

A Model for Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Teaching History: Lessons from Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Developing critical thinking skills in students has proved to be elusive for Zimbabwean history teachers. Using critical theory and its strands of critical pedagogy and constructivism, this qualitative case study engrained in the interpretive paradigm investigates whether the current practices by history teachers enhance the development of critical thinking skills and then discusses how classroom practitioners can develop critical thinking in teaching. A multiple case study design was adopted to generate data using document analysis, interviews and lessons observations. The sample, chosen for detailed study through purposive sampling, included three history teachers from three secondary schools in the Gweru Urban District in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. Evidence from the study reveals that history teachers continue to use teacher-centred methods of teaching, textbooks as the only resource, poor questioning techniques, and traditional assessment procedures that do not promote the development of critical thinking skills. It is recommended that history teaching must focus on the development of critical thinking skills rather than on the mastery of content for sustainable development to happen as dictated by the demands of the 21st century. To support that, the study proposes a transformative-interactive model to enhance the development of critical thinking skills. The research concludes that critical thinking skills do not happen arbitrarily but are developed. This study extends scholarship on history teaching by challenging and encouraging teachers to reflect on their role in the teaching of history to transform them into the designers of, and researchers of, curriculum methodology.

KEYWORDS

Critical thinking skills; transformative-interactive model; teaching history; sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

New demands emerged in the last quarter of the 20th and early 21st centuries, including those for sustainable development, better products, and alternative energy sources. These demands also prompted the development of new business and technological solutions as well as faster and more effective means of communication (Willingham, 2019). Governments, businesses, and society constantly push for educational reforms that can generate human capital with critical thinking skills that are viewed as the panacea to most problems (Giacomazzi et al., 2022). As a guide to belief or action, critical thinking skills are the intellectual processes of actively conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication (Thompson, 2011; Willingham, 2019). When applied to the teaching of history, understanding the chronology, locating historical data, interpreting, imagining, and rationalizing are all examples of critical thinking abilities in historical thinking (Maria et al., 2019). These skills enable history learners to cognitively understand, assess and evaluate, the historical information with the aim to discern their problems in the context of their community.

Despite all the benefits of critical thinking skills alluded to above, the transition to skill based approach has not been an easy process as it has been fraught with insurmountable challenges. The failure to develop critical thinking in history teaching has been reported in several studies (Dube & Moyo, 2022; Goburdhun, 2022; Godsell, 2022). While some of these studies attributed the challenges to educational practices that still favour memorisation and rote-learning (Goburdhun, 2022), others claim that history teaching is still arguably examination-orientated (Mitana et al., 2018). Available data indicate that a classroom pedagogy that prioritises factual recall over more complex cognitive abilities like synthesis and evaluation is also in use, which may have an impact on students' thinking processes (Goburdhun, 2022). Acknowledgment of the importance of the critical thinking skills in the global economy ignited reforms in the history curriculum across the globe. As such, several works from diverse countries for example in Lithuania (Penkauskiene, 2010), South Africa (Godsell, 2022), Mauritius (Goburdhun, 2022) Turkey (Aktekin, 2013; Polat, 2020), Malaysia (Maria et al., 2019) and Zimbabwe (Dombo & Mujere, 2023) concur that many countries started teaching history in a way that prioritises critical thinking abilities over memorisation of dates and names of people and locations. That development was an acknowledgement that with rote learning, students become overloaded with historical facts that they find meaningless or unimportant (Wineburg, 2018). As advice, Godsell (2022) claims that teaching history devoid of critical thinking abilities might turn it into an unthinking political instrument.

While previous studies might have addressed skills based teaching in history elsewhere (Godsell, 2022; Goburdhun, 2022; Maria et al., 2019), very few studies have investigated whether the current pedagogical practices employed by history teachers in Zimbabwe enhance the development of critical thinking skills. Scholarship is also scanty on the availability of models that can be employed to develop critical thinking skills in the teaching of history. So, this study

explores the flaws existing in historical teaching methods in Zimbabwe using the critical theory as a lens before proposing a model to foster critical thinking in students. By examining the practices that history teachers currently use to develop students' critical thinking skills, the current study adds to the body of knowledge on history teaching. It also offers history teachers and curriculum designers an alternative transformative-interactive model to foster students' critical thinking skills that can be used to achieve sustainable development.

Problem Statement

Around the world, nations recognise that fostering critical thinking is a key goal of education and that it is a crucial skill for the twenty-first century (Willingham, 2019). Young people have obviously long benefited from developing critical thinking skills, but their value is anticipated to grow as the world becomes increasingly enhanced by artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies. The best place to nurture critical thinking skills is in the school system. Zimbabwe realised this and engaged in history curriculum reforms since the early 1990s to date. This subsequently led to the teaching of several but different History syllabi namely: the 2160, 2166, 2167 and lately the latest 2015-2022 Forms 1-4 History syllabus in schools (MoPSE, 2015) whose focus is on the development of critical thinking skills. Like in many other nations, Zimbabwe's history curriculum promotes the skills-based approach to teaching history, but for history teachers, cultivating crucial skills has proven to be difficult. In addition, there are still significant gaps regarding how critical thinking skills are taught and acquired in schools, which affects how teachers can support learners in developing their critical thinking abilities. By examining the present educational methods employed by history teachers in Zimbabwe, this study fills a scholarly gap and then goes on to suggest a model that can help students develop their critical thinking skills.

The following objectives guided this study:

1. To elucidate current practices by history teachers in the development of critical thinking skills in history teaching.
2. To provide a framework that can be used to enhance the development of critical thinking skills in history teaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To put the study into context, the next section interrogates critical thinking skills and history teaching.

Critical thinking skills and history teaching

In the literature, most people agree that the term "critical thinking" encompasses a wide range of abilities, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that include in-depth reflection and questioning (Zembylas, 2022). Godsell (2022) further elaborates that analysing the data, formulating an argument (voice), and composing relational knowledge are all part of critical thinking skills. So, it encompasses a wide range of abilities, such as the ability to reason verbally, analyze arguments, think like a hypothesis tester, cope with likelihood and uncertainty, and make and

solve decisions (Machete & Turpin, 2020). Teachers must integrate critical thinking abilities into their lessons on history learning, as these are essential intellectual competencies. This is to make students apply the lessons they learn in the context of their lives. The goal of teaching history is to foster in students the process of critical thinking through the appraisal of historical evidence and the making of connections between historical events and the past and present (Godsell, 2022). In the context of history teaching, critical thinking is therefore a process reflecting consistency in history thinking and doing. There are five skills that can aid students in cognitively comprehending the process of applying historical information: finding historical data, comprehending the chronology, interpreting, rationalizing, and using imagination (Maria et al., 2019). To comprehend the past or think like a historian, the process entails interpreting context, standpoint, perspective, point of view, and the perceived facts (Maria et al., 2019). Students may hold the complexity of the past and present in their hands thanks to the critical thinking abilities that come from developing historical thinking skills like multi-perspectivity (Seixas & Morton, 2012). Nevertheless, it has been noted that learning facts and figures by heart is given greater weight in history classes than any other ability that teaching history ought to impart (Goburdhun, 2022).

The teaching of critical thinking skills is not an easy process. For example, in Zimbabwe and South Africa, lack of orientation, poor teacher preparation, learning support materials that are frequently out of print or insufficiently used in the classroom, large class sizes, and the continued use of traditional exams for assessment all hinder the teaching of critical thinking skills (Dube & Moyo, 2022; Dombo & Mujere, 2023; Godsell, 2022; Mapetere et al., 2012). That being so, however, there is no one answer that provides the strategies that can be used to teach critical thinking skills in history teaching. When it comes to encouraging critical thinking and voice in essays, Godsell (2022) suggests using a spiderweb tool that offers opportunities to comprehend the mediation of knowledge employed in an essay. Maria et al. (2019) suggest that teachers must shun the heavy reliance on prescribed history textbooks as sources of information and students must rarely write notes. Somewhat, the teachers are instead encouraged to ask high order questions that lead students to think outside the box. Furthermore, what is apparent from studies is that, rather than using the child-centred approach history teachers employ teacher centered approach that throttle the development of critical thinking skills. Such approaches are ineffective in motivating students to increase their critical thinking skills (Maria et al, 2019). The next section unpacks the history curriculum reforms in Zimbabwe, the site of this study.

Curriculum change in Zimbabwe that encouraged the move towards critical thinking skills in history teaching

Radical forms of curriculum theorising that drew from Marxist and neo-Marxist philosophy were established in Zimbabwe in response to calls for an emancipatory education focused on praxis as a pedagogical and political tool to challenge the colonial system's ingrained traditions (Moyo, 2013). Syllabus 2166, which started in 1990 was the first secondary school history curriculum

revision in Zimbabwe. Recent studies by Dombo and Mujere (2023) show that there were four phases in the transformation of the Zimbabwean History of which the Rhodesian syllabus or 2160 was the first curriculum to be implemented in the recently independent nation and was taken over from the colonial government. This was superseded by syllabus 2166, which was quickly followed by syllabus 2167. The four national policy documents on the teaching of history in Zimbabwe places emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills to enable learners to fit in the competitive world of the 21st century. The 2167 history syllabus in Zimbabwe amply illustrates the necessity to create a supportive learning environment for the enhancement of critical thinking skills in history teaching. This syllabus 2167, whose preface declares that it seeks to support students in developing a critical knowledge of social, economic, and political concerns, replaced the syllabuses 2158, 2160 and 2166 (Dombo & Mujere, 2023). The work of Sengai and Mokhele (2021) further affirms that the primary aims of Zimbabwe's national history curriculum revisions during the country's independence were to teach students how to analyze, interpret, and evaluate historical material; identify bias in written materials and books; comprehend opposing viewpoints; evaluate the facts; and make value judgments. This brings up the important topic of critical understanding, which calls for emphasizing critical thinking in historical education. Sengai and Mokhele (2021) assert that the Form 1-4 History syllabus, which superseded History 2167, eliminated the elements of content recitation, hence facilitating a critical and comprehensive analysis of historical data. The justification for the replacement of these history syllabi in Zimbabwe probably lies in Dube and Moyo's (2022) claim that rather than following the traditional history approach that emphasised the simple recall of facts, criticality was a goal of history teaching and undeniably that has characterised progressive history curriculum. Thus, the new historical approach demanded a shift towards a more learner-centered approach that placed an emphasis on the skills based approach for the improvement of critical thinking skills.

Taken together, the history curriculum in Zimbabwe envisages a competency-based approach that is achieved through a practical-oriented learning. In brief, Zimbabwe's national history curriculum is now competency-based (outcomes oriented) rather than content-based (examination bound), with an emphasis on students' ability to apply knowledge, skills, and attitudes in an autonomous, accountable, and feasible manner (Dube & Moyo, 2022). The main goal of competency-driven education is to provide students the skills they need to function in the global information economy of the twenty-first century (Willingham, 2019). Drawing from the national history curriculum policy document of Zimbabwe, learners must graduate with critical skills as captured in one of its aims that reads, 'to develop appropriate skills and tools of analysing historical transformation of societies.' The current Forms1-4 History syllabus spells out that its envisaged pedagogy involves 'learner-centred and multi-sensory approaches' (MoPSE, 2015, p. 4). The syllabus's preamble makes clear that its goal is to provide students with a critical and educated awareness of the social, economic, and political challenges they will face as they work to construct a developing country. Furthermore, it needs to cultivate

comprehension and admiration for matters pertaining to population, human rights, and democracy. Despite these proclamations within the policy documents, what is not clear from the literature is whether current pedagogical practices used by history teachers in Zimbabwe align with the intentions of the history curriculum. To explore the current practices in the teaching of history in Zimbabwe, we employed the critical theory lens hereunder discussed.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Frankfurt School's critical theory, which serves as the study's foundation, focuses on critiquing and urging institutions to break with tradition (Sabnis & Proctor, 2022; Todić et al., 2022). In this study, the critical approach is seen as appreciating the positive aspects of the current contexts for history teaching and learning while leveraging the negative aspects to suggest new ways to create those environments. That is supported by Sabnis and Proctor's (2022) assertion that the goal of critical theory is not just to comprehend facts and circumstances, but also to alter them. Critical theory, according to Corradetti (2014), vehemently rejects the notion of an objective world in which knowledge is seen as nothing more than a reflection of reality. With this idea in mind, critical theory proposes that the only knowledge that exists is provisional knowledge, which can be expanded to mean that knowledge is constantly changing or fluid. According to critical theorists, curriculum should emphasise student experiences that empower them to act on the real challenges they face (Dube et al., 2023; Sabnis & Proctor, 2022). According to Spencer et al. (2009), critical theory welcomes the chance to consider different paradigms as part of the teaching and learning process. This was pertinent to the study since it aimed to find an environment that could foster the growth of critical thinking skills in history education. The purpose of the study is to advance a new model that can support the skills-based approach instead of the narrative-based approach by focusing on how history is taught and learned in Zimbabwe's secondary schools. This is because critical theory is about challenging the status quo. This made the theory useful since it highlighted and analysed the barriers to the growth of critical thinking skills and then offered fresh ideas for how to overcome them.

METHODOLOGY

The locus of the study was to investigate whether the current pedagogical practices by history teachers promoted critical thinking skill. As such, it was decided that the best methodological technique for producing data was an interpretivist qualitative engrained in natural settings, utilising techniques that foster conversation and validate the opinions of the teachers (Yin, 2018). Purposive sampling was utilised to select three secondary schools and one history teacher from each school to participate in the study. The teachers were chosen based on their prior expertise teaching Syllabi 2166, a skills-based syllabus, as well as Syllabi 2167, a mostly content-based syllabus that encourages a skills-based approach. The three teachers selected consisted of two females and one male and had taught history for at least ten years. The two

females were aged 45 and 40 while the male was 52 years old. The most experienced teacher among the participants had taught for 29 years. Their experience was used as a criterion for their participation as they were deemed fit to provide rich and relevant information that answered the research questions. Three case studies were employed in this study to provide richer and more detailed data on the phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Each case study goes beyond the analysis of discrete variables because each school has a context and environment that cannot be compared to another. Data was generated through open-ended interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis (Patton, 2015). We employed open ended interviews to allow us to probe further when ambiguity arose. The employment of documents to generate data was beneficial because written documents are non-reactive data sources that could be read and reviewed several times, remaining unchanged by the researcher's bias and influence (Cohen et al., 2018). This improves the trustworthiness of the study, as findings could easily be replicated using the same documents (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Classroom observation was used and enabled us to obtain first-hand information of the context of the natural settings in which history was taught in Zimbabwe. In the current study, open ended interviews, document analysis and observations were utilised to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. That was methodological triangulation of which Yin (2018) describes it as a tactic in which varied data collection methods are employed to gather different opinions from diverse contributors on a similar entity of study. As for open ended interviews, an approximate interview schedule showing the dates and times of our school visits was given to teachers who took part in the study. After that, the interviews were scheduled by getting in touch with the participants ahead of time and setting up a time. One day before the interview, a phone call was made to confirm the time and date. When it was convenient for the teachers, the interviews were done at their place of employment during their free time. Classroom observation involved observing lessons taught by teachers as well as student' activities during and after the lessons. We used documents such as the history syllabus, past examination papers, history textbooks and students' exercise books to make an analysis of how history was taught in schools. The teachers' scheme-books were used to check the activities planned to promote critical thinking skills. The fundamental procedures for coding proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) were used to analyse the data generated. The data were analysed along with the themes that emerged from the inquiry in line with the demands of the research's focus. The data were thus coded, categorised and thematised case by case and then cross-case to reveal major findings of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, Yin, 2018). Data validity was enhanced through member checking and triangulation using multiple data generation strategies (Yin, 2018). We sought and received ethical clearance from the University (UFS-HSD2015/0692) which we used to apply for permission to conduct research in secondary schools from Zimbabwe's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Pseudonyms were used to conceal the teachers' identities and study sites.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study sought to investigate the current pedagogical practices employed by history teachers in Zimbabwe. The following section presents the themes that emerged from the analysis of data which are: lack of learner-centred approaches, questioning technique, examination oriented teaching, prevalence of traditional content-based assessment and textbook based teaching.

Lack of learner-centred approaches

From the in-depth interviews, it emerged that history teachers were using some of the traditional child-centred approaches to develop critical thinking skills when teaching history. While Teacher A reports that: *'I use presentations, both individual and group, debates, group work and assignments, that is, individual and group.'* Teacher B weighed in and said, *'I use group work, presentations by learners, homework, eish what else can I say...?'* and Teacher C capped it thus, *'I use the Socratic Method, presentations, group work and demonstrations.'* It was also evident from lessons observations that recall questions predominated in class, taking the place of group projects, discussions, demonstrations, and presentations. This suggests that history teachers were simply claiming to employ specific teaching strategies, as revealed by the interview data.

The opinions of the teachers regarding the application of learner-centered techniques in the history classroom attested to submissions in diverse literature (Goburdhun, 2022; Maria et al., 2019). However, contrary to these submission are findings by Takafakare (2015) that show that history students complained about being confined to classes where the teacher was the centre of instruction, which led to boredom and staleness. Put together, some reports from the pupils' perspectives reveal that approaches centred on activities that support the growth of critical thinking abilities were not conducted by the history teachers. Thus, those reports from learners are contrary to what critical theory, critical pedagogy and literature advance because critical theory envisages approaches that permit students to construct their own knowledge through active participation. As argued by Todic et al (2022) that teaching must be taught using critical pedagogy, which challenges the notion that children learn best by absorbing concepts from specialists and stresses education as a practice that is liberating. Considering that, we agree with Dombo and Mujere (2023) that the emphasis of the curriculum should be on providing students with experiences that empower them to address real-world issues. We therefore challenge teachers to employ critical pedagogy, wherein they use their own enlightenment (Alsubaie, 2016) to encourage students to question and challenge historical facts to promote critical thinking skills in students.

Questioning technique

A striking finding of the study was that during every lesson, most of the questions posed by teachers and pupils alike used lower order thinking. A sample of these dominant questions in the lessons at the three schools studied were:

What did we learn about yesterday? Who can tell me what we did yesterday? What do you remember about the causes of the First World War? What was the role of religion in the rise of the Mutapa state?

It was evident from the sample that there were noticeably few of the kinds of questions that would help students improve their critical thinking abilities during the lessons, such as analysis, comparison and contrast, synthesis, and evaluation. It was discovered that the history teachers who were taking part in the study were not taking advantage of obvious chances to pose questions that would encourage critical thinking in the students, yet one of the most important strategies for fostering the development of these abilities is questioning (Giacomazzi, 2022; Maria, et al, 2019; Thompson, 2011). The history teachers' practices fell short of Fogo's (2014) recommendations regarding the use of higher order questions in the teaching of history that develops critical thinking skills. The work of Takafakare (2015) further affirms that secondary school history in Zimbabwe even for the syllabus 2166 was problematic because at the ordinary level, questions were mostly asked in the form of narratives and required the memorisation of facts, which hindered the development of critical thinking skills. This then defeats the efforts by several sub-Saharan African countries that pushes for the leverage of critical thinking abilities to boost students' competitiveness in the global economy (Giacomazzi et al., 2022).

Examination oriented teaching

The open ended interviews, document analysis and observations of lessons revealed that history teachers tended to focus on examinations and as such their current practices lacked source-based teaching. As aptly explained by Teacher A who narrated thus: *'I do not teach the source based question for the ZIMSEC examination because there are questions which require more content in Paper 1 of the examination.'* This response was supported by Teacher B who also said: *'I avoid question 1 in Paper 1 of the examination.'* When probed why there was this avoidance, Teacher C explained:

The aspect of critical thinking is a skill that must be instilled over a long period. Late exposure hinders efforts to teach the source-based question. My focus is on covering the syllabus without delays as I teach the learners to pass the examination.

Such sentiments revealed that the history teachers avoided teaching the source-based tasks. That may have been the case because the examination's design absolves history teachers who admit to being ignorant of how to teach for the source-based question, which permits the non-teaching of the question. The results corroborate several studies (Fogo, 2014; Kellaghan & Greaney, 2020; Mapetere et al., 2012; Van Hoover & Yeager, 2013) that assert that even in cases where pre-service teachers were instructed in source-based teaching methodologies, they were often neglected because of the emphasis placed on the textbook and examinations.

Rather than focusing on source-based teaching which enhance the development of critical thinking skills, it emerged from document analysis and lesson observations that the syllabi's materials were the main emphasis of the instruction. According to a prior study, a lot

of teachers are still employing conventional teaching methods in the classroom to fulfill the requirements for public examinations (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2020; Mitana et al., 2018). There was not a single lesson that used the source-based question in any of the ones that were observed. The teachers' lesson plans clearly showed the identical situation of the source-based question not being taught. Furthermore, the scheme-cum-plans scheduled the content covering without organizing the instruction of the source-based question. Even though the Syllabus 2167 calls for this teaching for the source-based question in Paper 1 of the examination, research evidence has also demonstrated that there is no source-based teaching of history in Zimbabwe. Mapetere et al. (2012) agree with this when they state that examiner reports have indicated that students are shunning the source-based question because history teachers are no longer teaching it, despite the question's critical role in the development of critical thinking skills. The idea that source-based learning encourages students to raise questions about the past and helps them develop critical thinking abilities is supported by both constructivism and critical pedagogy (Fogo, 2014). Reworking, analyzing, and interpreting historical traces and accounts to create narratives that are contextually relevant to the learners and their worldview is one way that teachers and students can approach history teaching and learning with a critical mind (Cowgill & Waring, 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). We concur with Godsell (2022) that a key component of constructivism is the use of questions that force students to think more deeply. When considered in this light, it stands to reason that using primary materials helps students develop their capacity for analytical thought. The study backs up critical theories that contend that students should reject structural determinism and instead concentrate on their lived experiences as a means of expressing and realizing their own identities.

Prevalence of traditional content-based assessment

Data generated from interviews show that history teachers in Zimbabwe concur that the assessment systems currently employed in the subject are problematic. Teacher C had this to say:

The current assessment is not really focused on the development of critical thinking skills. It is content-heavy as shown by recall and description which is dominant. Even the analysis part of the question borders around the recall of facts. The analysis question has low mark allocation.

This comment demonstrates that Zimbabwe's history evaluation process is not set up to foster critical thinking abilities in students studying the subject. This was substantiated by Teacher B who said:

Assessment in history teaching now is a kind of injustice if the mind is to be a critical mind. There is an avoidance of Question 1 in Paper 1, that is, History of Southern Africa, which is source-based and very relevant in developing critical thinking skills in history teaching. The fact that it is not compulsory tells you a lot.

Additionally, the formative assessment conducted by history teachers nearly matched the assessment criterion established by the examining body, according to the document analysis of assessment papers and student exercise books. The finding is confirmed by studies which

reports that there is adequate evidence to suggest that the use of summative examinations as the primary assessment model continues to be one of the main obstacles in the transition of history education towards a skills-based approach (Kellaghan & Greaney, 2020; Mitana et al., 2018). Mapetere, *et al.* (2012) further back up this and argue that that Zimbabwe's secondary-level history evaluation system is summative and focused on mastering the content. The finding is contrary to what constructivism and critical pedagogy entail because from the lens of critical theory, summative evaluation stifles rather than stimulates critical thinking. As such, the nature of examinations and the question technique in use must be challenged to pave way for an assessment that is geared towards assessment for learning to enhance the development of critical thinking skills. The current study argues that the focus on the examination grades, which was evidently exposed in this research, militates against the development of critical thinking skills and as such teaching and learning about history should be centered on helping students develop critical thinking abilities rather than just memorisation for test scores. According to Salehi (2013), knowledge is a relative concept that evolves together with values and insights. Constructivism promotes authentic assessment or portfolio assessment because it sheds light on the nature of evaluation and how it might support the growth of critical thinking abilities in history education (Yilmaz, 2008).

Textbook-based teaching

From in-depth interviews and lesson observations, it emerged that teachers used textbook based teaching even though some of the texts were obsolete and were a handicap in the development of critical thinking skills. Teacher A said:

The materials we have in the school are textbooks which are secondary sources of history. They are written from the narrative perspective of history. We do not have primary sources to use in the development of critical thinking skills as required by the syllabus 2167. Materials like magazines and e-books are lacking greatly.

Teachers B and C both agreed with this. Teacher B stated: "There are no primary sources in the textbooks that I use, so there are no opportunities to teach history for the development of critical thinking skills." Teacher C also voiced her opinion:

The textbooks that I use like the Step Ahead and 'O' Level Focus on History, African Heritage and Dynamics of History series do not encourage the development of critical thinking skills in history teaching as they do not often carry extracts of primary sources. The textbooks are also written in the narrative manner.

These opinions make it abundantly evident that the textbook serves as the primary teaching tool for history classes at the schools. The narrative style of the textbooks promotes rote learning, which works against the development of critical thinking abilities in history education. The conclusion is supported by certain studies that show that examination-oriented education (Mitana et al., 2018) and classroom pedagogy that prioritises factual recall over more complex cognitive skills (Giacomazzi et al., 2022) are examples of educational practices that continue to favour memorisation and rote learning. The results go counter to the constructivist

tenets put forward by Major and Mangope (2012) and Mogashoa (2014), who both agree that constructivism envisions the availability of a range of materials, including original sources and raw data, in the teaching process. Furthermore, the main goal of critical pedagogy is to enable students to think and act critically to change their circumstances in life (Dube & Moyo, 2022). This is practically not possible when textbooks are the only source of historical information.

The lesson observations further supported the idea that the textbook serves as the primary information source while teaching history. For the lessons, the teachers only had one textbook with them. This was always placed at the teacher's workstation. It was usually encouraged for students to bring their textbooks for the next lesson. The use of textbooks as the only source of history information is also confirmed by literature of which Bertram (2012) justify the practices in South Africa on the basis that the textbooks are prescribed textbook by the authorities hence teachers are tied and have no choice. Such was the teaching and learning of history under apartheid. In Zimbabwe, additionally, it has been reported that the traditional textbook was only replaced with the Government of National Unity's recommended resource book for outcome-based evaluation (Moyo & Modiba, 2013). The Step Ahead and Total History Series' introduction confirms Zimbabwe's practice of teaching history using the official textbooks, according to observations made of the texts at the three schools under investigation. Because approved textbooks are used, there is no encouragement of different historical perspectives that students can interact with, as advocated by critical pedagogy ingrained in critical theory (Godsell, 2022; Seixas & Morton, 2012). This is corroborated by research conducted in 2015 by Takafakare, which found that most textbooks on the market are so out-of-date that they fail to assist students develop their critical thinking abilities. As suggested by constructivism, where learning should be in context to aid the development of critical thinking abilities, the textbooks instead encouraged rote learning and the recollection of historical information (Giacomazzi et al., 2022; Dube & Moyo, 2022). The teachers' scheme-cum-plans also demonstrated their fervent devotion to using the textbook. The textbook was named by teachers at the three schools as the primary information source for their lesson plans. The scheme-cum-plans' sources of resources section mentioned the textbook to demonstrate its hallowed status in the teaching of history.

When the results of the observation, document analysis, and interviewing were combined, it became clear that history students had very little exposure to the development of critical thinking abilities in the classroom. This is based on research showing that history teachers still employ conventional approaches to teaching the subject, as well as conventional texts and evaluation techniques that do not encourage the growth of critical thinking abilities in history students.

So what then?

In addition to the pertinent findings of this study and those reported in literature elsewhere, it is evident that teacher use a conventional paradigm, namely that the 'the teacher explains students listen' against the notion that students are changing from being objects to self-

determining subjects with the ability to make decisions and alter their reality, as history education moves away from a lecture-based approach towards discussion and analysis (Todic et al., 2022). Drawing from the critical theory, curricula should prioritise student experiences that empower them to address real-world issues instead of keeping them inactive while learning history. Considering this, the study adds to our understanding of how to address the shortcomings in the teaching of critical thinking in history classes and suggests the transformative-interactive framework for creating a supportive learning environment below.

The transformative-interactive model

Findings presented above support the need to change the history teachers' current practices in teaching that limit the development of the critical skills that drives sustainable development in the 21st century. Drawing references from the findings the critical theory the root of constructivism and critical pedagogy is used to create a framework for the improvement of students' critical thinking abilities when teaching history. Thus, a hybrid approach to constructivism and critical pedagogy resulted in what we call a transformative-interactive framework.

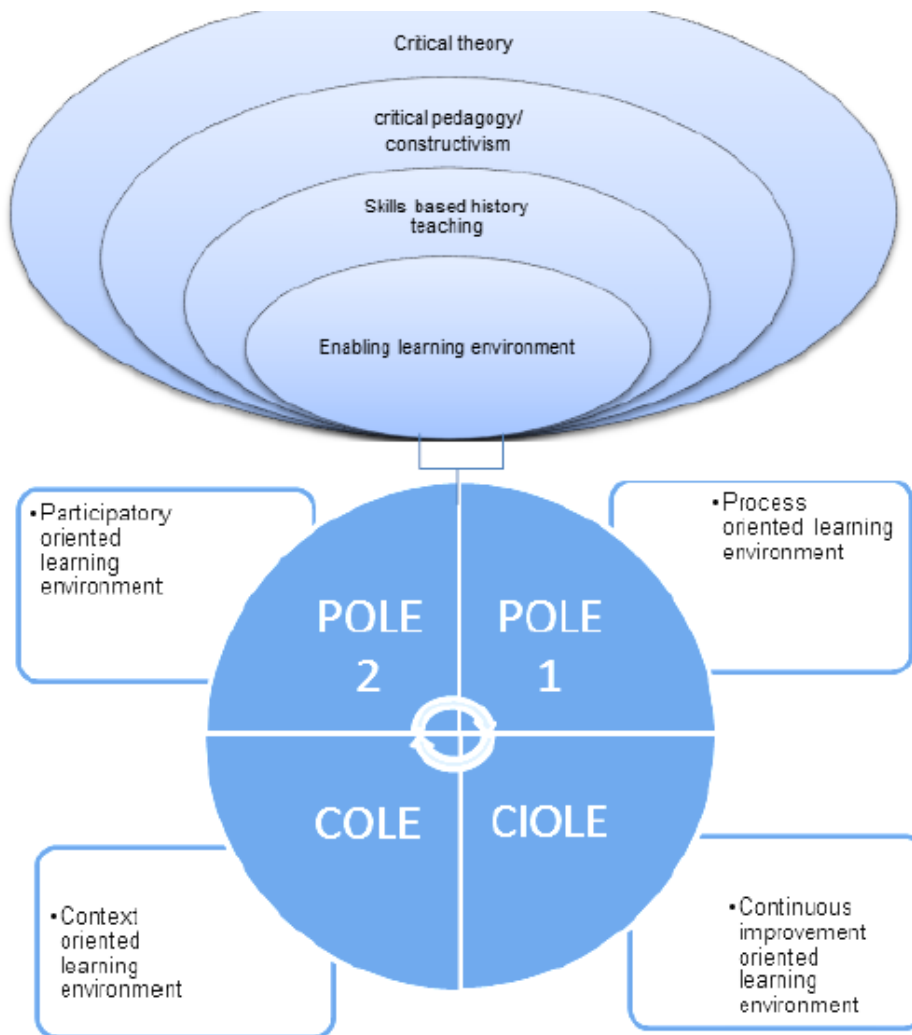
To create a supportive learning environment that fosters the development of critical thinking abilities in history teachers, this suggested framework takes an eclectic approach. The shift in Zimbabwean curricular thinking towards a skills-based approach to teaching history was influenced by critical theory, critical pedagogy, and constructivism. In teaching history, the skills-based approach places a strong emphasis on the development of critical thinking abilities. The four sectors of the circle stand for the four elements of the learning environment that together provide an atmosphere that is conducive to the growth of critical thinking abilities in history education. Context-oriented learning environment (COLE), process-oriented learning environment (POLE 1), participative oriented learning environment (POLE 2), and continuous improvement-oriented learning environment (CIOLE) are the learning environment components.

The framework's circular section outlines what need to occur in terms of managing curriculum changes and their demands as well as teacher development and support. The concepts of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and constructivism, as well as how to apply them to the teaching and learning of history, must be introduced to trainees and practicing history teachers during pre-service and in-service training. The same will hold true for the elements of curriculum change management that move history education toward a skills-based approach. The principles provide history teachers with a comprehensive set of pedagogical information that they can utilise to foster critical thinking abilities in their students. These principles include, but are not limited to, the following: the subjectivity of knowledge; democratization of education; experiential learning; radical pedagogy; diversity in curricular methods; dialogism; praxis; active learning; learner-centeredness; collaborative learning; contextual learning; and authentic assessment. The emphasis on activity-oriented learning that constructivism places, as proposed by Mogashoa (2008), is another one of its values. Our contention is that learning

through activities fosters student engagement and meaningful learning experiences that foster critical thinking.

Figure 1.

The 2P-2C transformative-interactive framework of constructing an enabling learning environment



The framework's sectorial part illustrates the necessary steps for teaching history in a way that fosters critical thinking. These steps are derived from the previously mentioned principles. This implies that there is a strong connection between the methods history teachers use in their teaching and the lessons they teach. After realising that critical thinking has been mostly absent from history instruction, this study was conducted to offer a framework to help teachers of history create a supportive learning environment. The 2P-2C approach aims for interactive, rather than revolutionary, transformation. The framework's cyclical arrows connecting the four sectors stand in for the supportive learning environment produced by combining constructivism and critical pedagogy ideas in an eclectic manner to serve as the conceptual frameworks for the study. This is the overall perspective or setting that encapsulates the learners' everyday experiences in their educational settings. This is the primary factor that

determines learning since it is a given that the desired learning cannot occur in the absence of a conducive learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The study has shown that, when it comes to fostering critical thinking abilities in history teaching, there is a significant disconnect between the goals of the syllabus and what happens. The examination of the literature, firsthand observations, and in-depth interviews made it clear that history teachers in Zimbabwe and other nations are having difficulty fostering critical thinking abilities in their students. It follows that, despite the recognition of the significance of critical pedagogy as the conventional method for ensuring its survival, there is very little exposure of the history students to improve the development of critical thinking abilities in history education. As a result, Zimbabwe's educational system, like that of other African nations, has come under fire for producing graduates who can memorise facts from school but lack critical thinking skills. The criticism has focused on the graduates' deficiency in critical skills, which renders them almost completely unemployed in a competitive global economy. The study presents the 2P-2C transformative-interactive framework as a substitute to address the issues by taking lessons from the current practices of history teachers that hindered the opportunity to build critical thinking abilities in history education. The model represented the result of combining the principles found in constructivism, critical pedagogy, and critical theory.

The study contends that critical theory, critical pedagogy, and constructivism—the three pillars of this research—recommend instructional approaches and tactics that place the student at the heart of the learning process based on the conclusions and arguments presented here. Teaching philosophies, techniques, and tactics that promote interactive, process-, and context-oriented teaching and learning are necessary for the development of critical thinking abilities in history students. This assertion emphasises how much more significance student actions or activities have over teacher actions or activities. The study puts history teachers to the test and exhorts them to abandon the conventional teaching strategies that promote rote memorisation over critical thinking. Considering this argument, history teachers can employ learner-centred techniques, such as the Socratic Method, group projects, talks, presentations, and group work, among others. When teaching history, these inquiry-based and collaborative teaching strategies can help students strengthen their critical thinking abilities. The paper makes the case that for students to contribute meaningful knowledge and topics for debate to the classes, teachers must adopt research-based historical teaching and learning practices. In this sense, the teacher's job will be to mentor the students and develop critical thinking exercises that help them advance to higher order critical thinking abilities.

According to this study, assessment for learning is the first step towards improving students' critical thinking skills in the classroom. The study concludes that both constructivism, with its numerous strands, and critical pedagogy view assessment as an essential part of learning. A learning environment that supports the development of critical thinking skills in history

education can be formed by employing the assessment of analytical and synthesis domains in homework assignments, tests, and summative evaluation. It is crucial to expose students to a variety of higher order instructional vocabulary terms, including analyze, synthesise, compare, extrapolate, contrast, infer, compose, and assess, through homework assignments and classroom-based examinations. The study concludes by recommending that history teachers concentrate on key lesson planning, including the techniques to employ, the activities students participate in, the resources to be used in the lesson, assessment, and feedback. In the teaching of history, each of these elements is essential to the development of critical thinking abilities. The study concludes that teaching history requires the development of critical thinking skills, which take place in supportive learning environments. Acquiring knowledge of history involves developing critical thinking skills rather than memorising facts. The limitation of this study lies in that a qualitative approach was adopted on a small scale using a small sample, to understand how school history was taught in Zimbabwean schools. As such, the data are to be treated with caution as the findings cannot be generalized though the study was concerned with details and specificity (Yin, 2018). A large-scale investigation using either the quantitative approach or the mixed method approach could possibly be undertaken to get a better understanding of how history is taught in Zimbabwean schools.

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The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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