

**Research Article**

# Understanding Nationalism in Historical Places: A Study of the Museum Visit Experience of Civic Education Students of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan

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**Abstract**

The research was inspired by the importance of nationalist values in history learning, particularly at a time when visiting museums is frequently regarded merely as a form of entertainment. The Katadata Insight Center has reported that 67.2% of museum visits are for recreational purposes, indicating that museums have not fully optimized their educational function. This research aims to reveal students' interpretations of and reflections on the nationalist values they develop after visiting museums. This study adopts a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected using in-depth interviews and documentation, and subsequently analyzed via thematic analysis. The subjects included the lecturer of the Indonesian National History course and six students from the Pancasila and Civic Education (PPKn) study program selected through purposive sampling. The findings reveal that museum visits engender a transformation of perspective toward history, a transfer of values, historical visual validation, a spiritual connection, and professional reflection for pre-service teachers. The experience encourages students to reflect on nationalism, as indicated by a redefinition of nationalism, increased historical awareness, an internalization of sacrifice, and changes in social behavior. The findings also show that an understanding of nationalism is shaped by students' interpretations of and reflections on their experiences during museum visits. These insights can serve as a reference for developing experience-based materials for history courses in higher education.



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## Introduction

Nationalism plays a crucial role in the life of citizens and the nation. The internalization of nationalist awareness leads a nation to develop a strong identity. One of the key factors influencing an individual's nationalism is their understanding of national history. Research by Sa'adah et al. (2019), conducted among senior high school students in Boyolali, found that historical understanding significantly contributes to national awareness, yielding an effective contribution of 6.5%. This finding aligns with the ideas of Kolarikova (2019), who states that national history and national myths play important roles in shaping national identity because both provide a sense of continuity for the people, explain their origins, and strengthen the nation's legitimacy. Several studies have shown that understanding history is a crucial foundation for developing students' national awareness. Cakranegara (2020) posits that a robust understanding of history provides a solid foundation for the development of students' critical thinking skills and national awareness.

However, students' motivation to learn about the nation's history remains low. Research by Hanifa and Dewi (2021) conducted among students at the Indonesia University of Education in Cibiru, Indonesia, showed that 86.4% of students are not interested in learning about history, such as through visiting museums. This phenomenon is highly relevant to the dynamics of museum visits in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, which has seen fluctuations in visitor numbers over the last few years.

**Table 1.** Number of museum visitors in the special region of Yogyakarta

Elements	Years				
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Domestic Tourists	179,844	98,813	1,662,967	1,645,680	1,809,902
International Tourists	175,000	13	76,421	6,009	38,484
Total	354,844	98,826	1,739,388	1,651,689	1,848,386

Source: Bapperida Yogyakarta (2025)

Table 1 shows that the number of museum visitors in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, including both domestic and international visitors, has fluctuated since 2021. The number decreased by 72.15% in 2022 but increased significantly in 2023 (by 1.660,05%). In 2024, the number decreased by 5.04%, then increased again by 11.91% in 2025. Although the data show an overall increase in the number of visitors, this rise is not directly proportional to the visitors' understanding of history or their internalization of nationalist values. According to a survey by the Katadata Insight Center, 67.2% of museum visits are driven mostly by entertainment purposes (Taufik, 2025). Museum visits should instead be understood as a primary means of understanding history and internalizing the values of nationalism. Understanding history is a

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crucial element in shaping the character of youth, especially students, amidst the threats of the globalization era (Safarani, 2023).

There are various ongoing efforts to increase the national awareness of youth. Fajri et al. (2022) mention several activities to increase national awareness, such as historical retracing, the introduction of cultural diversity, Civic Education coursework, movies and music that promote nationalism, and support for using domestic products. Historical retracing can be implemented as experiential learning for students. This approach is supported by research from Aji (2025), who claims that the strategy is innovative because it presents meaningful learning for students.. Similarly, Agustian et al. (2025) confirm that utilizing historical sites effectively improves students' national awareness, especially when activities are combined with reflective and participatory approaches.

A museum providing historical information contributes substantially to education. Multisensory involvement and direct experiences at a museum encourage active interaction with the objects and information presented (Luo et al., 2026). Wu (2026) states that museums provide authentic learning sources and opportunities for students to observe and explore the learning experience directly through participatory activities. This is further corroborated by Nabela et al. (2025), who state that museums possess educational, aesthetic, and reflective values that are significant for developing a critical understanding of history and local culture. Reflective experiences at a museum encourage students to find meaning in history, the values of struggle, and social life, helping them improve their civic awareness and internalize national values in daily life.

Understanding and reflection are important aspects of experience-based instruction because both help individuals comprehend and internalize their experiences. Understanding occurs when individuals assign meaning to an experience by connecting it to their knowledge, values, and social reality (Popa, 2023). Through these processes, the experience develops into a relevant and meaningful perception within the individual's life. Meanwhile, reflection allows individuals to review an experience and gain an in-depth understanding of their personality, social environment, and embedded values (Chan & Lee, 2021). Reflective instruction can also help individuals build and clarify the meaning of their experiences through active and critical thinking processes (Fragkos, 2016). Therefore, meaning-making and reflection become crucial to understanding how students internalize museum-visit experiences and subsequently interpret the history and national values they contain.

In the context of civic education, a museum is understood as a civic site that supports learning about history, the values of struggle, and social life. Octina et al. (2025) state that museums contribute to developing civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic culture. Civic knowledge is acquired through students' interactions with museum collections of historical value. Civic skills are developed through critical thinking

and discussions of historical events and civic values. Meanwhile, civic culture is shaped through the internalization of history and culture, fostering national awareness and respect for diversity. Through reflective learning, a museum visit serves as a medium for civic learning that supports students' nationalism and civic values. Fauzi and Roza (2019) claim in their research that competencies such as civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic culture are foundational supporting factors of civic virtue.

The Pancasila and Civic Education Study Program (PPKn) at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD) is one of the study programs that implement experiential learning through museum visits. These activities are part of the Indonesian National History course, which aims to improve students' knowledge of the nation's journey, increase their love for the nation and state, and heighten their concern for various issues facing the country. The museum visits align with one of the visions of the PPKn Study Program at UAD, which is to develop individuals who can implement the principles of virtue as citizens in the life of the people, nation, and state, imbued with Islamic values. Civic virtue, according to Arif (2017), refers to citizens' willingness to prioritize collective interests over personal ones.

Through museum visits, students internalize the values of nationalism that help them strengthen their sense of collective responsibility. The values of nationalism include pride in being an Indonesian citizen, patriotism, a willingness to sacrifice for the nation's interests, the acceptance of plurality and diversity, pride in a diverse culture, an appreciation of heroes' contributions, and the prioritization of the common good (Suwandi & Sari, 2017). In the present study, nationalism refers to a reflective awareness of social responsibility and the life of the nation within a plural society, rather than merely to formal national symbols. This understanding aligns with the theories of nationalism proposed by Anderson (2008), who explains that a nation is formed through the people's collective awareness because they share a common history, identity, and connectedness as a community. The understanding and internalization of these values become the basis of civic virtue through reflective and contextual learning experiences.

Research on the influence of museum visits on student nationalism at Universitas Persada Indonesia Y.A.I., conducted by Emarawati and Nursina (2019), concluded that museum visits significantly influence students' nationalism. Similarly, Anggara (2022) examined the relationship between historical tourist destination visits and youth nationalism. The findings showed that 79.5% of nationalist attitudes are influenced by historical tourism, with museum visits prominent among them. Furthermore, Fitriyani and Sopyan (2025) studied the relationship between visits to historical sites and the nationalism of history education students at Universitas Mulawarman. The frequency of site visits explained 47.4% of the variation in the sense of nationalism. Nevertheless, prior scholarship has predominantly confined its focus to quantifying explicit causal relationships, leaving the subjective experiential dimensions of museum visits

and nuanced student reflections on nationalist values largely under-examined. Diverging from these quantitative metrics, the present study shifts the analytical focus to reveal the qualitative interpretations and deep reflections that undergraduate civic education students develop following their immersive museum experiences.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the qualitative and interpretative dimensions of historical learning through museum visits among PPKn UAD students. Consequently, this study addresses the following research question: 'How do students understand the values of nationalism through museum-visit experiences?'. It is expected that this research can provide an in-depth understanding of how students interpret and reflect on the values of nationalism through their experiences visiting museums, as well as serve as a reference for lecturers in designing history course lessons that are more contextual and reflective at the higher education level.

## Method

The research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. According to Creswell (2015), a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design aims to illustrate the in-depth experiences of individuals and reduce them to an explanation that depicts the core meaning or universal essence of the phenomenon under study. This approach is highly suitable for the topic of the present study, which examines how students make meaning of the values of nationalism through museum visits. The main focus of phenomenological research is understanding the subjective meaning that participants ascribe to their experiences. Hence, the method is appropriate for exploring students' reflections on the values of nationalism internalized through museum visits.

The researchers selected the subjects using a purposive sampling technique. The subjects included the lecturer of the Indonesian National History course and six students from the PPKn program at UAD. The categories of the research informants are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Informant categories

Code	Role	Batch
MM	Lecturer	-
WA	Student	2022
FNS	Student	2022
ANF	Student	2023
WA	Student	2023
ATC	Student	2024
SA	Student	2024

The selection criteria for the participants required that they: (1) were active students of the Pancasila and Civic Education Study Program at UAD; (2) had taken and passed the Indonesian National History

course; (3) had participated in museum visits as part of the course activities; (4) were willing to participate and provide transparent information; and (5) were able to communicate their experiences and reflections effectively. These criteria were selected to recruit participants with relevant experience, adequate involvement in museum visits, and the ability to reflect on and explain their deep experiences. The study selected seven participants based on the principles of in-depth data collection in phenomenological research, in which the quality and depth of information are prioritized over the sheer number of participants. The researchers utilized data saturation as the basis for ending informant recruitment. Data collection was completed after the seventh participant because no new themes emerged at that point, indicating that the data were saturated.

The research was conducted within the Pancasila and Civic Education Study Program at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta. The museum visits, which served as the research objects, were conducted at several historical museums in Yogyakarta, including the Sasmitaloka Panglima Besar Jenderal Sudirman Museum, Monumen Yogya Kembali, the Vredenburg Fort Museum, and the Perjuangan Yogyakarta Museum. Data collection was conducted from November 2025 to February 2026.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on the phenomenon (Wijaya et al., 2025). This process enabled the informants to explain their experiences, understandings, and reflections on the values of nationalism. The interviews were semi-structured, using guidelines organized around the research objectives and the literature review. Prior research by Emarawati and Nursina (2019) revealed that museum visits influence students' nationalism. Similarly, Sa'adah et al. (2019) explained that historical understanding contributes to students' nationalist awareness. Based on these concepts, the researchers developed open-ended questions to explore students' experiences during museum visits, their understanding of the values of nationalism, and their perceptions of these values in the context of the life of the nation and the state.

The interview process began when the researchers contacted the informants, explained the research objectives, and agreed on an interview schedule. Each interview session lasted 45–60 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim. Before conducting the interviews, the researchers obtained the informants' informed consent and ensured the strict confidentiality of their identities throughout the research period. In addition to interviews, the researchers employed documentation techniques to complete the data collection process. Supporting documents, such as the Semester Lesson Plan (Rencana Pembelajaran Semester, or RPS), photographs of the museum visits,

field notes, and reports, were used to confirm the data and provide a comprehensive illustration of the activities.

The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically. The thematic analysis consisted of several steps: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the interview transcripts; (2) coding of data segments relevant to the research questions; (3) theme discovery by categorizing codes that exhibited similar patterns or meanings; (4) reviewing the themes to ensure consistency and relevance; (5) defining and naming the themes specifically; and (6) writing the reports of the analysis results (Najmah et al., 2023). The analysis process was conducted iteratively to gain an in-depth understanding of how students made meaning of nationalism through museum visits.

Data validity was assessed through triangulation to ensure the credibility of the research findings. The triangulation process included: (1) source triangulation, conducted by comparing the data from different interviews to identify similarities and differences in meaning; and (2) technique triangulation, achieved by combining data from the interviews and documentation for information verification and completeness. Additionally, the researchers carried out member checking by returning the interview transcripts and initial interpretations to the participants to ensure that the meanings interpreted by the researchers aligned with the participants' actual views. This process helped improve the accuracy and depth of the understanding of the phenomenon under study.

## Results

### Interpretations of museum visits by students

The analysis identified several subjective meanings students derived from their museum visits. These experiences stemmed from the students' interactions with the diverse historical collections displayed in the museums. The analysis revealed meaning patterns categorized into several themes, as presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Subjective understanding of historical museum visits by the students

Category	Research Findings	Meaning Made by Students
Perspective Transformation	Changes in perspective about History	History is not only about the past, but also about something meaningful and personal.
Value Transfer	Museum as a medium of "Value Transfer"	The museum engaged emotional faculties and facilitated a transfer of narratives of struggle absent from textbooks.
Visual Validation	Visualization of narratives from books	The museum depicts historical events realistically through dioramas and artifacts.
Spiritual Connection	Spiritual experience during the museum visit	Honor and respect towards the heroes' struggles.

Category	Research Findings	Meaning Made by Students
Professional Reflection	Reminders for pre-service teachers	Awareness to design contextual and joyful learning experiences.

Table 3 shows that the museum visits were interpreted through various experiences relevant to the students' understanding of history, the internalization of the values of struggle, and reflections on social life and their roles as pre-service teachers. Each meaning is further explained below.

### *Perspective Transformation*

Museum visits changed the students' perspectives on history. One of the student informants, NF (Batch 2023), stated that the museum visit increased awareness of the nation's history and artifacts. History was understood as part of the nation's journey and as directly relevant to students' lives. Museum visits helped students understand history in a more concrete and contextual way, thereby increasing their awareness of history and national identity.

### *Value Transfer*

Value transfer was observable in students' perspectives, as the museum became a space where they could directly witness the nation's struggles. A student informant, ATC (Batch 2024), confirmed that during the museum visits, a transfer of values occurred, even though it was not expressed verbally. To this informant, the experience allowed students to capture the values of struggle reflected in various collections and narratives displayed in the museum. In other words, students grasped the values embedded within the museum's collections. This understanding positioned museums as spaces for learning that present students with both historical knowledge and the values of struggle.

### *Visual Validation*

Museums provided realistic illustrations of historical events that students previously knew only from textbooks and teachers' explanations. A student informant, WA (Batch 2022), stated that the visualizations displayed in the museum helped them understand history more comprehensively. Similarly, another informant, NF (Batch 2023), revealed that museums made historical events visual and easier to comprehend. These meanings illustrate that visual experiences at a museum provide a contextual, concrete understanding of history.

### *Spiritual Connection*

Museum visits provided students with a spiritual experience through their appreciation of the heroes' struggles. A student informant, WA (Batch 2022), stated that the presence of a silent room at the museum was deeply touching and increased appreciation for the heroes' struggles. In addition, SA (Batch 2024) claimed that an excellent example of leadership was provided by a national figure, such as General

Soedirman, who maintained his spiritual rituals even when he was severely ill. This meaning shows that visiting museums provided an understanding of history alongside an internalization of the values of struggle and the examples set by national figures, which resonated within the students' personal lives.

### *Professional Reflection*

A museum visit was understood as an experience that allowed students to reflect on their future roles as pre-service teachers. A student informant, NF (Batch 2023), stated that the museum visit reminded students that learning about history must be joyful. MM (the lecturer of the Indonesian National History course) revealed that a museum can be a strategic learning resource for shaping the character of PPKn pre-service teachers by fostering insights, critical thinking skills, and a firm commitment to Pancasila values. Students understood experience-based learning as an approach that fosters joyful education. This meaning indicates that pre-service teachers perceived that history needs to be made relevant to students' lives so that future pupils can better understand the material and develop their national insights.

### *Reflection of the Values of Nationalism*

Students' subjective meanings of museum visits underlay their reflections on the values of nationalism. These reflections were categorized into several themes. Table 4 shows that after visiting museums, students changed their perceptions regarding nationalism, historical awareness, the values of sacrifice, and social life. The experience helped students understand nationalism through social concern, a sense of responsibility, and a commitment to public goods.

### *Redefinition of Nationalism*

Nationalism was understood as a form of active awareness of the nation, a sense of responsibility, and a willingness to contribute to the community. A student informant, NF (Batch 2023), stated that nationalism is not only about attending a flag ceremony but also about active concern for the nation and the state. Similarly, another informant, SA (Batch 2024), revealed that visiting the museum helped make nationalism feel more concrete and practicable in daily life. This shift in the meaning of nationalism shows that students perceived nationalism as social awareness, responsibility, and a willingness to contribute to society.

**Table 4.** Students' reflection on the values of nationalism

<b>Reflection Category</b>	<b>The emerging values</b>	<b>Value Internalization</b>
Redefinition of Nationalism	Nationalism as a real action	Shifted understanding of nationalism, moving from purely ceremonial acts (such as flag ceremonies) to active awareness of the nation.
Historical Awareness	Responsibility as a citizen	Awareness that building a country is a collective responsibility, serving as a way to

Reflection Category	The emerging values	Value Internalization
		return the favor of the heroes' struggles.
Sacrifice	Values of willingness to sacrifice	Willingness to prioritize the common good selflessly.
Changes in Behavior	Unity and <i>Gotong Royong</i> (Mutual Cooperation)	Transformation from individualism to mutual cooperation in social life.

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### *Historical Awareness*

Museum visits also improved students' historical awareness. History was viewed as a vital part of a nation's journey and as highly relevant to the current social life of the people. A student informant, NF (Batch 2023), stated that a country needs its people to develop actively. Another informant, WA (Batch 2023), suggested that visiting museums increased patriotism among the nation's future generation. The experience showed that students perceived themselves as part of the nation's ongoing life, carrying a social responsibility to society and the country. Historical awareness was not limited to knowledge about the past; it expanded to include the internalization of the students' current roles in the country.

### *Sacrifice*

Sacrifice was perceived as a willingness to prioritize the common good and show concern for other people. One of the informants, SA (Batch 2024), stated that the heroes' struggle was not for their own interests but for the nation and its people. After visiting the museum, students reflected on the meaning of sacrifice as a form of concern and a willingness to prioritize collective interests in daily life.

### *Change in behavior*

Students' reflections on historical events after visiting the museum were evident in changes in their daily behavior. They became more aware and willing to work with others. An informant, ATC (Batch 2024), claimed that visiting the museum deepened the student's understanding of unity, noting that in the past, people worked together through gotong royong (mutual cooperation). A student informant, FNS (Batch 2022), confirmed that students were now more willing to help the organizations they worked with, such as by managing food and administration. This showed that unity and mutual cooperation were perceived as essential parts of social life, relevant to building awareness and cooperation in daily routines.

## Discussion

Based on this research, it is clear that visiting a historical museum creates a deep sense of meaning for students. These meanings were made through students' interactions with the historical spaces, artifacts, and narratives displayed in the museum. Visiting a museum is not merely an academic activity but a highly

reflective learning experience. The display of historical artifacts in the museum allows students to understand history more concretely. Annisa et al. (2025), in their research on the learning process, suggest that learning experiences should be continued through deliberate reflection. This way, students can fully grasp the underlying meaning of the learning process. Furthermore, learning materials must be relevant to students' daily lives to be truly applicable. Therefore, visiting museums is not simply a matter of acquiring knowledge, but a reflective experience that encourages students to interpret the values of nationalism more contextually.

The primary theme emerging from the experiential data points to a profound cognitive transformation regarding how students conceptualize history. Participants transitioned away from viewing historical knowledge as a static body of material to be memorized, reconstructing it instead as an active narrative deeply relevant to contemporary life. This contextualized engagement within the museum landscape stimulated intellectual curiosity, deepened historical appreciation, and heightened long-term awareness of national cultural heritage. These findings are in line with research by Bamberger and Tal (2007), which demonstrated that site visits help learners correlate theoretical concepts with real-life practices. In addition, Syahfitri et al. (2025) stated that a museum is a place to reconstruct cultural-historical understanding from a modern perspective, thereby strengthening historical awareness and encouraging reflection on social life. Therefore, a museum visit is a transformative learning experience.

Students also perceived museum visits as a medium of value transfer. While observing historical heritage items, students reflected on the values of struggle depicted in the narratives. Syahfitri et al. (2025) conclude that museums can support character education because they contain core national values. These values encourage students to reflect on their national identity and the nation's concerns. Similarly, Sihole et al. (2023) state that museum visits can serve as an ideal medium for the value transformation of cultural heritage for future generations. Museums, acting as media of value transfer, provide opportunities for students to reflect on national values within their own character development.

Furthermore, a museum visit was regarded as a visual validation of the knowledge acquired by students from historical textbooks. Through the visual media displayed in museums, such as artifacts and dioramas, students formed concrete images of historical accounts. Dioramas and artifacts help students develop their abstract thinking skills (Safarani, 2023). Oktaviani et al. (2020) proposed that museum collections can improve students' historical understanding. This view is also supported by Dasfordate et al., (2025), who reported that 88.9% of students agreed that museum collections improved their understanding of history. These visual experiences prove that museums help students connect academic knowledge to their personal lives.

In addition, museum visits provided a spiritual connection for students. The reflective spaces and the museum's religious accounts of heroic figures provided spiritual and emotional experiences for the students. For example, the *Ruang Hening Garbha Graha*, provided in the Yogya Kembali Monument, functions as a place to pray for the spirits of the heroes (Nugroho, 2022). This encourages students to reflect deeply on the nation's struggles. Choi and Chisolm (2025) explain that museums can present reflective spaces that enable visitors to interpret their experience and the values they gain at the museum.

Besides, this spiritual connection was developed through the story of General Soedirman—presented via items such as his prayer mat, the Quran, and the urn used for ablution—which encouraged students to understand the values of struggle, discipline, and responsibility in modern life. This experience indicates that museum visits address not only the cognitive aspect but also the spiritual one. This aligns directly with one of the core functions of museums according to the International Council of Museums, namely to increase faithfulness and gratitude to God Almighty (Bu'ang et al., 2018). Through museum visits, students internalize the moral values underlying the heroes' struggles.

Students also perceived museum visits as a form of professional reflection. As pre-service teachers, they used the visits to gain direct experience regarding the importance of joyful and contextual learning. Students saw museums as an alternative learning strategy. These findings support Darliana et al. (2025), who concluded that museum introductions can trigger students' awareness as pre-service teachers, showing them how to utilize available learning resources outside traditional classroom settings. These ideas are supported by Mardiana et al. (2024), who claim that in the 21st century, teachers are required to act as facilitators who can encourage students' active participation. Therefore, museum visits help build students' awareness and prepare them for conducting contextual, relevant learning in the future. Direct learning experiences at a museum help students understand historical learning strategies that are more lively, reflective, and meaningful, which may lead their future pupils to connect learning materials to their own social realities.

The meaning made from the experience of visiting historical museums directly influenced the students' reflections on nationalism. They redefined nationalism based on their experiences. Previously, they had perceived nationalism as purely conceptual and symbolic. After the site visits, students saw nationalism as concrete action and active concern for the state. Maulani et al. (2024) state that a redefinition of nationalism is necessary to improve the nationalist spirit among youth. Further, Tosin et al. (2025) propose that nationalism is not limited to a country's formal symbols; it is reflected in people's attitudes and behaviors, such as respecting others' rights and responsibilities and being active in building the nation.

Nationalism needs to be instilled in students (Prasinta et al., 2024). Active and contextual learning through visiting a museum helps students understand the values of nationalism (Purwadi et al., 2024). Similarly, Saputro et al. (2021) claim that the museum is a representative medium that conveys concrete, relevant values of nationalism to modern society. Visiting historical museums can deepen students' understanding of nationalism, transforming it from theoretical concepts into relevant daily practices.

Students' reflections also indicated improved historical awareness and a heightened sense of responsibility as citizens. Students perceived the struggles of past heroes as a reminder for future generations to remain responsible for building the nation. Anderson (2008) explains that a nation is formed through the people's collective awareness because they share a common history, identity, and connectedness as one community. Historical awareness encourages students to understand their position as citizens with a clear moral responsibility to maintain and build the nation. Sumardin and Henri (2024) states that students who understand their nation's history tend to respect the heroes' contributions and become aware of the importance of preserving the nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Besides, Susilo et al. (2025) claim that an in-depth understanding of history can strengthen a community's identity, develop strong social solidarity, and improve collective pride. This shows that historical understanding shapes students' awareness of the importance of social concern, responsibility, and individual contribution to the life of the nation.

Moreover, the value of sacrifice was evident in the students' reflections after visiting the historical museums. A willingness to sacrifice is not merely about knowing heroes' stories of struggle; students no longer perceived sacrifice as a far-off heroic action removed from their reality. Instead, students saw sacrifice as a practical willingness to commit to the common good. This aligns closely with the study by Arif (2017) on civic virtue, which defines it as the willingness of a citizen to prioritize collective interests over personal ones. Students internalized this idea after visiting the museum, thereby improving their understanding of the importance of social responsibility and collective interests in the life of the nation.

In the end, the reflections resulting from the museum visits showed a clear change in the students' social orientation. Students showed greater concern for their social environment, expanding their embrace of mutual cooperation and their willingness to help others. Involvement in social activities within society indicates a progressive form of nationalism (Istiqomah et al., 2025). Helping each other and working together make gotong royong (mutual cooperation) a crucial element in building a nation's identity (Dewanti et al., 2025).

These changes in students' behavior are in line with research by Nasution and Yusnaldi, (2024), who state that contextual learning plays an important role in developing students' positive social attitudes. In addition, Sholikhatun & Uliya, (2025) claim that this method is highly effective in instilling gotong royong

values, especially in building students' social concern, cooperation, and sharing behaviors. Therefore, a museum visit shows that students perceive the nation's historical struggles and nationalism as directly relevant to their daily lives. Nationalism is not merely a national symbol; instead, it manifests clearly in social concern, cooperation, and responsibility toward their surroundings, appearing visibly in the social practices of the students' daily lives.

Apart from the advantages of museum visits, interviews with the lecturer of the Indonesian National History course revealed that the implementation faced various practical challenges. These included adjusting course schedules to align with museum operating hours, dealing with logistical and budgetary constraints, managing limited exploration time at the museums, addressing student exhaustion from visiting several locations in a single day, overcoming poor initial historical literacy among students, and refining less-prepared pedagogical designs. Tarsono et al. (2024) confirm in their study that without thorough preparation, learning objectives cannot be fully achieved. This aligns with the ideas of Nadlir et al., (2024), who state that a lesson plan is crucial to improving learning quality because it provides instructors with better opportunities to develop efficient learning strategies. Therefore, improvements in lesson planning for museum visits are highly necessary to enable systematic, directed, and effective learning.

Based on the challenges identified during the museum visits, the authors consider several practical implications to improve the learning process. Museum visits should be more rigidly structured in terms of scheduling to prevent activities from disrupting regular course timelines and to preserve students' physical well-being. Besides, the museums chosen for visits must be highly relevant to the learning materials, as well as manageable in terms of distance and budget. Lecturers need to introduce students to the planned agenda before implementation and evaluate the activities after the site visits through structured reflective discussions or written assignments. Enhanced coordination among lecturers, students, and academic institutions in budget planning is also necessary to make these activities more effective. Through these adjustments, museum visits can serve as an optimal learning strategy to strengthen students' historical understanding and encourage them to reflect deeply on the values of nationalism.

## Conclusion

This research was prompted by students' low interest in learning about history and the suboptimal use of museum visits as a learning facility to improve students' values of nationalism. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that historical museum visits, when integrated as a core part of learning, provide a profoundly meaningful experience for students. This approach develops students' reflective meaning-making through direct engagement with the historical collections on display. The experience creates various layers of meaning: a transformation of perspective toward history, a transfer of values, a visualized

understanding, a spiritual connection, and a professional reflection on their identity as pre-service teachers.

Furthermore, museum visits help students reflect on the values of nationalism, as shown by their redefinition of nationalism into a more concrete idea, an improved historical awareness that leads to proactive responsibility as good citizens, an internalization of the values of sacrifice, and positive changes in social attitudes. Despite facing technical and pedagogical challenges, the research shows that well-prepared museum visits can serve as an effective contextual learning strategy for deepening students' historical understanding and encouraging them to reflect on the core values of nationalism.

The research has several limitations. It involved students from only one study program and did not examine whether meaning-making and reflection can be successfully maintained over a longer period. Therefore, it is suggested that future research invite a more diverse range of informants and explore the continuity of these interpretations and reflections long after the museum visits have concluded. It is expected that such research can provide valuable theoretical contributions to understanding how students comprehend and reflect on the values of nationalism through museum visits, while serving as a practical reference for developing experience-based learning in higher education.

### Author's contributions

**Conceptualization:** Annisa Rahmania; **Methodology:** Annisa Rahmania, Dikdik Behaqi Arif; **Data collection:** Annisa Rahmania; **Formal analysis:** Annisa Rahmania; **Writing—original draft preparation:** Annisa Rahmania; **Writing—review and editing:** Dikdik Baehaqi Arif, Mahmuda Ma'arif; **Supervision:** Dikdik Baehaqi Arif, Mahmuda Ma'arif. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

### Data availability

The authors declare that the data supporting this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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