

Designing Technology-Enhanced Reflective History Learning for Controversial Pasts: An Initial Evaluation in Indonesian Senior High Schools

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Abstract – This study developed and conducted an initial evaluation of a technology-enhanced reflective history learning model for teaching controversial historical issues. The study employed a research and development design based on the Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE) framework. The implementation used a one-group pretest-posttest design involving 300 eleventh-grade students from six senior high schools in Indonesia. The model was implemented in four 60-minute meetings and combined digital historical resources, source analysis, perspective comparison, reflective discussion, and evidence-based historical presentations. Data were collected using five-point Likert-scale questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and paired-sample t-tests, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The results showed statistically significant increases in all indicators of critical reflection and historical thinking after implementation ($p < 0.001$). Mean differences in critical reflection ranged from 1.10 to 1.54 points, while differences in historical thinking ranged from 1.22 to 1.36 points. Classroom observations and interviews identified recurring changes in source evaluation, multiperspective interpretation, and reflective engagement.

DOI: 10.18421/SAR93-06

<https://doi.org/10.18421/SAR93-06>

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Received: 10 February 2026.

Revised: 01 September 2026.

Accepted: 08 September 2026.

Published: 27 November 2026.



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These qualitative findings supported the observed increases in questionnaire scores. The findings indicate improvements in students' critical reflection and historical thinking following the implementation of the model. However, since the study did not include a control group, the results should be interpreted as improvements following implementation rather than evidence of causal effectiveness.

Keywords – critical reflection, historical thinking, digital pedagogy, history education, controversial historical issues.

1. Introduction

History education faces significant challenges when addressing controversial historical issues, as students need opportunities to examine different interpretations of the past rather than simply memorize historical facts. Teaching topics related to conflict, colonialism, and identity requires instructional approaches that support critical analysis, respectful dialogue, and evidence-based interpretation. In this context, technology-enhanced reflective learning offers potential support by combining digital resources with structured reflection activities.

Previous studies indicate that reflective approaches can strengthen students' ability to evaluate historical narratives, while digital technologies can provide access to diverse historical sources and perspectives. However, technology alone does not guarantee deeper historical understanding; its educational value depends on how it is integrated into meaningful learning activities. Therefore, combining reflective pedagogy with digital resources may provide a useful approach for teaching controversial historical issues [1].

The primary challenge in contemporary history education lies in the disconnect between the complexity of controversial historical content and the pedagogical approaches that remain largely conventional and insufficiently contextualized.

Although digital technologies are widely available in classrooms, their usage tends to be primarily technical in nature and has not been systematically directed toward fostering critical reflection on layered and often contested historical narratives. As a result, students are inclined to absorb historical information passively, lacking deeper cognitive engagement or awareness of multiple historical perspectives. To address this issue, it is necessary to develop a technology-enhanced reflective history learning design that not only facilitates critical historical understanding but also creates dialogic spaces that are transnational and transcultural in nature. This is particularly important in the context of global education, which demands sensitivity to the diversity of collective memory [2].

Previous studies have explored various approaches to integrating reflective learning and digital technologies in history education. Reflective approaches have been shown to support students in evaluating historical narratives, examining multiple perspectives, and developing deeper historical understanding. Meanwhile, digital technologies provide opportunities to access diverse historical sources and support interactive engagement with complex historical issues. However, existing studies have often focused on specific technological applications or examined reflective learning separately from technology integration. Limited attention has been given to developing a structured instructional model that systematically combines digital resources with reflective processes for teaching controversial historical issues [3], [4], [5].

This study contributes by developing a technology-enhanced reflective history learning model that integrates digital historical resources, source analysis, perspective comparison, and reflective discussion within a structured instructional design. Unlike approaches that treat technology as a supplementary tool, this model positions digital resources as part of the learning process for analyzing and interpreting controversial historical issues [6].

This study focuses on the design and initial classroom evaluation of a technology-enhanced reflective history learning model in Indonesian senior high schools. Specifically, the study aims to develop a learning approach that integrates digital resources and reflective strategies to support students' critical reflection and historical thinking when engaging with controversial historical issues.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews relevant theoretical and empirical studies that underpin this research, particularly those related to reflective learning, history education, and the integration of technology in supporting critical reflection.

It aims to establish the conceptual framework and identify gaps addressed by the present study.

2.1. Critical Reflection in History Education

Critical reflection has become a central approach in contemporary history education, as it enables students to move beyond the mere recall of facts toward the ability to interpret, question, and evaluate historical narratives within contextual frameworks. Within the paradigm of historical thinking, critical reflection encompasses not only an understanding of what happened but also why certain events are interpreted differently by various social groups. History learning that incorporates reflection challenges students to evaluate sources, identify biases, and develop ethical awareness of the implications of the narratives they construct or inherit. This process is essential for fostering a democratic form of historical consciousness, as it equips learners with the skills to assess conflicting versions of the past [7].

Nevertheless, the literature also reveals that the implementation of critical reflection in history education often faces structural and pedagogical challenges. Many teachers report a lack of strategies or systematic instructional frameworks to guide students in engaging in meaningful reflection, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as colonialism, religious conflict, or human rights violations [8]. In such contexts, critical reflection often remains at a superficial level of discussion, without deepening students' historical understanding. Several studies further suggest that, without appropriate methodological support, reflection can devolve into a subjective activity disconnected from the analytical skills required for historical thinking [8]. Therefore, reflection in history learning has to be positioned as an integral component of instructional design, employing structured approaches supported by media that meaningfully facilitate multi-perspective exploration.

Amid the context of globalization and the increasing complexity of students' sociocultural identities, critical reflection in history education also plays a vital role in fostering multicultural awareness and historical empathy. Several studies emphasize that history is not solely studied to understand the past, but also to comprehend our current position and how we respond to the historical narratives that continue to shape society. Reflection on historiographical biases and on how historical events are retold by different groups serves to expand students' awareness of the diversity of collective memory. In this context, reflection is not only cognitive in nature but also affective and moral; students are trained to ethically position themselves in engaging with historical legacies marked by trauma or tension [9].

However, the effectiveness of critical reflection is highly dependent on how teachers design the learning process itself. Without intentional and structured pedagogical intervention, reflection may lose direction or even reinforce pre-existing biases [10]. It is therefore essential to develop instructional strategies that not only stimulate critical questioning but also provide a safe and dialogic space for students to explore diverse historical standpoints. This is where the integration of reflection into learning design becomes crucial, not merely as a didactic component, but as a transformative one. Recent research suggests that reflection facilitated through interactive or digital media can create more open, personalized, and responsive learning environments that align with students' lived experiences [10]. Hence, critical reflection should not be treated as a concluding activity in history education; rather, it has to serve as a central axis that shapes how students think, feel, and act in relation to the past [11].

2.2. Integration of Technology in Reflective History Learning

The advancement of digital technologies has opened new opportunities for designing history learning experiences that are more interactive, personalized, and multivocal. Technology is no longer merely positioned as a tool for content delivery, but rather as an epistemological medium that shapes how students access, interpret, and reconstruct historical narratives [12]. Through platforms such as virtual reality, digital storytelling, historical simulations, and international online collaboration (e.g., COIL), students are able to engage with history more deeply and from diverse cultural perspectives. Technology enables the integration of a wide array of historical sources such as textual, visual, and audiovisual, which were previously difficult to access through conventional teaching methods. In the context of reflective history learning, digital media not only broaden access to historical content but also reinforce the reflective dimension by providing spaces for exploration, narrative personalization, and direct engagement with controversial historical issues [13].

However, the adoption of technology in history education does not automatically result in reflective learning. Critical literature highlights that the use of technology without a strong pedagogical foundation risks shifting students' attention toward technical features rather than deepening critical understanding of historical content [14]. Many digital innovations emphasize visualization and entertainment but fail to create the cognitive conditions necessary for in-depth historical thinking.

Therefore, technology integration has to be embedded within an instructional design that is consciously oriented toward reflective goals such as: encouraging students to question narratives, weigh perspectives, and reflect on their own positionality in relation to the past. In this context, technology is not merely a conduit for information, but a structuring element of the learning experience that enables cognitive dissonance and reflective dialogue. In other words, the effectiveness of technology in history education depends on how it is functionally combined with pedagogical strategies that support critical reflection [15].

A growing body of empirical studies supports the potential of technology as a facilitator of critical reflection in history education. The use of digital storytelling enables students to construct alternative historical narratives from the perspectives of marginalized groups. This process not only requires an understanding of event chronology but also demands skills in interpreting historical sources, selecting meaningful representations, and formulating ethically grounded messages. In this context, digital technology functions as a reflective medium that mediates between historical knowledge and students' personal experiences. Similarly, a study by Tetsuo Isozaki [16] found that virtual reality simulations of historical events such as migration or anti-colonial resistance can evoke profound historical empathy, provided that they are accompanied by critical pedagogical facilitation rather than merely visual immersion.

Nonetheless, the primary challenge in integrating technology for reflective purposes lies in instructional design and teacher competency. Many history teachers have yet to develop the digital pedagogical skills necessary to align technology use with reflective learning objectives. Rather than guiding students' thinking processes, technology is often employed superficially as a mere variation of media use, lacking clear pedagogical direction [17]. Therefore, what is needed is a learning model that explicitly connects the use of technology with structured reflective processes, such as scaffolding reflective questioning, mapping historical perspectives, and assigning narrative reconstruction tasks. In other words, technology has to be operationalized not as a passive instrument but as an integral part of a learning ecology that fosters students' cognitive, affective, and ethical engagement in critically and contextually understanding the past **Methodology Section**

This study employed a research and development (R&D) design using the ADDIE model, which consists of Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation.

The study aimed to develop and evaluate a technology-enhanced reflective history learning model for teaching controversial historical issues. The implementation stage adopted a one-group pretest-posttest design. Therefore, the findings were interpreted as improvements after implementation rather than as evidence of causal effectiveness.

The study involved 300 eleventh-grade students from six senior high schools in six different cities, with 50 students from each school. The schools were purposively selected based on the availability of digital infrastructure, willingness to participate in pedagogical innovation, and diversity of students' social and cultural backgrounds. All participants had completed history coursework in the previous semester and participated in both the pretest-posttest.

The model was developed following the ADDIE stages. During the analysis stage, exploratory interviews with history teachers and curriculum document reviews were conducted to identify instructional needs and challenges in teaching controversial historical issues. During the design stage, the researchers developed the learning objectives, instructional procedures, reflective questions, digital learning activities, and student assignments. During the development stage, the learning model, lesson plans, digital learning materials, questionnaires, observation guidelines, and interview protocols were validated by experts in history education, instructional design, and educational technology before being revised for classroom implementation.

The model was implemented in four meetings, each lasting 60 minutes. Learning activities included introducing controversial historical issues, analyzing textbook narratives, exploring digital historical resources, comparing multiple historical perspectives, engaging in reflective discussions, constructing evidence-based historical arguments, and preparing digital historical presentations. Google Classroom was used to facilitate learning activities and access to digital historical resources.

During implementation, the teacher acted as a facilitator by introducing historical issues, guiding source analysis, encouraging reflective discussion, and providing feedback. Students analyzed historical sources, compared multiple perspectives, evaluated source credibility, developed evidence-based historical arguments, participated in reflective discussions, and presented their interpretations using digital media.

Data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires measured students' critical reflection and historical thinking using a five-point Likert scale.

Critical reflection was assessed through five indicators: identifying controversial historical issues, evaluating multiple perspectives, connecting historical narratives with social contexts, demonstrating ethical awareness, and reflecting on personal positions. Historical thinking was assessed through five indicators: analyzing primary historical sources, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing historical perspectives, constructing evidence-based arguments, and evaluating the credibility of historical narratives. The instruments were validated by experts prior to implementation.

The expert validation focused on the relevance, clarity, and suitability of the questionnaire items and learning materials for measuring students' critical reflection and historical thinking within the context of controversial history learning. Feedback obtained during the validation process was used to revise the wording of several items and improve the instructional materials before classroom implementation. The validated instruments were subsequently administered during the pretest-posttest to examine changes in students' learning outcomes following the implementation of the model.

The pretest was administered before the implementation of the learning model, while the posttest was conducted after the final meeting. Classroom observations were used to document student participation and engagement during learning, whereas interviews with teachers and students were conducted to explore their experiences and perceptions of the implementation.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired-sample t-tests, and effect size analysis to examine changes in students' critical reflection and historical thinking after implementation. Since the study did not include a control group, statistically significant differences were interpreted as improvements following implementation. Qualitative data from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis through coding and theme identification to support and explain the quantitative findings.

Permission was obtained from the participating schools, and parents or guardians were informed about the study. Students were informed about the study procedures and participated voluntarily, with the right to decline questions or withdraw without academic consequences. Confidentiality was maintained throughout data collection and reporting. As controversial historical issues were discussed, teachers established respectful discussion rules, avoided requiring personal or political disclosure, monitored students' discomfort, and allowed students to refrain from sensitive discussions.

3. Results

This section presents the key findings of the study, particularly the impact of the implemented approach on students' critical reflection ability.

3.1. Changes in Students' Critical Reflection

Table 1 presents the pretest-posttest scores for the five indicators of critical reflection. The mean scores increased across all indicators after the implementation of the technology-enhanced reflective history learning model.

The largest mean increase was found in evaluating multiple historical perspectives, with an increase of 1.54 points, from 2.68 to 4.22. This was followed by connecting historical narratives to social contexts, which increased by 1.35 points, and identifying controversial issues in history, which increased by 1.30 points. Ethical awareness increased by 1.16 points, while reflection on personal position increased by 1.10 points. Paired-sample t-tests indicated statistically significant improvements in all critical reflection indicators after the implementation of the learning model ($p < 0.001$). The magnitude of the observed changes was further examined using effect size analysis.

Table 1. Pretest-Posttest Scores on Critical Reflection

Critical Reflection Indicator	Pretest Mean $\pm$ SD	Posttest Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean Difference	df	p-value
Identifying controversial issues in history	2.75 $\pm$ 0.62	4.05 $\pm$ 0.51	1.30	299	< 0.001
Evaluating multiple historical perspectives	2.68 $\pm$ 0.58	4.22 $\pm$ 0.47	1.54	299	< 0.001
Connecting historical narratives to social contexts	2.83 $\pm$ 0.65	4.18 $\pm$ 0.49	1.35	299	< 0.001
Demonstrating ethical awareness of historical issues	2.94 $\pm$ 0.60	4.10 $\pm$ 0.52	1.16	299	< 0.001
Reflecting on personal position within historical narratives	2.95 $\pm$ 0.67	4.05 $\pm$ 0.48	1.10	299	< 0.001

Classroom observations indicated that students participated more actively in discussions of controversial historical issues by comparing different historical perspectives and supporting their interpretations with historical evidence. Interview findings further indicated that students perceived digital historical resources as useful for exploring different interpretations of historical events and participating in reflective discussions. However, as the study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, these findings should be interpreted as improvements following implementation rather than evidence that the learning model alone caused the observed changes.

3.2. Changes in Students' Historical Thinking

Table 2 presents the pretest and posttest scores for the five indicators of historical thinking. Mean scores increased across all indicators after the implementation of the learning model. The largest increase was found in evaluating the credibility of historical narratives, which increased by 1.36 points, from 2.76 to 4.12. Identifying historical cause-and-effect relationships increased by 1.26 points, while comparing multiple historical perspectives increased by 1.25 points. Constructing evidence-based historical arguments increased by 1.23 points, and analyzing primary historical sources increased by 1.22 points. Paired-sample t-tests indicated statistically significant pretest-posttest differences across all historical thinking indicators ($p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Pretest-Posttest Scores for Historical Thinking

Historical Thinking Indicator	Pretest Mean $\pm$ SD	Posttest Mean $\pm$ SD	Mean Difference	p-value
Analyzing primary historical sources	2.88 $\pm$ 0.60	4.10 $\pm$ 0.50	1.22	< 0.001
Identifying historical cause-and-effect relationships	2.79 $\pm$ 0.58	4.05 $\pm$ 0.52	1.26	< 0.001
Comparing multiple historical perspectives	2.90 $\pm$ 0.63	4.15 $\pm$ 0.48	1.25	< 0.001
Constructing evidence-based historical arguments	2.85 $\pm$ 0.66	4.08 $\pm$ 0.47	1.23	< 0.001
Evaluating the credibility of historical narratives	2.76 $\pm$ 0.59	4.12 $\pm$ 0.45	1.36	< 0.001

Classroom observations showed that students paid greater attention to the origin, authority, and possible bias of historical sources. Their assignments also showed greater use of historical evidence when comparing narratives from colonizing and colonized perspectives. Interview findings indicated that digital documents and visual historical resources helped students examine competing interpretations of historical events.

These observations provided additional insight into how students engaged with historical sources and competing interpretations during classroom activities. However, since the study employed a one-group pretest-posttest design without a control group, the findings should be interpreted as improvements following implementation rather than evidence that the learning model alone caused the observed changes.

3.3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The thematic analysis identified three recurring themes: source evaluation, multiperspective interpretation, and reflective engagement. Source evaluation was reflected in students' increased attention to the origin, credibility, and bias of historical sources. Multiperspective interpretation was reflected in their comparison of different historical narratives rather than reliance on textbook explanations alone. Reflective engagement was reflected in more active discussion of the social and ethical dimensions of controversial historical issues.

These themes complemented the quantitative findings. Source evaluation corresponded with improvements in analyzing primary sources and evaluating narrative credibility. Multiperspective interpretation corresponded with improvements in evaluating and comparing historical perspectives. Reflective engagement corresponded with improvements in identifying controversial issues, demonstrating ethical awareness, and reflecting on personal positions.

Together, these themes illustrate the learning processes through which students engaged with sources, perspectives, and reflective discussion during implementation. These findings do not establish causal effectiveness because the study did not include a control group.

4. Discussion

The findings highlight the importance of combining reflective activities with structured digital learning resources when addressing controversial historical issues in secondary education. All indicators of reflection, ranging from the ability to evaluate historical perspectives to reflecting on one's personal position within controversial narratives, showed statistically significant gains ($p < 0.001$), with mean score differences consistently exceeding 1.10 points. These quantitative results were supported by classroom observations and interview data, which indicated that students became increasingly confident in questioning dominant historical narratives, connecting the past to contemporary issues, and articulating ethically grounded and evidence-based perspectives. Critical reflection did not occur spontaneously; rather, it was intentionally cultivated through structured pedagogical interventions. These included the presentation of alternative historical media, the use of digital discussion forums, and the design of reflective tasks that challenged students' linear modes of thinking. This aligns with existing literature asserting that reflection in history education must be positioned as an active and purposeful learning process, rather than a supplementary activity.

In parallel, students' historical thinking abilities also experienced significant improvement. As shown in Figure 1, students showed progress in understanding historical causation, evaluating the credibility of narratives, and constructing arguments based on primary sources. The observed changes suggest that students benefited from opportunities to examine historical evidence, compare interpretations, and construct arguments during technology-supported activities. Qualitative data further reinforced that students' engagement in analyzing digital sources, comparing historical narratives, and constructing their own interpretations became more intense and meaningful. In this context, digital historical resources enabled students to access, compare, and discuss multiple historical sources and interpretations.

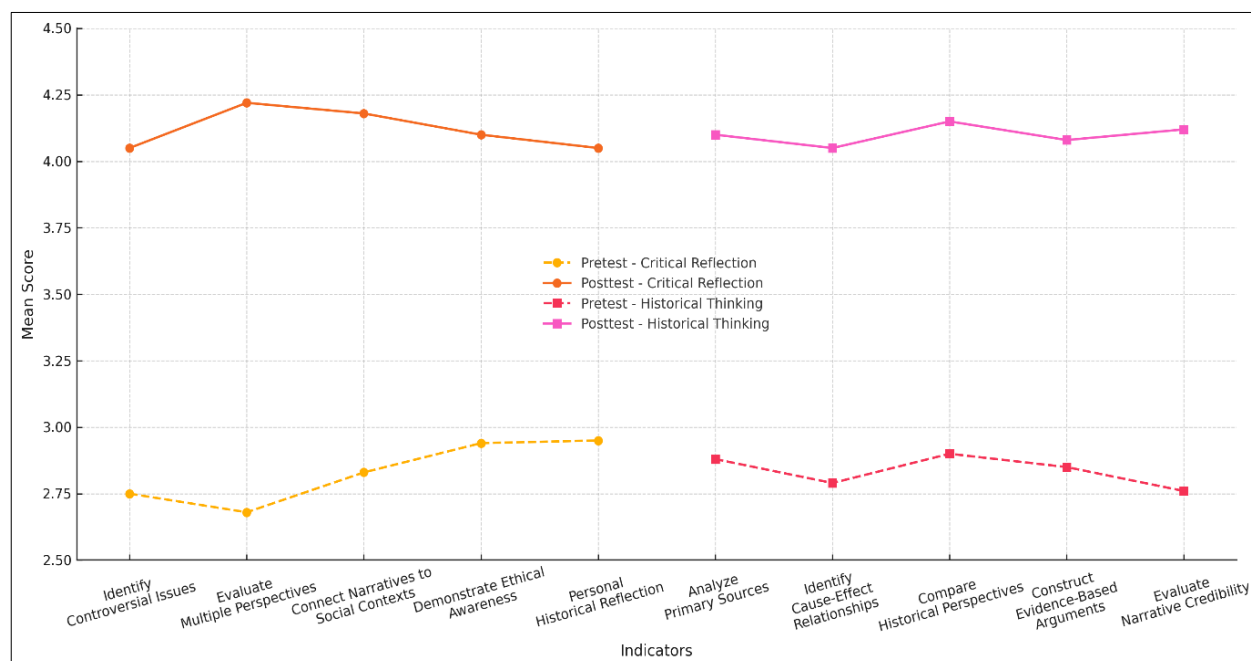


Figure 1. Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Scores on Two Key Learning Variables

These findings suggest that the combination of reflective activities and digital historical resources supported students' engagement with historical sources and interpretations. During the implementation, students actively engaged in source analysis, reflective discussion, and comparison of historical perspectives, indicating greater participation in historical inquiry. These findings are consistent with Samuelsson [18], who reported that meaningful history learning is supported by instructional activities that actively engage students in interpreting historical evidence rather than receiving historical information passively.

The improvement observed in this study suggests that integrating reflective activities with digital historical resources can support students' historical thinking and critical reflection during classroom implementation. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of reflective approaches in history education, whereas the present study illustrates how reflective activities can be implemented together with digital learning resources in classroom practice. Consistent with Lim et al. [19], digital technology supported student engagement when it was integrated with structured learning activities rather than used only as instructional media. The present study provides an example of integrating reflective learning activities with digital historical resources within a structured instructional model for history education [20].

The main contribution of this study is the development of a structured learning model that combines reflective learning with digital historical resources.

In this model, digital resources were used to support students in exploring historical sources, comparing perspectives, and discussing controversial historical issues during classroom learning. This learning sequence encouraged students to construct historical interpretations based on available evidence rather than relying solely on textbook narratives. Compared with conventional history instruction, the developed model provided more opportunities for students to analyze historical evidence and discuss alternative interpretations. These findings support previous studies that emphasize the importance of integrating appropriate learning resources into history instruction [21].

More critically, this study advances the argument that improvements in students' critical reflection and historical thinking do not emerge as automatic consequences of technological integration. Rather, such improvements are the result of an intentionally and contextually mediated instructional structure [22]. In this regard, the model developed in this research offers an important conceptual contribution: it redefines the teacher's role not merely as a technology facilitator, but as a designer of learning experiences that enable the negotiation of complex historical meanings [23]. Furthermore, by positioning students as active participants in evaluating and constructing historical narratives, the model may encourage more critical engagement with competing interpretations of the past [24].

Therefore, this study suggests that meaningful technology integration in history education depends not only on the availability of digital tools but also on the design of structured learning activities.

The developed model positions teachers as facilitators who guide students in analyzing historical evidence, comparing perspectives, and discussing controversial issues. These findings highlight the importance of reflective instructional design in supporting students' engagement with history as a subject involving multiple interpretations and perspectives [25].

5. Limitations

Despite offering significant conceptual and empirical contributions, this study acknowledges several limitations. First, the research design is based on a research and development (R&D) approach and limited implementation in six schools does not fully represent the diversity of educational contexts at national or international levels. Second, the instruments relied primarily on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or students' perceptions of teacher expectations. Furthermore, the relatively short duration of the model's implementation constrained the ability to observe long-term impacts on students' historical thinking patterns. To address these limitations, future research should adopt longitudinal designs with multiple time-point measurements and develop more authentic reflection instruments based on task performance and demonstrated competencies. Such efforts are crucial for thoroughly verifying the model's effectiveness and preparing it for wider-scale replication.

This study also opens several avenues for future research, particularly in further exploring the integration of critical reflection and educational technology within the context of global history education. Subsequent studies may expand the cultural scope and educational levels involved, including applications of the model in higher education or in local historical issues that remain politically and socially contested. Additionally, quantitative-comparative designs involving control groups could enhance the validity of findings and examine the sustainability of learning outcomes over time. Future research may also delve deeper into the affective dimensions of historical reflection, such as its influence on civic identity formation and intercultural tolerance. In this way, the present study not only enriches the discourse on critical history pedagogy but also offers a conceptual foundation for designing responsive instructional models that address the challenges of collective memory and historical disinformation in the digital age.

6. Conclusion

This study developed an ADDIE-based technology-enhanced reflective history learning model and conducted an initial classroom evaluation in Indonesian senior high schools. The findings suggest that the model provided opportunities for students to engage with historical sources, compare perspectives, and participate in reflective activities related to controversial historical issues. However, the absence of a control group limits causal interpretation. Further research with comparative designs and longer implementation periods is needed to examine the broader applicability of the model.

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