films in History Learning

The findings indicate that the implementation of documentary films in history learning followed a structured instructional sequence consisting of preparation, adaptation, presentation, and reflective discussion (Table 1). Rather than functioning merely as audiovisual support, documentary films were integrated into a pedagogical process in which teachers deliberately selected, adapted, and contextualized the learning materials to align with instructional objectives. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of documentary films depends not only on the media itself but also on how teachers facilitate students' engagement before, during, and after the screening. Such an approach reflects the principles of constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when learners actively construct knowledge through interaction, reflection, and guided discussion rather than through passive observation alone (Piaget; Vygotsky). The discussion stage, in particular, enabled students to interpret historical events, exchange perspectives, and develop historical reasoning, thereby transforming documentary films from a visual resource into an active learning medium.

Table 1. Stages of Documentary Film Implementation in History Learning

Learning Stage	Activities Conducted
Preparation	Teacher searched and selected relevant documentary films from YouTube and Google
Adaptation	Films were shortened into important sections to fit classroom duration
Introduction	Teacher explained the material before screening
Screening Process	Documentary films were displayed using projector, laptop, and speakers
Reflection and Discussion	Students answered questions, discussed, and explained the film content

The interview findings further demonstrate that students perceived documentary film-based instruction as more engaging than conventional lecture-based learning because the combination of visual and auditory information facilitated a more concrete understanding of historical events. These perceptions support the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning proposed by Mayer (2009), which argues that learners achieve deeper understanding when information is presented through complementary verbal and visual channels. Moreover, the positive responses toward post-screening discussions indicate that learning effectiveness was not solely generated by the documentary films themselves but also by opportunities for collaborative reflection and knowledge construction. This finding reinforces previous studies showing that audiovisual media are most effective when integrated with interactive instructional strategies that encourage students to analyze, interpret, and communicate their understanding of historical phenomena.

Table 2. Students' Responses Toward the Use of Documentary Films

Student Responses	Findings
Learning motivation	Students became more enthusiastic and interested in history learning
Classroom participation	Students were more active in discussions and answering questions
Learning atmosphere	Learning became more interactive and less monotonous
Understanding of material	Students understood historical events more easily through visualization
Learning focus	Students paid greater attention during the lesson

The responses presented in Table 2 suggest that documentary films influenced not only students' cognitive understanding but also their behavioral and affective engagement during history learning. Increased motivation, classroom participation, and learning focus indicate that audiovisual media can create a more student-centered learning environment in which learners actively interact with historical content rather than passively receiving information. This

finding is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that meaningful learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through interaction with learning resources and classroom discussion. Furthermore, the improvement in students' understanding of historical chronology and context supports Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which explains that integrating verbal explanations with visual representations enhances information processing and facilitates deeper conceptual understanding. Therefore, the educational value of documentary films lies not only in presenting historical facts visually but also in promoting active engagement, critical reflection, and meaningful learning experiences.

Obstacles in the Use of Documentary Films

Although documentary films provided many benefits, several obstacles were identified during their implementation in history learning. Based on classroom observations and interviews, the main challenges included technical limitations, classroom environmental conditions, and limited instructional time.

Table 3. Obstacles in the Use of Documentary Films

Obstacles	Description
Internet connection	Unstable network caused videos to lag or become blurry
Classroom noise	Classes near the cafeteria experienced sound disturbances
Limited speakers	Teachers sometimes lacked additional audio equipment
Time limitation	Documentary films could only be shown in short durations
Long film duration	Students occasionally lost concentration during lengthy screenings
Power interruptions	Electricity outages disrupted film screenings

Students explained that unclear sound quality and unstable internet connections often reduced the effectiveness of documentary film screenings. Some students also mentioned that long film durations affected their concentration during the learning process. To overcome these challenges, the teacher implemented several strategies such as downloading films before class, using additional speakers, and evaluating learning activities after each meeting to improve future implementation.

Table 4. Solutions Applied by the Teacher

Solutions	Implementation
Offline preparation	Films were downloaded before classroom use
Additional speakers	External speakers were used to improve audio clarity
Reflection and evaluation	Teacher evaluated shortcomings after learning activities
Film duration adjustment	Films were shortened into essential segments
Better preparation	Teacher anticipated technical problems before class

The responses presented in Table 2 indicate that the use of documentary films enhanced not only students' understanding of historical content but also their motivation, participation, and attention throughout the learning process. These findings suggest that the effectiveness of documentary films extends beyond their function as audiovisual resources, as they create learning experiences that encourage students to actively engage with historical issues through observation, discussion, and reflection. From a constructivist perspective, this active engagement enables students to construct historical knowledge by connecting visual evidence presented in the films with prior knowledge and classroom interactions, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of historical events. Furthermore, the improvement in students' comprehension of chronology and historical context is consistent with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which argues that the integration of verbal explanations and visual representations facilitates more effective cognitive processing and knowledge retention. Consequently, the findings demonstrate that documentary films serve not merely as

instructional media but as pedagogical tools that promote meaningful historical learning by simultaneously supporting cognitive, affective, and participatory dimensions of student learning.

Importance of Documentary Films in History Learning

The study found that documentary films played an important role in creating more meaningful and engaging history learning experiences. Both teachers and students agreed that documentary films increased students' learning interest, motivation, and understanding of historical events.

Table 5. Importance of Documentary Films in History Learning

Aspects	Findings
Learning interest	Students became more interested in studying history
Motivation	Students showed higher enthusiasm during lessons
Understanding	Historical events became easier to understand
Visualization	Students could directly observe historical representations
Classroom interaction	Students became more active in discussions
Learning effectiveness	Learning was considered more effective than conventional methods

The teacher's perception that documentary films were particularly effective for topics such as colonialism and national struggles further indicates that visualization plays a critical role in helping students comprehend complex historical phenomena. Rather than simply transmitting factual information, documentary films encourage learners to analyze historical evidence, interpret events from multiple perspectives, and engage in reflective classroom discussions. This interpretation aligns with Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which argues that combining verbal explanations with visual representations improves cognitive processing and facilitates deeper conceptual understanding. Moreover, the increased classroom interaction observed in this study indicates that documentary films function as catalysts for collaborative learning, enabling students to exchange ideas and construct historical understanding collectively.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that documentary films should be viewed not merely as supplementary instructional media but as pedagogical tools that integrate visualization, interaction, and reflection to enhance students' cognitive, affective, and participatory engagement in history learning. Their contribution lies not only in making lessons more engaging but also in promoting deeper historical understanding and more meaningful learning experiences.

Use of Documentary Films in History Learning

The findings revealed that the implementation of documentary films in history learning at SMAN Model Terpadu Madani Palu was conducted through several systematic stages, including film preparation, introductory explanation, film screening, and post-screening discussion activities. The teacher selected documentary films relevant to the learning material and shortened several sections to match classroom duration and students' learning needs. This finding indicates that documentary films were not only used as entertainment media, but also functioned as instructional tools integrated into the learning process to support students' historical understanding. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that documentary films can improve the effectiveness of history learning through visual and contextual presentations of historical events (Firmansyah et al., 2022; Sari & Wulandari, 2021).

Based on the classroom discussion, the students concluded that Japan's arrival in Indonesia, initially promoted through the propaganda of being the "Elder Brother," was merely a strategy to gain the support of the Indonesian people. After successfully occupying Indonesia, Japan established a repressive military administration that implemented various policies causing widespread suffering among the population. The students were also able to identify several forms of Japanese oppression depicted in the documentary, including the *romusha* forced labor system, the exploitation of natural resources, the confiscation of agricultural products, and the practice of *jugun ianfu* (comfort women). According to the students, the *romusha* policy represented a form of forced labor that subjected many Indonesians to severe hardship due to inadequate wages, food shortages, and limited access to healthcare. Likewise, the practice of *jugun ianfu* was

recognized as a serious violation of human rights that inflicted both physical and psychological suffering on its victims. Furthermore, the students concluded that Japanese policies contributed to food scarcity, increased famine, and a decline in public welfare because a substantial proportion of agricultural production was diverted to support Japan's war efforts. Several students also associated these conditions with the emergence of various forms of Indonesian resistance against the arbitrary actions of the Japanese occupation government. They further concluded that the hardships experienced during the occupation became one of the factors that strengthened the Indonesian people's determination to fight for national independence.

Interview findings showed that the teacher carefully selected documentary films from YouTube and other online sources before classroom implementation. The films were adapted into shorter segments to maintain students' concentration and align with learning objectives. According to the teacher, the visual, audio, and animation elements in documentary films made historical materials easier to understand and increased students' interest in learning history. This finding supports the argument that audiovisual media can strengthen learning experiences because students are able to observe historical events more concretely rather than only listening to verbal explanations (Putra & Rahman, 2023; Heinich et al., 2002).

Students also expressed positive responses toward the use of documentary films during history learning activities. Fadhal Rafif Pratisena explained that documentary films created a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere because students could directly observe visual representations of historical events. Similarly, Aiki Kaysan Alfathunisa stated that documentary films helped students understand historical materials more easily because they could both hear explanations and observe visual illustrations simultaneously. Other students, including Muhammad Faqih, Rindy Nurfatiha, May Alycia Gaghauna, and Siti Kirani Maharani Putri, emphasized that documentary films increased classroom participation, learning motivation, and student focus during discussions. These findings are in line with previous studies explaining that documentary films improve students' learning motivation, historical awareness, and classroom engagement (Hidayat, 2020; Sari et al., 2024; Rahmat et al., 2025).

The findings of this study are relevant to Bill Nichols' documentary representation theory, which explains that documentary films represent reality through narration and visualization that shape audience understanding of events (Nichols, 2021). In history learning, documentary films help students understand chronology, context, and causal relationships within historical events more systematically. This study also supports Faishol et al., who explained that documentary films encourage students to understand historical events more deeply through visual learning experiences (Faishol et al., 2021). In addition, the findings strengthen the constructivist perspective, which emphasizes that students construct knowledge more effectively through direct and meaningful learning experiences (Ihsan & Artika, 2025).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that documentary films positively influenced history learning activities at SMAN Model Terpadu Madani Palu. Documentary films created a more interactive, enjoyable, and meaningful learning atmosphere in which students became more focused, enthusiastic, and active during classroom discussions. Therefore, documentary films can be considered an effective instructional medium capable of supporting teachers in delivering historical materials while simultaneously increasing students' participation and understanding (Apriani et al., 2025; Yohannur et al., 2025).

Obstacles in the Use of Documentary Films

Although documentary films were found to improve learning effectiveness, the study identified several obstacles during their implementation in history learning. The main challenges included noisy classroom conditions, limited speaker availability, unstable internet connections, unclear audio and image quality, and limited classroom duration. These obstacles affected the effectiveness of documentary film screenings and sometimes disrupted students' concentration during learning activities.

The interview with the history teacher revealed that classrooms located near the school cafeteria frequently experienced noise disturbances that reduced the clarity of film audio. In addition, unstable internet connections often interrupted online screenings, causing videos to lag or stop unexpectedly. The teacher also explained that limited instructional time forced films to be shortened into several important segments rather than displayed completely. These findings indicate that technical preparation and classroom facilities remain important factors in determining the effectiveness of audiovisual learning media (Kafiar & Puteri, 2025).

Students also identified several obstacles during documentary film implementation. Aiki Kaysan Alfathunisa and Rindy Nurfatiha stated that unclear audio and noisy classroom conditions often reduced their concentration while watching the films. Muhammad Faqih and Fadhal Rafif Pratisena explained that excessively long film durations

sometimes caused students to lose focus during the screening process. Meanwhile, May Alycia Gaghauna and Siti Kirani Maharani Putri mentioned that unstable internet connections and occasional electricity outages disrupted classroom learning activities. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies, which found that the effectiveness of audiovisual learning media is highly dependent on technological readiness, classroom conditions, and supporting facilities (Hanafi et al., 2022; Budaya et al., 2026).

To overcome these obstacles, the teacher implemented several preventive strategies, including downloading films before class, using additional speakers, selecting only essential film segments, and conducting evaluations after each lesson. These efforts are consistent with Arsyad's theory of instructional media, which explains that the effectiveness of learning media depends on the suitability of the media, teacher preparation, and classroom management (Kafiar & Puteri, 2025). Heinich et al. also argued that media-based learning requires adequate facilities and supportive learning environments to ensure effective delivery of instructional messages (Heinich et al., 2002).

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that documentary film implementation in history learning still faces several technical and environmental challenges. However, through careful preparation and evaluation, teachers were able to minimize these obstacles and maintain effective classroom learning. Therefore, teacher readiness, media preparation, and adequate technological facilities are essential in supporting the successful implementation of documentary films as history learning media (Candra, 2025).

Importance of Documentary Films in History Learning

The findings demonstrated that documentary films played an important role in helping students understand historical events more concretely and meaningfully. Students explained that they could understand historical chronology and context more easily when they observed visual representations of events rather than relying solely on textbooks or verbal explanations from teachers. This finding indicates that documentary films contribute to more contextual and student-centered learning experiences (Sari & Wulandari, 2021).

The history teacher explained that documentary films significantly increased students' enthusiasm for learning history, which had previously been considered monotonous and less attractive. Documentary films were particularly effective for historical topics requiring visualization, such as colonialism and Japanese occupation in Indonesia. The combination of narration, images, sound, and animation helped students remain interested and focused throughout the learning process. This finding supports previous studies which stated that documentary films improve students' learning interest and historical thinking abilities (Yohannur et al., 2025; Rahmat et al., 2025).

Students also emphasized that documentary films created more engaging and interactive classroom environments. Aiki Kaysan Alfathunisa stated that documentary films enabled students to directly visualize historical events, making historical materials easier to understand. Rindy Nurfatiha similarly explained that documentary films created a more lively classroom atmosphere and increased learning motivation. Other students, including Siti Kirani Maharani Putri, Fadhal Rafif Pratisenana, Muhammad Faqih, and May Alycia Gaghauna, reported that documentary films made history lessons more enjoyable and less monotonous compared to lecture-based learning. These findings confirm that documentary films support not only cognitive understanding but also emotional engagement and classroom participation (Aderoben & Darmawan, 2023; Prananda & Ibrahim, 2020).

The findings of this study are consistent with Prananda and Ibrahim, who explained that documentary films help students develop historical understanding and historical empathy because students can observe visual representations of past realities more directly (Prananda & Ibrahim, 2020). In addition, Piaget's constructivist learning theory, as discussed by Rahayu and Imron, explains that knowledge is constructed through meaningful learning experiences and interaction with learning stimuli (Rahayu & Imron, 2025). In this context, documentary films provide contextual visual experiences that help students construct deeper historical understanding through observation and reflection.

Overall, the findings indicate that documentary films have an important role in improving the quality of history learning. Documentary films help students understand historical materials more concretely, increase learning motivation and classroom participation, and create more engaging learning environments. Therefore, documentary films can be considered effective instructional media capable of connecting historical concepts with authentic and meaningful visual learning experiences for students (Apriani et al., 2025; Firmansyah et al., 2022; Ihsan & Artika, 2025; Martini, 2025; Rachmani et al., 2026).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the use of documentary films as a medium for teaching history at SMAN Model Terpadu Madani Palu has a positive impact on the learning process. Documentary films have proven effective in enhancing students' interest, motivation, focus, and understanding of historical material because the content is presented visually, factually, and contextually, making it easier for students to grasp the sequence of historical events compared to relying solely on lectures and textbooks. This is evident from the students' enthusiasm during lessons and interview findings indicating that documentary films facilitate a deeper understanding of historical events. Furthermore, the use of documentary films helps teachers create a more engaging, interactive, and less monotonous learning environment, encouraging students to participate actively in classroom discussions and develop critical thinking skills. However, the study also identified several implementation challenges, including limited facilities and infrastructure, unstable internet connectivity, classroom noise, and the relatively long duration of documentary films, all of which may reduce the effectiveness of the learning process.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single senior high school involving one history teacher and six students, which limits the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the study employed a qualitative approach that focused on participants' experiences and perceptions without quantitatively measuring the impact of documentary films on students' academic achievement or historical thinking skills.

Future research is therefore recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample across different schools and educational settings to enhance the generalizability of the findings. In addition, mixed-methods or experimental studies could be conducted to examine the effectiveness of documentary films in improving learning outcomes, historical thinking, critical thinking, and student engagement, while also comparing documentary film-based instruction with other innovative learning media.

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