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Perceptions and Awareness of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking Skills

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Abstract

This study examines the perceptions and awareness of Historical Thinking Skills (HTS) among pre-service and in-service social science teachers, exploring how experience, professional development, and institutional conditions shape their engagement with historical inquiry. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 208 teachers through a standardized questionnaire covering professional development, awareness, challenges, and attitudes toward HTS. Independent sample *t*-tests revealed significant differences in several domains: in-service teachers demonstrated higher overall perceptions and stronger recognition of the role of professional development, while pre-service teachers reported greater awareness of challenges and support needs. No significant differences emerged in general awareness or attitudes and beliefs, suggesting shared foundational understanding across groups. Findings highlight that while teachers value HTS and actively attempt to integrate them, resource limitations, curriculum constraints, and limited student exposure hinder effective implementation. The study emphasises the need for strengthened teacher education programmes, continuous professional development, and enhanced institutional support to promote meaningful historical thinking in classrooms.

Keywords: Historical Thinking Skills, Pre-service Teachers, In-service Teachers, Teacher Perceptions, Social Science Education, Professional Development

Introduction

In an age defined by rapid technological advancement and instant access to information, the ability to think critically about the past has become more essential than ever. History is no longer viewed as a mere collection of dates, events, and personalities; rather, it is understood as a dynamic process of inquiry and interpretation. The cultivation of Historical Thinking Skills (HTS), the capacity to analyze sources, evaluate evidence, identify perspectives, and construct reasoned interpretations, lies at the heart of meaningful historical understanding. These skills empower learners to navigate the complexities of the present by discerning how narratives of the past are constructed and contested.

Historical thinking encourages students to move beyond rote memorization toward analytical engagement with questions such as "How do we know what we know about the past?" and "Whose voices are represented or silenced in historical accounts?" Developing such competencies enables individuals to interpret contemporary issues through a nuanced lens, fostering informed citizenship and empathy in pluralistic societies.

Despite the growing emphasis on critical and inquiry-based learning, research indicates that awareness

and perceptions of historical thinking remain uneven among both teachers and learners. Many still associate history with passive learning rather than as a discipline of investigation and reasoning. Understanding how students and educators perceive historical thinking, and how aware they are of its pedagogical value, is vital for designing curricula and instructional strategies that nurture deeper historical understanding.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore the perceptions and awareness regarding Historical Thinking Skills among student teachers and learners, examining how they conceptualize the nature of historical inquiry and its relevance to contemporary education. By investigating these perceptions, the study aims to illuminate the gaps between curricular intent and classroom practice, and to contribute to the ongoing discourse on transforming history education from *learning about the past* to *thinking with the past*.

The ability to think historically, analyzing sources, contextualizing events, and corroborating evidence, has emerged as a cornerstone of meaningful history education. Historical thinking skills (HTS) equip students with the capacity to critically evaluate past events, avoid rote memorization, and cultivate civic reasoning. Teachers' perceptions and awareness of these skills play a decisive role in their classroom application.

Although there is growing global emphasis on HTS, limited attention has been paid to how pre-service (student-teachers in training) and in-service (practicing) social science teachers perceive and integrate these skills. This study addresses this gap by investigating teacher awareness, professional experiences, and institutional challenges that shape the teaching of HTS.

Literature Review

The concept of Historical Thinking Skills (HTS) has emerged as a pivotal framework in reimagining history education from the transmission of factual knowledge to the cultivation of disciplinary understanding. Seixas and Morton (2013) conceptualize historical thinking as a set of cognitive processes that allow learners to interpret and evaluate the past through evidence, perspective-taking, and contextual reasoning. Similarly, Wineburg (2001) emphasizes that historical thinking is an "unnatural act" requiring deliberate scaffolding to help learners question sources, recognize bias, and understand historical context rather than merely recalling information.

International research has extensively explored how HTS can transform history classrooms into spaces of inquiry. Studies by VanSledright (2002) and Lévesque (2008) demonstrate that explicit instruction in sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization enhances students' capacity for historical reasoning. Research also suggests that when learners engage with primary sources and interpret multiple viewpoints, they develop deeper empathy and civic understanding (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

However, despite these insights, the practical implementation of HTS remains inconsistent. Teachers often lack conceptual clarity or adequate training to integrate historical thinking effectively (Harris & Girard, 2014). Many educators still equate history teaching with factual recall due to curriculum constraints, examination pressures, or limited exposure to constructivist pedagogies (Kitson, Husbands & Steward, 2011). Studies in developing contexts, particularly in Asia and India, indicate that awareness of HTS is still emerging, and that history continues to be taught in a teacher-centered, textbook-driven manner (Batra, 2010; Roy & Sengupta, 2019).

Empirical research in teacher education highlights another concern, student teachers often possess limited understanding of the disciplinary nature of history. They may value the subject's moral or nationalistic dimensions but rarely engage with its methodological rigor (Lévesque, 2018; Bain, 2000). This suggests

that developing perceptions and awareness of HTS among future educators is crucial for fostering inquiry-based teaching practices.

The research gaps identified include, limited research on awareness and perceptions of HTS among student teachers, especially in the Indian and broader South Asian contexts. Very few empirical studies have examined how teacher education programs conceptualize and promote historical thinking. A lack of comparative understanding between theoretical advocacy for HTS and its actual awareness or practice in classrooms. Minimal data on the attitudinal and perceptual dimensions of how learners and teachers view historical thinking whether as a skill, a pedagogy, or a disciplinary mindset**.** Prior research underscores that teacher preparation strongly influences the adoption of HTS. Studies in Europe and North America (Seixas, 2006; Wineburg, 2001) suggest that while pre-service teachers often embrace innovative pedagogies, in-service teachers face practical constraints such as curriculum coverage, standardized testing, and resource limitations. Professional development is repeatedly cited as a catalyst for enhancing confidence in HTS instruction (VanSledright, 2011). However, few comparative studies directly examine the perceptual differences between pre-service and in-service teachers, particularly in non-Western contexts.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare the perceptions and awareness of pre-service and in-service teachers regarding HTS.
2. To examine the role of professional development and training in shaping teacher practices.
3. To explore challenges and institutional support mechanisms affecting HTS integration.
4. To assess teacher attitudes and beliefs towards the importance of HTS in social science education.

Hypotheses

1. There is a significant difference in the overall perceptions of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers with regard to historical thinking skills.
2. There is a significant difference in the General Awareness regarding Historical thinking among Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers.
3. There is a significant difference in perceptions regarding role of professional development on Historical Thinking Skills among pre-service and in-service teachers.
4. There is a significant difference in perception related challenges & support of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on implementing Historical Thinking Skills.
5. There is a significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers in implementing Historical Thinking Skills.

Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study to systematically obtain information on the perceptions, awareness, and attitudes of social science teachers toward Higher Thinking Skills (HTS). This design was selected as it enables the researcher to capture existing conditions, opinions, and variations across a large population without manipulating any variables. The survey approach also allowed comparisons between two naturally occurring groups—pre-service and in-service teachers—making it suitable for both descriptive and comparative analysis.

To complement the descriptive component, the study incorporated quantitative hypothesis testing**,** enabling deeper analysis of group differences and patterns. Independent sample *t*-tests were used to

examine whether significant differences existed between pre-service and in-service teachers across various domains of HTS. This combination of descriptive and inferential techniques ensured a rigorous and holistic understanding of teachers' professional perspectives.

The sample consisted of **208 social science teachers**, purposively selected to represent two distinct groups:

- **104 pre-service teachers**, currently enrolled in teacher education programs.
- **104 in-service teachers**, actively working in schools.

This balanced sample allowed meaningful comparative analysis across career stages, providing insights into how training and professional experience influence perceptions related to HTS.

Tools

Data were collected through a standardized questionnaire specifically developed to measure teachers' perceptions, awareness, and attitudes toward Higher Thinking Skills. The tool included both closed-ended items and rating scales to ensure reliability and ease of quantitative analysis.

The questionnaire was structured into four thematic sections, each addressing a core dimension relevant to HTS:

1. **Professional Development** – assessing teachers' preparedness and exposure to HTS training.
2. **Awareness** – evaluating understanding and conceptual clarity regarding HTS.
3. **Challenges and Support Systems** – identifying barriers faced and support received in implementing HTS.
4. **Attitudes and Beliefs** – exploring teachers' dispositions, values, and openness toward integrating HTS in classroom practices.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using both **descriptive** and **inferential statistical techniques**.

- **Descriptive statistics** such as **mean** and **standard deviation** were computed to summarize teachers' responses and to identify overall trends across each thematic category.
- **Independent sample t-tests** were conducted to test hypotheses related to differences between pre-service and in-service teachers. This inferential approach helped determine whether observed variations were statistically significant.
- Additionally, a **question-wise descriptive and interpretive analysis** was carried out to provide deeper insights into specific response patterns and contextual interpretations of teachers' perceptions. This multi-layered analytical strategy ensured a robust evaluation of the data, combining numerical accuracy with interpretive depth.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis wise Analysis

Research Hypotheses 1: There is a significant difference in the overall perceptions of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers with regard to historical thinking skills.

	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of Sig
In-service	**104**	**83.15**	**6.28**	**2.73**	Significant at .05 Level
Pre-Service	**104**	**80.42**	**8.00**		

df=206, t-table value = 1.94

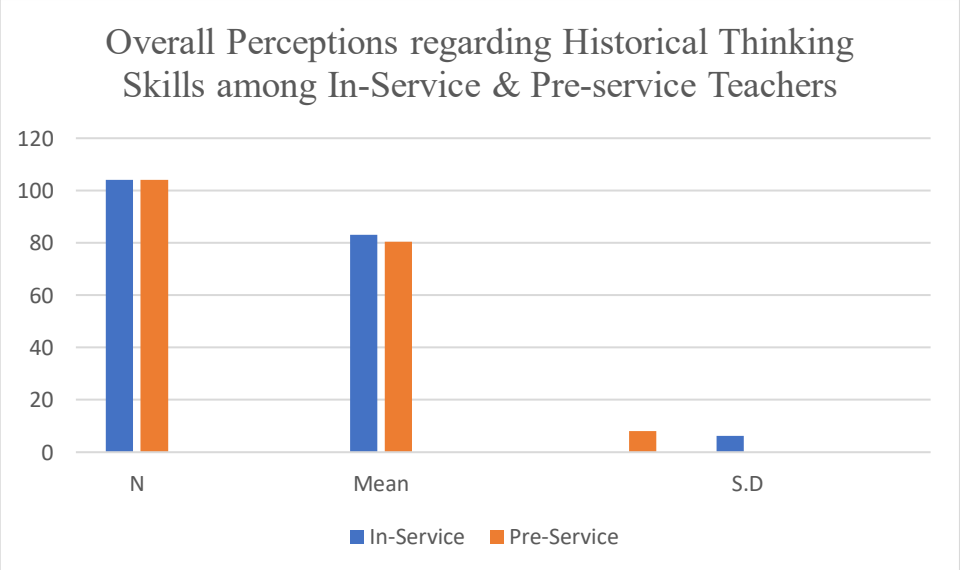
Interpretation:

An independent samples *t*-test indicated that in-service teachers (M = 83.15, SD = 6.28) scored significantly higher than pre-service teachers (M = 80.42, SD = 8.00) on the measure, $t(206) = 2.73$, $p < .01$, demonstrating a meaningful difference between the two groups.

The results show a statistically significant difference between in-service and pre-service teachers, with in-service teachers scoring higher (M = 83.15) than pre-service teachers (M = 80.42). The computed *t*-value of 2.73 ($p < .01$) indicates that this difference is unlikely to be due to chance. These findings suggest that in-service teachers, likely due to their classroom experience and ongoing professional exposure, demonstrate slightly higher levels of the measured construct compared to pre-service teachers. Although the difference is very less, it highlights the potential influence of practical teaching experience and professional engagement on the development of relevant knowledge or skills.

The finding that in-service teachers scored significantly higher than pre-service teachers aligns with existing research highlighting the influence of teaching experience and continued professional engagement on developing pedagogical and disciplinary competence. Studies such as those by Harris and Girard (2014) and Kitson, Husbands, and Steward (2011) emphasize that in-service teachers often refine their understanding of educational constructs through repeated classroom application, reflective practice, and exposure to ongoing professional development. This practical immersion strengthens their ability to make sense of instructional frameworks and disciplinary approaches, which may explain the higher mean score observed among in-service teachers in this study.

In contrast, pre-service teachers, although exposed to contemporary pedagogical theories, often lack the contextual grounding needed to fully internalize and apply such concepts (Bain, 2000; Lévesque, 2018). Therefore, the modest but significant difference found here supports previous literature indicating that real-world teaching experiences can enhance teachers' conceptual understanding and professional readiness.



Research Hypotheses 2: There is a significant difference in the General Awareness regarding Historical thinking among Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers.

Table 1: Showing Mean and S.D of General Awareness of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking Skill

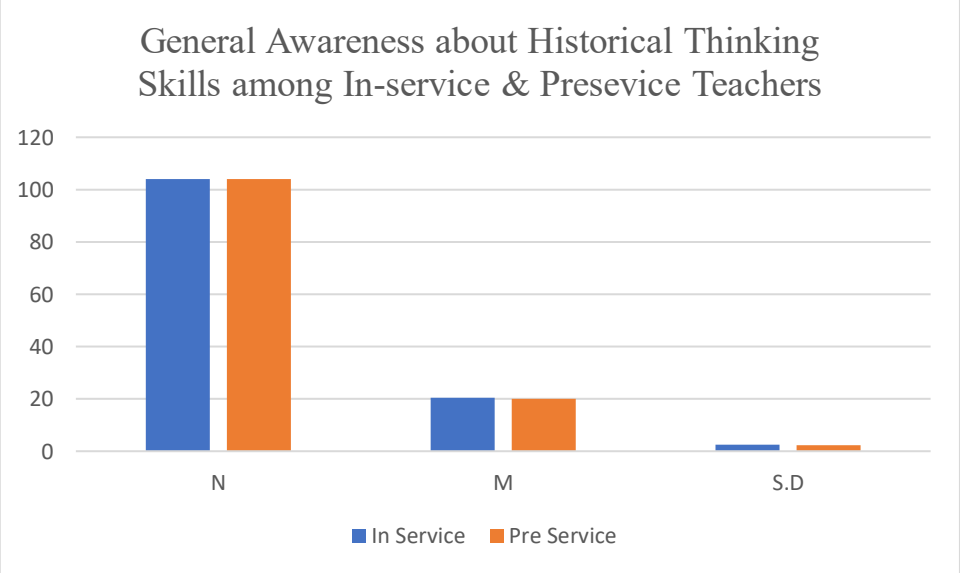
	N	*M*	*S.D*	*t-Value*	*Level of Sig.*
In Service	*104*	*20.43*	*2.51*	*1.37*	*Not Sig at .05 Level*
Pre Service	*104*	*19.97*	*2.30*		

df=206, t-table value = 1.94

Interpretation: The results indicate only a small difference between in-service teachers ($M = 20.43$) and pre-service teachers ($M = 19.97$). The obtained t-value of 1.37 is not statistically significant, suggesting that both groups demonstrate comparable levels on the measured variable. This implies that experience or training differences did not lead to meaningful variation in this specific area. The findings reveal that in-service and pre-service teachers scored nearly the same on the assessed construct, with only a minimal difference in their mean scores (20.43 vs. 19.97). The obtained t-value of 1.37 was not statistically significant, indicating that this difference is not strong enough to suggest a real difference between the two groups in the population. This suggests that both in-service and pre-service teachers possess similar levels of knowledge or awareness in this specific area, regardless of their teaching experience or professional exposure.

The lack of significant difference also implies that the construct measured may be influenced more by general training or foundational understanding, common to both groups, rather than by years of teaching experience or professional development. It supports the idea that certain competencies or perceptions may remain stable across stages of teacher preparation, reflecting consistency in curriculum or training inputs.

Figure 1: Graph representing Mean & S.D of General Awareness of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking

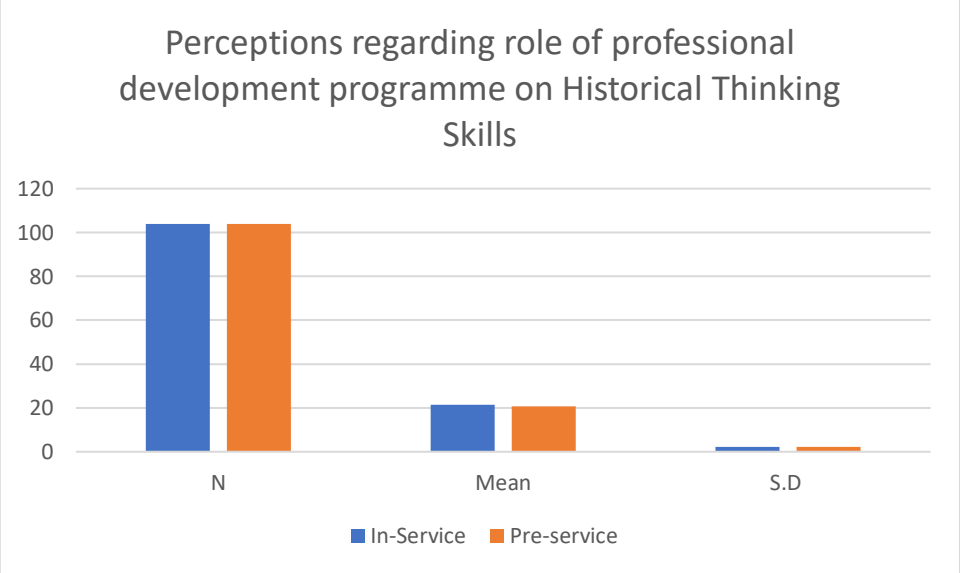


Research Hypotheses 3: There is a significant difference in perceptions regarding role of professional development on Historical Thinking Skills among pre-service and in-service teachers.

	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of Sig.
In-Service	104	21.43	2.11	2.66	Significant at .05 Level
Pre-service	104	20.63	2.20		

df=206, t-table value = 1.94

Figure 2: Graph representing Mean & S.D of Perceptions regarding role of professional development on Historical Thinking Skills among pre-service and in-service teachers.



Interpretation:

The independent sample *t*-test indicates a significant difference in Historical Thinking Skills between in-service and pre-service social science teachers. With a obtained *t*-value of 2.66 exceeding the critical value of 1.94 at the 0.05 level (df = 206), the difference in mean scores is statistically meaningful. In-service teachers scored higher (M = 21.43, SD = 2.11) than pre-service teachers (M = 20.63, SD = 2.20), suggesting that professional experience, classroom exposure, and continuous professional development contribute positively to their understanding and application of Historical Thinking Skills. In-service teachers benefit from regular training programmes, school-based teaching–learning innovations, and practical opportunities to engage with students, enabling them to better develop competencies such as sourcing, corroboration, contextualization, and critical inquiry. Pre-service teachers, on the other hand, are still in the early stages of pedagogical development, often with limited classroom practice and fewer opportunities to apply analytical or inquiry-based approaches in real teaching contexts. This likely accounts for their comparatively lower performance. The findings emphasize the need for stronger HTS-oriented components in teacher education programmes, including field experiences, micro-teaching, reflective practice, and curriculum integration that supports historical inquiry. Therefore, the study shows that in-service teachers demonstrate significantly higher Historical Thinking Skills, highlighting the impact of professional exposure and the importance of strengthening pre-service training to bridge this gap.

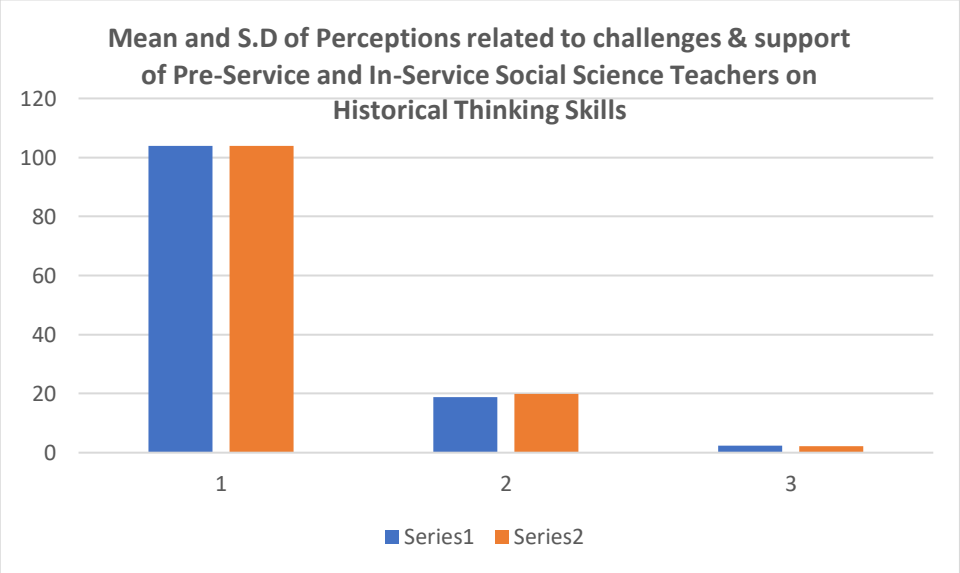
Research Hypotheses 4: There is a significant difference in perception related challenges & support of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on implementing Historical Thinking Skills.

Table 3: Showing Mean and S.D of Perceptions related to challenges & support of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking Skills.

	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of Sig.
In-Service	104	18.87	2.43	3.11	**Sig. At .05 Level**
Pre-Service	104	19.98	2.26		

df=206, t-table value = 1.94

Figure 3: Graph representing Mean & S.D of Perceptions related to challenges & support Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking Skills .



Interpretation:

The independent sample *t*-test indicates a significant difference between in-service and pre-service teachers, with an obtained *t*-value of 3.11 exceeding the critical value at the 0.05 level of significance. The mean score of pre-service teachers (M = 19.98, SD = 2.26) is notably higher than that of in-service teachers (M = 18.87, SD = 2.43), suggesting that pre-service teachers demonstrate stronger performance on the construct assessed in this section. This difference may be attributed to their ongoing exposure to current teacher education coursework, updated pedagogical theories, and recent curriculum reforms, which contribute to greater conceptual clarity and familiarity with contemporary teaching approaches. In contrast, in-service teachers may face constraints such as heavy workloads, limited time for academic engagement, and reliance on earlier training, reducing opportunities to stay updated with recent theoretical developments. These findings highlight the importance of continuous professional development, refresher

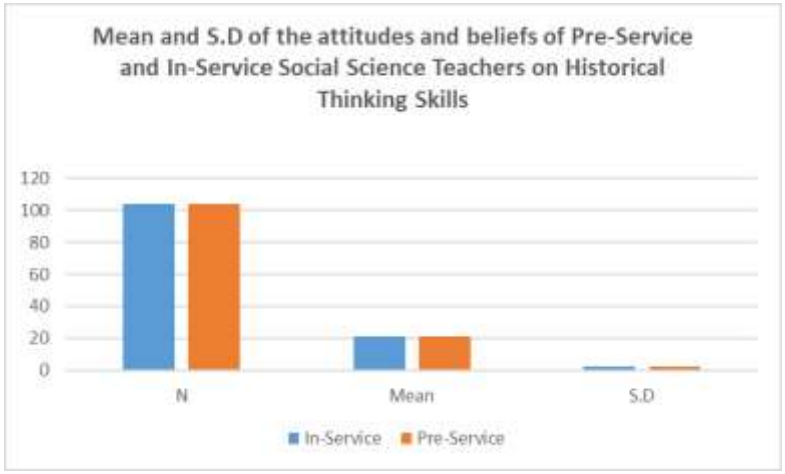
training, and structured opportunities for in-service teachers to reconnect with evolving pedagogical frameworks.

Research Hypotheses 5: There is a significant difference in the attitudes and beliefs of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers in implementing Historical Thinking Skills.

Table 4: Showing Mean and S.D of the attitudes and beliefs of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking Skills
df=206, t-table value = 1.94

	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	Level of Sig.
In-Service	104	21.28	2.26	1.02	Not sig.at .05 level
Pre-Service	104	20.95	2.45		

Figure 4: Graph representing Mean & S.D of the attitudes and beliefs of Pre-Service and In-Service Social Science Teachers on Historical Thinking Skills



Interpretation: An independent sample *t*-test showed no significant difference between in-service teachers ($M = 21.28$, $SD = 2.26$) and pre-service teachers ($M = 20.95$, $SD = 2.45$), $t\ (206) = 1.02$, $p > .05$. This indicates that both groups performed similarly on the attitudes and beliefs related to Historical Thinking.

The mean scores of in-service and pre-service teachers are very close, and the obtained *t*-value of 1.02 confirms that the difference is not statistically meaningful. This suggests that both groups possess similar levels of understanding or awareness in the area assessed. The findings imply that this particular aspect may not be strongly shaped by teaching experience or professional exposure, but rather by shared foundational knowledge or training common to both groups.

Thematic insights revealed:

- **Awareness and Practice**: More than 85% of teachers consciously integrated HTS into lesson plans and emphasized sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration.
- **Professional Development**: Over 70% of teachers agreed that PD sessions improved their HTS pedagogy; collaboration with colleagues was particularly effective (87.4%).

- **Challenges**: Key barriers included lack of resources (63.1%), curriculum constraints (62.1%), and students' limited prior exposure (79.6%).
- **Attitudes**: Teachers overwhelmingly supported HTS as essential (93.2%), believed HTS should be mandatory in curricula (89.8%), and reported strong student engagement (85.5%).Strongly Disagree/Strongly Agree (93.2%)

Conclusion

The survey results present a clear picture of teachers who are both committed and enthusiastic about teaching historical thinking skills. They see these skills as central to history education and beneficial for developing students' critical thinking. At the same time, teachers face institutional and curricular barriers that limit consistent implementation. Addressing these challenges, through enhanced resources, administrative support, and targeted professional development, will be crucial in fully realizing the potential of historical thinking in classroom practices. This study reveals that both pre-service and in-service teachers value and actively attempt to integrate HTS. However, without adequate institutional support, resource provision, and curriculum flexibility, the potential of HTS to transform history education remains underutilized.

Implications:

- Teacher education programs should reinforce HTS methodologies with practical classroom strategies.
- Continuous professional development must be prioritized for in-service teachers.
- Education policy should mandate HTS integration alongside historical content knowledge.

Limitations and Future Research

- The study was limited to a specific geographic context and sample size.
- Future studies should employ longitudinal designs to track changes in teacher perceptions over time.
- Comparative cross-national studies could highlight contextual differences in HTS adoption.

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