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Constructing Students' Affective Connection to Historical Events through Critical Reflection and Historical Contextualization: A Narrative Analysis of Senior High School Students

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Abstract: Developing affective connections to the past enables students to understand historical figures as individuals whose experiences were shaped by the social, cultural, and political circumstances of their time, thereby fostering an understanding of history that extends beyond the acquisition of factual knowledge. This study aims to 1) identify the tendencies of reflective learning in senior high schools in Banjarmasin City; 2) analyse how teachers can implement learning treatments to train students' affective connections to historical events; and 3) analyse the results of the learning treatments provided by teachers through narrative analysis. This study employed a qualitative narrative analysis design to explore how students construct affective connections to historical events through critical reflection and contextual understanding. The results show that to foster students' affective connections to historical events, learning treatments that allow students to express their knowledge and abilities through essays are needed. Student learning activities need to be adjusted to the stages of critical reflection and historical contextualization. The narrative analysis of students' essays identified expressions of affective engagement with historical events, particularly through reflections on historical actors, human suffering, and the social and political circumstances surrounding historical events.

Keywords: Affective Connection, Historical Events through, Critical Reflection, Historical Contextualization

INTRODUCTION

Studying history means studying human actions in the past. Affective connections in history learning require a student to see the differences between life in the present and in the past while maintaining the possibility that past perspectives hold some validity (Barton & Levstik, 2004). If asked to apply only logic or reason when exploring historical figures,

students are at a disadvantage in understanding people influenced by concerns such as pride, fear, love, hate, despair, or greed (Endacott & Brooks, 2013). The process of forming affective connections to the past allows students to see historical figures as human beings facing very human experiences. It leads to a richer understanding than perspective-taking alone (Endacott & Brooks, 2013).

This perspective on history learning, which accommodates the formation of affective connections to the past, has received little attention from history teachers, particularly in this study, which focuses on history learning in Banjarmasin City. A survey of history learning trends among public high school students in Banjarmasin City in 2024 and 2025 found that 21.7% of students doubted that their history lessons provided life lessons. This finding suggests that some students may experience difficulties in recognizing the personal relevance and broader meaning of learning history.

Connections that lead to meaning are at the heart of contextual teaching. When students can connect the subject matter to their own experiences, they will find meaning (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Failure to grasp meaning leads to a failure to form empathy (Howe, 2015). It becomes clear, then, that students' failure to derive meaning from what they learn will contribute to the failure to form empathy, in this case, historical empathy.

Reflective learning needs to be developed to help students discover the meaning of historical events, build affective connections, and foster empathy in history learning. Empirically, reflective learning can be used to teach historical empathy (Utami, 2019). Reflective activities may encourage students to construct meaning from historical events and develop cognitive and affective dimensions of historical empathy. This is because reflective learning is a model that prioritises thinking processes grounded in self-reflection, past experiences, and future hopes (Morrow, 2009).

The Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 008/H/KR/2022 concerning Learning Outcomes in Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and Secondary Education in the Independent Curriculum states that the characteristic of history learning is to guide students in developing reflective conclusions. Therefore, reflective learning is essential for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The rationale for high school history is explained in the text: history learning must transform past knowledge so that it is contextualised in contemporary life.

Reflective learning fosters the development of personal affection, future perspectives, and action, recognising that interactions with other groups influence learning through dialogue, conversation, and communication, providing new insights and experiences (Moon, 2004; Stroobants, 2007). The process of understanding and constructing critical interpretations enables students to develop affective connections to the historical events they study. This tendency, in Habermas's (1972) critical philosophical perspective, is referred to as critical reflection. Human interest in maintaining its autonomy as a knower can encourage them to reflect critically (critical reflection) on what matters to them, on their desires and interests, on various sources (resources) and on themselves as agents of knowing.

Reflective learning is a process in which students consciously reflect on experiences, ideas, actions, or values they have encountered to gain a deeper understanding, personal meaning, and the potential for transformation in their ways of thinking and acting. According to Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) "Reflection is a form of response of the learner to experience, which is guided and purposeful, seeking meaning and insight." Conceptually, reflective learning is aligned with, and is part of, experiential learning and narrative pedagogy. As explained in the previous section, experts place reflection at the core of their theory.

The reflective view, specifically that of Heron (1985), underscores the importance of reflection in the 'cooperative inquiry' process and its role in developing learning skills. Kolb

(1984) places reflection as an important part of the learning process, 'experiential learning' or experience-based learning. Savery & Duffy (1995) stated that reflection is one of the important pillars of constructivist learning, as it can help learners develop metacognitive awareness. Metacognitive awareness is awareness of one's own thoughts, as reflected in how a person performs tasks (Marzano, 1998). Degeng & Sudana (1998) stated that in the constructivist view, learning is the construction of knowledge from concrete experiences, collaborative activities, and reflection and interpretation. Thus, the main foundation of reflection in learning is constructivism. The essence of learning in the constructivist view is the process of building meaning. To reach this stage, one of the principles of constructivist learning is the opportunity to reflect.

Reflective learning enables effective personal development, shaping the future and applying actions, with a formulation that interactions with other groups influence learning through dialogue, conversation, and communication, providing new understanding and experiences. (Moon, 2004; Stroobants, 2007). Reflective learning enables learners to pay closer attention, think critically, develop their own ideas, find solutions, interpret and assess their surroundings, and reflect on their thinking (Honey & Mumford, 1992).

Reflective learning is a learning model that prioritises self-reflection, drawing on past experiences and future hopes (Morrow, 2009). This learning model relies on academic fantasy regarding what is observed and measured. Getz et al., (2008), thus giving rise to sensitivity to phenomena occurring around the learning environment. Reflective learning, according to Bain et al. (2002) it has five characteristics that show the hierarchy of thinking processes, namely: (1) Reporting, (2) Responding, (3) Relating, (4) Reasoning, and (5) Reconstructing. At the reporting level, it is characterized by the ability to describe situations, phenomena, symptoms or problems, at the responding level, it is characterized by the ability to develop emotional responses to problems, at the relating level, it is characterized by the ability to associate various phenomena with the theories underlying the phenomena, at the reasoning level, it is characterized by the ability to explain events based on systematic facts of events in accordance with the methodological concept of problem solving, and at the reconstructing level, it is characterized by the ability to plan problem-solving actions based on theoretical perspectives and past experiences.

Meaning in reflective learning requires students to master historical contextualization. Historical contextualization involves temporal sensitivity and an understanding of the social, political, and cultural conditions of the period being studied. This process enables students to interpret historical events within their original contexts rather than exclusively through contemporary perspectives (Endacott & Brooks, 2013). This awareness stems from the fact that each individual is bound by space and time; we cannot fully understand historical actors, such as their circumstances and reasons for acting as they did, by applying contemporary beliefs, standards, and attitudes (VanSledright, 2001). Portal (1987) has described the challenges of understanding, and even the collective memory we have, because the historical context, cultural frames of reference, and the characteristics of historical writers are not always congruent with what we transmit. What he means is that what historical actors did is often not fully interpretable due to various limitations, including emotional tendencies and beliefs that developed over time.

Previous studies have generally focused more on critical thinking and less on examining critical reflection specifically in history learning. Furthermore, they have focused more on classical quantitative experiments and have not conducted narrative analysis, particularly of student essays, as part of historical contextualization skills. This research aims to fill this gap, allowing for a more in-depth discussion.

Based on the analysis above, a synthesis can be formulated: how can affective connections with historical events be formed when students critically reflect on the events they learn and develop contextual thinking? This study aims to (1) identify reflective learning practices

in public senior high schools in Banjarmasin City; (2) examine how teachers implement learning activities designed to foster students' affective connections to historical events; and (3) analyze students' reflective essays to identify expressions of affective engagement, critical reflection, and historical contextualization.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative narrative analysis design to explore how students construct affective connections to historical events through critical reflection and contextual understanding. Narrative analysis was chosen because it allows researchers to examine how individuals make meaning of experiences through storytelling. Rather than measuring variables, this approach focuses on how students interpret, structure, and emotionally engage with historical content in their own words (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019).

Narratives are considered not merely as descriptions of events but as meaning-making processes through which learners construct identity, values, and interpretations of the past. This design enables an in-depth exploration of the cognitive–affective dimensions embedded in students' historical storytelling.

Research Object and Context

This study employed a qualitative research design using narrative analysis to examine students' interpretations of historical events and their expressions of affective engagement. It involved students and teachers from 13 public high schools in Banjarmasin City. In addition to completing a learning preference questionnaire, teachers and students were interviewed to identify problems and issues related to the research theme in their respective schools, as well as obstacles to fostering students' affective connections to historical events. After conducting this identification, the researchers and history teachers analysed learning treatments that could be implemented to instil students' affective connections to historical events. The formulated treatments were then implemented in history lessons and subjected to narrative analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

The instruments used were interview guidelines, narrative elicitation guides, learning activity observation sheets, and a coding framework. The interview guides were developed based on the problem formulation, and interview indicators/aspects were determined. The narrative elicitation guide used was a history learning-preference questionnaire for teachers, comprising open- and closed-ended questions about the history curriculum, common learning patterns, and teachers' justifications for students' tendencies toward historical empathy. The coding framework was an analytical instrument used to facilitate coding and identify students' responses in the learning essays they compiled. Coding identified the key concepts that became the research theme and the central issues that emerged.

Operational Definition of Variables

Affective connectedness is the level of emotional involvement students experience in understanding and interpreting historical events, both personally and collectively. This variable is measured through historical empathy, emotional resonance, and the ability to relate historical events to life values (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013).

Critical reflection is a student's ability to analyse and evaluate historical events in depth from various perspectives. This variable is measured through the ability to think analytically, question sources, and evaluate social and moral implications (Mezirow, 1991; Wineburg, 2001).

Historical contextualization is a student's ability to understand historical events in

relation to the context of time, place, and social and cultural conditions. This variable is measured through the ability to identify background, cause-and-effect relationships, and interrelationships between events (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Wineburg, 2001).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Trends in Contextual Reflective History Learning in Senior High Schools in Banjarmasin City

A common obstacle history teachers face is students being distracted by information from social media or hobby apps on their smartphones. According to history teachers, the influx of information on social media about current trends influences students' thinking toward presentism. Aspects less relevant to current trends receive less attention from most students, both in and out of the classroom.

The main indicator used in contextual reflective history learning is encouraging students to discover the relevance of historical events to the nation's current state. This trend is shown in the following graph.

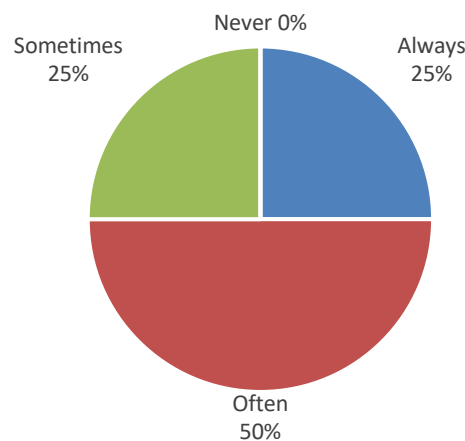


Figure 1. Tendencies in Contextualising Historical Events

These teachers' efforts demonstrate that, in general, history teachers in Banjarmasin City are aware of and actively cultivate contextual thinking in history teaching. Interviews revealed that these efforts occur during the reflection phase of learning and help students conclude. However, not all teachers can identify and demonstrate the relevance of the historical events they teach to current conditions. This trend is shown in the following graph.

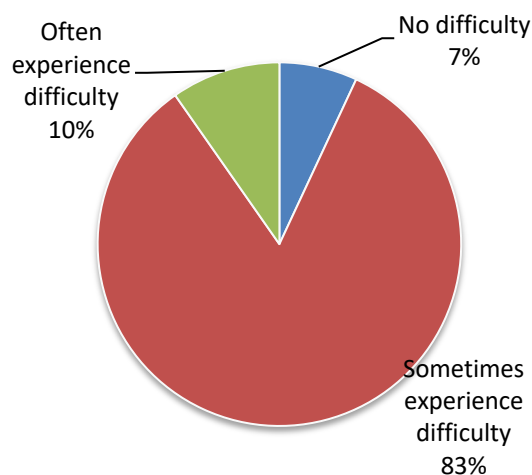


Figure 2. Tendency of Difficulty in Finding the Relevance of Historical Events to Current Conditions

Interviews revealed that the difficulty of identifying the relevance of historical events to current conditions makes learning history seem less appealing to students. This situation is also influenced by teachers' tendency to recommend or present less diverse forms of literacy to students.

Reflective learning has essentially been an approach developed since the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. A practical manifestation of this aspect of reflective learning is the inclusion of reflection activities at the end of lessons. However, in practice, reflective learning is often merely an accessory to learning activities. This is demonstrated by data showing that not all history teachers in public high schools in Banjarmasin City understand how reflective learning works.

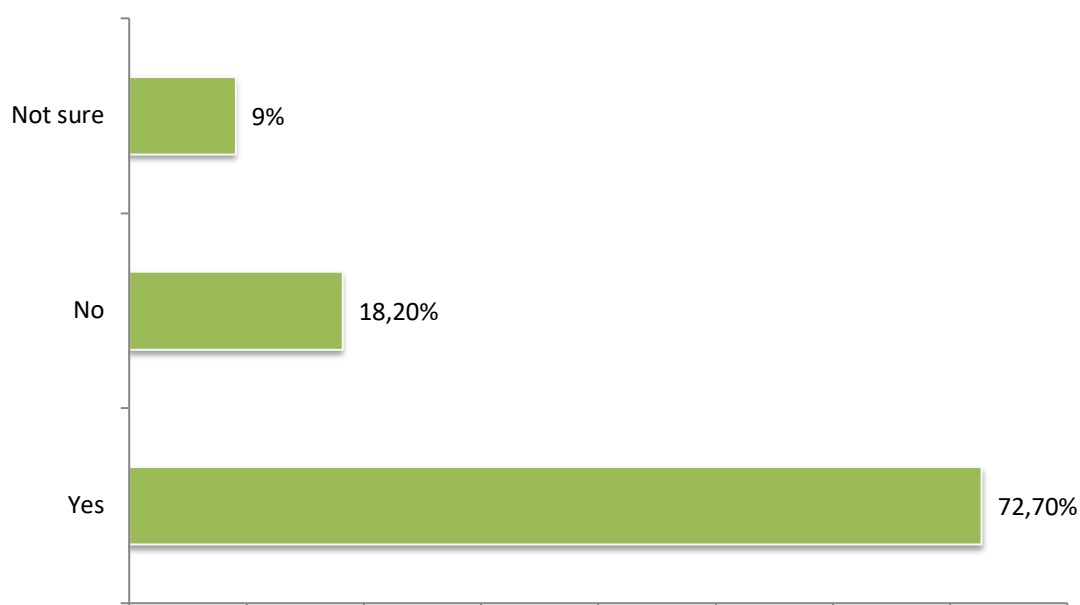


Figure 3. Reflective Learning Preferences

Based on interviews, it was discovered that a pattern frequently used by history teachers at public high schools in Banjarmasin City is to guide students through reflection at the end of the lesson. At this stage, teachers encourage students to identify what they learned or the life lessons from that day's history lesson. Another common pattern is to guide students to conclude at the end of the lesson.

During the end-of-lesson reflection activity, 25% of history teachers at public high schools in Banjarmasin City admitted to often directing students to interpret historical events in terms of their relevance to the nation's current situation. However, in other situations, 18.75% of history teachers in Banjarmasin City admitted to often struggling to encourage students to draw connections between historical events and current conditions. This difficulty stems from students' inability to understand the context of the events they are studying. Another factor teachers complain about is students' tendency to think in practical terms, which makes it difficult to encourage reflective thinking.

According to some teachers, one way to address these issues is by implementing problem-based learning. Students are asked to solve problems around them from a past perspective. According to history teachers, the challenge of this process is helping students understand the past so they can navigate the present and future. Furthermore, some history teachers tend to use Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) to address these conditions.

The forms of reflection carried out by History Teachers at State Senior High Schools in Banjarmasin City can be identified as follows:

- a) Ask students to explain what they have understood while training them to express their thoughts, both verbally and in writing.
- b) Check whether the learning objectives have been achieved by asking students directly in the last session. Alternatively, by doing practice questions and recording everything on the test sheet. *Lesson Plan* online
- c) Review and ask questions about what they have learned from previous learning. Reflection is divided into reflection on the material and learning as a whole, including students' personal experiences in the learning process.
- d) Write down values that can be applied in everyday life.
- e) Students are asked to write essays on aspects they learned during the learning activities.

These forms of reflection can serve as an alternative means of determining instructional treatments to foster students' affective connections with historical events.

Learning treatment to train students' affective connections with historical events

Based on the conceptual and theoretical review and research objectives in the previous section, there are at least two learning activities that students must undertake to achieve an affective connection to historical events. These two activities are critical reflection and historical contextualization. Reflective action is a conscious process that involves in-depth, evaluative, and critical thinking about experiences, assumptions, and the consequences of those actions. This action does not occur automatically or habitually, but rather arises from a process of reflection that considers the content of the experience (what happened), the process of understanding (how I interpreted it), and especially the basic assumptions that underlie my way of thinking. In the transformative learning framework developed by Mezirow (2015), reflective action occurs when someone not only revises their knowledge but also tests and, if necessary, changes the framework of thinking or perspectives that have been considered correct. Thus, reflective action is not simply an action that is "thought out" but rather one that has undergone critical examination of personal values, beliefs, and biases, resulting in more mature, contextual, and responsible attitudes or decisions. In history learning, for example, reflective action is seen when students not only conclude that a figure is a hero or a villain, but also, after understanding the complexity of the context of their time, take a conscious, argumentative, and non-historical value position.

In this case, an example of a theme used in learning is the issue of "Soekarno Mandor Romusha." To examine this theme, students are required to critically reflect on the information and narratives they obtain from learning sources. The first stage is content reflection. At this stage, students focus on what happened. They try to understand the available facts, data, and information. In history lessons, for example, students analyse the causes and effects of an event, the actors involved, and its socio-political context. The second stage is process reflection, in which students explain the sources of information used. The third stage is presupposition reflection, which is the core of critical reflection. At this stage, individuals no longer question the content or process of their thinking but begin to examine the deepest assumptions that shape their perspective. They ask, "Why do I view this event in a certain way?" What values do I use to judge the actions of historical figures?

Next, historical contextualization is carried out by identifying the temporal and spatial setting. Contextualization involves understanding the perspectives of historical actors. A person living in the past has a framework of thought shaped by the values and knowledge available at the time. One learning activity to practice these two skills is to ask students to write a short essay in response to a teacher-posed prompt.

Name: _____ Class: _____

LEMBAR AKTIVITAS INDIVIDU

Soekarno dan Romusha



Berdasarkan fakta sejarah yang telah dipelajari, bagaimanakah pandangan anda terhadap Romusha?

Figure 4. Student Activity Sheet for Essay Writing

Using the stages of critical reflection and historical contextualization as explained previously, students are asked to write a short essay on a student activity sheet. The resulting essay will serve as material for further research.

Analysis of the achievement of constructing affective connections to historical events through narrative analysis

Several issues demonstrate affective connections to historical events that students highlight in their essays.

Essay 1

ma di wilayah yang diduduki oleh Jepang, seperti Indonesia. Mereka dipaksa bekerja dalam kondisi yang sangat berat dan seringkali tanpa perawatan yang memadai, seperti kurangnya makanan dan perawatan medis. Banyak Romusha meninggal karena kelaparan, penyakit, atau kelelahan ekstrem, menggambarkan pelanggaran terhadap hak asasi manusia dan martabat manusia.

Perilaku tidak manusiawi terhadap Romusha mencerminkan bagian kelam dari sejarah kolonialisme dan penjajahan Jepang di Asia. Ini adalah pengingat yang penting tentang kejahatan perang dan pelanggaran hak asasi manusia yang pernah terjadi. Memahami sejarah ini penting untuk menghormati martabat manusia dan memastikan bahwa tragedi semacam itu tidak terulang di masa depan.

Essay 2

Kekejaman pada saat penggunaan romusha mencakup kondisi kerja yang ekstrem, kurangnya perawatan kesehatan, dan perlakuan tidak manusiawi terhadap para pekerja paksa. Mereka sering dipaksa untuk bekerja dalam kondisi yang berat dan tanpa hak-hak asasi manusia dasar. Diperkirakan jumlah Romusha yang meninggal sedikitnya 300.000 jiwa.

Lalu ada hal yang sering diperdebatkan yaitu keterlibatannya Bung Karno secara langsung terhadap pengerahan Romusha. Menurut saya hal tersebut keputusan yang cukup benar meskipun harus mengabaikan hati nurani, karena menurut saya tindakan Soekarno yang tampil sebagai bintang iklan program propaganda perekrutan Romusha bisa dilihat sebagai siasat untuk meraih kepercayaan pihak Jepang, bahwa Soekarno dan para tokoh yang bersedia berkolaborasi ke...

Figure 5. Sample Essays 1 and 2

Essays 1 and 2 highlight several issues that demonstrate affective connections, including human rights, human dignity, and welfare. These issues are relevant to the learning material, namely, Japanese atrocities. At this stage, students are generally able to grasp the messages and facts in the learning resources they use. In Essay 1, the issues raised are relevant to the theme of the material related to the history of Romusha. Students generally agree that Romusha constitutes a form of war crime.

In essay 2, the welfare of Romusha workers and Soekarno's role in the Romusha practice attracted students' attention. An interesting aspect of Soekarno's role as a Romusha foreman was that students held differing opinions, each based on their respective arguments. Using historical contextualization to examine these differences in students' interpretations, it appears that, at some level, students have a part of the affective connection, namely, understanding the reasons for the actions of historical figures.

The student's reflective narrative is relevant to several cognitive questions related to critical reflection and historical contextualization, including why certain historical events occur and how they unfold. Meanwhile, the student's reflective narrative is relevant to the criteria for affective problems of historical contextualization, including the role of historical figures in historical events and considerations of their actions. In the essay example, the student also realised that there were differences of opinion regarding how Soekarno's role as a central figure in the edutainment issue was used in learning. This tendency is evident in the historical contextualization through the use of the student's perspective. The essay provides an example of how a student interprets a historical figure's actions within a broader historical context. The narrative also suggests an emerging affective engagement with the historical event, although further analysis is required to establish the depth of this engagement.

Essay 3

dan kondisi kerja yang tidak manusiawi. Pandangan terhadap romusha seringkali dipenuhi dengan simpati dan empati terhadap penderitaan yang mereka alami sebagai korban dari kebijakan penjajah yang kejam.

Selain itu, romusha juga sering kali diabaikan dalam narasi sejarah resmi, dengan pengakuan dan penghormatan atas pengalaman dan penderitaan mereka yang terlambat dan terkadang tidak memadai. Meskipun begitu, banyak upaya telah dilakukan untuk mengabadikan ingatan mereka dan mengakui kontribusi mereka dalam memperjuangkan keadilan dan perdamaian setelah perang. Menegaskan pentingnya untuk mengingat dan mempelajari pelajaran dari masa lalu demi mencegah kebrutalan serupa terjadi di masa depan.

Essay 4

Meskipun di satu sisi, beberapa pandangan mungkin mencoba untuk menyoroti aspek kemanusiaan atau keterpaksaan yang dialami oleh Romusha, namun pada tingkat yang lebih luas, Romusha dianggap sebagai bagian penting dari narasi perlawanan dan perjuangan melawan penindasan kolonialisme dan perang. Banyak Romusha yang memilih untuk berjuang melawan pendudukan Jepang secara aktif, baik melalui sabotase atau bergabung dengan gerakan perlawanan di masa itu.

Namun, penting juga untuk dicatat bahwa pandangan tentang Romusha tidak selalu homogen. Ada perbedaan dalam cara pandang, beberapa orang mungkin lebih cenderung untuk menekankan peran Romusha dalam perjuangan kemerdekaan, sementara yang lain mungkin lebih fokus pada penderitaan dan kesengsaraan yang dialami oleh mereka selama masa kerja paksa.

Figure 6. Sample Essays 3 and 4

An interesting narrative in essay 3 includes the statement that the views of Romusha are often filled with sympathy and empathy for the suffering they experienced as victims of cruel colonial policies. This narrative demonstrates a synthesis of thought based on the historical facts presented in the learning resources. Overall, the student's narrative exceeded the researcher's expectations. However, when his behaviour during the learning activities was validated, the student demonstrated an understanding of the description he wrote.

Essay 4 raises a similar issue, albeit using different language. The narrative that Romusha is an important part of the resistance against colonialism, in the context of students' affective connections to historical events, is relevant to historical contextualization, namely, sensitivity to differences in social, political, and cultural conditions across the period studied (Endacott & Brooks, 2013). Essay 4 also demonstrates students' ability to grasp different views regarding the Romusha incident.

Essay samples 3 and 4 exemplify students' affective connection to historical events, as evidenced by reflective narratives. These examples illustrate how reflective essay-writing activities may provide opportunities for students to demonstrate critical reflection and historical

contextualization. However, the selected narratives alone do not establish the overall effectiveness of the learning activities. The reflective narratives presented by these students are relevant to several questions about why certain historical events occurred or how they occurred. In effect, these reflective narratives are relevant to the affective problem criteria of the roles of historical figures in historical events and the considerations behind their actions. Therefore, these essay examples can be justified as demonstrating students' affective connection to historical events in learning, as manifested in reflective narratives.

CONCLUSION

An affective connection to historical events is one of the skills students must possess to interpret them, thereby shaping broader perspectives. This ability can be developed through, among other things, critical reflection and historical contextualization. In studying history, students must truly understand the context in which events occur, according to the dimensions of humanity, space, and time. Furthermore, students are required to engage in critical reflection, which is useful, among other things, for understanding an event's causes and effects. Research results show that critical reflection and appropriate historical contextualization can help students develop an affective connection to historical events. Historical events are not merely seen as facts but also serve as a reference for interpreting future events and developing life values.

The findings of this study imply that history learning needs to be positioned more holistically by integrating cognitive and affective dimensions through strengthening students' emotional attachment to historical events. Theoretically, these results enrich the framework of historical thinking and transformative learning by emphasising that critical reflection and historical contextualization function not only as cognitive skills but also as mechanisms for the formation of historical meaning and awareness that influence life values. In practice, these implications require teachers and curriculum designers to develop learning strategies that encourage contextual analysis (space, time, and humanity) and case-based or narrative-based critical reflection, so that students not only understand history as facts but also internalise its meaning and relevance for present and future life.

This research is limited to critical reflection and contextualization variables in shaping students' affective connections to historical events. Other variables likely contribute to the formation of affective connections. These variables include perspective-taking, understanding facts, and various variables relevant to historical awareness, historical empathy, and historical thinking. This gap opens opportunities for further research.

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