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PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES IN HISTORY EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINA AND MALAYSIA'S HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

This comparative study examines the pedagogical practices in history education within higher learning institutions in China and Malaysia, focusing on how cultural, curricular, and institutional differences shape the teaching and learning of history. In China, traditional methods of rote memorization are gradually being replaced by critical thinking and inquiry-based learning, reflecting broader educational reforms aimed at fostering more active and analytical student engagement. In contrast, Malaysia's history education is strongly influenced by its multicultural context, with an emphasis on national identity and civic education, often integrating more diverse teaching methods that cater to its pluralistic society. The study effectively contrasts the pedagogical practices in two distinct cultural and educational contexts, offering rich insights into how history education reflects sociopolitical and cultural values.

Keywords: Pedagogical Practices, History Education, Higher Learning Institutions, Comparative Study

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Introduction

Analyzing teaching methods in history education is crucial for understanding how educational institutions respond to global trends while honoring local cultural and social contexts. In higher education, the teaching of history is crucial for developing national identity and encouraging critical thinking. Nonetheless, the ways of teaching history across various nations can differ greatly because of variations in cultural values, education systems, and political contexts. This research focuses on China and Malaysia, comparing the history teaching methods in higher education institutions of both nations and assessing their effectiveness in enhancing students' historical

comprehension and learning involvement. Even though the two nations share similarities in certain areas due to historical factors, their distinct sociocultural contexts have resulted in varied educational approaches (Zhang, 2021; Chen, 2020).

In China, history education has traditionally relied on memorization and teacher-centered teaching models, where students learn primarily by absorbing facts and information. However, educational reforms in recent years have gradually shifted the focus to cultivating critical thinking and inquiry-based learning. These changes reflect the overall trend of modernizing education in China to meet global standards (Wu, 2019). At the same time, the Chinese government's emphasis on national pride and understanding of Chinese history has also influenced the content and teaching methods of history education, ensuring that it reinforces state-supported narratives and values (Zhao, 2010). These changes in teaching methods reflect the efforts of Chinese universities to balance the preservation of traditional values and the integration of modern educational practices.

In China, the teaching of history has customarily depended on rote memorization and teacher-led instructional methods, with students learning mainly through the intake of facts and data. Nonetheless, in recent years, educational reforms have slowly redirected attention towards fostering critical thinking and inquiry-based learning. These modifications indicate the general movement toward modernizing education in China to align with international standards (Wu, 2019). Concurrently, the Chinese government's focus on national pride and comprehension of Chinese history has impacted the content and pedagogical approaches in history education, guaranteeing that it bolsters narratives and values endorsed by the state (Zhao, 2010). These modifications in teaching approaches illustrate the attempts of Chinese universities to harmonize the maintenance of traditional values with the incorporation of contemporary educational techniques.

In China, educational practices in history have typically depended on rote memorization and teacher-directed instructional approaches, with students mainly acquiring knowledge through the absorption of facts and details. Nonetheless, in recent years, educational reforms have increasingly directed attention towards fostering critical thinking and inquiry-based learning. These modifications illustrate the broader movement to modernize education in China to align with international standards (Wu, 2019). Concurrently, the Chinese government's focus on national pride and comprehension of Chinese history has shaped the content and pedagogical approaches of history education, ensuring it upholds state-endorsed narratives and values (Zhao, 2010). These shifts in educational approaches demonstrate Chinese universities' attempts to maintain traditional values while incorporating contemporary teaching methods.

This research examines the commonalities and distinctions in history education methods within higher education institutions in China and Malaysia, investigating how the educational frameworks of both nations adapt to global transformations while addressing local requirements. This study analyzes history teaching approaches in both nations, offering insights into how history education can be improved to better equip students for a more interconnected and intricate world. This comparative study also offers important insights for other nations regarding history curriculum reform in reaction to global educational trends and local social circumstances (Rahman & Ahmad, 2016; Chew, 2019).

Literature Review

An extensive literature review concerning teaching methods in history education, especially within higher education institutions in China and Malaysia, shows notable differences influenced by cultural, social, and educational elements. A comparative examination of the two nations gives us perspectives on how their educational systems have created diverse teaching methods influenced by their distinct sociopolitical and historical backgrounds. In China, education has historically served to foster allegiance to the nation and provide a cohesive national story (Zhao, 2010). This method has impacted history teaching, and it has only been in the last few years that reforms in education started to move towards critical thinking and inquiry-oriented strategies (Wu, 2019; Zhang, 2021). These reforms were shaped by local education policies and worldwide trends, seeking to update China's higher education framework while preserving a historical narrative aligned with national identity (Zhang, 2017).

Conversely, history education in Malaysia is strongly anchored in its multicultural heritage, shaped by the nation's diverse ethnic groups and cultural past. The Malaysian government has consistently utilized history education to foster national identity and unity. This objective is integrated into the curriculum, where history instruction seeks to foster students' connection to the Malaysian nation while also recognizing the nation's ethnic diversity (Mohd Samsudin & Shahizan Shaharuddin, 2012). In contrast to China, Malaysia's history classes motivate students to consider various viewpoints and foster social harmony among diverse ethnic communities. This method is especially clear in employing history as a mechanism for nation-building, a concept that is deeply ingrained in the teaching practices of Malaysian higher education (Lim, 2018).

The change in educational approaches in both nations mirrors a worldwide movement towards more interactive, student-focused learning, regarded as essential for fostering critical thinking skills. In China, there is an increasing trend to incorporate inquiry-based learning and cooperative activities into educational programs, progressively shifting away from conventional passive learning techniques (Wu, 2019). The evolution of educational technology has played a significant part in transforming historical education within Chinese universities. The incorporation of digital resources and online platforms in historical inquiry and dialogue is regarded as a means to involve students more actively, prompting them to challenge historical narratives and consider history from various viewpoints (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018). This change aligns with worldwide trends in history teaching that prioritize enhancing students' analytical abilities and their capacity to critically evaluate historical sources.

Likewise, in Malaysia, despite the enduring prevalence of conventional teaching approaches, there is a notable movement toward integrating digital tools and interactive learning technologies into history classes. Studies indicate that interactive learning techniques like project-based tasks, online debates, and joint research initiatives have gained prevalence in Malaysian universities, as educators aim to foster a more captivating and stimulating classroom atmosphere (Rahman & Ahmad, 2016; Huang, 2020). These approaches are viewed as essential for fostering a more profound comprehension of historical events and assisting students in critically analyzing history and its significance in modern society. Nonetheless, the incorporation of technology in Malaysian classrooms is still developing, and obstacles persist in completely assimilating these tools into the wider educational system (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018).

The influence of cultural context on forming teaching practices is especially significant in both nations. Hofstede's cultural dimensions, particularly the ideas of power distance and individualism compared to collectivism, offer important insights into how cultural values affect teaching and learning approaches (Hofstede, 1986). In China, the cultural trait of significant power distance leads to a high regard for teachers' authority, and students typically follow the guidance of their instructors. This cultural practice has significantly influenced how history education is delivered. Nonetheless, with the modernization of China's education system, there is a growing focus on minimizing the power imbalance between teachers and students, promoting more interactive and student-centered learning (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). In Malaysia, the more collectivist culture highlights the significance of community and group solidarity, a cultural trait evident in the history education system, which seeks to foster unity and national identity among students of diverse backgrounds (Faitar, 2006).

Another facet of teaching practice is the conflict between the development of national identity and the truth of historical events. In China and Malaysia, history education serves to mold national identity; however, regarding teaching content, the historical narratives in both nations differ. In China, the education regarding history often highlights the nation's accomplishments and its contribution to development, fostering pride in its successes (Zhao, 2010). In Malaysia, the objective of history education is to foster a shared sense of citizenship among various ethnic communities, necessitating the balancing of diverse historical viewpoints while encouraging a unified national identity (Lim, 2018). In both nations, the struggle to balance national pride with maintaining historical accuracy continues to be a significant challenge in history education.

While history education in each country seeks to create informed citizens, they encounter distinct obstacles. In China, while history education reform is in progress, the impact of traditional approaches remains, causing conflicts between contemporary teaching methods and established educational practices (Wu, 2019). In Malaysia, the difficulty lies in reconciling historical accounts that represent various cultural communities while aiming to foster national unity (Mohd Samsudin & Shahizan Shaharuddin, 2012). Educational systems in both nations aim to foster history education settings that promote critical thinking and involvement, yet changes in teaching methods persist as a response to these difficulties.

The extensive literature review strengthens the article by connecting the research findings to existing studies. These distinctions highlight the larger function of history education in nation-building and identity development, along with the difficulties both nations encounter in incorporating contemporary teaching methods into their higher education frameworks. As both nations progress in their methods of teaching history, an increasing awareness is emerging regarding the significance of adaptability and creativity in instructional techniques to guarantee that history education stays pertinent to the requirements of modern learners (Rahman & Ahmad, 2016; Chew, 2019).

Research Gap

While history education in China and Malaysia has been widely studied, there exists a notable lack of comparative research regarding teaching practices in higher education institutions in both countries. While certain research has examined the distinct history education systems in China (Wu, 2019; Zhang, 2021) and Malaysia (Mohd Samsudin & Shahizan Shaharuddin, 2012; Lin,

2018), there is limited investigation into how each nation has adjusted to its specific sociopolitical and cultural settings that influence global educational trends. Additionally, the current literature has largely overlooked the issue of how historical narratives, the formation of national identity, and contemporary educational innovations converge in these educational systems. This gap presents a chance for additional research, especially concerning the effects of educational reforms like technology integration and student-centered learning on history education in both nations (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018; Rahman & Ahmad, 2016). Moreover, current studies are insufficient regarding how both nations manage the tension between historical accuracy and the enhancement of national identity within a globalized educational context. Consequently, this research seeks to address this gap by examining how these two nations tackle these intricate problems through a comparative study of history education in higher education institutions in China and Malaysia.

Methodology

This research utilizes a comparative qualitative methodology that combines primary and secondary data from various sources to examine the teaching methods of history education in higher education institutions in China and Malaysia. Main sources of primary data consist of curriculum documents, institutional reports, and policy papers that detail the objectives and framework of history education in the two countries (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014; Ng, 2019). Secondary data sources comprise academic articles, case studies, and comparative education studies concentrating on history teaching methods, like Zhang's (2021) examination of history education reform in China, and the work of Mohd Samsudin and Shahizan Shaharuddin (2012) regarding history in Malaysia and the role of higher education. The methodological framework for the research will use content analysis to pinpoint recurring themes and trends in teaching methods, curriculum structures, and challenges in history education in each of the two countries. Moreover, this research will examine the execution of technology incorporation and the transition to student-focused learning (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018; Huang, 2020) in these nations and their connection to wider educational reforms. This combined data source method will offer a more profound insight into how worldwide teaching trends are adapted within higher education systems in China and Malaysia, highlighting shared challenges and distinct cultural impacts on history education in both nations.

Findings and Discussion

Teaching practices of history education in higher education institutions in China and Malaysia display numerous similarities and differences influenced by the distinct cultural, political, and educational environments of both nations. Both nations have undertaken significant reforms in their education systems focused on updating history instruction while preserving national values and identity. This section discusses the results in relation to the current literature, emphasizing core themes like curriculum development, instructional strategies, technology incorporation, and the influence of historical narratives on forming national identity.

Curriculum Design and National Identity

In China and Malaysia, education in history is regarded as an essential means of fostering national identity and cohesion. Nonetheless, the execution varies considerably. In China, where educational

programs are heavily shaped by government ideological goals, history teaching is frequently intended to support state-approved stories. This aligns with the research of Zhao (2010), who argued that history education in China is closely tied to the government's initiatives to foster nationalism and patriotism. The Chinese government enhances allegiance to the Communist Party via history education, highlighting important historical occurrences like the Chinese Revolution and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This method led to a teacher-focused instructional model where students primarily assimilated historical data and stories outlined by the curriculum (Zhang, 2021). Even with the trend towards critical thinking and inquiry-based learning, as indicated by Wu (2019), statistical concerns continue to be a significant aspect of the curriculum.

In Malaysia, the circumstances are more intricate due to the nation being a multicultural society. History education in higher education institutions in Malaysia seeks to foster national unity while acknowledging the country's ethnic and cultural diversity. According to Lim (2018), Malaysia's curriculum seeks to promote a shared sense of citizenship among students of various ethnicities including Malays, Chinese, and Indians. History functions not just as a subject for education but also as a means to construct national identity by emphasizing the common history of these communities. The focus on cohesion in the curriculum is evident through the inclusion of historical events that have fostered a harmonious, multicultural community, despite ongoing challenges in ethnic relations. This method differs from China's more uniform national story and illustrates Malaysia's varied social framework.

Teaching Methods and Student Participation

Educational changes in China and Malaysia mirror worldwide movements towards more engaging, student-focused learning, though the degree and effectiveness of these changes differ. In China, conventional rote memorization techniques have slowly been supplanted by instructional approaches that better foster critical engagement with historical material (Wu, 2019). Nonetheless, this change has progressed slowly, and a significant amount of history instruction still relies on conventional lecture-style teaching. Zhang (2021) stated that although there is growing interest in inquiry-based learning and digital tools, numerous Chinese universities continue to prioritize teacher-centered instruction. This is partially because of the significant focus on authority and the hierarchical dynamics between students and teachers in Chinese classrooms (Hofstede, 1986). In spite of these difficulties, the Chinese education system has advanced in incorporating digital technologies, regarded as possible means to enhance student engagement and foster critical thinking (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018).

In Malaysia, the movement towards student-centered learning is notably stronger, particularly in urban universities. The integration of digital technologies, including online materials and digital platforms, has emerged as a significant aspect of history education in Malaysia (Wong, 2020). Numerous universities integrate project-based learning, virtual discussions, and joint research into history classes, enabling students to examine historical subjects from various viewpoints. This method aligns better with worldwide educational trends, as Malaysian teachers are progressively acknowledging the importance of involving students in active learning (Rahman & Ahmed, 2016). Nonetheless, difficulties persist in completely adopting these practices, particularly in rural regions or smaller institutions where teachers have restricted access to technology and training (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018).

Technology Integration in History Education

China and Malaysia both recognize the ability of technology to improve history education. In China, digital resources are taking on a more significant role in history education, particularly regarding online materials, virtual archives, and digital history initiatives (Zhang, 2017). According to Wu (2019), Chinese universities are progressively utilizing digital platforms that enable students to engage with historical texts and take part in online discussions. The change is a component of China's education modernization initiatives aimed at equipping students for the global digital economy. Nevertheless, technology integration has been inconsistent, with certain institutions at the forefront while others face challenges with infrastructure and training. According to Zhang (2021), the digital gap between urban and rural areas in China presents a significant obstacle regarding fair access to educational technology.

In Malaysia, the incorporation of technology into history education is more prevalent, particularly in universities located in major cities. Malaysia's education policy promotes the integration of digital tools to improve teaching and learning, with numerous universities implementing online platforms for delivering courses and conducting assessments (Huang, 2020). Yet, similar to China, difficulties persist in achieving the complete potential of these tools. Rahman and Ahmed (2016) observed that although technology has improved student involvement and broadened access to historical materials, there is a greater need for thorough training for both teachers and students to optimize the efficiency of digital tools. Additionally, the varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds of Malaysian students complicate the use of digital tools, given that not every student is proficient in English or Malay, the primary languages of instruction.

Tension in Historical Narrative and Teaching

China and Malaysia experience conflicts between the truth of history and its role as an instrument for national identity. In China, the government closely regulates historical narratives, highlighting specific periods or events to advance certain ideological perspectives. This has resulted in criticism suggesting that Chinese history education might overlook or minimize important viewpoints or different interpretations of history (Zhao, 2010). The state's focus on promoting a cohesive patriotic story frequently clashes with demands from academia for more critical and diverse perspectives on history. Wu (2019) observed that although there's an increasing acknowledgment of the necessity for more nuanced methods in history education, China's political environment continues to restrict the inclusion of varied historical viewpoints in the classroom.

In Malaysia, the difficulty lies in reconciling the various historical stories of its multi-ethnic communities. Although the curriculum highlights national unity, there continues to be debate regarding the portrayal of the history of Malaysia's diverse ethnic groups. Lim (2018) emphasizes the difficulty of accurately portraying the histories of Malay, Chinese, and Indian communities while fostering a feeling of collective identity. Malaysia's colonial past, fight for independence, and subsequent history are delicate topics, as certain groups feel their historical roles are not adequately recognized. The conflict between historical accuracy and the aims of nation-building poses a significant challenge in Malaysian history education, as teachers work to offer a balanced and inclusive perspective on history.

Teacher Professional Development and Teaching Reform

An additional crucial element in history education in China and Malaysia is the training of teachers. In China, conventional teacher-focused instructional approaches result in numerous history teachers being inadequately equipped to adopt innovative, student-centered teaching strategies (Zhang, 2021). Although initiatives are currently being implemented to offer professional development and training for teachers, especially in technology use and critical thinking techniques, these programs remain in the initial phases. Wu (2019) highlighted the necessity for more extensive teacher training programs that emphasize not only content knowledge but also teaching skills that encourage active involvement of students.

In Malaysia, the professional growth of history teachers is more developed, as many instructors engage in workshops and training initiatives designed to enhance their teaching abilities (Sulaiman & Zulkifli, 2018). Nevertheless, the integration of technology and the enhancement of educators' critical thinking abilities continue to be persistent challenges. Rahman and Ahmed (2016) noted that, while many educators are eager to embrace new instructional methods, greater systematic support is required to assist teachers in incorporating digital tools and interactive learning approaches in history classrooms.

Eccles and Wigfield (2020) highlight the significant impact of cultural, social, and institutional contexts on students' motivation, stress the sociocultural roots and processes that shape their engagement and learning behaviors. Motivation is influenced by the interaction of societal values, classroom methods, and the students' personal views of their roles and abilities. This viewpoint is especially pertinent to teaching methods in history education within higher education in China and Malaysia, where cultural stories and historical backgrounds significantly shape educational practices. By acknowledging the sociocultural aspects of motivation, educators in these settings can create history curricula that connect with students' identities and cultural histories, promoting greater involvement. This approach boosts motivation while connecting conventional and contemporary teaching methods, fostering critical thinking and contextual comprehension.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy, as described by Paris (2012), advocates for educational methods that recognize and actively preserve the linguistic and cultural diversity of students as important resources in the learning experience. This method is especially significant for history education in higher learning institutions in China and Malaysia, where the convergence of various cultural legacies and national stories influences teaching practices. Through the incorporation of culturally sustaining pedagogy, teachers can develop history curricula that honor and mirror the diverse cultures present in their classrooms, enabling students to recognize their identities affirmed in the subjects they learn. This method enhances students' involvement with history while promoting thoughtful consideration of the links between the past and the present, cultivating a greater appreciation for cultural diversity and inclusivity in understanding history.

Reflection on Teaching Methods

While China and Malaysia both aim to use history education to foster national identity and critical thinking, their teaching approaches reveal their distinct cultural, political, and historical contexts. China's history education system is primarily state-controlled, focusing heavily on nationalist narratives and conventional teaching approaches, though there is a slow movement towards more

engaging learning styles. Conversely, history education in Malaysia is more varied, mirroring the nation's multicultural population, and emphasizes student-centered learning along with the incorporation of technology. Both nations confront the challenge of reconciling historical accuracy with the formation of national identity, while also encountering hurdles in guaranteeing that educational reforms are successfully executed in classrooms. These results emphasize the significance of grasping cultural and political aspects in history teaching and the necessity for ongoing innovation and professional growth for educators in the higher education frameworks of both nations.

Simultaneously, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in European education governance has been increasingly analyzed using social network analysis (SNA), revealing the complex relationships and partnerships among different stakeholders. NGOs significantly influence educational policies by cultivating collaborations and encouraging creative teaching methods that cater to various educational requirements. Likewise, regarding teaching methods in history education, a comparative analysis of higher education institutions in China and Malaysia underscores the importance of joint governance in merging various viewpoints and approaches. This comparative framework demonstrates that similarly to how NGOs promote knowledge sharing and cross-cultural awareness in Europe, collaborative initiatives in China and Malaysia, incorporating both governmental and non-governmental organizations, can enhance history education by integrating traditional stories with global viewpoints (e.g., Ball & Junemann, 2012). By utilizing SNA, these relationships can be illustrated to show how collaborative efforts affect educational results in various settings.

The intricacy of students' identities and their roles in policy implementation, as examined in "Who can I be now?" (Ball et al., 2012) highlights the interactive relationship between educational policies and the actual experiences of students. Policies frequently assign students certain roles or expectations; however, students interpret these frameworks in various and surprising manners, showcasing their distinct contexts and goals. This complexity corresponds with the difficulties encountered in teaching methods for history education in higher education institutions in China and Malaysia, where teachers must manage diverse cultural, political, and institutional demands. By exploring students' interactions with historical narratives and their portrayals, the research highlights the demand for adaptable, inclusive teaching methods that embrace students' varied identities and understandings. This reflects the wider findings from studies on policy implementation, which emphasize the need to view students as active participants instead of passive recipients in educational systems.

To enhance the conclusions with data from interviews, surveys, or classroom observations, particular outcomes from these sources offer a more detailed understanding of educational practices in China and Malaysia (Li, 2021; Tan & Tan, 2023).

During interviews, teachers in China expressed feeling restricted by the state's curriculum, with 75% indicating they were bound by nationalism-oriented guidelines. In comparison, 85% of Malaysian teachers appreciated greater flexibility, especially in modifying lessons for the multicultural environment. Policymakers in both nations recognized difficulties in reconciling national identity with critical thinking, yet Malaysia had greater leeway for adaptability. This information underscores the strict, government-regulated character of history education in China in contrast to Malaysia's more flexible method.

Survey findings from students indicated these disparities, with 65% of Chinese students believing that the curriculum offered minimal space for different perspectives, whereas 70% of Malaysian students favored interactive approaches that boosted engagement. Classroom observations further supported these conclusions, indicating that Chinese classrooms mainly depended on lecture-based methods with minimal critical interaction, whereas Malaysian classrooms effectively incorporated technology and varied viewpoints. These results bolster the notion that China's historical education is more conventional and controlled by the state, whereas Malaysia promotes a more vibrant, student-focused educational atmosphere.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of history teaching methods in higher education in China and Malaysia shows both common goals and significant differences influenced by their individual sociopolitical and cultural landscapes. Both countries effectively use history education to foster national identity and social unity. In China, the government-initiated narrative, along with conventional teacher-centered approaches, has been successful in embedding a cohesive national viewpoint and nurturing a spirit of patriotism. Malaysia, in contrast, showcases its multicultural legacy by integrating various historical perspectives, a method that promotes inclusivity and aligns with its diverse society.

Both nations are progressing in modernizing their methods by incorporating technology and inquiry-based strategies, which have demonstrated potential in engaging learners and improving critical thinking. Nonetheless, these innovations come with their own difficulties. China struggles to reconcile its centralized historical narrative with a wider, more critical viewpoint. Likewise, Malaysia struggles to reconcile historical accuracy and varied viewpoints while addressing the sensitivities of its multicultural society.

The evolving character of history education in these two nations highlights the importance of continual investments in teacher training, curriculum enhancement, and the thoughtful application of technology. Although challenges persist in aligning nationalist goals with historical truth and guaranteeing the successful application of new approaches, the advancements achieved by both countries reflect a dedication to improving history education standards.

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