



Teaching history from an intercultural perspective: An action research study

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Abstract: This study explores how teaching history through an intercultural lens can foster critical thinking, empathy, and inclusion among students in increasingly diverse classrooms. Conducted in a secondary school in Zaragoza, Spain—where nearly half of the students have foreign backgrounds—the research introduces an educational unit on Ancient Rome. The unit aimed to integrate active learning methodologies with concepts of interculturality, connecting historical content with students' real-life experiences. Grounded in current educational theory and Spanish legislative frameworks (LOMCE and LOMLOE), the project designed lessons that combine traditional teaching with cooperative, game-based, and project-based learning. The approach emphasized meta-concepts like historical empathy, continuity and change, multiperspectivity, and, notably, interculturality. This last concept was key to helping students understand the complexity of past societies and their relevance to today's multicultural realities. The study involved 18 students of diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and used interviews and focus groups to evaluate outcomes. Results demonstrated that students developed a more nuanced understanding of Ancient Rome—not only as a historical civilization but also as a multicultural society. They drew parallels between Roman religious tolerance and contemporary cultural diversity, questioned social inequalities such as slavery and gender roles, and reflected on how historical narratives shape present identities. By emphasizing inclusive narratives and active participation, the teaching unit promoted historical thinking and civic engagement. The study concludes that incorporating intercultural perspectives in history education is not just a pedagogical innovation but a necessity in plural societies. It recommends that teachers adapt curricula to reflect diverse identities and equip students with the tools to critically interpret the past and actively contribute to a democratic, inclusive future.

Research Article



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Introduction

This study was designed to address the perception of an increasingly pressing need in the teaching of history in compulsory education. While this phenomenon affects the entire European Union, this study focuses specifically on Spain to illustrate the issue. In recent years, Spain's foreign-born population has increased considerably. According to the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE, 2024), 13.4% of residents in Spain hold a nationality other than Spanish and 18.06% of the population is foreign-born. On average, these residents with diverse origins are younger than those of Spanish origin (INE, 2024), as most migrate during their working-age years. In fact, over one third of infants born in Spain in 2021 had at least one foreign-born parent (INE, 2022), as they mostly belong to this age cohort. This proportion has been rising steadily since the 1990s (INE, 2024) and global socioeconomic trends suggest that this situation is unlikely to reverse in the near future.

The school population has clearly changed and despite successive laws and the Spanish Constitution itself suggesting that education should contribute to the full development of students, the discourse in history classes remains rooted in an identity-based and national approach, though with some changes (Parra-Monserrat et al., 2021; Toro-Pérez & Parra-Monserrat, 2022). Education is not only a right protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and the Spanish Constitution (1978), but it is also the first and most important safeguard against intolerance and discrimination (Louzau & Duránte, 2013). Therefore, all students must feel represented and heirs to a common past, participants in a shared present with diverse cultures and future builders of coexistence and peace.

Context

The neighbourhood of San Pablo in Zaragoza has experienced steady socioeconomic decline since the 1980s, marked by marginalisation and urban decay, further compounded by social issues like drug trafficking and poverty (ASSI, 2015). While institutions, neighbourhood associations and NGOs are working to improve the living conditions of residents, many significant challenges and problems remain despite these efforts (Zaragoza City Council, n.d.).

Since the early twenty-first century, multiculturalism in San Pablo has grown at a faster rate compared to other areas of the city, making it one of the neighbourhoods with the greatest diversity of nationalities, languages and religions (Zaragoza City Council, 2023). In socioeconomic terms, some of the streets in this neighbourhood have the lowest income per household in Aragon and an unemployment rate twice the regional average (Zaragoza City Council, 2022; INE, 2022). Moreover, health conditions commonly associated with the most vulnerable populations, such as cirrhosis and respiratory diseases, are more prevalent here than in other neighbourhoods (INE, 2022, Zaragoza City Council, 2022).

The school where the study was conducted is notable for its growing proportion of foreign students. Nearly 50% of the students do not hold Spanish nationality, and this percentage is even higher when other factors, such as place of birth or family origin, are taken into account (School's internal data, 2023). Although the school offers educational stages from early childhood education to compulsory secondary education (ESO), this study will focus on the latter stage.

Legislative Framework

This study was conducted while Organic Law 8/2013 (LOMCE) was still in force in Spain, so it was designed in accordance with its provisions. However, it is fully achievable and compatible within the framework of Organic Law 3/2020 (LOMLOE), as its core knowledge and specific competencies are addressed through the proposed learning activities. In fact, the

preamble of this second law emphasises the educational goal of promoting “active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion ... that enable the development of the values of democratic citizenship...” (LOMLOE, 2020, p. 122869), all of which align with the focus of our teaching proposal.

Theoretical Framework

Empirical research on the teaching of history inherently involves working with meta-concepts from the perspectives of authors such as Lee (2005), Levesque (2008) and Seixas and Morton (2013). Several authors and successive educational laws emphasise the development of historical thinking as one of the goals of history teaching. Certain concepts are essential to acquiring this skill, including historical significance or relevance, evidence (use of primary sources), the idea of change and continuity, causality and consequences (progress and decline), empathy and historical perspective (Paricio, 2019; Doñate & Ferrete, 2019; Miralles, 2022), the ethical dimension and historical discourses. The literature also highlights controversial issues (Stenhouse, 1987; Santiesteban & Pagès, 2019), the inclusion of gender perspective (Díez-Bedmar & Fernández-Valencia, 2019; Triviño-Cabrera, 2023; Lucas et al., 2023) or conflict and coexistence as objects of study (Sáiz-Serrano, 2013; Franco & Hernández, 2020).

History teaching goes beyond simply transmitting information; it is a crucial tool for building students’ identities. History should not only ponder how the past has shaped the present but also encourage reflection on how reality mirrors past events. This identification process is vital, as it extends beyond educational settings and is also present in family and social environments, where the origins and traditions of our closest surroundings are often known (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

This teaching and learning process faces its own challenges. The idealisation of the past and the emphasis on a collective identity can undermine objectivity and empower political or social interests that distort reality. Rosenzweig and Thelen (1998) argue that the experience of historical events and family narratives are instrumental in shaping individual identity, extending far beyond political or social changes. Lowenthal (1998) adds that family history, which people frequently idealise, constitutes a vital component of their personal identity. Therefore, history should be taught critically in schools, considering the influence of historical narratives in either reinforcing or challenging collective identities (Prats & Santacana, 2011).

Heritage also holds significant importance as it has become a symbol of national identity and a source of emotional and social conflict. Studies like those conducted by Cuenca (2023) and Marqués et al. (2020) underscore the dual nature of this dynamic, since heritage generates conflict, while also bringing communities together around shared values and the defence of traditions.

National and personal identity begins to take shape in childhood, with school environment serving as one of the earliest spaces of socialisation where these identities are introduced and reinforced (Delgado & López-Facal, 2021; Fozdar & Martin, 2021). However, this process often revolves around discourse of unity centred on patriotic ideas, frequently overlooking diversity and ethnic issues (May & Aikman, 2003). The history taught, therefore, should avoid presenting a one-sided, romanticised or heroic portrayal of the past and instead prioritise a pluralistic and critical understanding (Berger & Conrad, 2015). Similarly, research by Gómez-Carrasco and Miralles (2022) criticise the tendency of school curricula to emphasise nationalist identities, calling a shift toward approaches that are not only more inclusive but also grounded in critical thinking.

The need to adapt history teaching to multicultural contexts is becoming increasingly evident. In fact, similar challenges have already been addressed in international settings, such as the United States, where the lack of identification among Black (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020; King, 2023) and Native American students (Jacob et al., 2015) in history classes has been widely documented in the literature. The Australian curriculum faces similar problems (Fozdar & Martin, 2021). Although efforts have been made to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives, full inclusion has yet to be achieved. In the Spanish-speaking world, numerous studies have explored the relationship between history teaching and ethnic diversity in various Latin American countries (Turra-Díaz, 2022). However, although these issues are linked to cultural diversity—often shaped by identity, culture or skin colour—they concern individuals who belong to, identify with and are part of the very spaces they inhabit. Yet, despite this connection, these individuals often feel disconnected from the historical narratives they are taught in schools.

A different situation is that of first- or second-generation immigrants, who, in addition to being exposed to a history that they perceive as foreign, often experience a sense of not owning or belonging to the space where they live. Howard (2016) reflects on this topic, criticising certain attitudes among Western teachers—mostly native and white—such as their lack of interest in understanding diversity or their neutral or ‘colourblind’ approach, which ignores diversity as if it did not exist. He also advocates the design of inclusive curricula that validate all students’ stories and perspectives, as well as the establishment of authentic and respectful relationships with students. This approach encourages teachers to take responsibility for challenging their own prejudices and striving to create equitable classrooms. Hajisoteriou et al. (2023) suggest the introduction of methods that strengthen intercultural understanding and coexistence, which are essential for diverse, global societies. However, this adaptation must consider multiple perspectives and avoid oversimplifying complex concepts, offering students the tools to question and understand their place within broader historical narratives (Sáiz-Serrano & López-Facal, 2012).

Pursuing civic and democratic education involves avoiding oversimplification and distinguishing it from moral education, while also preventing indoctrination. According to Prats (1997), this education should be neutral and prioritise an understanding of how society, its institutions and laws operate. Jordán (1995) supports this view, emphasising that civic education should refrain from indoctrinating students and should be more instrumental than theoretical, especially at compulsory education levels. García-Pérez and De Alba (2008) argue that schools play a key role in addressing social coexistence issues, defining an active role for students in shaping their social future. This approach aligns with Dewey’s (1916) advocacy of ‘reflective thinking’ as a means to develop critical and active citizenship. In this context, Navarro and De Alba (2011) claim that students must be aware of their rights and responsibilities and understand their involvement in social and political initiatives.

LeCompte et al. (2011) link this skill to the development of critical thinking and suggest that schools should strive to cultivate responsible citizens who can think critically and in solidarity with others. This goal aligns with the most recent Spanish legislation (LOMCE, 2013 and LOMLOE, 2020), which connects educational quality with democracy and tolerance, aiming to eliminate all forms of discrimination as part of a comprehensive education. These laws also highlight the importance of learning to exercise one’s rights in an environment of respect and tolerance, upholding democratic values that are fundamental for coexistence in a diverse society. These guidelines are specifically implemented through the subject of geography and history, which is used to explore the relationship between past and present democracies, thereby encouraging a critical understanding of society.

Beyond legislation, Laurín (2001) and Grütter and Buchmann (2020) argue that civic education must be transformative and empower individuals to make informed decisions that respect diversity and advance social justice. In this context, Ramírez-Íñiguez (2020) highlights two key factors for educating citizens who engage with and commit to their community: interculturality, understood as a means to transform inequality within the educational system, and inclusion, which is essential for achieving quality in civic and democratic education. According to Molina-Neira (2017), civic education should also cultivate scepticism toward received information, self-criticism and empathy, all of which are key components for a democratic society.

Method

Research Method and Design

The study followed an action research design within a qualitative methodological framework, aiming to improve teaching practices while simultaneously generating knowledge through critical reflection. This approach allowed the teacher-researchers to implement a teaching unit on Ancient Rome and to explore its impact on students' historical thinking and intercultural empathy in a real educational setting. Given the diverse cultural and social background of the participating school, this method was particularly suited to adapting the intervention to the specific needs of the students and their context.

The research was structured around two main objectives. The first main objective was to implement a teaching unit with a strong focus on active methodologies in an effective manner. Within this, a specific objective was to ensure that students acquired content related to the history of Ancient Rome appropriate to their educational level. This included two further specific objectives: introducing the concept of interculturality into the study of Ancient Rome and encouraging reflection on the past and comparisons with the present, particularly by emphasising principles such as historical thinking, historical empathy and the notion of change and continuity. Another specific objective under this main goal was to evaluate the learning outcomes of the teaching unit from the students' perspective, focusing on the development of historical thinking, empathy, and understanding of change and continuity, through the use of interviews and a focus group.

The second main objective was to engage the students in the teaching and learning process from an intercultural perspective, fostering a more inclusive and reflective understanding of history. This methodological approach not only supported the assessment of educational outcomes but also promoted a deeper awareness among students of the relevance of history in diverse and contemporary societies.

The study was conducted over a three-week period, during which the teaching unit was implemented in twelve one-hour sessions. Weekly progress was aligned with the planned sequence of activities and materials—such as cooperative tasks, multimedia presentations, primary source analysis and a field trip—which were adapted as needed based on student feedback and observations.

The action research followed the classic cyclical model comprising four stages: planning, action, observation and reflection (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In the planning stage, the teaching unit was designed and aligned with research objectives. The action phase involved implementing the unit in the classroom. The observation stage consisted of data collection through student work, interviews and a focus group. Finally, in the reflection stage, data were analysed to assess the impact of the intervention and identify areas for improvement.

Population and Sample (or Study Group)

The study involved a class of 18 students selected through convenience sampling, determined by the teacher-researcher's accessibility to participants. To ensure the sample reflected the diversity of the school and its surrounding community, specific inclusion criteria were established. Participants were first-year students enrolled in compulsory secondary education (ESO) and represented a variety of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, mirroring the demographic composition of the school's overall student population -10 different nationalities, 4 different faith-based sensitivities and diverse family models-. While the convenience-based sampling approach may limit the generalisability of the results, efforts were made to mitigate this limitation by selecting a group of participants that was as representative as possible of the broader student body.

Data Collection Tools

The study employed two types of instruments: some for developing the teaching unit and others for collecting data on its implementation. The former are described in the section on the teaching proposal. For the latter, data collection involved 10 semi-structured interviews—conducted using an ad hoc script—and a focus group, both centred on the following key topics: the identification of cultural coexistence and interculturality in Ancient Rome, the development of historical empathy and the relationship between the past and the present, the perception of learning in the teaching unit and the relevance of the methodologies used.

The choice of semi-structured interviews was justified by their flexibility in gathering valid and reliable data that accurately reflect students' experiences, adapting the language and questions to each participant, ensuring clarity and facilitating a deeper understanding of the information sought (Kvale, 2023). The interviews explored topics such as cultural coexistence in Ancient Rome, respect for other religions, equality, slavery and interest in antiquity, drawing comparisons with contemporary society.

The focus group provided insights into participants' opinions on the same topics addressed in the interviews, with the added dynamic of peer interaction, sharing their impressions and experiences. The teacher-researcher acted as a moderator, guiding the discussions toward key points through questions and comments, thus grounding the conversation (Benavides-Lara et al., 2022). The purpose of the focus group was to understand reality from the perspective of participants, who recognised themselves as the object of study.

Teaching proposal

A teaching unit on Ancient Rome was designed to explore its origins, political organisation during the Roman Republic and Empire, the influence of Christianity and the Romanisation of Hispania. The unit covered the political, social, cultural and religious development of Roman civilisation.

Designed to improve historical understanding among students, the unit was implemented during the third term of the academic year under the framework of the previous educational legislation. It remains fully compatible with current legislation (LOMLOE) and aligns even more effectively with its objectives and approaches.

The unit employed a variety of teaching approaches, blending traditional lectures with active methodologies such as cooperative learning, game-based learning, and project-based learning. Sessions were structured to promote student interaction using technological resources and multimedia materials to enrich the educational experience. The teaching process began with a preliminary assessment of students' prior knowledge, followed by an

overview of Rome that included its geographical context and historical development. Subsequent sessions focused on specific topics, such as politics, society, conquests and acculturation. These sessions combined brief theoretical explanations with hands-on activities that explored the topics in detail. Examples of such activities included cooperative map-making, computer-based analyses of primary sources and research and investigation work. The unit concluded with a visit to Roman Zaragoza—including several museums and archaeological remains—to connect the content learned in class with tangible vestiges of Roman civilisation in the students' immediate surroundings.

The unit incorporated meta-concepts (or second-order concepts) to structure analysis and discussion, helping students not only learn about historical events but also to develop critical thinking skills. The concepts covered included those widely recognised in the literature, such as causality and consequences, historical empathy, change and continuity, multiperspective, historical relevance, progress and decline (Levesque, 2008; Seixas et al., 2015), the ethical dimension and the use of sources (Seixas & Morton, 2013). In addition to these, a new concept was introduced, tailored to address the students' particular needs: the intercultural dimension. This meta-concept is closely connected to the others but focuses on understanding the cultural exchanges of the past as a dynamic force that shaped change, continuity, progress and decline. It is crucial for developing historical thinking and for critically and thoughtfully interpreting the past as a means of explaining the present.

The intercultural dimension transcends merely naming or identifying cultural exchanges to force a connection with the present. This new meta-concept seeks to build a more comprehensive historical perspective, prompting a holistic understanding of the past. It triggers deeper exploration of societies, cultivating a kind of empathy that extends beyond prominent figures and dominant cultures to value the contributions of other peoples. This perspective supports a view of the past that conceives the history of groups of humans of different origins inhabiting the same planet and coexisting, interacting, forming alliances, exchanging ideas and sometimes clashing. It challenges an exclusively white and Western narrative of history, enriching it by incorporating the perspectives of the 'other' and underscoring and appreciating that, while great empires rose and fell, other peoples across the world were simultaneously developing, constructing their own identities and engaging with one another and with larger civilisations.

The assessment process was designed to be continuous, starting with the preliminary assessment, including formative assessments to monitor progress and concluding with a summative assessment at the end of the unit. The assessment instruments included rubrics for the development and final outcomes of tasks, an objective test, self- and peer-assessments and a final project. Grading criteria were based on students' participation in sessions, their performance in activities and projects and their overall development of skills and acquisition of knowledge.

Analysis of Data

Following the completion of the teaching unit, the students' outputs were collected, and both interviews and a focus group were conducted. The data were transcribed, anonymised, appropriately formatted and the recordings were deleted. The next step involved coding the data based on key areas of interest to classify it for further analysis.

Certain meta-concepts were linked to the different categories, reflecting the intended focus of the research. This operational approach established connections between references to the concepts explored by the students and the activities they had completed. This coding

phase was carried out using Nvivo v.14 software, by loading the transcribed texts and defining the categories and subcategories that had emerged during the process.

The subsequent analysis not only examined the emerging categories and subcategories but also considered the frequency of words, ideas and concepts, as well as the similarities, overlaps and differences in the students' responses.

Limitations, strategies for reliability and validity and ethical issues

This action research is subject to several limitations. The first concerns the subjectivity and bias of the researcher, who assumes a dual role as both teacher and researcher. This duality may influence how the collected data are interpreted, especially during interviews, and compromise the study's validity due to the inherent power dynamics between teacher and students (Kemmis et al., 2014). Additionally, the generalisability of the results is limited, as is often the case with qualitative studies, since they are heavily influenced by context (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004).

Reliability and validity were ensured using triangulation. Several strategies were applied for data collection—interviews with different informants and a focus group—and nod cross-referencing. To further minimise bias, external researchers unaffiliated with the school were involved in the process (Bautista, 2022). Thus, while the results remain context-dependent, the research design is adaptable to similar settings and the data collected are both valid and reliable.

Regarding ethical considerations, all results were anonymised, the recordings were deleted and informed consent was obtained from participants and their parents or legal guardians. Prior to the intervention, the project was submitted to the University of Zaragoza and the Research Ethics Committee of Aragon (CEICA).

Results

Analysis of students' contributions

The results obtained from the analysis of the interviews, the focus group and the assessment instruments reveal that the students not only acquired knowledge about Ancient Rome but also developed historical and critical thinking skills. Their ability to draw comparisons between Ancient Rome and the present, identifying similarities in areas such as cultural diversity and religious tolerance, demonstrates significant progress in their historical understanding. This analytical ability indicates that they effectively assimilated the concepts of change, continuity and causality, thereby supporting the validity of the methodologies employed: '(...) Well, yes, they discriminate in both, but in different ways. And so much time has passed. I think that given how much time has passed, we shouldn't discriminate at all, yet we continue to do so'. [E. ALU. VIII. P. 8].

The analysed data further indicate that the students developed an awareness of intercultural coexistence in Ancient Rome, particularly regarding the acceptance of various religions within its borders. They provided specific examples, such as the respect afforded to polytheistic religions and the tolerance of different cultures: 'about being allowed to continue with their religion... In general, they were allowed to, because, for example, the Egyptians continued with the religion of Ra' (E. ALU. I. P. 6 and 10). They also recognised the limits of this tolerance: 'If they were monotheists, like the Christians, they were not respected and were even killed' (E. ALU. VIII. P. 18).

Students also established connections between the intercultural practices of Ancient Rome and their own realities. Their responses included aspects related to cultural integration and inclusion policies from the past, which are opposed to their perception of the present: 'Also, as they were smart, instead of destroying cities and things, they learned from them and improved' (E. ALU. VI. P. 10). This ability to relate the past to the present shows the development of mature historical thinking that helps them draw comparisons across different periods and cultures.

Regarding equality and inequalities in the past, students voiced their understanding of the social structure in Ancient Rome, identifying inequalities, especially in terms of gender and socioeconomic status. By exploring and discovering Antiquity, they observed that some groups, such as women and slaves, were disadvantaged: 'No, there was no equality in Roman society, since no woman was an empress or a patrician...' (E. ALU. VI. P. 20); 'There was no equality because slaves were objects. They weren't considered people' (E. ALU. IV. P. 20). These statements reflect a critical view of power structures and their implications for equity.

The discussion on slavery prompted reflections on both historical and contemporary practices of oppression. By comparing slavery to modern forms of exploitation and marginalisation, students noted significant differences and alarming similarities. For example, one participant observed: 'I don't think so. There are no slaves in this generation like there were the past. Now there is a little more freedom, though there are people who work a lot' (E. ALU. I. P. 26). This perspective highlights their understanding of continuity and change in forms of exploitation over time.

Discussion

This study highlights the pressing need to teach history in a manner that values and represents cultural diversity. In this regard, Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2018) emphasise the importance of engaging students in historical events rooted in their surroundings to support meaningful learning. This approach is evident in the students' perceptions, as they drew parallels between Roman policies of coexistence and modern intercultural practices. Similarly, Massip and Pagès (2016) and Montanares et al. (2022) stress the need to humanise the history taught to promote personal identification and establish emotional and intellectual bonds with the past. Lingardi and McWilliams (2017) argue that identity formation is deeply influenced by sociocultural contexts, further emphasising the need for teaching practices that acknowledge and value the diversity of identities in the classroom. By including these approaches, the aim is not only to discover history, but also to encourage students from different backgrounds to develop a sense of belonging and inclusion.

The development of historical thinking is crucial for students who might otherwise merely receive and memorise historical information. Instead, it equips them to critically analyse these events and understand their implications for the present and future. The assessment of this teaching unit, using the instruments outlined in its design and supplemented by the interviews, suggests a high or medium-high level of acquisition, as measured by the instrument developed by Molina and Medina (2023). In line with Valle (2018), the development of historical thinking is essential to transcend educational models based exclusively on rote memorisation, cultivating instead a deep and meaningful analysis of historical events. For Santiesteban (2010), historical thinking encompasses a range of skills such as temporal awareness and the ability to critically and thoughtfully relate the past, present and future. Beyond learning about historical events, this helps students understand the processes that have shaped contemporary society and how they might influence the future.

Gómez-Carrasco et al. (2017) discuss the advantages of integrating ICTs into the teaching of social sciences, advocating more interactive and participatory learning methods. In this study, the use of technological tools provided more direct and dynamic access to historical sources and multimedia resources, allowing students to explore history more independently. This strategy is designed to stimulate inquiry and contributes to the development of historical thinking, which is indispensable for achieving a nuanced understanding of the past (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Working with sources motivates a deeper and more critical understanding of history, helping students move beyond conventional narratives and consider multiple perspectives. This skill is particularly relevant in an increasingly globalised world with an abundance of online information. The students' acquisition of these competencies was demonstrated in their discussions of controversial topics such as slavery and religious tolerance, where they displayed an ability to look beyond isolated facts or source descriptions and grasp the underlying dynamics that have influenced intercultural relations both in the past and the present.

Teaching history with a focus on civic and democratic education is key to the formation of a conscious, informed and active citizenry. For Barton and Levstik (2004), one of the primary goals of history teaching is to develop an engaged citizenry that understands and upholds democratic and civic principles. History, therefore, serves as a tool to examine the power structures and political and social relationships that have shaped the past and continue to influence the present, equipping students' to participate effectively and responsibly in society. This idea is clearly visible in participants' reflections on the values of equality and justice in Ancient Rome compared to values of today, illustrating their commitment to democratic principles and their understanding of how these ideas have evolved. In this regard, Parra (2017) and Parra et al. (2021) argue that a profound understanding of local and global history enhances students' sense of belonging and civic responsibility.

By connecting historical events to their own lives and communities, students can recognise the relevance of history through their own experiences and gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities in their surroundings. This aligns with Barton and Levstik's (2008) advocacy for teaching history from multiple standpoints to drive a more empathetic and comprehensive understanding of different cultures and societies—a crucial skill in an era characterised by diversity and global interconnectedness.

Conclusion

This research underscores the imperative of active learning methodologies in history education, not merely as an innovation but as a necessity to cultivate profound and critical understanding of the past. These methodologies develop competencies such as research, critical thinking and the ability to work with different sources, challenging the stereotypical study of history through rote memorisation. The positive response from participants revealed enhanced comprehension of complex concepts and the ability to question and reflect critically on past events. Collectively, these results suggest that history education can and should adapt to the needs and contexts of contemporary diverse student body.

The integration of an intercultural dimension enriches students' understanding of historical cultural exchanges and conflicts, highlighting their impact on contemporary societies. By approaching history from multiple points of view, learners can explore the different ways in which human societies have interacted, cooperated and clashed, which is considered key to developing a global and empathetic view of the society they inhabit. This approach not only strengthens students' connection with the knowledge and competencies

outlined in the curriculum, but also improves their ability to critically analyse how history is told and remembered. Incorporating interculturality as a meta-concept stimulates rich and varied discussions in the classroom, where students feel engaged and motivated to explore and discuss historical topics. This not only consolidates their academic learning but also prepares them to interact and coexist peacefully and effectively in multicultural settings, cultivating key skills such as empathy, respect and communication. By studying Ancient Rome from an intercultural perspective, students recognised and problematised the contributions of Roman policies toward other peoples and cultures. This showed them that history is not as a linear chronology of isolated events, but rather as an intricate network of human relations that continues to shape present-day realities. Furthermore, given the diversity of the group, this educational approach helped them feel like heirs to a history with a more globalising and inclusive outlook, in contrast to the patriotism typical of other times.

The intercultural dimension transcends mere supplementation of conventional history teaching; it constitutes a distinct approach that responds to the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student body. The effectiveness of the approach taken by this project underscores the need to rethink history education, eschewing obsolete practices to instead celebrate diversity and prioritise inclusive, critical understanding of the past. As diversity grows, further exploration and extension of these approaches are imperative to ensure history education remains accessible, relevant and enriching for all students, regardless of their particular backgrounds.

Looking ahead, history educators must continue to develop strategies that embed interculturality into teaching practices. This entails adapting their approaches and methodologies to incorporate varied historical perspectives and receiving proper training to effectively harness classroom diversity and use it as a resource for collective enrichment.

The teaching of history has long sought to assert its unique competencies, but it must adapt and become a living contextually aware discipline. As teachers, equipping students with the tools necessary to navigate and understand an interconnected and multicultural world begins with recognising, understanding and embracing its diversity.

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