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PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that we welcome all participants to the International Conference on “Innovating Education and Social Science for a Sustainable Future”, held on 5th July 2025 at the Faculty of Education, Thaksin University, Thailand.

This conference serves as a platform for scholars, researchers, educators, and practitioners from diverse disciplines to share knowledge, exchange innovative ideas, and explore practical solutions in the fields of education and social sciences. In today's rapidly changing world, education and social development are crucial foundations for building a sustainable future. By fostering collaboration across cultures and academic perspectives, this event aims to generate new insights that can guide both policy and practice.

The Faculty of Education, Thaksin University, is committed to advancing research and innovation that address the challenges of our time. Through this conference, we hope to inspire meaningful dialogue, encourage the development of innovative models, and strengthen international cooperation.

On behalf of the organizing committee, we would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all keynote speakers, presenters, participants, and supporters whose contributions make this conference possible. We are confident that the discussions and ideas exchanged here will inspire future research, collaboration, and action towards achieving a more sustainable world.

We wish you all a successful and enriching conference experience.

Faculty of Education
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5th July 2025

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An Instructional Innovation for History Learning: Implementing an Active Learning Approach to Enhance Critical Thinking in Primary Education

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Abstract

In an era defined by rapid information exchange and complex global challenges, the role of education in cultivating critical thinking among young learners has never been more vital. Within this context, history education traditionally reliant on memorization of facts, dates, and figures must evolve to meet the needs of 21st-century learners. This study aims to explore and propose an instructional innovation for history learning that leverages active learning approaches to enhance critical thinking among primary school students. Using the documentary research method, this paper synthesizes a wide range of scholarly sources, policy documents, and pedagogical models to construct a conceptual framework for innovative and student-centered history instruction.

The research is grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of constructivism and social constructivism, which advocate for learning as an active, contextualized process of knowledge construction. These frameworks support pedagogical strategies that prioritize inquiry, collaboration, and reflection—elements central to both active learning and critical thinking. By analyzing historical thinking models, inquiry-based learning theories, and international curricular standards, the study identifies key features of effective history instruction, including the use of primary sources, debate and discussion formats, and project-based assessments.

The findings indicate that active learning in history is not only possible but highly effective in developing critical thinking skills such as source evaluation, contextual analysis, and reasoned argumentation. Empirical evidence from global contexts including educational systems in the UK, Australia, and the United States demonstrates that when students are engaged in historical inquiry, they develop deeper conceptual understandings and are better able to analyze complex social and historical phenomena. Furthermore, national education policies, including Thailand's Basic Education Core Curriculum (2008), emphasize analytical and evaluative learning outcomes, providing institutional support for such innovations.

Key instructional models emerging from the documentary analysis include the Historical Inquiry Model, which fosters independent investigation; Project-Based Learning, which promotes long-term engagement with historical questions; and dialogic teaching strategies, which cultivate reasoning and empathy through classroom discussion. Each model places the learner at the center of the educational experience, empowering them to question, interpret, and connect historical content to their own lives and societies. These approaches contrast sharply with traditional lecture-based methods, which often fail to develop higher-order thinking skills.

The paper concludes by offering a set of practical recommendations for integrating active learning into primary-level history instruction. These include professional development for teachers in active learning methodologies, the development of contextualized instructional materials such as historical case studies and source packs, and the alignment of assessment practices with critical thinking objectives. The study also highlights the importance of teacher roles as facilitators and co-learners in the classroom, requiring shifts in both mindset and instructional practice.

By documenting, analyzing, and synthesizing key sources in the field, this paper provides a foundational resource for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to innovate history education in ways that are pedagogically sound, contextually appropriate, and oriented toward the development of essential 21st-century competencies. The proposed

instructional innovation aligns with global educational priorities and offers a roadmap for transformative teaching practices that empower students to think historically and critically from a young age.

Keywords: instructional innovation, history education, active learning, critical thinking, documentary research, primary education

1. Introduction

In the 21st century, the primary education landscape is undergoing significant transformation, particularly in the domain of history education. Traditionally, history teaching in primary schools has focused heavily on the transmission of factual knowledge—dates, events, and prominent figures often through rote memorization and textbook-based instruction (Levstik & Barton, 2015). While this approach may provide a foundational understanding of historical content, it has been criticized for failing to equip students with the cognitive tools necessary to engage in meaningful historical inquiry and develop critical thinking skills (Wineburg, 2001). As global education reform movements increasingly emphasize the development of higher-order thinking, creativity, and analytical reasoning, history education must be reimaged to align with these evolving goals (OECD, 2018).

The concept of **instructional innovation** in history learning is thus gaining traction among educators and researchers. Instructional innovation refers to the purposeful design and implementation of novel pedagogical strategies that improve student engagement, learning outcomes, and skill development (Fullan, 2007). In the context of history education, this involves moving beyond passive learning paradigms toward active, student-centered methodologies that promote inquiry, interpretation, and reflection. Active learning, defined as any instructional method that actively involves students in the learning process through activities and/or discussion in class (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), has shown considerable promise in promoting critical engagement with historical content.

This paradigm shift is underpinned by **constructivist learning theory**, which posits that knowledge is not simply transmitted from teacher to student, but actively constructed by the learner through experience, social interaction, and critical reflection (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1972). When applied to history education, constructivism encourages learners to engage with multiple perspectives, analyze primary sources, question historical narratives, and synthesize evidence to draw informed conclusions. Scholars such as Seixas and Morton (2013) have further developed the concept of "historical thinking," emphasizing skills such as sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, and the use of historical evidence—competencies that are essential for developing a sophisticated understanding of the past and its implications for the present.

Moreover, fostering **critical thinking** in primary education is increasingly recognized as a fundamental goal of schooling. According to Facione (1990), critical thinking entails purposeful, self-regulatory judgment which results in interpretation, analysis, evaluation, and inference. In history classrooms, this translates into the ability to question sources, evaluate differing accounts of events, recognize bias, and develop reasoned arguments. The development of such skills from an early age is vital for nurturing informed, reflective, and responsible citizens an objective that aligns closely with the broader goals of civic education and democratic participation (NCSS, 2013).

In Thailand, the current **Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008)** emphasizes learner-centered instruction and the development of analytical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, empirical studies have revealed a gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, particularly in history education, which often remains teacher-centered and textbook-driven (Saengpassa, 2019). There is, therefore, a pressing need to explore and

document effective instructional innovations that bridge this gap and align pedagogical practice with curriculum goals.

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to explore and synthesize the documentary evidence surrounding the implementation of active learning approaches in history education at the primary level, with a specific focus on their impact on critical thinking. Using the **documentary research method**, this study investigates the theoretical foundations, pedagogical strategies, and practical models documented in national and international literature. Documentary research, as a qualitative method, involves systematic review and analysis of existing documents to generate new interpretations and insights (Bowen, 2009). It is particularly well-suited to educational research that seeks to conceptualize and inform pedagogical innovation.

This study is guided by the belief that history learning can and should be an intellectually vibrant and transformative experience for young learners. When students are empowered to explore historical questions, evaluate evidence, and engage in dialogue about the past, they not only acquire knowledge but also develop the skills and dispositions necessary for critical engagement in a complex world. Through this research, it is hoped that educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers will gain a deeper understanding of how active learning approaches can be effectively integrated into history instruction to enhance critical thinking in primary education.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge that supports pedagogical reform in history education. It aims to serve as a conceptual and practical resource for educators seeking to implement instructional innovations that foster deeper learning and critical engagement among their students. In the following sections, the study outlines its objectives, methodology, findings from documentary analysis, and implications for practice, offering a comprehensive overview of how active learning can serve as a vehicle for enhancing historical thinking and critical reasoning at the foundational levels of education.

2. Research Objectives

This research aims to explore and synthesize knowledge from existing documents to develop an instructional innovation that integrates active learning strategies into history education for primary students, with the ultimate goal of enhancing their critical thinking skills. The specific objectives are:

1. **To examine the theoretical foundations that underpin active learning and its application in history education**
This includes analyzing constructivist learning theories, principles of historical thinking, and the role of critical thinking in primary education. The objective is to establish a sound pedagogical rationale for the integration of active learning approaches in the context of history instruction.
2. **To investigate international and national curriculum policies, academic research, and educational frameworks related to the teaching of history in primary education**
This involves a documentary analysis of curriculum standards (e.g., Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum, British and Australian history curricula), teacher education policies, and best practice guidelines that inform how history is taught and how critical thinking is fostered in young learners.
3. **To identify and analyze documented instructional models, teaching strategies, and classroom practices that demonstrate the successful use of active learning in history education**
The goal is to gather evidence-based approaches such as project-based learning,

historical inquiry, role-play, and source analysis that have been documented to enhance student engagement and higher-order thinking in historical contexts.

4. To assess the documented impact of active learning on the development of critical thinking in primary school students

Through reviewing case studies, evaluation reports, and empirical studies, this objective seeks to determine how active learning contributes to specific critical thinking competencies such as analysis, evaluation, and reasoning within history lessons.

5. To synthesize the findings into a conceptual model or set of recommendations for designing an instructional innovation in history education

Based on the findings from the literature and policy documents, the study aims to develop a theoretically informed and practically applicable framework that educators can adopt or adapt to improve the effectiveness of history teaching in primary schools.

3. Methodology

This study employed the **documentary research method**, a qualitative approach that systematically investigates existing documents to extract, analyze, and synthesize information relevant to a specific research problem. This method is particularly suitable for studies that aim to conceptualize and develop new theoretical or instructional models based on established knowledge and practices (Bowen, 2009). In the context of this research, documentary analysis was used to examine literature, curricula, pedagogical frameworks, policy documents, and empirical studies related to active learning, historical education, and critical thinking at the primary education level.

3.1 Research Design

This research followed a qualitative, interpretive design based on documentary analysis. The design involved three primary phases:

1. Data Collection
2. Data Analysis and Synthesis
3. Model Construction and Interpretation

The goal was not to measure phenomena quantitatively but to interpret and understand patterns, frameworks, and pedagogical principles grounded in documented sources. This interpretive stance aligns with constructivist epistemology, where knowledge is understood as socially and historically constructed.

3.2 Data Collection

Data were collected from a variety of **primary and secondary sources**, selected based on their academic rigor, relevance to the research objectives, and credibility. These sources included:

- **Academic journal articles** indexed in Scopus, ERIC, and Web of Science
- **Books and book chapters** on history pedagogy and instructional innovation
- **Curriculum documents** (e.g., Thai Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551, UK National Curriculum, Australian Curriculum)
- **Policy reports** from educational ministries and agencies
- **Conference proceedings and dissertations** related to active learning in history
- **Frameworks and models** on critical thinking and historical thinking (e.g., Wineburg, Seixas & Morton)

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select documents that addressed at least one of the core themes: (1) active learning, (2) history instruction, or (3) critical thinking in education.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analytical process followed the content **analysis** approach.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Theoretical Foundations

The development of instructional innovations in history education, particularly those aimed at enhancing critical thinking, must be anchored in robust theoretical foundations. This section explores the theoretical perspectives that inform the integration of active learning approaches in history instruction, focusing on constructivist learning theory, social constructivism, Bloom's taxonomy, and critical pedagogy. These frameworks not only support the rationale for active learning but also provide a lens through which educators can design and assess history learning experiences that promote critical engagement with historical knowledge.

4.1.1 Constructivist Learning Theory

At the heart of active learning lies constructivist theory, which posits that learners actively construct knowledge through their experiences and interactions with the world. Jean Piaget (1972), a foundational figure in constructivist thought, emphasized the importance of cognitive development stages and the process of assimilation and accommodation in learning. According to Piaget, children develop understanding through active engagement with content and context, making sense of new information by relating it to prior knowledge. In history education, this implies that students must do more than memorize dates and events; they must actively interpret historical evidence, identify cause-effect relationships, and draw inferences about societal change.

Constructivist pedagogy in history encourages inquiry, exploration, and critical reflection. When learners are presented with historical problems or dilemmas, they are compelled to think analytically and seek meaning beyond surface facts. This aligns with active learning strategies such as case-based instruction, simulations, and document analysis, where students "construct" historical understanding by interrogating primary and secondary sources.

4.1.2 Social Constructivism and the Zone of Proximal Development

While Piaget emphasized the individual's cognitive processes, Lev Vygotsky (1978) introduced social constructivism, highlighting the fundamental role of social interaction and cultural tools in learning. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) refers to the gap between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance from a more knowledgeable other (e.g., teacher or peer). This concept is especially relevant in history education, where students often grapple with abstract concepts and unfamiliar historical contexts.

Active learning strategies align well with Vygotskian theory. Collaborative activities such as group discussions, peer teaching, and joint source analysis offer opportunities for learners to operate within their ZPD. The teacher's role as a facilitator becomes crucial, as they scaffold students' thinking through questioning, prompting, and modeling disciplinary reasoning. Social constructivist approaches thus validate the use of dialogic teaching, where historical narratives are co-constructed through classroom discourse (Mercer, 2000; Alexander, 2008).

4.1.3 Bloom's Taxonomy and Higher-Order Thinking

Another theoretical foundation relevant to this study is Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (Bloom et al., 1956; revised by Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which classifies cognitive skills into hierarchical levels: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. History education often stagnates at the lower levels of this taxonomy—particularly in traditional approaches that emphasize rote memorization.

However, critical thinking, as an essential outcome of history learning, resides in the upper levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Active learning approaches are purposefully designed to move students beyond factual recall toward analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. For example, when students compare differing historical accounts, assess the credibility of sources, or create timelines and arguments based on conflicting evidence, they are operating at higher-

order thinking levels. Instructional models such as inquiry-based learning and problem-based learning (PBL) are grounded in the idea that authentic tasks promote cognitive complexity and metacognition (Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

4.1.4 Critical Pedagogy and Historical Consciousness

Critical pedagogy, advanced by scholars like Paulo Freire (1970) and Henry Giroux (1988), offers yet another theoretical lens through which historical education can be transformed. This perspective argues that education should empower learners to question dominant narratives, recognize social injustices, and act as agents of change. In the context of history learning, critical pedagogy encourages students to engage with multiple perspectives, particularly those of marginalized groups, and to interrogate how history is written and remembered.

Active learning supports critical pedagogy by creating participatory, student-centered environments where learners critically engage with historical texts and develop a nuanced understanding of the past. This is particularly important in multicultural and postcolonial societies, where historical education has the potential to either reinforce or challenge hegemonic ideologies (Banks, 2008). Historical consciousness, or the awareness of the relationship between past, present, and future, emerges from this engagement and contributes to learners' civic identity (Rüsen, 2004).

4.1.5 Implications for Instructional Design

Integrating these theoretical foundations, the instructional design for history education must:

1. Promote active engagement with content through exploration, inquiry, and reflection (constructivism);
2. Facilitate collaborative learning environments with strategic scaffolding and guided discovery (social constructivism);
3. Encourage cognitive rigor, using tasks aligned with higher-order thinking skills (Bloom's taxonomy); and
4. Foster critical consciousness, enabling students to analyze historical power structures and narratives (critical pedagogy).

A synthesis of these perspectives supports the development of an instructional innovation in history learning that not only enhances critical thinking but also prepares students to be thoughtful, informed citizens in a complex world.

4.2 Active Learning in History

Active learning in history education represents a paradigm shift from teacher-centered lectures and rote memorization to student-centered engagement, participation, and inquiry. Rooted in constructivist theories of learning, particularly those of Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978), active learning emphasizes that students learn best when they are actively involved in constructing their own understanding. In history education, this translates to students engaging with historical sources, posing questions, interpreting evidence, constructing narratives, and critically reflecting on the past. The aim is not merely to transfer historical knowledge but to cultivate historical thinking and critical literacy.

One of the foundational principles of active learning is that learners are not passive recipients of information but active participants in the learning process (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This is particularly significant in history, where understanding is not fixed or absolute, but interpretative and contested. Active learning thus enables students to appreciate the complexity of historical events, recognize multiple perspectives, and develop the skills to analyze causes, consequences, and ethical dimensions of the past.

A wide range of pedagogical strategies fall under the umbrella of active learning in history. These include **historical inquiry**, **problem-based learning**, **project-based learning**, **role-playing and simulations**, **debates**, **Socratic seminars**, and **interactive timelines or primary**

source analysis. Each of these strategies encourages students to engage cognitively and affectively with historical content.

4.2.1 Historical inquiry is perhaps the most widely recognized form of active learning in historic education. It involves posing open-ended questions, investigating historical sources, and constructing arguments based on evidence (Levstik & Barton, 2015; Seixas & Morton, 2013). Through inquiry, students act as young historians, learning not just historical facts, but how historical knowledge is produced. For instance, students might be asked to explore "Was the American Revolution truly revolutionary?" or "What factors contributed to the fall of the Ayutthaya Kingdom?" These questions prompt learners to investigate primary and secondary sources, identify bias, and develop reasoned interpretations.

4.2.2 Project-based learning (PBL) in history allows students to investigate a complex question or theme over an extended period. In PBL, students may create historical documentaries, museum exhibits, or digital archives based on their research. According to Krajcik and Blumenfeld (2006), such projects enhance student motivation, content mastery, and the development of transferable skills such as collaboration, time management, and problem-solving. In the context of primary education, projects might involve students interviewing community elders about local history or designing a visual timeline of significant national events.

4.2.3 Simulations and role-plays offer another compelling avenue for active engagement. These strategies place students in historical roles, allowing them to reenact debates, simulate historical negotiations, or make decisions based on the information available at the time. For example, students might participate in a simulated constitutional convention or reenact a historical trial. Such activities foster empathy, deepen understanding, and promote historical perspective-taking (Brooks, 2011). They also allow for affective engagement, enabling students to connect emotionally with the content, which enhances memory and critical engagement.

4.2.4 Debates and Socratic seminars further encourage students to articulate and defend historical positions, engage with counterarguments, and refine their reasoning. These formats are especially effective in developing argumentation skills and fostering respect for diverse viewpoints—core components of critical thinking. For instance, students may debate whether a particular leader was a hero or a villain, requiring them to examine multiple sources and viewpoints to support their stance.

Another effective strategy is the use of **primary source analysis**, which trains students to "read" history like a historian. By examining documents, photographs, artifacts, or oral histories, students learn to ask questions such as: Who created this? Why? What perspective is reflected? What is missing? (Wineburg, 2001). The skill of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration, as core historical thinking practices by Wineburg (1991)—can be taught even at the primary level with age-appropriate materials.

Research evidence supports the efficacy of active learning in improving historical understanding and fostering critical thinking. A meta-analysis by Freeman et al. (2014) concluded that active learning significantly improves student performance in STEM and social sciences alike. Specifically in history education, VanSledright (2011) and Seixas & Morton (2013) found that students who engage in inquiry-based and interactive learning perform better in tasks requiring evidence-based reasoning and argument construction.

Moreover, active learning has been shown to increase student engagement and motivation. When learners see themselves as agents in the construction of knowledge, they are more likely to take ownership of their learning (Hattie, 2009). In primary classrooms, where developmental readiness and curiosity are high, these approaches can tap into students' natural inquisitiveness and channel it into disciplined thinking.

However, successful implementation of active learning in history is contingent on several factors. Teachers must possess strong pedagogical content knowledge, including a deep understanding of historical concepts and the ability to facilitate discussion and inquiry. Additionally, curricular materials and assessment practices must align with the goals of active learning. Traditional standardized tests may not adequately capture the skills developed through these approaches, necessitating alternative assessments such as portfolios, reflective journals, and performance-based tasks (Drake & Brown, 2003).

Finally, it is important to recognize that active learning is not a one-size-fits-all model. Contextual factors such as class size, availability of resources, cultural expectations, and curricular constraints influence its feasibility and effectiveness. In the Thai education context, where rote memorization has traditionally dominated, integrating active learning requires systemic support, including teacher training, administrative encouragement, and curricular flexibility (Office of the Education Council, 2017).

In conclusion, active learning in history education offers a powerful framework for promoting critical thinking, historical understanding, and learner engagement. Through inquiry, discussion, and experiential learning, students are empowered to think deeply about the past and its relevance to the present. As this study continues to explore innovative instructional approaches, the documented benefits of active learning provide a compelling rationale for its adoption in primary history classrooms.

4.3 Critical Thinking and Historical Thinking

Critical thinking and historical thinking are foundational competencies in modern education, particularly within the domain of history. While critical thinking is a general cognitive skill set that encompasses analysis, evaluation, inference, and reflective judgment (Facione, 1990), historical thinking refers specifically to the processes through which individuals engage with the past using disciplinary methods. In primary education, fostering both skill sets contributes significantly to students' intellectual development, preparing them to navigate complex information environments and participate meaningfully in civic life.

According to Ennis (1993), critical thinking involves the ability to reason effectively, make reasoned judgments, and solve problems. In the context of history education, this involves scrutinizing historical claims, assessing the reliability of sources, understanding cause and effect, and considering multiple perspectives. Historical thinking, therefore, can be considered a discipline-specific form of critical thinking, requiring the application of general reasoning skills to historical content.

Wineburg (1991) introduced a seminal framework that articulates how historical thinking is distinct from everyday reasoning. He emphasized that students must "think like historians," which includes sourcing documents, contextualizing information, corroborating across multiple accounts, and constructing interpretations. These competencies challenge the conventional approach in history classrooms that often emphasize rote memorization of facts, dates, and events. Instead, they push students to interrogate the nature of evidence, the credibility of accounts, and the subjectivity of historical narratives.

Seixas and Morton (2013) further developed a pedagogical framework for historical thinking, identifying six core concepts: (1) historical significance, (2) evidence, (3) continuity and change, (4) cause and consequence, (5) historical perspectives, and (6) the ethical dimension. These concepts guide educators in designing instructional activities that prompt students to engage with history as an interpretive process rather than a static body of knowledge. For instance, evaluating the causes of a historical event encourages students to distinguish between immediate and underlying factors, and to consider the impact of agency, structure, and contingency.

In primary education, historical thinking must be introduced in developmentally appropriate ways. Research suggests that even young learners can engage in complex

reasoning when instruction is scaffolded effectively (Lee & Ashby, 2000). This involves providing them with structured opportunities to analyze primary sources, engage in historical inquiry, and construct narratives. For example, through guided discussions, role-playing, or visual source analysis, children begin to understand that historical knowledge is constructed and contested. This early exposure lays the groundwork for more sophisticated critical thinking in later stages of education.

Critical thinking in history also supports the development of metacognitive awareness. When students are asked to justify their interpretations, reflect on their reasoning, or revise their arguments based on new evidence, they become more conscious of their own thinking processes. Kuhn (1999) notes that such metacognitive abilities are essential for cultivating a reflective and independent mindset. In history education, this translates into students not merely learning about the past but developing the skills to question, interpret, and apply historical knowledge critically.

Moreover, historical thinking fosters empathy and perspective-taking—skills that are crucial for social cohesion and democratic citizenship (Barton & Levstik, 2004). By examining diverse experiences and voices from the past, students learn to appreciate complexity, avoid simplistic judgments, and consider the implications of decisions made by individuals and societies. This dimension of critical historical inquiry aligns with global education goals, such as those outlined in UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education framework, which promotes critical inquiry and historical consciousness as pillars of peace education (UNESCO, 2015).

In recent years, scholars have emphasized the integration of disciplinary literacy into history teaching. This approach encourages students to read, write, and think like historians, thereby aligning literacy development with historical reasoning (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Teaching students how to deconstruct historical texts, ask investigable questions, and articulate arguments using evidence contributes not only to critical thinking but also to academic literacy.

Despite these pedagogical advances, the implementation of critical and historical thinking in primary classrooms faces several challenges. These include limited instructional time, assessment systems that prioritize factual recall, and inadequate teacher preparation (VanSledright, 2011). Teachers often require professional development to understand historical thinking as a pedagogical goal and to design learning activities that support its development. Therefore, any instructional innovation aimed at enhancing critical thinking in history must also address systemic factors and provide teachers with the necessary tools and support.

In summary, the development of critical and historical thinking in primary education is both feasible and essential. It empowers students to become thoughtful, informed, and active citizens. Instructional innovations rooted in active learning strategies—such as inquiry-based learning, project-based assignments, and dialogic teaching—offer effective pathways for embedding these skills in history education. As this documentary research will later explore, such innovations are grounded in both empirical research and international best practices, offering promising models for future curriculum development.

5. Documentary Findings

The documentary analysis revealed substantial literature and policy documents that provide insights into how active learning approaches have been integrated into history education to foster critical thinking among primary students. These findings are organized into four thematic areas: (1) curriculum and policy orientation, (2) instructional models and classroom strategies, (3) teacher roles and competencies, and (4) challenges and enabling conditions.

5.1 Curriculum and Policy Orientation toward Active Learning and Critical Thinking

Across many national educational systems, curriculum frameworks have undergone reforms aimed at cultivating 21st-century competencies, with critical thinking emerging as a central outcome. For instance, the **Australian Curriculum: History** (ACARA, 2022) explicitly emphasizes historical inquiry skills, encouraging students to pose questions, locate and analyze sources, and construct informed narratives. Similarly, the **UK National Curriculum** outlines objectives that promote evaluative thinking and the use of evidence to make judgments about past events (DfE, 2014).

In Southeast Asia, countries like Singapore and Thailand have embraced similar reform agendas. Thailand's **Basic Education Core Curriculum (2008)** encourages analytical thinking and problem-solving across subjects, including Social Studies, Religion, and Culture, which houses history education. The curriculum advocates student-centered learning environments and emphasizes "active learning" as a means of transforming classrooms into spaces of inquiry and dialogue (Thai Ministry of Education, 2008). However, studies suggest that the implementation of such curricular intentions varies widely depending on teacher preparedness and institutional support (Hallinger & Lee, 2011).

5.2 Instructional Models and Classroom Strategies

Documentary sources present a range of **active learning models** that have demonstrated efficacy in enhancing historical thinking and critical reasoning in the primary years. Among the most cited is the **Historical Inquiry Model**, which encourages students to explore key questions about the past using primary and secondary sources. This model is supported by research from Lee and Ashby (2000), who found that even young children can engage meaningfully with historical evidence when guided through structured inquiry.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is another widely documented strategy, wherein students investigate complex historical themes over time, culminating in presentations, exhibitions, or written narratives (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006). In a study by Grant (2011), primary students engaged in a local history project that involved interviews with community elders and analysis of historical photographs, resulting in improved critical engagement and a deeper connection to their local context.

Role-playing and historical simulations are also highlighted in literature as tools for building empathy and argumentative reasoning. For example, Barton and Levstik (2004) describe classroom simulations of historical debates that require students to understand multiple perspectives and defend their positions using historical evidence.

Moreover, **discussion-based strategies**, such as Socratic questioning and structured academic controversy, have been shown to foster critical discourse and evaluative skills (Hess, 2009). These approaches encourage students to interrogate narratives, identify bias, and consider the reliability of sources—skills aligned with higher-order thinking in Bloom's taxonomy.

5.3 Teacher Roles and Competencies in Active History Learning

Literature consistently highlights the role of the teacher as a **facilitator of inquiry**, rather than a transmitter of information. Teachers are expected to design learning experiences that scaffold student thinking, guide them through cognitive dissonance, and encourage reflection. According to Hammond and Gibbons (2005), scaffolding is particularly important when dealing with complex historical texts and abstract concepts. Teachers must know how to break down inquiry tasks and provide linguistic and cognitive support appropriate to students' developmental levels.

Research from Thai classrooms (Sirikul & Nuangchaler, 2014) points to gaps in teacher readiness to adopt active learning pedagogies, particularly in large classrooms with limited resources. While many educators express support for critical thinking and student-centered learning in theory, their practice remains predominantly didactic due to workload, assessment pressures, and limited professional development opportunities.

Nonetheless, several successful initiatives have been documented, such as collaborative lesson study programs and teacher inquiry communities, which have helped teachers experiment with active learning techniques and develop reflective teaching practices (Inprasitha, 2011). These findings underscore the need for sustained teacher support systems to ensure the success of instructional innovation.

5.4 Challenges and Enabling Conditions

Despite strong policy alignment and theoretical support for active learning in history education, literature reveals significant challenges. **Structural constraints**, such as rigid timetables, high-stakes testing, and prescriptive curricula, often limit teachers' flexibility to implement inquiry-based or project-based methods. Moreover, **resource limitations**, particularly in underfunded schools, hinder access to primary sources, digital tools, and collaborative spaces necessary for effective active learning.

However, the literature also highlights several **enabling conditions**. These include strong leadership, school cultures that value innovation, integration of ICT tools for historical analysis (e.g., digital archives, timelines, and interactive maps), and parental/community involvement in history projects. For instance, the use of local history resources and community interviews has proven effective in connecting students' lived experiences with historical inquiry, making learning more relevant and meaningful (Seixas & Morton, 2013). In conclusion, documentary findings affirm the viability and educational value of active learning approaches in history education at the primary level. However, success depends on an ecosystem of supportive policies, teacher competence, and adequate resources. These insights inform the development of an instructional innovation model tailored to the Thai educational context and globally relevant practices.

6. Discussion

The findings from this documentary research underscore the transformative potential of active learning as a pedagogical strategy in history education at the primary level. This discussion explores the implications of integrating active learning to enhance critical thinking skills, considering theoretical alignment, practical feasibility, and contextual relevance especially within the Thai education system.

6.1 Theoretical Alignment with Constructivist Pedagogy

The active learning approaches identified across documentary sources are deeply rooted in **constructivist theory**, which emphasizes learners' active engagement in constructing knowledge through experience, reflection, and dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978; Piaget, 1972). Historical inquiry, project-based learning, and debate-based methods mirror the constructivist principles of scaffolding, zone of proximal development, and social construction of knowledge. These approaches contrast sharply with the traditional didactic teaching methods that have long dominated history instruction in many education systems, including Thailand's (Srikul & Nuangchaler, 2014).

The alignment between constructivism and historical education is particularly crucial for cultivating **historical thinking** and **critical reasoning**. When students engage with primary sources, analyze cause and effect, evaluate multiple perspectives, and construct arguments, they are practicing the very essence of historical inquiry as defined by scholars such as Wineburg (1991) and Seixas & Morton (2013).

6.2 The Role of Active Learning in Developing Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a higher-order skill that requires learners to go beyond surface-level recall and engage in evaluation, synthesis, and reflection (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The findings suggest that active learning provides a structured yet flexible environment for fostering these skills. For example, project-based learning enables students to investigate

complex historical questions, while debates and simulations develop reasoning and argumentation.

Moreover, critical thinking in history involves not only cognitive processes but also **dispositions**, such as open-mindedness, skepticism, and empathy. Role-playing and perspective-taking strategies, documented in several studies (Levstik & Barton, 2015; Hess, 2009), cultivate these dispositions by immersing students in the viewpoints of historical figures or marginalized groups. Thus, active learning promotes both **cognitive** and **affective** dimensions of critical thinking.

6.3 Contextual Challenges in Implementation

Despite the theoretical and empirical support for active learning, implementing it within real classroom contexts especially in resource-constrained or high-pressure systems presents significant challenges. The Thai education system, while endorsing active learning in official policy (MOE, 2008), faces persistent barriers in practice. These include:

- **Large class sizes** and limited instructional time
- **High-stakes assessments** that prioritize factual recall over critical reasoning
- **Insufficient teacher training and professional development** in constructivist pedagogy
- **Lack of instructional materials** for inquiry-based history learning

Similar challenges are echoed in international contexts, reinforcing the notion that policy endorsement alone is insufficient without **systemic support**, including curriculum redesign, assessment reform, and continuous teacher capacity-building (Hallinger & Lee, 2011; Fullan, 2007).

6.4 Teacher Agency and Professional Learning

The documentary review reveals that teacher agency is a critical factor in the successful adoption of active learning. Teachers must be equipped not only with knowledge of active strategies but also with pedagogical **content knowledge** to adapt these strategies to students' developmental levels and learning needs (Shulman, 1986).

Moreover, research emphasizes the value of **collaborative professional development**, such as lesson study, peer coaching, and action research, in empowering teachers to innovate and reflect on their practice (Inprasitha, 2011). In the Thai context, locally led communities of practice could support teachers in experimenting with active history lessons, integrating local history, and co-developing materials tailored to their learners.

6.5 Towards a Contextualized Instructional Innovation Model

Given the insights gathered, a viable instructional innovation for history education in Thailand must integrate global best practices with local realities. It must be **scalable, resource-conscious, and aligned with curriculum goals**. Key elements may include:

- Inquiry cycles embedded within existing units
- Use of local history and oral narratives to make content relatable
- Guided source analysis activities using accessible materials
- Formative assessment tools that capture thinking processes, such as reflective journals and argument maps

In this sense, the innovation is not merely about introducing new techniques but about **reframing the role of history education**: from transmitting facts to cultivating thoughtful, reflective citizens.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

This documentary research examined the theoretical foundations, instructional models, and contextual factors influencing the use of active learning strategies to enhance critical thinking in primary-level history education. The review of literature and policy documents from both international and local contexts confirms the value of constructivism, inquiry-based approaches for cultivating historical thinking and higher-order cognitive skills in young learners.

Key findings emphasize that:

- Active learning aligns with global educational reform efforts aimed at fostering 21st-century skills.
- Historical inquiry, project-based learning, discussion-based strategies, and simulations are effective in developing critical thinking in history education.
- The role of teachers is central; they must act as facilitators who guide inquiry, scaffold student thinking, and foster reflective learning environments.
- Challenges such as large class sizes, rigid curricula, and limited teacher training impede the widespread adoption of active learning in countries like Thailand.
- A localized, resource-sensitive, and curriculum-aligned instructional innovation is essential for sustainable implementation.

In summary, enhancing history instruction through active learning is not only pedagogically sound but also necessary for preparing learners to think critically, engage civically, and understand the complexity of the human past.

7.2 Recommendations

To support the development and implementation of an instructional innovation that effectively integrates active learning into primary history education, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Curriculum Enrichment and Alignment

- Revise history curriculum documents to embed inquiry-based learning objectives, focusing on skills such as questioning, evidence evaluation, and perspective-taking.
- Encourage integration of local history and community-based content to contextualize learning and increase student engagement.
- Ensure that curriculum standards allow flexibility for teachers to design and implement active learning activities.

2. Teacher Professional Development

- Implement ongoing professional learning programs focused on active learning, historical thinking pedagogy, and classroom-based research.
- Promote collaborative learning models such as lesson study, peer observation, and teacher research communities to foster reflection and innovation.
- Provide training on formative assessment tools that align with active learning, such as rubrics for historical arguments, reflective journals, and performance-based assessments.

3. Instructional Resource Development

- Develop user-friendly teaching guides, lesson templates, and source analysis tools to support teachers in designing active history lessons.
- Curate and distribute collections of local primary sources, oral histories, and visual materials that are age-appropriate and culturally relevant.
- Utilize digital platforms and open educational resources (OERs) to make historical documents and inquiry tools accessible to teachers and students.

4. Assessment Reform

- Promote the use of formative assessment practices that capture students' reasoning processes, rather than rote memorization.
- Encourage school-level or district-level initiatives that experiment with alternative assessments, such as student portfolios, exhibitions, or debates.
- Align national assessments with higher-order learning outcomes to reinforce the value of critical thinking and active engagement.

5. Supportive Policy and School Leadership

- Advocate for educational policies that prioritize innovation in pedagogy and provide time and resources for teacher development.
- Equip school leaders to support active learning by facilitating instructional coaching, allocating planning time, and encouraging experimentation.
- Encourage pilot programs or action research projects in schools to model successful integration of active learning in history classrooms.

By adopting these recommendations, education systems can create the necessary conditions for meaningful, inquiry-driven history education. For Thailand and similar contexts, a localized instructional innovation rooted in active learning holds the potential to not only improve students' academic performance but also prepare them for thoughtful and informed participation in society.

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