



Examining historical thinking skills in pre-service history teachers: Challenges in Bridging theory and practice in Indonesia

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Abstract

Historical thinking skills (HTS) are an important component of history education, yet their application in pre-service teachers' training remains challenging. This study aims to assess the level of HTS among pre-service teachers and identify the challenges they face in bridging theory and practice. This research used a qualitative method with a case study approach. The participants consisted of 65 pre-service teachers from the History Education Study Programme of Nusa Cendana University, who took a final exam with written assignments relating to analysing historical sources and applying HTS. The results showed that the majority of participants (63.08%) only reached the declarative level, while only 24.62 percent managed to reach the applicative level in HTS. The successful integration of these skills was strongly influenced by the participants' educational background and ability to connect theory with practice. The findings show that although the participants had declarative knowledge of HTS, only a tiny proportion achieved advanced competencies. The participants reported that time constraints and lack of guidance were significant obstacles to applying skills during teaching practice. This research offers practical insights into the limitations of traditional teaching methods in fostering HTS and recommends expanding practice placements and strengthening mentorship programmes to align teacher training with the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) curriculum. The research highlights the need to integrate theory and practice to develop history teachers who effectively teach HTS in Indonesia.

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Introduction

Historical thinking skills (HTS), which pre-service teachers should possess to critically analyse and interpret past events while fostering a deeper understanding of historical context, are essential in history education (Chang et al., 2023; Saigal, 2023). These skills include working with primary and secondary sources, identifying cause-and-effect relationships between events, and applying historical knowledge to contemporary issues (Bunari et al., 2023; Luque et al., 2024). Mastering these competencies will strengthen pre-service teachers' understanding of history as a discipline and enhance their broader critical thinking skills (Gestsdóttir et al., 2018; Lesh & Ayers, 2023).

Globally, many countries have recognised the importance of HTS by incorporating such into the education curriculum to prepare history teachers for competency-based education (Saefudin et al., 2024a). However, there still seems to be a gap between theory and practice in curriculum implementation. Traditional pedagogical methods, such as memorisation, continue to dominate, limiting opportunities to develop applicative skills (Keddie et al., 2022; Rüsen, 2005; Yoon, 2022). In addition, time constraints and inadequate guidance during the teaching practicum have left many pre-service teachers with only declarative competencies and needing more applicative competencies for classroom application (Kropman et al., 2021; Parra-Monserrat et al., 2021).

Declarative competence refers to understanding and knowledge of historical concepts, such as the ability to describe historical events or explain their significance. However, these competencies do not extend to active use in teaching or problem-solving scenarios. Applicative competencies, on the other hand, involve applying historical knowledge in practical contexts, such as designing lesson plans, encouraging analytical discussions, or creating evaluation rubrics aligned with educational objectives (Van Boxtel et al., 2020; van Boxtel & van Drie, 2018). These competencies are essential for history teachers to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical teaching. Bridging the gap between theory and practice remains an ongoing challenge.

Implementing the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) curriculum in Indonesia reflects efforts to promote competency-based learning. The MBKM curriculum, launched in the 2020/2021 academic year by the Ministry of Education and Culture, aims to give students greater autonomy in designing their educational path. This curriculum is intended for practical programme

students involved in the world of work in various majors. The programme generally lasts for one semester (6 months) with an allocation of four–five credits, covering the main programme groups such as internships, independent projects, and education majors teaching practice in schools. For example, students can participate in teaching practice for a full semester at a partner school, where they practice pedagogical and classroom management skills directly. This activity aims to integrate theory with practice while developing applicative competencies such as teamwork, problem-solving and adaptability (Saefudin et al., 2024c). In the context of history teacher education, the MBKM curriculum does not only encourage the acquisition of declarative skills but seeks to develop HTS by encouraging pre-service teachers to have applicative skills, i.e. engaging directly with real-world historical issues, designing innovative teaching models, and applying critical thinking in learning (Alphen, 2019; Gracová & Labischová, 2017). This approach aligns with the global shift towards competency-based education and aims to bridge the continuing gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom application.

Previous research on HTS has been conducted in various countries around the world. Research in Western countries, such as the United States and the Netherlands, shows that the integration of HTS in the curriculum can improve students' analytical skills, particularly in evaluating historical sources and understanding cause-and-effect relationships (Sheppard, 2023; Tuithof et al., 2023; Wineburg, 1999). Models such as the Anglo-American approach emphasise developing evidence-based skills (Lévesque & Clark, 2018; Sandwell & von Heyking, 2014), while the German approaches emphasise historical awareness and moral reflection (Körber, 2021; Rüsen, 2005). While these approaches provide a rich framework, their implementation in non-Western countries, including Indonesia, is poorly understood. This is evidenced by research showing that pre-service teachers often only reach declarative competence and face difficulties in connecting theory with practice (Bunari et al., 2023; Saefudin et al., 2024c).

Most previous research has focused on the theoretical aspects of HTS or its evaluation in developed countries, with little attention to implementation challenges in developing countries. This research seeks to fill that gap by exploring the development and application of HTS among pre-service teachers in Indonesia and how teacher training programmes can bridge the gap between theory and practice. As such, it offers new insights into how the global model of HTS can be adapted to unique local contexts.

Therefore, this study answers the following research questions: (1) What level of HTS competence (in declarative and applicative competence) do pre-service teachers achieve after completing theory and practice courses? (2) How do these pre-service teachers perceive the challenges of implementing HTS in the classroom?

This study aims to answer these research questions by examining the level of HTS among pre-service teachers and identifying the challenges they face in bridging theory and practice. The research offers valuable insights into how pre-service teachers' education programmes can be improved to align more with the MBKM curriculum framework by focusing on these aspects.

Literature Review

Historical thinking skills (HTS) are important competencies in contextually analysing, evaluating and interpreting historical events to foster reflective and critical thinking (Wineburg, 1999, 2007). These skills include interaction with primary and secondary sources, understanding cause-and-effect relationships between events, and developing historical empathy, which is the ability to understand past events from the perspective of the people who experienced them (Retz, 2017; Seixas, 2004). As Lesh and Ayers (2023) emphasised, HTS is about remembering historical facts and equipping pre-service teachers with competencies to face contemporary social challenges through historical understanding. These competencies align with competency-based learning that emphasises knowledge acquisition and its application in real-world contexts.

Research shows that pre-service teachers with HTS can develop better analytical skills, preparing them to deal with complex historical and contemporary issues (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, 2021; Calanca, 2019; Chapman et al., 2018). A theoretical understanding of HTS provides an important foundation for exploring how these skills are applied in various education systems worldwide. Such global approaches provide insights into how different educational models address challenges and opportunities in developing HTS, especially in diverse cultural and educational contexts. However, despite their theoretical importance, many education systems need help implementing HTS due to the gap between theory and practice (Grant, 2018).

Global education systems adopt different approaches in developing HTS. The Anglo-American approach focuses on evidence-based learning and practical competence, encouraging students to analyse historical documents critically, interpret conflicting sources and develop independent narratives (Esterling & John-Hopkins, 2018; Wineburg, 2007). Meanwhile, the German approach emphasises historical awareness (*historisches Bewusstsein*), linking the past, present and future to form personal and social orientations, with the integration of cognitive and moral dimensions to help students reflect on social responsibility (Edling et al., 2020; Rüsen, 2005). On the other hand, the Dutch approach combines theory and practice through project-based learning that emphasises the interdisciplinary nature of HTS, allowing students to relate these skills to other academic fields (Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2018; Van Boxtel et al., 2020).

All three approaches provide relevant frameworks for developing HTS, but their application in non-Western contexts such as Indonesia presents unique challenges and opportunities. For example, education in Indonesia, with its diversity of historical and cultural narratives, requires adaptations that integrate local perspectives within a global framework. The Anglo-American focus on source analysis is highly relevant for Indonesian classrooms, especially in dealing with the complexities of colonial legacies. The German approach that emphasises moral responsibility through historical awareness resonates with Indonesia's efforts to promote the values of Pancasila. Meanwhile, the Dutch balance of theory and practice aligns with the MBKM curriculum, which prioritises theoretical mastery and practical application.

The dominance of rote learning that still dominates the history education system in Indonesia today results in the limited acquisition of factual knowledge without developing analytical, evaluative and creative skills. This reduces students' critical thinking and narrows their ability to handle complex real-world situations (Körber, 2021; Rüsen, 2005). Memorised learning emphasises the retention of facts often divorced from context, hindering the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as in the context of HTS, which enhance applicative skills (Van Boxtel et al., 2020). In addition, intensive interaction with mentors in the field provides professional guidance that is not always available in conventional education systems. Thus, adapting this global approach to Indonesia's specific challenges can effectively develop HTS in non-Western contexts.

Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methods using a case study approach to explore pre-service teachers' experiences integrating historical thinking skills (HTS) into their practice. As applied by Chang et al. (2023) and Claravall and Irely (2022), this approach enabled a deeper understanding of participants' knowledge acquisition and reflection on their challenges during practical teaching.

This method allows for a detailed analysis of the interactions between individual, institutional and curriculum factors that influence the development of HTS (Yin, 2016). By focusing on a single research topic, this approach provides deep contextual insights that are difficult to achieve through quantitative or experimental designs. This choice also supports the research objective of exploring the declarative and applicative competencies of HTS and the challenges that pre-service teachers face during training.

Participants

This research was conducted at the History Education Study Programme of Nusa Cendana University, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The programme prepares future history teachers with the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) national curriculum, integrating competency-based learning and practical experience through teaching practicums and community projects. The course 'History Learning Innovation,' which is involved in this research, is designed to encourage critical thinking and pedagogical innovation, which aligns with the programme's aim to develop educators capable of applying HTS in the classroom.

The participants of this study consisted of 65 pre-service teachers enrolled in the Bachelor of History Education programme. The sample consisted of 27 males and 38 females from three consecutive academic years (2020/2021, 2021/2022, and 2022/2023). As part of the final assessment, each history teacher candidate was required to complete a written assignment after undergoing teaching practice in a secondary school. The participants' educational backgrounds were distributed as follows: 80 percent (52 participants) had a Social Science background, 13.85 percent (9 participants) came from Natural Science, and 9.23 percent (4 participants) had a Language education background. The sampling technique was non-probabilistic, using convenience sampling based on the availability and accessibility of

the participants. Although convenience sampling offers accessibility, it has limitations in generalisability, which were managed by following Flick's (2014) guidelines on the principles of accessibility.

Although convenience sampling was used due to accessibility limitations, strategies were implemented to minimise potential bias and ensure the reliability of findings. Triangulation was applied by comparing data from multiple sources, including participants' written assignments across the three academic groups and reflective responses. This approach enabled the identification of consistent patterns and themes, thus enhancing the validity of the research results (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In addition, participant validation was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants to ensure the accuracy and relevance of interpretations. These steps were designed to reduce the biases inherent to convenience sampling and to strengthen the credibility of the research conclusions.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument consisted of two parts: a written exam and reflective questions conducted during the final session of the History Learning Innovation course between October and early November. This data collection served as the main tool to measure the level of HTS competence achieved by pre-service teachers after completing the course and to determine their perceptions of challenges in implementing HTS in the classroom.

This study did not utilise classroom observations and interviews in data collection. Instead, reflective questions in the written assignment aimed to obtain information about participants' self-assessments and perceptions of the challenges of implementing HTS, thus still providing qualitative depth. This approach ensured the data collected was relevant and contextualised to the research objectives.

One part of the written test involved analysing ten short historical sources relevant to Indonesian history, consisting of:

1. Four primary sources (texts and images) on the political-ideological foundations of the New Order regime.
2. Six secondary sources report on the features of the dictatorship in terms of social support, repression and propaganda.

Pre-service teachers were asked to answer three statements:

1. Analyse the sources by identifying their nature, main ideas and historical context.

2. Explain the characteristics of the New Order dictatorship using the sources to support your answer.

3. Compare New Order democracy with Reformation democracy in contemporary Indonesia and discuss how the political regime impacted citizens' lives.

After the written exam, pre-service teachers answered additional reflective questions reflecting on their teaching experience.

1. What teaching model does this exercise reflect, and to what extent does this model represent educational innovation?

2. What historical competencies were covered, and how were they applied?

3. Design a basic evaluation rubric that aligns with this exercise.

4. Describe the challenges faced in implementing HTS during teaching practice.

These exercises aim to assess pre-service teachers' ability to integrate HTS into their teaching practice and identify challenges to teaching innovation.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach with text as the primary source. The process began with open coding to identify initial themes and categories from participants' responses, per Flick's (2014) guidelines. Yin's (2016) case study methodology was used as a coding and data interpretation framework. Axial coding was then applied to establish relationships

between categories, particularly how different aspects of HTS (such as declarative and applicative competencies) are interrelated. Finally, selective coding synthesised those relationships into a coherent framework aligned with the research objectives.

To ensure reliability, multiple researchers conducted the coding independently to minimise bias, and disagreements were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. Triangulation was applied by comparing results across academic years and data sources (exam answers and reflections). At the same time, the validity of analyses was enhanced through transparent coding procedures and themes based on participants' responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This multi-stage approach resulted in systematic findings that provided comprehensive insights into the issues under study. [Tables 1](#), [Table 2](#), and [Table 3](#) are presented as a guide for data analysis concerning Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2020; 2018).

[Tables 2](#) and [3](#) show that participants' discourses were further categorised according to their reflections on teaching models and challenges encountered during practicums.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from Nusa Cendana University's Ethics Committee. Participants provided informed consent, and their data were anonymised to protect their identities. The study adhered to ethical research principles outlined by Flick (2014), ensuring participants' rights were respected throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Table 1 Levels of historical thinking skills

Level	Description
Level 0: None	No recognition of historical thinking competencies.
Level 1: Basic declarative	Recognises some aspects of HTS but cannot effectively design rubrics or allocate marks.
Level 2: Moderate-declarative	Explains HTS but needs to develop a detailed evaluation rubric.
Level 3: Basic applicative	Design rubrics for at least one historical competency but without comprehensive evaluation.
Level 4: Complex applicative	Design rubrics with developmental levels for multiple aspects of HTS.

Table 2 Discourse on teaching models and innovation

Level	Description
Level 1: None	No information was provided on teaching models.
Level 2: Methodological discourse	Links the exercise to teaching models but with limited depth.
Level 3: Critical discourse	Provides in-depth connections between teaching models, content, and educational objectives.

Table 3 Comments on the challenges of teaching HTS

Level	Description
Level 0	No recognition of teaching challenges.
Level 1	Identifies challenges but does not link them to practical experience.
Level 2	Provides detailed reflections on challenges based on practical teaching experience.

Results

Levels and Discourses in Historical Thinking Skills

This section presents the results of analyses of historical thinking levels and qualitative insights drawn from participants' reflections. The aim is to assess the competencies achieved by the pre-service teachers and identify areas that require further development.

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the participants' level of historical thinking, showing a spread across declarative, applicative and non-achievement levels. The dominance of the declarative level indicates that most students only have theoretical understanding and limited ability to apply historical thinking in practice. Table 4 details the test results of the pre-service teachers.

The visualisation results in Figure 1 show that most participants (63.08%) could only master HTS at the declarative level. Specifically, only 24.62 percent of pre-service teachers achieved an applicative level, with a small proportion (9.23%) demonstrating higher abilities in designing rubrics and applying historical empathy. Nonetheless, the written task-based assessment

Table 4 Knowledge level of historical thinking skills among participants

Levels of Historical Thinking Skills	Quantity	Percentage
0: None Level	8	12.31
Declarative Level (1–2)	41	63.08
Level 1: Basic declarative	26	40
Level 2: Moderate declarative	15	23.08
Applicative Level (3–4)	16	24.62
Level 3: Basic applicative	10	15.8
Level 4: Complex applicative	6	9.23
Total	65	100

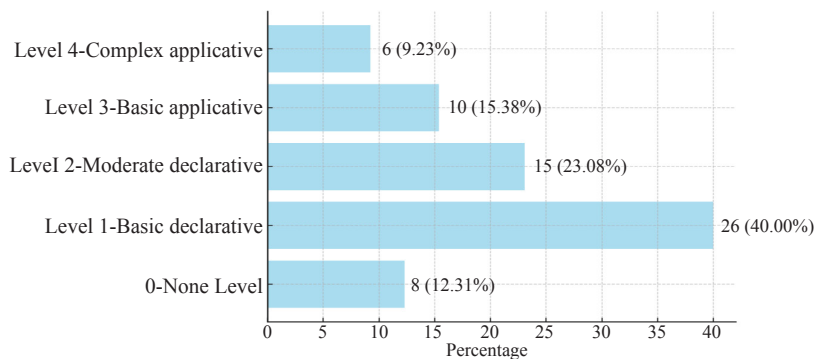


Figure 1 Distribution of historical thinking levels among participants

format may only partially capture participants' ability to practically apply HTS in actual teaching situations.

The large proportion of pre-service teachers (40%) at the basic declarative level shows that although they understand the importance of historical competencies, they cannot apply them effectively within practical teaching contexts. These findings highlight the need for improved strategies to develop higher-order competencies such as historical empathy, analytical reasoning, and the use of evidence.

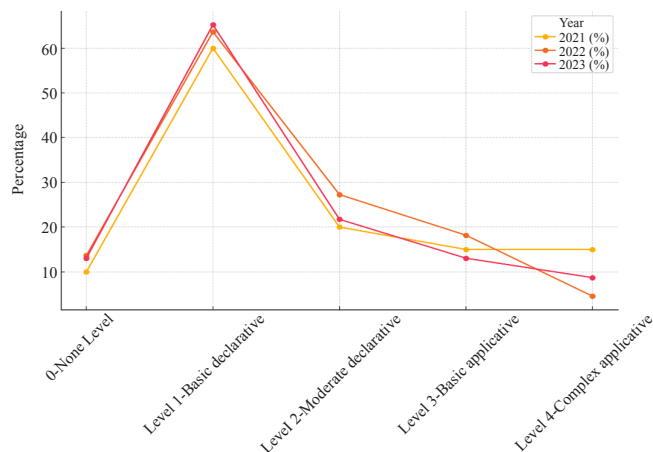
Table 5 and Figure 2 illustrate the trends in HTS across the three academic years (2021–2023). The data show consistent performance patterns, with a stable distribution of pre-service teachers remaining at declarative levels. This suggests that innovative teaching methods and curriculum changes have not significantly improved.

Over the years, the need for significant growth in applicative competencies has raised concerns about the effectiveness of pre-service teachers' training programmes. Figure 2 visualises this trend, showing that despite post-pandemic improvements in the educational environment, the number of pre-service teachers achieving high-level competencies still needs to be higher.

Comparative analysis of HTS levels over three academic years shows a relatively stagnant trend, with most pre-service teachers still at the declarative level. This indicates that the learning approach in the curriculum of related courses, such as History Learning Innovation, has yet to undergo significant modifications that can encourage the development of applicative competencies. To overcome this limitation, it is necessary to strengthen the direct practical experience in schools, allowing participants to implement HTS in real teaching contexts.

Table 5 Historical thinking skill levels by academic year

Levels of Historical Thinking	2021	2022	2023
0: None Level	2 (10%)	3 (13.64%)	3 (13.04%)
Declarative Level (1-2)	12 (60%)	14 (63.64%)	15 (65.22%)
Level 1: Basic declarative	8 (40%)	8 (36.36%)	10 (43.48%)
Level 2: Moderate declarative	4 (20%)	6 (27.27%)	5 (21.74%)
Applicative Level (3-4)	6 (30%)	5 (22.73%)	5 (21.74%)
Level 3: Basic applicative	3 (15%)	4 (18.18%)	3 (13.04%)
Level 4: Complex applicative	3 (15%)	1 (4.55%)	2 (8.70%)
Total	20 (100%)	22 (100%)	23 (100 %)

**Figure 2** Trends in historical thinking skills from 2021 to 2023

The stagnant level of mastery of applicative competence indicates that participants still need help transforming theoretical knowledge into practical skills. This condition confirms the importance of more intensive guidance and integration of practice-based learning in teacher education programmes. This strategy is expected to increase participants' in-depth engagement with historical competencies. To illustrate, although the data show a slight increase in the level of applicative competence in the academic year 2023 compared to 2021, this achievement is attributed mainly to efforts to integrate historical source analysis methods in pre-service teachers' final assignments. However, limitations in implementing hands-on practice or the lack of intensive guidance during the training period remain significant obstacles that must be overcome to achieve optimal results.

Within the MBKM curriculum framework, the curriculum is designed to provide more significant space for developing practice-based competencies. However, these findings indicate that implementing the MBKM programme has yet to improve mastery of applicative skills. Thus, structural changes are needed, such as increasing the duration of practicum and strengthening intensive mentoring, to maximise the benefits of this approach. This reform is expected to bridge the gap between the

mastery of theory and the application of practice in history teacher training, resulting in educators who are more competent and ready to develop HTS in learning.

Pre-service teacher's reflections on challenges

The qualitative data revealed significant insights into how pre-service teachers perceived their ability to apply historical thinking skills. Participants at the basic declarative level generally demonstrated conceptual understanding but needed help to align their knowledge with practical teaching demands. Many identified challenges integrating core competencies, such as historical empathy and causality, into their lesson plans. For example, one pre-service teacher commented:

"Although I understand the concepts of historical sources and empathy, it is difficult to apply them when students expect simple factual answers."
(pre-service teachers A2/2021).

Similarly, pre-service teachers at the moderate declarative level showed some progress in recognising key competencies but needed to develop effective evaluation rubrics. These pre-service teachers often relied on traditional teaching models, reflecting the persistence of rote learning practices in the classroom.

Teacher candidates who reached the applied level demonstrated a more nuanced understanding of the significance of historical thinking. These participants developed evaluation tools and were able to integrate competencies such as source analysis and empathy into their teaching. For example, one pre-service teacher reflected on the comparison between Indonesia's New Order regime and current democratic reforms:

"Using historical empathy helps students understand life under authoritarianism and reflect on the value of democracy today." (pre-service teachers A10/2022).

However, pre-service teachers need help even at the complex applied level. They report resistance from pre-service teachers and colleagues who are used to traditional methods and difficulties designing activities that balance theoretical knowledge and practical application. This reflects the broader challenge of introducing innovative teaching approaches in an education system rooted in conventional practices.

Lack of mentoring and time constraints during the teaching practicum emerged as key barriers to competency development. Many participants expressed frustration at the limited mentoring they received, with one participant stating:

"There was not enough time during the teaching practicum to experiment with new teaching models. Most of the time, we were focused on completing the administrative requirements of the curriculum." (pre-service teachers A45/2023).

In addition, some pre-service teachers highlighted the difficulty of changing pre-service teachers' ingrained learning habits. Traditional methods, such as memorisation and textbook-based learning, are still prevalent, limiting students' ability to engage in historical inquiry and critical thinking.

These findings suggest that while pre-service teachers possess basic declarative knowledge, the development of applicative competencies is limited. The lack of progress over three years points to the need for curriculum reform and improved mentorship programmes. The reflections of the history teacher candidates further underscore the importance of aligning theory with practice to ensure that future teachers can effectively encourage historical thinking in the classroom.

After each practice session, mentor guidance can be optimised using written reflections or group discussions. This activity allows participants to evaluate their teaching strategies, identify challenges, and seek solutions with the mentor. This reflective approach will also help participants internalise HTS applicative competencies, such as document analysis and evaluation rubric design.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the History Learning Innovation course needs to effectively equip pre-service teachers with the practical competencies required to implement historical thinking skills (HTS) in the classroom. These findings reflect the ongoing challenges highlighted by Tuithof et al. (2023) and (Van Boxtel et al., 2020; Van Boxtel & Van Drie, 2018), where competency-based education must often bridge the gap between theory and practice. However, participants gained declarative knowledge through the course and most needed help with advanced competencies such as historical empathy and source analysis. This supports the theoretical argument that knowledge acquisition alone is insufficient; pre-service teachers must also master didactic strategies to meaningfully apply HTS in the classroom (Rüsen, 2005; Wineburg, 1999). As such, this finding highlights the theoretical-practical gap in history teacher education, which aligns with Gracová and Labischová's (2017) research and calls for a more systematic integration of theory and practice in history education programmes.

The results also revealed that participants with a social science background showed better mastery of HTS than participants from natural sciences or languages. This advantage can be attributed to the characteristics of social science learning that emphasise critical analysis and reflection, which are relevant to the development of HTS. Pre-service teachers from the social sciences show better mastery of HTS due to elements of the social science curriculum that directly support analytical, critical and creative skills. Methods such as case study analysis, critical discussion and qualitative research provide ideal learning environments for developing these abilities. In contrast, participants from natural sciences and languages lag due to curriculum approaches that are less supportive of HTS principles (Esterling & John-Hopkins, 2018; Wineburg, 2007). Natural sciences often focus on applying theory through deductive methods and experiments. At the same time, languages tend to emphasise technical competencies, such as grammar, without encouraging critical evaluation or creativity in realistic contexts (Saefudin et al., 2024b).

However, these findings also reveal limitations in the history teacher training curriculum, particularly in supporting the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) principles, which aim to strengthen practice-based experiences for all participants, regardless of their academic background.

The lack of practical experience and intensive guidance during training is a significant obstacle to developing HTS applicative competencies (Martínez-Hita et al., 2021; Nuraedah & Saefudin, 2024). To address this gap, pre-service teachers can be directed to design and implement lessons based on local history source analysis, which not only strengthens analytical skills but also encourages the development of historical empathy.

These challenges in history teacher education in Indonesia mirror those found in various international contexts. The Anglo-American system, for example, tends to focus on source analysis without practical application, while the German approach emphasises moral reflection through historical awareness. On the other hand, the Netherlands has successfully integrated theory and practice through interdisciplinary project-based learning. Such projects often involve students from different disciplines to solve problems like urban sustainability or community-based waste management. This approach enhances practice-based learning and equips students with interdisciplinary skills relevant to the needs of the working world (Cukurova et al., 2018). This approach offers valuable insights that can be adapted into the MBKM curriculum framework. For example, collaborating between universities and schools to develop community-based learning modules can provide future history teachers hands-on experience implementing HTS. This is because the MBKM curriculum offers a framework specifically designed to enhance practice-based learning, often lacking in older teacher education programmes. The principles of MBKM, such as curriculum flexibility, authentic learning experiences, and collaboration with the world of work, encourage students to apply pedagogical theories directly in the field (Alphen, 2019; Gracová & Labischová, 2017).

With MBKM, pre-service teachers' structured and collaborative practice-based experiences strengthen their readiness to master HTS skills. To ensure successful implementation of the MBKM, significant structural changes, such as extending the duration of the practicum and increasing the intensity of mentor guidance, are necessary. With these measures, participants understand HTS theoretically and can apply it in teaching, resulting in more competent educators ready to face challenges in the classroom (Darsono et al., 2024; Tuithof et al., 2023).

This study's findings significantly contribute to the academic discussion on theory and practice in history teacher education. Theoretically, the results corroborate the constructivist perspective that knowledge is only meaningful if actively applied. The findings

also underline the limitations of traditional training models that focus too much on theory without providing adequate opportunities for practical application. The results suggest that curriculum reform is essential to improve history teacher education, mainly by enhancing practicum-based learning within the MBKM framework (Saefudin et al., 2024c). An emphasis on collaboration between universities and schools is also needed to ensure training that is responsive to the needs of the field. In addition, intensive mentorship during the training period can support the transition of pre-service teachers from theory to practice, enabling them to overcome complex classroom teaching challenges.

This study highlights the need for further research to explore how different training models impact the development of HTS in the Indonesian educational context. Future research could include comparative studies between Indonesian universities and international programmes to identify best practices in developing historical competencies. The implementation of these recommendations will not only prepare future teachers to engage pre-service teachers in history learning critically and contribute to a more inclusive citizenship education. However, it should be noted that this study has limitations in the convenience sampling method, which may affect the generalisability of the findings. Therefore, more extensive research with more representative sampling methods is needed to strengthen the validity of the findings.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This research shows that the history learning innovation course still needs to fully prepare pre-service teachers to effectively apply historical thinking skills (HTS) in the classroom. Although the course integrates theory and practice, many participants still need help to balance theory understanding and application in the field. This finding confirms that the effectiveness of teacher training largely depends on combining theoretical knowledge with practical teaching experience and adapting to participants' educational backgrounds. While some participants managed to acquire declarative knowledge, they often lacked the didactic skills to apply and assess historical competence in the classroom. This gap reflects the broader challenge of bridging the relationship between theory and practice, such as bridging the MBKM curriculum framework and a pedagogical perspective that is not only lecture-based but is crucial to fostering critical and meaningful HTS.

Inspiration from Anglo-American, German and Dutch education systems suggests that moral reflection and project-based learning can be key elements in bridging the gap between theory and practice. This approach could strengthen the practice's relevance in Indonesia if adapted to local values and national policies, such as *gotong royong* value (mutual cooperation), which can be integrated through project-based learning such as the MBKM curriculum framework.

To address these challenges, this study recommends contextualised competency-based learning, extended duration of teaching practice to two full semesters with structured mentorship, and stronger collaboration between universities and schools. Competency-based learning focuses on practical skills, such as lesson planning and formative assessment, to reduce the performance gap, especially for pre-service teachers from non-social fields. Tools such as assessment rubrics to evaluate lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation can be used to monitor participants' progress comprehensively. Collaborative mechanisms like joint curricula designed between universities and schools can bridge teaching theory and practice with field needs through local values-based projects, such as revitalising traditional culture, to develop pre-service teachers' HTS skills. Integrating competency improvement, moral reflection, and local cultural elements also strengthens HTS. It connects history learning to the Indonesian educational context while preparing pre-service teachers to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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