

Thinking Skills and Learning Interest in World History of Junior High Students

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Raichelle Joy P. Montelibano¹, Joel M. Bual², and Dennis V. Madrigal³

¹Handumanan National High School, Bacolod City, Philippines

^{2,3}University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos, Bacolod City, Philippines

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ABSTRACT. World History's importance lies in its ability to enhance thinking skills and interest in understanding global events. Therefore, assessing students' thinking skills and interests is necessary to determine their inclination toward the discipline. Based on Cognitive Development Theory, this study aimed to assess the level of thinking skills and learning interests and their correlative relationship. A descriptive-correlational approach was used, and validated and reliability-tested questionnaires were administered to 294 junior high school students in a public school in Bacolod City, Philippines. The mean, standard deviation, and Spearman rank correlation were used for data analysis. Students displayed average thinking skills and a high level of learning interest. Additionally, no significant correlation was found between students' thinking skills and their interest in learning world history. This invalidated the anchored theory. Hence, continuous improvements in employing strategies are recommended to public school teachers to boost students' critical thinking abilities and engagement in the subject.

1.0. Introduction

Thinking skills are necessary for students to learn World History (Lévesque & Clark, 2018). These cognitive skills are essential as they contribute to achieving the discipline's competencies (Tiruneh et al., 2018). When learners have established these thinking skills, they can apply the acquired competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes in real-world contexts, such as the various challenges and circumstances that may come their way (Merkt et al., 2017). Additionally, when they are well-equipped with these critical thinking skills, they will have an in-depth grasp of man's multifaceted nature and his actions as far as his pursuit of life in the global arena is concerned (Fridrikh et al., 2020). Hence, developing these skills among students would require their unreserved interest in learning World History (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017).

Students' interest is vital in learning World History (Ca et al., 2020). Given the complexity of the subject, it is essential for them to actively engage in successful teaching and learning processes (Setiawan et al., 2020). Their consistent interest in learning gives them an optimistic perspective and quality learning experiences, making it easy to grasp the discipline's competencies (Harackiewicz & Hulleman, 2010). The

learning outcomes of complex subjects like Social Studies are highly influenced by how well-disposed the students are toward the discipline (Permatasari et al., 2019). Hence, there is a need to employ various strategies to stimulate the learners' interest in putting their acquisition of competencies in place (Park, 2003).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd, 2016) incorporated World History as one of the subjects of the K12 curriculum. It aims to produce functionally literate learners who can shape their perspectives while developing their knowledge and skills. Given this context, the students must develop their thinking skills and interest to learn the subject successfully and achieve these visions (Corpuz & Gloria, 2013). However, most students are not into History because they perceive this subject as boring due to the conventional instruction (Lorbis, 2019). They must memorize names, places, and dates, eventually lessening their interest (Balante et al., 2023). Also, some students have insufficient prior knowledge of the lessons given the effect of the pandemic modality (Agayon & Pentang, 2022; Cena & Bual, 2021; Garcia & Bual, 2022; Margario et al., 2022; Rios et al., 2023). Some are even promoted to the next grade level regardless of acquiring the learning competencies (Cruz & Nuqui, 2014). These circumstances compromise students' thinking skills and interests (Derraco & Derraco, 2022).

In public schools of Bacolod City, Philippines, it

*Correspondence: r.j.montelibano10@gmail.com

Raichelle Joy P. Montelibano, Handumanan National High School, Bacolod City, Philippines



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is observed that students' thinking skills are limited to remembering due to traditional instruction (Lobaton et al., 2023). Most learners lack the foundation of World History since this subject does not adhere to the spiral curriculum, unlike other subjects (Refugio et al., 2020). Besides, the time allocation to learning the lessons per quarter is insufficient, compromising their competency acquisition (Serafico-Reyes et al., 2019). These learners belong to a generation with a lower attention span due to preoccupation with technology (Gonzales, 2020). All these observations concretely put into question their thinking skills and interest in the subject.

Several studies were conducted on thinking skills and learning interest in World History. In Malaysia, Dahalan et al. (2020) conducted a study on the effectiveness of the 21st-century teaching module towards high-order thinking skills. In Indonesia, Framesty et al. (2021) conducted a study on interest in historical learning materials. In correlating the two constructs, Derraco and Derraco (2022) linked thinking skills with learning interests pertinent to online distance in Social Studies. However, given the available studies, there is limited literature on thinking skills and learning interest in World History and the correlation of both in the Philippines, especially in a public school setting. This is the gap that this study would like to fill in.

Thus, this study assessed the thinking skills of junior high students in a public school in Bacolod City, Philippines, in World History in terms of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Likewise, it assessed their learning interest in the discipline and their correlational relationship. The findings were the basis for formulating a Strategic Intervention Material (SIM) to continuously improve the students' thinking skills and interest in World History.

2.0. Framework of the Study

The study theorized that learning World History developed the students' thinking skills and interest. Piaget's (2013) Theory of Cognitive Development theorized that as learners enter the formal operational stage of development, they typically think and reason more conceptually. More so, the students asked higher-order thinking questions based on the information they did not grasp. These questions were interesting and engaging to students with the subject matter. Lastly, the students participated in higher-level historical thinking, comprehending concepts, and applying principles to actual circumstances as they moved through the developmental stages and enhanced their cognitive abilities.

3.0. Methodology

This study employed the quantitative research design, particularly the descriptive-correlational approach. The descriptive approach described the students' thinking skills and learning interest in World History. Meanwhile, the correlational approach investigated the relationship between these two variables. The respondents were 294 Grade 9 junior high school students in a public school in Bacolod City, Philippines, during 2022-2023 and were determined using stratified random sampling.

In assessing the thinking skills, two sets of researcher-made test questionnaires were used: a 60-item test questionnaire based on the Social Studies Most Essential Learning Competencies (DepEd, 2016) that was categorized into six domains: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating; and a 25-item test questionnaire to determine the students' learning interest. Both instruments had very low, low, average, high, and very high responses. These were subjected to the validity of 10 jurors and yielded a valid CVR score of 0.97 for both variables. Meanwhile, the questionnaires were pilot-tested and yielded a KR-20 score of 0.815 for thinking skills and a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.958 for learning interest. The test questions for thinking skills were subjected to item analysis and resulted in a rating of 98.1%.

In analyzing the data, descriptive and correlational analyses were employed. The descriptive analysis assessed the thinking skills and learning interest using mean and standard deviation. Meanwhile, the correlational analysis investigated the relationship between these two variables. Kolmogorov-Smirnov was used to test their normality and revealed that thinking skills [$KS=0.074$, $p=0.001$] and learning interest [$KS=0.086$, $p=0.000$] were not normally distributed. Hence, non-parametric statistical tools were employed. Specifically, Spearman rank correlation was utilized to determine the relationship between the two constructs. In terms of ethical considerations, this paper addressed the general respect for persons, beneficence, and justice following the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board's (PHREB's) ethical standards. Ethical practices in this research were observed, such as acquiring signed informed consent and adhering to respondents' vulnerability, anonymity, and the confidentiality of the data gathered.

4.0. Results and Discussion

Students' Thinking Skills in World History

Thinking skills guided the students in their understanding of World History. These skills allowed them to develop a sense of introspection and

establish diverse perspectives about the community and the world. As these skills were developed, they became ready to face this constantly changing world. Hence, they need to think since their global issues are unstructured, sophisticated, and unpredictable (Pratama & Retnawati, 2018). Table 1 presents the level of thinking skills in World History in terms of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Generally, their thinking skills (M=27.81, SD=9.26) were average. However, of the six domains, remembering (M=5.13, SD=1.93) and creating (M=4.4, SD=2.10) were averagely rated; while understanding (M=3.90, SD=1.82), analyzing (M=3.90, SD=1.74) and evaluating (M=4.01, SD=2.34) were rated low.

Table 1
Students' Thinking Skills in World History

Variable	M	SD	Int
Remembering	5.13	1.93	Average
Understanding	3.90	1.82	Low
Applying	6.18	2.75	High
Analyzing	3.90	1.74	Low
Evaluating	4.01	2.34	Low
Creating	4.40	2.10	Average
<i>Thinking Skills</i>	<i>27.81</i>	<i>9.26</i>	<i>Average</i>

Per thinking skill: Very low (0.00-2.00), low (2.01-4.00), average (4.01-6.00), high (6.01-8.00), and very high (8.01-10.00)

Generally, the average rating indicated that public school students exhibited an approaching proficiency in their thinking skills vis-à-vis World History. They did not fully acquire and demonstrate the thinking skills they must perform as learners of this subject. With their inadequate ability to think, they have not yet recognized the vitality of reflecting and establishing varied global views. Aside from this, it showed that they were not ready to face the changing world and its emerging complex challenges. These scenarios revealed that the students did not acquire higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), giving them room for improvement. The average result could be attributed to the timeline of the conduct of the study. The fact that the grade 9 respondents took World History a year before this was conducted could highly influence the ratings since most of them might have forgotten the lessons. Besides, the researcher-made test questionnaire used, though validated and reliability tested, was not a standardized test and did not undergo factor analysis, which could also be an attribution.

Aside from this, the Department of Education enacted a curriculum under the DepEd Order No. 25, s. 2002, where Social Studies became part of the Makabayan learning area, which is not part of the core subjects (Satiniaman, 2023). Thus, the allocated time to deliver the lessons was insufficient, jeopardizing the instructional delivery and the students' learning. Gromada and Shewbridge (2016) supported the

critical need for ample time allocation to deliver the lessons the learners needed to acquire. Yesil Dagli (2019) and Alic and Bual (2021) argued that when the time was adequately allocated, it ensured content acquisition and the student's knowledge, skills, and attitude vis-à-vis the subject. Hence, these encouraged the teachers to provide feedback on students' learning and efficiently manage the allocated time for discipline.

The average thinking skills could also be ascribed to the fact that these students were products of pandemic modality, which likely affected the rating. During this circumstance, most, if not all, were not ready for the instructional delivery using distance modality. Though they finished the course, the delivery of contents, strategies, and assessments was

questioned. This scenario might have impacted the students' learning disposition, resulting in poor thinking skills. In support, Miletic and Rados (2021), Beboso and Bual (2022), Quirao et al. (2023), Malagsic et al. (2021), and Esman

et al. (2023) perceived that the changing modality negatively impacted the students and the teachers who implemented the lessons.

Meanwhile, Baraily et al. (2021), Ecang and Petalla (2022), and Pahilanga et al. (2023) found that most of the instructions during the pandemic failed to connect the lessons to the students' lives, making the instructions superficial. Also, Miguel-Revilla (2022) found that most students did not see the relevance of World History since the discussions talked about the past, which has nothing to do with the present. Hence, these imply reviewing the strategies to ensure the quality development of thinking skills. Additionally, it signified the teachers' encouragement of the students to recognize the relevance of learning World History.

Relative to remembering, the average result could be attributed to the fact that this study was conducted a year after they took the course, which might have influenced their memory skills. This explains that most might have already forgotten the lessons in World History. Undeniably, despite the traditional instruction, like lectures, discussion, and memorization, they still failed to fully exhibit the remembering skill because the circumstance and the modality impeded their disposition to learn (Rijal et al., 2022). Maurino (2006) acknowledged their poor inclination toward learning because they felt they were not obliged to attend and participate in the discussion. Most students thought they could

still pass the subject regardless of participation. This compromised the development of remembering skills. Hence, this implied the establishment of students' foundation of thinking skills, remembering to develop HOTS.

Meanwhile, the average result in creating indicated that they did not fully achieve the HOTS. In the public school grading system, the students demonstrated creative skills in their performance tasks and were required to comply once a quarter. However, if this was the case, then it was expected that the students would be performing these four times a year, and this would limit their ability to demonstrate their full creative skills. This scenario might have affected the domain's average rating. In support, Markle et al. (2013) perceived creating as the highest of the HOTS expected to be exercised by the students. Yet, for this skill to be fully exhibited, it should not be limited to the performance tasks but must be incorporated into the teachers' strategies and activities (Gul et al., 2015, Petalla & Madrigal, 2017). Hence, it implied that integrating creative skills in the students' activities guarantees the development of creating and HOTS.

Relative to low understanding skills, this could be influenced by the World History activities that focused much on the content where the students mostly read, listen, and write. Naturally, these tasks were knowledge-based activities that inclined students to memorize or retain information. Considering the six domains, most learning activities were limited to remembering and failed to reach the understanding stage. This scenario may compromise the students' in-depth grasp of the lessons. In support, Tikhonova and Kudinova (2015) found that most students fail to grasp the lessons because they usually present the information without genuinely understanding the nature of the subject. Aside from this, Hwang et al. (2005) perceived that when learning activities were passive, these negatively impacted the students' understanding due to the absence of active interaction. It is noted that having a favorable classroom learning environment vis-à-vis World History will elicit interactive discussion to advance understanding and the rest of the HOTS successfully (Havekes et al., 2017). Hence, this implied the need for teachers to establish an interactive atmosphere to aid the students' understanding skills and acquisition of World History competencies.

Lastly, the low analyzing and evaluating skills could be attributed to the fact that most activities employed remembering and understanding skills and

failed to reach the analyzing and evaluating parts. Here, the instruction failed to connect the lessons to the students' lives. This indicated that the low ratings could be ascribed to the unavailability of activities that were elicited from the students' analytical and evaluating minds. Zhang et al. (2017) perceived that students could only exercise their analyzing and evaluating skills when provided with problems and issues to resolve. Meanwhile, Egerton et al. (2007) believed that the best way to encourage the students' analytical and evaluating minds was when they were presented with the different current issues in History that advance their perspectives in life. Hence, these encouraged the teachers to connect the lessons to the students' lives and provide activities that elicit their analytical and evaluating skills.

Students' Learning Interest in World History

Learning interest referred to the students' disposition to learn the competencies of World History. When the learners were inclined to learn the subject, their perspectives were developed and improved vis-à-vis local and global issues (Renninger & Rieley, 2013). Table 2 presents the students' degree of learning interest in World History. Generally, their learning interest (M=3.56, SD=0.63) was high. Elaborately, the students' high interest level in learning World History competencies correlated with their high inclination to learn diverse perspectives, which could help them deal with local and global concerns.

Table 2
Students' Learning Interest in World History

Variable	M	SD	Interpretation
Learning Interest	3.56	0.63	High

Note: Very low (1.00-1.80), low (1.81-2.60), average (2.61-3.40), high (3.41-4.20), and very high (4.21-5.00)

The different factors available in the public school could influence the students' high ratings, which could generate the students' learning interest. First, this could be attributed to the teachers' diverse activities, encouraging students' interest in the subject. For most, disciplines like World History are boring due to their nature, requiring students to read, memorize, and write (Lorbis, 2019). However, with the differentiated activities provided to students, this perception could be turned into a more interesting discussion. Besides, most learners nowadays are mobile and love to perform rather than sit down for long hours (Park, 2003, (Petalla & Doromal, 2021). Meanwhile, Setiawan et al. (2020) agree that when varied activities are provided among learners, most recognize how important it is to learn the lessons. Hence, these imply teachers' importance in exhausting diverse activities that elicit interactive participation among students to boost their interest in World History.

Another factor was the use of technology, particularly multimedia, in delivering instruction. Given that this subject was perceived to be boring due to its inclination to conventional instruction, multimedia use, and online applications could boost the students' interest in World History learning. Nurbaiti et al. (2020) perceived that students nowadays are not only into auditory but also visual. In support, Malysheva et al. (2022) found that listening was not enough; it must be audio-visual. Nuttall (2021) believed that history subjects could best be learned when multisensory pedagogy aided the students' learning, and one example was the use of technological applications. Regarding research works, they could easily access information through technology to help them comply with their requirement (Quirao et al., 2023). Hence, these encouraged incorporating educational technology to support the students' quest for knowledge and competency acquisition vis-à-vis World History.

Undeniably, the learning environment was also necessary for students to learn subjects like World History. The availability of this environment to students could influence their high-interest rating. Ketterlin-Geller et al. (2015) mentioned that this can best be achieved when administrators and teachers support students' activities. This means the teachers and the students can easily access the necessary resources. In support, the conducive environment reflected in the administrative support could establish the teachers' motivation to teach, resulting in a successful teaching-learning process (Suneetha, 2013). Hence, the findings implied the essentials of establishing a favorable learning environment through administrative and teacher support to ensure the quality interest of the students towards World History.

Relationship between the Students' Thinking Skills and Learning Interest in World History

Table 3 presents the relationship between the students' thinking skills and learning interest in World History. Using the Spearman rank correlation, there was no significant relationship between thinking skills and learning interest [$r_s(292)=0.015, p=0.803$]. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Table 3
Relationship between the Students' Thinking Skills and Learning Interest in World History

Variable	rs	df	p
Thinking Skills and Learning Interest	0.015	292	0.803

Note: *relationship is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

The absence of correlation between the two constructs revealed that the two variables were not relative. This means that their thinking skills did not affect their interest and vice versa. This

could be attributed to the student's development of thinking skills regardless of their interest in the subject. Meanwhile, despite their high interest level as manifested in the descriptive results, it was also possible that their thinking skills could be developed without referring to their interest. There might be other factors that influenced the development of each construct.

Adhering to the curriculum of the Department of Education vis-à-vis World History, both lower and higher-order thinking skills were spread across all competencies. In complying with these competencies, students need to execute the given requirements by their teachers regardless of their interests. Not to mention, one of the categories of the grading system is the performance task, which prioritizes the HOTS of the students. So, whether they are interested or not, they need to do it since this is their terminal requirement to pass (Roszkowski & Ricci, 2019). Aside from this, most students were grade-conscious, as supported by Szalai (2014). With this, students demonstrate their thinking skills for the grades.

Public school students could establish their learning interests even without the aid of their cognition. In fact, students' high interest could be ascribed to the various instructional aids like multimedia and other online resources, diverse learning activities, and a favorable environment. In support, Malysheva et al. (2022) and Petalla (2022) found that the use of technological resources is of great help in the delivery of instruction; however, it does not entirely guarantee the students' full cognitive development. It is possible that they were interested but struggled to grasp the contents of the subject matter (Renninger & Riley, 2013). Moreover, rewards are also necessary to get the students' attention to participate. Obuyes and Obuyes (2021) supported the perception that rewards were significant in developing students' interest. When there are rewards, they participate actively in class discussions (Gbollie & Keamu, 2017). Hence, this implied the establishment of the student's development of thinking skills and interest not just for rewards but for their cognition and disposition towards the subject.

The study theorized that in learning World History, students develop their level of thinking skills and degree of learning interest toward the discipline. The results showed an overall average thinking skills despite their high interest in the subject. It was assumed that as soon as the learners advance in World History, they could think critically as products of their learning and acquisition of the competencies. This is

a manifestation that their thinking skills developed conversely with their learning progress. But in this case, it did not. With this, it encouraged the school's improvement of instruction, focusing on the delivery of the content, strategies, and assessment to determine their students' thinking skills and learning interest in the subject. This also calls for further research to validate the claims of this study.

5.0. Conclusion

The average thinking skills of the public school students clearly showed that they had not sustainably engaged and exhibited the HOTS, which was supposed to be expected of them as learners of World History. The results revealed the need for constant improvement in the advancement of the instructions and effective teaching strategies in teaching World History. By giving premium to these aspects, the competencies advocated by this discipline are guaranteed along with the acquisition and development of their thinking skills. Meanwhile, the high learning interest of these students depicted their disposition to learn the subject matter. With this, it was a clear manifestation that they had the foundation to learn the subject, which the teachers must grab and consider in the successful advancement of the competencies of the Department of Education. However, despite the absence of correlation between the two constructs, this still signified the importance of maintaining their interest as the primary element for other enduring and essential discipline competencies to develop in HOTS. By putting in place all these aspects, their learning of World History relative to these two constructs was ensured. Given the results and the limitations, as well as the non-validation of the theory anchored, these implied the need to conduct further studies on these constructs to validate the claims of this study.

6.0. Limitations of the Findings

The study acknowledges limitations, including the need for more extensive research to generalize the findings to a larger student population beyond one public school. The respondent pool was restricted to post-pandemic grade 9 students, and no demographic variables were utilized. The research design relied solely on descriptive and correlational statistics, thus limiting the depth of the explanation of the results. Additionally, a researcher-made questionnaire was used, and the validity and reliability depended on question quality and response accuracy. Furthermore, test duration and the time between instruction and study implementation could influence respondents' answers.

7.0. Practical Value of the Paper

This paper is beneficial to the locale, specifically to a public school. The focus of the study, as well as the proposed output, the thinking skills and learning interest in World History, could be utilized by school administrators in improving and developing the students' thinking skills and interest. Furthermore, the findings of the study would contribute to scientific knowledge by filling in the gap in the literature.

8.0. Directions for Future Research

Given the limitations of this study, researchers may do further studies on the level of thinking skills and learning interest in World History in a public school to validate the claims of this paper. They are also encouraged to utilize qualitative or mixed-method designs to provide an in-depth understanding of the constructs. They may use extensive and varied samples, such as individuals from various academic environments, including public and private educational institutions, to support the results of this study and fill the gap in the body of literature.

9.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Additional Author's Information:

RAICHELE JOY P. MONTELIBANO
r.j.montelibano10@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2445-6606>

JOEL M. BUAL
joelmaguadual@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8734-4855>

DENNIS V. MADRIGAL
dennis_madrigal@yahoo.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5548-2682>