Applying Constructivist Theory in Organizing History Teaching Activities to Develop Historical Thinking Competence for High School Students

Nguyen Thi Thuy My, M.Ed.

Can Tho University, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

In competency-based education, History teaching is expected to move beyond factual knowledge transmission toward developing students' historical thinking competence (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018, 2022). This study investigates how constructivist theory can inform the organization of History teaching activities to enhance students' abilities in reasoning, interpretation, comparison, contextualization, and evidence-based argumentation—key dimensions of historical thinking (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022). A quasi-experimental design was conducted with two Grade 11 classes over four weeks. The experimental group engaged in constructivist-oriented strategies, including discovery learning, problem-based learning, historical debate, flipped classroom, and project-based learning, while the control group received traditional instruction (Hämäläinen et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2023). Students' competence was assessed using a nine indicator rubric aligned with contemporary approaches to measuring causal reasoning and evidence use in History learning (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022). The findings show significant improvements in the experimental group, particularly in causal reasoning, interpretation, comparison, and the use of historical evidence. The study provides empirical support for applying constructivist pedagogy in History education and offers practical implications for implementing competency-based curricula (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, 2020).

Keywords: constructivism, historical thinking, competency-based education, History teaching, learning activities

INTRODUCTION

Educational reforms worldwide have increasingly shifted from content-based instruction toward competency-based education. Within this framework, History teaching is expected to move beyond the transmission of factual knowledge and toward fostering students' historical thinking competence (Ministry of Education and Training, 2018, 2022). Historical thinking is widely characterized by students' ability to analyze causes and consequences, recognize continuity and change, compare historical phenomena, contextualize events, evaluate sources, and construct evidence-based interpretations (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022). Constructivist theory offers a robust theoretical foundation for this pedagogical transformation. From a constructivist perspective, knowledge is actively constructed through learners' engagement with problems, sources, and social interaction rather than passively received from teachers. This epistemological stance aligns closely with the nature of historical inquiry, in which learners examine multiple sources, interpret diverse perspectives, and negotiate meaning through discussion and reasoning (Hämäläinen et al., 2023; Wiley et al., 2020).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that inquiry-oriented and project-based approaches grounded in constructivist principles can enhance students' engagement with historical problems while strengthening their interpretive reasoning and sourcing practices (Pan et al., 2023; Cinnamon et al., 2021). Despite these theoretical and empirical advances, History classrooms in many contexts remain dominated by lecture-based practices that prioritize memorization of events and dates over higher-order historical reasoning. In addition, the assessment of students' historical thinking competence remains insufficiently developed. Recent research

underscores the importance of using reliable indicators and structured rubrics to evaluate students' abilities in causal analysis and evidence-based reasoning (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022). To address this gap, the present study applies constructivist teaching strategies in Grade 11 History classrooms and empirically examines their effectiveness in developing students' historical thinking competence within a competency-based curriculum framework (Ministry of Education and Training, 2019, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Constructivism in History Education

Constructivism posits that learning occurs when students actively construct knowledge through exploration, discussion, collaboration, and reflection. In History education, this perspective implies that students must engage directly with historical sources, analyze evidence, and participate in interpretive dialogue rather than passively receiving historical narratives. From a constructivist standpoint, knowledge is not transmitted but formed through meaning-making processes shaped by prior understanding, social interaction, and cognitive engagement. This view aligns closely with the epistemic nature of History as a discipline, where understanding the past involves interpretation based on evidence, context, and perspective rather than memorization of fixed facts (Wiley et al., 2020; Cinnamon et al., 2021).

In constructivist History classrooms, students are positioned as novice historians who analyze documents, evaluate evidence, compare viewpoints, and construct reasoned interpretations. Such practices mirror authentic historical inquiry and disciplinary literacy, where learners engage with problems and sources in ways similar to professional historians (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Hämäläinen et al., 2023). Consequently, the teacher's role shifts from transmitter of content to designer of learning environments that present students with meaningful historical problems, diverse sources, and opportunities for inquiry. Through guided questioning, collaborative discussion, and structured tasks, students progressively refine their understanding and construct historically grounded knowledge.

Social interaction plays a crucial role in this process. Peer discussion, group tasks, and whole-class debates provide opportunities for students to articulate their thinking, encounter alternative interpretations, and reorganize their ideas. This dialogic dimension of learning is particularly significant in History education, where multiple perspectives and contested interpretations are inherent to the subject (Wilke et al., 2022). Moreover, constructivist approaches emphasize the use of authentic historical materials—such as maps, letters, legal documents, images, and statistical data—which enable students to move beyond textbook summaries and develop the capacity to evaluate sources, identify bias, and assess evidentiary limitations (Hämäläinen et al., 2023). Cognitive conflict also plays an important role in constructivist History learning. When students encounter conflicting interpretations or evidence that challenges their existing understanding, they are prompted to seek explanations and reconsider their assumptions. This cognitive tension fosters deeper engagement and supports the development of more sophisticated historical reasoning. In addition, reflection is essential to consolidating learning. Opportunities to reflect on how interpretations have evolved through inquiry and discussion enhance students' metacognitive awareness and strengthen their historical thinking competence (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022).

In sum, constructivism provides a coherent framework for History education because it corresponds to the interpretive, evidence-based, and dialogic nature of historical learning. By organizing classrooms around inquiry, interaction, evidence analysis, and reflection, teachers create conditions that promote the development of genuine historical thinking competence rather than rote memorization of historical information.

Historical Thinking Competence

METHODOLOGY

Historical thinking competence in this study is conceptualized through nine interrelated indicators that collectively represent how students engage with the past as an evidence-based and interpretive domain of knowledge: (1) identifying causes and consequences, (2) recognizing continuity and change, (3) comparing historical events, (4) contextualizing historical phenomena, (5) using historical evidence, (6) constructing

logical arguments, (7) interpreting history from personal perspectives, (8) evaluating historical events and figures, and (9) synthesizing historical knowledge in relation to present contexts. These indicators function not only as assessment criteria but also as principles guiding the design of learning activities in constructivist History classrooms (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022).

Historical thinking is not a discrete skill but a constellation of cognitive operations that enable learners to interpret the past through reasoning, evidence, and perspective. The first indicator—identifying causes and consequences—requires students to move beyond description toward explanation, distinguishing between immediate and underlying causes as well as short-term and long-term effects. Inquiry-oriented learning tasks that present historical problems naturally stimulate this form of reasoning by requiring students to examine multiple factors before drawing conclusions (Cinnamon et al., 2021). Recognizing continuity and change encourages students to perceive history as a dynamic process rather than a sequence of isolated events. When students trace developments across time, they begin to identify patterns, transitions, and historical progression. Similarly, comparing historical events or phenomena enables learners to explain why historical processes unfolded differently across contexts. Constructivist learning environments that incorporate diverse sources and viewpoints provide optimal conditions for such comparative analysis (Pan et al., 2023).

Contextualizing historical phenomena is another essential component. Students must understand that events are embedded within political, social, economic, and cultural contexts. Learning activities that require reconstruction of these contexts help students avoid simplistic interpretations and develop more nuanced explanations. The ability to use historical evidence lies at the core of historical inquiry. Students learn to select, interpret, and evaluate sources rather than accept information uncritically, especially when working with primary materials such as maps, letters, images, and statistical data (Hämäläinen et al., 2023). Constructing logical arguments emerges from effective evidence use. Students are expected to organize information coherently, support claims with sources, and defend their viewpoints during discussions and debates. Such opportunities are central in constructivist classrooms where dialogue and collaboration shape learning processes (Wiley et al., 2020). Interpreting history from personal perspectives further encourages students to articulate their own reasoned understandings while remaining grounded in evidence, fostering intellectual engagement rather than subjective opinion.

Evaluating historical events and figures requires balanced judgment based on multiple perspectives. Exposure to differing interpretations during classroom interactions strengthens students' evaluative thinking. Finally, synthesizing historical knowledge and relating it to present contexts enables students to recognize the relevance of history to contemporary life. Project-based and reflective learning activities are particularly effective in developing this integrative competence (Pan et al., 2023). Taken together, these nine indicators provide a comprehensive framework for understanding historical thinking competence and offer concrete guidance for teachers in designing learning activities that move students beyond memorization toward genuine historical reasoning (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022).

Research Design

A quasi-experimental design involving an experimental group and a control group was adopted to examine the impact of constructivist-oriented teaching on students' historical thinking competence. This approach was considered appropriate for investigating instructional effectiveness within authentic school contexts, where random assignment of students is often impractical. Conducting the study in naturally existing classrooms ensured ecological validity and preserved the normal conditions of History teaching.

The two participating Grade 11 classes were comparable in size, academic level, and prior learning performance, providing a reasonable basis for comparison. One class was designated as the experimental group and engaged in constructivist-oriented instructional strategies, while the other served as the control group and received traditional lecture-based instruction. Both groups studied the same historical content during the same period, were taught by the same teacher, and were assessed using identical evaluation criteria. Controlling these variables allowed differences in learning outcomes to be attributed primarily to variations in teaching approaches rather than external factors. The intervention lasted four weeks and focused on a thematic unit in the Grade 11 History curriculum. During this period, the experimental group participated in learning activities grounded in constructivist principles, including discovery learning, problem-based situations, historical debate,

flipped classroom preparation, and project-based tasks. These strategies are consistent with inquiry-based and project based approaches shown to enhance students' engagement with historical problems, sourcing practices, and interpretive reasoning (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Hämäläinen et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2023). In contrast, the control group followed teacher-centered instruction characterized by explanation, note-taking, and question–answer sessions.

The design also enabled the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Written assessments measured students' performance across indicators of historical thinking competence, while classroom observations and students' learning products provided insight into their engagement, interaction, and reasoning processes. The use of a structured rubric as a standardized assessment instrument strengthened the reliability and validity of data collection (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022). Through this quasi-experimental framework, the study not only compared learning outcomes between constructivist and traditional settings but also examined how differences in classroom interaction, task organization, and student participation contributed to the development of historical thinking competence. This design therefore offers a comprehensive understanding of how instructional approaches shape students' historical reasoning in real educational contexts (Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022).

Participants

Class	Students	Teaching method	Role
11A1	42	Constructivist oriented	Experimental
11A2	41	Traditional lecture	Control

The study involved two existing Grade 11 classes within the same school context. Class 11A1 consisted of 42 students and was designated as the experimental group, receiving constructivist-oriented instruction. Class 11A2 included 41 students and served as the control group, following traditional lecture-based teaching. The near equivalence in group size is methodologically significant, as it minimizes the potential influence of class size on interaction patterns, participation opportunities, classroom management, and teacher attention. This balance increases the likelihood that differences in learning outcomes can be attributed to instructional approaches rather than classroom dynamics.

The clear differentiation of roles between the two classes is essential to the quasi-experimental design. While the experimental group engaged in learning activities such as exploration, discussion, source analysis, debate, and problem-solving, the control group primarily experienced knowledge transmission through explanation and note-taking. Because both groups studied the same curriculum content, were taught during the same period, and were instructed by the same teacher, the instructional approach constituted the primary independent variable of the study. This controlled contrast enables a meaningful examination of how different teaching organizations influence students' historical thinking competence (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Pan et al., 2023).

Importantly, the two classes were not artificially formed for research purposes but were naturally existing classes. This preserves the authenticity of classroom interaction and strengthens the ecological validity of the study. The findings therefore reflect real teaching and learning conditions rather than outcomes produced in an experimental laboratory setting. Such authenticity enhances the practical relevance of the research for History teachers implementing constructivist and inquiry-based approaches in everyday classrooms (Hämäläinen et al., 2023). By maintaining comparable conditions across the two groups and varying only the teaching method, the study establishes a logical structure for investigating the effectiveness of constructivist instruction in developing students' historical thinking competence. This design is further supported by the use of standardized assessment criteria aligned with contemporary approaches to evaluating historical reasoning (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022).

Teaching Intervention (4 weeks)

The teaching intervention was conducted over four weeks, comprising eight History lessons within a thematic unit of the Grade 11 curriculum. During this period, the experimental class was not merely exposed to isolated constructivist techniques; rather, the entire organization of classroom learning was systematically redesigned according to constructivist principles. Learning tasks, patterns of interaction, and the roles of both teacher and students were intentionally structured to create an environment in which historical knowledge could be actively constructed through inquiry and dialogue rather than passively received.

Discovery learning served as the entry point for most lessons. Students were introduced to historical maps, official documents, images, statistical data, and brief narratives prior to formal explanation. They were encouraged to observe, question, and infer meaning from these materials as novice historians working with evidence. Such practices align with research emphasizing the importance of sourcing and evidence engagement in historical inquiry (Hämäläinen et al., 2023; Cinnamon et al., 2021). Problem-based learning was integrated through carefully designed historical situations that contained elements of cognitive conflict. Instead of presenting conclusions, the teacher posed guiding questions that required students to analyze multiple factors, compare perspectives, and construct explanations grounded in evidence. This approach is consistent with inquiry-based models shown to enhance interpretive reasoning and disciplinary literacy in History classrooms (Cinnamon et al., 2021).

Historical debate was frequently employed to deepen students' reasoning. After working with sources in groups, students presented and defended their interpretations in whole-class discussions. Through exposure to contrasting viewpoints, they refined their arguments and developed an understanding of the multi-perspective nature of historical interpretation. Such dialogic interaction has been shown to strengthen epistemic reasoning and evaluative thinking (Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022).

The flipped classroom model further supported these activities by shifting part of the knowledge acquisition process outside the classroom. Students prepared through short readings, videos, or document reviews before lessons, allowing classroom time to be devoted primarily to analysis, discussion, and higher order thinking. This reallocation of instructional time increased opportunities for historical reasoning during class. Toward the end of the intervention, project-based learning was implemented. Students worked collaboratively on tasks that connected historical content to broader contexts and contemporary issues. These projects required synthesis of information, organization of findings, and creative presentation, supporting the development of integrative historical understanding (Pan et al., 2023).

In contrast, the control class followed a traditional teacher-centered approach characterized by explanation, note-taking, and brief question–answer exchanges. While this approach ensured content coverage, it provided limited opportunities for students to engage with sources, discuss interpretations, or construct understanding independently. The distinction between the two instructional approaches therefore extended beyond specific techniques to the overall learning environment. In the experimental class, students actively interacted with historical materials, peers, and ideas in processes of meaning-making. In the control class, learning remained predominantly receptive. This clear instructional contrast provided a solid basis for examining how constructivist-oriented teaching influences the development of historical thinking competence.

Assessment Instrument

To measure the development of students' historical thinking competence in a systematic and reliable manner, this study employed a rubric based on nine indicators of historical thinking aligned with the History competency framework and the theoretical foundations discussed earlier. Unlike conventional assessments that primarily evaluate factual recall, this rubric was designed to capture how students reason, analyze, interpret, and use evidence when engaging with historical content (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022).

Each indicator in the rubric represents a distinct dimension of historical thinking, including causal reasoning, recognition of continuity and change, comparison of historical phenomena, contextualization, evidence use, and construction of logical arguments. In this way, the rubric functions not only as an assessment tool but also as an operational representation of what it means to "think historically" in classroom practice (Cinnamon et al.,

2021; Wiley et al., 2020). The rubric consisted of four performance levels, ranging from basic recall to advanced analytical and interpretive thinking. At the lowest level, students tended to reproduce textbook information with minimal explanation. At higher levels, students demonstrated the ability to connect multiple factors, evaluate sources, analyze relationships between events, and present evidence-based interpretations. This gradation enabled the researcher to observe the progression of students' reasoning rather than merely assign numerical scores.

Throughout the intervention, the rubric was applied consistently across multiple forms of assessment, including written tests, group learning products, classroom discussions, and student presentations. The use of common criteria across these contexts ensured coherence between instructional objectives and evaluation practices. Students were therefore assessed on how they engaged in historical reasoning throughout the learning process, not solely at the end of the unit (Hämäläinen et al., 2023). Clear performance descriptors were developed for each level of the rubric to minimize subjectivity and enhance scoring reliability. Because the same instrument was used for both the experimental and control groups, differences in outcomes could be attributed to variations in instructional experience rather than inconsistencies in assessment procedures.

In addition to its summative function, the rubric also served a formative role. Feedback based on rubric criteria was provided during the intervention, enabling students to recognize which aspects of historical thinking required further development. In this sense, assessment became integrated into the learning process rather than functioning as a separate activity. Overall, the rubric strengthened the methodological rigor of the study by ensuring alignment between theoretical constructs, instructional design, and evaluation. It allowed the research to measure precisely the development of historical thinking competence while maintaining consistency, reliability, and validity across learning contexts.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Indicator	Experimental	Control
Causal reasoning	83%	56%
Use of evidence	79%	48%
Comparison	76%	52%
Historical interpretation	71%	39%
Mean score	**8.1**	**6.5**

The data presented in the table offers empirical evidence of how different instructional approaches shape the development of students' historical thinking competence. Although the numerical differences appear straightforward, their pedagogical implications become clearer when interpreted in relation to the constructivist teaching strategies and the assessment rubric employed in this study. The most pronounced difference appears in causal reasoning, where the experimental group achieved 83% compared to 56% in the control group. This substantial gap suggests that students exposed to constructivist-oriented activities were more capable of analyzing why historical events occurred and identifying their consequences. Such reasoning requires the examination of multiple interacting factors, a process actively promoted through problem-based situations and structured historical debate (Cinnamon et al., 2021). In contrast, students in the lecture-based setting demonstrated more limited independent reasoning, likely due to fewer opportunities to analyze cause–effect relationships through inquiry.

A similar pattern is observed in the use of historical evidence. The experimental group reached 79%, whereas the control group achieved 48%. This difference highlights the impact of learning tasks that required students to work directly with historical documents, maps, images, and textual sources. Research has shown that engagement with authentic materials strengthens students' sourcing practices and evidence-based reasoning

(Hämäläinen et al., 2023). In the constructivist classroom, evidence served as the foundation for discussion and argumentation, while in the traditional classroom, reliance on textbook summaries limited students' direct interaction with sources. The indicator of comparison also reveals a notable difference (76% versus 52%). Comparative thinking develops when students are encouraged to analyze similarities and differences across contexts, an ability fostered through collaborative discussion and analytical tasks (Pan et al., 2023). Lecture based instruction, by presenting historical content sequentially, offers fewer opportunities for such cross-event connections. The largest gap is evident in historical interpretation, where the experimental group achieved 71% compared to only 39% in the control group. This finding indicates that students in the experimental class were more capable of forming reasoned interpretations rather than reproducing textbook explanations. Dialogic activities such as debate and reflection, which emphasize perspective-taking and argument construction, have been shown to strengthen epistemic reasoning in History learning (Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022).

Finally, the overall mean score (8.1 for the experimental group versus 6.5 for the control group) confirms the cumulative effect of constructivist teaching on historical thinking performance. Because both groups studied the same content within the same timeframe and were assessed using the same rubric, these differences can reasonably be attributed to the organization of learning activities rather than to content coverage. Taken together, the data demonstrate that constructivist-oriented instruction does not merely increase classroom participation but significantly enhances key dimensions of historical thinking. When students are given structured opportunities to engage with sources, participate in discussion, and construct their own interpretations, their capacity to think historically develops in measurable and meaningful ways (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Ningsih & Abidin, 2022).

Qualitative Observations

Classroom observations conducted throughout the intervention period revealed substantial differences in how students in the two groups engaged with historical content. These qualitative findings complement the quantitative results by illustrating how constructivist-oriented instruction shaped students' learning behaviors and thinking processes during classroom activities. In the experimental class, students were observed actively initiating questions, responding to peers' ideas, and participating in sustained group discussions. During historical debates, students frequently referred to maps, documents, and textual sources to justify their arguments. Their contributions extended beyond recalling information to explaining relationships between events, proposing interpretations, and critically examining alternative viewpoints. Such behaviors reflect the type of disciplinary literacy and inquiry practices emphasized in research on historical learning (Cinnamon et al., 2021). A prominent feature of classroom interaction in the experimental group was the emergence of multiperspective thinking. Students demonstrated awareness that historical events could be understood from different social, political, and cultural viewpoints. Rather than searching for a single correct answer, they explored multiple interpretations and supported their reasoning with evidence. This pattern of engagement corresponds with studies highlighting the role of dialogic interaction and epistemic reasoning in developing historical thinking (Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022).

The use of historical sources was also more frequent and purposeful. Students treated maps, documents, and images as tools for reasoning rather than supplementary materials. They compared information across sources, questioned reliability, and selectively used evidence to support claims. Such practices align with findings that emphasize the importance of sourcing and evidence evaluation in inquiry-based History learning (Hämäläinen et al., 2023). Collaboration played a central role in these processes. Group tasks created opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and refine ideas through dialogue. These interactions often led students to reconsider initial assumptions and develop more sophisticated explanations, demonstrating collective knowledge construction within the classroom environment (Pan et al., 2023).

In contrast, observations in the control class indicated that student participation was largely limited to responding to the teacher's questions. Most students focused on note-taking, and classroom discussions were brief and teacher-directed. References to historical sources were infrequent, and opportunities for extended reasoning or debate were minimal. Consequently, students' engagement with historical content remained primarily at the level of information reception rather than interpretive analysis. These qualitative observations demonstrate how the organization of learning activities directly influenced students' cognitive engagement. The constructivist classroom created conditions for students to practice historical reasoning through inquiry, evidence use, and dialogue, whereas the traditional classroom provided fewer opportunities for such

intellectual involvement. Together, these observations help explain the higher performance of the experimental group in the assessment of historical thinking competence (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022).

Rubric for Assessing Historical Thinking Competence

Table X. Rubric for Assessing Historical Thinking Competence

Historical Thinking Indicator	Level 1 – Basic Recall	Level 2 – Developing	Level 3 – Proficient	Level 4 – Advanced Historical Reasoning
1. Identifying causes and consequences	Mentions events without explaining causes or effects.	Identifies either causes or consequences separately.	Explains relationships between causes and consequences.	Distinguishes direct/indirect causes and short/long-term consequences with clear reasoning.
2. Recognizing continuity and change	Sees events as isolated facts.	Notes changes over time without explanation.	Explains how and why changes occurred across periods.	Analyzes patterns of continuity and change within broader historical processes.
3. Comparing historical events	Lists similarities or differences without analysis.	Compares events descriptively.	Explains similarities and differences with reasoning.	Uses comparison to explain different historical outcomes in different contexts.
4. Contextualizing historical phenomena	Describes events without context.	Identifies context but does not connect it to the event.	Explains how context influences events.	Analyzes the two-way relationship between context and historical development.
5. Using historical evidence	Does not use sources to support statements.	Uses sources but in a fragmented way.	Selects appropriate evidence to support claims.	Integrates multiple sources, evaluates their reliability and limitations.
6. Constructing logical arguments	Expresses opinions without logical structure.	Presents arguments with limited support.	Develops logical arguments supported by evidence.	Constructs coherent arguments and responds to counterarguments critically.
7. Interpreting history from personal perspectives	Repeats textbook information.	Restates content in own words.	Presents personal interpretation supported by evidence.	Develops insightful interpretations reflecting independent historical reasoning.
8. Evaluating historical events and figures	Gives emotional or one-sided judgments.	Evaluates from a single perspective.	Evaluates from multiple perspectives.	Provides balanced, evidence-based, multidimensional evaluation.

9. Synthesizing knowledge and relating to present contexts	Cannot relate history to present issues.	Makes simple connections to current contexts.	Relates historical lessons logically to present situations.	Draws meaningful, creative, and well-reasoned lessons from history for contemporary issues.

This rubric functions as more than a scoring guide; it operationalizes the conceptual framework through which historical thinking competence is defined and measured in this study. Its structure demonstrates how theoretical understandings of historical cognition can be translated into observable and assessable classroom practices (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022; Wilke et al., 2022). The nine indicators embedded in the rubric are not arbitrarily selected but directly reflect the core dimensions of historical thinking emphasized in the curriculum framework and contemporary research. From causal reasoning and contextualization to evidence use and synthesis of knowledge, the rubric captures the range of cognitive processes required for meaningful historical understanding. This alignment ensures that assessment is grounded in theoretical and curricular principles rather than subjective judgment (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Wiley et al., 2020).

A key strength of the rubric lies in its four performance levels, which represent a progression of thinking rather than a binary measure of correctness. At the lowest level, students primarily reproduce factual knowledge, reflecting recall-based engagement with history. Higher levels demonstrate increasingly sophisticated reasoning, including analytical use of evidence, evaluation of multiple factors, and construction of well-supported interpretations. This gradation allows the researcher to trace the developmental trajectory of students' historical reasoning across the intervention. Each indicator corresponds to observable classroom behaviors. The rubric makes it possible to determine whether students actively use historical sources to support arguments, whether comparisons are analytical rather than descriptive, and whether evaluations consider multiple perspectives. In this way, the rubric establishes a clear connection between theoretical notions of historical thinking and constructivist learning activities that emphasize inquiry, discussion, and evidence analysis (Hämäläinen et al., 2023).

The rubric was applied consistently across various forms of assessment, including written tests, group products, classroom discussions, debates, and project presentations. This broad application ensures that evaluation reflects students' engagement in historical reasoning throughout the learning process rather than in a single testing situation. Such integration of learning and assessment is consistent with constructivist principles and inquiry-based History education (Pan et al., 2023). Importantly, the same rubric was used for both the experimental and control groups, enhancing the validity and reliability of the research findings. Differences in performance can therefore be attributed to instructional approaches rather than variations in assessment criteria. In this sense, the rubric serves not only as an evaluative instrument but also as a conceptual model of historical thinking, demonstrating that this competence can be clearly described, observed, measured, and compared in authentic classroom contexts.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that constructivist-oriented instruction creates favorable conditions for the development of students' historical thinking competence. Quantitative differences between the experimental and control groups were substantiated by qualitative observations of classroom interaction, indicating that instructional organization directly influenced how students engaged with historical knowledge. These results suggest that historical thinking does not emerge primarily from content exposure but from participation in inquiry, dialogue, and evidence-based reasoning (Cinnamon et al., 2021; Wiley et al., 2020). Constructivist strategies such as historical debate, problem-based situations, discovery tasks, and project-based learning did more than increase student participation. They created intellectual contexts in which students were required to interpret information, evaluate sources, and justify their claims with evidence. In such contexts, reliance on memorized information was insufficient; students had to analyze relationships between events and

articulate reasoned interpretations. This repeated engagement with reasoning processes gradually strengthened the cognitive operations associated with historical thinking (Hämäläinen et al., 2023).

Historical debate proved particularly effective in promoting multi-perspective understanding. When confronted with contrasting viewpoints, students were prompted to reconsider assumptions and refine their arguments. Similarly, problem-based tasks generated cognitive conflict that stimulated curiosity and deeper inquiry. Project-based activities further enabled students to synthesize historical knowledge and relate it to broader or contemporary contexts. These findings align closely with constructivist theory, which emphasizes knowledge construction through interaction, inquiry, and reflection, and with research highlighting the importance of authentic tasks and evidence-based reasoning in History education (Pan et al., 2023; Wilke et al., 2022). By combining structured instructional design with a rubric-based assessment of historical thinking, this study contributes empirical support to existing discussions on how constructivist pedagogy can be effectively operationalized and measured in real classroom settings (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022).

Implications

The results of this study carry important implications for History teachers, curriculum designers, and assessment practices within competency-based education.

For teachers, the findings suggest that organizing classroom activities around inquiry, discussion, and evidence analysis can substantially enhance students' historical thinking. Rather than prioritizing content delivery, teachers may consider designing learning situations that require students to explore sources, debate interpretations, and construct their own understanding (Cinnamon et al., 2021).

For curriculum designers, the study highlights the necessity of aligning learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment methods. If the goal of History education is to develop historical thinking competence, curricula should encourage approaches that extend beyond lectures and memorization. The nine-indicator rubric presented in this study offers a practical reference for designing competency-based learning tasks (Wilke et al., 2022). For assessment practices, the study demonstrates the value of rubric-based evaluation. Traditional tests often fail to capture how students reason historically, whereas structured rubrics enable educators to assess argumentation, evidence use, and interpretation in authentic learning contexts (Ningsih & Abidin, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that constructivist-oriented teaching significantly enhances students' historical thinking competence. By engaging students in discovery, problem-solving, debate, and project-based activities, teachers create learning environments in which historical knowledge is actively constructed rather than passively received. The use of a rubric with clearly defined indicators further demonstrates that historical thinking can be systematically observed, measured, and compared in classroom practice. The findings contribute both theoretically and practically to History education by providing an empirically grounded model for implementing competency-based teaching reforms. When students are given opportunities to work with evidence, engage in dialogue, and reflect on multiple perspectives, they do not simply learn historical content—they develop the capacity to think historically (Wiley et al., 2020; Wilke et al., 2022).

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