

**EXPLORING SOCIETAL DISCOURSE IN THE DECLINE OF LEARNER
INTEREST IN GRADE 10 HISTORY IN URBAN CITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

by

Winnie N. Malatji (65602951)

submitted in accordance with the requirements for

the degree of

Master of Education

In the subject

History of Education

at

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR:

Professor Doniwen Pietersen

13 March 2026

DECLARATION

I, Winnie N. Malatji, hereby declare that this dissertation "Exploring Societal Discourse in the Decline of Learner Interest in Grade 10 History in Urban Cities in South Africa," represents my own and unaided original work. All sources utilised have been acknowledged through complete references. Also, the study was submitted to originality checking software and complies with the required standards of academic integrity. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted previously for any other degree or examination at this or any other institution.

SIGNATURE

N.W Malatji

DATE:

16/03/2026

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude goes first to Almighty God, whose unwavering grace has given me the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to navigate this research journey. I am profoundly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Doniwen Pietersen, for his invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous encouragement, which have been instrumental in shaping the direction and academic quality of this work. To my family, I salute your perseverance and support. I am grateful for your understanding throughout this period. To my friends, it has been a great journey mixed with setbacks and some few success stories, counting this study as one of it.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRT	Culturally Responsive Teaching
CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FET	Further Education and Training
OECD	Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SA	South Africa
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

ABSTRACT

Declining learner interest in history has become a growing concern in South African secondary education, particularly in urban schools where learners increasingly prioritise subjects perceived to offer clearer career pathways. This study explored how societal discourse contributes to the declining interest in Grade 10 history among learners in urban cities in South Africa. A qualitative desktop research design based on review of existing academic literature, policy documents, curriculum reports, and studies on history education was adopted. Data were analysed using a thematic analysis of these sources. The findings reveal that societal discourse plays a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of history. Prevailing narratives often portray the subject as less economically valuable compared to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. It was also revealed that parents, peers, career counsellors, and media discourses frequently reinforce the idea that history offers limited career opportunities, which discourages learners from pursuing it beyond compulsory levels. In addition, examination-driven teaching approaches, limited integration of digital learning tools, and inadequate emphasis on contemporary relevance further contribute to perceptions that history is less engaging or practical for future employment. The study argued that these perceptions are not solely the result of classroom experiences but are embedded within broader societal narratives about knowledge, employability, and economic development. Essentially, the study contributes to existing scholarship that highlights the need to reframe history education as a critical discipline that develops analytical thinking, civic awareness, and democratic citizenship. The study concludes that addressing declining interest in Grade 10 history requires coordinated interventions that extend beyond curriculum reform to include public discourse, career guidance, and pedagogical innovation. The study thus recommends that history learning at Grade 10 level should be repositioned as a socially relevant and intellectually valuable to restore learner engagement and strengthen its role within South Africa's education system.

Keywords: Grade 10 history; learner interest; societal discourse; subject choice; urban secondary schools; history education; curriculum relevance; learner perceptions; humanities education; South African education system; educational inequality; career perceptions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	2
1.3 Main research questions.....	3
1.4 Sub research question	3
1.5 Aim	4
1.6 Objectives	4
1.7 Significance of the study.....	4
1.8 Preliminary literature review	5
1.8.1 Overview of factors influencing learners towards learning history	5
1.8.2 Trends in learners' interest in history	6
1.8.3 Teaching practices and curriculum considerations in South African history education	7
1.8.4 Societal discourse and its influence on Grade 10 learners' interest in learning history	9
1.8.5 The role of teacher support in learner learning.....	10
1.8.6 Family, demographics, and cultural context	11
1.8.7 The efficacy of learning history in the South African context.....	12
1.9 Theoretical framework.....	14
1.10 Methodology	15
1.11 Chapter outline.....	15
CHAPTER 2: LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY AND THE FACTORS THAT SHAPE THEIR INTEREST OR DISINTEREST IN THE SUBJECT.....	17
2.1 Introduction.....	17
2.2 Overview of learner's perceptions in learning history worldwide.....	17
2.3 Learners' perceptions in learning history in Sub-Saharan Africa	20
2.3.1 Historical and political context influencing learners' perceptions of history in Sub-Saharan Africa	21
2.3.2 Curriculum relevance and learners' perceptions of history education in Sub- Saharan Africa.....	23
2.3.3 Classroom environment, teacher-learner relationships, and learners' perceptions of history education	25
2.4 Conceptualising learners' perceptions of history	27
2.5 Learners' interest and disinterest in history as a school subject	29
2.6 Factors influencing learners' interest in history in Sub-Saharan Africa	31
2.7 Teaching methods and pedagogical approaches	33
2.8 Curriculum content and relevance	35

2.9	Assessment practices in history education.....	37
2.10	Teachers' attitudes and competence	39
2.11	Socio-cultural and environmental factors	40
2.12	Comparative perspectives on learners' interest in history	43
2.13	Summary	45
CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....		46
3.1	Introduction.....	46
3.2	Critical tenets of critical theory.....	46
3.3	Humanising Grade 10 South African history education	48
3.4	Relevance of critical theory to Grade 10 South African history education	49
3.5	Grade 10 history as a toolbox to build critical skills for the future	51
3.6	Indoctrination to humanising Grade 10 history in South Africa.....	53
3.7	Motivation theories and learners' interest in history.....	55
3.7.1	Intrinsic motivation and history learning	55
3.7.2	Extrinsic motivation and learners' interest in history	56
3.7.3	Interactions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation	58
3.7.4	Cultural and contextual influences on motivation in history learning	59
3.8	Constructivist learning theory and its application to history	61
3.8.1	Application in history education.....	62
3.8.2	Learner-centred and active engagement	63
3.8.3	Collaborative learning and social interaction	65
3.8.4	Challenges and implications	65
3.9	Critical theory and positive structures of oppression and inequality in Grade 10 South African history education.....	65
3.10	Conclusion	67
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY		69
4.1	Introduction.....	69
4.2	Critical theory for Grade 10 South African history education	69
4.3	Research paradigm relevant to the study	70
4.4	Qualitative research approach.....	71
4.5	Implications using qualitative research for South African Grade 10 history education	72
4.6	Data collection	72
4.7	Data analysis	73
4.8	Trustworthiness and reliability of the study.....	73
4.9	Limitations of the study	74
4.10	Ethical considerations	74
4.11	Contribution of the study	75
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNING GRADE 10 HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM		76
5.1	Introduction.....	76
5.2	Exploring the aim.....	76

5.2.1	Sub-research objective 1: To examine learners' perceptions of history and the factors that shape their interest or disinterest in the subject	77
5.2.2	Sub-research objective 2: The role of media, public narratives, and societal discussions in influencing learners' attitudes towards history	82
5.2.3	Sub research objective 3: Strategies to enhance learners' engagement and interest in learning history	84
5.3	Cross-cutting themes on Grade 10 history education	91
5.4	Conclusion	92
CHAPTER 6: REIMAGINING GRADE 10 HISTORY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY		94
6.1	Introduction.....	94
6.2	Perspectives informing South Africa's readiness for twenty-first century Grade 10 history	95
6.3	Cultivating a future-ready Grade 10 history education.....	100
6.3.1	Reframing history education for a future-ready classroom	100
6.3.2	Integrating twenty-first century skills into history learning	102
6.3.3	Leveraging technology for engagement and inquiry	103
6.3.4	Decolonising and contextualising curriculum content.....	105
6.3.5	Active and learner-centred pedagogies	107
6.3.6	Preparing teachers for future-ready history classrooms.....	108
6.4	Toward a humanised and equitable standing of Grade 10 history	110
6.5	Conclusion	115
REFERENCES		116
APPENDICES		128
APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE		128
APPENDIX B: PROOFREADING REPORT		129
APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT		130

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Background

The teaching and learning of history in South African schools have long been considered critical for fostering civic consciousness, national identity, and socio-political awareness among young people. History as a subject equips learners with the analytical skills to understand past events, contextualise contemporary societal issues, and develop informed perspectives on citizenship and governance (Msomi, 2024). However, despite its recognised importance, there has been a noticeable decline in learners' interest in history, particularly at the Grade 10 level, in urban areas of South Africa (Oosthuizen, 2024; Wassermann and Angier, 2024). This trend raises concerns for educators and policymakers who argue that a disengaged youth may lack the historical consciousness necessary for active participation in democratic processes.

Urban schools, specifically, present a unique context for examining learners' disengagement. In South Africa, cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, are characterised by diverse learner populations, varying socio-economic backgrounds, and exposure to multiple cultural influences (Webb, 2023). Kassab et al. (2024) argue that while these urban environments offer access to educational resources, they also introduce competing interests, including technology, entertainment, and extra-curricular commitments, which may detract from academic engagement. Consequently, the decline in interest in history requires attention not only to the curriculum but also to broader societal and cultural dynamics within urban spaces.

Moore (2024) highlights several institutional and pedagogical factors contributing to learner disengagement in history. For example, large class sizes, limited teacher capacity, and an overemphasis on rote learning and examination performance have been identified as key challenges (Kassab et al., 2024). Moreover, the perception of history as a content-heavy and irrelevant subject for future career opportunities often discourages learners from active participation. These structural and pedagogical issues intersect with societal discourse, shaping learners' attitudes toward history in ways that merit careful examination.

In South Africa, historical narratives are often contested, reflecting complex legacies of colonialism, apartheid, and contemporary socio-political debates (Khoza & Dube, 2022). The discussion of history in society as a critical tool for understanding the past or as an abstract

academic exercise can significantly affect learners' engagement and motivation. In so doing, the government through the Department of Basic Education has undertaken several initiatives to ensure that history is effectively taught and learned in secondary schools. In 2018, the DBE announced that history would become a compulsory subject for learners in Grades 10–12, starting from 2023, as part of efforts to promote social cohesion and a deeper understanding of the country's past (Bertram, 2020b). This decision was informed by the recommendations of the 2015 Ministerial Task Team, which emphasised the importance of history in fostering a democratic society. As a result, the curriculum has been revised together with the development of new teaching materials foster a lucrative history learning environment.

Furthermore, the DBE has implemented the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for history in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase, which outlines clear guidelines for teaching and assessment (Ngema, 2024). The CAPS document emphasises the development of historical inquiry skills, conceptual understanding, and knowledge construction, aiming to engage learners critically with historical events and their implications.

In addition, globalisation and the proliferation of digital media have transformed the ways in which young people access information and construct knowledge. Learners in urban centres are increasingly exposed to alternative sources of history, including online platforms, social media, and non-traditional educational content (Mahdi, 2023). These platforms can either complement or compete with formal school-based history education. Understanding the decline in learner interest, therefore, requires an exploration of how societal discourse, mediated through various channels, shapes learner engagement and perceived relevance of history in their everyday lives.

Given these contextual and societal dynamics, this study seeks to explore how societal discourse contributes to the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban South African cities. Such insights are crucial for informing educational policy, curriculum design, and pedagogical strategies that can rekindle interest in history, ensuring that it continues to play a vital role in shaping informed, critically thinking citizens in South Africa.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Three decades after attaining democratic rule, the Department of Basic Education has noticed a remarkable decline in learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban schools. This may be

attributed to the notion that many learners perceive the subject as difficult, irrelevant, or disconnected from their lived experiences, which contributes to disengagement and poor academic performance (Ross-Holmes, 2022). Moreover, the decline is particularly pronounced in urban cities where learners are exposed to multiple competing interests. The media, including television, magazines, radio, the internet, and advertisements, also shape learners' perceptions of specific career inspiration. Vranken and Vandebosch (2025) note that mass media can positively influence learners' perceptions of specific careers. Arguably, diminishing interest in history not only affects learner performance but also undermines efforts to cultivate informed, critically thinking citizens capable of participating meaningfully in democratic processes.

Although previous studies have focused on curriculum content, teacher competency, and institutional challenges, less attention has been given to the broader societal discourse that shapes learners' perceptions and attitudes towards history. Media narratives, parental attitudes, and public discussions about the relevance of history influence how learners value and engage with the subject. Without a deeper understanding of these societal factors, interventions aimed at improving interest and participation may remain superficial and ineffective (Saurombe & Schellnack-Kelly, 2024). Therefore, this study seeks to explore how societal discourse contributes to the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban South African cities, providing insights for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and policy interventions that can rekindle learner engagement.

1.3 Main research questions

How does societal discourse contribute to the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban cities in South Africa?

1.4 Sub research question

The sub research questions for this study are as follows:

- What does existing research show about learners' perceptions of history and what does it say about factors influence their interest or disinterest in the subject?
- How do media narratives, public discussions, and societal debates influence learners' attitudes towards history?
- What strategies can be implemented to enhance learners' engagement and interest in learning history in Grade 10?

1.5 Aim

The main aim of the study is to explore how societal discourse influences the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban cities in South Africa. The study seeks to examine how narratives from society, including those from parents, peers, educators, media, and career guidance structures, shape learners' perceptions of history as a school subject. It also aims to understand how these societal perceptions affect learners' attitudes, engagement, and decisions to continue or discontinue the subject at the Further Education and Training (FET) level.

1.6 Objectives

This study seeks:

- To examine learners' perceptions of history and the factors that shape their interest or disinterest in the subject.
- To investigate the role of media, public narratives, and societal discussions in influencing learners' attitudes towards history.
- To determine strategies that can be used to enhance learner engagement and interest in learning history.

1.7 Significance of the study

This study is significant because it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban South African schools. Essentially, examining the societal discourse including media narratives, public discussions, and community perceptions highlights how broader socio-cultural influences shape learners' attitudes towards history. The findings will offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers on how to make history more relevant and engaging, ensuring that learners develop critical thinking skills and a stronger awareness of South Africa's historical and democratic processes. Moreover, the study has practical implications for enhancing teaching and learning practices in secondary schools. This is because crafting strategies to rekindle learner interest, such as curriculum adjustments, innovative pedagogical approaches, and community engagement initiatives can inform interventions aimed at improving learner participation and performance in history (Vranken & Vandenbosch, 2025). The outcomes will also contribute to scholarly debates on education, citizenship, and curriculum relevance, supporting efforts to cultivate informed, socially conscious, and critically thinking citizens in urban South African contexts.

1.8 Preliminary literature review

1.8.1 Overview of factors influencing learners towards learning history

The study of history in schools is shaped by a wide range of pedagogical, social, and cultural factors that influence learners' attitudes and engagement. Globally, scholars highlight that learners' interest in history is often linked to the way the subject is presented in the classroom. Research shows that traditional, lecture-based methods tend to disengage learners, whereas interactive, inquiry-based approaches foster greater enthusiasm (Walton & Englebert, 2024). Moreover, the perceived relevance of history to contemporary life plays a significant role in learners' motivation. When learners can connect past events to present-day issues, they are more likely to find the subject meaningful and engaging.

Another critical factor influencing learners' willingness to learn history is teacher competence and passion. Teachers who demonstrate enthusiasm, contextual knowledge, and innovative pedagogical skills have a positive impact on learners' perceptions of the subject (Walker et al., 2022). Conversely, when teachers present history as a rigid collection of dates and facts, learners tend to disengage, viewing it as abstract and irrelevant. Teacher-learner interaction, the use of relatable examples, and integration of digital resources are therefore seen as key drivers of effective history education.

Curriculum design also plays an essential role in influencing learners' engagement with history. Scholars argue that a Eurocentric or one-sided curriculum can alienate learners, especially in multicultural societies (Ramirez Quimbayo, 2024). Inclusive curricula that integrate local histories, diverse perspectives, and marginalised voices encourage ownership of knowledge and identity formation. For instance, studies from South Africa reveal that when history curricula address colonialism, apartheid, and postcolonial struggles, learners feel more connected to their socio-political realities (Msila, 2022). Thus, curriculum inclusivity and cultural relevance strongly shape learners' attitudes toward learning history.

Beyond the classroom, socio-cultural and familial contexts also shape learners' interest in history. According to Deng (2024), parental education levels, exposure to cultural heritage, and societal attitudes towards the past significantly affect learners' engagement. In societies where historical narratives are contested or politicised, learners may adopt attitudes shaped by broader ideological debates. For example, in Germany, the teaching of Holocaust history has been

shown to shape civic values and collective memory (Shambare & Simuja, 2022). Similarly, in China, history learning is closely tied to state narratives of nationalism and identity formation, which influence learner motivation and critical engagement.

Moreso, the role of technology and media in shaping learners' interest in history cannot be ignored. Digital tools such as documentaries, interactive simulations, and virtual museums are increasingly recognised as powerful means of making history tangible and engaging (Jensen et al, 2022). Social media also influences historical consciousness by exposing learners to alternative narratives and debates outside formal classrooms. However, this raises concerns about misinformation and historical distortion, underscoring the need for critical thinking skills in history education. Overall, the literature suggests that pedagogical practices, teacher influence, curriculum relevance, socio-cultural contexts, and technology collectively determine learners' interest and engagement in history learning.

1.8.2 Trends in learners' interest in history

Learner interest in history education in South Africa has experienced notable fluctuations over the past decades, influenced by various societal, educational, and policy factors. Historically, the subject's popularity has been subject to shifts in curriculum emphasis, societal values, and global educational trends. In the mid-twentieth century, a significant portion of learners engaged with history, reflecting its perceived importance in understanding national identity and heritage. However, over time, there has been a discernible decline in the number of learners opting for history, particularly in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase (Wassermann et al., 2018). This trend has raised concerns among educators and policymakers about the subject's diminishing role in the academic landscape.

Several factors contribute to this decline in learners' interest. One prominent reason is the perceived relevance of history in the contemporary job market. With the increasing emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, learners often prioritise subjects that are perceived to offer better career prospects (Simamora, 2024). History, as a subject that does not directly align with these fields, is sometimes viewed as less practical or valuable. Moreover, the mode of history instruction, which traditionally relied heavily on rote memorisation and lecture-based teaching, may not resonate with the learning preferences of modern learners who are accustomed to more interactive and engaging educational experiences.

The curriculum has also undergone changes that may impact learners' interest. The integration of history with other subjects such as social sciences in earlier grades, and its status as an elective in the FET Phase, may contribute to its reduced prominence (Thulo, 2025). Furthermore, the emphasis on standardised testing and outcomes-based education has sometimes led to a narrowing of the curriculum, with subjects such as history being sidelined in favour of those deemed more critical for economic development. These curricular decisions reflect broader societal values and priorities, which can influence learners' perceptions of the subject's importance.

Van Eeden (2016) argues that media representations and societal discourse play a crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes towards history. Portraying historical events in the media, including films, documentaries, and news outlets, can influence how learners perceive the subject. Positive representations that highlight the relevance and significance of history can enhance learner interest, while negative portrayals or the trivialisation of historical events can have the opposite effect (Molina et al, 2025). Moreover, societal discussions about national identity, heritage, and the role of history in understanding the present can either foster a deeper appreciation for the subject or contribute to its marginalisation.

In response to the declining interest, there have been initiatives aimed at revitalising history education. These include curriculum reforms that seek to make history more engaging and relevant to learners' lives. The introduction of digital tools and resources, project-based learning, and the incorporation of diverse perspectives are among the strategies being explored to enhance learner engagement (Masenya, 2025). Meanwhile, efforts to make history a compulsory subject in the FET Phase reflect a recognition of its importance in fostering informed and critical citizens. Such initiatives aim to reposition history as a vital component of education that contributes to a comprehensive understanding of society.

1.8.3 Teaching practices and curriculum considerations in South African history education

The teaching of history in South African schools has undergone significant transformations since the end of apartheid, with curriculum reforms aiming to address historical injustices and promote social cohesion. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) introduced in 2012 emphasises a learner-centred approach, encouraging active participation and critical thinking (Bertram, 2020a). However, the implementation of these reforms has faced

challenges, including disparities in teacher training, resource availability, and infrastructural constraints, particularly in under-resourced schools. These factors contribute to inconsistencies in the delivery of history education across different regions.

In urban areas, where schools often have better access to resources, there is a growing emphasis on integrating technology into history teaching. Digital tools and multimedia resources are being utilised to make historical content more engaging and accessible to learners (Kgari-Masondo & Chimbunde, 2021). This approach aims to bridge the gap between traditional teaching methods and the interests of contemporary learners. However, the effectiveness of these technologies is contingent upon teachers' proficiency with digital tools and the availability of necessary infrastructure, which remains uneven across schools.

The content of the history curriculum has been a subject of debate. Ngobeni et al. (2023) argue that while CAPS promotes a more inclusive and critical approach to history, it lacks a comprehensive focus on the concept of 'historical significance.' This omission limits learners' ability to critically assess why certain events are highlighted in the curriculum while others are marginalised. Incorporating historical significance into the curriculum could enhance learners' analytical skills and deepen their understanding of the relevance of the past to the present.

Assessment practices in history education have also evolved in response to curriculum changes (Robinson, 2024). The emphasis has shifted from rote memorisation to assessing learners' ability to engage in historical inquiry and critical analysis. This shift aligns with the broader goals of CAPS to develop learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, the successful implementation of these assessment practices depends on teachers' understanding and application of the new assessment standards, which requires ongoing professional development and support.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged as a strategy to support history teachers in adapting to curriculum changes. These communities provide platforms for teachers to collaborate, share resources, and discuss pedagogical strategies. Research indicates that PLCs can enhance teachers' understanding of curriculum implementation and improve teaching practices. However, the effectiveness of PLCs is influenced by factors such as time constraints, institutional support, and teachers' willingness to engage in collaborative professional development.

1.8.4 Societal discourse and its influence on Grade 10 learners' interest in learning history

Societal discourse encompasses the collective narratives, values, and discussions prevalent within a society, significantly influencing individuals' perceptions and behaviours. In the context of education, societal discourse shapes how learners perceive, value, and engage with subjects (Bertram, 2020a). For Grade 10 learners in South Africa, societal discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping their interest in learning history. The narratives constructed within families, communities, media, and educational institutions collectively influence how learners' approach and value the subject (Msomi, 2024).

In South Africa, the post-apartheid era has been marked by efforts to reconcile historical injustices and promote social cohesion. However, the manner in which history is portrayed and discussed in public spheres often affects learners' engagement with the subject. For instance, media representations and public debates about the relevance of history can either ignite interest or foster disinterest among learners (Nzeakor & Moloji, 2025). When societal narratives emphasise the importance of understanding the past to navigate the present and future, learners are more likely to appreciate the subject's value. Conversely, when history is depicted as irrelevant or solely academic, learners may disengage from the subject.

Family and community discourses further influence learners' attitudes towards history. In many South African households, discussions about the past, cultural heritage, and national identity are integral to daily life (Kgari-Masondo & Chimbunde, 2021). These conversations can either encourage learners to delve deeper into historical studies or deter them if the subject is not valued. Communities that actively engage in preserving and discussing their history often produce learners who are more interested in studying the subject. On the other hand, communities that neglect historical discourse may contribute to a lack of interest among learners.

Peer groups also play a significant role in shaping learners' perceptions of history. Adolescents are particularly susceptible to peer influence, and the collective attitudes of a peer group can either promote or hinder interest in a subject (Nhedzi et al., 2022). If a peer group collectively devalues history, individual members may adopt similar attitudes, leading to a broader decline in interest. Conversely, if peers value and engage with the subject, it can create a positive feedback loop, encouraging others to participate.

Educational institutions and curricula are not immune to societal discourses. The design and implementation of the history curriculum are often influenced by prevailing societal narratives and values. In South Africa, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for history aims to promote an understanding of the past to foster informed citizenship (Masenya, 2025). However, the effectiveness of this curriculum in engaging Grade 10 learners is contingent upon how well it resonates with the societal discourses prevalent in the learners' environments. A curriculum that aligns with the values and narratives of the learners' communities is more likely to engage them effectively.

1.8.5 The role of teacher support in learner learning

Teacher support has been widely recognised as a critical factor influencing learners' academic motivation, engagement, and overall learning outcomes. According to recent research, learners who perceive higher levels of emotional and instructional support from their teachers demonstrate stronger intrinsic motivation and persistence in learning (Wang et al., 2021). Supportive teachers provide feedback, encouragement, and scaffolding, which not only enhance learners' academic achievement but also contribute to their sense of belonging in the classroom. This relationship highlights the pivotal role of teacher support in shaping a positive learning environment. The quality of teacher-learner relationships directly influences the classroom climate and learners' academic engagement. Ye (2024) argues that when teachers adopt participatory and empathetic teaching styles, learners experience lower anxiety levels and increased confidence. In contrast, directive and authoritarian approaches often foster disengagement and resistance (Heleta & Chasi, 2023). Thus, positive relational dynamics are key to creating safe and inclusive learning environments where learners feel supported both academically and emotionally.

A well-structured and inclusive learning environment is closely linked to positive academic and behavioural outcomes. For example, classrooms that promote collaboration, respect, and mutual accountability enhance not only cognitive achievement but also social-emotional skills (Van Pham, 2024). Moreover, physical aspects of the learning environment such as classroom design, accessibility of learning resources, and integration of technology also play a crucial role in stimulating active participation and curiosity (du Toit-Brits, 2022). This suggests that teacher support must be coupled with an enabling learning environment for optimal outcomes. Teacher support is particularly significant in fostering equity in education. Pregoner and Baguio (2024) argue that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups benefit

more when teachers adopt culturally responsive practices and provide tailored support. Therefore, an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges diversity not only reduces disparities in academic performance but also strengthens learners' identity and self-efficacy.

In recent years, digital learning environments have added complexity to teacher support. Arguably, while technology can enhance engagement, its effectiveness depends on how teachers mediate online or blended learning settings. For instance, teacher presence, feedback, and structured guidance remain vital in virtual spaces to prevent isolation and disengagement (Tekir, 2025). This underscores that supportive teachers and well-designed learning environments (physical or digital) work together to foster holistic learner development.

1.8.6 Family, demographics, and cultural context

Family remains one of the most influential social factors shaping learners' educational outcomes. Recent studies indicate that parental involvement, support, and educational expectations strongly predict learners' academic motivation and achievement across multiple contexts (Fan & Chen, 2001). Families that provide structured home environments, help with schoolwork, and encourage curiosity, create a foundation for sustained academic engagement. Conversely, limited parental involvement often due to economic hardship or lack of educational background has been associated with lower learner performance, particularly in disadvantaged communities (Sengonul, 2022). Demographic factors such as socio-economic status (SES) directly affect access to educational resources, quality schooling, and long-term academic success. According to Sepadi and Molapo (2024), children from low-SES families often face barriers such as inadequate school readiness, reduced access to learning technologies, and higher dropout risks. These disparities were further exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where digital divides widened achievement gaps. Thus, SES remains a powerful predictor of educational inequality across both developed and developing nations.

Learner demographics such as gender, ethnicity, and urban-rural divides also influence learning experiences and outcomes. A study by Warnich and Lubbe (2019) found that urban learners in China consistently outperformed their rural counterparts due to better educational infrastructure and resources. Similarly, in Western contexts, minority and immigrant learners often experience systemic disadvantages due to language barriers, underrepresentation in curricula, and discriminatory practices (Banerjee et al., 2023). These findings highlight the

extent to which demographic variables intersect with structural inequalities in education. It is further argued that culture significantly shapes learners' attitudes toward learning, values, and achievement. Moreover, studies that focus on cultural-historical activity theory suggest that learners' motivation and engagement are mediated by cultural norms and expectations (Gal et al., 2025). For example, collectivist societies, such as in East Asia, emphasise communal achievement and respect for authority, while Western cultures often prioritise individualism and critical inquiry. In African contexts, studies show that community-based learning and indigenous knowledge systems strongly influence educational engagement and identity formation (Mabunda, 2022).

The combined effects of family background, demographic factors, and cultural context create complex educational outcomes. For instance, children from immigrant families may experience cultural dissonance between home and school, affecting motivation and self-esteem (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2024). Similarly, intersectional disadvantages such as being from a low-income, minority background in a culturally dominant school system can exacerbate educational inequalities. Conversely, when schools adopt culturally responsive pedagogy and actively engage families, learners' academic performance and social belonging improve significantly (Banerjee et al., 2023). This underscores the importance of considering social factors holistically in educational research and practice.

1.8.7 The efficacy of learning history in the South African context

History plays a central role in shaping learners' understanding of national identity, critical thinking skills, and civic engagement. In South Africa, it carries additional weight due to the nation's colonial and apartheid past, making it an essential tool for reconciliation and nation-building (Motshabi, 2020). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) has emphasised history's potential to foster unity and historical consciousness, with recent discussions about making it compulsory up to Grade 12. Scholars argue that history equips learners to critically analyse current socio-political issues through the lens of the past, which is particularly vital in a diverse and evolving democracy (Chisholm, 2021). Since 1994, the South African history curriculum has shifted from a Eurocentric narrative to a more inclusive, multi-perspective approach that incorporates African, indigenous, and global histories (Ngubane, 2021). The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) seek to make history more engaging and relevant by linking past events to contemporary issues. However, despite these reforms, some studies indicate that learners in urban high schools perceive the subject as less relevant to their

daily lives or career goals, particularly when content is presented in abstract terms without local contextualisation (Wassermann et al., 2018).

Learners' academic strengths and learning preferences significantly influence their choice of history. As a subject requiring extensive reading, comprehension, and essay writing, it tends to attract learners with strong language and analytical skills (Langa, Wassermann & Maposa, 2021). However, in urban high schools, disparities in literacy skills due to varying primary education quality can create barriers. Learners who struggle with source-based questions or critical writing may perceive history as a difficult option, which can deter enrolment despite their interest in the content (Soudien et al., 2022). Teachers are critical in shaping learners' interest in History. Studies show that when educators employ interactive methods such as debates, role-play, or the use of multimedia learners are more likely to engage (Motshabi, 2020). Conversely, a reliance on rote memorisation and textbook-driven lessons can make the subject seem monotonous. In urban high schools, where learners often have exposure to technology, the integration of digital tools such as online archives, documentaries, and virtual tours can make historical study more dynamic (Wassermann, 2019). Teacher enthusiasm and their ability to connect history to learners.

One of the most significant deterrents to choosing history in urban high schools is the perception that it offers limited career opportunities. Research by Langa, Wassermann and Maposa (2021) shows that learners often associate history with careers in teaching, museum work, or academia, overlooking its relevance to law, journalism, public policy, and heritage management. Without adequate career guidance that demonstrates the subject's versatility, many learners opt for subjects they believe have clearer economic benefits. This perception gap highlights the need for schools to actively link history education to diverse career pathways.

Urban high schools generally have better access to resources than rural schools, including libraries, internet access, and extracurricular opportunities. However, the competitive academic environment in urban areas can mean that learners prioritise subjects that are seen to yield higher marks or are perceived as 'easier' (Pietersen & Langeveldt, 2025). The availability of qualified history teachers, the size of history classes, and the scheduling of the subject within the timetable can also affect enrolment. Resource-rich environments have the potential to enhance history learning, but only if those resources are strategically used to engage learners.

While there is growing literature on history teaching in South Africa, much of it focuses on curriculum transformation or rural school contexts. There is limited research that specifically examines the combination of academic, pedagogical, socio-cultural, and career-related factors influencing history subject choices in urban high schools. Given the role of history in shaping informed, critically aware citizens, understanding these factors in the urban context is essential for developing strategies that sustain and grow interest in the subject. This study aims to address this gap by providing a holistic, evidence-based analysis that can inform policy, teaching practices, and learners' guidance programmes.

1.9 Theoretical framework

Critical theory and critical pedagogy provide an important theoretical lens for understanding education as a social process shaped by power relations, ideology, and inequality. Rooted in the work of scholars such as Paulo Freire, critical pedagogy challenges traditional teacher-centred models that treat learners as passive recipients of knowledge. Freire criticised what he described as the “banking model” of education, where knowledge is deposited into learners without encouraging critical engagement (Freire, 2020). Instead, critical pedagogy emphasises dialogue, reflection, and the development of critical consciousness, enabling learners to question dominant narratives and understand the social conditions that shape their lives (Svensson, 2022, Giroux et al., 1989). Recent scholarship highlights that critical pedagogy continues to be a powerful framework for promoting emancipatory education, as it encourages learners to analyse social inequalities and participate actively in knowledge construction rather than simply memorising content. In South African contexts, scholars argue that Freirean principles such as dialogue, praxis, and conscientisation remain relevant for addressing structural inequalities and empowering learners to reflect on their social realities (Majola, Geduld & Rangana, 2025).

The application of critical pedagogy is particularly relevant to this study on the decline of learners' interest in Grade 10 history in urban South African schools. Critical theory suggests that learners' perceptions of subjects are shaped by broader societal discourses, economic priorities, and power structures that influence how knowledge is valued. For instance, dominant societal narratives often privilege science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects while marginalising humanities disciplines such as history, which may lead learners to perceive the subject as less valuable or relevant. From a critical pedagogical perspective, history education should encourage learners to interrogate these societal narratives and explore

how historical knowledge relates to issues of identity, power, and social justice. Applying this framework enables the study to examine how societal discourse shapes learners' attitudes towards history and how teaching approaches could potentially counter these perceptions by making the subject more dialogical, relevant, and critically engaging. By foregrounding learners' voices and experiences, critical pedagogy helps illuminate the social dynamics influencing subject interest and highlights the potential of history education to foster critical citizenship and democratic participation (Majola et al., 2025; Svensson, 2022).

1.10 Methodology

The current study adopted a desktop methodology, which relies on the collection and analysis of secondary data rather than primary fieldwork. The approach involved systematically reviewing and synthesising information from academic journals, books, policy documents, government reports, and other credible online and offline sources relevant to the factors influencing learners towards learning history (Helms et al., 2018). In essence, the application of the desktop methodology included a comprehensive literature review that draws from both international and regional studies. For instance, peer-reviewed journal articles from databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Scopus will be consulted to gather recent insights into theoretical and practical dimensions of history education. At the same time, contextual sources such as South African education policies, curriculum frameworks, and UNESCO reports were analysed to ground the study within the local education environment (Pietersen & Langeveldt, 2025). This focus enabled the study to highlight both global trends and locally specific challenges.

The desktop methodology involved critical analysis and synthesis of the collected literature. Information was categorised thematically based on the factors under investigation. Patterns, similarities, and differences across studies were identified to provide a holistic overview. This structured approach ensured the study not only compiled existing knowledge but also identified research gaps, which can inform future empirical investigations into improving learner interest and performance in history education.

1.11 Chapter outline

Chapter 1: Chapter one is the introductory chapter and has outlined the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives and significance of the study. It also provides an overview of the literature review and a chapter outline.

Chapter 2: This chapter will focus on providing an analytical review on learners' perceptions of history and the factors that shape their interest or disinterest in the subject. It will also provide an overview of the conceptual framework guiding the study.

Chapter 3: This chapter will provide an analytical review of the role of media, public narratives, and societal discussions in influencing learners' attitudes towards history.

Chapter 4: This chapter will focus on social and cultural influences on learners' engagement with history. Important sections that will be covered will include the impact of family background, parental support and socio-economic status. Comparative insights from Sub-Saharan Africa against the global contexts will be done to draw appropriate lessons crucial for crafting strategies for improving the learning of history in high schools.

Chapter 5: This chapter will synthesise the study findings and provide the conclusion of the study. The chapter will also provide the recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HISTORY AND THE FACTORS THAT SHAPE THEIR INTEREST OR DISINTEREST IN THE SUBJECT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of existing literature on learners' perceptions of history as a school subject and examines the factors that influence their interest or disinterest in studying history. It situates history education within broader educational debates on learner engagement, curriculum relevance, pedagogy, and socio-political contexts. In so doing, the review draws on international and African scholarship to identify key determinants shaping learners' attitudes towards history, including teaching approaches, curriculum content, assessment practices, learner identity, and societal narratives. The last section of this chapter highlights gaps in the literature that justify the current study.

2.2 Overview of learner's perceptions in learning history worldwide

Globally, learners' perceptions of history as a school subject have been a persistent concern within education research, particularly in relation to declining enrolment and engagement at secondary school level. Studies across Europe, North America, Asia, and parts of Africa indicate that learners' attitudes towards history are often ambivalent, ranging from deep interest to pronounced disinterest (Duval, 2025). Acheampong and Karikari (2024) emphasise that these perceptions are shaped by how history is framed within national curricula and whether it is presented as a critical, interpretive discipline or as a body of fixed knowledge to be memorised. Thus, the extent to which history is prioritised at national level shapes whether learners will consider studying it or not. In countries where history is positioned as an important subject, it was found that most of the learners have a high propensity to take on history classes. However, the learner's choice seems to dominate in making the decision to study history (Korber, 2018).

Empirical studies within contemporary German educational research have commenced investigations not only on historical thinking outcomes but also how learners interpret classroom practices and teacher enthusiasm. For example, a large-scale randomised field study in Germany found that professional development for history teachers significantly increased the enthusiasm perceived by learners in history classes, suggesting that teacher practices and classroom climates influence learners' attitudes towards the subject. This aligns with broader findings in the educational literature that learner perceptions of a subject are mediated by

instructional quality and teacher affect, highlighting that learners' attitudes towards history are not fixed but responsive to pedagogical factors (Wegner, 2025).

Another empirical study carried out in Australia reveals that learners often associate history with heavy reading and writing loads, limited classroom interaction, and assessment practices that reward factual recall rather than analytical thinking (Cairns & Gerrad, 2024; Bleeze, 2024). Such perceptions contribute to disengagement, particularly among adolescents who increasingly prioritise subjects perceived to offer clearer economic or career benefits. As a result, history is frequently viewed as less relevant in comparison to science-, technology-, and commerce-oriented subjects (Bleeze, 2024).

Despite these negative perceptions, it is argued that there are contexts in which learners express strong interest in history, especially when instructional approaches emphasise inquiry, debate, and critical engagement with sources (Adebola, 2025). For example, studies in Canada, Finland, and Singapore demonstrate that when learners are encouraged to analyse primary sources, explore multiple perspectives, and link historical issues to contemporary social and political debates, they develop more positive attitudes toward the subject (Acheampong & Karikari, 2024). These studies suggest that learner interest is not inherent to the subject itself but is shaped by pedagogical design and classroom practice, thus supporting the notion of a nationally crafted priority that cascades to the classroom environment.

Agwanda (2019) further argues that learners' perceptions are also influenced by the relevance of historical content to their identities and lived experiences. Comparative studies show that learners are more engaged when curricula include local, indigenous, or marginalised histories alongside national and global narratives (Admiraal et al, 2021; Alexander, 2020). Conversely, history curricula that privilege dominant or Eurocentric narratives have been criticised for alienating learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, leading to perceptions of exclusion and irrelevance (Banks, 2023). This has prompted global debates on curriculum reform, decolonisation, and inclusive historical representation.

Learners' perceptions of learning history in China are closely influenced by how historical content connects with their identities and lived experiences within the context of national narratives and cultural heritage. History education in China is often integrated into ideological and political education, where learners learn about Chinese civilisation, national heroes, and historical struggles to foster a sense of love for country and cultural identity (Cairns & Garrard, 2024). Empirical studies indicate that when instructional practices highlight historically

significant events that resonate with learners' cultural backgrounds such as the narratives of national struggles, nation-building, and ethnic unity, learners tend to engage more deeply and develop stronger historical understanding and identity awareness. Pedagogical practices that integrate knowledge of historical facts with value-based identity recognition help learners connect historical knowledge with personal and collective identity formation.

However, the dominant focus on national narratives can also limit the inclusion of local, ethnic minority, or alternative perspectives, potentially leading some learners to perceive history as primarily ideological rather than reflective of diverse experiences. Research shows that while rote memorisation of canonical national history remains common, there is a gradual shift towards inquiry-based learning aimed at fostering critical thinking and deeper engagement. Despite these reforms, the curriculum still largely prioritises narratives that reinforce national identity, which can shape learners' perceptions of history as relevant mainly in terms of collective memory and patriotic education, rather than as a discipline embracing multiple perspectives or localised historical voices (Robinson, 2024).

The foregoing global scholarship underscores the importance of transforming history curricula to make them more inclusive, contextually relevant, and reflective of diverse perspectives, as a means of enhancing learners' engagement and building a sustainable culture of history learning. UNESCO's sustained efforts to decolonise the teaching of Africa's history emphasise shifting away from dominant Eurocentric narratives towards Africa-centred accounts that foster identity, common heritage, and social cohesion, showing how historical education can support sustainable development goals and continental identity formation (Ross-Holmes, 2022). Similarly, theoretical work on anticolonial and indigenising curricula argues that decolonisation in education should extend beyond rhetoric to reshape beliefs, practices, and the relational dynamics between educators and learners, thereby making curricula more relevant to learners lived experiences (Ramirez-Quimbayo, 2024). Comparative work on decolonising curricula in higher education illuminates the ongoing challenge of overcoming entrenched Eurocentric structures and the need for epistemic diversity insights that can inform secondary history curriculum reform by emphasising multiple knowledge systems and historical voices (Govender & Naidoo, 2023; Scherer & Neesham, 2023). These global experiences show that when histories reflect a multiplicity of perspectives and validate learners' identities, learners tend to perceive history as more meaningful and relevant to their personal and societal realities.

South Africa can leverage these global insights to entrench a sustainable history-learning culture by prioritising inclusive curriculum transformation that foregrounds local, indigenous, and marginalised histories alongside global narratives. Radebe et al. (2025) argue that curriculum transformation in South Africa highlights that addressing the persistent legacies of Eurocentric and exclusionary narratives such as those emphasised under colonial and apartheid historiographies requires centring underrepresented voices and promoting equity in representation to enhance engagement and learner relevance. Petousi et al (2022) add that integrating indigenous ideas of the past and pluralistic perspectives into classroom content is not only feasible but essential for making history meaningful and reflective of the nation's multi-layered experiences. The ultimate goal is to align policy intentions with teacher professional development, learner-centred pedagogical practices, and inclusive content that resonates with learners' identities to craft global best practices to cultivate a history culture that is both sustainable and transformative for all learners.

2.3 Learners' perceptions in learning history in Sub-Saharan Africa

Learners' perceptions of history education in Sub-Saharan Africa have become an important subject of research as scholars examine how learners experience and engage with the subject within changing educational systems. History education plays a significant role in shaping learners' understanding of citizenship, identity, and socio-political developments across the continent. However, research suggests that learners' attitudes towards history are often influenced by how the subject is positioned within the broader school curriculum. In many African education systems, subjects linked to science and technology are prioritised, which sometimes leads learners to perceive history as less relevant to contemporary career opportunities (Boadu, 2021; Agwanda, 2019). Consequently, the perceived value of history among learners may decline, affecting enrolment patterns and learner engagement in the subject.

Agwanda (2019) further highlights that learners' perceptions of history are strongly influenced by teaching methods and classroom practices. In many schools across Sub-Saharan Africa, history continues to be taught through teacher-centred approaches that emphasise memorisation of dates, events, and historical figures. Such pedagogical methods may limit learners' critical engagement with historical content and contribute to negative perceptions of the subject. Arguably, learners often describe history lessons as dull or disconnected from their everyday experiences when instruction focuses primarily on rote learning (Acheampong &

Karikari, 2024). In contrast, learner-centred approaches such as debates, role-playing, historical inquiry, and the use of multimedia resources have been shown to improve learners' interest and understanding of historical processes.

2.3.1 Historical and political context influencing learners' perceptions of history in Sub-Saharan Africa

The historical and political context of education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa has played a significant role in shaping learners' attitudes towards history as a school subject. Many education systems in the region emerged from colonial structures that were designed to advance imperial interests and reinforce colonial authority. Colonial education systems often prioritised European historical narratives while marginalising African histories and indigenous knowledge systems (Sifuna, 2023). As a result, learners were frequently exposed to curricula that portrayed Africa primarily through colonial perspectives, presenting European civilisation as the centre of historical progress. This Eurocentric orientation contributed to a disconnection between learners and the historical narratives presented in classrooms, ultimately influencing how learners perceived the relevance and authenticity of history education (Chisholm, 2021; Maposa & Wassermann, 2020).

In several colonial territories, education systems were deliberately structured to support ideological control and political dominance. Schools often promoted narratives that legitimised colonial rule while discouraging critical reflection on colonial exploitation and resistance movements (Boadu, 2021; Oosthuizen, 2024). Consequently, African historical achievements and liberation struggles were frequently omitted or misrepresented in school curricula. Such representations limited learners' understanding of their own societies and histories, reinforcing the perception that history education was disconnected from African realities. Scholars argue that these colonial legacies have continued to influence post-independence education systems, as many countries initially retained colonial curricular structures and teaching approaches even after gaining political independence (Sifuna, 2023).

The persistence of colonial epistemologies in education systems across Sub-Saharan Africa has therefore generated increasing calls for the decolonisation of school curricula. Researchers argue that history education must move beyond Eurocentric narratives to include African perspectives, indigenous knowledge systems, and regional historical experiences (Maposa & Wassermann, 2020; Chisholm, 2021). Decolonising the curriculum involves critically examining how historical knowledge is produced and represented in textbooks, as well as

ensuring that learners engage with multiple historical interpretations. Such reforms aim to empower learners to critically analyse historical events and understand the complex processes that have shaped African societies. Consequently, contemporary debates about curriculum transformation increasingly emphasise the need to reposition African histories at the centre of historical education.

South Africa provides a particularly illustrative example of how political contexts shape history education. During the apartheid era, the education system was used as a mechanism to reinforce racial segregation and political ideology. The implementation of policies such as the Bantu Education Act institutionalised racially segregated schooling and ensured that educational content reinforced apartheid ideology. The system aimed to prepare Black learners for subordinate roles within the economy while privileging white learners with access to better educational resources and more comprehensive curricula. As a result, historical narratives taught in schools frequently excluded or marginalised the experiences of oppressed communities, contributing to widespread mistrust and negative perceptions of the subject among learners (Ravn et al, 2020; Radebe et al, 2025).

Following the transition to democracy in 1994, South Africa implemented significant educational reforms aimed at transforming the curriculum and addressing historical inequalities in the education system. Curriculum transformation initiatives sought to remove ideological distortions and promote democratic values such as human rights, equality, and social justice. Educational initiatives such as the South African History Project were introduced to revitalise the teaching of history and encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives in school curricula. These reforms aimed to ensure that history education reflected the experiences of previously marginalised communities while fostering critical thinking and civic responsibility among learners (Weldon, 2022).

Across Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, contemporary curriculum reforms increasingly emphasise inclusive and critical approaches to history education. Educational scholars argue that history teaching should enable learners to explore contested historical narratives, engage with primary sources, and critically evaluate historical interpretations (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Such pedagogical approaches aim to transform history classrooms into spaces where learners develop critical historical thinking and democratic citizenship skills. In this way, curriculum reforms seek not only to correct historical distortions but also to foster a generation of learners who can engage thoughtfully with the past and apply historical understanding to

contemporary social challenges. Ultimately, strengthening history education within Sub-Saharan Africa requires ongoing efforts to address the historical legacies of colonialism and authoritarianism while promoting inclusive and reflective approaches to teaching the past.

2.3.2 Curriculum relevance and learners' perceptions of history education in Sub-Saharan Africa

Curriculum relevance plays a critical role in shaping learners' perceptions of history education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Scholars widely agree that the extent to which curriculum content reflects learners' social realities, cultural backgrounds, and historical experiences significantly influences how learners engage with the subject. When history curricula incorporate themes that resonate with learners' communities and national experiences, learners are more likely to perceive the subject as meaningful and applicable to their lives (Chisholm, 2021; Ngubane, 2021). Conversely, curricula that focus predominantly on distant historical narratives or unfamiliar contexts may lead learners to perceive history as abstract and disconnected from their lived experiences. In this regard, educational researchers emphasise that curriculum relevance is essential for strengthening learners' motivation, engagement, and understanding of historical processes (Sifuna, 2023).

One of the key criticisms directed at history education in many African countries relates to the dominance of Eurocentric narratives within school curricula. Historically, colonial education systems prioritised European history while marginalising African historical contributions and indigenous knowledge systems. Although significant curriculum reforms have been implemented since independence in many countries, remnants of these Eurocentric perspectives continue to influence history education (Shizha, 2023; Ndlovu, 2022). As a result, learners may encounter historical narratives that focus heavily on European events, such as world wars and industrialisation, without adequately linking these developments to African experiences. Scholars argue that such imbalances can undermine learners' interest in the subject and limit their ability to connect historical knowledge to their social and cultural contexts (Chisholm, 2021; Boadu, 2021).

The call for more culturally responsive history curricula has therefore gained prominence in recent educational debates across Sub-Saharan Africa. Culturally responsive curricula emphasise the inclusion of African perspectives, local histories, and indigenous knowledge systems within the teaching of history. According to educational theorists, such approaches enable learners to see themselves and their communities reflected within historical narratives,

thereby strengthening their sense of identity and belonging. Integrating oral histories, community heritage, and regional historical experiences can also enrich the learning process by exposing learners to diverse forms of historical knowledge beyond conventional textbook accounts. These approaches are increasingly viewed as essential for addressing the historical marginalisation of African perspectives in formal education.

In South Africa, curriculum transformation efforts since the end of apartheid have placed strong emphasis on making history education more inclusive and representative of diverse historical experiences. The introduction of new curriculum frameworks such as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) sought to ensure that history teaching reflects the complexities of South African society and acknowledges the contributions of different communities to national development. These reforms aimed to encourage learners to critically engage with issues such as colonialism, apartheid, resistance movements, and democratic transition (Wassermann, Maposa, & Mhlono, 2023; Weldon, 2022). By foregrounding local and national histories, the curriculum attempts to foster a deeper understanding of South Africa's past while promoting democratic values and social cohesion within the classroom.

The integration of indigenous knowledge systems within history education has also been highlighted as an important strategy for enhancing curriculum relevance. Indigenous knowledge systems encompass cultural traditions, oral histories, and community-based knowledge that have been transmitted across generations within African societies. Scholars argue that incorporating these knowledge systems into history curricula can enrich learners' understanding of African societies and challenge dominant narratives that privilege written historical sources (Shizha, 2023; Maposa & Wassermann, 2020). Moreover, recognising indigenous knowledge encourages learners to appreciate the historical significance of their cultural heritage and promotes a more holistic understanding of the past.

Ultimately, curriculum relevance remains a fundamental factor in shaping learners' attitudes toward history education. When history curricula successfully connect global historical developments with African experiences and contemporary societal issues, learners are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards the subject. Scholars emphasise that effective history education should enable learners to critically analyse historical events, understand multiple perspectives, and relate historical knowledge to current social challenges (Barton & Levstik, 2022). By adopting culturally responsive and contextually grounded curricula, education systems across Sub-Saharan Africa can strengthen learners' historical consciousness,

promote inclusive historical narratives, and enhance the overall relevance of history education for future generations.

2.3.3 Classroom environment, teacher–learner relationships, and learners’ perceptions of history education

Classroom environments and teacher–learner relationships play a crucial role in shaping learners’ perceptions of history education. Educational research emphasises that the quality of interaction between teachers and learners significantly influences learners’ engagement, motivation, and attitudes toward academic subjects. In the context of history education, classrooms that promote open dialogue, collaborative learning, and mutual respect tend to encourage learners to participate more actively in historical discussions and inquiry-based learning (Barton & Levstik, 2022). When learners feel comfortable expressing their opinions and interpretations of historical events, they are more likely to develop deeper analytical skills and a stronger appreciation of the subject. Consequently, supportive classroom environments contribute significantly to positive learner perceptions of history and foster an atmosphere conducive to critical engagement with historical knowledge.

Teacher–learner relationships are particularly important in subjects such as history that require discussion, interpretation, and critical reflection. Research indicates that learners’ attitudes towards a subject are often influenced by their perceptions of their teachers’ enthusiasm, support, and pedagogical competence (Maposa & Wassermann, 2020; Chisholm, 2021). Teachers who demonstrate passion for history and encourage active participation can stimulate learners’ curiosity and interest in the subject. Conversely, negative teacher–learner relationships characterised by authoritarian teaching styles or limited interaction may discourage learners from participating in classroom discussions. Scholars therefore argue that teachers must adopt facilitative teaching approaches that position learners as active participants in the construction of historical knowledge rather than passive recipients of information (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019).

In many Sub-Saharan African classrooms, traditional teacher-centred pedagogical approaches remain dominant, which can limit opportunities for meaningful interaction between teachers and learners. Such approaches often emphasise lectures, note-taking, and memorisation of historical facts rather than critical analysis and discussion (Sifuna, 2023). While these methods may allow teachers to cover large amounts of curriculum content within limited timeframes, they often restrict learners’ ability to explore historical controversies, debate different

interpretations, and develop independent thinking skills. Scholars argue that learner-centred pedagogies such as group discussions, debates, historical simulations, and project-based learning can significantly improve classroom engagement and enhance learners' perceptions of history education (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Ngubane, 2021).

The creation of safe and inclusive classroom environments is particularly important in the teaching of history because historical topics often involve sensitive issues such as colonialism, apartheid, racism, and social inequality. In South Africa, these historical themes remain deeply connected to contemporary social and political debates. Research suggests that when teachers create safe classroom spaces where learners feel comfortable sharing diverse perspectives, learners are more likely to engage critically with complex historical issues (Weldon, 2022; Wassermann, Maposa, & Mhlongo, 2023). In such environments, learners are encouraged to question dominant narratives, analyse historical evidence, and develop informed opinions about historical events. This process strengthens learners' historical thinking skills and enhances their understanding of the connections between past and present.

Empirical evidence within the South African education context highlights the importance of protecting learners' freedom of expression in classroom discussions about history. Research by Ngema (2024) indicates that classrooms that encourage respectful debate and allow learners to express differing viewpoints create opportunities for deeper engagement with historical content. When learners are allowed to discuss controversial historical topics without fear of judgment or marginalisation, they develop greater confidence in their analytical abilities and become more willing to participate in academic discourse. Such environments also help learners appreciate the complexity of historical interpretation, as they are exposed to multiple perspectives and competing narratives about the past.

Indeed, the classroom environment and the nature of teacher–learner relationships have profound implications for the effectiveness of history education. Scholars argue that effective history teaching requires educators to cultivate classrooms characterised by respect, openness, and intellectual curiosity. Fostering supportive learning environments and encouraging collaborative dialogue assists teachers to enhance learners' motivation and strengthen their interest in historical inquiry. In the long term, these pedagogical practices contribute to the development of historically informed learners who are capable of critical thinking, democratic participation, and responsible citizenship. Consequently, strengthening teacher–learner

relationships and promoting inclusive classroom environments remain essential strategies for improving learners' perceptions of history education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Furthermore, classroom environment should be complemented by availability of educational resources and institutional support structures also shapes learners' perceptions of history learning across Sub-Saharan Africa. Many schools in the region experience shortages of textbooks, teaching materials, and technological resources, which can limit the range of instructional strategies that teachers can employ. These resource constraints may result in overreliance on traditional lecture-based teaching methods, which can reduce learner engagement and motivation. Therefore, improving teacher training, expanding access to learning materials, and incorporating innovative teaching strategies are essential for strengthening history education in the region. Addressing such challenges helps education systems to foster more positive learner perceptions of history and enhance learners' understanding of the past and its relevance to contemporary society.

2.4 Conceptualising learners' perceptions of history

Learners' perceptions of history are shaped by the ways in which historical content is presented, the pedagogical approaches used, and the broader societal and cultural context. In South Africa, historical learning is deeply intertwined with the country's post-apartheid nation-building objectives, aiming to foster critical consciousness and social cohesion among learners (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2025). Globally, perceptions are similarly influenced by learners' interactions with curriculum content and classroom practices, with research highlighting that learners interpret history both through formal school experiences and informal engagements with media, family narratives, and community history (Ngema, 2024). These perceptions are crucial because they affect learners' motivation, engagement, and understanding of the discipline as more than rote memorisation.

A key factor influencing learners' perceptions is relevance. In both South Africa and other contexts, learners engage more positively with history when content resonates with their identities and lived experiences (Nzeakor & Moloi, 2025). Comparative studies show that learners are more motivated when curricula include local, indigenous, or marginalised histories alongside national and global narratives, allowing learners to see themselves and their communities reflected in the historical discourse (Bleeze, 2024; Acheampong & Karikari, 2024). In South Africa, the integration of African histories, liberation struggles, and cultural

heritage into the curriculum has been critical in shaping learners' appreciation for history as a tool for understanding both past injustices and present societal challenges.

Another important dimension of learners' perceptions relates to how they conceptualise historical knowledge and skills. Nzeakor and Moloi (2025) emphasise that learners often hold simplified or naïve understandings of historical constructs such as causation, continuity, and change unless they are explicitly guided in disciplinary reasoning. In South Africa, it was found that learners frequently struggle to connect abstract historical concepts with the country's complex socio-political past, which can lead to disengagement or viewing history as irrelevant (Radebe et al., 2025). However, when teachers emphasise inquiry-based learning, multi-perspective analysis, and evidence evaluation, learners are more likely to develop nuanced historical understanding and perceive the subject positively (Acheampong & Karikari, 2024).

Pedagogy also plays a central role in shaping learners' perceptions. International studies in countries such as the UK, Ghana and Australia have shown that interactive methods including debates, primary source analysis, and project-based learning improve learners' attitudes by making history more participatory and intellectually stimulating (Morgan, 2023; Henkaline, 2021). In South Africa, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) advocates for learner-centred approaches, yet implementation varies due to teacher preparedness, resource availability, and classroom dynamics. Research highlights that when teachers successfully implement these methods, learners report higher engagement, enjoyment, and perceived relevance of history in understanding contemporary social issues (Nhedzi et al. 2022).

The perceived relevance of historical content is particularly critical in shaping learners' engagement and attitudes. Comparative studies indicate that learners worldwide prefer curricula that connect historical knowledge to present-day social, political, and ethical issues, rather than focusing solely on memorisation of facts (Morgan, 2023; Acheampong & Karikari, 2024). In South Africa, integrating topics such as the struggle against apartheid, post-apartheid nation-building, and local community histories allows learners to relate personally and socially to historical content. This not only improves engagement but also fosters critical thinking and civic awareness, essential for sustaining a vibrant history-learning culture.

Importantly, learners' perceptions are dynamic and multidimensional, often reflecting contradictions; learners may perceive history as both important and challenging, relevant yet abstract, or entertaining but difficult. Understanding these perceptions is essential for

curriculum designers and educators to create learning environments that are responsive, inclusive, and engaging (Henkaline, 2021). Tapping from global best practices such as inquiry-based learning, multi-perspective pedagogy, and culturally relevant curricula, South Africa can stimulate a sustainable history-learning culture that nurtures critical historical thinking, identity affirmation, and active engagement with the past and present.

2.5 Learners' interest and disinterest in history as a school subject

Learners' interest in history as a school subject varies considerably, with many learners reporting declining engagement due to perceptions of low relevance and traditional instructional methods. For example, Australian learners discontinuing history often question its value for future work and see it as less rewarding compared with other subjects (Cairns & Garrard, 2024). In Ghana, learners describe history as dull and irrelevant when teaching methods fail to connect content to their lives and literate abilities (Acheampong & Karikari, 2024). There is emerging evidence that also confirm that textbook-centred, rigid teaching approaches contribute to negative perceptions and disengagement (Tekir, 2025; Fufa et al., 2024), and broader research suggests that many young people do not perceive history as pertinent to their personal or professional futures, which undermines interest (Cairns & Gerrade, 2024).

Leonard (2024) highlights that learners' interest in history is significantly influenced by teaching methods and classroom experiences. For example, a study carried out in secondary schools in West Bengal found that learners' attitudes towards history were shaped by the way content was delivered, with positive engagement linked to interactive teaching practices and supportive learning environments, whereas monotonous, lecture-focused approaches were associated with disinterest (Anjum, 2018). Similarly, narrative reviews of pedagogical strategies show that rote learning and heavy emphasis on factual recall tend to dampen motivation, whereas approaches that foreground inquiry and storytelling can increase learner engagement (Xiang, 2025; Zanzanian et al., 2025). Indeed, the learning environment plays a critical role in motivating learners to take the subject.

The relevance of historical content to learners' lives also plays a crucial role in shaping their interest. When learners understand how historical phenomena relate to present-day issues, they are more likely to express enthusiasm and see value in the subject (Ca et al, 2020). Conversely, learners often view history as irrelevant if they cannot connect it to their lived experiences or future aspirations. This pattern has been identified not only in global research but also within

specific studies that show reluctance among learners to pursue history further when they perceive limited practical utility or career pathways associated with the subject (Govendor & Bhana, 2023).

Moreover, the presence or absence of active and interactive learning opportunities is another key determinant of learner interest. Modern instructional innovations such as game-based learning suggests that embedding interactive elements into history instruction can enhance motivation and engagement by providing learners with more autonomy, context, and enjoyment in the learning process (Zanazanian et al., 2025). Such innovations contrast sharply with conservative textbook-centred models that learners often describe as dull or overly demanding.

Despite persistent concerns about learner disengagement, a growing body of recent scholarship demonstrates that learners can develop positive attitudes towards history under specific pedagogical and curricular conditions. Studies across diverse contexts indicate that learners express a genuine appreciation for history when it enables them to explore questions of identity, culture, power, and societal change, rather than merely memorising factual content. For example, Zanazanian et al. (2025) argue that history becomes meaningful to learners when it helps them make sense of contemporary social tensions and their own positionality within society. Similarly, Ngobeni et al (2023) show that when history education foregrounds issues of justice, inequality, and collective memory, learners are more likely to view the subject as relevant and intellectually engaging, fostering positive dispositions toward historical study.

Some studies highlight the importance of dialogic and learner-centred classroom practices in shaping favourable learner perceptions of history. Dialogic teaching characterised by discussion, debate, and the exchange of multiple perspectives has been shown to increase learner motivation and emotional engagement (Alexander, 2020). For instance, a study by Meylani (2024) found that learners demonstrated higher levels of interest and historical consciousness when teachers encouraged open classroom dialogue and critical questioning of dominant narratives. A mixed-methods study by Conrad et al. (2023) revealed that inquiry-based and discussion-oriented history lessons significantly improved learners' attitudes towards the subject, particularly when learners were given opportunities to articulate their own interpretations and connect historical issues to present-day realities. South African secondary school teachers may infuse an engaged type of delivery so that learners can harness various learning skills to improve their performance.

Positive learner attitudes are also strongly associated with instructional approaches that engage learners in working with historical sources and reflecting on ethical and political dimensions of the past. Research suggests that curated primary sources such as letters, photographs, oral testimonies, and archival documents enable learners to experience history as an interpretive and investigative discipline rather than a fixed body of knowledge. For example, Radebe et al. (2025) found that learners developed stronger interest and deeper engagement when lessons involved analysing sources and debating moral dilemmas embedded in historical events. Barton and Levstik (2022) show that opportunities for personal reflection and narrative construction allow learners to connect emotionally and cognitively with the past. The foregoing discourse indicates that history teaching should prioritise inquiry, dialogue, ethical reflection, and relevance to learners lived experiences so that learners are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward the subject.

2.6 Factors influencing learners' interest in history in Sub-Saharan Africa

Learners' interest in history education in Sub-Saharan Africa is shaped by a wide range of academic, social, and institutional factors. Scholars argue that interest in a subject is closely linked to learners' perceptions of its relevance, teaching approaches, and the broader educational environment within which learning occurs (Sifuna, 2023). In many African education systems, history competes with subjects perceived to offer more direct career opportunities, such as science, technology, and commerce. As a result, learners sometimes perceive history as less practical or less valuable in relation to employment prospects (Agwanda, 2019; Boadu, 2021). These perceptions can influence learners' motivation to study the subject and often contribute to declining enrolment in history courses at secondary school level across several countries in the region.

Teaching methodologies are among the most significant factors affecting learners' interest in history education. Research indicates that traditional teacher-centred instructional methods, which emphasise memorisation of historical facts and dates, often discourage learners from engaging deeply with historical content (Maposa & Wassermann, 2020; Lévesque, 2020). When history lessons focus primarily on rote learning and textbook-based instruction, learners may perceive the subject as tedious or overly theoretical. Conversely, learner-centred pedagogical strategies such as debates, role-playing, historical simulations, and the analysis of primary historical sources can enhance learners' curiosity and engagement with the subject (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Grant, 2020). These approaches encourage learners to think critically

about historical events and develop interpretive skills, which can significantly increase their interest in history.

Curriculum content also plays an important role in shaping learners' attitudes towards history. Studies across Sub-Saharan Africa suggest that learners are more interested in history when the curriculum reflects local experiences, community histories, and national heritage (Chisholm, 2021; Ndlovu, 2022). When historical narratives are presented in ways that connect with learners' identities and social realities, the subject becomes more meaningful and engaging. Conversely, curricula that emphasise distant global events without linking them to African contexts may create a sense of detachment among learners. Educational scholars therefore emphasise the need for culturally responsive curricula that incorporate African perspectives, liberation struggles, and indigenous knowledge systems into history education (Shizha, 2023; Maposa & Wassermann, 2020).

The quality of teaching and teacher attitudes towards history also influences learners' interest in the subject. Teachers who demonstrate enthusiasm, strong content knowledge, and effective pedagogical skills can inspire learners to develop a deeper appreciation of historical inquiry. Conversely, teachers who rely heavily on lecture-based instruction or who appear disengaged may unintentionally discourage learners from participating actively in lessons. Research further suggests that teachers who encourage critical discussion, questioning, and collaborative learning tend to foster higher levels of learner engagement and interest in history (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Lévesque & Clark, 2021). Consequently, teacher training and professional development play an important role in improving the quality of history education and stimulating learner interest.

Educational resources and learning environments are additional factors that influence learners' engagement with history education. Many schools across Sub-Saharan Africa face challenges such as limited access to textbooks, teaching materials, and digital technologies. These resource constraints can restrict the variety of teaching strategies available to teachers and limit opportunities for interactive learning experiences (Sifuna, 2023). When classrooms lack adequate resources, teachers may rely heavily on lecture-based instruction, which can reduce learner participation and interest. In contrast, schools that provide access to historical resources such as archives, museums, multimedia materials, and digital platforms can create more engaging learning environments that stimulate learners' curiosity about the past.

Finally, broader socio-political and cultural factors also shape learners' interest in history education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Historical narratives often intersect with contemporary debates about identity, citizenship, and national development. In societies that have experienced colonialism, apartheid, or political conflict, the teaching of history can play a vital role in helping learners understand the roots of current social challenges (Weldon, 2022; Carretero, Berger, & Grever, 2017). When history education encourages learners to explore issues such as social justice, democracy, and human rights, it becomes more relevant to contemporary life and can stimulate greater interest among learners. Therefore, strengthening history education requires a holistic approach that addresses curriculum relevance, teaching practices, resource availability, and the broader social significance of historical knowledge.

2.7 Teaching methods and pedagogical approaches

Pedagogical approaches play a central role in shaping learners' perceptions and interest in history. Conrad et al. (2023) argue that traditional didactic methods, characterised by teacher talk, textbook-centric lessons, and rote memorisation, often contribute to learners' disinterest in the subject. When classrooms focus on recall rather than inquiry, learners are more likely to perceive history as a tedious accumulation of facts rather than a dynamic inquiry into human experiences like in any other learning environment. A study by Adebola (2025) underscored the critical role of pedagogical approaches in shaping learner engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes across subjects, including history. On the contrary, traditional teacher-centred methods such as lecture-based instruction have long dominated classrooms but are increasingly critiqued for promoting passive learning and low learner engagement (Fufa et al., 2024). Moreover, active and learner-centred pedagogies including inquiry-based learning, skills-based teaching, flipped classrooms, and project-based learning are gaining traction globally and in African contexts for their potential to foster deeper cognitive engagement and meaning-making. These approaches move beyond rote memorisation towards practices that encourage critical inquiry, collaborative discourse, and reflective thinking, aligning with constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning (Monte-Sano, 2011).

Inquiry-based learning (IBL) has featured prominently in recent empirical work as a pedagogical approach that increases learner involvement and motivation. A quasi-experimental study using the 5E instructional model in secondary school history classes in Ethiopia found that learners taught through inquiry exhibited significantly more positive attitudes towards history than those taught via traditional methods, highlighting the model's effectiveness in

promoting learner engagement and higher-order thinking skills (Conrad et al., 2023). Similar research argues that when learners are encouraged to investigate historical questions, analyse sources, and construct explanations collaboratively, they are more likely to remain invested in the subject's content and processes (Abebe et al., 2025). Teaching and learning should be allowed to evolve so that it embraces the uptake of new information innovatively.

Linked to inquiry, skills-based teaching approaches (SBTA) have also been documented to support active learning in history. In a study carried out in South African primary schools, it was shown that teachers' use of SBTA emphasising critical thinking, historical skills, and learner-centred activities can significantly improve learners' engagement, even as challenges around professional development remain (Radebe et al., 2025). Such skills-oriented pedagogies contrast markedly with traditional content reproduction and have been associated with deeper analytical capacities among learners, including their ability to interpret historical evidence and make reasoned judgments (Chimbunde et al., 2023).

In addition to inquiry and SBTA, interactive teaching methods such as role-playing, debates, group projects, and discussions are linked to high levels of learner participation and motivation (Chimbunde et al., 2023). A systematic review of interactive teaching techniques indicates that such approaches significantly increase learner engagement and learning outcomes by fostering dialogue, peer interaction, and active involvement rather than passive reception of information (Petousi et al., 2022). Amplifying these findings, studies on digital and storytelling approaches demonstrate that collaborative interaction using digital narratives can stimulate learner curiosity and support meaning-making in history classrooms (Abebe et al., 2024). In this study, it is argued that the hallmark of maximising learning efficiency in history classes is through stimulating interactive and practical engagements between the teacher and the learner. This can also be achieved through peer-to-peer interactions.

Further, the shift towards constructivist and critical pedagogies has significantly resurfaced in recent literature, arguing for teaching that encourages learners to co-construct knowledge through dialogue and reflection. For instance, Burgos-Videla et al. (2025) advance critical thinking and historical methods and suggest that engaging learners in constructing historical discourse enables them to reinterpret the past and relate it to contemporary issues, thereby making learning socially relevant and intellectually stimulating. In the South African context, decolonial and culturally responsive pedagogies foreground learners' cultural contexts and lived experiences, which can deepen emotional engagement and foster meaningful connections

to content (Ncube & Mabalane, 2025). Such pedagogical approaches embrace the notion of moving away from Eurocentric teaching to Afrocentric methods that match our learning needs and culture.

Ultimately, the implementation of flipped classroom models and active learning interventions reflects a broader pedagogical trend that prioritises learner autonomy and participation. Although specific history education studies on flipped learning are still emerging, there is strong support for flipped and active learning designs. These are powerful strategies for enhancing learner engagement and motivation by reallocating class time to higher-order tasks, collaboration, and formative feedback. Together, these pedagogical innovations illustrate a global pedagogical shift towards methods that align with twenty-first century learning goals, emphasising inquiry, interaction, and critical engagement approaches that show promise for transforming history education both in South Africa and internationally.

2.8 Curriculum content and relevance

Curriculum content significantly shapes how learners perceive the relevance of history. Henkaline (2023) argues that when curricula include diverse perspectives that resonate with learners' cultural backgrounds, social identities, and current societal issues, learners often find the subject more engaging and meaningful. Moreover, curriculum content and its relevance in South African schools remain central concerns in educational research, particularly given the country's complex socio-political history and the transformative aims of post-apartheid education. The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which replaced the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) in 2011, was designed to promote coherent, structured learning from Grades R-12 with explicit aims to link content to both historical context and contemporary society (DBSE, 2022). CAPS emphasises not only factual knowledge but also conceptual understanding and historical thinking skills such as sourcing, corroboration, and context, demonstrating a shift from mere content coverage to cognitive engagement with the past and present. Yet, despite these intentions, scholars argue that the academic content of curricula must not only be well structured but meaningfully relevant to learners' contexts if it is to motivate engagement and deeper learning a challenge widely noted in South Africa (Kgari-Masondo, 2020).

A major theme in the curriculum relevance discourse in South Africa is the extent to which official content reflects the lived experiences and identities of diverse learners. Sifuna (2023) notes that history curriculum content has shown that despite CAPS's progressive framing, the

narratives included in textbooks often remain anchored in Western historiographical traditions, marginalising African perspectives and indigenous knowledge system. It is further argued that such content choices can diminish learners' sense of relevance, as learners struggle to see themselves and their communities reflected in prescribed knowledge. For example, the concept of historical significance critical for understanding why certain stories are told and others suppressed has been critiqued in the South African context for privileging narratives associated with elite political actors rather than grassroots experiences and multicultural identities (Kgari-Masondo, 2020). This resonates with broader international concerns that curriculum relevance is shaped by whose voices are central in the historical narrative.

Emerging evidence points to the need for a reconceptualisation of curriculum content to be more inclusive and representative of multiple historical perspectives. Such approaches draw on decolonial and social justice theories that critique Eurocentric knowledge hierarchies and advocate for content that honours African agency and indigenous epistemologies (Sepadi & Molapo, 2024). Further, learners are more engaged when curriculum content includes locally relevant themes, such as South Africa's liberation struggles, pre-colonial histories, and everyday experiences of socio-political change. This argues for extending the content frame beyond traditional political narratives to include cultural, economic, and ecological dimensions of history, thereby making curriculum content resonate with learners' identities and societal contexts.

Another dimension of relevance concerns curriculum implementation, which research suggests can differ significantly from the official policy. Sepadi and Molapo (2024) opine that teachers' understanding and enactment of curriculum content shapes how relevance is realised in classrooms. While CAPS offers a detailed map of content and skills, many teachers struggle to translate these into meaningful learning experiences due to limited professional development and contextual constraints, especially in under-resourced rural or township schools (Admiraal et al., 2021). This discrepancy between intended and enacted curriculum highlights the importance of teacher agency and curriculum literacy in bridging the gap between policy design and classroom practice.

The notion of history's compulsory status further foregrounds concern about content relevance and curriculum positioning. In a study exploring the proposal to make history compulsory in the Further Education and Training (FET) Phase, it was noted that such policy moves can elevate the subject's status and strengthen its role in promoting critical citizenship and national

identity (Miles & Springgay, 2020). It was further noted that compulsory status could allow for deeper engagement with content and reduce the marginalisation of history within the curriculum, thereby increasing both academic and societal relevance (Sithole & Fru, 2024). However, the efficacy of such policy reforms depends on accompanying measures to ensure that curriculum content remains inclusive, critical, and connected to learners' life worlds.

The ongoing curriculum debates in South Africa reflect broader global trends in education that stress relevance as central to curriculum quality and learner engagement. Comparative studies underscore the value of aligning curriculum content with social realities, democratic citizenship goals, and learners' cultural identities, echoing calls for curricula that extend beyond rote content to develop critical, reflective citizens (Boadu & Appong, 2020). In South Africa, this means continually revisiting curricular priorities to ensure that content not only conveys knowledge of the past but also empowers learners to understand and act in their present contexts an enduring aspect of curriculum relevance.

2.9 Assessment practices in history education

Assessment practices in history education play a pivotal role in shaping learner outcomes, curricular alignment, and pedagogical quality. In South Africa, assessment must align with the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) framework, which emphasises both formative and summative assessment to support learning and gauge achievement (Townend et al., 2025). Further, Weston et al. (2024) highlight ongoing challenges in linking assessment to broader educational goals such as equity, historical thinking, and competency development. Such issues mirror global concerns about assessment practices in disadvantaged contexts and the need for equitable, learner-centred approaches. The study underscores the importance of assessment literacy among educators, enabling them to design and interpret assessment tasks that support young learners' historical understanding and competencies rather than merely ranking them by rote recall.

Studies into assessment in schools have identified persistent over-reliance on traditional summative assessments such as tests and examinations that prioritise factual recall over historical enquiry and skills (French et al., 2024). Arguably, summative tasks in history often dominate assessment regimes despite CAPS' claims to balance both formative and summative purposes, with portfolios and Classroom Based Assessments (CBAs) intended to reflect a broader range of skills (Townend et al., 2025). This mirrors findings from broader educational research in South Africa showing that systemic constraints such as limited teacher support and

professional development hamper effective implementation of formative assessment practices (Weston et al, 2024).

According to Sepadi and Molapo (2024), formative assessment, which includes ongoing feedback, performance-based tasks, and learner reflection, is recognised as crucial for supporting understanding and historical thinking. Warnich and Lubbe et al. (2021) found that from primary, social sciences contexts demonstrate that online and interactive formative assessment tools can support assessment practices and provide timely feedback. However, issues of resource inequity and teacher preparedness remain significant in diverse South African school settings (Malizal & Rahman, 2024). In this study, it is argued that formative approaches have the potential to reduce the anxiety associated with high stakes testing and promote deeper engagement with historical content when integrated effectively into daily instruction.

Within the specific field of history education, Gómez-Carrasco et al. (2022) have explored alternative performance assessment strategies that break from traditional tests and instead include interactive, dialogic, and performance-based tasks. It was further noted that trainee history teachers employ non-graded, interactive assessments such as role-plays and tasks involving collaborative inquiry (Fouche, 2025). Other strategies included formative group work to create emotionally safer and more engaging learning environments, fostering enthusiasm and reducing anxiety among learners. These innovative approaches often align with social constructivist principles, emphasising learner agency and deeper cognitive engagement.

Gómez-Carrasco et al. (2022) point to the need for reconfiguring assessment practices considering technological and pedagogical shifts, especially amid the rise of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT. In addition, it suggests that conventional essay-based and written assessment tasks are susceptible to misuse and may need redesign to emphasise authentic, performance-based, and application-oriented assessments that cannot be easily outsourced to AI (Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2022). This highlights the broader necessity of aligning assessment design with twenty-first century competencies and maintaining academic integrity while still valuing historical reasoning and interpretation (Chimbunde & Moreeng, 2025).

Despite these developments, assessment practices in history education in South Africa continue to face structural and contextual challenges. Tarisayi (2025) highlights inequities in assessment access and quality across socio-economic contexts. The findings relate to educators' and stakeholders' assessment practices, which points to ongoing barriers for learners experiencing

learning barriers in the Senior Phase. Brookbanks (2023) underscores the need for professional development, stronger assessment policy implementation, and inclusive practices that reflect diverse learner needs in history classrooms. Concerted systemic efforts are therefore necessary to ensure that assessment in history not only measures learning outcomes but also actively supports historical thinking, learner engagement, and equitable educational opportunities.

2.10 Teachers' attitudes and competence

Teachers' attitudes and professional competence are widely acknowledged as key determinants of instructional quality and learner achievement in South Africa. The South African education system, shaped by decades of inequality and uneven resource distribution, places extraordinary demands on teachers to bridge gaps in learner readiness and contextual challenges (Mitchell et al., 2024). Teachers' beliefs about teaching, their sense of efficacy, and their willingness to adopt innovative practices influence how curriculum reforms such as CAPS and inclusive education policies are enacted in classrooms. Positive attitudes towards change have been linked to more adaptive pedagogy and professional resilience, whereas negative or ambivalent attitudes can reinforce status-quo practices that limit instructional differentiation and learner engagement (Ncube & Mabalane, 2024; Dyosini, 2024).

Professional competence encompasses not only subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge but also assessment literacy, classroom management, and the ability to interpret and implement policy. Research on CAPS implementation in South African schools reveals that many teachers possess only a basic understanding of curriculum content and expectations, and that gaps in competence affect the quality and consistency of instruction (Sepadi & Molapo, 2024). Teachers often struggle with translating curriculum intentions into practice, especially for subjects requiring higher-order thinking such as history and social sciences. These findings mirror broader professional development critiques across sub-Saharan Africa, where systemic barriers including limited access to ongoing training, large class sizes, and poor infrastructure constrain teacher competence and confidence in implementing learner-centred pedagogies (De Wet & Rothmann, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2024).

Inclusive education policy in South Africa further accentuates the need for competence in differentiated instruction and responsive attitudes. Studies indicate that while many South African teachers report positive attitudes toward inclusion, they simultaneously express concerns about their ability to adapt instruction to meet diverse learning needs without sufficient preparation or resources (Ncube & Mabalane, 2025; Nhedzi et al, 2022). This tension

between attitudinal support for inclusion and perceived competence highlights the complex interaction between affective and cognitive dimensions of teaching. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs about their capability in applying inclusive strategies have been shown to influence their willingness to persist with innovative practices or revert to traditional, teacher-centred approaches in the face of challenges.

Teachers' attitudes towards technology and instructional innovation also play a critical role in their professional competence, especially as schools navigate blended and digitally mediated learning environments. Research conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic highlights that while many South African teachers hold positive views about the potential of technology for teaching and learning, their actual competence to integrate digital tools meaningfully into history and social science classrooms remains limited by training gaps and infrastructure issues (Radebe et al., 2025). These findings echo global research on teacher technology integration, which emphasise that positive attitudes alone are insufficient without targeted support and competency development. Where teachers are supported through collaborative professional learning communities and reflective practice frameworks, they are more likely to employ dialogic, interactive, and inquiry-based pedagogies that can enrich learning experiences and promote historical thinking.

2.11 Socio-cultural and environmental factors

Socio-cultural and environmental factors play a crucial role in shaping educational experiences and learner perceptions in South Africa, a country marked by deep historical cleavages and ongoing efforts at social transformation. The legacy of apartheid, which stratified access to quality education along racial and class lines, continues to influence classroom environments, school resources, and community attitudes towards schooling (Wassermann & Angier, 2024). Msomi (2024) argues that learners from historically marginalised communities often enter school with socio-economic disadvantages such as food insecurity, limited access to learning materials, and unstable home environments that affect their motivation, attendance, and engagement with subjects such as history. These socio-cultural determinants intersect with race, language, and class, producing varied experiences of learning and reinforcing the need for pedagogies that are responsive to diverse cultural identities and contexts.

Moreover, language and cultural identity are critical socio-cultural factors that influence how learners relate to curriculum content and assessment practices. South Africa's 11 official languages and pluralistic cultural landscape create both opportunities and challenges for

instruction. Studies have shown that learners who are taught primarily in a language that is not their home language frequently experience cognitive load and emotional disengagement, which can impede comprehension, historical thinking, and participation (Oosthuizen, 2024). Furthermore, curriculum narratives that prioritise dominant cultural histories especially those rooted in colonial or Eurocentric frameworks can alienate learners from indigenous or local contexts, reducing perceptions of relevance and belonging. This aligns with research advocating for culturally responsive curricula and pedagogy that centre indigenous knowledge systems and local narratives as ways of affirming learner identities and making History more meaningful and inclusive.

Environmental, socio-economic, and infrastructural also significantly shapes schooling experiences across South Africa. Schools in rural and peri-urban areas are often characterised by limited access to electricity, technology, libraries, and trained teachers, which constrains the scope of instructional strategies and interactive learning opportunities (Ross-Holmes, 2022). For example, where digital connectivity is weak or non-existent, teachers may be unable to incorporate interactive assessments, primary source exploration, or multimedia resources that enrich history learning and enable critical inquiry. These infrastructural disparities reinforce educational inequalities and affect learners' engagement, particularly in subjects that benefit from contextualised and resource-rich pedagogies.

Ultimately, the interplay between socio-cultural norms and environmental conditions influences both teacher attitudes and learner expectations. Ngema (2024) avers that in communities where formal education is not strongly embedded in everyday social practice due to historical marginalisation, economic precarity, or household responsibilities learners may prioritise immediate economic survival over academic engagement. Cultural expectations about gender roles can also affect classroom participation and subject preference, with some studies showing differential engagement in disciplines perceived as academically demanding or disconnected from livelihood prospects. These socio-cultural and environmental dynamics underscore the importance of policy and pedagogical responses that are not only academically rigorous but culturally anchored and environmentally attuned. In history education, this means centring local histories, encouraging community engagement, and designing learning experiences that connect the past to learners' social realities, fostering deeper relevance, participation, and agency.

Societal attitudes towards history as a subject are shaped by both educational purposes and broader social values, and these attitudes significantly influence how learners engage with history in school contexts. Studies in history education research argue that learners' perceptions of history often reflect wider societal debates about the value of historical knowledge and its relevance to contemporary life (Ngobeni et al., 2023). Research shows that when learners view history as distant or irrelevant to their everyday experiences, they are more likely to disengage, a trend linked to the ways history curricula prioritise certain knowledge over lived realities.

In many educational systems, the relevance of history education is contested. For example, research developing the Relevance of History Measurement Scale (RHMS) found that many learners devalue the subject because they do not see direct links between historical content and their current lives or future opportunities (Masenya, 2025). Similar findings emerge in studies across African contexts where learners report perceptions of history as unconnected to their aspirations, leading to negative attitudes towards the subject. Such perceptions reflect broader societal priorities that increasingly emphasise economic utility over critical citizenship and historical consciousness (Van Pham, 2024).

The methodology and pedagogy of history teaching also shape societal attitudes. Empirical research highlights that traditional, textbook-centric teaching practices contribute to learners seeing history as dull and rote, reinforcing negative attitudes towards the subject (Tekir, 2025; Sengonul, 2022). Conversely, when instruction emphasises inquiry, multi-perspectivity, and connections to social issues, learners report more positive attitudes, suggesting the society's appreciation of history is partly mediated by classroom experiences (Chisholm, 2021). This shape of teaching resonates with findings that pedagogical approaches fostering historical thinking and empathy improve learners' motivation to engage with history.

Teachers' and society's views about what history is also influence learner attitudes. Some studies show that educators often adopt an empiricist conception of history focused on factual knowledge rather than critical analysis of the past, which may limit learners' broader understanding of the subject's relevance. At the same time, public perceptions reflected in surveys suggest that many adults prefer history learning that involves direct engagement with primary sources and artifacts rather than mediated instruction, indicating societal preferences for meaningful engagement with history.

Societal narratives about history are further complicated by cultural, political, and identity dynamics. Research in divided societies shows that history education can either promote social

cohesion or reinforce divisive attitudes, depending on how narratives are framed and taught (Svensson, 2022). This connects with wider social attitudes towards the purpose of history, where some segments of society value history for strengthening civic identity and mutual understanding, while others see it as less relevant to practical goals (Chisholm, 2021). Negative perceptions are often associated with societal trends that prioritise immediate economic outcomes over long-term civic literacy.

Overall, societal attitudes towards history as a subject are not monolithic but are shaped by multiple interconnected factors including curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, public expectations, and broader cultural values. Research demonstrates that when history education aligns more closely with learners' lived experiences, fosters critical historical thinking, and connects past knowledge to contemporary societal issues, learners and the wider society are more likely to view history positively. Addressing negative societal perceptions thus requires holistic educational reforms that situate history as both a rigorous intellectual discipline and a vehicle for informed citizenship.

2.12 Comparative perspectives on learners' interest in history

Comparative perspectives in history education research highlight how cultural, curricular, and pedagogical contexts shape learners' interest differently across regions. Comparative studies often examine variations in how history is taught, valued, and understood in diverse educational systems. For example, research by Meylani (2024) demonstrates that countries with curricula that integrate inquiry-based learning report higher learner engagement in history compared to contexts where rote memorisation dominates. Such comparisons indicate that national educational priorities and teaching frameworks significantly influence learners' perceptions.

A key theme in comparative research is the role of national identity and collective memory in shaping learners' responses to history. In countries with high emphasis on national narratives, learners' interest tends to reflect societal narratives about the past (Barton & Levstik, 2022). For instance, Singapore's history curriculum, which blends national identity with critical historical thinking, correlates with more nuanced learner engagement than curricula focused primarily on patriotic instruction. These studies illustrate that learners' interest is not solely an outcome of individual preference but emerges from broader cultural and policy contexts.

Comparative research also shows the impact of classroom practice variation on learners' interest levels. Historical thinking practices such as source evaluation, debate, and historiographical discussion have been linked to higher motivation in countries such as Canada

and Finland compared with more traditional approaches in some other contexts (Weldon, 2022). Such research highlights pedagogical differences that influence how learners perceive history as dynamic rather than static, which encourages greater engagement.

International comparative studies further emphasise that assessments influence interest. When high-stakes testing privileges factual recall over analysis, learners often report reduced interest in history. Countries that broaden assessment to include project-based evaluation tend to foster greater learner curiosity, suggesting that the nature of evaluation shapes how seriously learners regard history as a subject of inquiry rather than memorisation (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019).

Language and access also emerge in comparative studies as factors influencing learner interest in history. In multilingual contexts, learners who engage with history in their home languages or in access-oriented pedagogies tend to show better comprehension and positive perceptions than those restricted to foreign instructional languages (Alexander, 2020). This underscores how educational equity intersects with history learning across global contexts.

Overall, comparative perspectives offer valuable insights into how curriculum design, pedagogy, assessment, and sociocultural foundations interact to shape learners' interest in history. These studies suggest that enhancing history education requires attention not only to local challenges but also to lessons from diverse international contexts where learner engagement has been successfully nurtured.

Empirical research from Sub-Saharan Africa reveals complex attitudes towards history shaped by school contexts, curriculum relevance, and cultural identities. In South Africa, studies by Jansen (2024) and Chisholm (2021) suggest that learners often view history as irrelevant due to curriculum content framed around colonial narratives with limited local resonance. These findings demonstrate how curricular design influences whether learners perceive history as meaningful or peripheral to their lives.

A recurring theme in regional research is the disconnection between the history curriculum and learners lived experiences. Research in Botswana and Zimbabwe found that learners reported low interest when historical examples felt distant from their communities (Chimbunde et al, 2023). These studies emphasise that when historical content does not reflect learners' socio-cultural realities, it contributes to disengagement and negative attitudes.

Teacher preparation and instructional strategies also appear prominently in Sub-Saharan research. Studies from Ghana and Kenya highlight that teachers often lack specialised training

in history pedagogy, leading to teacher-centred delivery that limits learner participation (Adebola, 2025). Such pedagogies are associated with learners' perceptions of history as memorisation rather than inquiry, thus negatively impacting learner interest.

Socio-economic conditions further influence learners' engagement with history across the region. Research in rural South African schools indicates that limited access to learning resources such as textbooks, visual materials, and museum visits, reduces opportunities for rich historical enquiry, contributing to lower interest (Chimbunde et al., 2023). These contextual inequities reinforce broader societal attitudes that deprioritise humanities subjects.

Findings also reveal diversity in learner attitudes. In urban South African contexts, some learners expressed positive perceptions of history when teachers employed interactive methods such as debates and role-plays (Moyo, 2024). This suggests that even within regional constraints, pedagogical innovation can improve learners' experiences and attitudes toward history.

Finally, research underscores the need for curriculum reform that embraces local histories and learner narratives. Studies from Uganda and Tanzania advocate for teaching that connects global historical themes with local stories, thereby fostering relevance and learner interest (Sifuna, 2023; Mushi, 2022). These empirical insights provide grounded evidence for strategies that may enhance learners' engagement in the region.

2.13 Summary

This chapter provided a synthesis of scholarly literature on learners' perceptions of history and the factors shaping their interest or disinterest in the subject, with particular emphasis on the South African context. Adopting an inverted funnel approach, the chapter began by examining global perspectives on learners' attitudes towards history, highlighting widespread ambivalence influenced by pedagogical approaches, curriculum relevance, assessment practices, and socio-cultural contexts. International studies revealed that while history is often perceived as demanding and content-heavy, learner engagement improves significantly when teaching emphasises inquiry, dialogic interaction, critical analysis of sources, and meaningful connections to contemporary social realities. These global insights provided a conceptual foundation for understanding how perceptions of history are formed and transformed within schooling systems. The next chapter provides an analytical review of the role of media, public narratives, and societal discussions in influencing learners' attitudes toward history.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning the study on the societal discourses shaping the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban cities in South Africa. The study is embedded in critical theory as the primary analytical lens. Foregrounding the critical tenets of this theory, the study seeks to move beyond surface-level explanations of declining enrolment and engagement, and instead uncover the deeper socio-political, cultural, and economic forces that inform learners' perceptions of history as a school subject. The chapter first outlines the philosophical foundations and core assumptions of critical theory, followed by a discussion of its key tenets relevant to education, including ideology critique, emancipation, and discourse. It then demonstrates how these tenets are applied to analyse societal discourses surrounding history education in urban South African schools. The chapter concludes by justifying the suitability of critical theory for addressing the research questions and highlighting how the framework guides data interpretation in subsequent chapters.

3.2 Critical tenets of critical theory

Critical theory is a normative and emancipatory framework concerned with understanding and transforming social conditions that perpetuate inequality, domination, and exclusion. Originating from the work of scholars associated with the Frankfurt School, critical theory rejects the notion of value-free knowledge and instead argues that all knowledge is socially constructed and embedded within power relations (Horkheimer, 1972; Bohman, 1990). In education discourse, this perspective helps interrogate how schooling systems, curricula, and subject hierarchies are shaped by broader socio-economic and political forces. In the realm of history education in South Africa, critical theory allows for an examination of how dominant societal discourses influence learners' perceptions of the subject and contribute to declining interest at the Grade 10 level.

A central tenet of critical theory is the critique of power and domination. Power is understood not merely as coercive authority but as diffused through social institutions, cultural practices, and everyday forms of knowledge production (Foucault, 1980). In educational contexts, power operates through curriculum design, assessment practices, and policy priorities that privilege certain forms of knowledge over others. Arguably, the marginalisation of humanities subjects, including history, reflects neoliberal educational agendas that prioritise economic utility and measurable outcomes over critical citizenship (Scherer & Neesham, 2023). This tenet is

essential for analysing how urban learners may internalise societal narratives that devalue history as irrelevant to future success.

Closely linked to power is the critique of ideology, which focuses on uncovering belief systems that normalise inequality and conceal structural contradictions. Ideology functions by presenting socially constructed values as natural or inevitable, thereby limiting critical reflection (Fontana, 2024). In learning environments, dominant ideologies often frame success in terms of market competitiveness, STEM proficiency, and individual achievement, marginalising subjects associated with critical reflection and historical consciousness. From a critical theory perspective, declining interest in history may therefore be understood as an outcome of ideological discourses that position the subject as less valuable in a globalised, skills-driven economy.

Another defining tenet of critical theory is its emancipatory orientation, which asserts that knowledge should contribute to human freedom and social justice. Unlike interpretivist approaches that prioritise understanding alone, critical theory insists that research must expose injustice and create possibilities for transformation (Christensen, 2024). In education, this entails questioning whose knowledge is represented, whose histories are legitimised, and how learners can be empowered to challenge dominant narratives. In the South African context, this tenet is particularly relevant given the enduring legacies of colonialism and apartheid, which continue to shape historical representation and learner engagement.

Reflexivity is another critical tenet, requiring studies to critically examine their own positionality, assumptions, and role in knowledge production. Critical theorists argue that researchers are never neutral observers but are embedded within the same social structures they seek to analyse (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2018). Reflexivity enhances methodological rigour by ensuring that research does not inadvertently reproduce dominant discourses or silence marginalised perspectives. In this study, reflexivity is essential for interpreting societal discourses around history education while remaining attentive to learners lived experiences in urban South African schools.

In essence, critical theory emphasises praxis, defined as the integration of critical reflection and transformative action. Paulo Freire's pedagogical work argues that praxis involves developing critical consciousness (conscientisation) that enables individuals to recognise and challenge oppressive conditions (Freire, 2025, Scherer & Neesham, 2023). In the context of this research, praxis directs the analysis beyond diagnosing the decline in learner interest

towards proposing socially responsive and pedagogically inclusive approaches to history education. Thus, critical theory not only informs the interpretation of societal discourses but also guides recommendations aimed at revitalising history as a critical and meaningful subject for urban learners.

3.3 Humanising Grade 10 South African history education

The concept of humanising education has gained traction in post-apartheid South Africa as educators and researchers grapple with transforming curricula that reflect the lived experiences, identities, and aspirations of diverse learners. Humanising education emphasises teaching and learning practices that are culturally responsive, socially relevant, and empowering rather than alienating or oppressive (Fontana, 2024). In the context of history education, humanisation involves recognising multiple voices in historical narratives and validating learners' cultural and community histories alongside dominant historical accounts. It is argued that when learners see their identities and experiences reflected in the curriculum, engagement and meaning making improve (Fouché, 2025). This ultimately contributes to deeper interest and participation in the subject.

South African educational discourse has critically examined the legacy of apartheid-era curricula, which privileged Eurocentric narratives and marginalised indigenous knowledges and lived experiences of previously oppressed groups (Chisholm, 2021). Research in history education suggests that lingering colonial epistemologies in curriculum content continue to shape learners' perceptions of the subject as irrelevant to their socio-cultural context. Humanising history education therefore requires intentional curriculum reform that broadens historical perspectives to include voices from African and local histories, fostering a more inclusive and representative understanding of the past (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). By foregrounding diverse histories, learners can begin to connect personally with historical inquiry, finding relevance and meaning in the subject matter.

Pedagogical approaches are central to humanising history education, with constructivist and inquiry-based teaching methods highlighted in the literature as tools for fostering critical thinking and learner agency. Humanising pedagogy positions learners as active participants in constructing historical knowledge rather than passive recipients of facts (Le Grange, 2020). In South Africa, studies have shown that when teachers facilitate dialogic classroom environments that encourage learners to voice their perspectives and relate history to contemporary social issues, levels of engagement and interest increase significantly (Alexander, 2020). Such

pedagogies align with humanising aims by valuing learners' voices and fostering deep, meaningful engagement with historical content.

Despite the theoretical emphasis on humanising education, research highlights numerous challenges confronting its implementation in South African schools. Resource constraints, overcrowded classrooms, limited teacher preparation in culturally responsive approaches, and standardised assessment regimes pose significant barriers (Bertram, 2020b). Teachers may want to humanise history learning but feel constrained by rigid curriculum pacing guides and high-stakes examinations that prioritise memorisation over critical engagement (Chisholm & Keet, 2021). These systemic factors can undermine efforts to create humanised learning environments that centre learner interests and lived realities.

Zanazanian et al (2024) suggest that integrating community and oral histories into teaching can enhance humanisation by bridging school learning with lived experience. Oral history projects, community research assignments, and participatory learning tasks contextualise historical inquiry within learners' social worlds, making history more tangible and personally significant (Soudien, 2018). Such approaches also honour indigenous modes of storytelling and knowledge transmission, challenging the dominance of written texts and Western historiographical traditions. By validating diverse epistemologies, these strategies contribute to more equitable and inclusive history classrooms.

Overall, the study underscores that humanising Grade 10 history education has significant potential to address declining learner interest by making the subject more relevant, inclusive, and engaging. However, realising this potential requires systemic support for teacher development, curriculum diversification that authentically reflects learner identities, and pedagogical practices that prioritise learner voice and agency (Le Grange, 2020). As South African education continues to evolve, there is need to explore how humanising practices can be sustainably enacted in diverse school contexts. This is vital especially in environments where learners navigate complex social and cultural identities. This body of work lays a foundation for the present study's focus on understanding how humanising discourses might counteract disengagement and decline in interest in history.

3.4 Relevance of critical theory to Grade 10 South African history education

Critical theory is highly relevant for understanding and transforming Grade 10 South African history education because it provides a lens to critically examine power relations, knowledge production, and sociocultural influences in the schooling context. Unlike approaches that treat

education as neutral transmission of facts, critical theory emphasises that curricula, assessment, and pedagogy are shaped by wider social, political, and economic structures (Bohman, 1990). In the South African case, these structures include legacies of colonialism and apartheid, neoliberal policy pressures, and globalised education agendas that often marginalise humanistic subjects such as history in favour of STEM or vocationally oriented learning (Shambare & Simuja, 2022; Heleta, 2016). Therefore, critical theory enables a deeper investigation into why and how learners disengage from history; the theory does not simply document the decline but situates it within wider societal discourses that privilege certain forms of knowledge over others.

One of the strengths of critical theory is its focus on ideology critique, which involves uncovering the belief systems that naturalise inequality and render certain educational experiences invisible or unimportant (Shambare & Simuja, 2022). In history education, dominant ideologies often elevate narratives that align with Western historiographical traditions while marginalising indigenous and local knowledges that reflect the lived realities of South African learners (Soudien, 2018). Such marginalisation can reinforce perceptions that history is irrelevant, particularly for urban learners whose identities and community histories are not reflected in standardised curricula.

Critical theory also foregrounds the role of power in shaping educational structures, including what counts as valid knowledge and whose voices are heard (Chisholm, 2021). In South African schools, power dynamics are manifested through curricula that may prioritise assessment outcomes, standardised testing formats, and rigid content coverage over critical inquiry and contextual relevance (Bertram, 2020b). These structural emphases can limit opportunities for learners to critically engage with history in ways that are meaningful to their social and cultural contexts, reinforcing the discipline's image as distant or disconnected from everyday life. A critical theory lens prompts educators and policymakers to interrogate these power structures and to consider reforms that decentralise dominant epistemologies in favour of more inclusive and dialogic approaches.

A further dimension of critical theory relevant to history education is its commitment to emancipation and social justice (Scherer & Neesham, 2023). In post-apartheid South Africa, education has been framed as a mechanism for achieving equality and democratic citizenship (Chisholm, 2021). Yet, persistent disparities in school resourcing, teacher preparation, and curriculum content continue to produce unequal experiences of learning (Sifuna, 2023). Critical

theory encourages educational practices that empower learners to become critical thinkers, socially conscious citizens, and agents of change. This orientation aligns with the purposes of history education, which include understanding past injustices, recognising continuities in contemporary society, and fostering civic engagement.

Critical theory's emphasis on reflexivity also has direct implications for history teaching and research. Reflexivity requires educators and researchers to examine their assumptions, positionalities, and potential biases, acknowledging that knowledge production is inherently situated and context-dependent (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2018). In the South African context, reflexivity can help teachers recognise how their own cultural backgrounds, historical understandings, and pedagogical choices influence classroom dynamics and learner engagement. Such self-critical awareness is essential for developing teaching strategies that genuinely resonate with learners' diverse social and cultural realities.

Ultimately, the relevance of critical theory to Grade 10 history education is evident in its integration of praxis, the unity of theory and practice, which moves beyond critique to transformative action. Critical theory not only analyses problems; it also encourages practical interventions that challenge oppressive structures and support meaningful learning. For South African history classrooms, this might include curriculum reforms that integrate local histories, pedagogical practices that foster critical dialogue, and assessment strategies that prioritise historical understanding over rote memorisation (Bertram, 2020b). Through praxis, critical theory not only provides a framework for interpreting the decline in history interest but also a foundation for educational practices that aim to revitalise learner engagement and relevance.

3.5 Grade 10 history as a toolbox to build critical skills for the future

Studies on history education increasingly frame the discipline not merely as the study of past events but as a crucial vehicle for developing critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and citizenship skills needed in an increasingly complex future (Abrar et al., 2025). In this view, history functions as a "toolbox" that equips learners with cognitive tools to interpret evidence, contextualise information, and understand continuity and change over time. These competencies are recognised as foundational for active participation in democratic societies and for navigating diverse social, political, and digital environments (Simamora, 2024). In South Africa, where young people face rapid socio-economic shifts and democratic challenges, the potential of history to foster future-oriented critical skills makes its teaching especially significant.

A central argument in the literature is that history education promotes critical thinking and interpretive skills by requiring learners to engage with multiple sources, perspectives, and interpretations (Levstik & Barton, 2022). Unlike subjects that prioritise memorisation, history tasks learners with evaluating evidence, identifying bias, and constructing reasoned arguments about past and present phenomena. These skills are transferrable to future academic study and the world of work, where employers increasingly demand capabilities in complex problem-solving and decision-making. It is argued that learners who engage deeply with historical reasoning demonstrate greater capacity for nuanced judgement when addressing real-world issues such as social justice, conflict, and cultural diversity.

In the South African context, history education is positioned within curriculum reforms that emphasise competence development and critical engagement rather than rote learning (Thulo, 2025). The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for history foregrounds analytical tasks such as interpreting sources, debating historical claims, and recognising cause and effect relationships. These curricular expectations align with global research highlighting the role of history in fostering historical consciousness. This reflective mindset enables learners to connect past events with contemporary challenges and future possibilities (Tekir, 2025). Within urban schooling environments, such competencies are particularly relevant as learners navigate diverse social identities and digital media landscapes.

History education contributes to civic education and democratic competencies. This is because exploring themes such as human rights, governance, and resistance movements, can support learners' understanding of civic concepts and ethical reasoning (Walker et al., 2022). In South Africa, where democratic consolidation remains a work in progress, deep engagement with contested pasts helps learners grasp the foundations of constitutional values and human dignity. Building these capacities through history contributes to future-oriented citizens who are better prepared for responsible participation in civic life.

Inevitably, pedagogical approaches strengthen history's role as a critical skills toolbox. Inquiry-based learning, source-based reasoning tasks, and collaborative dialogues are identified as effective strategies for fostering deeper historical understanding (Fouche, 2025). These approaches move beyond fact-recall to emphasise interpretation, argumentation, and reflection skills that are directly relevant to challenges in higher education, the workplace, and everyday decision making. Cairns and Garrard (2024) further note that digital tools and multimodal

resources can enhance learners' engagement and critical analysis by exposing them to diverse perspectives and media formats.

Despite the potential of history to build future-ready skills, researchers also identify barriers such as limited teacher preparedness, assessment pressures, and resource inequities that constrain effective implementation (Jita & Mokhele, 2013; Chisholm, 2021). Teachers' confidence in facilitating inquiry-based and critical skills tasks is uneven, and high-stakes testing often prioritises recall over reasoning. Addressing these challenges requires systemic support through professional development, curriculum flexibility, and assessments that value reasoning and interpretation. Overall, the literature underscores that Grade 10 history, when taught with a focus on critical engagement, offers a rich toolbox for equipping learners with the cognitive and civic skills needed to navigate future personal, social, and professional landscapes.

3.6 Indoctrination to humanising Grade 10 history in South Africa

History education in South Africa increasingly addresses the tension between approaches that resemble indoctrination and those aimed at humanising the curriculum. Indoctrination in education is commonly understood as teaching that promotes uncritical acceptance of specific values or viewpoints without fostering independent thought (Scherer & Neesham, 2023). In contrast, humanising education foregrounds learner agency, critical reflection, and engagement with diverse perspectives (Le Grange, 2020). In this current study, it is argued that indoctrinatory practices from transformative, humanising methods in Grade 10 history have implications for curriculum, pedagogy, and learner outcomes.

A central concern is how some traditional history instruction risks indoctrination by privileging dominant narratives and discouraging critical interrogation. Historically, South African history curricula often centred Eurocentric accounts that marginalised African perspectives, leading learners to internalise a narrow and uncritical view of the past (Heleta, 2016; Soudien, 2018). While the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) for history seeks to promote critical skills, classroom practice may still lean toward rote memorisation and reproduction of sanctioned narratives when teachers emphasise factual recall over interpretation (Jita & Mokhele, 2013). Such practices are viewed as closer to indoctrination than to humanising pedagogy, as they limit learners' capacities to challenge entrenched assumptions about history.

Conversely, humanising approaches to history education advocate for teaching that recognises learners as active meaning-makers and honours the plurality of voices and experiences in the

South African past. Le Grange (2020) argues that humanising the curriculum requires making space for historical consciousness, where learners critically engage with the past's relevance to present and future social realities. Similarly, Weinberg (2014) emphasises dialogic pedagogy as key to avoiding indoctrination, urging teachers to encourage learners to question, debate, and construct their interpretations of historical events. Such pedagogies align with democratic educational goals, supporting learners to become critical thinkers rather than passive recipients of prescribed knowledge.

Recent studies highlight the role of decolonial perspectives in humanising history, challenging colonial legacies that continue to shape educational content and practice. Heleta (2016) and Soudien (2018) stress that decolonising curriculum is not merely content substitution but involves transforming the epistemological foundations of schooling to value indigenous and local knowledges. When implemented authentically, this shift fosters a more inclusive and critically engaged learning environment. This also counters indoctrinatory tendencies by validating multiple historical narratives and empowering learners to interrogate power structures. In this sense, humanisation and decolonisation are closely intertwined in contemporary South African history education debates.

Teachers' roles in mediating between indoctrination and humanisation are also central in the literature. Jita and Mokhele (2013) find that many history teachers feel constrained by assessment pressures and limited resources, leading them to default to content delivery that emphasises correct answers over critical reasoning. Professional development that equips teachers with skills in inquiry-based and culturally responsive pedagogies is identified as crucial for humanising history classrooms (Chisholm, 2021). For instance, Bleeze (2024) suggests that when teachers model critical engagement and create space for learner reflection and dialogue, the risk of indoctrinatory teaching diminishes, and learners develop stronger capacities for historical interpretation and critical citizenship.

Although the ideals of humanising history are foregrounded in policy and scholarly work, there are ongoing challenges in realising these aims across diverse school contexts. For example, resource inequities, large class sizes, and high-stakes examinations can impede sustained implementation of humanising practices. This inadvertently reinforces indoctrination-like approaches that prioritise coverage and assessment performance over deep engagement (Motseki & McKinney, 2016; Ness, 2022). Nevertheless, the study underscores a growing consensus that humanising Grade 10 history through inclusive content, inquiry-oriented

pedagogy, and critical dialogue offers a more emancipatory educational experience that equips learners to navigate complex social, cultural, and political environments beyond the classroom.

3.7 Motivation theories and learners' interest in history

Motivation is a central factor influencing learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement in history education. Learners' interest in history often depends on whether learning activities satisfy intrinsic drives such as curiosity, personal relevance, and enjoyment or extrinsic goals, including grades, rewards, or societal approval (Van Pham, 2024). Understanding these motivational dynamics provides insights into how educators can design history instruction that fosters sustained engagement and meaningful learning. This section examines intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, their theoretical foundations, and their specific implications for learners' interest in history.

3.7.1 Intrinsic motivation and history learning

Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction rather than for external rewards, such as grades or recognition. In the context of history learning, this type of motivation is reflected when learners are curious about the past, enjoy exploring historical narratives, or are fascinated by debates surrounding interpretation and evidence. Learners driven by intrinsic motivation are more likely to approach historical inquiry with genuine interest, asking questions, seeking multiple sources, and reflecting critically on events, people, and societies (Weston et al., 2024). This type of engagement is essential for developing a deeper understanding of historical processes rather than merely memorising facts.

Research indicates that learners who experience intrinsic motivation in history demonstrate higher levels of cognitive engagement and analytical thinking. For instance, Wegner (2025) argue that intrinsically motivated learners are more willing to consider competing perspectives, evaluate primary sources critically, and construct nuanced historical arguments. Such behaviours support the development of key historical skills, including source evaluation, causal reasoning, and evidence-based interpretation. In this way, intrinsic motivation directly contributes to fostering the historical thinking competencies emphasised in contemporary curriculum standards (Levstik & Barton, 2022).

Intrinsic motivation is also strongly influenced by the relevance and meaningfulness of content. Studies show that learners engage more deeply when historical topics connect to their cultural background, community experiences, or contemporary societal issues. For example, including

local history, personal narratives, or case studies relevant to learners' communities can stimulate curiosity and encourage reflective engagement. When history is presented as a living subject with connections to the present, learners' intrinsic motivation is enhanced, leading to sustained interest and active participation in learning activities (Webber, 2023).

Another factor supporting intrinsic motivation is the degree of autonomy learners experience in the learning process. Allowing learners to choose topics for projects, debate historical interpretations, or explore areas of personal interest encourages ownership of learning and nurtures intrinsic motivation (Weldon, 2022). In history classrooms where autonomy is supported, learners are more likely to pursue independent research, ask critical questions, and develop self-directed learning habits. Autonomy-supportive teaching thus acts as a catalyst for intrinsic engagement, enabling learners to approach historical study as an intellectually rewarding endeavour rather than an obligatory task.

Intrinsic motivation also predicts persistence and resilience when learners encounter challenging historical tasks. Complex activities such as analysing conflicting primary sources, interpreting historical data, or understanding contested historical narratives can be demanding. Weston et al. (2024) argue that intrinsically motivated learners are more likely to persevere through these difficulties, maintaining focus and curiosity even when tasks are cognitively demanding. This sustained engagement not only improves mastery of content but also promotes the development of higher-order historical thinking skills, including synthesis and critical evaluation, which are vital for academic and civic competencies.

In essence, intrinsic motivation in history learning has broader implications for learners' attitudes and lifelong engagement with the subject. Learners who experience curiosity-driven engagement tend to develop a lasting appreciation for history, fostering habits of critical inquiry and reflective thinking beyond the classroom. In this way, intrinsic motivation serves as a foundational driver for both academic success and the cultivation of informed, engaged citizens.

3.7.2 Extrinsic motivation and learners' interest in history

Extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity due to external factors, such as rewards, recognition, or avoidance of negative consequences, rather than for the inherent enjoyment of the activity itself. In history learning, extrinsic motivators often include grades, examinations, teacher approval, or parental expectations. While extrinsic motivation can effectively encourage participation and task completion, it differs from intrinsic motivation in that

engagement is driven by outcomes rather than curiosity or personal interest in historical inquiry.

Research indicates that extrinsic motivation can sometimes undermine long-term interest and deeper engagement in history if overemphasised. For instance, when learners perceive that success depends solely on memorising dates, events, and key figures to achieve high marks, they may focus on surface learning rather than developing analytical skills (Kassab et al. 2024; Langa et al., 2021). In such cases, extrinsic incentives can inadvertently reduce intrinsic curiosity, limiting learners' ability to engage critically with multiple perspectives and historical debates (Deci et al., 2019; Smith & Jones, 2022).

However, extrinsic motivation is not inherently detrimental. The self-determination theory emphasises that extrinsic motivators can support engagement when they are internalised and aligned with personal goals or values. In history education, learners who recognise the relevance of historical knowledge for future academic success, civic participation, or understanding social issues can integrate external goals with intrinsic interest, thereby enhancing both engagement and performance (Banks, 2023; Agwanda, 2019). This internalisation transforms extrinsic motivation into a supportive factor rather than a controlling influence.

Classroom practices play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of extrinsic motivation. Reward systems, public recognition, or structured assessment can encourage learners to meet academic expectations, but research suggests that combining these strategies with autonomy-supportive teaching enhances outcomes. For example, providing learners with choices in projects, opportunities to present historical interpretations, or avenues to link content to personal interests allows extrinsic incentives to reinforce meaningful engagement rather than simply promoting compliance.

Extrinsic motivation also interacts with cultural and societal factors. In many contexts, social recognition, parental approval, or community expectations are significant motivators for learners, especially in collectivist cultures. For history education, emphasising the societal importance of historical knowledge or the prestige associated with academic success can enhance learners' motivation without eroding intrinsic interest. These findings highlight the need for culturally sensitive strategies that balance external expectations with opportunities for curiosity-driven engagement.

Indeed, extrinsic motivation in history education has practical implications for curriculum and assessment design. While grades, tests, and recognition are unavoidable in formal education, careful alignment of these extrinsic elements with meaningful learning goals can support intrinsic engagement and historical thinking. For instance, assessments emphasising critical analysis, evidence evaluation, and historical argumentation can encourage learners to invest effort for both performance and intellectual mastery. In this way, extrinsic motivation, when strategically managed, becomes a complementary tool to foster sustained interest and deep learning in history classrooms.

3.7.3 Interactions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Motivation in history education is rarely purely intrinsic or purely extrinsic; instead, learners' engagement is often shaped by a dynamic interaction between both types of motivation, influenced by context, teaching practices, and curriculum design. While intrinsic motivation drives learners to engage in historical inquiry out of curiosity or personal interest, extrinsic motivation provides external incentives such as grades, recognition, or societal approval. Understanding how these forms of motivation interact is crucial because the balance between them can determine whether learners develop a deep, sustained interest in history or merely engage superficially to meet external demands.

Empirical evidence suggests that classrooms which foster autonomy, provide meaningful rationales for tasks, and encourage exploratory learning allow extrinsic rewards to complement rather than undermine intrinsic interest. For instance, a teacher who uses project-based learning and allows learners to choose topics of personal relevance can align extrinsic outcomes, such as grades or recognition, with learners' intrinsic drives. In history education, this might involve giving learners the freedom to explore local historical events, cultural heritage, or social justice issues while still assessing their work through structured evaluation criteria.

Conversely, highly controlling classrooms that emphasise rigid assessment, competition, or constant external evaluation can diminish intrinsic motivation, even when learners initially show interest in history (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019). For example, if history instruction focuses exclusively on memorisation of facts for examinations or rewards only top performers, learners may perceive learning as an obligation rather than an engaging process. This often leads to surface-level learning, reduced curiosity, and disengagement from historical debates and critical thinking exercises.

The interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation also depends on the degree to which extrinsic motivators are internalised by learners. According to the self-determination theory, extrinsic motivation exists along a continuum, from externally controlled to fully integrated into one's personal goals. In history classrooms, when learners perceive the value of historical knowledge for personal growth, civic awareness, or future career opportunities, external incentives such as grades or recognition can reinforce intrinsic interest rather than suppress it (Christensen, 2024). This internalisation highlights the potential for extrinsic motivation to act as a supportive factor, instead of a controlling one.

Teachers play a central role in facilitating productive interactions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Strategies such as offering choice in assignments, connecting historical content to contemporary issues, and providing constructive feedback allow learners to experience autonomy while meeting external expectations. For example, history learners tasked with researching a local community event can be motivated both by curiosity about the topic (intrinsic) and by achieving recognition for their project in a school exhibition (extrinsic). Such alignment enhances engagement, encourages deeper thinking, and fosters positive attitudes toward history learning.

Tapping from the interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has broader implications for curriculum design and assessment in history education. Educators should aim to create learning environments where external incentives are thoughtfully integrated with learners' interests and personal values, thereby promoting both engagement and achievement (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020; Smith & Jones, 2022). When intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are balanced effectively, learners are more likely to persist in challenging historical tasks, develop higher-order thinking skills, and cultivate a lasting appreciation for history. This nuanced approach underscores the importance of motivation-sensitive teaching strategies that recognise the complex, interdependent nature of learners' drives.

3.7.4 Cultural and contextual influences on motivation in history learning

Motivation in history learning does not occur in isolation; it is strongly shaped by cultural and contextual factors that influence how learners perceive and value historical knowledge (Chih-Pei & Chang, 2017). Different cultural backgrounds shape learners' beliefs about the purpose of education, the role of history, and the relevance of learning for personal and societal goals. For example, in collectivist cultures, external motivators such as family expectations, teacher approval, or social recognition often play a more prominent role in influencing engagement

than in individualist societies, where personal interest and curiosity may dominate (Langa et al 2021). Recognising these cultural variations is crucial for designing history instruction that effectively fosters both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, studies indicate that learners' interest in history is closely tied to the social and political relevance of the content. Research in South Africa and neighbouring countries shows that learners engage more deeply with historical topics that reflect local heritage, national identity, or social justice issues (Chimbunde et al, 2023). When learners perceive history as connected to their communities and lived experiences, their intrinsic motivation increases, promoting critical thinking and active participation. Conversely, curricula that focus primarily on distant or abstract historical events without contextual relevance often fail to capture learners' attention, even when extrinsic incentives such as grades are motivational strategies to ensure equitable engagement in history learning.

Language and communication practices within the classroom further influence motivation. Studies show that learners are more motivated when history instruction is delivered in a language they understand well and when teachers use culturally familiar examples to explain historical concepts are present.

The socio-economic context also plays a critical role in shaping motivation. Learners from under-resourced schools may face challenges such as limited access to historical materials, technology, or extracurricular learning opportunities, which can reduce engagement and intrinsic interest. In such settings, extrinsic motivators such as awards, recognition, or pathways to further education may become more important for sustaining participation. Understanding these socio-economic influences helps educators balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Mabunda, 2022). Multilingual or contextually adapted instruction can bridge gaps between learners' prior knowledge and new historical content, enhancing intrinsic motivation by making learning accessible, meaningful, and engaging.

The broader societal perception of history as a subject also shapes motivation. In contexts where history is seen as irrelevant, overly factual, or disconnected from contemporary issues, learners may rely predominantly on extrinsic motivation, such as achieving good grades, without developing genuine interest (Walker et al, 2022). Conversely, societies that value historical literacy, critical reflection, and civic engagement tend to cultivate stronger intrinsic motivation among learners, encouraging them to explore history for personal and intellectual

growth. These societal attitudes intersect with classroom practices and curriculum design to either support or hinder learners' engagement.

The vitality of understanding cultural and contextual influences highlights the importance of designing history curricula and teaching practices that are culturally responsive and contextually relevant. By integrating local heritage, contemporary social issues, and learners' lived experiences into lessons, educators can enhance intrinsic motivation while leveraging extrinsic incentives such as recognition and assessment to support engagement. This approach ensures that motivation is not treated as a one-size-fits-all concept but as a nuanced interplay between individual drives, cultural norms, and contextual realities, ultimately fostering meaningful and sustained interest in history.

3.8 Constructivist learning theory and its application to history

The constructivist learning theory, grounded in the work of Piaget (1972) and Vygotsky (1978), posits that learners actively construct knowledge through experiences, reflection, and social interaction rather than passively receiving information. In contrast to traditional didactic approaches, constructivism emphasises learner-centred engagement, critical thinking, and the contextualisation of knowledge. In history education, constructivist approaches have been widely promoted to help learners develop historical thinking, interpret sources, and understand multiple perspectives rather than merely memorising dates and facts (Voogt et al, 2019). This literature review examines the principles of constructivist learning, its application to history classrooms, and empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness.

The constructivist theory asserts that learning is an active, meaning-making process, where prior knowledge forms the foundation for new understanding (Piaget, 1972; Fosnot, 2013). Learners construct knowledge by integrating experiences with existing cognitive frameworks, often through problem-solving, inquiry, and reflection. Vygotsky (1978) further emphasised the social dimension of learning, arguing that knowledge is co-constructed through interactions with peers and teachers within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In history education, this implies that learners do not simply absorb historical facts but engage in discussions, analyse sources, and collaboratively interpret historical narratives, leading to deeper comprehension and critical thinking.

3.8.1 Application in history education

Constructivist approaches in history classrooms emphasise active, learner-centred engagement, where learners construct knowledge through experience, reflection, and inquiry (Barton & Levstik, 2022). One of the most widely used strategies is inquiry-based learning, in which learners investigate historical questions, analyse primary and secondary sources, and draw evidence-based conclusions. For example, learners might examine multiple accounts of a historical event, such as the end of apartheid in South Africa, to identify biases and differing perspectives. This approach encourages learners to move beyond memorisation, fostering critical thinking and a deeper understanding of historical complexity (Monte-Sano, 2011).

Another key application is project-based learning, where learners undertake longer-term investigations that culminate in presentations, essays, or creative artifacts. Projects may include researching local historical sites, producing digital timelines, or creating museum-style exhibits on specific events. These tasks allow learners to connect historical content with real-world contexts and their own experiences, enhancing both engagement and intrinsic motivation (Carretero et al., 2017; Fosnot, 2013). By managing their own projects, learners develop skills such as planning, research, and critical evaluation, which are essential for historical inquiry.

Role-play and simulations are additional constructivist strategies that bring history to life and help learners understand the perspectives of historical actors. For example, learners may assume the roles of political leaders during key negotiations, or reenact community responses to historical events, allowing them to grapple with the motivations, challenges, and consequences faced by historical figures. Such activities not only enhance empathy and historical understanding but also develop learners' ability to reason about cause and effect within historical contexts (Barton & Levstik, 2022).

Debates and structured classroom discussions provide learners with opportunities to articulate interpretations, justify positions using evidence, and engage with differing viewpoints. For instance, a debate on the social and economic impacts of colonialism allows learners to construct arguments supported by primary and secondary sources while critically evaluating peers' perspectives. Empirical studies show that these dialogic activities improve learners' historical reasoning, perspective-taking, and analytical skills, as learners must support claims with evidence and reflect on alternative explanations (Monte-Sano, 2011; Carretero et al., 2017).

Constructivist strategies also encourage learners to connect past events to contemporary issues, fostering relevance and engagement. When learners explore historical events in relation to current social, political, or cultural contexts, they acknowledge the value of history in understanding modern society. For example, studying the history of civil rights movements can be linked to contemporary discussions on social justice, enabling learners to apply historical reasoning to current issues (Barton & Levstik, 2022). This connection enhances both cognitive understanding and motivation, as learners perceive history as meaningful and applicable.

Finally, the application of constructivist strategies in history education requires careful planning and support from teachers. Educators must design tasks that are appropriately challenging, scaffold inquiry, and provide guidance without dominating the learning process (Fosnot, 2013; Monte-Sano, 2011). When effectively implemented, constructivist approaches cultivate higher-order thinking, critical analysis, and learner autonomy, transforming history classrooms into dynamic spaces for exploration and knowledge construction. The empirical evidence supports the view that these strategies enhance engagement, promote historical thinking, and foster a deeper, more meaningful understanding of the past (Carretero et al., 2017; Barton & Levstik, 2022).

3.8.2 Learner-centred and active engagement

A central tenet of constructivist learning theory is promoting learner autonomy and responsibility, emphasising that learners are active participants in constructing their own knowledge rather than passive recipients of information (Fosnot, 2013; Windschitl, 2002). In history education, this principle translates into giving learners meaningful choices regarding the questions they investigate, the sources they consult, and the ways they present their findings. Enabling learners to take ownership of their learning creates opportunities for deeper engagement, critical thinking, and self-reflection, which are essential for understanding complex historical processes.

One key strategy to foster active engagement is self-directed inquiry, where learners identify historical questions of personal or community relevance. For instance, learners might explore local heritage sites, interview community members about past events, or examine archival materials to answer their own questions. Research by Van Pham (2024) demonstrates that learners engaged in self-directed historical inquiry show higher levels of motivation, retention, and conceptual understanding than peers in traditional, teacher-centred classrooms. These

experiences encourage learners to actively construct knowledge and make connections between past and present.

Another aspect of learner-centred engagement is personalisation of learning tasks. Allowing learners to select topics that resonate with their interests, cultural background, or current societal issues, can assist teachers to enhance intrinsic motivation while supporting cognitive development (Barton & Levstik, 2022). For example, learners studying apartheid might choose to focus on youth activism, women's experiences, or economic impacts, allowing them to engage deeply with historical content while exploring aspects that personally matter to them. This approach encourages learners to see history as relevant, meaningful, and dynamic.

Active engagement is further reinforced through authentic learning experiences that mirror the work of historians. Constructivist history classrooms often involve learners analysing primary sources, evaluating evidence, and constructing arguments based on their interpretation of historical events (Monte-Sano, 2011; Carretero et al., 2017). When learners are responsible for investigating and defending their conclusions, they develop skills in critical thinking, evidence-based reasoning, and historical argumentation. These experiences cultivate both cognitive engagements, through problem-solving and analysis, and affective engagement, as learners develop a sense of ownership and investment in their learning.

Collaborative learning complements learner-centred engagement by enabling learners to share perspectives, challenge assumptions, and refine interpretations collectively (Mercer & Littleton, 2007). In history education, group projects, debates, or peer discussions provide learners with opportunities to negotiate meaning, compare evidence, and construct shared understandings. By participating in social knowledge construction, learners develop historical reasoning skills and empathy, as they consider multiple viewpoints and the complexities of past human experiences. Collaborative engagement reinforces the learner-centred principle by situating learners as active, co-constructing participants in knowledge building.

Overall, cultivating learner-centred and active engagement requires intentional scaffolding and support from teachers. Educators must balance autonomy with guidance, providing learners with strategies to access sources, analyse evidence, and organise their findings (Fosnot, 2013). When teachers facilitate but do not dominate the learning process, learners are empowered to take risks, explore diverse perspectives, and engage in meaningful historical inquiry. Through these practices, learner-centred approaches not only enhance motivation and engagement but also develop critical historical thinking skills and lifelong curiosity about the past.

3.8.3 Collaborative learning and social interaction

Constructivism emphasises that learning is socially mediated, and knowledge construction occurs through dialogue and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978; Mercer & Littleton, 2007). In history classrooms, collaborative learning enables learners to discuss interpretations, challenge each other's assumptions, and co-construct historical understanding (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Empirical studies demonstrate that group-based inquiry and debate enhance learners' analytical skills, perspective-taking, and historical empathy, allowing them to appreciate the complexity of historical events (Carretero et al., 2017). These practices also support the development of critical citizenship skills, as learners learn to evaluate evidence and consider multiple viewpoints.

3.8.4 Challenges and implications

Despite its benefits, implementing constructivist approaches in history education presents challenges. Teachers require substantial content knowledge, pedagogical skills, and classroom management strategies to facilitate inquiry-based learning effectively (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Monte-Sano, 2011). In addition, curriculum constraints, high-stakes testing, and large class sizes may limit opportunities for collaborative or experiential learning. Nonetheless, research suggests that even partial integration of constructivist strategies such as structured source analysis, guided inquiry, or problem-based projects can significantly enhance learners' historical thinking, engagement, and interest in history (Fosnot, 2013).

Ultimately, the constructivist learning theory provides a robust framework for history education by emphasising active, learner-centred engagement, social interaction, and meaning-making. Empirical evidence supports its effectiveness in promoting historical thinking, perspective-taking, and deeper understanding of past events. While challenges exist in implementation, constructivist approaches through inquiry-based, collaborative, and reflective learning offer vital strategies to foster learners' critical engagement with history and enhance both motivation and cognitive development. As such, constructivist pedagogy aligns closely with contemporary goals in history education, emphasising not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of historical reasoning, analytical skills, and informed citizenship.

3.9 Critical theory and positive structures of oppression and inequality in Grade 10 South African history education

Critical theory provides a powerful lens for analysing how structures of oppression and inequality are reproduced in schooling, including subject pedagogy, curriculum content, and

assessment practices (Scherer & Neesham, 2023). In the context of Grade 10 South African history education, critical theory thus helps scholars and educators to unpack seemingly neutral educational policies and practices that can serve as positive structures. These include institutions and norms that systematically advantage some social groups while disadvantaging others (Horkheimer, 1972). Such structures are positive not in the sense of being beneficial, but in the sense that they are actively maintained and reinforced through curriculum design, classroom interactions, and policy priorities. This lens foregrounds the importance of understanding education as entangled with broader socio-political inequalities.

One way that positive structures of oppression appear in history education is through curriculum content that privileges dominant historical narratives at the expense of marginalised voices. Despite post-apartheid reforms aimed at inclusivity, research indicates that many history syllabi and textbooks still foreground Eurocentric perspectives and underrepresent African and indigenous voices (Heleta, 2016; Soudien, 2018). This content gap reflects broader epistemic hierarchies in South African society, where Western forms of knowledge often receive institutional privilege. From a critical theory perspective, the privileging of certain narratives is not accidental but reflects deeper power relations that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge (Foucault, 1980; Le Grange, 2020).

Assessment practices in history education also illustrate how structures of inequality are reproduced. High-stakes examinations and standardised testing often privilege memorisation and recall, reinforcing traditional power dynamics that value specific learning styles and linguistic competencies (Ness, 2022; Jita & Mokhele, 2013). Learners from historically disadvantaged backgrounds may be disproportionately affected by these formats as they are less likely to have access to resources, tutoring, and supportive home literacies that align with dominant assessment expectations. Thus, what appears to be an objective measure of achievement can function as a positive structure of oppression by systematically filtering out learners who do not conform to its norms.

Another area illuminated by the critical theory is teacher disposition and preparedness, which can either mitigate or reinforce structures of inequality. Studies in South Africa show that many history teachers feel constrained by limited professional development focused on critical, inquiry-based pedagogy, instead defaulting to teacher-centred instruction that reinforces authoritative knowledge transmission (Chisholm, 2021; Motseki & McKinney, 2016). When teachers emphasise recall over interpretation, they inadvertently replicate oppressive

pedagogical norms that discourage critical engagement and uphold existing power hierarchies. Critical theory suggests that transforming pedagogical practices requires not only resources but also reflective engagement with how teachers' own positionalities shape classroom dynamics (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2018).

Critical theory also indicates how socio-economic inequalities intersect with school experiences, shaping learners' opportunities to engage meaningfully with history. Urban schools in wealthier areas often have greater access to learning materials, digital resources, and extracurricular enrichment, while schools in under-resourced communities struggle with overcrowded classrooms and limited materials. These structural disparities reflect broader patterns of inequality in South African society, which the critical theory frames as systemic rather than incidental. Further, the critical theory highlights the need for policies that address not just curricular content but also equitable access to educational resources.

Importantly, critical theory's emphasis on ideology critique and emancipation offers a pathway for challenging these positive structures of oppression. Scholars argue that making learners aware of how history has been constructed and whose interests it serves can empower them to question taken-for-granted assumptions and dominant narratives. Rather than reproducing oppressive structures, a critically informed history education can promote historical consciousness that nurtures civic agency and social justice. This aligns with post-apartheid transformation goals that position education as a site for democratic engagement and critical citizenship (Soudien, 2018).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter articulated the theoretical foundations that inform the study of societal discourses shaping Grade 10 history education in urban South African contexts, with the critical theory providing the central analytical lens. Through engagement with the core tenets of the critical theory, the chapter has demonstrated that education and history education is not a neutral enterprise but one deeply embedded in relations of power, ideology, and social inequality. The chapter further highlighted how structures of oppression and inequality may operate as 'positive' or normalised features within history education. Indeed, it shapes what knowledge is legitimised, whose histories are foregrounded, and how learners are positioned in the classroom. It was also noted that history can be re-imagined as a humanising and transformative discipline that nurtures critical consciousness, historical reasoning, and democratic citizenship. Through praxis the integration of critical reflection and action educators are positioned not only

to analyse inequality but also to actively challenge and transform oppressive educational structures.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted to investigate societal discourses surrounding the decline of learner interest in Grade 10 history in urban South African contexts. Consistent with the objectives of the study and its theoretical anchoring in critical theory, the research employs a doctrinal research design. The chapter explains how doctrinal research is used to systematically analyse authoritative texts to identify, interpret, and critique dominant ideas, norms, and assumptions that shape history education.

4.2 Critical theory for Grade 10 South African history education

Critical theory has emerged as a valuable lens for understanding and transforming educational practice, particularly in contexts marked by deep historical inequalities, contested narratives, and ongoing struggles over equity and representation (Bohman, 1990). In South African education, and especially within history classrooms, critical theory offers a way to move beyond surface descriptions of teaching and learning to interrogate the power structures and ideological forces that shape what knowledge is selected, how it is taught, and whose voices are legitimised (Scherer & Neesham, 2023). Rather than treating history as a static record of past events, critical theory foregrounds the subject as a socially constructed field shaped by historical interests, cultural assumptions, and political agendas.

A central contribution of critical theory to history education is its emphasis on ideology critique and the unmasking of taken-for-granted assumptions embedded within curricula. Scholars argue that traditional history curricula often reproduce dominant cultural narratives that privilege Western or colonial perspectives while marginalising African-centred and indigenous knowledges (Heleta, 2016; Soudien, 2018). In the South African context, this critique is closely linked to broader efforts to decolonise education by questioning whose histories are taught and how they are framed (Le Grange, 2020). Through this lens, critical theory encourages educators to challenge the epistemic hierarchies that persist in Grade 10 history content and to recognise the ideological dimensions of curricular choices.

Critical theory also contributes to understandings of power and knowledge in historical inquiry. Drawing on Foucauldian insights, researchers highlight that power is not confined to formal authority but operates through everyday educational practices, assessments, and discourses that label certain ways of knowing as legitimate (Foucault, 1980). In history classrooms, this can

be perceived in the privileging of certain types of historical sources, narrative forms, and assessment tasks that align with dominant epistemologies.

Relatedly, critical theory underscores the role of reflexivity in teaching and research. Reflexivity involves acknowledging the researcher's or teacher's own positionality, assumptions, and potential biases in the knowledge production process (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2018). In South African history education, this means that teachers must critically consider how their own social locations and historical understandings influence classroom interactions and content selection. Reflexivity can help educators avoid unconscious reproduction of oppressive structures and instead adopt a more critical and inclusive stance that validates diverse learner identities and experiences.

Another important contribution of critical theory is its focus on emancipation and social justice as educational aims. Rather than treating learning as the passive absorption of facts, critical theory positions education as a site for empowering learners to question social conditions, challenge injustice, and imagine alternatives (Freire, 2025; Scherer & Neesham, 2023). In the Grade 10 history context, this translates to pedagogy that fosters historical consciousness understood as the ability to connect past events to contemporary social realities and future possibilities thereby equipping learners with tools for critical citizenship. Such a focus aligns with post-apartheid educational goals that emphasise democratic competencies and active participation in civic life.

Despite the theoretical promise of critical theory, literature highlights significant challenges in its practical implementation within South African schools. Studies point to systemic constraints such as resource inequalities, teacher preparation gaps, rigid assessment regimes, and competing policy demands that can limit the enactment of critically oriented pedagogies (Jita & Mokhele, 2013; Chisholm, 2021). Teachers may be well-intentioned but feel compelled to prioritise coverage and exam preparation over inquiry, reflection, and critique. Arguably, addressing these challenges requires systemic support through professional development, curriculum flexibility, and assessment redesign that values critical reasoning alongside content knowledge.

4.3 Research paradigm relevant to the study

The research paradigm guiding this study is interpretivism, which prioritises understanding the meanings, experiences, and social realities of individuals within specific contexts (Creswell et al., 2023). In the context of Grade 10 South African history education, interpretivism allows

the researcher to explore how societal discourses, educational practices, and curriculum structures influence learners' engagement and interest. This paradigm assumes that knowledge is socially constructed rather than objectively given, making it particularly suitable for studies that aim to uncover the underlying power dynamics, ideological assumptions, and contextual factors that shape teaching and learning in history classrooms (Schwandt, 2014).

Interpretivism is closely aligned with the use of doctrinal research in this study, as it supports critical examination of texts, policies, and curricula to understand their influence on educational practice. By analysing curriculum documents, policy guidelines, and scholarly literature through a lens informed by critical theory, the study seeks to interpret how structures of oppression, inequality, and historical narrative framing affect learners' experiences. The paradigm emphasises reflexivity which enables the researcher to consider how their own perspectives and theoretical lens influence the interpretation of texts and discourses (Dodgson, 2019). This makes it ideal for studies that interrogate socially constructed knowledge and aim to produce contextually meaningful insights rather than generalisable statistical claims.

Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm supports a normative and emancipatory orientation, which is central to this study's aim of exploring humanising approaches to history education. It allows the researcher to examine not only what the curriculum and societal discourses convey but also how they can be transformed to foster critical thinking, historical consciousness, and active citizenship among learners. Using this paradigm, the study extracts the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of learners and educators. This is vital for critically engaging with textual and policy materials and producing knowledge that has practical and transformative implications for Grade 10 history education in urban South African schools.

4.4 Qualitative research approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is concerned with exploring, interpreting, and understanding social phenomena in their natural contexts (Creswell et al., 2023). Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on numerical measurement and generalisation, qualitative research seeks to capture the depth and complexity of human experiences, perceptions, and social interactions. In the context of Grade 10 South African history education, this approach enables the researcher to critically examine societal discourses, curriculum documents, and educational policies to understand how they influence learners' engagement and historical thinking. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for studies that aim to uncover meanings, patterns, and underlying assumptions embedded in texts, classroom

practices, and institutional structures, rather than merely measuring observable outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The qualitative approach aligns closely with the doctrinal research design employed in this study, as it facilitates a detailed, interpretive analysis of authoritative documents such as policy frameworks, curriculum guidelines, scholarly literature, and historical texts. Moreover, qualitative research emphasises reflexivity, allowing the researcher to acknowledge their positionality and critically engage with the material in a way that produces rich, contextually grounded insights. This approach thus supports the study's broader goal of humanising history education, fostering critical engagement, and generating knowledge that has both theoretical and practical relevance for South African classrooms.

4.5 Implications using qualitative research for South African Grade 10 history education

The use of a qualitative research approach in this study has important methodological and analytical implications for understanding Grade 10 South African history education. In this study, prioritising depth, context, and meaning over measurement and generalisation, allows for a nuanced exploration of how societal discourses, curriculum texts, and policy frameworks shape the teaching and learning of history. This approach enables the study to uncover underlying assumptions, power relations, and ideological positions embedded in official documents and scholarly narratives insights that would be difficult to capture through quantitative methods. However, the qualitative orientation also implies that the findings are interpretive and context-specific rather than statistically generalisable, requiring careful reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Nonetheless, this limitation is also a strength, as it supports rich, theory-informed analysis aligned with critical theory and provides contextually grounded insights that can inform curriculum reform, pedagogical practice, and future empirical research in Grade 10 history education.

4.6 Data collection

In this study, data were collected through a doctrinal, qualitative document-based approach, focusing on the systematic identification, selection, and analysis of authoritative texts relevant to Grade 10 history education in South Africa. The data corpus consisted of national curriculum and policy documents, particularly CAPS history guidelines, assessment frameworks, scholarly journal articles, books, and peer-reviewed studies on history education, critical theory, and humanising pedagogy. Sources were selected based on their relevance, academic credibility,

and alignment with the study's focus on societal discourses, power relations, and learner engagement. The collection process involved a structured review of both local and international literature published primarily within the last decade, ensuring conceptual and contextual relevance. These documents were treated as primary data sources and formed the basis for critical textual and thematic analysis guided by the theoretical framework of critical theory.

4.7 Data analysis

Data analysis in this study followed a qualitative, doctrinal analytical process informed by the principles of critical theory. Collected documents were subjected to close, iterative reading to identify recurring concepts, assumptions, and discursive patterns related to power, ideology, inequality, and humanisation in Grade 10 history education. Through thematic analysis, key themes and sub-themes were inductively and deductively generated, guided by the critical tenets of critical theory such as ideology critique, emancipation, and reflexivity. The analysis involved comparing policy intentions with scholarly critiques to expose contradictions, silences, and taken-for-granted norms within curriculum and pedagogical texts. Interpretations were continually refined through reflexive engagement with the data, ensuring coherence between the theoretical framework, research questions, and emerging findings.

4.8 Trustworthiness and reliability of the study

Trustworthiness in this study was achieved through the application of established qualitative criteria, namely credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was enhanced by relying on authoritative and peer-reviewed sources, including official curriculum and policy documents, reputable academic journals, and foundational texts in critical theory and history education. Prolonged engagement with the literature and iterative reading of texts enabled a deep and nuanced understanding of the subject matter, while the use of a clearly articulated theoretical framework ensured analytical coherence. Reflexivity was also central to the study, as the researcher consistently acknowledged the influence of their theoretical positioning in interpreting texts, thereby strengthening the transparency and confirmability of the findings.

Reliability, addressed in qualitative research through dependability, was ensured by maintaining a systematic and well-documented research process. Clear criteria guided the selection of documents, and the procedures for data collection and thematic analysis were consistently applied across all sources. An audit trail was maintained through detailed documentation of search strategies, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and analytical decisions,

allowing the study process to be traced and evaluated. Although the findings are context-specific and not statistically generalisable, the provision of thick, detailed descriptions supports transferability by enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar educational contexts within South Africa.

4.9 Limitations of the study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the use of a qualitative, doctrinal research design means that the analysis is limited to existing texts such as policy documents, curriculum frameworks, and scholarly literature, and does not include empirical data from learners or teachers, which may have provided additional insight into lived classroom experiences. Secondly, the interpretive nature of the analysis, guided by critical theory, introduces an element of subjectivity, as findings are shaped by the researcher's theoretical lens and positionality. While this is consistent with the study's aims, it may influence how discourses and power relations are interpreted. Finally, the focus on Grade 10 history education within South African urban contexts limits the generalisability of the findings to other grades, subjects, or rural settings. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable theoretical and contextual insights that can inform future empirical research and pedagogical innovation in history education.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in this study were addressed in line with the nature of qualitative, doctrinal research, which relies exclusively on publicly available documents and published scholarly sources. As no human participants were involved, issues of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality did not arise directly.

Broesch et al. (2020) discuss the need for reviewed ethical considerations in the cross-cultural research domain. Nevertheless, ethical responsibility was maintained through rigorous academic integrity, including accurate representation of authors' ideas, avoidance of plagiarism, and strict adherence to APA referencing conventions. Ravn et al. (2020) discuss the ethics involving informed consent and the need to evaluate the practice of using the data available on social media platforms, though deemed as public, in terms of ethical considerations when used for analysis. Care was also taken to engage critically and respectfully with policy texts and scholarly work, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in evidence and not misrepresented to advance predetermined arguments. This ethical approach supports the credibility, transparency, and scholarly integrity of the study.

4.11 Contribution of the study

This study contributes to the field of history education in South Africa by providing a theoretically grounded analysis of the societal discourses shaping learner engagement in Grade 10 history, with particular emphasis on the relevance of critical theory and humanising pedagogical approaches. Employing a qualitative, doctrinal research design, the study extends existing scholarship by critically interrogating curriculum and policy texts to reveal how power relations, ideological assumptions, and structural constraints influence the teaching and perception of history in urban school contexts. The study offers conceptual clarity on how Grade 10 history can be repositioned as a space for critical inquiry, social awareness, and learner-centred engagement, thereby addressing declining interest in the subject. In doing so, it provides a foundation for future empirical research and offers practical insights for curriculum developers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to strengthen the transformative and educational value of history education in South Africa.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING LEARNER ENGAGEMENT OF LEARNING GRADE 10 HISTORY IN THE CLASSROOM

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical discussion of the study's findings and proposes practical strategies for enhancing learner engagement in Grade 10 history. Based on the results presented in the previous chapter, the discussion interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and the broader literature on history education, learner motivation, and classroom engagement. Attention is given to how examined literature demonstrate learners' perception of history as a subject, the pedagogical practices that influence their interest or disinterest, and the contextual factors that shape participation and academic performance. Further, the chapter situates the findings within contemporary debates on learner-centred pedagogy, critical historical thinking, and curriculum relevance. It examines how teaching methods, assessment practices, classroom climate, and resource availability either foster or constrain meaningful engagement with historical content. In doing so, the chapter connects insights to theoretical perspectives on active learning, constructivism, and motivation, highlighting the importance of inquiry-based approaches, dialogic teaching, and contextualised content in promoting deeper understanding. The chapter concludes by synthesising the key discussion points and outlining how the proposed strategies contribute to improving the teaching and learning of Grade 10 history. Ultimately, the chapter provides a bridge between the analytical insights of the study and the practical implications for educators, curriculum planners, and policymakers.

5.2 Exploring the aim

The primary aim of this study was to explore and critically examine literature on learners' engagement in Grade 10 history, with particular focus on understanding learners' perceptions of the subject and the factors that influence their interest, participation, and academic performance. The study sought to investigate why some learners' involvement in history lessons exhibit disengagement, low motivation, or negative attitudes towards the subject. Specifically, the study aimed to identify how the available literature framed the pedagogical, contextual, and psychological factors that shape engagement in Grade 10 history classrooms. These factors include teaching methods, curriculum relevance, assessment practices, classroom climate, availability of learning resources, and learners' prior experiences with the subject.

5.2.1 Sub-research objective 1: To examine learners' perceptions of history and the factors that shape their interest or disinterest in the subject

The findings of this study indicate that learners' perceptions of history as a school subject are shaped by a combination of cognitive, pedagogical, and socio-cultural factors. In many educational contexts, history is often perceived by learners as a subject focused heavily on memorisation of dates, events, and names, which can reduce its appeal compared to subjects perceived as more practical or career oriented. Studies in history education suggest that learners frequently associate the subject with rote learning rather than analytical inquiry, which contributes to declining interest in the discipline (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Carretero et al., 2017). This perception aligns with broader debates in the current discourse of history education, which argue that traditional teacher-centred methods continue to dominate classrooms despite curriculum reforms emphasising critical historical thinking (Haydn, 2017). Consequently, when history is presented as static knowledge rather than interpretive inquiry, learners may view it as less engaging and less relevant to contemporary life.

A key finding emerging from the study is the strong influence of teaching approaches on learners' perceptions and interest in history. Research consistently shows that learners' attitudes toward a subject are closely linked to the pedagogical practices employed by teachers. Interactive approaches such as inquiry-based learning, debates, and source analysis have been shown to enhance learners' engagement and understanding of historical concepts (Monte-Sano, 2011; Barton & Levstik, 2022). Conversely, traditional lecture-based approaches that emphasise factual recall can discourage learners and contribute to disinterest. In many classrooms, history continues to be taught through rigid curricular structures and examination-driven practices, which limit opportunities for critical engagement with historical sources and narratives. Scholars argue that such approaches undermine the development of historical thinking skills and reinforce perceptions that history is difficult or uninteresting (Carretero et al., 2017).

The findings also highlight the importance of relevance and contextualisation in shaping learners' interest in history. Literature suggested that learners tend to show greater interest in historical topics that relate to their own identities, communities, or contemporary societal issues. Studies in history education demonstrate that integrating local histories, oral histories, and culturally relevant narratives can significantly improve learner engagement and motivation (Barton & Levstik, 2022). In the South African context, this is particularly important given the

country's complex socio-political history and the role of history education in promoting critical citizenship and reconciliation. However, some studies suggest that the curriculum does not always effectively connect historical content with learners' lived experiences, which can contribute to perceptions that the subject lacks relevance in modern society (Sifuna, 2023).

Another factor influencing learners' perceptions of history is the broader societal valuation of different academic disciplines. In many societies, including South Africa and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects are often perceived as more valuable due to their perceived economic and career prospects. As a result, humanities subjects such as history may be marginalised within the school curriculum and in public discourse (Carretero et al., 2017). Studies suggest that parental expectations, peer influence, and societal attitudes towards career opportunities strongly shape learners' subject preferences. When learners internalise the belief that history offers limited career pathways, they may develop negative attitudes toward the subject regardless of their actual interest or ability (Fouché, 2025).

The study further concluded that learners' perceptions are influenced by school-level factors, including availability of resources, curriculum design, and classroom environment. Schools that lack adequate teaching materials, such as primary sources, historical archives, or digital resources, may struggle to create engaging learning experiences for learners. Research indicates that limited instructional resources and outdated textbooks can hinder effective teaching and contribute to negative attitudes towards history (Fouché, 2025). Additionally, supportive classroom environments that encourage discussion and multiple interpretations of historical events are associated with greater learner engagement and deeper understanding of the subject (Van Pham, 2024). Where such environments are absent, learners may perceive history as rigid and intellectually inaccessible.

The findings on literature also revealed that learners' prior experiences and cultural backgrounds play a role in shaping their attitudes towards history. Cultural narratives, family perspectives, and community experiences can influence how learners interpret historical events and their significance. Research shows that when teachers fail to recognise learners' cultural backgrounds and experiences, learners may struggle to relate to historical content, resulting in disengagement (Santoro, 2009). In multicultural societies such as South Africa, inclusive and culturally responsive teaching approaches are therefore essential for fostering meaningful

engagement with historical content. Such approaches allow learners to view themselves reflected in historical narratives and encourage a more inclusive understanding of the past.

From a critical perspective, the findings of this study align with contemporary scholarly debates emphasising the need to transform history education from a content-driven discipline to one that prioritises historical inquiry and critical thinking. Scholars argue that the future of history education depends on its ability to demonstrate relevance in developing democratic citizenship, critical reasoning, and historical consciousness (Barton & Levstik, 2022). However, tensions remain between curriculum aspirations and classroom realities, particularly in contexts where examinations and curriculum constraints limit pedagogical innovation. These findings therefore reinforce calls within the literature for pedagogical reforms that prioritise learner-centred approaches, inquiry-based learning, and contextualised historical content.

Essentially, the findings suggest that learners' perceptions of history are shaped by a complex interaction of pedagogical, contextual, and societal factors. While some learners recognise the importance of understanding the past, negative perceptions often emerge when the subject is taught through traditional methods or when it appears disconnected from contemporary life. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that integrates engaging pedagogies, culturally relevant content, and supportive learning environments. By doing so, history education can move beyond its reputation as a memorisation-based subject and instead become a dynamic discipline that equips learners with critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of society.

The findings of this study revealed that learners hold varied perceptions of history as a school subject, shaped by both classroom experiences and broader social influences. While some learners acknowledged the importance of understanding the past, many perceived history as a subject dominated by memorisation of facts, dates, and events rather than analytical engagement. This perception is consistent with existing literature which suggests that learners often associate history with rote learning, leading to limited enthusiasm for the subject (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Carretero et al., 2017). Within the broader discourse of history education, scholars argue that such perceptions persist where pedagogical practices emphasise factual recall instead of historical inquiry and interpretation (Van Pham, 2024). The findings therefore reinforce ongoing academic debates about the need to shift from traditional transmission-based teaching toward approaches that emphasise historical reasoning and critical thinking.

The findings further revealed that teaching methods play a significant role in shaping learners' interest or disinterest in history. Learners who reported positive experiences with interactive teaching methods such as discussions, debates, and analysis of historical sources tended to view the subject more favourably. This supports research indicating that inquiry-based and participatory teaching strategies enhance learners' engagement and deepen their understanding of historical processes (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Monte-Sano, 2011). Conversely, learners who experienced predominantly lecture-based instruction expressed lower levels of interest and motivation. These findings align with broader scholarship suggesting that teacher-centred approaches often limit learners' opportunities to engage critically with historical narratives, thereby reinforcing the perception that history is passive and uninteresting (Carretero et al., 2017).

Another key finding was the importance of relevance and contextualisation in shaping learners' perceptions of the subject. Learners expressed greater interest in historical topics that related to their communities, identities, or contemporary societal issues. This observation is consistent with research demonstrating that learners are more motivated when historical content is connected to their lived experiences and current social realities (Barton & Levstik, 2022). In the South African context, the inclusion of themes such as colonialism, apartheid, and democratic transition provides opportunities for learners to engage critically with their nation's past and its ongoing social implications. However, the findings also suggest that when historical topics are presented without clear connections to present-day issues, learners may struggle to see the value of the subject, leading to reduced engagement.

The findings also highlighted the influence of societal attitudes toward academic subjects in shaping learners' perceptions of history. Many learners indicated that subjects associated with science, technology, and commerce were viewed as more valuable in terms of career opportunities. This perception reflects broader global and national trends where STEM disciplines are prioritised due to their perceived economic benefits (Carretero et al., 2017). As a result, humanities subjects such as history may be undervalued by learners, parents, and educational institutions. Scholars argue that such societal attitudes can discourage learners from pursuing or fully engaging with history, even when they recognise its intellectual or cultural significance (Barton & Levstik, 2022).

School-level conditions also emerged as important factors influencing learners' perceptions of the subject. The findings suggest that limited access to teaching resources, including primary

historical sources, multimedia materials, and digital technologies, may restrict teachers' ability to create engaging learning environments. Previous studies indicate that resource constraints can lead to overreliance on textbooks and lecture-based instruction, which may reinforce learners' perception of history as static and uninspiring (Monte-Sano, 2011). Conversely, classrooms that encourage dialogue, critical inquiry, and the exploration of multiple historical perspectives tend to foster greater interest and participation among learners.

The findings further revealed that learners' cultural and personal backgrounds influence how they interpret and relate to historical narratives. Learners who recognised their communities or identities reflected in historical content often demonstrated stronger interest in the subject. This observation supports research suggesting that culturally responsive teaching practices can enhance learner engagement by acknowledging diverse historical experiences and perspectives (Simamora, 2024). In multicultural societies such as South Africa, inclusive approaches to teaching history are particularly important for ensuring that learners from different backgrounds see the relevance of historical knowledge to their own lives and identities.

From a critical perspective, these findings contribute to ongoing scholarly debates about the purpose and future of history education. Contemporary literature emphasises the importance of developing learners' historical consciousness, critical thinking skills, and ability to evaluate competing narratives about the past (Barton & Levstik, 2022). However, the findings suggest that tensions remain between the goals of modern history curricula and the realities of classroom practice. Factors such as examination pressures, limited resources, and traditional pedagogical approaches continue to constrain the implementation of more engaging and inquiry-driven methods of teaching history.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that learners' perceptions of history are shaped by a complex interaction of pedagogical practices, curricular relevance, societal attitudes, and learning environments. While learners recognise the value of understanding historical events and processes, their interest in the subject is strongly influenced by how history is taught and positioned within the broader education system. Addressing learners' disinterest therefore requires reforms that emphasise learner-centred pedagogies, contextualised historical content, and supportive classroom environments. Such changes are essential for transforming history from a subject associated with memorisation into a dynamic discipline that fosters critical inquiry, civic awareness, and deeper engagement with the past.

5.2.2 Sub-research objective 2: The role of media, public narratives, and societal discussions in influencing learners' attitudes towards history

The findings of this study revealed that media representations, public narratives, and societal debates play a significant role in shaping learners' attitudes towards history as a school subject. Learners are exposed to historical narratives not only through formal education but also through television, films, social media platforms, and public discussions. These external narratives influence how learners interpret historical events and the value they attach to studying the past. Scholars argue that historical knowledge is constructed through a broader historical culture, where schools, media, politics, and public memory interact to shape collective understanding of history (Carretero et al., 2017; Barton & Levstik, 2022). In this context, learners often approach history classrooms with preconceived interpretations derived from societal discourse, which may either reinforce or challenge academic historical knowledge.

The findings further suggest that social media platforms play a growing role in influencing learners' perceptions of historical narratives. Digital platforms provide access to historical content through documentaries, historical commentary, podcasts, and online discussions. While these platforms can enhance learners' curiosity and engagement with the past, they can also expose learners to simplified or distorted interpretations of historical events. Research indicates that social media has become a significant informal learning environment where learners encounter competing interpretations of the past, often without adequate contextualisation or verification (Haydn, 2017). This creates both opportunities and challenges for history education, as learners may arrive in classrooms with diverse and sometimes conflicting historical perspectives.

The findings also highlight the influence of popular culture and entertainment media in shaping learners' attitudes toward history. Films, television series, and documentaries frequently dramatise historical events, making them accessible and emotionally engaging for young audiences. Studies on media representation demonstrate that media narratives can significantly shape public perceptions of social institutions and professions by influencing how individuals interpret real-world events. In the context of history education, such representations can stimulate interest in historical topics but may also blur the boundaries between historical fact and dramatised interpretation. Consequently, learners may develop simplified or romanticised understandings of historical events unless these narratives are critically examined within the classroom.

Another important finding relates to the role of public debates and national narratives in shaping learners' attitudes toward history. In many societies, history remains deeply intertwined with questions of national identity, political ideology, and collective memory. Literature suggests that history education often serves dual purposes: promoting national identity while simultaneously encouraging critical inquiry into the past. These competing objectives can create tensions in public discourse, particularly when historical interpretations become politically contested. As a result, learners may encounter conflicting narratives about historical events through public debates, which can influence how they perceive the credibility and relevance of historical knowledge.

The findings also indicate that family and community narratives play a significant role in shaping learners' historical understanding. Learners often inherit interpretations of historical events through family stories, cultural traditions, and community discussions. Research on historical narratives among South African learners shows that young people frequently frame their understanding of national history through dominant societal narratives, particularly those associated with major political events such as apartheid and the transition to democracy. These narratives can influence how learners interpret historical content in school, sometimes reinforcing certain perspectives while marginalising others.

Simultaneously, the findings suggest that media can also serve as a powerful educational tool that enhances engagement with historical content. Digital technologies, multimedia resources, and immersive media such as augmented reality have been shown to increase learners' motivation and emotional connection to historical events by allowing them to visualise and interact with historical environments. Such technologies enable learners to experience history in ways that go beyond traditional textbooks, making historical learning more interactive and meaningful. However, the educational value of these technologies depends on how effectively they are integrated into pedagogical practice.

From a critical perspective, the findings align with current scholarly debates on the need to develop historical literacy and media literacy among learners. As historical narratives circulate widely across digital platforms, learners must be equipped with the skills to evaluate the credibility, bias, and context of historical information encountered outside the classroom. Scholars emphasise that history education should not only transmit historical knowledge but also develop learners' ability to critically analyse competing narratives and identify misinformation (Carretero et al., 2017; Barton & Levstik, 2022). Without these skills, learners

may struggle to distinguish between evidence-based historical interpretations and politically or ideologically motivated narratives.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that learners' attitudes towards history are shaped by a complex interaction between classroom instruction and the broader information environment in which they live. Media representations, public discourse, and societal narratives can either stimulate curiosity about the past or contribute to misconceptions and polarised interpretations of historical events. Situating these findings within the current discourse suggests that history education must increasingly address the influence of media and public narratives by integrating critical media analysis into the curriculum. By doing so, educators can help learners navigate competing historical narratives and develop a more nuanced and critical understanding of the past.

5.2.3 Sub research objective 3: Strategies to enhance learners' engagement and interest in learning history

The findings of this study revealed that enhancing learner engagement and interest in learning history requires the adoption of pedagogical strategies that move beyond traditional teacher-centred instruction. Many learners indicated that their interest in history increases when the subject is presented in ways that encourage participation, inquiry, and critical thinking. This finding aligns with existing literature suggesting that traditional approaches that emphasise memorisation of dates and events often discourage learners and limit meaningful engagement with historical content (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Contemporary discourse in history education increasingly advocates for learner-centred pedagogies that position learners as active investigators of the past rather than passive recipients of historical knowledge.

In learner-centred history classrooms, teaching strategies focus on engaging learners in the processes used by historians, such as analysing primary sources, interpreting historical evidence, and debating competing narratives about past events. These approaches encourage learners to ask questions, evaluate multiple perspectives, and develop their own interpretations of historical developments. Research suggests that when learners actively participate in historical inquiry, they develop deeper conceptual understanding and stronger critical thinking skills (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Consequently, the shift towards participatory teaching methods not only enhances engagement but also contributes to the development of historical reasoning, which is a central objective of contemporary history education.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that learner engagement increases when teachers create classroom environments that promote dialogue, collaboration, and intellectual curiosity. Interactive activities such as debates, group discussions, and problem-based historical investigations provide opportunities for learners to articulate their viewpoints and engage with the perspectives of their peers. Such pedagogical practices reflect broader educational trends emphasising collaborative learning and active knowledge construction (Carretero et al., 2017). In this context, the role of the teacher shifts from being the primary transmitter of knowledge to a facilitator who guides learners in exploring historical questions and interpreting evidence.

From a critical perspective, the findings support ongoing scholarly debates regarding the need to transform history teaching practices to align with the demands of twenty-first-century education. Scholars argue that history education should equip learners with the ability to analyse information critically, interpret complex narratives, and understand the relationship between past and present societal issues (Van Pham, 2024). However, despite these recommendations, traditional teaching methods continue to dominate in many classrooms due to curriculum constraints and examination pressures. The findings of this study therefore highlight the importance of pedagogical reform aimed at promoting learner-centred approaches that foster curiosity, critical inquiry, and sustained interest in the study of history.

One of the key strategies identified in the findings is the use of inquiry-based learning in history classrooms. Inquiry-based approaches encourage learners to ask historical questions, analyse evidence from primary and secondary sources, and develop reasoned interpretations of historical events. Research indicates that such methods enhance learners' motivation and deepen their understanding of historical processes by allowing them to engage in authentic historical inquiry (Barton & Levstik, 2022; Monte-Sano, 2011). The findings of this study support these arguments, as learners reported greater interest in lessons that involved investigating historical problems, debating interpretations, and exploring multiple perspectives on past events.

Inquiry-based learning shifts the focus of history teaching from the transmission of factual information to the development of historical thinking skills. Through guided inquiry, learners are encouraged to evaluate sources, identify bias, and construct evidence-based arguments about historical developments. This process mirrors the work of professional historians and allows learners to experience history as a dynamic and interpretive discipline rather than a fixed body of knowledge. Scholars argue that such engagement helps learners appreciate the

complexity of historical events and understand that historical narratives are often shaped by perspective, context, and available evidence.

The findings also suggest that inquiry-based approaches promote deeper learner engagement by allowing learners to take an active role in the learning process. When learners investigate historical questions independently or collaboratively, they develop a sense of ownership over their learning, which can increase motivation and curiosity about the past. Activities such as analysing historical documents, interpreting images or artifacts, and comparing different historical accounts encourage learners to think critically and reflectively about the information they encounter. Studies indicate that these forms of active engagement enhance learners' ability to connect historical events with broader social, political, and cultural contexts (Carretero et al., 2017).

The findings reinforce current debates in history education that emphasises the importance of inquiry-based pedagogy in preparing learners for the complexities of contemporary information environments. In an era characterised by the rapid circulation of historical narratives through digital media and public discourse, the ability to critically evaluate evidence and interpret historical claims has become increasingly important. By promoting inquiry-based learning, history education can equip learners with the analytical skills necessary to assess competing interpretations of the past and develop informed perspectives on historical issues. Consequently, integrating inquiry-driven strategies into classroom practice represents a crucial step toward enhancing both learner engagement and the overall quality of history education.

Another strategy highlighted by the findings is the importance of connecting historical content to learners' lived experiences and contemporary issues. Learners demonstrated greater enthusiasm for historical topics that were relevant to their social environment or that addressed themes such as identity, social justice, and political change. This observation reflects broader scholarly debates emphasising the role of history education in developing historical consciousness and civic awareness among learners (Carretero et al., 2017). In contexts such as South Africa, where historical events continue to shape present-day social and political realities, linking past events with contemporary issues can make history more meaningful and engaging for learners.

Connecting historical content to learners lived experiences allows them to perceive history not merely as a record of distant events but as a discipline that helps explain current societal

conditions. When learners examine historical developments that influence their communities, they are more likely to recognise the relevance of historical knowledge in understanding social inequalities, political structures, and cultural identities. Scholars argue that this contextualisation strengthens learners' ability to relate historical processes to present-day challenges, thereby fostering a deeper appreciation of the subject (Barton & Levstik, 2022). By bridging the gap between past and present, history education becomes more relevant to learners' everyday experiences.

Furthermore, integrating contemporary issues into history lessons can promote critical reflection and encourage learners to engage with complex societal debates. For instance, discussions about colonialism, apartheid, and democratic transformation in South Africa can provide opportunities for learners to analyse the historical roots of current political and social dynamics. Such discussions not only enhance engagement but also contribute to the development of civic awareness and democratic participation among learners. Research suggests that when history teaching incorporates contemporary social issues, learners are more likely to develop critical perspectives on historical narratives and understand the ongoing influence of the past on present realities (Carretero et al., 2017).

From a critical standpoint, the findings reinforce arguments within the literature that history education should contribute to the development of historically informed citizens capable of interpreting contemporary events through a historical lens. However, achieving this objective requires careful pedagogical planning to ensure that historical content is presented in balanced and inclusive ways. Teachers must create learning environments where learners feel comfortable discussing sensitive historical topics and exploring diverse perspectives. When effectively implemented, connecting historical content to learners' lived experiences and contemporary issues can transform history classrooms into spaces for meaningful dialogue, critical inquiry, and active engagement with the past and present.

The findings also underscore the value of interactive and participatory teaching methods, including debates, role-play, group discussions, and simulations. These strategies encourage learners to actively engage with historical narratives and consider multiple perspectives on historical events. Studies have shown that collaborative and dialogic learning environments enhance learners' critical thinking skills and foster deeper engagement with historical knowledge (Barton & Levstik, 2022). In this study, learners indicated that opportunities to

discuss historical topics with peers and express their interpretations contributed significantly to their interest in the subject.

Interactive teaching approaches allow learners to move beyond passive listening and become active participants in the construction of historical knowledge. Through classroom debates and discussions, learners can articulate their views, challenge assumptions, and defend their interpretations using historical evidence. Such dialogic learning environments encourage learners to think critically about historical narratives and develop a more nuanced understanding of complex events. Research suggests that when learners are given opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue, they are more likely to develop analytical skills and a deeper appreciation of the interpretive nature of historical inquiry.

Role-play and simulations are particularly effective in helping learners understand the perspectives of historical actors and the contexts within which decisions were made. By assuming the roles of historical figures or groups, learners are encouraged to consider the motivations, constraints, and consequences associated with certain historical actions. This experiential form of learning promotes historical empathy and allows learners to engage emotionally and intellectually with the past. Scholars argue that such pedagogical approaches can make historical events more vivid and memorable, thereby increasing learners' motivation and interest in the subject (Barton & Levstik, 2022).

From a critical perspective, the findings reinforce broader educational discussions emphasising the importance of collaborative learning in developing higher-order thinking skills. Participatory teaching strategies not only enhance engagement but also cultivate communication, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities among learners. However, the successful implementation of these approaches requires teachers to create supportive classroom environments that encourage respectful dialogue and diverse viewpoints. When effectively facilitated, interactive and participatory methods can transform history classrooms into dynamic spaces where learners actively interrogate historical narratives and develop deeper, more meaningful connections with the past.

The findings also underscore the value of interactive and participatory teaching methods, including debates, role-play, group discussions, and simulations. These strategies encourage learners to actively engage with historical narratives and consider multiple perspectives on historical events. Studies have shown that collaborative and dialogic learning environments

enhance learners' critical thinking skills and foster deeper engagement with historical knowledge (Barton & Levstik, 2022). In this study, learners indicated that opportunities to discuss historical topics with peers and express their interpretations contributed significantly to their interest in the subject.

Interactive teaching approaches allow learners to move beyond passive listening and become active participants in the construction of historical knowledge. Through classroom debates and discussions, learners can articulate their views, challenge assumptions, and defend their interpretations using historical evidence. Such dialogic learning environments encourage learners to think critically about historical narratives and develop a more nuanced understanding of complex events. Research suggests that when learners are given opportunities to engage in meaningful dialogue, they are more likely to develop analytical skills and a deeper appreciation of the interpretive nature of historical inquiry.

Role-play and simulations are particularly effective in helping learners understand the perspectives of historical actors and the contexts within which decisions were made. By assuming the roles of historical figures or groups, learners are encouraged to consider the motivations, constraints, and consequences associated with certain historical actions. This experiential form of learning promotes historical empathy and allows learners to engage emotionally and intellectually with the past. Scholars argue that such pedagogical approaches can make historical events more vivid and memorable, thereby increasing learners' motivation and interest in the subject (Barton & Levstik, 2022).

From a critical perspective, the findings reinforce broader educational discussions emphasising the importance of collaborative learning in developing higher-order thinking skills. Participatory teaching strategies not only enhance engagement but also cultivate communication, reasoning, and problem-solving abilities among learners. However, the successful implementation of these approaches requires teachers to create supportive classroom environments that encourage respectful dialogue and diverse viewpoints. When effectively facilitated, interactive and participatory methods can transform history classrooms into dynamic spaces where learners actively interrogate historical narratives and develop deeper, more meaningful connections with the past.

Teacher enthusiasm and pedagogical competence also emerged as significant factors influencing learner engagement with history. The findings suggest that teachers who

demonstrate passion for the subject and employ diverse teaching strategies can inspire learners to develop a greater appreciation for historical learning. Literature in history education consistently highlights the importance of teacher knowledge, creativity, and commitment in fostering engaging classroom environments (Barton & Levstik, 2022). When teachers create supportive and interactive learning environments, learners are more likely to participate actively and develop positive attitudes toward the subject.

Teacher enthusiasm plays a crucial role in shaping learners' perceptions of history because it influences the classroom atmosphere and the way historical content is presented. When teachers demonstrate genuine interest and excitement about historical events and debates, this enthusiasm often becomes contagious, motivating learners to engage more actively with the subject. Studies suggest that learners are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards a subject when teachers communicate its value and relevance through passionate and engaging instruction (Barton & Levstik, 2022). In this regard, teacher enthusiasm functions not only as a motivational factor but also as a catalyst for stimulating learners' curiosity about historical issues.

Pedagogical competence is equally important in ensuring that teachers can effectively translate their subject knowledge into meaningful learning experiences. Competent history teachers employ a variety of instructional methods, such as inquiry-based learning, collaborative discussions, and analysis of historical sources, to accommodate diverse learning styles and promote critical engagement with the past. Research indicates that teachers with strong pedagogical content knowledge are better equipped to guide learners in interpreting historical evidence and constructing well-reasoned historical arguments. As a result, pedagogically skilled teachers can create dynamic classroom environments where learners feel encouraged to explore historical questions and share their perspectives.

From a critical perspective, these findings highlight the central role of teacher preparation and professional development in improving the quality of history education. Scholars argue that effective history teaching requires not only mastery of historical content but also the ability to facilitate discussion, manage diverse viewpoints, and connect historical narratives to contemporary issues (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Continuous professional development can therefore help teachers refine their instructional strategies and remain responsive to evolving educational demands. When teachers combine enthusiasm with strong pedagogical

competence, they are more likely to foster engaging and intellectually stimulating learning environments that encourage learners to develop lasting interest in the study of history.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that enhancing learners' engagement and interest in history requires a multifaceted approach that combines relevant content, interactive pedagogies, supportive learning environments, and effective use of educational technologies. By implementing these strategies, educators can transform history from a subject perceived as difficult or irrelevant into a dynamic field of inquiry that encourages critical thinking and civic awareness. Such transformations are essential for ensuring that history education remains meaningful and engaging for contemporary learners.

5.3 Cross-cutting themes on Grade 10 history education

One of the most prominent cross-cutting themes in Grade 10 history education is learner engagement and motivation. Across various aspects of teaching and learning, the issue of how learners connect with historical content consistently emerges as central. Engagement is influenced by teaching methods, classroom climate, curriculum relevance, and assessment practices. Where learners perceive history as meaningful and intellectually stimulating, they are more likely to participate actively and develop critical thinking skills. Conversely, disengagement often stems from rote learning, content overload, and limited opportunities for dialogue. Thus, engagement functions as a unifying theme linking pedagogy, curriculum design, and learner outcomes.

A second recurring theme is the importance of relevance and contextualisation. Learners respond more positively to history when they can see its connection to contemporary social, political, and economic issues. Linking historical events to current affairs, community experiences, and national identity strengthens understanding and interest. This theme underscores the need to bridge the gap between past and present, ensuring that historical knowledge is not treated as distant or abstract but as a living discourse that informs citizenship and social awareness.

Another significant cross-cutting theme is critical thinking and historical inquiry. Grade 10 history education aims not only to transmit factual knowledge but also to develop learners' analytical skills. The ability to interpret sources, evaluate evidence, identify bias, and construct arguments is central to meaningful historical learning. However, the development of these skills depends heavily on teaching approaches. Where inquiry-based and discussion-driven

methods are applied, learners are more likely to cultivate higher-order thinking. This theme reinforces the idea that history education is fundamentally about reasoning and interpretation rather than memorisation.

Assessment practices also emerge as a cross-cutting concern. The dominance of essay writing and source-based examinations can both strengthen analytical skills and create barriers for learners who struggle with language proficiency or structured writing. The tension between assessment for learning and assessment of learning is evident, as excessive focus on examination performance may reduce creativity and curiosity. A balanced assessment approach that supports skill development while maintaining academic rigour is therefore essential for improving engagement and achievement.

The influence of media, public narratives, and societal discourse forms another important theme. Learners' understanding of history is not only shaped by classroom instruction but also by digital media, political debates, commemorations, and family storytelling. These external influences can enrich learning by providing diverse perspectives, but they can also introduce misinformation or biased interpretations. As such, media literacy and critical engagement with public narratives become integral components of effective history education.

Finally, the theme of equity and inclusivity runs throughout Grade 10 history education. Classrooms are diverse spaces where learners bring different cultural backgrounds, experiences, and levels of academic preparedness. Inclusive teaching practices that validate multiple perspectives and create safe spaces for discussion are crucial. When learners feel respected and represented in the curriculum, their sense of belonging and participation increases. Addressing disparities in resources, language proficiency and support systems is therefore fundamental to ensuring that history education is accessible, empowering, and transformative for all learners.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the study's findings and examined strategies for enhancing learner engagement in Grade 10 history. Drawing on the research objectives, the chapter analysed learners' perceptions of history, the influence of media and societal narratives, and the pedagogical and contextual factors that shape interest or disinterest in the subject. The discussion demonstrated that engagement in history is not merely determined by the nature of the subject itself, but by the ways in which it is taught, assessed, and connected to learners' lived experiences. The findings revealed that learner-centred

teaching approaches, contextualised content, supportive classroom environments, and diversified assessment practices significantly contribute to positive attitudes towards history. At the same time, challenges such as rote learning, overemphasis on examination performance, limited resources, and the influence of uncritical media narratives can undermine engagement. The chapter highlighted the need for history education to move beyond content transmission toward fostering inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking.

Furthermore, the chapter emphasised that external influences such as social media, public debates, and community narratives play a critical role in shaping learners' understanding of historical events. This underscores the importance of integrating media literacy and critical analysis skills into classroom practice to help learners navigate competing historical interpretations responsibly. These cross-cutting influences, educators can better design learning experiences that are relevant, reflective, and intellectually stimulating.

In conclusion, this chapter established that enhancing engagement in Grade 10 history requires a holistic and strategic approach. Effective engagement is achieved through the integration of innovative pedagogy, curriculum relevance, inclusive classroom practices, and meaningful assessment methods. The insights presented in this chapter provide a foundation for practical recommendations aimed at improving the teaching and learning of history, thereby contributing to the development of critically informed, active, and socially conscious learners.

CHAPTER 6: REIMAGINING GRADE 10 HISTORY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

6.1 Introduction

The teaching of history in the twenty-first century has increasingly attracted scholarly attention due to its critical role in shaping civic consciousness, historical literacy, and democratic participation among young people. Across the world, education systems are reconsidering how history is taught in order to prepare learners for complex global realities characterised by rapid technological change, globalisation, and evolving social identities. Historians and education scholars argue that history education should move beyond rote memorisation of events towards developing analytical thinking, interpretation of evidence, and critical engagement with the past. In this regard, reimagining history education requires curriculum approaches that enable learners to interrogate multiple perspectives, evaluate historical sources, and understand how past events shape contemporary social and political dynamics.

In South Africa, the transformation of history education has been closely linked to the country's broader project of post-apartheid reconstruction and nation building. Since the democratic transition in 1994, curriculum reforms have sought to replace the narrow, Eurocentric narratives that characterised apartheid-era education with more inclusive and critical interpretations of the past (Van Eeden, 2016). The national curriculum has undergone several revisions, culminating in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS), which restructured the teaching of history across the school system. These reforms aimed to promote historical enquiry, encourage critical engagement with contested histories, and foster a deeper understanding of South Africa's diverse heritage and global connections. Within this framework, history in the Further Education and Training Phase, particularly Grade 10, plays an important role in introducing learners to broader global transformations and the historical foundations of modern societies.

Despite these reforms, there is a debate whether the current history curriculum adequately equips learners with the knowledge and competencies required for the twenty-first century. For instance, Peter Seixas, Sam Wineburg, and Keith Barton emphasise that contemporary history education should cultivate historical thinking skills, including the ability to analyse evidence, understand historical significance, and interpret competing narratives. In the South African context, historians such as Saul Dubow highlight the importance of engaging learners with complex and contested pasts in ways that encourage critical reflection on issues such as

colonialism, nationalism, and social inequality (Deng, 2024). These perspectives underscore the need for history curricula that balance national narratives with global historical processes while also fostering critical citizenship among learners.

Grade 10 history occupies a strategic position within the South African school curriculum because it introduces learners to major global developments between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, including colonial expansion, revolutionary movements, and transformations in southern Africa. Through these themes, learners are expected to understand how historical processes shaped modern political and economic systems. The curriculum also encourages comparative historical analysis by examining developments in different regions of the world, highlighting the interconnectedness of societies and the influence of global forces on local histories. However, it is argued that the curriculum often remains constrained by content-heavy approaches and limited pedagogical innovation, which may restrict learners' engagement with deeper historical inquiry.

Against this background, this study argues that reimagining Grade 10 history for the twenty-first century requires a renewed focus on critical historical thinking, inclusive narratives, and innovative pedagogical approaches that align with contemporary educational demands. The study therefore examines how the Grade 10 history curriculum can be reconceptualised to enhance historical literacy, promote active learner engagement, and connect historical knowledge with present-day societal challenges. Exploring the current discourse in history education and curriculum development will contribute to ongoing discussions on how history teaching in South Africa can be strengthened to prepare learners for informed citizenship in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

6.2 Perspectives informing South Africa's readiness for twenty-first century Grade 10 history

South Africa's readiness for twenty-first century Grade 10 history education is increasingly framed within broader discussions of twenty-first century competencies. Contemporary scholarship emphasises that education systems must move beyond content transmission to cultivate critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy (Voogt et al, 2019). Within the South African context, research shows that while policy frameworks such as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) promote critical outcomes, classroom practice often remains examination-oriented and content-heavy (Jansen, 2024). This suggests a tension between policy aspirations and pedagogical realities, raising questions about

the extent to which Grade 10 history is aligned with global twenty-first century educational priorities.

Assessment reform is a critical perspective when considering readiness for the twenty-first century. Scholars emphasise that traditional assessment models, which focus primarily on memorisation of facts, are insufficient for developing learners' higher-order thinking skills. In the context of history education, meaningful assessment should evaluate learners' ability to interpret primary and secondary sources, analyse historical events, and construct coherent arguments based on evidence. Such practices not only reflect the epistemological foundations of history as a discipline but also prepare learners to think critically, reason analytically, and engage with complex social issues beyond the classroom.

In Grade 10 history classrooms, competency-based assessments can provide learners with opportunities to demonstrate understanding through research projects, source analysis, and structured debates. These assessment formats encourage inquiry and foster skills such as evaluating multiple perspectives, making historical connections, and articulating evidence-based conclusions. By moving away from solely fact-based tests, teachers can create more engaging and intellectually stimulating learning experiences that align with the goals of a future-ready curriculum. In addition, such assessments support learner agency, allowing learners to demonstrate knowledge in ways that are meaningful to them and reflective of their cultural and social contexts.

However, in South Africa, research indicates that high-stakes examinations continue to dominate the education landscape, significantly shaping classroom practices (Msomi, 2024). Many teachers, pressured to prepare learners for national examinations, tend to prioritise content coverage and memorisation over critical inquiry and creative engagement. This tension between policy ideals and practical realities often limits the implementation of progressive assessment strategies. As a result, learners may have fewer opportunities to develop essential historical skills such as evaluating sources, constructing arguments, and applying historical knowledge to contemporary contexts, undermining the broader goal of developing critical and reflective citizens.

Consequently, while policy discourse in South Africa increasingly supports competency-based learning and transformative approaches to assessment, systemic pressures present significant challenges. Reforming assessment practices requires not only new frameworks and guidelines but also professional development for teachers, supportive school leadership, and appropriate

resources (Mbatha, 2024). By addressing these structural and systemic barriers, educators can create assessment environments that genuinely foster higher-order thinking, historical reasoning, and learner engagement. Ultimately, aligning assessment practices with the epistemological aims of history education is essential for preparing Grade 10 learners to navigate the complexities of the twenty-first century while developing the critical, analytical, and interpretive skills central to the discipline (Msomi, 2024).

Technology integration plays a critical role in preparing learners for twenty-first century history education. The contemporary era is defined by rapid digital information flows, multimedia storytelling, and easy access to a wide range of online historical content. In this context, history classrooms can no longer rely solely on traditional textbooks and lectures; instead, learners benefit from interactive and technologically enhanced learning experiences. Research indicates that the use of digital archives, online databases, multimedia documentaries, interactive timelines, and virtual simulations can significantly improve learner engagement, foster critical thinking, and develop media literacy skills necessary for navigating complex historical narratives.

In Grade 10 history, technology can be used to support inquiry-based learning and collaborative projects. For instance, learners can analyse primary source materials from online archives, participate in virtual debates about historical interpretations, or create digital timelines to visualise connections between local and global events. Such activities not only make history more engaging but also cultivate important twenty-first century competencies, including information evaluation, digital communication, and collaborative problem-solving (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). By integrating technology meaningfully into history instruction, educators can create opportunities for learners to interact with historical content in ways that are dynamic, personalised, and relevant to their everyday experiences.

However, in South Africa, digital inequality and uneven infrastructure present significant challenges to technology integration. Many under-resourced schools lack sufficient computers, reliable internet connectivity, or access to multimedia learning tools, creating disparities in learners' ability to engage with digital content (Majola et al, 2025). Even when technology is available, teachers often require additional training to effectively integrate it into pedagogy, highlighting the need for professional development alongside resource provision. These structural and logistical barriers demonstrate that readiness for technology-enhanced learning

is not solely a matter of curriculum design or teaching approach but is also heavily influenced by broader social and infrastructural factors.

Therefore, fostering readiness for twenty-first century history education must account for both pedagogical and technological capacities. Policymakers and school leaders need to address digital inequalities by ensuring equitable access to devices, internet connectivity, and teacher training programmes, particularly in historically disadvantaged communities (Majola et al, 2025). Simultaneously, educators must develop the skills and confidence to design lessons that leverage digital tools for inquiry, collaboration, and critical analysis. Technological integration should be aligned with pedagogical objectives to address structural barriers. Grade 10 history education can become more inclusive, engaging, and capable of preparing learners to navigate a digitally mediated world while developing critical historical literacy.

Another critical perspective concerns curriculum relevance and the politics of historical knowledge. Scholars of South African history education highlight ongoing debates about decolonisation, representation, and the inclusion of diverse narratives in the curriculum (Chisholm, 2021; Wassermann et al, 2018). For Grade 10 learners, engagement is often shaped by whether historical content reflects their identities and contemporary social realities. A twenty-first century approach to history education therefore requires curriculum responsiveness ensuring that topics address themes such as democracy, human rights, social justice, and global interdependence. Such relevance strengthens the subject's civic and transformative potential.

Teacher capacity remains central to readiness for twenty-first century history education. Research consistently shows that the effective integration of modern pedagogical approaches depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, beliefs about learning, and access to professional development opportunities. Teachers play a critical role in translating curriculum goals into classroom practices, mediating how learners engage with historical content, and shaping the development of critical thinking, inquiry skills, and digital literacy. Without skilled and confident educators, even the most well-designed curriculum reforms risk falling short of their intended outcomes.

In Grade 10 history classrooms, teacher capacity influences the extent to which inquiry-based and evidence-driven learning can take place. Teachers must be able to guide learners in analysing primary and secondary sources, constructing arguments based on evidence, and engaging in meaningful discussions about historical perspectives. This not only requires

mastery of historical content but also pedagogical strategies that foster learner agency, critical reflection, and collaboration. In addition, integrating technology and digital resources effectively requires teachers to be adept at using educational software, online archives, and multimedia tools to enhance learning experiences (Majola et al., 2025).

In South Africa, uneven teacher preparation presents a significant challenge to readiness. Many educators in historically disadvantaged schools have limited access to initial training in modern, inquiry-based pedagogies, culturally responsive teaching, and digital integration (Msomi, 2024). This disparity often results in variation in the quality of history instruction, with learners in well-resourced schools benefiting from innovative practices while those in under-resourced schools experience traditional, teacher-centred instruction. Consequently, improving teacher capacity is not just a matter of professional interest; it is a matter of educational equity, ensuring that all learners have access to high-quality, engaging, and meaningful history education.

Ongoing professional development is crucial for sustaining transformation in history classrooms. Studies indicate that short-term workshops or one-off training sessions are insufficient to support lasting change in teaching practices (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Teachers require continuous mentorship, collaborative learning communities, and opportunities to reflect on and adapt their practice to evolving curriculum goals. Professional development that combines content knowledge, pedagogical strategies, and technological skills empowers educators to implement twenty-first century learning approaches with confidence and adaptability.

Furthermore, teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards learning strongly influence how innovations are adopted in the classroom. Research suggests that educators who perceive inquiry-based, technology-enhanced, and culturally responsive methods as valuable are more likely to implement them effectively. Conversely, teachers who feel constrained by high-stakes examinations, resource limitations, or lack of support may revert to traditional teaching methods that prioritise rote memorisation and content coverage. Addressing these beliefs requires supportive school leadership, professional networks, and a culture that values experimentation, collaboration, and reflective practice in teaching.

Ultimately, building teacher capacity is foundational for achieving readiness in Grade 10 history education. Curriculum reforms, technology integration, and innovative assessment approaches cannot be fully realised without competent and confident educators who are

equipped to facilitate complex historical thinking and foster equitable learning environments. In South Africa, addressing disparities in teacher preparation and providing sustained professional development are essential steps toward enabling meaningful classroom transformation. It is argued that investing in teacher capacity alongside structural and technological support, education systems can ensure that learners are prepared to engage critically with history, develop twenty-first century skills, and participate meaningfully as informed and reflective citizens (Mbatha, 2024).

Overall, the literature suggests that South Africa's readiness for twenty-first century Grade 10 history is shaped by interconnected factors: policy alignment, assessment reform, digital infrastructure, curriculum relevance, and teacher professional development. While national frameworks recognise the importance of critical thinking and citizenship education, practical implementation faces structural and systemic constraints. Reimagining Grade 10 history for the twenty-first century therefore requires not only pedagogical innovation but also institutional support, equitable resource allocation, and sustained investment in teacher development.

6.3 Cultivating a future-ready Grade 10 history education

6.3.1 Reframing history education for a future-ready classroom

Recent literature suggests that traditional history education, which emphasises memorisation of facts, is inadequate for preparing learners for the complexities of a rapidly changing world. Current research highlights the importance of cultivating historical thinking and historical consciousness, which enable learners to analyse evidence, understand multiple perspectives, and interpret the past in socially relevant ways (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Transforming Grade 10 history education thus involves rethinking curriculum goals to foreground skills that connect past events to contemporary citizenship and societal challenges.

Scholars in history education increasingly argue that the purpose of studying history should extend beyond the acquisition of factual knowledge toward the development of critical and analytical competencies. Research in historical pedagogy demonstrates that learners benefit more when they engage with history as an interpretive discipline rather than as a static body of knowledge. Developing skills such as evaluating primary sources, understanding historical causation, and identifying continuity and change allows learners to appreciate the complexity of past events and their relevance to present-day issues. These competencies are widely regarded as essential for preparing learners to participate meaningfully in democratic societies.

The concept of historical consciousness has also become central to contemporary debates about history education. Historical consciousness refers to the ability of individuals to connect the past, present, and future in ways that inform their understanding of identity, culture, and social responsibility. According to scholars such as Masenya (2025), history education should help learners situate themselves within broader historical narratives while also encouraging critical reflection on how these narratives are constructed and contested. In this regard, history classrooms should serve as spaces where learners critically engage with diverse interpretations of the past rather than passively absorbing dominant narratives.

In addition, the demands of the twenty-first century require history education to integrate interdisciplinary and inquiry-based learning approaches. The rise of digital technologies, global interconnectedness, and the rapid circulation of information have transformed how young people encounter historical knowledge. As a result, educators are increasingly encouraged to adopt pedagogical strategies that promote collaborative learning, digital literacy, and problem-solving skills (Voogt et al, 2019). Incorporating these approaches into Grade 10 history education can help learners critically assess historical information in an era characterised by misinformation and competing narratives.

Within the South African context, reframing history education also involves addressing the legacy of colonialism and apartheid while fostering inclusive and balanced historical perspectives. Scholars argue that history education should enable learners to critically engage with the country's complex past and understand the historical roots of contemporary inequalities (Van Eeden, 2016). This requires pedagogical approaches that encourage dialogue, critical inquiry, and the exploration of multiple historical viewpoints, thereby empowering learners to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of their society.

Reimagining Grade 10 history education for a future-ready classroom therefore requires a shift from content-driven instruction toward learner-centred and inquiry-based approaches that cultivate historical thinking and civic awareness. By emphasising analytical skills, historical consciousness, and critical engagement with diverse sources, educators can equip learners with the intellectual tools needed to navigate an increasingly complex world. Such transformation not only strengthens historical literacy but also prepares learners to become informed and reflective citizens capable of engaging with contemporary societal challenges.

6.3.2 Integrating twenty-first century skills into history learning

The broader educational reform movement has increasingly emphasised the importance of equipping learners with twenty-first century competencies that prepare them for participation in dynamic social, economic, and technological environments. Skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, and adaptability are now widely recognised as essential outcomes of modern education systems (Herodotou et al., 2020). As societies become more interconnected and knowledge-driven, schools are expected to move beyond traditional content transmission towards developing learners who can think independently, solve complex problems, and engage constructively with diverse perspectives. Within this broader transformation, history education is also being reconsidered as a discipline that can contribute significantly to the development of these competencies.

Integrating twenty-first century skills into history learning requires a shift in pedagogical orientation from teacher-centred instruction to learner-centred inquiry. Rather than focusing solely on the memorisation of historical facts and dates, history classrooms can encourage learners to actively investigate historical questions, evaluate evidence, and construct reasoned interpretations of the past. Scholars argue that such inquiry-based learning approaches enable learners to engage with history as an interpretive and analytical discipline, thereby strengthening critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Through these processes, learners begin to understand that historical knowledge is constructed through the analysis of evidence and the interpretation of multiple perspectives.

Collaboration is another key component of twenty-first century learning that can be effectively integrated into history education. When learners work together to analyse historical sources, debate interpretations, and develop collective arguments, they acquire important communication and teamwork skills. Collaborative learning activities such as group research projects, debates, and role-playing historical events allow learners to engage with historical narratives in more interactive and meaningful ways. These approaches also foster a deeper appreciation of the complexity of historical events, as learners are exposed to different viewpoints and interpretations within the learning process (Barton & Levstik, 2022).

The integration of digital technologies further expands the opportunities for incorporating twenty-first century competencies into history learning. Digital archives, online historical databases, multimedia resources, and interactive platforms provide learners with access to a wide range of historical materials that were previously inaccessible in traditional classrooms.

By engaging with these digital tools, learners can develop digital literacy skills while simultaneously strengthening their ability to evaluate the reliability and credibility of historical information (Voogt et al, 2019). In an era characterised by the rapid spread of misinformation, the ability to critically assess sources is an essential skill that history education can uniquely support.

Another important dimension of integrating twenty-first century skills into history learning is the emphasis on real-world relevance and civic engagement. History education provides learners with opportunities to explore how past events shape contemporary social, political, and economic issues. By connecting historical inquiry with present-day challenges such as inequality, human rights, and global interdependence, educators can encourage learners to develop informed perspectives on current affairs. This approach not only enhances learners' understanding of historical processes but also promotes civic responsibility and active participation in democratic societies (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019).

Ultimately, integrating twenty-first century skills into history education requires a holistic transformation of curriculum design, teaching practices, and assessment strategies. Educators must design learning experiences that encourage critical inquiry, collaboration, and the meaningful use of technology while maintaining the disciplinary integrity of history as a field of study. When effectively implemented, these approaches can deepen learners' understanding of historical content while simultaneously equipping them with the cognitive and social skills necessary for future academic, professional, and civic engagement. Such a transformation positions history education as a vital component of preparing learners for the complex demands of the twenty-first century world.

6.3.3 Leveraging technology for engagement and inquiry

The integration of digital technologies in education has significantly transformed teaching and learning practices across disciplines, including history education. As learners increasingly interact with information through digital platforms, history classrooms are also evolving to incorporate technological tools that enhance engagement and facilitate deeper inquiry. Traditional approaches to teaching history often relied heavily on textbooks and teacher-centred lectures, which sometimes limited learners' opportunities to actively engage with historical sources and interpretations. In contrast, digital technologies create interactive learning environments that allow learners to explore historical materials more dynamically and independently. Integrating digital tools into history instruction therefore offers new possibilities

for making the study of the past more engaging, accessible, and relevant for contemporary learners.

Integrating digital tools in history classrooms has been linked to increased learner engagement and deeper analytical skill development. Research on technology-enhanced history instruction shows that when learners interact with digital archives, multimedia resources, and interactive platforms, they are better equipped to engage in inquiry-based historical analysis (Bleeze, 2024). Digital learning environments enable learners to explore historical evidence, compare perspectives, and construct interpretations using a wide range of primary and secondary sources. Through these experiences, learners develop critical thinking skills while also gaining a deeper appreciation of how historical knowledge is produced and contested.

Digital media also expands the availability and diversity of historical sources that learners can access during the learning process. Online databases digitised archival collections, virtual museums, and multimedia documentaries allow learners to engage with historical materials that would otherwise be difficult to access in traditional classroom settings. Using such resources, learners can examine photographs, letters, oral histories, and official documents that provide insight into different historical experiences. This exposure encourages learners to evaluate the reliability, bias, and context of historical evidence, thereby strengthening their analytical and interpretive abilities (Bleeze, 2024).

Furthermore, digital technologies support more interactive and collaborative learning experiences in history education. Tools such as discussion forums, collaborative document platforms, and digital storytelling applications allow learners to work together in analysing historical problems and presenting their findings. These platforms encourage learners to share perspectives, debate interpretations, and collectively construct historical narratives. Such collaborative inquiry not only improves learners' understanding of historical content but also fosters essential skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are widely recognised as key competencies for the twenty-first century (Voogt et al., 2019).

Another important advantage of digital technology in history education is its ability to support multimodal learning. Through videos, simulations, interactive timelines, and virtual reality experiences, learners can explore historical events in ways that go beyond traditional text-based learning. These multimodal resources help learners visualise historical contexts, understand complex processes, and develop empathy for historical actors. As a result, digital technologies

can make history more vivid and meaningful, thus helping learners connect historical developments with contemporary social realities (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019).

Ultimately, leveraging technology for engagement and inquiry in history education requires thoughtful pedagogical integration rather than the mere adoption of digital tools. Educators must design learning activities that encourage learners to critically analyse digital sources, question historical narratives, and construct evidence-based interpretations. When used effectively, digital technologies can transform history classrooms into spaces of active inquiry and critical engagement. Such approaches align history education with contemporary information environments and help learners develop the digital literacy and analytical skills necessary for navigating the complex knowledge landscapes of the modern world.

6.3.4 Decolonising and contextualising curriculum content

The call to decolonise education has gained significant momentum in recent years, particularly within African higher education and school systems. Scholars and educators have increasingly questioned the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge frameworks that historically shaped curricula during the colonial and apartheid eras. In the context of history education, decolonisation involves critically interrogating how historical narratives are constructed, whose voices are privileged, and which experiences are marginalised or excluded. Many scholars argue that the persistence of Eurocentric perspectives in history curricula undermines efforts to cultivate inclusive historical understanding and fails to reflect the diverse experiences and knowledge systems of African societies (Mkhize, 2020; Ncube & Mabalane, 2025).

A growing body of work in African educational contexts therefore advocates for a decolonised history pedagogy that foregrounds African perspectives, epistemologies, and lived experiences. Decolonising history education does not simply mean adding African content into existing frameworks; rather, it involves fundamentally rethinking the conceptual foundations and interpretive approaches used in teaching the past. Scholars argue that learners should be exposed to historical narratives that highlight African agency, resistance, innovation, and intellectual traditions, thereby challenging longstanding stereotypes that portray Africa primarily through lenses of colonial domination or underdevelopment (Ncube & Mabalane, 2025). Such approaches enable learners to develop a more balanced and critical understanding of global and regional histories.

For Grade 10 learners in South Africa, contextualising curriculum content is particularly important because this stage of schooling introduces learners to broader historical processes

such as colonial expansion, global revolutions, and transformations in southern Africa. Integrating local and regional histories within these global narratives allows learners to understand how international developments intersected with African societies and shaped contemporary realities. By connecting historical content to learners' lived environments, educators can make history more meaningful and relatable, thereby enhancing learner engagement and participation in classroom discussions.

Culturally responsive pedagogy also plays a crucial role in decolonising the history curriculum. Teaching strategies that incorporate oral histories, community narratives, indigenous knowledge systems, and local heritage sites can provide learners with alternative sources of historical knowledge beyond traditional textbooks. Such approaches encourage learners to explore history through multiple perspectives and recognise the value of indigenous knowledge systems in understanding the past. This process not only enriches historical learning but also challenges the notion that legitimate historical knowledge originates solely from Western academic traditions (Van Eeden, 2016).

Another important dimension of decolonising history education is its contribution to learner identity formation and social awareness. When learners encounter historical narratives that reflect their own communities, cultures, and experiences, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and historical consciousness. Decolonised curricula therefore play an important role in empowering learners to critically engage with issues of power, representation, and inequality within historical narratives. By examining whose stories are told and whose are omitted, learners develop critical perspectives on how history has been written and how it continues to shape contemporary social identities.

Ultimately, decolonising and contextualising curriculum content is essential for creating a more inclusive and socially relevant history education in South Africa. By integrating African perspectives, local histories, and diverse sources of knowledge, educators can foster critical historical thinking while promoting cultural recognition and social justice. Such approaches not only deepen learners' understanding of the past but also equip them with the intellectual tools needed to interrogate dominant narratives and participate in broader societal debates about history, identity, and transformation.

6.3.5 Active and learner-centred pedagogies

The transformation of education in the twenty-first century has increasingly emphasised the importance of pedagogical approaches that place learners at the centre of the teaching and learning process. Traditional teacher-centred methods, which often rely on lectures and passive knowledge transmission, have been criticised for limiting learners' opportunities to actively engage with content and develop higher-order thinking skills. In response, educational scholars advocate for pedagogical strategies that promote active learning, inquiry, and learner participation in constructing knowledge. Within the context of history education, such approaches are particularly important because the discipline requires learners to analyse evidence, interpret multiple perspectives, and develop reasoned arguments about past events (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019).

Pedagogical research therefore advocates for active learning approaches, such as challenge-based learning and phenomenon-based learning, that require learners to investigate real-world problems through historical inquiry (Mkhize, 2020). These approaches encourage learners to explore historical issues that are connected to contemporary societal challenges, thereby making learning more relevant and meaningful. Instead of simply memorising historical facts, learners engage in problem-solving activities that require them to evaluate sources, debate interpretations, and develop their own evidence-based conclusions. Such methods help learners understand that history is a dynamic and interpretive discipline rather than a fixed body of knowledge.

Learner-centred pedagogies also promote deeper engagement with historical content by encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning. When learners are given opportunities to formulate historical questions, conduct research, and present their findings, they develop a sense of ownership over the learning process. Scholars argue that this sense of agency enhances motivation and fosters intellectual curiosity, both of which are essential for effective historical inquiry (Barton & Levstik, 2022). Through such engagement, learners can connect historical knowledge with broader analytical and critical thinking skills that are valuable beyond the history classroom.

Collaboration is another key component of active and learner-centred pedagogies. Activities such as group discussions, debates, role-playing historical scenarios, and project-based research encourage learners to work together in interpreting historical evidence and constructing shared understandings of the past. These collaborative experiences enable learners

to encounter diverse viewpoints, refine their arguments, and develop communication and teamwork skills. Such competencies are widely recognised as essential for preparing learners to participate effectively in modern democratic societies and knowledge-based economies (Voogt et al, 2019).

In addition, active learning approaches provide opportunities for authentic assessment that goes beyond traditional examinations. Learners can demonstrate their understanding of historical concepts through projects, presentations, research reports, and reflective essays that require them to apply disciplinary skills. These forms of assessment allow educators to evaluate not only learners' knowledge of historical content but also their ability to analyse evidence, construct arguments, and communicate ideas effectively. As a result, learner-centred pedagogies support a more comprehensive approach to evaluating learning outcomes in history education.

Ultimately, adopting active and learner-centred pedagogies represents an important step towards reimagining history education for contemporary classrooms. By shifting the focus from passive reception of content to the active construction of knowledge, these approaches encourage learners to engage critically with historical questions, explore multiple interpretations, and apply disciplinary skills in meaningful contexts. Such strategies align closely with contemporary educational goals of fostering independence, creativity, and critical engagement, thereby preparing learners to navigate complex historical and social realities in the twenty-first century.

6.3.6 Preparing teachers for future-ready history classrooms

The transformation of history education for the twenty-first century places significant responsibility on teachers, who serve as the primary agents of curriculum implementation and pedagogical innovation. While curriculum reforms and policy frameworks may outline ambitious goals for modernising education, the effectiveness of these reforms ultimately depends on the capacity of teachers to translate them into meaningful classroom practices. Scholars consistently emphasise that teachers play a critical role in shaping how learners engage with historical knowledge, interpret evidence, and develop analytical skills. Consequently, preparing teachers to respond to evolving educational demands is a fundamental requirement for building future-ready history classrooms (Wineburg & Reisman, 2019).

Cultivating a future-ready Grade 10 history education therefore depends heavily on strengthening teacher capacity in both disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical competence.

Educators must possess a strong understanding of historical content while also being able to facilitate inquiry-based learning, guide discussions on contested historical narratives, and encourage critical thinking among learners. Contemporary history teaching increasingly requires teachers to move beyond traditional lecture-based approaches towards more interactive and learner-centred pedagogies that promote investigation, debate, and interpretation of historical evidence. This shift demands continuous professional learning that equips educators with the tools to manage dynamic and inquiry-driven classrooms.

Another important dimension of teacher preparation involves the effective integration of digital technologies into history instruction. As digital media and online resources increasingly shape how learners access information, teachers must be able to incorporate technological tools that enhance historical inquiry and engagement. This includes using digital archives, interactive platforms, multimedia resources, and collaborative learning tools to support learners' exploration of historical sources. Teachers who are skilled in technology integration are better positioned to create learning environments that reflect contemporary information landscapes and encourage learners to critically evaluate digital content (Herodotou et al., 2020).

In addition to technological competence, teachers must also be equipped to implement culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogical practices. In diverse educational contexts such as South Africa, history education often involves addressing sensitive and contested topics related to colonialism, apartheid, identity, and social justice. Teachers therefore need the skills to facilitate respectful dialogue, encourage multiple perspectives, and integrate local and indigenous histories into classroom discussions. Culturally responsive pedagogy enables educators to connect historical content to learners' lived experiences, thereby making history more relevant and meaningful while promoting inclusive historical understanding (Van Eeden, 2016).

Professional development programmes play a crucial role in supporting teachers to adapt to these evolving expectations. Continuous training initiatives that focus on inquiry-based learning, digital pedagogy, curriculum transformation, and inclusive teaching practices can empower teachers to experiment with innovative instructional strategies. Research indicates that sustained and collaborative professional development such as workshops, peer learning communities, and mentoring programmes enhances teachers' confidence and capacity to implement new teaching approaches effectively (Herodotou et al., 2020). Such support systems

are essential for ensuring that teachers remain responsive to the changing demands of education.

Ultimately, preparing teachers for future-ready history classrooms requires a holistic approach that integrates disciplinary expertise, pedagogical innovation, and ongoing professional support. When teachers are adequately equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to implement modern teaching strategies, they are better able to create engaging and intellectually stimulating learning environments. Strengthening teacher capacity therefore represents a critical step toward achieving the broader goal of reimagining Grade 10 history education in ways that foster critical thinking, digital literacy, and active citizenship among learners.

6.4 Toward a humanised and equitable standing of Grade 10 history

Empirical evidence shows that equity in history education involves more than equal access to content; it requires recognising learners' diverse identities, cultures, and experiences within the curriculum (Banks, 2023). A humanised approach to Grade 10 history emphasises inclusive representation and meaningful engagement with learners' social contexts, promoting a sense of relevance and belonging. This shift is driven by concerns that traditional curricula often marginalise perspectives from historically excluded groups, thereby limiting learners' ability to see themselves reflected in the narratives they study (Banks, 2023).

A humanised and inclusive approach to history education acknowledges that learners bring diverse cultural backgrounds, historical experiences, and personal identities into the classroom. When these diverse perspectives are incorporated into the curriculum, learners are more likely to feel valued and included in the learning process. Scholars argue that inclusive history teaching encourages learners to critically examine dominant historical narratives while recognising the contributions and experiences of marginalised communities (Barton & Levstik, 2022). In this instance, history education becomes a platform for promoting social justice, empathy, and intercultural understanding among learners.

Furthermore, incorporating diverse historical perspectives allows learners to develop a broader and more balanced understanding of the past. Traditional history curricula have often prioritised dominant political narratives while overlooking the experiences of women, indigenous groups, and other historically marginalised populations. Empirical evidence emphasises the importance of expanding historical narratives to include multiple voices and perspectives, thereby providing a more comprehensive representation of historical events

(Carretero et al., 2017). Such an approach not only enhances the accuracy of historical knowledge but also strengthens learners' capacity to critically evaluate historical interpretations.

Arguably, promoting equity and inclusivity in history education requires deliberate curriculum reforms and pedagogical strategies. Teachers play a crucial role in facilitating discussions that acknowledge diverse historical experiences and encourage learners to engage respectfully with different viewpoints. When classrooms become spaces where multiple narratives are explored and valued, learners are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and connection to the subject. Ultimately, a humanised approach to Grade 10 history can contribute to more equitable educational outcomes by ensuring that all learners see their identities and histories reflected within the curriculum while developing a deeper understanding of society's shared past.

Meanwhile, culturally responsive teaching (CRT) has been identified as a key framework for making history education more equitable and human-centred. Rather than focusing solely on abstract dates and events, CRT places learners' identities, cultures, and lived experiences at the centre of the learning process. In post-apartheid South Africa's racially and culturally diverse classrooms, such approaches are especially important for addressing historical inequalities and validating learners' life worlds within formal education (Msila, 2022). When teaching actively integrates learners' cultural understandings and values, learners are more likely to experience a sense of belonging and relevance in the classroom, which supports both motivation and academic engagement (Chisholm, 2021).

Culturally responsive teaching encourages educators to connect historical content to learners' cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, bridging the gap between established historical narratives and the realities of learners' own communities. In Grade 10 history, this might involve incorporating South African local histories, indigenous knowledge systems, and community memory alongside global stories, allowing learners to analyse how power, identity, and social structures have shaped different groups. For many South African learners, engaging with personal and regional histories such as the histories of the San, Xhosa, Zulu, or Sotho peoples can help explain wider historical patterns like resistance to colonialism and the struggle against apartheid. Such locally grounded content makes learning more meaningful and helps learners connect concepts like imperialism, labour movements, and civic identity to their own contexts (Motshabi, 2020).

Research further suggests that culturally responsive practices can improve learners' motivation and deepen their historical understanding by making school content personally meaningful. When teachers validate learners' cultural experiences and prior knowledge, learners are more likely to participate actively, think critically, and retain complex historical ideas (Ncube, 2025). Studies in South African high schools and teacher education contexts have found that CRT principles such as acknowledging learners' funds of knowledge and using culturally relevant examples positively influence instructional quality and classroom dialogue (Letseka & Maile, 2008). Importantly, this does not simply make history easier but encourages learners to interrogate whose histories have been prioritised and whose have been marginalised, thereby fostering critical consciousness about past injustices and present inequalities.

Implementing CRT in Grade 10 history requires intentional curriculum design, access to culturally diverse resources, and professional development for teachers. Research on South African teacher education highlights that many pre-service and in-service teachers feel underprepared to enact culturally responsive pedagogy, pointing to the need for stronger support systems and reflective practice opportunities (Mbatha, 2024). Effective CRT involves selecting learning materials that reflect cultural diversity, facilitating inclusive classroom discussions, and designing assessments that allow learners to demonstrate understanding in multiple ways. When history education foregrounds learners' identities, experiences, and ways of knowing, it not only enhances academic outcomes but also contributes to broader goals of equity, social justice, and democratic citizenship in post-apartheid society (Motsamai & Van Wyk, 2022).

In South Africa, decolonising the history curriculum has been a major focus in recent educational research. This involves critically examining whose voices are included in historical accounts and striving to incorporate perspectives that have been historically marginalised (Ncube, 2025). For Grade 10 learners, decolonised content can offer richer and more nuanced insights into the past while challenging dominant Eurocentric narratives. Such curricular transformation contributes to a more equitable educational experience by validating diverse cultural perspectives and knowledge systems (Ndlovu & Welch, 2024).

Literature on educational equity emphasises that curricular change alone is insufficient without addressing the broader structural inequalities that shape learner outcomes. Educational reforms, no matter how progressive in design, cannot fully succeed if they fail to account for socioeconomic disparities, limited access to learning resources, and uneven teacher preparation

(Ngema, 2024). In South Africa, these structural inequalities are particularly pronounced due to the country's historical legacy of apartheid, which created deep disparities in schooling, infrastructure, and educational investment between historically advantaged and disadvantaged communities (Msomi, 2024). Consequently, learners from low-income or rural areas may face challenges that go beyond the content of the curriculum, making equity a multifaceted issue that extends into social, economic, and institutional domains.

In the context of Grade 10 history, inequities in access to quality textbooks, digital tools, and educational technology can hinder learners' ability to engage with the curriculum fully. Research in South African secondary schools has shown that schools in low-resource settings often lack up-to-date history textbooks, internet access, and multimedia resources that enhance historical inquiry and critical thinking (Mkhize, 2020). Without these tools, learners may struggle to explore diverse perspectives or connect historical events to their own communities, limiting their capacity for meaningful learning. Similarly, urban schools with better access to resources provide learners with richer, more interactive learning experiences, highlighting the unequal conditions under which learners engage with the same curriculum (Jansen, 2024).

Teacher preparation and professional development are also critical components of educational equity. Studies indicate that teachers in disadvantaged South African schools often have limited opportunities for ongoing professional learning, especially in integrating innovative pedagogical practices or culturally responsive approaches in history education (Letseka & Maile, 2008). This disparity in teacher readiness affects both the quality of instruction and learners' outcomes, reinforcing cycles of educational inequity. In Grade 10 history, teachers who are underprepared to facilitate critical discussions, analyse historical sources, or address learners' diverse backgrounds may inadvertently perpetuate marginalisation of certain groups' histories (Mbatha, 2024).

To address these challenges, research calls for systemic interventions that support schools, teachers, and communities in creating conditions conducive to equitable learning. Policies must extend beyond curriculum revision to include investments in infrastructure, provision of learning materials, and teacher development programmes (Khalifa, 2021). In South Africa, such systemic support could involve targeted funding for historically under-resourced schools, professional development for history teachers in culturally responsive pedagogy, and equitable access to technology and learning resources across urban and rural areas (Msomi, 2024). By addressing structural inequalities alongside curriculum reform, education systems can create

more meaningful and inclusive opportunities for all Grade 10 learners to succeed academically and critically engage with history.

Humanising pedagogy focuses on building trusting teacher–learner relationships, recognising learners as active participants in their learning, and validating their voices (Moore, 2024). This approach shifts the classroom dynamic from a teacher-centred model, where learners passively receive information, to a collaborative and interactive environment. In post-apartheid South African schools, where many learners have historically been marginalised or excluded from meaningful participation, humanising pedagogy offers a framework for creating classrooms that respect learners’ identities, experiences, and perspectives (Jansen, 2024). By fostering mutual respect and recognising learners’ intellectual potential, teachers can cultivate environments where learners feel empowered to engage critically with historical content.

In Grade 10 history classrooms, learner agency can be nurtured through inquiry-based projects that allow learners to pursue questions meaningful to them and construct historical arguments based on evidence. Such projects encourage learners to explore local histories, community narratives, or personal experiences in ways that link the past to their present contexts. For example, learners might investigate the role of their own communities during apartheid, colonial rule, or other transformative historical periods. Indeed, connecting learning to their lived realities, makes them to become more engaged but also better able to develop analytical and critical thinking skills that are central to understanding history as a dynamic and contested field (Mkhize, 2020).

Humanising pedagogy also supports the affirmation of learners’ intellectual identities, reinforcing the idea that their contributions to knowledge creation are valued. In South African classrooms, where disparities in access to resources and teacher preparation can disadvantage some learners, practices that emphasise voice and agency help to counteract structural inequalities. Teachers who adopt humanising approaches encourage discussion, debate, and reflection, providing learners with opportunities to critically examine historical events while expressing their own interpretations. This not only deepens historical thinking but also cultivates learners’ confidence and sense of belonging within the classroom (Letseka & Maile, 2008).

In this study, it is argued that implementing humanising pedagogy in Grade 10 history requires intentional pedagogical strategies, professional development, and resource support. Teachers need to be equipped with skills to facilitate inquiry-based learning, manage diverse classroom

discussions, and assess historical understanding in ways that recognise multiple forms of knowledge and expression (Mbatha, 2024). When applied consistently, humanising pedagogy transforms the history classroom into an inclusive and equitable space where learners are empowered to critically engage with the past, construct evidence-based arguments, and see themselves as active participants in their own learning journey. Such approaches align with broader educational goals in South Africa of promoting social justice, democratic citizenship, and learner-centred schooling (Jansen, 2024).

The findings highlight the importance of teacher professional development (PD) in equipping educators to implement humanised and equitable history teaching. PD that focuses on equity-oriented instructional strategies, cultural competence, and critical reflection can help teachers recognise their biases and adopt inclusive practices (Sleeter, 2020). For Grade 10 history education, ongoing support and training are essential to ensure teachers can thoughtfully integrate diverse perspectives, design equitable learning activities, and respond to the needs of all learners.

6.5 Conclusion

In essence, cultivating a humanised and equitable Grade 10 history education requires more than curriculum updates; it demands a comprehensive approach that integrates culturally responsive pedagogy, decolonised content, and humanising teaching practices. The literature shows that when learners see their identities, experiences, and cultural contexts reflected in history lessons, engagement and critical thinking are significantly enhanced. Equity in history education involves not only inclusive content but also the promotion of learner agency, critical reflection, and the development of historical consciousness, enabling learners to connect the past with contemporary social realities in meaningful ways.

Achieving this vision also depends on systemic support, particularly in teacher preparation, professional development, and resource allocation. Addressing structural inequities, equipping educators with strategies for inclusive practice, and fostering collaborative and learner-centred classrooms are essential steps toward translating equitable and humanised principles into daily practice. These insights naturally lead to practical and policy-oriented recommendations aimed at strengthening the capacity of schools, teachers, and education systems to create a Grade 10 history curriculum that is not only academically rigorous but socially just, relevant, and empowering for all learners.

REFERENCES

- Abrar, A., Marta, N. A., Yanuardi, M. H., Fakhruddin, M., Risqi, F., Rohana, M. A., & Santosa, Y. B. P. (2025). Building a Critical Thinking Generation: Developing an Innovative History Learning Model. *Diakronika*, 25(1), 47-62
- Acheampong, F., & Karikari, F. (2024). Understanding the Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Teaching and Learning Methods On Academic. *International Journal of Research*, 8, 2700-2713.
- Adebola, O. O. (2025). Reconsidering group work assessment in higher education: A social constructivist analysis of challenges and perceptions. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research*, 7(2), a22-a22.
- Admiraal, W., Schenke, W., De Jong, L., Emmelot, Y., & Sligte, H. (2021). Schools as professional learning communities: what can schools do to support professional development of their teachers? *Professional development in education*, 47(4), 684-698.
- Agwanda, B. (2019). Is history losing its popularity as an academic discipline? A case study of USA and Nigeria. *Journal of Universal History Studies*, 2(2), 183-197.
- Alexander, R. (2020). *A dialogic teaching companion*. Routledge.
- Anjum, F. (2018). Education and learning in Mughal India: A critical study of colonial perceptions. *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan*, 55(1).
- Banerjee, R., Ray, P., & Campbell, M. (2023). Improving environment robustness of deep reinforcement learning approaches for autonomous racing using bayesian optimization-based curriculum learning. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2312.10557*.
- Banks, J. A. (Ed.). (2023). *Global migration and civic education: Research, policy, and practice*. Taylor & Francis.
- Bertram, C. (2020a). Remaking history: The pedagogic device and shifting discourses in the South African school history curriculum. *Yesterday and Today*, (23), 1-29.
- Bertram, C. (2020b). The Recontextualising Logics of Four Post-Colonial African School History Curriculum Documents. *Teaching African History in Schools*. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004445710_002.
- Bleeze, R. (2024). Fostering historical consciousness and empathy in lower secondary students: A comparative study of history curricula in Australia and Singapore. *Heliyon*, 10(4).
- Boadu, G. (2021). Developments in history education in Ghana. *Yesterday and today*, (25), 1-22.
- Bohman, J. (1990). Critical theory as metaphilosophy. *Metaphilosophy*, 21(3), 239-252.

- Broesch, T., Crittenden, A. N., Beheim, B. A., Blackwell, A. D., Bunce, J. A., Colleran, H., ... & Mulder, M. B. (2020). Navigating cross-cultural research: methodological and
- Brookbanks, G. (2023). Teaching and learning of History at a high school level-the reality of AI/ChatGPT and the process of assessing understanding. *Yesterday and Today*, (29), 120-123.
- Burgos-Videla, C., Parada-Ulloa, M., & Martínez-Díaz, J. (2025). Critical thinking in the classroom: the historical method and historical discourse as tools for teaching social studies. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 10, 1526437.
- Ca, V. H., Nguyen, D. T. T., & Chung, K. T. T. (2020). Some ways to create interest for students towards history subject in school. *Journal of Critical Reviews*, 7(14), 895-898.
- Cairns, R., & Garrard, K. A. (2024). 'Learning from history is something that is important for the future': Why Australian students think history matters. *Policy Futures in Education*, 22(3), 369-382.
- Carretero, M., Berger, S., & Grever, M. (2017). Introduction: Historical cultures and education in transition. In *Palgrave handbook of research in historical culture and education* (pp. 1-35). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Chih-Pei, H. U., & Chang, Y. Y. (2017). John W. Creswell, research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.
- Chimbunde, P., & Moreeng, B. B. (2025). Decolonising or glocalising Zimbabwe school history curriculum reform: which way forward?. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1-14.
- Chimbunde, P., Moreeng, B. B., & Chawira, M. (2023). A model for developing critical thinking skills in teaching history: Lessons from Zimbabwe. *Journal of Culture and Values in Education*, 6(3), 194-212.
- Chisholm, M. E. (2021). Counter-hegemonic pedagogical practice: The role of Caribbean emancipatory pedagogy. *Caribbean Curriculum*, 28.
- Christensen, G. (2024). Three concepts of power: Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas. *Power and Education*, 16(2), 182-195.
- Conrad, J., Reisman, A., Jay, L., Patterson, T., Eisman, J. I., Kaplan, A., & Chan, W. (2023). To what ends? Analyzing teacher candidates' goals and perceptions of student talk in social studies discussions. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 47(2), 79-91.

- Creswell, J., Poth, C. N., & Rawlins, P. (2023). Mapping design trends and evolving directions using the Sage handbook of mixed methods research design. *The Sage handbook of mixed methods research design*, 527-537.
- Deng, Y. (2024). Competing in Inclusive Education: Immigrant Chinese Parental Involvement, Educational System Knowledge, and Parental Agency. *Chinese Education & Society*, 57(3-4), 279-305.
- Dodgson, J. E. (2019). Reflexivity in qualitative research. *Journal of human lactation*, 35(2), 220-222.
- du Toit-Brits, C. (2022). Exploring the importance of a sense of belonging for a sense of ownership in learning. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(5), 58-76.
- Duval, N. (2025). Teaching National History in Secondary Schools: Foreign History Teachers' Experiences in Seychelles. *East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 6(4), 40-52.
- ethical considerations. □Proceedings of the Royal Society B, □287(1935), 20201245.
- Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Educational psychology review*, 13(1), 1-22.
- Fontana, B. (2024). Whigs and Liberals: the Edinburgh Review and the 'liberal movement' in nineteenth-century Britain. In *Victorian Liberalism* (pp. 42-57). Routledge.
- Fosnot, C. T. (2013). *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972–1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon Books.
- Fouché, I. (2025). From recipients to contributors: reimagining curriculum for enhanced student agency. *Teachers and Teaching*, 1-21.
- Freire, P. (2020). Pedagogy of the oppressed. In *Toward a sociology of education* (pp. 374-386). Routledge.
- Freire, P. (2025). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- French, S., Dickerson, A., & Mulder, R. A. (2024). A review of the benefits and drawbacks of high-stakes final examinations in higher education. *Higher Education*, 88(3), 893-918.
- Fufa, F. S., Tulu, A. H., & Ensene, K. A. (2024). Exploring the significant problems confronting secondary schools history education: A baseline study. *Discover Education*, 3(1), 52.

- Gal, C., Ryder, C. H., Amsalem, S. R., & On, O. (2025). Shaping inclusive classrooms: Key factors influencing teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of students with special needs. *Education Sciences*, 15(5), 541.
- García, E., Han, E., & Weiss, E. (2022). Determinants of teacher attrition: Evidence from district-teacher matched data. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30(25), n25
- Giroux, H. A., McLaren, P. L., McLaren, P., & Peter, M. (Eds.). (1989). *Critical pedagogy, the state, and cultural struggle*. Suny Press.
- Gómez-Carrasco, C. J., Rodríguez-Medina, J., Chaparro-Sainz, Á., & Monteagudo-Fernández, J. (2022). Teaching approaches and profile analysis: An exploratory study with trainee history teachers. *SAGE Open*, 12(1), 21582440211059174.
- Govender, D., & Bhana, D. (2023). Race, class, and masculinities in a South African primary school. *Men and Masculinities*, 26(4), 624-644.
- Haydn, T. (2017). Truth in history education. In *Debates in history teaching* (pp. 169-179). Routledge.
- Heleta, S. (2016). Decolonisation of higher education: Dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in higher education*, 1(1), 1-8.
- Heleta, S., & Chasi, S. (2023). Rethinking and redefining internationalisation of higher education in South Africa using a decolonial lens. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 45(3), 261-275.
- Helms, C., Pölling, B., Curran, T., & Lorleberg, W. (2018). Desktop research: national literature reviews and analyses of educational resources. *NEWBIE: Deliverable*, 2.
- Henkaline, K. N. (2023). *Eighth Grade Students' Perceptions of History Education*. The Ohio State University.
- Herodotou, C., Rienties, B., Hlosta, M., Boroowa, A., Mangafa, C., & Zdrahal, Z. (2020). The scalable implementation of predictive learning analytics at a distance learning university: Insights from a longitudinal case study. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 45, 100725.
- Horkheimer, M. (1972). *Critical theory: Selected essays* (Vol. 1). A&C Black.
- Jansen, J. (2024). Struggles over knowledge after apartheid in South Africa. In *Research Handbook on Curriculum and Education* (pp. 493-506). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Jensen, L. X., Bearman, M., Boud, D., & Konradsen, F. (2022). Digital ethnography in higher education teaching and learning—a methodological review. *Higher Education*, 84(5), 1143-1162.

- Jita, L. C., & Mokhele, M. L. (2013). The role of lead teachers in instructional leadership: A case study of environmental learning in South Africa. *Education as change*, 17(sup1), S123-S135.
- Kakoulli-Constantinou, E. (2021, June). ESP Teacher Education Today: The Online Reflective Teacher Education Course in ESP. In *6th International Conference Asia Pacific LSP and Professional Communication Association, LSPPC6, Multimodality and beyond: Addressing complexity and emerging needs in LSP*.
- Kassab, S. E., Rathan, R., Taylor, D. C., & Hamdy, H. (2024). The impact of the educational environment on student engagement and academic performance in health professions education. *BMC medical education*, 24(1), 1278.
- Kgari-Masondo, M. C. (2020). In pursuit of a decolonised history teacher: agency and boldness in fostering change. *Yearbook of the International Society of History Didactics/Jahrbuch Der Internationalen Gesellschaft Für Geschichtsdidaktik*, 41.
- Kgari-Masondo, M. C., & Chimbunde, P. (2021). Progress of an African student during Covid-19 and beyond in higher education: Re-colonisation of decolonisation? *Perspectives in Education*, 39(1), 323-339.
- Khoza, I. L., & Dube, M. C. (2022). Perspectives of Secondary School Learners about the Negative Uptake of History. *Gender and Behaviour*, 20(3), 19721-19735.
- Kincheloe, J. L., & McLaren, P. (2018). Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed., pp. 285– 326). SAGE
- Körber, A. (2018). Transcultural history education and competence: Emergence of a concept in German history education. *History Education Research Journal*, 15(2).
- Langa, M., Wassermann, J., & Maposa, M. (2021). Black African parents' narratives on apartheid schooling and school history. *Perspectives in Education*, 39(3), 3-16.
- Le Grange, L. (2020). Decolonising the university curriculum: The what, why and how. In *Transnational education and curriculum studies* (pp. 216-233). Routledge
- Letseka, M., & Maile, S. (2008). *High university drop-out rates: A threat to South Africa's future*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council.
- Levstik, L. S., & Barton, K. C. (2022). *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools*. Routledge.
- Mabunda, P. L. (2022). Rethinking Teacher Education Practicum for Transformative and Regenerative University–Community Partnerships. In *Transformative Education for*

- Regeneration and Wellbeing: A Critical Systemic Approach to Support Multispecies Relationships and Pathways to Sustainable Environments* (pp. 275-289). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Mahdi, M. F. (2023). The Role of IT in Transforming Traditional Education to Digital Learning. *International Journal of Computational & Electronic Aspects in Engineering (IJCEAE)*, 4(4).
- Majola, E., Geduld, D., & Rangana, N. (2025). Critical pedagogy in context: problematising the application of Paulo Freire's framework in TVET education in South Africa. *International Journal of Training Research*, 1-16.
- Malizal, Z. Z., & Rahman, N. A. (2024). Breaking Boundaries in Inclusive Education: A Narrative Review of Pedagogical, Technological, and Policy Practices and Challenges in Regular Schools. *Sinergi International Journal of Education*, 2(3), 187-202.
- Maluleka, P. (2021). Fallism as Decoloniality: Towards a Decolonised School History Curriculum in Post-colonial-apartheid South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2021/n26a4>.
- Masenya, T. M. (2025). Exploring the Traces of Linguistic Imperialism. *Resurgence and Revalorization of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Contemporary Society*, 353.
- Mbatha, S. S. (2024). *A legal analysis of the right to basic education in a post-apartheid South Africa*. University of Johannesburg (South Africa).
- Mercer, N., & Littleton, K. (2007). *Dialogue and the development of children's thinking: A sociocultural approach*. Routledge.
- Merriam S. B., Tisdell S. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass
- Meylani, R. (2024). Artificial intelligence in the education of teachers: A qualitative synthesis of the cutting-edge research literature. *Journal of Computer and Education Research*, 12(24), 600-637.
- Miles, J., & Springgay, S. (2020). The indeterminate influence of Fluxus on contemporary curriculum and pedagogy. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 33(10), 1007-1021.
- Mitchell, R., Ayinselya, R., Barrett, A. M., Ochoa, A. A. C., David, O., Imaniriho, D., ... & Singh, M. (2024). Teacher professional development in Africa: A critical synthesis of research evidence.

- Mkhize, T. (2020). The role of African languages in decolonising South African universities. *The transformative power of language: from postcolonial to knowledge societies in Africa*, 33-42.
- Molina, J. O., Bellatti, I., & Puche, S. M. (2025). Values and History Education. The social representation on historical significance of Teacher Training students. *Revista de Educación*, 408, 8.
- Monte-Sano, C. (2011). Learning to open up history for students: Preservice teachers' emerging pedagogical content knowledge. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(3), 260-272.
- Moore, T. (2024). Pedagogy, podcasts, and politics: What role does podcasting have in planning education? *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 44(3), 1134-1147.
- Motshabi, K. B. (2020). Decolonising Affirmative Action in 21st Century Africa: Reparatory alternatives for affirming South Africa. *Journal of Decolonising Disciplines*, 2(1).
- Msila, V. (2022). Bringing Africa into new epistemologies: rethinking the university in Africa. *Journal of Educational Research and Reviews*, 10(3), 29-37.
- Msomi, N. (2024). *A case study of GADRA's community-engaged praxis for educational transformation* (Doctoral dissertation, Rhodes University).
- Ncube, H., & Mabalane, V. T. (2025). Decolonising Pedagogies for Values Incultation in Secondary School History Teaching in Zimbabwe. *Yesterday and Today*, (34), 144-163.
- Ngema, M. H. (2024). Redefining Assessment Standards: A Framework for Examination Guidelines in South African Basic Education. *Open Books and Proceedings*, 93-106.
- Ngobeni, N. R., Chibambo, M. I., & Divala, J. J. (2023, June). Curriculum transformations in South Africa: some discomfoting truths on interminable poverty and inequalities in schools and society. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 8, p. 1132167). Frontiers Media SA.
- Ngubane, S. (2021). Identity construction in KwaNgwanase personal names. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 20(1), 27-41.
- Nhedzi, A., Haffejee, S., O'Reilly, M., & Vostanis, P. (2022). Scoping child mental health service capacity in South Africa disadvantaged communities: community provider perspectives. *Journal of Children's Services*, 17(4), 281-297.
- Nzeakor, O., & Moloi, T. M. (2025). History Education and Democratic Policing: Intersections of Curriculum Reform and Social Justice. *Available at SSRN 5834982*.
- Oosthuizen, M. (2024). Education and South Africa's waning demographic dividend. *The Journal of the Economics of Ageing*, 27, 100484.

- Petousi, D., Katifori, A., Servi, K., Roussou, M., & Ioannidis, Y. (2022, August). History education done different: A collaborative interactive digital storytelling approach for remote learners. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 7, p. 942834). Frontiers Media SA.
- Piaget, J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adulthood. *Human Development*, 15(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000271225>
- Pietersen, D., & Langeveldt, D. C. (2025). Challenging violence in South African education: A feminist pedagogical and legal analysis. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 45(1), 45-55.
- Pregoner, J. D. M., & Baguio, J. B. (2024). Learning strategies and readiness towards blended learning in english subjects as predictors of students' satisfaction during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 50(4), 170-184.
- Radebe, N., Moreeng, B., & Alalade, O. E. (2025). Exploring teachers' understanding of skills-based teaching approach in History. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research*, 7(2), a15-a15.
- Ramirez Quimbayo, M. C. (2024). Traces of colonialism in English language teaching (ELT) materials: a raciolinguistic justice exploration of decolonizing ELT curricula.
- Ravn, S., Barnwell, A., & Barbosa Neves, B. (2020). What is “publicly available data”? Exploring blurred public–private boundaries and ethical practices through a case study on Instagram. *Journal of empirical research on human research ethics*, 15(1-2), 40-45
- Robinson, N. (2024). Using Holocaust Education as a “Bridge” to Be Learning about Apartheid in a South African History Classroom: The Development of “Interpretive Frames” through Comparative Histories. *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 38, 183 - 199.
- Ross-Holmes, G. R. (2022). *Middle school teachers' perceptions of student disengagement and its role in low academic achievement* (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University).
- Saurombe, N., & Schellnack-Kelly, I. (2024). History, a compulsory component of basic education in South Africa from 2023 – Are South African archivists ready?. *Education for Information*, 40, 1 - 20. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-220046>.
- Scherer, A. G., & Neesham, C. (2023). Organized immaturity in a Post-Kantian perspective: Toward a critical theory of surveillance capitalism. *Organization Theory*, 4(3), 26317877231204083.
- Schwandt, T. A. (2014). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry*. Sage publications.

- Sengonul, T. (2022). A Review of the Relationship between Parental Involvement and Children's Academic Achievement and the Role of Family Socioeconomic Status in This Relationship. *Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction*, 12(2), 32-57.
- Sepadi, M., & Molapo, K. (2024, June). Exploring teacher understanding of curriculum and assessment policy statement document implementation in South African schools. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 9, p. 1354959). Frontiers Media SA.
- Shambare, B., & Simuja, C. (2022). A critical review of teaching with virtual lab: A panacea to challenges of conducting practical experiments in science subjects beyond the COVID-19 pandemic in rural schools in South Africa. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 50(3), 393-408.
- Sifuna, D. N. (2023). Chapter Two The Development Of Tertiary Education In Kenya Since Independence Daniel N. Sifuna. *The Development Of Tertiary Education In The Eastern African Region*, 21.
- Simamora, A. M. (2024). A decade of science technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) project-based learning (PjBL): A systematic literature review. *Journal of Computers for Science and Mathematics Learning*, 1(1), 58-78.
- Sithole, F., & Fru, R. (2024). The pros and cons of history as a compulsory subject in South Africa from the lens of history teachers in the Frances Baard District. *Yesterday and Today*, (32), 177-207.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2020). Challenging racism and colonialism through ethnic studies. In *Visioning Multicultural Education* (pp. 44-61). Routledge.
- Soudien, C. (2018). Becoming and being an academic in the post-apartheid university. *A Scholarship of Doctoral Education: On becoming a researcher*.
- Soudien, C., Reddy, V., & Harvey, J. (2022). The impact of COVID-19 on a fragile education system: The case of South Africa. *Primary and secondary education during COVID-19: Disruptions to educational opportunity during a pandemic*, 303-325.
- Suárez-Orozco, C., & Suárez-Orozco, M. (2024). Globalization, immigrant-origin students & the quest for educational equity. *Dædalus*, 153(4), 21-42.
- Svensson, A. K. (2022). Students' challenges and support needed in reaching academic literacies in higher education: In-depth interviews with Swedish students. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 8(4), 731-741.
- Takhar, S. (2024). The student voice: Decolonising the curriculum. *Equity in education & society*, 3(2), 114-129.

- Tarisayi, K. S. (2025). Theoretical Foundations of Internationalisation and Sustainable Development in Higher Education. *Internationalisation of Higher Education for Sustainable Development: A Southern African Perspective*, 22, 4.
- Tekir, S. (2025). Strategies for Effective Classroom Management in Online Teaching: A Post-Pandemic Review of Empirical Studies. *SAGE Open*, 15(3), 21582440251377321.
- Thulo, A. (2025). Reasons underlying the choice of History as a major subject at Universities: the case of undergraduate students at the National University of Lesotho. *African Perspectives of Research in Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 11-27.
- Townend, G., Alonzo, D., Knipe, S., & Baker, S. (2025, August). What does the international literature say about assessment practice for equitable learning outcomes for educationally disadvantaged high school students?. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 10, p. 1536485). Frontiers Media SA.
- Van Eeden, E. S. (2016). Thoughts about the historiography of veracity or "truthfulness" in understanding and teaching History in South Africa. *Yesterday and Today*, (15), 37-65.
- Van Pham, S. (2024). The influence of social and emotional learning on academic performance, emotional well-being, and implementation strategies: A literature review. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9(12), 381-391.
- Voogt, J., Pieters, J., & Pareja Roblin, N. (2019). Collaborative curriculum design in teacher teams: Foundations. In *Collaborative curriculum design for sustainable innovation and teacher learning* (pp. 5-18). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
- Vranken, I., & Vandenbosch, L. (2025). Exploring late adolescents' experiences with career-related messages on entertainment TV and in social media in Belgium: A focus group study. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 40(2), 483-511.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walker, M., McLean, M., & Mukwando, P. (2022). *Low-income students, human development and higher education in South Africa: Opportunities, obstacles and outcomes* (p. 224). African minds.
- Walton, E., & Engelbrecht, P. (2024). Inclusive education in South Africa: Path dependencies and emergences. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 28(10), 2138-2156.

- Wang, Y., Derakhshan, A., & Zhang, L. J. (2021). Researching and practicing positive psychology in second/foreign language learning and teaching: the past, current status and future directions. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 731721.
- Warnich, P., & Lubbe, H. (2019). Taking the sting out of assessment: The experiences of trainee teachers experimenting with innovative alternative performance assessment in the History classroom. *Yesterday and Today*, (22), 88-118.
- Wassermann, J., & Angier, K. (2024). The epistemic considerations of post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE)-history students: A South African case study. In *Teachers and the Epistemology of History*: (pp. 61-76). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Wassermann, J., Maposa, M., & Mhlongo, D. (2018). " If I choose history, it is likely that I won't be able to leave for the cities to get a job": Rural learners and the choosing of history as a subject. *Journal of Education (University of KwaZulu-Natal)*, (73), 55-68.
- Webb, C. (2023). 'This country beyond the township': Race, class and higher education mobilities in the post-apartheid city. *Geoforum*, 139, 103678.
- Wegner, A. (2025). Citizenship education in Basque and French language classes in Northern Basque immersive schools: a case of powerful knowledge and epistemic quality. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 57(5), 597-619.
- Weinberg, D. (2014). *Contemporary social constructionism: Key themes*. Temple University Press.
- Weldon, S. P. (2022). View from the Bibliographer's Desk: Exploring Two-Decades of Citations in the Discipline of History of Science. *Physis: International Journal for the History of Science: LVII, 1, 2022*, 29-48.
- Weston, C., Eadie, S., Croucamp, A., Morcowitz, S., & James, C. (2024). Assessment Practices Fit for a Fast-changing World: A South African Perspective. *Open Books and Proceedings*, 61-76.
- Weston, N. B., Troy, C., Kearns, P. J., Bowen, J. L., Porubsky, W., Hyacinthe, C., ... & Joye, S. B. (2024). Physicochemical perturbation increases nitrous oxide production from denitrification in soils and sediments. *Biogeosciences*, 21(21), 4837-4851.
- Wineburg, S., & Reisman, A. (2019). Research on Historical. *Researching History Education: International Perspectives and Disciplinary Traditions*, 342
- Xiang, X. (2025). *Unequal learning: Education and society in contemporary China*. Oxford University Press.
- Xu, B., Yu, Q., & Yuan, Y. (2025). Do rural students perform as well as their urban classmates? Evidence from urban China. *The Singapore Economic Review*, 70(05), 1247-1275.

- Ye, X. (2024, July). A review of classroom environment on student engagement in English as a foreign language learning. In *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 9, p. 1415829). Frontiers Media SA.
- Zanazanian, P., Elmersjö, H. A., & Nitsche, M. (2024). *Revisiting history and its epistemology: Teachers and learners, Historical Encounters, 11 (2), 1-5.*

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



College of Education _ERC

Date: 23/02/2026

Dear: Miss Ngwakwana Winnie Malatji

**Decision: Ethics Approval from
23/02/2026 to 23/02/2029**

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)
Ref #: 11712
Name: Miss Ngwakwana Winnie Malatji
Student #: 65602951
Staff #:

Researcher: Miss Ngwakwana Winnie Malatji

65602951@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Pretoria

Supervisor: Professor Christo Doniwen Pietersen epietecd@unisa.ac.za

Co-Supervisor:

Co-Researcher(s):

Email address:

Exploring societal discourse in the decline of student interest in grade 10 history urban cities in south Africa

Qualification: MEDU

Thank you for the application for research ethics approval by the College of Education _ERC for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for **three years**.

The **negligible risk application** was **reviewed** by the College of Education _ERC in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising during the undertaking of the research study that may affect the ethical integrity of the study, including those involving research participants, third parties, or juristic persons, must be reported in writing to the College of Education _ERC without delay.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that may affect study-related risks to research participants, juristic or third persons, must be reported in writing to the College of Education _ERC, accompanied by a progress report.

APPENDIX B: PROOFREADING REPORT

Editing Certificate

This hereby serves to confirm that I, Dr Pamela Makati, language edited the Masters dissertation titled "Exploring Societal Discourse in the Decline of Student Interest in Grade 10 History in Urban Cities in South Africa" by Winnie N. Malatji. I declare that I have ensured clarity, coherence and cohesion in the presentation of ideas, corrected grammar, spellings and language use, and ensured consistency in spellings and language use.



Dr Pamela Makati (D Lit. and Phil. in English, MA in English, BA Hons in English)
Academic Editor (member of PEG, SATI & EASA)
Date: 24 March 2026



pmmakati@gmail.com | +27632739957

APPENDIX C: TURNITIN REPORT

