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Learning History Through LENS: Critical Analysis of Narratives in Documentary Films

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Abstract

History learning in the digital era faces challenges in attracting interest and building college students critical understanding of past events. One innovative approach that can be used is the use of documentary films as a learning medium. Documentaries are not only informative, but also present a narrative that is reflective of historical constructions. This study aims to analyze the use of documentary films in history learning and develop critical analysis strategies through *the Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen* (LENS) model. This study uses the Dick and Carey instructional design method which consists of ten systematic steps, namely: identification of learning objectives, analysis of learning and college student characteristics, formulation of special learning objectives, development of evaluation instruments, development of learning strategies, development and selection of materials, development of learning media, implementation of learning, and formative and summative evaluation. Historical documentaries are used as the primary source in analytical activities to train college students interpretive, analytical, and reflective abilities against visually presented historical narratives. The results of the study show that the integration of documentary film into history learning through the LENS strategy is able to improve college students active participation, critical thinking skills, and historical awareness. The results of the experiment in two classes showed that the LENS strategy significantly increased college students interest in learning (86%) and understanding of historical material (78%). This strategy also encourages college students to question dominant narratives, evaluate different perspectives, and develop media and historical literacy in an integrated manner. Thus, this approach can be an effective alternative in creating more contextual, interactive, and meaningful history learning.

Keywords: Learning History , Documentary, LENS Strategy

Introduction

History learning plays an important role in shaping the cultural identity, critical awareness, and character of the younger generation, while encouraging reflective understanding and responsibility for the past. Globally, serious challenges continue to arise because many college students still view history as a boring discipline, too dominated by memorizing names, dates, and events, and lacking relevance to contemporary life (Lim et al., 2023). This low motivation shows the need to update the history teaching strategy to be more dynamic, interactive, and relevant to the context of modern life (Bunari et al., 2023). At the national level, especially in Indonesia, the practice of teaching history still relies heavily on textual methods and one-way lectures that tend to place college students as passive recipients of knowledge. This condition has an impact on the weak affective involvement of college students in understanding history as a complex human process as well as a lack of emphasis on the development of historical thinking skills, including context, chronology, cause-effect, and

multiperspective understanding (Senadheera et al., 2024). This problem is increasingly felt at the regional level, especially in schools and local communities, where the limitations of pedagogical innovation make college students historical thinking skills not optimally developed. Recent findings suggest that the application of a source-based learning model is able to improve historical skills, although its implementation is still limited in a number of schools (Sihotang & Sirear, 2024). Similar results were also found that teachers who used an interactive historical thinking approach through document analysis and critical discussion could increase college students interest and critical thinking skills, even though some college students were not fully comfortable with the method. This reality confirms that learning history requires a more innovative, interactive, and contextual strategy by utilizing a variety of sources, both local and digital, and emphasizing the process of historical thinking (Masruroh et al., 2023). In the context of the development of 21st century education, this reform is very urgent to be directed at the use of digital technology, because technology-based media has proven to be able to provide a more reflective, interactive, and relevant learning experience to the lives of the younger generation in the midst of global and local challenges.

The advancement of digital technology in the last two decades offers a new approach that can revitalize the learning of history. Audiovisual media, especially documentary films, is one of the potential innovations because it is able to present historical narratives in a more imaginative and emotional format. Visualization in the documentary not only displays information, but also shapes the narrative through moving images, sound narratives, and the preparation of scenes that arouse college students critical power (Prakoso et al., 2023). The representation of history through film opens up space to examine how history is constructed, interpreted, and interpreted from a certain point of view (McLane, 2023). This allows college students not only to understand history as facts, but also as ideological and contextual narratives.

The effectiveness of documentary films as a learning medium has been proven through various studies at the international and national levels. Piotrowska (2023) stating that the use of film in teaching history can increase college students emotional and cognitive engagement, as well as strengthen understanding of the material being taught. On the other hand Peters (2020) it emphasizes the importance of developing historical thinking skills through alternative sources such as audiovisuals, as they are able to trigger critical questions and profound interpretations of past events. In the Indonesian context, it shows that the planned use of documentary films can increase college students interest in national history and help them understand the socio-political dynamics behind historical events (Sulaeman, 2021). These findings show that documentary films have a strategic role as a reflective media as well as an analytical instrument in the history learning process.

The use of documentary films in history learning is still generally sporadic and has not been systematically integrated into instructional design. Many teachers only use film as an interlude or complement material without a clear pedagogical strategy (Chubb, 2019). As a result, the potential of film as a critical and contextual learning medium has not been maximized. In fact, the effectiveness of media in learning is highly dependent on a comprehensive instructional design, starting from the formulation of learning objectives, content selection, organizing learning activities, to evaluation strategies. Bastaman (2018) affirms that the effectiveness of technology in learning depends on the extent to which the media is designed based on measurable and relevant instructional design principles. Without systematic planning, documentaries will remain passive spectacles, rather than tools for college students cognitive and affective transformation.

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Dick and Carey's instructional design model is one of the approaches that can be used to systematically integrate media in the learning process. The model consists of ten structured steps, ranging from needs analysis to summative evaluation, and aims to ensure a logical connection between objectives, strategies, materials, and assessments in learning activities. The advantage of this model is its ability to manage system-based learning holistically, making it highly relevant applied to complex, interpretive, and narrative-based history subjects (Dick et al., 2014). Using this approach, teachers can design history learning that is not only informative, but also forms a critical and reflective mindset in college students.

The application of the Dick and Carey model in the context of documentary-based history learning is still very limited (Adeoye et al., 2024). This creates a gap between the potential of the media and the implementation of structured learning strategies. In response to this, the LENS (Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen) learning strategy was developed to bridge the integration between documentary films as a learning medium with systematic instructional design principles (Fitzgerald & Lowe, 2020). This strategy is based on the understanding that history is a social and narrative construct that needs to be read critically, not just memorized as facts.

LENS in practice is designed starting from the analysis of college student characteristics and learning context, then continued with the formulation of specific learning objectives. Furthermore, the documentary film was selected based on the depth of the issue and relevance to the applicable historical curriculum. College students are directed to explore narratives through worksheets, group discussions, and the preparation of structured historical criticism. Evaluation not only focuses on mastery of the material, but also measures college students historical thinking skills, such as distinguishing facts and opinions, recognizing source bias, and understanding the socio-political context of the film's narrative (Maskun et al., 2021;Setiawati et al., 2021). This strategy allows college students to experience history contextually and personally, while improving media literacy skills that are increasingly crucial in the digital era.

Overall, LENS' learning strategy seeks to transform the history learning experience into a more participatory, reflective, and contextual process. This approach not only bridges the gap between media and pedagogy, but also integrates instructional design principles with the exploration of historical narratives through documentaries. By applying this strategy systematically, history learning is no longer a routine of memorization, but a space for critical dialogue between the past, present, and future (Febriyanti, 2023).

Method

The *Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen* (LENS) learning strategy was developed to improve college students historical thinking skills through exploration and critical analysis of historical narratives in documentaries. College students are trained not only to passively receive historical information, but to be able to examine visual representations of history by considering narrative perspectives, socio-political contexts, and ideological tendencies in its presentation. This ability is important to shape college students historical awareness as citizens who are reflective of past narratives (Gaunkar et al., 2022).

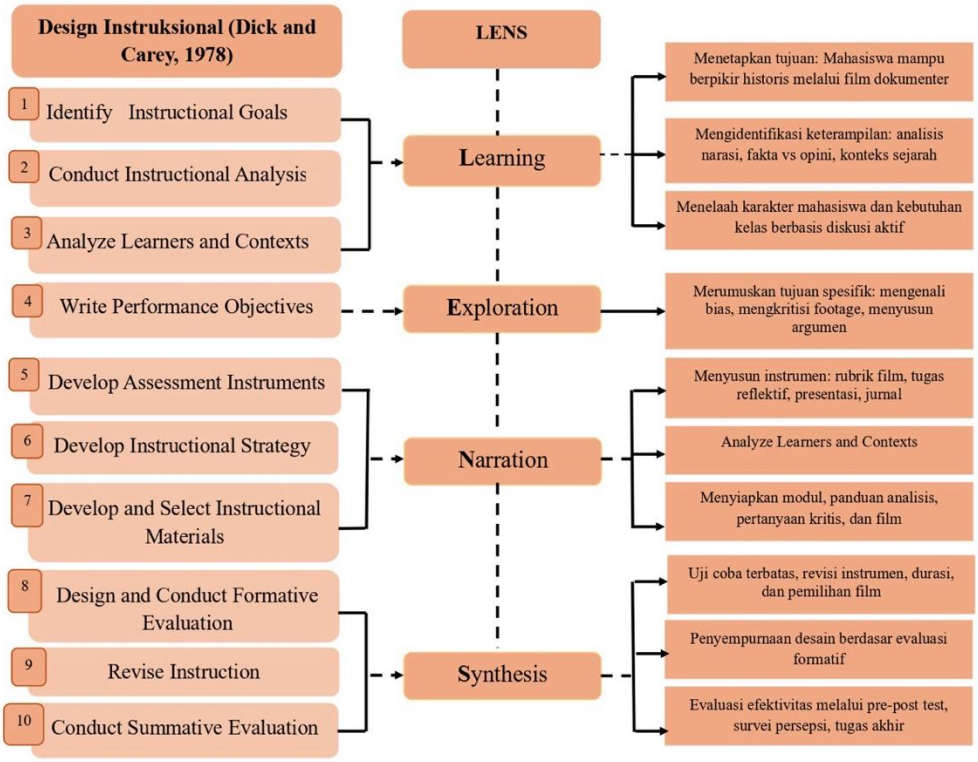

Figure 1. Lens Strategy Flow with Dick and Carey's Instructional design approach
Source: Processed Researcher (2025).

The LENS strategy design process is based on the system-oriented Dick and Carey Instructional Design model. This model emphasizes that learning is the result of interaction between interrelated components, such as learning objectives, needs analysis, college student characteristics, delivery methods, and evaluation (Dick & Carey, 2014). The use of this model allows each stage in strategy development to be carried out in a structured, measurable, and effective manner through formative and summative approaches.

Determining general learning objectives is the first step in the LENS strategy. The purpose is formulated so that college students are able to critically analyze historical events through documentary films, taking into account the visual narrative, historical context, and ideological meaning contained in the presentation. This ability is the basis of Tepelea (2021) *historical thinking* competence, which is the ability to interpret the past based on evidence and diverse perspectives. The next stage is to conduct an instructional analysis to identify the basic skills that college students need. Among them is the ability to recognize narrative structures in documentaries, distinguish between facts and opinions, and develop historical arguments based on visual sources. The college students targeted by this strategy come from history education study programs that already have a foundation of historical knowledge, but require reinforcement in visual literacy and narrative analysis (Winston, 2019).

The formulation of special learning objectives is carried out based on the characteristics of college students as adult learners. These objectives include the skills of identifying narrative biases in documentaries, evaluating the use of footage and sound narratives, and drafting analytical essays that critically reflect historical understanding. The assessment of learning outcomes is carried out through analysis rubrics, reflective journals, group presentations, and individual essay assignments (Hemansyah, 2017). This instrument is designed to measure

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conceptual comprehension, narrative analysis power, and the development of college students overall historical awareness.

The LENS strategy is implemented through five main stages: documentary screening as an initial exposure phase, exploration of narrative elements through structured worksheets, group discussions to explore meaning, preparation of written historical criticism, and personal reflection on the material (Pungkiawan, 2022). This approach encourages college students to unpack the meaning behind the presentation of history in film and reflect it in their contemporary social and cultural context. Each stage is designed to make the learning process collaborative and analytical. The development of learning materials is an important aspect in supporting the success of the LENS strategy. The material consists of a narrative analysis guide, a historical contextual module, and a list of critical questions arranged sequentially to support discussion and reflection activities. The selection of documentary films is adjusted to the curriculum, paying attention to the relevance of the theme and the depth of the issues raised (Scott, 2022). Formative evaluation is carried out through a limited trial to identify weaknesses of the strategy before it is widely applied The results of this trial are the basis for improving the guideline, duration, and completeness of contextual material.

Summative evaluation was used to measure the effectiveness of the implementation of the LENS strategy. The assessment was carried out by comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test of college students historical thinking, accompanied by a survey of perceptions of learning experiences, as well as analysis of final projects and personal reflections (Indahri, 2021). Findings show that college students experience significant improvements in understanding history critically, being able to identify representation biases, and showing active involvement in discussions (Azmi, 2017). This data supports that documentary-based approaches are able to develop high-level thinking competencies in history learning.

The Dick and Carey model provides a systematic framework that allows LENS strategies to be developed in a scalable and flexible manner. Each element in this model works in support of each other, from needs analysis to evaluation, which makes the learning design more cohesive. The integration of documentary films as the main medium, with a critical analysis approach and narrative reflection, creates a challenging learning ecosystem while building college students thinking (Barton & Levstik, 2020). This strategy contributes to the improvement of historical and visual literacy, which is very relevant in 21st century education.

Thus, the LENS strategy not only serves as an innovative approach in history learning, but also as a medium for forming college students historical awareness. Strengthening aspects of narrative analysis, visual skills, and critical reflection makes this strategy in line with the goals of higher education that is transformative and oriented towards character development. In this context, documentaries play a role not only as a visual aid, but as a main learning resource that shapes the way of thinking and the way of interpreting history more broadly.

Results

Documentary Film in the Study and Learning of History

Documentary films are developing as one of the increasingly relevant historiographic instruments in the context of modern history education. Its ability to visually and auditorially represent past events makes documentaries more than just a learning complement. Documentaries reframe historical facts into cinematic narratives that not only inform, but also interpret and animate collective memory (Lindsay, 2023). This makes documentaries an effective medium to internalize historical experiences emotionally and intellectually.

The relevance of documentaries as a learning medium lies in its ability to build multisensory historical experiences. Unlike historical texts that tend to be descriptive, documentaries are able to stimulate empathy and imagination through visual representations, archival audio, voice narration, and personal testimonials. The acceptance of history is no longer one-way, but dialogical and reflective (Nurhikmah et al., 2022). College students are faced with a living historical reality, not frozen in numbers and facts, but full of nuances and social meaning. In the context of historiography, documentary films not only play a role in conveying information about the past, but also become a form of representation that is loaded with ideology. Documentaries structure events based on the constructs of their creator's point of view, choosing scenes, editing, and inserting meaning through visual symbols. This process makes documentary a form of modern historiography that challenges the position of the written text as the sole authority in historical writing (Council of Erupe, 2018). College students need to understand that each documentary carries a certain vision and interpretation that deserves to be criticized.

Criticism of documentaries as a narrative construction makes this medium very effective for building historical thinking skills. College students are not only invited to remember historical facts, but also to evaluate the way these facts are packaged, selected, and emphasized in visual narratives. In the context of higher education, the ability to think historically is not enough with memorization, but must include interpretation, analysis of sources, and the ability to distinguish between facts and opinions (Bunari et al., 2023). Documentaries are a powerful training arena to form these skills. Documentaries also have the potential to present a more democratic and inclusive historical narrative. Many contemporary documentaries instead take the perspective of those who are marginalized in the dominant historical narrative: women, indigenous peoples, victims of political violence, or the working class. The representation of these groups is a correction to the official historiography that often only voices the interests of the rulers (Ratmanto, 2018). College students are invited to realize that history does not only belong to the winners, but also holds traces of wounds, struggles, and resistance that are often hidden.

The presence of documentaries in history learning provides an opportunity to introduce various forms of historical sources. Historical sources are no longer limited to written documents, official archives, and academic narratives, but include video recordings, eyewitness voices, visualizations of events, and montages of archival images. All of this allows college students to experience history in a more concrete and contextual form (Rabiger & Hermann, 2020). The ability to read audio-visual sources is an important skill in historical literacy in the digital era (Effendhie, 2019). In learning practice, the Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen (LENS) strategy is an approach that places documentary films at the center of critical analysis. LENS is designed for college students to not only watch, but also explore narrative structures, craft ideological analysis, and identify biases in historical representations. This strategy brings together cognitive, affective, and aesthetic activities in a series of reflective and contextual history learning.

The implementation of the LENS strategy emphasizes the importance of structured instructional design. College students are not only given films to watch, but also equipped with analysis guides, assessment rubrics, and reflective discussion sessions that encourage the emergence of historical arguments. This process develops college students media literacy and historiography skills simultaneously. They learn to ask critical questions, such as: who is speaking in the movie? Whose point of view is not heard? What visual symbols are used to form a particular meaning? These questions form the basis of historical learning based on critical interpretation and representational awareness (Abbas et al., 2022). Documentaries also play an important role in shaping historical empathy, which is the ability to understand past events from

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the perspective of historical actors in their context. College students who watch documentaries about tragedy, exile or colonialism, not only absorb the facts, but also feel the intensity of emotions that accompany them (Ratmanto, 2018). This experience expands the dimension of history learning to be more humanistic and meaningful. Through documentaries, history is no longer perceived as dry data, but as a human narrative that lives and has an impact on the present.

The use of documentaries in learning history also contributes to the formation of college students characters as reflective citizens. The documentary opens up a space of awareness of the values of justice, diversity, and social sustainability. When college students are invited to watch a film about agrarian conflicts, human rights struggles, or the climate crisis from a historical perspective, they not only understand the past, but also build an ethical position against contemporary challenges (Chubb, 2019). This awareness is important in history education which aims to prepare a generation of critical and socially active thinkers.

The challenges faced in the use of documentary as historiographic media are inseparable from the potential for visual manipulation, excessive dramatization, and neglect of scientific principles. Therefore, the role of lecturers or educators is very important in guiding the process of interpretation and evaluation of narratives. College students must be given the understanding that documentary is not "historical truth" in itself, but rather a form of representation that needs to be tested epistemologically (Trimarsanto, 2023). It is this approach that maintains a balance between educational and critical aspects in documentary-based history learning.

Documentaries have a strategic position in history education in the digital era. College students live in an intensive visual culture, so relevant learning must be able to integrate visual media productively. Documentaries are the link between the academic world and the social life that college students face on a daily basis. When documentaries are critically studied in history classes, not only knowledge develops, but also college students perspectives on today's social and political realities (Haris et al., 2022). History education also moves from just transmitting information to transforming the way of thinking.

Learning Syntax with the LENS Learning History Strategy through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen

The LENS (*Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen*) learning strategy is an innovative approach in history education that integrates documentary film media as the main source of learning. This approach not only presents history in the form of a visual narrative, but also encourages college students to become critical analysts of the historical constructs displayed on screen. LENS was developed to answer the need for a history learning method that not only relies on written texts, but also includes visuals as a legitimate source of historical interpretation. The use of documentary in learning reflects a shift in historiographic paradigms towards a more visual, emotional, and contextual direction (Ruspa & Nirvana, 2018). Documentaries allow for a more vivid presentation of history and contain a strong reflective force against the narratives of the past.

LENS is rooted in the understanding that history is not solely a record of events, but a narrative constructed through points of view, ideology, and representation. Documentaries frame history through visual and auditory choices that represent the reality of the past in a specific construct (Hemansyah, 2017). College students are invited to not only understand what happened, but also to explore how and why the event was told through certain visual media. This approach hones sensitivity to bias and ideology in historical narratives.

The LENS strategy learning syntax is systematically arranged to develop historical thinking skills, visual literacy skills, and a deep understanding of the complexity of historical narratives. The design is based on the Dick and Carey Instructional Design model which

emphasizes the importance of a systematic relationship between objectives, materials, strategies, and evaluations (Dick & Carey, 2014). This approach ensures that each stage of learning has a clear and measurable goal, and allows lecturers to organize learning in a logical and structured way. Four main principles are the basis of the LENS strategy: *Learning History, Exploration, Narratives*, and *on Screen*. Each principle is used as a foothold in compiling learning steps and in determining the use of documentary films as a source of historical learning. The application of these principles emphasizes the need for collaboration between historical knowledge, media literacy skills, and critical awareness of historical visual construction (Rabiger & Herman, 2020). College students are not only invited to understand the content of the film, but also analyze the way it is presented and the representational implications it causes.

1. Learning History

The first step begins with the establishment of explicit and measurable history learning objectives. Lecturers must formulate learning objectives that are relevant to graduate learning outcomes (CPL) and relate them to historical thinking skills. Learning objectives include understanding chronology, source analysis, and interpretation of historical context. This determination is important so that the direction of learning can be controlled according to the competency framework that college students want to achieve.

College students are required to develop skills in questioning, criticizing sources, and tracing various versions of historical narratives. Learning that emphasizes *historical thinking* helps college students become individuals who not only memorize facts, but are able to construct alternative narratives based on evidence. Historical understanding becomes more reflective because college students can put themselves in an active position in understanding the dynamics of the past.

2. Exploration

The next stage is the exploration of college student characteristics and the selection of appropriate visual materials. Lecturers need to analyze the level of media literacy, critical thinking skills, and college student learning experiences in the context of visual narratives. The analysis of these characteristics is the basis for choosing strategies and films that are relevant to college students learning needs. Adjusting the material based on the college students profile can increase learning engagement and effectiveness.

The documentary selection process is carried out taking into account accuracy, depth of narrative, valid visual sources, and diversity of perspectives. Films from institutions such as Watchdoc, BRIN, or National Geographic have advantages in research-based presentation. Documentaries were chosen because they contain points of view that are able to raise complex social, cultural, and political themes. The suitability of film content with lecture topics is an important factor so that the learning process remains contextual.

3. Narratives

This stage includes the implementation of historical visual narrative-based learning through four subphases: pre-screening, screening, post-screening, and reflection. In the prescreening, college students were given the historical context of the film and equipped with spark questions to direct their attention to the narrative construction. This strategy is important to activate the critical thinking framework before entering the film's narrative. College students become better prepared to identify ideological and aesthetic elements in documentaries. During the screening, college students were asked to note the cinematic elements and narrative structures that emerged, such as plots, the use of visual archives, music, and cultural symbols. This observation aims to build visual literacy and increase sensitivity to the way historical facts are presented. This training prepares college students to become active spectators who are able to interpret the media as a form of historical text.

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After the filming, college students conducted a group discussion to evaluate the historical narrative in the film. This discussion is complemented by comparisons with other historical sources such as archival documents or textbooks. College students are trained to identify biases, examine the accuracy of information, and craft critical arguments. This phase strengthens intellectual collaboration and broadens historical perspectives. Reflection is closed with the preparation of analytical essays or historiographic criticism based on the documentary watched. College students are asked to evaluate the content of the film and explain how cinematography plays a role in shaping historical meaning. This task strengthens the ability to think reflectively and awareness of subjectivity in historical writing. This evaluation also provides college students with the opportunity to convey their personal perspectives supported by visual and historical data.

4. On Screen

The last stage emphasizes the use of screens as a space for historical visual literacy. Documentary films are understood not as passive media, but as visual texts that have certain intentions, meanings, and ideologies. College students are taught to read symbols, colors, sounds, and editing structures as part of historical narratives. This approach is relevant because visual media is an inseparable part of the formation of historical awareness of the digital generation.

College students are also given short documentary production tasks as a form of alternative assessment. The project encourages college students to engage in the process of historical reconstruction through a creative and evidence-based approach. This experience contributes to the formation of college students as media-aware producers of historical knowledge (Haris et al., 2022). Evaluation no longer only assesses memorization, but the ability to compile historical narratives independently and visually.

The implementation of LENS is in line with the goals of the modern history education curriculum that emphasizes 21st century literacy, critical thinking, and technology integration. This strategy encourages college students to become active interpreters of history and intelligent users of digital media. The LENS model provides a framework that brings together historiography, pedagogy, and media studies in one holistic approach that is contextual and relevant to today's generation.

Integration of LENS Strategy in History Learning

The *Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen* (LENS) strategy has a high degree of flexibility to be integrated into various history course contexts. The implementation of this strategy allows adjustments to the course learning outcomes (CPMK), both in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Sydarmadji, 2020). This flexibility makes LENS not only relevant to be applied in Public History and History Learning Technology and Innovation, but can also be adapted for other courses such as Local History, Historiography, and Cultural History. Adjustments to narrative and audiovisual content are carried out while still paying attention to alignment with the learning achievement targets.

The LENS approach provides a visual media-based critical analysis framework that supports college students overall competencies. In the Public History course, this strategy supports learning that emphasizes college students ability to analyze the role of collective memory, cultural identity, and public engagement in historical narratives. College students are invited to understand how the media, especially documentaries, play a role as agents of historical representation in the public space (Haris et al., 2022). On the other hand, in the History Learning Technology and Innovation course, the LENS strategy strengthens college students skills in evaluating digital communication formats and developing audiovisual media-based historical learning designs. Media literacy is essential, considering that in the context of the 21st century,

college students are not only required as consumers of historical information, but also as producers of digital narratives (Mahardika, 2021).

The application of the LENS strategy has been piloted on semester and VII college students of the History Education Study Program, State University of Malang. The trial was carried out by showing three documentary films by the author, namely *Tiwul*, *Wong Jowo Ojo Ilang Jowone*, and the *Story from Balik Batu series*. These three films were selected based on thematic relevance to local history, cultural identity, and historical heritage preservation issues. The film material not only conveys historical data, but also represents how history is lived and inherited by the community through visual narratives and cultural practices. The following table describes the linkages of the documentary films used in the LENS strategy trial:

Table 1. Documentary Films That Are Tested

Movie Title	Main Themes	Competencies Developed
Tiwul	Local food and ecological history	Analysis of the relationship between ecology, food culture, and history
The Man Who Lost His Virginity	Javanese cultural identity	Reflection on cultural identity and resistance in historiography
Stories from Balik Batu	Heritage of local historical sites	Place-based history study

Source: Researcher, 2025

The results of class observations and questionnaires showed that 86% of college students experienced an increase in interest in history materials after participating in learning with the LENS strategy. As many as 78% stated that they find it easier to understand historical concepts through visualization in documentaries than conventional methods. This data shows that visual representations are able to relive historical events in a more contextual and relatable form for college students (Warsini, 2019). Visualization in documentary films also provides an affective and multisensory experience that cannot be obtained through text alone.

The classroom analysis also shows an increase in the dimension of historical thinking. College students are better able to identify narrative biases, criticize the viewpoints of sources, and develop diverse interpretations of history based on documentary screenings. Their critical reflection shows that the historical narrative in film is not objective, but rather the result of a construction influenced by the film's visual choices, shooting angles, narrator, and ideology (Erniasih et al., 2018). This process trains college students to be skeptical of a single narrative and to consider the diversity of representations of the past.

The LENS strategy is also considered suitable for the development of college students final projects in the form of a mini documentary project. Integrating media production into learning evaluations provides space for college students to develop creativity as well as analytical competence. In this project, college students are not only required to research a specific historical topic, but also present it in a communicative narrative and visual manner. This activity strengthens the understanding that history is an interpretive and communicative practice that can be expressed through various media (Hasan et al., 2021). Pedagogically, the LENS strategy shows great potential to be applied in project-based and cross-disciplinary history learning. This approach allows for collaboration between the fields of history, media studies, learning technology, and cultural studies. College students can be invited to explore local

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historical issues that have socio-cultural resonance in their communities, and then compile them in the form of a documentary. This process provides a more contextual and authentic meaning of learning, while strengthening field research skills, visual communication, and academic reflection.

21st century literacy demands participatory, collaborative, and creative learning. Yudianto (2017) emphasizing that the ability to think critically, communicate, collaborate, and create media-based are essential competencies that must be possessed by university graduates. The LENS strategy accommodates these four skills integratively. In the process, college students learn to understand history not just as a series of past events, but as a social practice that is constructed, negotiated, and rerepresented in various forms of media. The integration of the LENS strategy in the third semester of History Education college students of the State University of Malang opens up a more reflective, participatory, and in-depth understanding-oriented learning space. This strategy shifts the learning paradigm from a mere knowledge transfer to a learning experience that stimulates the meaning and critical awareness of history. College students are no longer passive objects of instruction, but active actors who are able to read, interpret, and even recreate historical narratives based on a solid ethical and scientific framework.

Discussion

History learning requires an innovative approach that can develop students critical thinking skills. Historical documentaries not only function as an information medium, but also as a means of interpretation that encourages students to analyze, compare, and evaluate representations of past events (Conquered et al., 2025). The Learning History Through LENS model provides a strategic framework for conducting narrative criticism in documentaries, so that students can distinguish between facts, interpretations, and ideological constructions in film. This understanding expands the awareness that history is not just a chronological memorization, but the result of a dialogue between sources, filmmakers, and audiences.

Historical documentaries have rhetorical power that can shape the way of looking at events. Visuals, narrative, and shooting choices often carry an ideological message that is not always neutral (Shyngyssova et al., 2025). Through the LENS strategy, students are trained to read documentaries as historical texts full of meaning. Critical analysis allows students to recognize biases in the presentation of narratives, as well as understand that documentary films are interpretations influenced by the perspective of their creators. This understanding is important so that students do not get caught up in the assumption that documentaries fully represent objective facts.

The success of the LENS strategy lies in its focus on developing historical visual literacy. Visual literacy requires students to understand how images, sounds, and narratives work simultaneously in building historical meaning. Documentaries can present a powerful emotional experience, but these experiences must be balanced with analytical skills (Carretero et al., 2025). By asking critical questions about the source, production context, and purpose of filmmaking, students can unravel the narrative layers that make up documentaries. This approach encourages a balance between emotional engagement and academic rigor.

The integration of LENS strategies in learning also encourages interactive discussions in the classroom. Discussions provide a space for students to negotiate meanings and compare different interpretations. This activity shows that history is multi-perspective, so there is no single narrative that is correct. In this context, documentaries are positioned as a form of representation that can be challenged, tested, and debated (Speed, 2025). This process fosters

a reflective attitude while improving students argumentative skills). Through critical engagement, students learn to build a more mature historical awareness.

The connection of the LENS strategy with the competency-based pedagogical approach confirms its relevance in history education. 21st century competencies require students to have the ability to think critically, creatively, communicatively, and collaboratively. Documentaries as a learning medium can meet these demands by providing authentic material that challenges students to analyze in depth (Valdez & Myat, 2025). Through the LENS strategy, documentaries are no longer just watched but systematically studied with narrative analysis tools. This makes learning history more contextual, critical, and meaningful.

The limitations of documentaries in presenting facts in their entirety are a pedagogical opportunity. Students are encouraged to look for other sources as a comparison, either in the form of written documents, archives, or oral testimonies (Renov, 2025). This activity accustomed students to triangulating sources, an essential skill in historical research. Thus, the LENS strategy not only builds critical awareness of film but also strengthens historical research methodologies at the academic level. This step demonstrates the significant contribution of the LENS strategy in shaping the skills of young historians.

The implementation of the LENS strategy ultimately places documentary films as a means of dialogue between the past and the present. The documentary relives historical events in a way that is relevant to the modern generation, while critical analysis ensures that students understanding does not stop at the surface (Harvey, 2025). This involvement equips students with the awareness that every historical narrative is the result of construction, not an absolute reflection of reality. With this framework, history learning becomes a critical space that trains intellectuals while strengthening historical identity.

Conclusion

This study shows that *the Learning History through the Exploration of Narratives on Screen* (LENS) learning strategy is able to provide a significant pedagogical alternative in visual media-based history learning. Through this approach, college students not only study history as factual narratives, but are also trained to interpret historical constructions presented in documentaries critically and reflectively. The integration of Dick and Carey's instructional design model with a visual-narrative approach has proven effective in building historical thinking skills, increasing classroom participation, and strengthening awareness of the diversity of perspectives in historiography.

The results of the experiment in two classes showed that the LENS strategy significantly increased college students interest in learning (86%) and understanding of historical material (78%). Documentaries by authors such as *Tiwul*, *Wong Jowo Ojo Ilang Jowone*, and *Cerita dari Balik Batu* have succeeded in becoming a medium that is not only representative of local historical content, but also encourages college students to evaluate historical narratives in their own social and cultural contexts. This approach changes the role of college students from mere consumers of information to active readers and potential producers of media-based historical narratives.

These findings contribute to the development of scientific knowledge in the field of history education, especially in enriching contextual, reflective, and technology-based approaches to history learning. This study also shows that the LENS strategy can be adapted in various history courses, as long as it is adjusted to the learning outcomes and characteristics of college students. This model supports the principles of historical literacy and media literacy which are very relevant in the digital era. However, it should be noted that this study has some

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limitations. First, the trial was conducted in a limited scope of two classes at one institution, so the results could not be generalized to the wider population. Second, the duration of the intervention was relatively short, so it was not able to measure the long-term impact on the change in college students historical thinking. Third, most of the documentaries used are in-house productions, so preferences for visual themes and approaches may affect college student engagement.

Taking these limitations into account, follow-up research is recommended to expand the scope of participants across institutions, test the effectiveness of these strategies over a longer period of time, and use film variations from more diverse sources. Nonetheless, this study has proven that the LENS strategy has great potential to advance the approach to history learning at the college level and provide a new direction in the development of media-based pedagogy.

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