

HUMSS Students' Critical Thinking Skills And Strategies in History Education In The First Congressional District Of Batangas

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Abstract

Critical thinking is considered one of the most essential competencies in 21st-century education, particularly among Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) students who are expected to analyze historical events, evaluate evidence, and communicate informed interpretations. History education plays a significant role in developing analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication through inquiry-based and learner-centered instruction. However, despite the implementation of the K to 12 curriculum and other educational reforms, many history classes still rely on traditional lecture-based approaches, limiting opportunities for deeper historical inquiry and critical analysis. This study aimed to assess the critical thinking skills of HUMSS students and the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education in the First Congressional District of Batangas during the Academic Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it examined students' analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication, as well as teachers' utilization of problem-solving, collaborative learning, and experiential learning strategies.

The study employed a descriptive mixed-method research design involving quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were gathered from 140 HUMSS teachers through a validated researcher-made questionnaire and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Statistical tools such as weighted mean, ranking, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were utilized for quantitative analysis, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data.

Findings revealed that HUMSS students demonstrated an Above Average level of critical thinking skills, particularly in meaningful communication, while research ability obtained the lowest ratings in evaluating the credibility and reliability of historical sources. Teaching strategies were generally Moderately Utilized, with collaborative learning identified as the most frequently employed approach. Furthermore, the study found a significant relationship between teaching strategies and students' critical thinking skills, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis ($p = 0.000$). The study concluded that learner-centered and inquiry-based instructional strategies significantly contribute to the enhancement of students' critical thinking skills in history education and recommended the implementation of Project HIBLA and other



experiential learning activities to strengthen historical inquiry and evidence-based reasoning among HUMSS learners.

Keywords: *Critical Thinking, History Education, HUMSS, Pedagogical Strategies, Project HIBLA*

Introduction

Critical thinking is considered one of the most essential competencies in 21st-century education because it enables learners to analyze information, evaluate evidence, solve problems, and communicate sound judgments effectively. In the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand, critical thinking plays a significant role in helping students understand social issues, interpret historical events, and construct evidence-based conclusions. History education, in particular, provides meaningful opportunities for learners to develop analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication through the study of historical events, perspectives, and sources.

Globally, educational institutions have increasingly emphasized the development of critical thinking as part of outcome-based and inquiry-centered learning. International assessments and educational studies reveal that students must move beyond rote memorization toward higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and interpretation. History education contributes to this goal by encouraging learners to examine multiple viewpoints, evaluate historical evidence, and formulate reasoned arguments based on factual information. Through inquiry-based and learner-centered approaches, students become more reflective, analytical, and socially aware individuals.

In the Philippine educational context, the need to strengthen critical thinking among learners has become increasingly evident. Republic Act No. 10533, also known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013, highlights the importance of developing 21st-century skills, including critical thinking, communication, and research competence. Likewise, the K to 12 Curriculum promotes learner-centered and inquiry-based instruction to improve students' understanding and application of knowledge. However, despite these educational reforms, many students still rely heavily on memorization rather than critical analysis and interpretation, especially in history and social science subjects.

Within the First Congressional District of Batangas, variations in students' critical thinking performance have been observed among HUMSS learners, particularly in tasks involving historical analysis, interpretation of events, and research-based communication. Teachers recognize the importance of fostering higher-order thinking skills; however, challenges such as large class sizes, limited instructional resources, insufficient professional development, and curriculum congestion hinder the consistent implementation of learner-centered teaching strategies. Consequently, many history classes continue to utilize traditional lecture-based instruction, limiting opportunities for students to engage in deeper inquiry, collaborative learning, and experiential activities.

Teaching strategies such as problem-solving, collaborative learning, and experiential learning are considered effective approaches in promoting critical thinking among students. These instructional methods encourage learners to actively participate in discussions, evaluate historical sources, conduct research, and apply historical knowledge to real-life situations. Studies suggest that inquiry-driven and student-centered pedagogies significantly improve students' analytical reasoning, communication skills, and evidence-based thinking. However,

there remains limited empirical evidence examining the relationship between teaching strategies and students' critical thinking skills in history education within the local context of Batangas.

Given these conditions, the present study aimed to assess the critical thinking skills of HUMSS students and the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education in the Senior High Schools of the First Congressional District of Batangas during the Academic Year 2025–2026. Specifically, the study focused on analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication, as well as the use of problem-solving, collaborative learning, and experiential learning strategies. Furthermore, it sought to determine the relationship between these variables, identify the challenges encountered by history teachers, and propose instructional strategies that may enhance students' critical thinking skills. Through this investigation, the study intended to contribute to the improvement of history instruction and the promotion of inquiry-based learning in the HUMSS strand.

Research Question

This study was to assess the critical thinking skills of HUMSS students and the strategies in History Education in the Senior High Schools of the First Congressional District of Batangas during the Academic Year 2025-2026. Specifically, the present study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of students' critical thinking skills, as assessed by the teachers in terms of:
 - 1.1. analytical thinking;
 - 1.2. research ability; and
 - 1.3. meaningful communication?
2. What is the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education in terms of;
 - 2.1. problem-solving;
 - 2.2. collaborative learning; and
 - 2.3. experiential learning?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the assessments on the level of students' critical thinking skills and on the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education?
4. What challenges do HUMSS teachers face in teaching history?
5. Based on the results, what instructional strategies may be proposed to enhance students' critical thinking skills?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the utilization of teaching strategies in history education and the critical thinking skills of HUMSS students in the First Congressional District of Batangas.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive mixed-method research design utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches to determine the relationship between teaching strategies in history education and the critical thinking skills of HUMSS students in the First Congressional District of Batangas. The quantitative aspect focused on measuring the level of students' critical thinking skills and the extent of utilization of teaching strategies through survey questionnaires. Meanwhile, the qualitative component explored the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching history through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The mixed-method approach enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive data and deeper insights regarding the development of critical thinking skills among HUMSS students.

Participants

The respondents of the study consisted of 140 HUMSS teachers from selected Senior High Schools in the First Congressional District of Batangas during the Academic Year 2025–2026. The respondents were selected from a population of 220 teachers using stratified random sampling to ensure proper representation from participating schools. The teachers served as respondents because of their direct involvement in implementing teaching strategies and evaluating students' critical thinking skills in history education.

Research Instruments

The study utilized a validated researcher-made questionnaire as the primary instrument for data gathering. The questionnaire was divided into sections measuring the students' critical thinking skills in terms of analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication, as well as the extent of utilization of teaching strategies such as problem-solving, collaborative learning, and experiential learning. A five-point Likert scale was used to quantify respondents' perceptions and assessments.

To support the quantitative findings, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide was also prepared to gather qualitative data regarding the challenges encountered by teachers in teaching history education. The research instruments underwent content validation by experts and pilot testing to ensure reliability and validity.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the Graduate School, school administrators, and concerned authorities. A letter requesting permission to conduct the study was distributed to participating schools. Upon approval, informed consent was obtained from the respondents to ensure voluntary participation and confidentiality of responses.

The researcher administered the questionnaires through an online survey platform to facilitate efficient data collection. Respondents were given sufficient time to answer the survey instruments. After the retrieval of questionnaires, selected participants were invited to participate in Focus Group Discussions to provide further insights regarding teaching strategies and challenges encountered in history education. All collected data were organized, tabulated, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The data gathered were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Weighted mean and ranking were used to determine the level of students' critical thinking skills and the extent of utilization of teaching strategies. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (Pearson r) was utilized to determine the significant relationship between the variables at a 0.05 level of significance. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes and challenges encountered by teachers in history education.

Results

1. Level of Students' Critical Thinking Skills as Assessed by the Teachers

1.1 Level of Students' Critical Thinking Skills as Assessed by the Teachers in terms of Analytical Thinking.

Table 2

Analytical Thinking

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Analyze historical events to identify patterns, cause-and-effect relationships, and consequences.	3.19	AA	2
2. Evaluate different sources of historical information for accuracy, credibility, and bias.	3.11	AA	6

3. Identify underlying assumptions, perspectives, and interpretations in historical narratives.	3.15	AA	4.5
4. Construct well-reasoned arguments and conclusions based on historical evidence.	3.04	AA	7
5. Compare and contrast multiple historical perspectives to draw informed judgments.	3.17	AA	3
6. Recognize the implications of historical events on contemporary society.	3.21	AA	1
7. Critically examine conflicting views in historical debates.	3.02	AA	8
8. Apply logical reasoning to solve historical problems or address historical questions.	3.15	AA	4.5
Composite Mean	3.13	AA	

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = High (H); 2.50 – 3.49 = Above Average (AA);
1.50 – 2.49 = Below Average (BA); 1.00 – 1.49 = Low (L)*

The data revealed a composite mean of 3.13, which corresponded to a verbal interpretation of Above Average suggesting that the students possessed a consistent and reliable capacity to process historical information and apply logical reasoning within their academic tasks. In a detailed examination of the specific indicators, the highest results highlighted the students' proficiency in contextualizing historical knowledge, particularly in their ability to recognize the implications of historical events on contemporary society, which garnered the highest weighted mean of 3.21. Finally, the lowest on the rank was the indicator regarding the students' ability to critically examine conflicting views in historical debates with a weighted mean of 3.02.

1.2 Level of Students' Critical Thinking Skills as Assessed by the Teachers in terms of Research Ability.

Table 3
Research Ability

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Gather relevant historical data from primary and secondary sources systematically.	3.11	AA	1
2. Organize historical information logically for analysis and interpretation.	3.04	AA	7
3. Critically evaluate the validity, reliability, and relevance of different sources.	2.99	AA	8
4. Apply research processes and inquiry-based methods to complete history projects.	3.06	AA	5.5
5. Synthesize historical evidence to support conclusions or develop new insights.	3.10	AA	2.5
6. Use appropriate tools and techniques to analyze historical data effectively.	3.10	AA	2.5
7. Design research questions that are clear, focused, and relevant to historical topics.	3.08	AA	4
8. Reflect on the research process to improve investigation and analysis skills.	3.06	AA	5.5
Composite Mean	3.06	AA	

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = High (H); 2.50 – 3.49 = Above Average (AA);
1.50 – 2.49 = Below Average (BA); 1.00 – 1.49 = Low (L)*

The results illustrated a composite mean of 3.06, which was equivalent to a verbal interpretation of AboveAverage. Ranking first was the ability of students to gather relevant historical data from primary and secondary sources systematically, which garnered the highest weighted mean of 3.11. Finally, the lowest on the rank was the indicator regarding the students' ability to critically evaluate the validity, reliability, and relevance of different sources, which yielded a weighted mean of 2.99.

1.3 Level of Students' Critical Thinking Skills as Assessed by the Teachers in terms of Meaningful Communication.

Table 4
Meaningful Communication

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Express historical ideas clearly and coherently in writing.	3.19	AA	4
2. Engage actively in history-related discussions and debates.	3.19	AA	4
3. Present historical information in an organized and logical manner.	3.17	AA	6.5
4. Convey historical analyses persuasively to different audiences.	2.98	AA	8
5. Ask relevant and insightful questions that deepen understanding of historical topics.	3.19	AA	4
6. Use visual or digital media effectively to communicate historical findings.	3.17	AA	6.5
7. Adapt communication style depending on the audience (peers,	3.21	AA	1

teachers, community).			
8. Provide constructive feedback to peers on historical analyses or presentations	3.20	AA	2
Composite Mean	3.16	AA	

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = High (H); 2.50 – 3.49 = Above Average (AA);
1.50 – 2.49 = Below Average (BA); 1.00 – 1.49 = Low (L)*

The results yielded a composite mean of 3.16, which corresponded to a verbal interpretation of Above Average. Ranking highest was the ability of students to adapt communication style depending on the audience, which garnered a weighted mean of 3.21. Finally, the lowest on the rank was the ability to convey historical analyses persuasively to different audiences, which yielded a weighted mean of 2.98.

Table 5

Summary of the Level of Students' Critical Thinking Skills as Assessed by the Teachers

Indicators	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Analytical Thinking	3.13	Above Average	2
Research Ability	3.06	Above Average	3
Meaningful Communication	3.16	Above Average	1
Composite Mean	3.12	Above Average	

*Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = High (H); 2.50 – 3.49 = Above Average (AA);
1.50 – 2.49 = Below Average (BA); 1.00 – 1.49 = Low (L)*

Summary. The statistical findings revealed an overall composite mean of 3.12, which corresponded to a verbal interpretation of Above Average. Ranking first was Meaningful Communication, which garnered the highest composite mean of 3.16. Finally, the lowest on the rank among the subcomponents was Research Ability, which yielded a composite mean of 3.06.

2. Extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education.

2.1 Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education in Terms of Problem-Solving.

Table 6
Problem-Solving

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Present real historical problems or dilemmas for students to solve.	3.36	MU	5
2. Encourage students to propose solutions based on historical evidence.	3.37	MU	3
3. Integrate case studies or historical scenarios that require critical thinking.	3.34	MU	8
4. Allow students to evaluate outcomes of past historical events.	3.36	MU	5
5. Guide students in applying analytical reasoning to solve historical questions.	3.49	MU	1
6. Challenge students to generate multiple possible solutions to historical issues.	3.38	MU	7

7. Require students to justify their solutions with supporting evidence.	3.36	MU	5
8. Reflect on students' problem-solving processes and provide feedback.	3.39	MU	2
Composite Mean	3.37		

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Highly Utilized; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Utilized; 1.50 – 2.49 = Slightly Utilized; 1.00 – 1.49 = Least Utilized

The assessment of problem-solving strategies in history education yielded a composite mean of 3.37, which was verbally interpreted as moderately utilized. Among the indicators evaluated, the practice of guiding students in applying analytical reasoning to solve historical questions garnered the highest weighted mean of 3.49, which was verbally interpreted as moderately utilized. This result implied that educators prioritized the cultivation of logical frameworks and cause-and-effect analysis to move learners beyond rote memorization toward evidence-based historical inquiry. Conversely, the integration of case studies or historical scenarios that required critical thinking received the lowest weighted mean of 3.34, also verbally interpreted as moderately-utilized. This suggested that while inquiry-based learning was present, immersive and scenario-based pedagogical tools were less frequently employed, likely due to structural constraints such as limited instructional time and the pressure of curriculum coverage.

2.2 Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education in Terms of Collaborative Learning.

Table 7

Collaborative Learning

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Design group activities or projects that require active student collaboration.	3.50	HU	5
2. Encourage students to share	3.58	HU	1

ideas and perspectives with peers.			
3. Promote peer support and constructive feedback in history tasks.	3.51	HU	3
4. Facilitate discussions that require negotiation of differing viewpoints.	3.46	MU	8
5. Use group outputs to assess understanding of historical topics.	3.51	HU	3
6. Provide opportunities for students to collectively solve historical problems.	3.47	MU	7
7. Guide students to reflect on group processes to improve teamwork.	3.51	HU	3
8. Consistently integrate collaborative learning activities into lessons.	3.49	MU	6
Composite Mean	3.50	HU	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Highly Utilized; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Utilized; 1.50 – 2.49 = Slightly Utilized; 1.00 – 1.49 = Least Utilized

The quantitative assessment of collaborative learning strategies yielded a composite mean of 3.50, which was verbally interpreted as highly utilized. This indicated that social-constructivist approaches were deeply embedded in a dominant pedagogical framework in history instruction. The indicator regarding encouraging students to share ideas and perspectives with peers achieved the highest weighted mean of 3.58, verbally interpreted as highly utilized. This implied that respondents successfully cultivated an interactive classroom culture where the exchange of diverse viewpoints served as a primary vehicle for refining historical understanding. Conversely, the facilitation of discussions that required the negotiation of differing viewpoints emerged as the lowest-ranked indicator with a weighted mean of 3.46, which was verbally interpreted as moderately-utilized. This suggested that while idea-sharing was prevalent, there was a distinct need for improvement in scaffolding, structured argumentation and the reconciliation of conflicting historical narratives.

2.3 Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education in Terms of Experiential Learning.

Table 8

Experiential Learning

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Conduct simulations, role-plays, or reenactments related to historical events.	3.41	MU	6
2. Connect lessons to real-life experiences or contemporary contexts.	3.53	MU	1
3. Organize field trips, museum visits, or virtual explorations to enrich lessons.	3.19	MU	8
4. Encourage students to reflect on learning from hands-on activities.	3.44	MU	3.5
5. Provide inquiry-based tasks where students analyze historical sources.	3.45	MU	2
6. Guide students in conducting mini-research or historical investigations.'	3.41	MU	6
7. Support students to reconstruct historical narratives from primary and secondary sources.	3.41	MU	6
8. Consistently incorporate experiential learning activities into the curriculum.	3.44	MU	3.5
Composite Mean	3.41	MU	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Highly Utilized; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Utilized; 1.50 – 2.49 = Slightly Utilized; 1.00 – 1.49 = Least Utilized

The quantitative analysis of experiential learning strategies yielded a composite mean of 3.41, which was verbally interpreted as moderately utilized. This indicated that while hands-on and context-rich inquiry was integrated into history instruction, it was not yet a primary or consistent pedagogical fixture. The highest-rated indicator was the practice of connecting lessons to real-life experiences or contemporary contexts, which garnered a weighted mean of 3.53 and was verbally interpreted as highly utilized. This implied that respondents were highly effective at establishing the modern-day relevance of historical events to bridge the gap between past narratives and the students' lived realities. In contrast, the organization of field trips, museum visits, or virtual explorations emerged as the lowest-ranked indicator with a weighted mean of 3.19, which was verbally interpreted as moderately utilized. This suggested a significant need for improvement in facilitating immersive, out-of-classroom experiences, which were often hindered by structural barriers such as budgetary constraints and administrative requirements.

Summary of the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education.

Table 9

Summary of the Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education

Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education	Composite Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Collaborative Learning	3.50	HU	1
Problem Solving	3.37	MU	3
Experiential Learning	3.41	MU	2
Composite Mean	3.43	MU	

Legend: 3.50 – 4.00 = Highly Utilized; 2.50 – 3.49 = Moderately Utilized; 1.50 – 2.49 = Slightly Utilized; 1.00 – 1.49 = Least Utilized

The evaluation of pedagogical approaches in history education yielded an overall composite mean of 3.43, which was verbally interpreted as moderately utilized. This indicated that while student-centered strategies were integrated into the curriculum, they had not yet reached a level of maximum or consistent implementation across all instructional dimensions. Among the assessed strategies, collaborative learning emerged as the highest indicator with a composite mean of 3.50, which was verbally interpreted as highly utilized. This implied that educators prioritized social-constructivist environments where peer interaction and shared meaning-making served as the primary vehicles for historical inquiry. Conversely, problem-

solving strategies received the lowest composite mean of 3.37, verbally interpreted as moderately utilized. This suggested that the area most in need of improvement involved systematic integration of structured analytical tasks and evidence-based decision-making, which were often sidelined by curriculum density.

3. Relationship Between Teacher-Respondents' Assessment of Students' Level of Critical Thinking Skills and the Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies

3.1 Relationship between the Level of Students' Analytical Thinking and Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education.

Table 10

Relationship between the Level of Students' Analytical Thinking and Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education

Variables	p-values	Computed r-values	Interpretation	Decision on Ho	Verbal Interpretation
Problem Solving	0.000	0.602**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant
Collaborative Learning	0.000	0.604**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant
Experiential Learning	0.000	0.643**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant

Coefficient of correlation (r): +1.0 (Perfect relationship), +.76 to .99 (Very Strong relationship), +.51 to .75 (Strong relationship), +.26-.50 (Moderate Relationship), +.11 to .25 (Weak relationship), +.01 to .10 (Very weak relationship), .00 (No relationship)

3.2 Relationship between the Level of Students' Research Ability and Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education.

Table 11

Relationship between the Level of Students' Research Ability and Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education

Variables	p-values	Computed r-values	Interpretation	Decision on Ho	Verbal Interpretation
Problem Solving	0.000	0.618**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant
Collaborative Learning	0.000	0.617**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant
Experiential Learning	0.000	0.662**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant

Coefficient of correlation (r): +1.0 (Perfect relationship), +.76 to .99 (Very Strong relationship), +.51 to .75 (Strong relationship), +.26-.50 (Moderate Relationship), +.11 to .25 (Weak relationship), +.01 to .10 (Very weak relationship), .00 (No relationship)

3.3 Relationship between the Level of Students' Meaningful Communication and Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education.

Table 12

Relationship between the Level of Students' Meaningful Communication and Extent of Utilization of Teaching Strategies in History Education

Variables	p-values	Computed r-values	Interpretation	Decision on Ho	Verbal Interpretation
Problem Solving	0.000	0.576**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant
Collaborative Learning	0.000	0.575**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant

Experiential Learning	0.000	0.640**	Strong relationship	Reject	Significant
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Coefficient of correlation (r): +1.0 (Perfect relationship), +.76 to .99 (Very Strong relationship), +.51 to .75 (Strong relationship), +.26-.50 (Moderate Relationship), +.11 to .25 (Weak relationship), +.01 to .10 (Very weak relationship), .00 (No relationship)

The data revealed that the three teaching strategies in history education - namely problem-solving, collaborative learning, and experiential learning - yielded p-values of 0.000, which are significantly lower than the standard alpha level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected across all variables, indicating a significant relationship between the teaching strategies employed and the students' critical thinking skills in terms of analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication.

4. Challenges Faced by HUMSS Teachers in Teaching History

Table 13

Challenges Faced by HUMSS Teachers in Teaching History

Identified Themes	Weight	Verbal Interpretation
Gaps in students' prior knowledge	8	P
Students' low engagement	7	P
Time constraints and curriculum pressure	7	P
Barriers in collaborative learning	7	P
Systemic and institutional constraints	7	P
Resource and material limitations	6	P
Limited implementation	5	MP
Composite Mean	6.71	P

The qualitative analysis identified several interconnected themes that hindered the effective delivery of history education. Central to these was a memorization-oriented mindset among students, where learners perceived the subject as a task of rote recall rather than interpretive analysis, resulting in low engagement and a disconnect from contemporary relevance. This issue was compounded by significant gaps in prior knowledge and conceptual readiness, which forced educators to prioritize foundational context-building over advanced historical inquiry. Participants emphasized that learners often lacked the chronological scaffolding necessary for critical analysis, requiring frequent remedial explanations that diverted time from core competencies. Consequently, these gaps necessitated a shift toward simplified instruction to accommodate students' uneven historical foundations.

Systemic barriers, specifically curriculum pressure and resource limitations, further constrained pedagogical innovation. Teachers reported that the breadth of the curriculum, coupled with inadequate access to primary sources and technological aids, mandated a prioritize-content-over-depth approach. Discussions and experiential tasks were frequently shortened to meet administrative deadlines, leading to a synthesized sentiment that "time and curriculum congestion served as the primary enemies of inquiry." Furthermore, classroom management and logistical constraints weakened collaborative efforts, as overcrowded spaces and unequal participation hindered equitable peer learning. The overarching implication is that fostering critical historical thinking requires a dual approach: systemic reform to reduce curriculum load and institutional investment in localized, digital resources to support authentic, evidence-based inquiry.

5. Proposed Instructional Strategy

The research identified a "Satisfactory Paradox" where HUMSS students exhibit strong communicative competencies but remain deficient in critical inquiry skills, specifically in source validation (2.99) and the analysis of conflicting historical perspectives (3.02). This deficit is linked to an instructional imbalance, as teachers frequently employ collaborative strategies (3.50) while underutilizing the problem-solving (3.37) and experiential learning (3.41) methods necessary for deep analytical thinking. Consequently, the study establishes a significant correlation between student-centered instructional strategies and the development of higher-order critical thinking, justifying the implementation of localized, inquiry-based interventions like Project HIBLA.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that HUMSS students demonstrated an Above Average level of critical thinking skills, particularly in meaningful communication and analytical thinking. This implies that students are capable of interpreting historical events, expressing ideas clearly, and participating in reflective discussions. However, research ability obtained comparatively lower ratings, especially in evaluating the credibility and reliability of historical sources, indicating the need to strengthen students' inquiry and evidence-based reasoning skills in history education.

The study further showed that collaborative learning was the most utilized teaching strategy among history teachers, while problem-solving and experiential learning were only moderately utilized due to instructional limitations, curriculum congestion, and lack of resources. These findings suggest that learner-centered approaches positively contribute to students' engagement and development of critical thinking skills. This supports constructivist and inquiry-based learning theories which emphasize active participation, collaboration, and reflective learning as effective methods in promoting deeper understanding and higher-order thinking.

Moreover, the significant relationship found between teaching strategies and students' critical thinking skills indicates that effective instructional practices directly influence the development of analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication among HUMSS students. The findings imply that the increased use of inquiry-based, collaborative, and experiential learning activities can improve students' ability to analyze historical issues and evaluate evidence critically. However, challenges such as memorization-oriented learning habits, limited instructional materials, and insufficient time for inquiry-based activities continue to hinder the full implementation of critical-thinking-oriented instruction. Thus, the study recommended the implementation of Project HIBLA and other experiential learning strategies to strengthen historical inquiry, evidence-based reasoning, and active student participation in history education.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. The level of students' critical thinking skills - specifically in analytical thinking, research ability, and meaningful communication is above average.
2. The assessment on the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education was found moderate in terms of problem-solving and experiential learning, while it was highly utilized in terms of collaborative learning.
3. There is a significant relationship between the assessments on the level of students' critical thinking skills and on the extent of utilization of teaching strategies in history education.
4. HUMSS teachers encountered a complex interplay of students' memorization-oriented mindsets and significant gaps in prior knowledge, which necessitated constant scaffolding at the expense of higher-order inquiry. Furthermore, systemic barriers such as curriculum congestion, limited resources, and institutional constraints frequently forced educators to prioritize content coverage over the consistent implementation of experiential and problem-solving strategies.
5. Project HIBLA addresses the identified "Satisfactory Paradox" by bridging the gap between collaborative fluency and critical inquiry through targeted problem-solving and experiential learning strategies. By integrating localized dossiers and rigorous source validation tools, the strategy systematically elevates students' ability to synthesize conflicting narratives and cultivate an evidence-based historical consciousness.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- To bridge the gap between communicative fluency and critical inquiry, Project HIBLA should be adopted as a district-wide instructional roadmap. By utilizing "Cold Case" historical dossiers and localized heritage exploration, the project provides a concrete mechanism to transform history from a static subject of memory into a dynamic, evidence-based process of discovery tailored for the 21st-century Batangueño historian.
- To elevate the above average but vulnerable level of students' critical thinking, schools should shift the focus from general communication to specific higher-order skills. This includes conducting specialized workshops for students on the CRAAP Test (*Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose*) to address the lowest-ranked indicator in research ability and analytical thinking.
- Given that collaborative learning is highly utilized while problem-solving and experiential learning lag behind, the Department of Education should mandate the integration of Scenario-Based Learning (SBL). Teachers must move beyond simple idea-sharing toward structured "negotiation of viewpoints" to strengthen the weakest areas of collaborative instruction.
- In light of the significant relationship between teaching strategies and student performance, school divisions should provide professional development specifically targeting the design of problem-solving modules. Training should focus on transforming teachers from facilitators of discussion into architects of inquiry, ensuring that student-centered strategies are consistently used to drive analytical outcomes.
- To overcome the systemic barriers of curriculum congestion and resource limitations, educational leaders should implement a "less is more" approach by streamlining curriculum competencies to allow for deep-dive analysis. Institutional investment is required to create a Digital Localized Archive, providing teachers with accessible primary sources to mitigate the "time vs. depth" conflict and reduce reliance on rote memorization.

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