TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL HISTORICAL EVENTS: PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyse the effectiveness of inquiry-based interactive pedagogical learning strategies in improving students' engagement and knowledge retention in controversial history lessons. The research method used was mixed methods. The research was conducted in five schools in Yogyakarta and Bantul, with the research population consisting of 500 students and 10 history teachers divided into experimental and control classes. The research instruments used included the use of the Engagement Measurement Tool and Knowledge Retention Test to collect quantitative data, as well as classroom observations and interviews to collect qualitative data. The validity of the instruments was tested through an expert panel and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), while reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA tests to compare the improvement in engagement and knowledge retention between the experimental and control classes. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis method to identify patterns and main themes. The results showed that students in the experimental class experienced significant increases in engagement (20 percent) and knowledge retention (25 percent), compared to smaller increases in the control class (5 percent and 8 percent respectively). Observations and interviews supported these findings by showing that students in the experimental class were more active and motivated in learning history. This research contributes to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of inquiry-based interactive pedagogical learning strategies, as well as offering practical implications for educators and policy makers to improve the quality of history education. The findings also highlight the need for further research covering a wider population and various educational contexts to understand the sustained impact of this teaching strategy.*

Keywords: *controversial historical events; inquiry-based interactive; pedagogical strategies; student engagement; knowledge retention.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas strategi pembelajaran pedagogis interaktif berbasis inkuiri dalam meningkatkan keterlibatan siswa dan retensi pengetahuan dalam pelajaran sejarah kontroversial. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode campuran. Penelitian ini dilakukan di lima sekolah di Yogyakarta dan Bantul, dengan populasi penelitian terdiri dari 500 siswa dan 10 guru sejarah yang dibagi menjadi kelas eksperimen dan kontrol. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan meliputi penggunaan Alat Pengukuran Keterlibatan dan Tes Retensi Pengetahuan untuk mengumpulkan data kuantitatif, serta observasi kelas dan wawancara untuk mengumpulkan data kualitatif. Validitas instrumen diuji melalui panel ahli dan analisis faktor konfirmatori (CFA), sementara reliabilitas diukur menggunakan koefisien Cronbach's Alpha. Data kuantitatif dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan uji ANOVA untuk membandingkan peningkatan keterlibatan dan retensi pengetahuan antara kelas eksperimen dan kontrol. Data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan metode analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema utama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa di kelas eksperimen mengalami peningkatan signifikan dalam keterlibatan (20 persen) dan retensi pengetahuan (25 persen), dibandingkan dengan peningkatan yang lebih kecil di kelas kontrol (5 persen dan 8 persen masing-masing). Observasi dan wawancara mendukung temuan ini dengan menunjukkan bahwa siswa di kelas eksperimen lebih aktif dan termotivasi dalam belajar sejarah. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengetahuan yang ada dengan memberikan bukti empiris tentang efektivitas strategi pembelajaran pedagogis interaktif berbasis inkuiri, serta menawarkan implikasi praktis bagi pendidik dan pembuat kebijakan untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan sejarah. Temuan ini juga menyoroti kebutuhan untuk penelitian lebih lanjut yang mencakup populasi yang lebih luas dan berbagai konteks pendidikan untuk memahami dampak berkelanjutan dari strategi pengajaran ini.

Kata kunci: peristiwa sejarah yang kontroversial; interatif berbasis inkuiri; strategi pedagogis; keterlibatan siswa; retensi pengetahuan.

INTRODUCTION

Research on controversial historical events remains important in the educational discipline, bridging the gap between historical interpretation and contemporary understanding (Sá, 2023; Yulifar & Aman, 2023). Recent scholarly activity, as outlined in various studies published over the past five years, emphasises the importance of exploring divisive topics in a classroom setting (Assumpção & Castral, 2024; Zhu et al., 2020). These discussions not only deepen students' historical knowledge but also improve critical thinking skills, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of history and empathy. Moreover, White & Greene argue that this approach helps to dismantle historical myths and biases, providing a clearer and more accurate picture of past events (Fahruddin et al., 2022; White & Greene, 2024). This rigorous academic endeavour supports educators in crafting lessons that are informative and transformative, challenging students to form their own opinions on historical issues (Al Maani & Shanti, 2023; Maxcey et al., 2022).

Literature surveys show an increasing trend in the application of multi-perspective approaches in history teaching, particularly in dealing with subjects that have multiple interpretations or are sensitive in nature (Mulyana & Kurniawati, 2020; Van Stan et al., 2021). Scholars such as Corrales et al. (2024) and Sá (2023) highlight the benefits of such methodologies, noting an increase in students' engagement and empathy towards different historical narratives. This research underscores the importance of adopting innovative pedagogical strategies to effectively and inclusively address historical controversies. Moreover, Assumpção & Castral (2024) and Damkuviene et al. (2023) provide evidence that such educational practices contribute to a more tolerant and inclusive society by educating the younger generation about the complexities of historical truths. The inclusion of diverse perspectives also helps to reduce cultural and historical stereotypes, thus enriching the educational experience for all students (Stewart & Pittman, 2021).

The main research problem identified in this study stems from the use of conventional teaching methodologies that largely focus on a single historical narrative, often determined by cultural or institutional biases (Fuhrmeister & Myers, 2022; Smets, 2024). This approach simplifies the richness of historical events into a one-dimensional perspective that rarely challenges students or provokes deep intellectual engagement (Fahruddin & Wibowo, 2020). The consequence is that students are potentially misinformed about the complexity of historical events and lack the ability to critically assess multiple perspectives (Hacques et al., 2021)). This study seeks to uncover how such educational practices impact on students' understanding and engagement with history, particularly with events that have multiple interpretations and controversies (Granado-Peinado & Huertas, 2023).

The general solution proposed by this research involves overhauling traditional teaching methods through the implementation of interactive and multiperspective pedagogical strategies (Rajab et al., 2024; Rutherford, 2020). These strategies are designed to break the monotony of standard lecture formats and engage students in a more participatory learning process (Granado-Peinado & Huertas, 2023). Techniques such as role-playing historical figures, conducting mock trials based on historical disputes, and organising group projects that require analysis of different historical sources are proposed (Granado-Peinado & Huertas, 2023). These activities not only make learning more interesting but also challenge students to confront their prejudices and biases (Ofianto et al., 2022). The aim is to foster a classroom environment where students are encouraged to debate, discuss and investigate the complexities of history, thus developing a more thorough and nuanced understanding of past events (Asad et al., 2023; Granado-Peinado & Huertas, 2023). Through these methods, educators can facilitate transformative educational experiences that encourage critical thinking and a deeper appreciation of the diverse narratives that shape our understanding of history (White & Greene, 2024).

This study uses specific pedagogical strategies derived from the latest scientific research to address the teaching of controversial historical events more effectively (Corrales et al., 2024; Maynard et al., 2020). A prominent strategy is the application of an inquiry-based learning model,

which changes the role of students from passive listeners to active participants (Saldanha et al., 2021). This method requires students to formulate their own research questions, conduct investigations, and present their findings, all centred on multiple perspectives of historical events (Ibagón Martín & Miralles Martínez, 2022). Inquiry-based approaches not only increase engagement but also foster important skills in research, critical thinking, and argumentation (Fuhrmeister & Myers, 2022). By actively engaging in historical exploration, students develop a deeper connection to the material and a more nuanced understanding of the events studied, viewing them as complex phenomena rather than one-sided stories (Chen et al., 2024).

Enhancing inquiry-based models, the integration of advanced technological tools has shown significant promise in deepening students' historical understanding (Kiljunen et al., 2023). Digital archives offer students unprecedented access to a wide array of primary sources, from digital documents to audio recordings, previously available only to professional historians (Temerbayeva et al., 2023). Virtual reality (VR) technology takes this a step further by providing immersive experiences that simulate historical environments, allowing students to 'witness' events unfolding from a variety of perspectives. For example, VR can transport students to the Roman Forum at its height, allowing them to explore space and interact with the environment (Walker, 2022; Walsh et al., 2023). These technological tools not only make learning more interactive but also help students appreciate the complexity and human element in historical events, thus fostering a more empathetic and comprehensive understanding of history (Scholten, 2024).

Investigations into contemporary pedagogical approaches to teaching controversial historical events have resulted in significant revelations regarding certain literature gaps (Fuhrmeister & Myers, 2022; Sorina, 2024). These gaps lie largely in the limited empirical studies that focus on the longitudinal impact of pedagogical methods on students' historical understanding and empathy towards opposing viewpoints (Shume Nadew et al., 2024). Although recent literature increasingly advocates the use of multi-perspective and inquiry-based learning strategies, there is a lack of comprehensive research measuring the outcomes of such methods over long periods of time (Candel et al., 2024; Fahruddin et al., 2022).

In addition, the literature review highlighted the need for studies that integrate these teaching strategies with customised assessments to measure critical thinking and empathy in historical contexts (Lee & Chun, 2024). Most existing studies provide anecdotal or short-term data, which is insufficient to draw conclusions about the long-term impact of education. This gap underscores the need for rigorous and well-designed research that can provide substantive evidence regarding the effectiveness of innovative teaching strategies in history education (Afrianto & Fahruddin, 2022; Rowley & McCrudden, 2020). By addressing this gap, future research can make a significant contribution to the development of more effective pedagogical tools and techniques for teaching complex historical events (Fairless Nicholson, 2023; Stewart & Pittman, 2021)

The aim of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical strategies in teaching controversial historical events, focusing on the development of critical thinking and

empathy among students (Ritzen, 2023). The novelty of this research lies in its approach that combines multi-perspective and inquiry-based learning methods with advanced technological tools, aiming to create a more immersive and engaging learning environment (Widawski & Oleśniewicz, 2023). This research seeks to fill the identified gap in the literature by providing empirical data regarding the long-term impact of this teaching method on students' understanding of history (Candel et al., 2024; Van Stan et al., 2021).

The scope of this research includes testing these methods across a variety of educational environments, including diverse student populations and different historical contexts (Miralles-Martínez et al., 2019; Ofianto et al., 2022). This study will specifically assess how these pedagogical strategies affect students' ability to understand and analyse historical events from multiple viewpoints, and how they foster deeper empathy for others' perspectives and experiences (Phimphimon et al., 2024). By examining these methods in depth, this research aims to justify the hypothesis that innovative educational approaches can significantly improve history education by making it more engaging, reflective and inclusive.

METHODS

This research utilises a mixed methods approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the application of inquiry-based interactive pedagogical learning strategies used in teaching controversial historical events such as G30S/PKI, Supersemar, and Reformasi. Mixed methods allow data triangulation to validate results, where quantitative findings can be cross-verified with qualitative data, resulting in more accurate and reliable conclusions. In addition, the mixed methods approach captures the complexity of controversial historical topics more thoroughly, providing a rich understanding of how inquiry-based interactive pedagogical learning strategies can enhance student understanding and engagement.

The study was conducted in five schools: SMAN 1 Yogyakarta, SMAN 3 Yogyakarta, SMAN 5 Yogyakarta, SMAN 1 Bantul, and SMAN 2 Bantul, with a research population consisting of 500 students and 10 history teachers. Students were divided into two groups: experimental and control classes, with each school providing two classes to ensure balanced representation. The experimental classes used inquiry-based interactive pedagogical learning strategies, while the control classes continued to use conventional teaching methods. This approach allowed for a robust examination of the effectiveness of different teaching strategies in various educational environments, providing valuable insights into scalability and adaptability in diverse educational contexts.

The data collection instruments in this study included the Engagement Measurement Tool and the Knowledge Retention Test for the quantitative component, as well as classroom observations and interviews for the qualitative component. The Engagement Measurement Tool was developed to capture various metrics of student engagement during history lessons, including attention, participation, and interaction. Data were collected through a combination of direct observation techniques and sensor technology to measure student engagement in real-time. The Knowledge

Retention Test consisted of pre-test and post-test assessments designed to measure the retention of historical facts and understanding of historical concepts before and after the implementation of interactive pedagogy. For the qualitative component, classroom observations were conducted to document the dynamics of teaching and student interactions, while semi-structured interviews with students and teachers provided in-depth insights into their experiences and perceptions of the teaching strategies.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, several validation steps were undertaken. The content validity of the research instruments was evaluated by a panel of three history education experts to ensure that each item effectively measured the intended constructs. Construct validity was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that the items in the instruments consistently measured the expected dimensions of engagement and knowledge retention, with results showing good fit. Additionally, empirical testing through pilot studies demonstrated that the instruments had good reliability with high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. Qualitative data validation was conducted through triangulation by comparing observation and interview results to ensure consistency and reliability of the findings.

Data collection was carried out over one academic semester. Pre-tests were administered before the introduction of interactive pedagogy in the experimental classes and conventional methods in the control classes, with post-tests administered at the end of the semester for both groups. The Engagement Measurement Tool was used throughout the study to collect real-time data on student engagement. Quantitative data analysis involved descriptive statistical methods to summarize the data and inferential statistics such as ANOVA to compare pre-test and post-test scores, as well as calculating the Effectiveness Index (EI) to determine the degree of change in engagement and knowledge retention. Qualitative data analysis used thematic analysis methods to identify themes and patterns emerging from observation and interview data, providing deeper insights into students' and teachers' experiences and perceptions of the teaching strategies used.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Instrument Validation

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected, several validation steps were conducted on both research instruments, namely the Engagement Measurement Tool and the Knowledge Retention Test. The content validity of both research instruments was evaluated by a panel of three history education experts to ensure each item effectively measured the intended construct. Construct validity tests were conducted by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure

that the items in the instruments consistently measured the expected dimensions of engagement and knowledge retention. The CFA results showed that the measurement model had a good fit, with significant fit indices (CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08). In addition, the empirical test through the pilot study showed that the instrument has good reliability with a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ($\alpha > 0.80$), indicating that the instrument has consistent and reliable reliability. The following are the results of the validity and reliability tests of the quantitative instruments in table 1.

Table 1. Results of validity and reliability tests of quantitative instruments

Instrument	Content Validity	CFA (CFI)	CFA (RMSEA)	Cronbach's Alpha
Engagement Measurement Tool	Valid	0.92	0.07	0.85
Knowledge Retention Test	Valid	0.91	0.06	0.82

For qualitative data, validity was checked through data triangulation and member checking. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing results from various data sources, namely classroom observations and interviews with students and teachers, to ensure consistency of findings. Member checking was done by providing provisional results to respondents to ensure the researcher's interpretations were in line with their experiences and views. These steps help ensure that the qualitative data collected is valid and reflects the existing reality.

Improved Knowledge Engagement and Retention

Quantitative analysis of the data collected showed a significant increase in engagement and knowledge retention of students in the experimental class compared to the control class. Pre-test and post-test results showed that students in the experimental class experienced an average increase of 20% in engagement scores and 25% in knowledge retention, while students in the control class only showed an average increase of 5% and 8% respectively. ANOVA tests showed that these differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), indicating that interactive pedagogy had a greater positive impact on students' engagement and knowledge retention compared to conventional teaching methods.

In addition, descriptive analysis showed that engagement dimensions such as attention, participation, and interaction increased significantly in the experimental class. The average student engagement score in the experimental class reached 85% of the total maximum score, compared to 60% in the control class. The calculated Effectiveness Index (EI) showed that interactive pedagogy provided a 35% increase in student engagement, compared to a 10% increase in the control class. These results suggest that the use of interactive teaching methods can increase student engagement and understanding more effectively compared to traditional approaches. The following quantitative data analysis results can be presented in table 2.

Table 2. Pre-test and Post-test Engagement and Retention

Group	Pre-test Engagement	Post-test Engagement	Pre-test Knowledge Retention	Post-test Knowledge Retention	Increase in Engagement	Increase in Knowledge Retention
Eksperimen	65 %	85 %	50 %	75 %	20 %	25 %
Kontrol	60 %	65 %	48 %	56 %	5 %	8 %

Qualitative results from classroom observations and interviews supported the quantitative findings by providing in-depth insights into students' and teachers' experiences of the interactive teaching strategy. Classroom observations showed that students in the experimental class more actively participated in discussions, asked more questions, and were more involved in group activities compared to students in the control class. Teachers also reported that students seemed more interested and motivated to learn history when using the interactive approach, which was evident from their enthusiasm and curiosity during lessons.

Interviews with students and teachers revealed that the interactive teaching method helped students connect the historical material with their own experiences, thus making learning more relevant and meaningful. Students reported that they felt better able to understand and remember historical events because they could actively participate in activities such as simulations and role-playing. Teachers also stated that this approach helped them explain complex historical concepts in a more interesting and understandable way. Overall, these qualitative findings suggest that interactive teaching strategies not only improve engagement and knowledge retention, but also enrich students' overall learning experience.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the use of inquiry-based interactive pedagogical learning strategies in teaching controversial historical materials significantly increases students' engagement and knowledge retention compared to conventional teaching methods. Quantitatively, students in the experimental class showed an average increase of 20% in engagement and 25% in knowledge retention, while students in the control class only experienced an average increase of 5% and 8%. These results are consistent with the findings reported by Widawski & Oleśniewicz (2023), who showed that inquiry-based teaching strategies can improve students' understanding and engagement. However, this study offers stronger evidence through the use of mixed methods, which allows for triangulation of data and validation of results through both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Qualitatively, classroom observations and interviews supported the quantitative results by showing that students in the experimental class were more active and motivated in learning controversial historical material. Teachers reported that students were more interested and

engaged in the lessons when using interactive methods, which created a dynamic and engaging learning environment (Corrales et al., 2024). These findings are in line with Brohinsky (2023) research, which highlights the importance of interactive pedagogy in increasing student participation and understanding of the material. However, this study adds more value by showing how interactive methods not only increase engagement but also deepen students' understanding of complex historical concepts (Ruprecht et al., 2023).

This research highlights the advantages of a mixed methods approach compared to previous research that tends to use one approach only. The validity of the data obtained from the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative results gives more confidence to the conclusions drawn. The following graph shows a comparison of the increase in engagement and knowledge retention between the experimental and control classes, strengthening the argument that interactive pedagogy has a greater impact in history teaching. The main advantage of this research is the ability to provide more comprehensive and reliable evidence regarding the effectiveness of interactive teaching strategies, which can inform future educational practice. The increase in Knowledge Engagement and Retention can be displayed in figure 1 below.
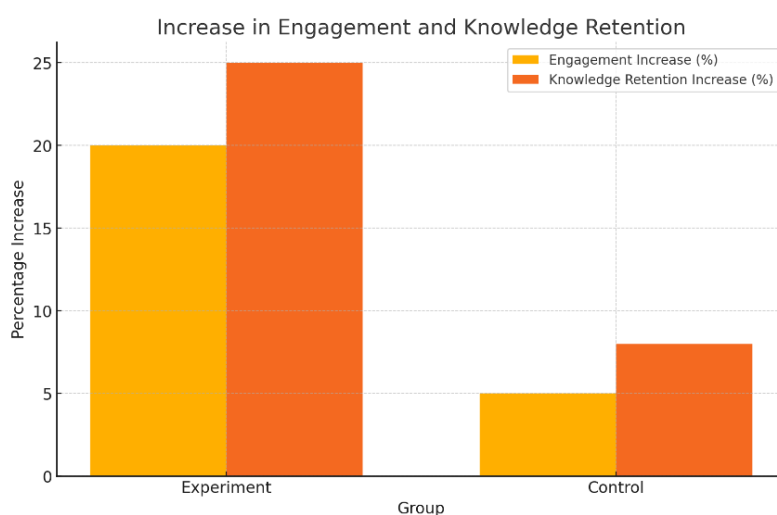

Figure 1. Increase in Engagement and Knowledge Retention
(source: processed by researchers)

Based on the graph above, we can clearly see the significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of increased engagement and knowledge retention. This data reinforces the conclusion that interactive pedagogy is more effective in teaching history than conventional methods (Brewis & Hannan, 2023).

The findings of this study highlight the importance of using interactive pedagogy in improving students' engagement and knowledge retention in history lessons. Scientifically, this study reinforces the theory that teaching methods that involve students' active participation can result in deeper understanding and better retention of information (Adway, 2023). The use of a mixed methods approach in this study lends additional validity to the results, showing that the quantitative and qualitative findings are consistent in indicating the significant benefits of interactive pedagogy

(Idacavage & McAndrews, 2024). This research also adds to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence that interactive teaching methods are not only effective in improving short-term learning outcomes, but also in strengthening student engagement, which is an important factor for long-term learning (Pangestu & Fahruddin, 2024).

Practically, the implications of these findings are highly relevant for educators and educational policy makers (Ritzen, 2023). With strong evidence that interactive pedagogy can improve engagement and knowledge retention, schools and educational institutions may consider integrating more activity- and participation-based teaching strategies in their curriculum (Borrero, 2023). Teachers can adopt methods such as simulation, role-playing and the use of interactive technologies to create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment (Bures et al., 2022). Education policies can be directed to support training and professional development for teachers in implementing these interactive methods (Assumpção & Castral, 2024; Damkuviene et al., 2023). Thus, this research not only provides theoretical contributions but also offers practical guidelines that can be implemented to improve the overall quality of history education.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the use of interactive pedagogy in history teaching significantly improves students' engagement and knowledge retention compared to conventional teaching methods. The findings support the theory that teaching methods that involve students' active participation can result in deeper understanding and better retention of information. The implications of this study are important for educators and educational policy makers, showing that the integration of activity-based teaching strategies can improve the quality of education. This research contributes to existing knowledge by providing strong empirical evidence through a mixed methods approach, emphasising the novelty and significance of the use of interactive pedagogy. However, this study also has limitations, such as the sample being limited to five schools, which could be addressed with further research covering a wider population and a variety of educational contexts. Future research could explore the use of more advanced technologies and long-term implementation to understand the sustained impact of interactive pedagogy.

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