
MUSEUM-BASED RECREATIONAL LEARNING: EXPLORING HISTORY AT THE NORTH SUMATRA PROVINCIAL STATE MUSEUM

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ABSTRACT

Museums have increasingly become important educational institutions that provide opportunities for experiential, interactive, and recreational learning. Unlike conventional classroom-based instruction, museum-based learning allows students to engage directly with historical artifacts, cultural objects, and tangible evidence of the past. This study explores the role of the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum as a medium for recreational history learning. The museum serves not only as a repository of cultural heritage but also as an educational environment that promotes historical understanding through enjoyable and meaningful experiences. This article employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on literature review, observation reports, and previous studies concerning museum education and the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum. The findings indicate that museum-based recreational learning enhances students' historical awareness, cultural appreciation, critical thinking skills, and motivation to learn history. Through direct interaction with collections representing the diverse ethnic groups of North Sumatra, learners gain authentic experiences that cannot be obtained solely through textbooks. The museum's collections, exhibitions, and educational programs contribute significantly to creating engaging learning experiences while preserving local cultural heritage. The study concludes that the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum functions as an effective learning resource that combines education and recreation, making history learning more meaningful and enjoyable for students.

KEYWORDS:

*Museum-Based Learning,
Recreational Learning,
History Education*

INTRODUCTION

History education plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding of the past, developing national identity, and fostering appreciation for cultural heritage. However, history is often perceived by students as a subject dominated by memorization

of dates, events, and historical figures. Such perceptions frequently reduce students' motivation and engagement in learning. Consequently, educators are challenged to develop innovative learning approaches that make history more meaningful, interactive, and enjoyable.

One promising approach is museum-based learning. Museums serve as educational institutions that preserve and communicate historical and cultural knowledge to the public. Unlike classroom learning, museums offer opportunities for experiential learning through direct encounters with historical objects and cultural artifacts (Siregar, 2025). Museums allow learners to interact with tangible evidence of the past, thereby facilitating deeper understanding and emotional connections with historical narratives.

According to constructivist learning theory, learning occurs when individuals actively construct knowledge through experiences and interactions with their environment. Museums provide ideal environments for such learning because visitors can observe, interpret, and reflect upon historical objects while connecting them with prior knowledge and personal experiences. Modern museum education emphasizes visitor-centered learning, where learning is viewed as an active process of meaning-making rather than passive reception of information.

The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum, commonly known as Museum Negeri Sumatera Utara or Museum Gedung Arca, is one of the most important cultural institutions in Indonesia. The museum serves as a center for preserving, researching, and exhibiting the cultural and historical heritage of North Sumatra. As a Type-A provincial museum, it houses extensive collections representing the diverse ethnic groups and historical developments of the region. The museum functions as a center for preservation, education, research, and cultural promotion.

The museum contains collections related to archaeology, ethnography, history, ceramics, traditional arts, and local culture. These collections represent the rich cultural diversity of North Sumatra, including the traditions of Batak, Malay, Nias, Karo, Mandailing, Pakpak, Simalungun, and other ethnic communities. Through these collections, visitors can explore various aspects of regional history and culture in a comprehensive manner (UPTD North Sumatra State Museum, 2025).

Recent studies highlight the educational significance of the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum. Research has shown that the museum can function effectively as a learning resource for history education, contributing to students' historical awareness and cultural understanding. Additionally, the museum has been recognized as both a tourist destination and a cultural education medium that combines recreation and learning.

The concept of recreational learning has gained increasing attention in contemporary education. Recreational learning refers to learning experiences that combine educational objectives with enjoyable and engaging activities. Rather than viewing learning and recreation as separate domains, recreational learning integrates both dimensions to create meaningful educational experiences. In museum contexts, recreational learning occurs when visitors enjoy exploring exhibitions while simultaneously acquiring knowledge and developing skills.

Museum-based recreational learning offers several advantages for history education. First, it provides authentic learning experiences through direct observation of historical artifacts. Second, it encourages active participation and inquiry-based learning. Third, it stimulates curiosity and motivation through engaging exhibitions and interactive activities. Fourth, it facilitates emotional connections with historical events and cultural heritage (Sinaga, 2021).

The educational potential of museums has become increasingly important in the twenty-first century. Museums are no longer viewed merely as repositories of artifacts but as dynamic educational spaces that support lifelong learning. Contemporary museums seek to engage diverse audiences through innovative educational programs, interactive exhibits, and digital technologies. This transformation reflects broader changes in educational philosophy emphasizing learner-centered and experience-based approaches.

The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum exemplifies these developments by serving as both a cultural institution and an educational resource. Its collections and exhibitions provide opportunities for students to learn about local history, cultural diversity, traditional knowledge, and social change (Sembiring, 2023).. Furthermore, the museum contributes to the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage across generations.

This article aims to examine the role of the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum in facilitating recreational history learning. Specifically, it explores how museum-based learning contributes to students' historical understanding, cultural awareness, and engagement with history. The study also discusses the educational value of museum collections and the implications of museum-based recreational learning for history education.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design using a literature review approach. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring educational phenomena, understanding contextual factors, and interpreting meanings associated with museum-based learning experiences. The data for this study were collected from various sources, including: (1) Academic journal articles on museum education and history learning, (2) Research studies concerning the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum, (3) Books related to museum studies, experiential learning, and history education, (4) Government and institutional publications regarding museum functions and cultural heritage preservation, and (5) Reports and documents describing museum collections and educational activities.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis techniques. The analysis involved several stages: (1) Identifying relevant literature on museum-based learning, (2) Categorizing themes related to recreational learning and history education, (3) Examining evidence concerning the educational role of the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum, (4) Interpreting findings in relation to constructivist and experiential learning theories, and (5) Drawing conclusions regarding the effectiveness of museum-based recreational learning.

The validity of the study was strengthened through triangulation of sources, comparing findings from different academic publications and institutional documents. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the museum's educational role and the broader significance of museum-based learning (Hosnan Safriyanti, & Yahfizham, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum as a Learning Environment

The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum serves as an important educational environment where visitors can explore historical and cultural heritage through direct observation. Established as a regional cultural institution, the museum preserves thousands of artifacts representing various periods and communities in North Sumatra. The museum is recognized as a major center for cultural preservation, education, and research in the province.

Unlike traditional classrooms, the museum provides authentic contexts for learning. Students encounter original artifacts, traditional objects, archaeological findings, and cultural exhibits that represent real historical experiences. Such encounters enable learners to develop concrete understandings of abstract historical concepts.

The museum's educational value lies in its ability to connect historical narratives with material evidence (Nabilla, 2025).. Through exhibitions, visitors can observe how people lived, worked, communicated, and expressed cultural identities in different historical periods. This direct engagement enriches historical understanding and promotes meaningful learning experiences.

B. Museum-Based Recreational Learning

Recreational learning emphasizes enjoyment, engagement, and participation in educational activities. In museum settings, recreational learning occurs when visitors explore exhibitions voluntarily, motivated by curiosity and interest rather than external requirements.

The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum supports recreational learning in several ways. First, its exhibitions are organized thematically, allowing visitors to explore different aspects of regional history and culture. Second, the diversity of collections creates opportunities for discovery and exploration. Third, the museum environment itself provides a unique atmosphere distinct from formal classroom settings.

Research indicates that museums function effectively as spaces where education and recreation intersect. Visitors can learn while enjoying cultural experiences, thereby

increasing motivation and retention of knowledge. The museum's role as both a tourist destination and an educational institution illustrates this integration of learning and recreation.

Furthermore, recreational learning promotes intrinsic motivation. Students become active participants in learning processes rather than passive recipients of information. Such engagement contributes to deeper understanding and longer-lasting learning outcomes.

C. Enhancing Historical Understanding Through Authentic Experiences

One of the most significant advantages of museum-based learning is the provision of authentic experiences. Historical artifacts serve as primary sources that allow students to investigate the past directly.

At the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum, students can examine traditional tools, clothing, manuscripts, weapons, ceremonial objects, and archaeological remains. These artifacts provide evidence of historical developments and cultural practices. Through observation and interpretation, students learn to analyze historical sources and construct historical understanding.

Experiential learning theory emphasizes the importance of concrete experiences in knowledge construction. Museums support this process by providing opportunities for observation, reflection, conceptualization, and application. Visitors engage with historical objects, reflect on their meanings, connect them with existing knowledge, and develop new understandings.

Authentic experiences also facilitate emotional engagement. Seeing actual artifacts often evokes stronger emotional responses than reading descriptions in textbooks. Such emotional connections contribute to greater interest in history and stronger appreciation for cultural heritage.

D. Promoting Cultural Awareness and Identity

North Sumatra is characterized by remarkable cultural diversity. The province is home to numerous ethnic groups, each possessing unique traditions, languages, customs, and artistic expressions. The museum preserves and showcases this diversity through its collections and exhibitions.

Museum-based learning helps students understand and appreciate cultural differences. By exploring exhibits representing various ethnic communities, students gain insights into the richness of regional culture. Such understanding contributes to intercultural awareness and social cohesion.

The museum also supports identity formation. Learning about local history and cultural heritage enables students to develop a sense of belonging and pride in their communities. Historical awareness strengthens connections between individuals and their cultural roots.

Studies have highlighted the role of the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum in promoting cultural education and preserving local heritage. The museum's collections serve as valuable resources for introducing younger generations to traditional knowledge and cultural values.

E. Developing Critical Thinking Skills

Museum-based learning encourages critical thinking through inquiry and interpretation. Unlike textbooks that often present fixed narratives, museum exhibits invite visitors to ask questions, make observations, and draw conclusions.

Students visiting the museum may investigate questions such as: (1) What does this artifact reveal about past societies?, (2) How was this object used?, (3) Why was it important in its historical context?, and (4) What cultural values does it represent?. Such inquiries foster analytical skills and historical reasoning. Students learn to evaluate evidence, identify patterns, and consider multiple perspectives.

Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge rather than simply receiving information. Museums support this process by providing open-ended learning environments where visitors engage in exploration and meaning-making.

The development of critical thinking skills is particularly important in history education because historical understanding requires interpretation, evaluation, and contextual analysis.

F. Museums as Sources of Historical Learning

Research demonstrates that museums function effectively as sources of historical learning (Falk, 2018). The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum has been identified as a valuable educational resource for secondary school history education. Its collections complement classroom instruction by providing concrete examples of historical concepts and events.

Museum visits can enrich history curricula in several ways: (1) Providing primary historical sources, (2) Supporting inquiry-based learning, (3) Encouraging interdisciplinary approaches, (4) Enhancing student motivation, and (5) Connecting local and national history.

Through museum-based activities, students gain opportunities to engage with history beyond textbooks. Such experiences contribute to deeper understanding and more positive attitudes toward history learning.

G. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its educational potential, museum-based learning faces several challenges. These include limited accessibility, insufficient integration with school curricula, resource constraints, and varying levels of visitor engagement.

Some students may visit museums without adequate preparation, reducing learning effectiveness. Similarly, educators may not fully utilize museum resources in their instructional practices. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration between museums, schools, and educational authorities.

Digital technologies offer promising opportunities for enhancing museum-based learning. Educational games, virtual exhibitions, augmented reality, and interactive applications can increase accessibility and engagement. Recent initiatives related to the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum demonstrate the potential of digital innovation in promoting museum education. Educational games developed around museum collections have shown positive impacts on visitor engagement and learning outcomes.

Future developments may include virtual tours, interactive learning modules, and digital storytelling platforms. Such innovations can extend museum learning beyond physical visits and reach broader audiences (Anderson, 2012)..

H. Implications for History Education

The findings of this study have several implications for history education. First, educators should recognize museums as valuable learning environments that complement classroom instruction. Museum visits should be integrated into curriculum planning and learning activities.

Second, history teachers should adopt experiential and inquiry-based approaches that encourage active student participation. Museum collections provide rich opportunities for such approaches.

Third, collaboration between schools and museums should be strengthened. Educational programs, guided tours, workshops, and project-based learning activities can enhance educational outcomes.

Finally, policymakers should support museum education initiatives through funding, professional development, and curriculum integration. Museums represent important cultural resources that contribute to educational quality and cultural preservation. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007).

CONCLUSION

The North Sumatra Provincial State Museum plays a significant role in facilitating museum-based recreational learning for history education. By combining educational objectives with enjoyable learning experiences, the museum provides an effective alternative to conventional classroom-based instruction. Its collections and exhibitions enable students to engage directly with historical artifacts and cultural heritage, thereby enhancing historical understanding, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills.

Museum-based recreational learning aligns with constructivist and experiential learning theories by emphasizing active participation, inquiry, and meaning-making. Through authentic experiences, students develop deeper connections with history and greater appreciation for cultural diversity. The museum also contributes to identity formation and heritage preservation by introducing learners to the rich cultural traditions of North Sumatra.

Although challenges remain, opportunities for innovation through digital technologies and institutional collaboration offer promising directions for future development. As educational institutions continue to seek engaging and meaningful

learning approaches, museums will remain valuable partners in promoting historical literacy and cultural understanding.

In conclusion, the North Sumatra Provincial State Museum demonstrates how museums can successfully function as spaces where education and recreation intersect, transforming history learning into an engaging, meaningful, and memorable experience.

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