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Research Article

Reimagining History Education: Historical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy, and the Development of Democratic Citizenship

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Abstract

History education has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, moving beyond traditional approaches centred on the memorisation of historical facts toward pedagogies that emphasise inquiry, critical reflection, and democratic engagement. This narrative review examines the interrelationships among historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education within contemporary history education research. Drawing upon international scholarship published between 2018 and 2025, alongside selected foundational works, the study synthesises literature related to historical reasoning, inquiry-based learning, democratic citizenship, global citizenship, and critical pedagogical approaches. The review identifies historical thinking as a disciplinary framework that enables learners to evaluate evidence, analyse multiple perspectives, and construct evidence-based interpretations of the past. Critical pedagogy complements these processes by promoting dialogue, reflection, participation, and critical examination of dominant narratives. The findings suggest that while historical inquiry contributes significantly to analytical and interpretive competencies, the development of democratic citizenship requires the deliberate integration of civic dialogue, ethical reflection, and participatory learning experiences. The review further highlights the growing relevance of history education in addressing contemporary challenges such as misinformation, political polarisation, globalisation, and digital media environments. Particular attention is given to the Indian educational context, including the implications of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 for competency-based and inquiry-oriented history teaching. The study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates historical thinking and critical pedagogy as complementary pathways toward citizenship education. It concludes that history education can play a vital role in preparing informed, reflective, and responsible citizens when disciplinary inquiry is effectively connected with democratic learning and civic engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

History education holds a central place in school curricula because it shapes how learners make sense of the past, navigate the present, and envision possible futures. It does more than transmit factual knowledge: it helps form identity, nurture cultural awareness, deepen social understanding, and foster civic participation. In increasingly diverse and digitally connected societies, the aims of history education have shifted. Memorising dates and national narratives is no longer enough. The field now calls for critical thinking, historical reasoning, and preparation for active, democratic citizenship.

For much of the twentieth century, history classrooms were often defined by content delivery and recall. Students learned to reproduce timelines, names, and events, but had few opportunities to interrogate sources, weigh evidence, or grapple with conflicting interpretations. Research in history education, historiography, and learning theory has since challenged that model. Scholars now argue that history is not simply a collection of settled facts, but a discipline built on inquiry, interpretation, and evidence-based argument (Seixas, 2017).

This reorientation has given rise to historical thinking: the set of intellectual practices through which historical knowledge is constructed and judged. It asks learners to analyse sources, evaluate evidence, consider multiple viewpoints, trace continuity and change, and build reasoned interpretations of the past. Far from treating history as a fixed record, this approach presents it as an interpretive and contested domain. Studies indicate that such methods deepen understanding, sharpen analytical skills, and strengthen students' capacity to engage critically with information in public life (Thorp & Persson, 2020; Wilke et al., 2022).

Alongside historical thinking, critical pedagogy has reshaped debates about purpose and practice. Drawing on Freire, critical pedagogy resists teacher-centred transmission and instead centres dialogue, reflection, participation, and the questioning of social realities. In history classrooms, it prompts students to interrogate dominant narratives, attend to issues of power and representation, and consider the ethical stakes of how the past is told. Learners become co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

The turn toward historical thinking and critical pedagogy has also renewed attention to the link between history education and citizenship education. Democratic societies depend on citizens who can assess evidence, engage across difference, participate in public discourse, and make informed judgments on complex issues. History offers a distinctive space to cultivate these dispositions by examining human experience, tracing causes and consequences, and confronting questions of justice, identity, and responsibility (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

Yet these three domains, historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education, are often studied in isolation. Research has advanced each strand, but their intersections remain underexamined. Important questions persist about how, and to what extent, historical thinking and critical pedagogy together support the development of democratic citizenship.

This study responds to that gap. Using a narrative review, it examines the conceptual and practical relationships among historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education. Drawing on recent international scholarship, it traces how these perspectives have redefined the purposes of history education, informed classroom practice, and contributed to debates on democratic participation. The review also addresses contemporary pressures — globalisation, digital media, misinformation, and teacher preparation — and considers implications for policy and professional practice.

By bringing these literatures into conversation, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about the role of history education in preparing learners for reflective, informed, and responsible participation in democratic life.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative narrative review approach to examine the relationship between historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education within contemporary history education research. Narrative reviews are particularly useful for synthesising theoretical perspectives, identifying emerging themes, and establishing conceptual connections across diverse bodies of literature (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Snyder, 2019).

The review draws primarily on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, and educational research reports published in the fields of history education, social studies education, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education. Particular attention was given to recent scholarship published between 2018 and 2025 to capture contemporary developments in historical thinking, inquiry-based learning, democratic citizenship, and global citizenship education. Seminal works that have significantly influenced the field, such as those by Paulo Freire, Peter Seixas, Reisman, and Westheimer and Kahne, were also included to provide theoretical and historical foundations for the discussion.

Literature was selected based on its relevance to one or more of the following themes: (a) historical thinking and historical reasoning, (b) critical pedagogy in history and social studies education, (c) inquiry-based approaches to history teaching, (d) citizenship and democratic education, and (e) contemporary challenges affecting history education, including digital literacy, misinformation, and globalisation. Studies were further examined for their conceptual contributions, empirical findings, and implications for classroom practice and teacher education.

The analysis followed a thematic synthesis approach. Relevant literature was read, compared, and organised into recurring conceptual categories. Through an iterative process of interpretation, six major themes emerged: historical thinking and the changing purposes of history education; critical pedagogy and the rejection of rote learning; historical inquiry and classroom practice; history education, citizenship, and democracy; global perspectives and contemporary challenges; and implications for teacher education and professional practice. These themes provided the organisational framework

for the chapter and guided the discussion of contemporary developments in history education.

Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the purpose of this review is to synthesise existing scholarship, identify areas of convergence and debate, and develop a conceptual understanding of how historical thinking and critical pedagogy can contribute to citizenship education in contemporary democratic societies.

3. Historical Thinking and the Changing Purposes of History Education

One of the clearest shifts in history education today is the move away from content-heavy instruction toward developing historical thinking. For decades, many classrooms treated history as a subject to be memorised, dates, battles, leaders, and national stories passed from teacher to student with little room for questioning. Substantive knowledge still matters, but scholars now argue that good history teaching should also build students' capacity to investigate, interpret, and weigh historical evidence, not just reproduce it (Seixas, 2017).

This change grew out of a problem: traditional approaches often framed history as a closed, settled account of the past. Historical thinking challenges that view. It treats history as an open-ended process of inquiry where interpretations are made, debated, and revised. Students are invited to think like historians, analysing sources, assessing evidence, placing events in context, and constructing arguments. The goal is to help them understand both what happened and how we come to know it.

Seixas's (2017) framework has been especially influential here. It outlines six interrelated concepts: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives, and the ethical dimension. Together, they give students a toolkit for interrogating the past. Rather than accepting narratives at face value, learners practice asking sharper questions and judging competing claims.

Evidence sits at the core. All historical knowledge is built from primary and secondary sources, and each source carries its own context, intent, and blind spots. Students, therefore, need to learn how to test reliability, credibility, and limits. That skill feels more urgent now than ever. In a digital landscape crowded with information, half-truths, and competing versions of history, the ability to evaluate evidence reaches beyond the classroom. It becomes a form of civic and information literacy.

Historical perspective-taking is another key dimension. It asks students to step into the worldviews of people in the past and to see how social, cultural, political, and economic conditions shaped their choices. This is not about excusing harm or suspending judgment. It is about resisting presentism and recognising the complexity of human decision-making. Research shows this practice can deepen contextual understanding, foster historical empathy, and expand students' appreciation of difference.

Continuity and change, along with cause and consequence, help students track patterns across time. They learn that change is rarely neat or linear, and that social and political outcomes usually emerge from multiple, overlapping forces. Seeing both what persists and what shifts gives learners a more nuanced grasp of how the past still speaks to the present.

This emphasis on historical thinking has also reopened questions about why we teach history at all. School history has long been tied to nation-building, shaping collective memory, identity, and cohesion. Those aims haven't disappeared. Yet recent scholarship stresses disciplinary understanding and critical inquiry alongside social goals. As Thorp and Persson (2020) point out, history education has to hold both: if it becomes only skills training, it risks losing social meaning; if it becomes only citizenship, it risks losing intellectual depth.

Importantly, this isn't just theory. Researchers are finding ways to bring historical thinking into practice and to see whether it works. Gestsdóttir, Van Boxtel, and Van Drie (2018), for example, developed the Teach-HTR observation framework to identify classroom practices that actually support historical reasoning. Tools like this matter because they help bridge the gap between conceptual models and day-to-day teaching.

Taken together, these shifts point to a broader change in what education is for. Contemporary life demands people who can sift evidence, interpret complexity, and engage thoughtfully with competing views. Historical thinking answers that demand by giving students analytical habits that travel beyond the history room. History, then, is not only about understanding the past. It is a discipline that equips learners to meet the intellectual, social, and civic challenges of the present.

4. Critical Pedagogy and the Rejection of Rote Learning

The rise of historical thinking has run parallel to growing interest in critical pedagogy within history education. If historical thinking equips learners with disciplinary tools to work with evidence and build interpretations, critical pedagogy widens the lens. It foregrounds dialogue, participation, reflection, and a close look at how power shapes knowledge. Both push back against older models of instruction that privilege memorisation and passive absorption.

For a long time, history classrooms in many systems looked much the same: teacher-led lectures, heavy reliance on textbooks, and assessment built around recall. Students were expected to take in official narratives and reproduce them on exams. That approach covers content, but it leaves little space for students to wrestle with sources or form their own readings of the past.

Critical pedagogy offers a different starting point. Drawing on Paulo Freire, it rejects what he called the "banking model" of education, where knowledge is deposited by the teacher into the student. Learning, instead, becomes a dialogic process. Students participate actively, questioning, discussing, and reflecting and knowledge is co-constructed rather than handed down. Education is not just about information transfer; it is about intellectual and social transformation.

In history education, this means inviting students to ask how narratives get made, whose perspectives count, and whose voices are missing. Historical accounts are never neutral. They are interpretations formed within particular social, political, and

cultural settings. Students are therefore encouraged to probe assumptions, entertain multiple viewpoints, and consider how knowledge and power intersect.

Critical pedagogy and historical thinking overlap in important ways. Historical thinking asks students to test evidence, weigh competing claims, and argue with reasons. Critical pedagogy extends that by prompting reflection on what those interpretations mean for the present — for questions of justice, identity, and civic life. Together, they make for a more active, reflective way of learning history.

Even so, traditional practices persist. Research from Zimbabwe and Ghana shows that lectures, textbook summaries, note-taking, and exam drills still dominate many history lessons (Hlungwani, 2021; Chimbunde et al., 2023; Ogah, 2023). The result is an emphasis on recall over reasoning. The gap between what curricula aspire to and what happens in classrooms remains wide.

The reasons are familiar. High-stakes exams, overcrowded classes, thin resources, pressure to cover syllabi, and limited professional support all make inquiry-based teaching hard to sustain. Hlungwani (2021) found that many teachers actually favour student-centred and critical approaches, but practical constraints keep them from using those methods consistently. Curriculum change alone is not enough; teachers need structural support to make the shift.

When critical pedagogical approaches are implemented well, the payoff is real. Chimbunde, Moreeng, and Chawira (2023) describe a transformative-interactive model that blends critical pedagogy with collaboration, problem-solving, and active participation. Their work suggests students become more engaged when they investigate historical questions, debate alternative interpretations, and build their own understandings.

Dialogue is central to this process. Through discussion and joint inquiry, students meet perspectives different from their own and learn to back claims with evidence. They come to see that historical understanding is often contested, and that disagreement can deepen insight rather than shut it down. Those are habits that matter beyond school, especially in democratic societies where reasoned public talk is essential.

Critical pedagogy also helps students link the past to the present. Themes like inequality, identity, colonialism, migration, human rights, and social justice can be explored through historical inquiry, tracing how current challenges have historical roots. As Burgos-Videla, Parada-Ulloa, and Martínez-Díaz (2025) argue, historical discourse and method strengthen critical thinking by training learners to analyse context, causation, continuity, change, and multiple perspectives. Students move from surface-level reactions toward more careful, layered analysis.

None of this means abandoning historical content. Inquiry needs substance. Students have to know contexts, events, and concepts to evaluate evidence and make informed interpretations. The aim is not to swap knowledge for skills, but to weave them together so that understanding becomes both deeper and more critical.

In the end, critical pedagogy and historical thinking share a core commitment: active learning, reflection, and reasoning from evidence. Together, they challenge the idea that history education is simply the delivery of fixed facts. They point instead to a form of learning that is intellectually rigorous, socially relevant, and oriented toward democratic life — one that can better prepare students to think thoughtfully about the world they inherit.

5. Historical Inquiry and Classroom Practice

Historical inquiry sits at the heart of history education today because it turns historical thinking from an idea into something students actually do. If historical thinking is about helping learners analyse evidence, weigh interpretations, and make reasoned arguments, then inquiry is the classroom pathway that gets them there. That is why inquiry-based learning has become one of the defining approaches in contemporary history teaching.

Traditional models tend to start with answers: the teacher or textbook delivers a settled account, and students take notes. Inquiry flips that sequence. Learning begins with questions, not conclusions. Students become investigators of the past, sifting through sources, comparing accounts, spotting patterns, and building explanations that are anchored in evidence. In this way, the classroom mirrors the work historians actually do, and students see that historical knowledge is made through interpretation rather than simply uncovered as a fixed fact. A well-known example is Reisman's (2012) Reading Like a Historian curriculum. It puts primary and secondary sources directly in students' hands and asks them to interrogate authorship, context, reliability, and corroboration. Studies of the program found gains not only in historical reasoning, but also in reading comprehension and content knowledge. It pushes back on the idea that inquiry means less attention to substance. Done well, inquiry deepens conceptual understanding while it builds disciplinary skill.

Students now have far more to work with than a single textbook chapter. Letters, diaries, photographs, maps, oral histories, newspapers, government records, digital archives, and museum collections can all become material for investigation. Handling these sources helps learners see that evidence is messy, partial, and shaped by perspective. Understanding the past, they come to realize, requires critical evaluation rather than passive acceptance.

Research backs the value of structured inquiry. Wilke, Depaepe, and Van Nieuwenhuyse (2022) showed that explicit instruction in historical inquiry significantly strengthened students' reasoning. Learners got better at posing historical questions, judging evidence, and crafting interpretations supported by sources. Their work makes a strong case that inquiry is not just a teaching trick; it is a robust way to build disciplinary understanding.

But the same study also points to a limit. While reasoning improved, students' democratic attitudes and civic dispositions shifted much less. Historical inquiry sharpens analytical competence, yet that does not automatically translate into civic

engagement. If history education also aims to nurture democratic citizenship, inquiry needs to be paired with deliberate space for dialogue, ethical reflection, and civic participation.

What happens in the classroom matters just as much as the model. Miralles-Sánchez, Rodríguez-Medina, and Gómez-Carrasco (2025) found that teacher talk can open or close opportunities for historical reasoning. A classroom dominated by teacher explanation gives students few chances to ask their own questions or wrestle with evidence. Classrooms that make room for discussion, questioning, and joint investigation tend to draw students more deeply into historical thinking.

Plenty of strategies can support this kind of work. Structured debates, document-based investigations, collaborative source analysis, local history projects, role-plays, and inquiry-oriented research tasks all let students engage actively with evidence. These approaches push learners to form arguments, weigh competing interpretations, and defend conclusions with reasons grounded in sources. The emphasis moves from memorising toward investigating and interpreting.

Digital tools have widened the field even further. Online archives, virtual museums, digitised collections, and interactive resources give students access to authentic materials that were once out of reach. Yet the same abundance creates new demands. Learners have to judge the credibility of online sources, spot misinformation, and tell the difference between evidence-based claims and unsupported ones. Historical inquiry, then, now overlaps with digital and media literacy.

None of this is easy to implement. Curriculum coverage, exam pressure, limited time, scarce resources, and uneven student preparation all constrain inquiry-based teaching. Some students, especially those used to teacher-directed lessons, can find open-ended investigation unsettling at first. Thoughtful scaffolding and consistent teacher support are essential.

Even with those challenges, the case for historical inquiry is strong. By involving students in the process of making historical knowledge, it cultivates critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and interpretive skills. It shows history as complex and contested rather than a list of settled facts. In doing so, it prepares learners not only for academic work, but for informed, reflective participation in democratic life.

6. History Education, Citizenship, and Democracy

The link between history education and citizenship has long been central to how we think about schooling. Across many countries, history has been seen as a key way to build civic identity, social cohesion, and democratic participation. The basic idea is straightforward: understanding the past helps people make better sense of the present and take part more effectively in public life. But both citizenship and history education have changed. As social and political conditions shift, so do expectations about what kind of citizens schools should help shape.

For much of the modern era, citizenship education was tied closely to nation-building. School history often highlighted national achievements, institutions, traditions, and shared identities to encourage unity and loyalty. Those aims still influence curricula in many places. Yet today's democracies ask for more than national identification. Citizens are expected to assess information critically, engage with difference, take part in public discussion, and respond to complex social problems. That broader view has renewed attention to how history education can support democratic life.

Historical thinking gives this work a strong base. Many skills used in historical inquiry look a lot like the skills of informed citizenship: evaluating evidence, weighing competing interpretations, recognising bias, considering multiple perspectives, and making reasoned judgments. When students work with sources and debates, they practice habits of mind that matter beyond the classroom. They learn to test claims and build argument capacities that are just as relevant to civic decision-making.

Research suggests this connection is real, but it depends on how classrooms operate. Fuentes-Moreno, Sabariego-Puig, and Ambrós-Pallarés (2020) found that social and civic competencies grow when students learn through collaboration, dialogue, and reflection rather than simply receiving information. The democratic potential of history, then, rests not only on what is taught but on how it is taught.

Two concepts help bridge history and citizenship: historical consciousness and historical empathy. Historical consciousness is about seeing connections between the past, the present, and future. It helps students recognise that historical processes still shape social, political, and cultural realities today. With that awareness, learners can place current issues in a wider context and grasp the long reach of human choices.

Historical empathy works alongside it. It asks students to understand people in the past within the conditions of their time — social, cultural, political, and economic. This is not about endorsing past actions. It is about understanding why individuals and groups acted as they did, given their circumstances. Studies indicate that historical empathy can increase appreciation for diversity, tolerance for differing views, and a more nuanced grasp of human behaviour. Those dispositions line up closely with democratic values.

Still, we should not assume that historical thinking automatically produces stronger citizenship. The link is not automatic. Wilke, Depaepe, and Van Nieuwenhuyse (2022) ran a cluster-randomised intervention and found that inquiry-based history instruction clearly improved students' historical thinking, but its effect on democratic dispositions was much smaller. Disciplinary skill gives an important foundation, but it is not enough on its own to foster active citizenship. Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) framework helps clarify what is at stake. They describe three models of citizenship education: the personally responsible citizen, who emphasises good character and following rules; the participatory citizen, who takes part in community and civic life; and the justice-oriented citizen, who examines social structures and addresses root causes of inequality. History education can support any of these, depending on the content chosen, the questions asked, and the teaching methods used. That is why curriculum debates

are often really debates about citizenship; about the kind of public life we want schools to prepare students for.

Those debates play out in the politics of curriculum itself. Bedford (2023) shows how arguments over national histories, Indigenous histories, colonial legacies, and collective memory reflect competing visions of citizenship and identity. Choices about whose stories are told, which events are foregrounded, and how controversial topics are handled are not just academic. They shape how students understand belonging, diversity, justice, and what it means to participate.

Classroom practice matters too. Democracy depends on people who can disagree respectfully, assess evidence, and explain their views with reasons. History classrooms can build those capacities when students discuss contested issues, examine multiple perspectives, and defend interpretations with evidence. Through that work, learners see that disagreement is not a threat to democracy but part of how it functions.

In all, history education has real potential to strengthen democratic citizenship. Historical thinking, historical consciousness, and historical empathy offer intellectual and ethical groundwork for civic life. But realising that potential takes more than disciplinary instruction alone. It requires the deliberate weaving together of inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and opportunities for democratic participation. When those elements come together, history education can help prepare students to engage with society thoughtfully, critically, and responsibly.

5. Global Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges

History education today takes place in a world marked by rapid technological change, growing cultural diversity, migration, globalisation, and political polarisation. These shifts have reshaped what we expect from schools. Conversations about historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship now reach beyond national borders to include global awareness, intercultural understanding, digital literacy, and what it means to participate in a connected world.

For much of the twentieth century, citizenship education focused mainly on building national identity and loyalty. Curricula emphasised shared histories, traditions, and collective memory to foster social cohesion. Those goals have not disappeared. Yet many of the problems societies face — climate change, migration, public health crises, technological disruption, economic interdependence, and global inequality — cut across borders. Educational scholarship has therefore pushed for preparing learners as both national and global citizens.

History is well placed to support that broader mission. It helps students trace the historical origins of today's global issues. Colonialism, industrialisation, globalization, migration, and cultural exchange have all shaped the political, economic, and social realities we live with now. Through historical inquiry, learners can see the long arcs that link past and present, and come to understand how interconnected human societies really are. Recent work on global citizenship education makes this connection explicit. Mellado-Moreno and Burgos (2025) set out a multidimensional framework that brings together critical thinking, participation, social responsibility, identity, and intercultural understanding. They argue that citizenship education must equip young people to engage responsibly with concerns that are both local and global. History contributes by asking students to examine connections across societies and to appreciate the complexity of interdependence.

Digital technologies have changed the landscape of history teaching. Archives, museums, platforms, and multimedia resources have opened access to sources from around the world. Students can now work directly with primary materials from different cultural and geographic contexts in ways that were impossible a generation ago. That supports inquiry and expands what counts as evidence in the classroom.

But the same digital environment brings new risks. Misinformation and disinformation spread quickly. Historical claims circulate on social media, videos, and websites, often stripped of context or evidence. At times, pieces of the past are used selectively to advance political aims, harden identities, or polarise debate. This is where historical thinking remains vital. Skills like source evaluation, contextualization, corroboration, and evidence-based reasoning map closely onto what digital and media literacy demands. Students who learn to judge a historical source are better prepared to judge information they encounter online.

Political polarisation adds another layer. Questions of colonialism, race, migration, nationalism, identity, and memory can provoke sharp disagreement. History classrooms often sit at the intersection of past and present politics. That can be tense, but it also creates openings for democratic learning. Students can practice engaging with controversy, listening to different perspectives, and making arguments rooted in evidence.

Gozálvez and Calandín (2025) argue that declining civic trust and social fragmentation call for a renewed focus on dialogue, cooperation, and participatory civic education. Their point lines up with both historical thinking and critical pedagogy: evidence-based reasoning, reflective inquiry, and respectful engagement with difference are not add-ons. They are core to democratic learning.

Comparative studies show there is no single template for doing this work. Mork's (2023) analysis of Norwegian and Swedish curricula traces a move from content delivery toward inquiry, though challenges in practice persist. Darvai and Somogyvári (2025) show how citizenship education in socialist Hungary reflected specific political priorities, a reminder that educational aims are always shaped by context. Lypp (2025), writing on Germany, stresses citizenship as self-reflection, dialogue, and personal responsibility. These cases differ, but they share concerns with critical thinking, participation, and democratic engagement.

Across contexts, common patterns appear. More systems are emphasising inquiry, multiperspectivity, critical reasoning, intercultural understanding, and active participation. Citizenship education is shifting from passing on set values to preparing learners for uncertainty, diversity, and rapid change. History matters here because so many of today's global

challenges have deep historical roots. Without historical analysis, those challenges are hard to grasp in full.

In this setting, bringing together historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education takes on real importance. Combined, they offer learners knowledge, analytical skill, ethical awareness, and democratic dispositions needed to navigate an interconnected world. By fostering critical engagement with the past and informed reflection on the present, history education can help form citizens who act responsibly at local, national, and global levels.

Table 1: Relationship Between Historical Thinking, Critical Pedagogy, and Citizenship Education

Historical Thinking	Critical Pedagogy	Citizenship Education
Evidence evaluation	Critical reflection	Informed decision-making
Source analysis	Questioning dominant narratives	Civic literacy
Perspective-taking	Dialogue and participation	Democratic engagement
Historical reasoning	Social awareness	Responsible citizenship
Multiperspectivity	Transformative learning	Democratic citizenship

Source: Developed by the author based on the reviewed literature (Freire, 1970; Seixas, 2017; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Wilke et al., 2022).

7. Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Practice

In the end, whether historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education actually take hold comes down to teachers and the conditions they work in. Curricula can call for inquiry, participation, and critical engagement, but those ideas only become real inside classrooms. That makes teacher preparation and ongoing professional development decisive. They determine whether new approaches to history education stay on paper or become everyday practice.

Research keeps finding the same tension: a gap between what curricula intend and what happens in lessons. Many systems have rewritten history syllabi to stress inquiry, source analysis, critical thinking, and student-centred work. Yet classrooms often remain shaped by lectures, textbook coverage, and exam prep. This is not usually because teachers reject change. More often, it is practical that crowded curricula, limited time, large classes, assessment pressure, and too little institutional support.

So, teacher education has to do more than deliver content knowledge. Future teachers need to understand how historical thinking actually develops in students. Strong pedagogical content knowledge lets them turn disciplinary ideas into learning experiences that work. Knowing the facts is necessary, but not enough. Teachers have to design environments where students can analyse evidence, weigh interpretations, build arguments, and carry out historical inquiry. That matters because historical thinking is not intuitive. Concepts like significance, continuity and change, cause and consequence, evidence, historical perspective, and ethical judgment all need deliberate teaching. Teacher preparation should therefore give candidates direct experience with inquiry. They need to do historical investigations themselves and reflect on the teaching moves that support reasoning. You cannot teach inquiry well if you have never lived it.

For teachers already in schools, professional development cannot be a one-off workshop. Expectations shift as research evolves, technology changes, and educational priorities move. Learning has to be sustained. Mentoring, teacher networks, professional learning communities, and classroom-based action research all help teachers refine practice and respond to new challenges. We now have better tools to support that work. Gestsdóttir, Van Boxtel, and Van Drie (2018) created the Teach-HTR framework to identify what historical reasoning and inquiry actually look like in classrooms. Frameworks like this give teachers, researchers, and educators a shared language. They make it possible to observe practice, name what is working, and see where to improve. They turn reflection into something concrete.

Digital technologies add both possibility and responsibility. Online archives, virtual museums, interactive maps, and multimedia collections expand what students can investigate. They bring diverse sources and perspectives into reach and can make inquiry more engaging. But using tech well takes more than clicking the right buttons. Teachers have to help students judge credibility, spot misinformation, read context, and reason from evidence in digital spaces. Historical literacy and digital literacy are now intertwined.

Teachers also need support for handling controversial and sensitive history. Colonialism, nationalism, religion, identity, inequality, conflict, and historical injustice raise strong emotions and conflicting views. Educators have to facilitate respectful discussion, manage disagreement, and build classrooms where students can express and defend evidence-based positions without fear. Those skills are essential if history rooms are going to function as spaces for democratic learning.

Classroom culture matters just as much as lesson plans. Research shows that civic competencies grow when students take part in discussion, collaborative inquiry, shared decision-making, and reflection. Teachers are not just delivering content. They are setting the conditions for a democratic experience. By encouraging participation, critical reflection, and respectful debate, they help students develop the habits and dispositions of citizenship.

None of this happens in isolation. Curriculum reform will stall if assessment still rewards memorisation and recall. If we value historical thinking, then tests and assignments need to value evidence evaluation, reasoning, interpretation, and argument. Schools and systems also have to provide time, resources, materials, and professional learning that make innovative teaching possible.

From a policy view, investing in teacher education is one of the clearest levers we have. Teachers sit at the centre of any effort to develop historically informed, critically engaged, democratic learners. So, reform should put sustained support for teacher learning alongside changes to curriculum and assessment. Put simply, the future of history education rests on more than good theory. It rests on teachers who are prepared and supported to bring historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education to life. When that happens, classrooms become places where students investigate evidence, reflect critically, talk through differences, and build the competencies needed for informed, responsible participation in society.

8. History Education in the Indian Context: NEP 2020 and Contemporary Challenges

The debates about history education in India echo many of the global shifts outlined earlier, but they are also shaped by the country's own social, cultural, and educational realities. India is one of the world's largest and most diverse democracies, and that creates a particular challenge: how to design history teaching that builds historical understanding while also supporting national integration, respect for diversity, critical thinking, and democratic citizenship. These aims have come into sharper focus with recent reforms, especially the National Education Policy 2020. For a long time, history classrooms in India have been defined by heavy syllabi, textbook reliance, and exams that reward recall. Students often spend their time memorising events, dates, leaders, and political timelines. That approach does build a base of factual knowledge, but it leaves little room for inquiry, source work, interpretation, or critical reflection. As a result, questions have grown about whether this kind of history education actually prepares young people for the demands of democratic life today.

NEP 2020 signals a shift. It calls for competency-based learning, critical thinking, experiential education, problem-solving, and more multidisciplinary ways of working with knowledge. The focus moves from content coverage to higher-order skills and learner-centred teaching. Those priorities line up closely with historical thinking and inquiry-based learning. Both ask students to work with evidence, consider multiple viewpoints, and develop reasoned interpretations rather than simply reproducing what the textbook says.

The policy also puts weight on constitutional values, democratic participation, ethical reasoning, and global citizenship. That reinforces an older idea: that history and citizenship education are closely tied. By studying India's past independence struggles, the making of the Constitution, social reform movements, and the building of democratic institutions, students can gain a deeper sense of civic responsibility, equality, diversity, and social justice. History, then, has real potential to help form informed and responsible citizens within India's democratic framework.

India's diversity makes historical thinking and multi-perspectivity even more important. The country's past is shaped by many languages, religions, regions, and cultural traditions. If history teaching sticks to a single narrative, it misses that complexity. Classrooms that invite multiple perspectives not only deepen historical understanding; they also nurture tolerance, empathy, and respect for difference. Those qualities matter in a plural democracy. Still, the challenges are real. Exams continue to drive what happens in classrooms. Teachers and students often feel pressure to cover content and memorise facts rather than spend time on inquiry and analysis. Large classes, limited periods, scarce resources, and uneven teacher preparation all make it harder to shift toward inquiry-based work. The gap between what policy envisions and what happens day to day remains wide.

Digital technologies add both openings and complications. Access to online archives, virtual museums, and educational platforms has grown quickly. That creates new chances for students to work directly with sources and to investigate the past for themselves. But it also means learners must sort through vast amounts of information, some of it unreliable or deliberately misleading. The skills at the heart of historical thinking — evaluating sources, placing them in context, checking them against other evidence, and reasoning from evidence — are now essential in the Indian classroom as well.

Teacher education sits at the centre of this. NEP 2020 will only succeed if teachers are ready to use learner-centred methods and guide historical inquiry. Preparation programs need to give teachers both strong disciplinary grounding and practical strategies for supporting historical thinking, reflection, and democratic dialogue. And professional development cannot be a one-time event. Teachers need ongoing opportunities to adapt to new curricula, new tools, and new expectations. Looking ahead, much depends on whether policy, curriculum, assessment, and teacher education can move together. If assessments keep rewarding recall, inquiry will struggle. If we align assessment with historical thinking, expand space for inquiry, and strengthen teacher preparation, the quality of history education can improve. That would serve academic goals, but more importantly, it would help develop students who are critically informed, socially responsible, and ready to take part in democratic life.

In this light, bringing together historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education offers a useful way to reimagine history teaching in India. By centring inquiry, reflection, dialogue, and evidence-based reasoning, history classrooms can move beyond rote learning and meet the broader aims set out in NEP 2020. Done well, that approach can deepen historical understanding and strengthen democratic citizenship for the next generation of learners.

9. Conceptual Framework

The present review proposes a conceptual framework that integrates historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education within contemporary history education. Although these concepts have often been studied independently, the literature suggests that they are closely interconnected and collectively contribute to the development of informed and democratically engaged citizens. Historical thinking provides the disciplinary foundation for history education by enabling

learners to evaluate evidence, analyse historical sources, consider multiple perspectives, and construct reasoned interpretations. Through these processes, students develop analytical and interpretive skills that support critical engagement with historical and contemporary issues.

Critical pedagogy complements historical thinking by emphasising dialogue, reflection, participation, and the examination of power relations. Rather than treating students as passive recipients of knowledge, critical pedagogy encourages active inquiry and the questioning of dominant narratives. This approach creates opportunities for learners to connect historical understanding with contemporary social realities and democratic concerns. Citizenship education represents the broader social objective of these educational processes. Democratic citizenship requires individuals who can evaluate information critically, engage constructively with diverse perspectives, participate in public discourse, and make informed decisions regarding social and political issues. Historical thinking and critical pedagogy provide important pathways through which these competencies can be developed.

The proposed conceptual framework suggests that historical thinking and critical pedagogy function as complementary pedagogical processes that contribute to citizenship development. Historical inquiry promotes evidence-based reasoning and interpretive understanding, while critical pedagogy encourages reflection, dialogue, and social awareness. Together, these processes foster democratic competencies such as critical judgment, empathy, civic participation, and responsible citizenship.

The framework can be represented as follows:

Historical Thinking

(Source Analysis, Evidence Evaluation, Historical Reasoning)

↓

Inquiry-Based Learning

↓

Critical Pedagogy

(Dialogue, Reflection, Multi-perspectivity, Social Awareness)

↓

Democratic Competencies

(Critical Thinking, Historical Empathy, Civic Understanding)

↓

Citizenship Education

(Informed, Reflective, and Responsible Democratic Participation)

This framework provides a theoretical basis for understanding how history education can contribute simultaneously to disciplinary learning and democratic citizenship in contemporary societies.

10. Implications for Future Research

We now have a much clearer picture of how historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education relate to one another. But there are still important questions to take up. One is context. Most of the existing work comes from a limited set of countries and school systems. We need to know more about how these approaches play out in different settings, especially in developing countries and multilingual societies where classrooms, resources, and cultural histories vary widely. What does inquiry-based history look like there, and what supports or constrains it?

Technology is another open area. Digital archives, artificial intelligence, and social media are changing how students encounter the past. They expand access to sources, but they also flood learners with competing claims and misinformation. Future research should look closely at how these tools shape historical understanding and civic engagement. Do they strengthen students' ability to evaluate evidence, or do they make it harder? How do young people navigate online historical narratives, and what kinds of classroom practices actually help? Time matters too. We still do not know enough about long-term effects. Does learning to think historically in school lead to stronger democratic dispositions years later? Longitudinal studies that follow students beyond the classroom could tell us whether these skills stick, and whether they translate into civic participation, media literacy, and informed decision-making over time.

Teacher education also deserves closer attention. We talk a lot about inquiry-based and citizenship-oriented history teaching, but we know less about how to prepare teachers to do it well. Research that examines which models of professional learning actually change classroom practice would be valuable. What kinds of training, mentoring, or collaborative work help teachers move from content coverage toward dialogue, reflection, and evidence-based inquiry? Pursuing these lines of inquiry will give us a better sense of how history education can meet the demands of the twenty-first century. The goal is not just to advance scholarship, but to strengthen practice to make sure history classrooms keep supporting democratic participation and informed citizenship in a world that is complex, connected, and rapidly changing.

11. CONCLUSION

This review set out to explore how historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education intersect in current history education research. What emerges is clear: history teaching has changed. Over the last few decades, it has moved away from an emphasis on memorisation and content delivery toward approaches built on inquiry, interpretation, critical reflection, and democratic engagement. That shift speaks to a wider concern — how to prepare learners for social, political, and informational worlds that are increasingly complex and contested. Historical thinking now stands as a central framework for how we understand historical knowledge itself and how it is made, tested, and shared. When students work

with evidence, consider context, practice perspective-taking, and develop historical reasoning, they gain analytical skills that reach well beyond the history classroom. They learn to question information, recognise that interpretations differ, and make arguments grounded in evidence. Those capacities are becoming indispensable for life in democratic societies. Critical pedagogy widens the frame. By centring dialogue, participation, reflection, and a close look at power, it pushes back against passive models of learning. Students become co-creators of knowledge rather than recipients of it. In history education, this means engaging with narratives critically, asking who is represented and who is left out, and linking the past to present questions of justice and representation.

One of the key insights here is that the link between historical thinking and democratic citizenship matters, but it is not automatic. Inquiry-based history does a great deal for students' analytical and interpretive abilities. Yet democratic dispositions, the willingness to deliberate, reflect ethically, collaborate, and participate, need deliberate space in the classroom. Effective citizenship education has to weave disciplinary inquiry together with opportunities for civic discussion and democratic practice. The review also states that history education is increasingly relevant in a global digital age. Misinformation, polarisation, cultural diversity, migration, and global interdependence all press on schools. Responding to their calls for critical evaluation of information, intercultural understanding, and informed participation. Historical thinking, combined with critical pedagogy and citizenship education, offers a way to meet those demands. It gives learners knowledge, skills, and dispositions to engage thoughtfully with complex social realities. None of this works without teachers. Curriculum change alone cannot transform classrooms. Real change requires sustained investment in teacher education, ongoing professional development, assessment that matches our goals, and institutional support. Teachers need to be prepared to guide historical inquiry and, just as importantly, to create classrooms where dialogue, critical reflection, and democratic participation are the norm. By drawing together scholarship on historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education, this review clarifies how these strands connect. Together, they offer a framework for seeing how history education can help form informed, reflective, and responsible citizens. There is more work to do. We need to know more about how historical thinking and citizenship education play out in different cultural and institutional settings. We also need studies on how digital tools, global citizenship initiatives, and teacher education programs shape the uptake of inquiry-based, democratic approaches. That research will matter for strengthening history's role in democratic life in the twenty-first century.

Ultimately, history education is not only about understanding the past. It is about equipping learners to engage critically with the present and to help shape the future. When historical thinking, critical pedagogy, and citizenship education are brought together effectively, history classrooms can become spaces for inquiry, reflection, democratic dialogue, and civic learning. Through that work, history education contributes to academic growth and, more importantly, to the making of active, informed citizens in a complex world.

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