



## The Basic Concepts of Historical Science: Foundations and Contemporary Applications

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### ABSTRACT

History is a branch of the social sciences that can be understood more profoundly if one follows the thought patterns of historians and comprehends the methodological principles underlying historical research. Unlike the medical profession, which requires a specific educational background, history is more inclusive and accessible. Anyone can become a historian as long as they can systematically, consistently, and responsibly apply historical methodologies. This study aims to analyze the basic concepts of historical science and their implications for history education, with a particular focus on the integration of historical methodologies into Social Studies (Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial/IPS) curricula. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach through literature review the research explores how historians' ways of thinking and methodological rigor can be applied in classroom contexts. Understanding history requires adopting multi-causal and multi-perspective approaches, in line with the complexity and scope of historical studies. For educators, particularly those with educational backgrounds, it is crucial to develop a comprehensive understanding of history's position within the broader framework of social sciences and its integration into Social Studies curricula. The findings indicate that applying historical concepts systematically not only enhances the effectiveness of history teaching but also enables teachers to deliver materials proportionally, in alignment with students' cognitive development at different educational levels.



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## INTRODUCTION

History, as a branch of social science, cannot be instantly understood due to its inherent complexity, both in its approaches and interpretations (DeLay, 2014; Ferreira et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2024). In academic practices, there is often confusion between history and related disciplines such as archaeology, philology, and anthropology. While these fields sometimes share similar empirical sources, they differ fundamentally in their objects of study and methodological approaches.

This complexity becomes even more pronounced when history is incorporated into formal education curricula (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025), requiring educators not only to master the scientific and methodological aspects but also to understand the pedagogical dimensions. In the context of Social Studies (IPS), teachers are expected to deliver historical content appropriately based on students' developmental characteristics and educational levels.

Furthermore, it is essential to differentiate between history as an academic discipline and history as instructional material. Marhumah, (2019) explains that social sciences aim to develop knowledge through scientific inquiry and research activities, while IPS focuses on achieving instructional objectives by integrating various social science disciplines into an accessible and practical format for students (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis & Abdullah, 2025). Therefore, teachers need to understand each discipline's scientific characteristics and adopt effective strategies for teaching history within IPS contexts.

A comprehensive understanding also requires examining the thoughts of prominent historians (Ercanbrack, 2024; Hasan et al., 2011), including Indonesian scholars such as Sartono Kartodirdjo and Kuntowijoyo, as well as international historians like Peter Carey and M. C (Rischard, 2025; Tiwari & Dhotrekar, 2022). Ricklefs, whose works on Indonesian history provide valuable methodological insights.

However, despite the extensive literature on historical methodology and history education, few studies have explicitly examined how the basic concepts of historical science can be systematically integrated into Social Studies (IPS) teaching. Most existing works either focus on general historiography or on pedagogical strategies without linking them to the epistemological foundations of history. This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the fundamental principles of historical science and demonstrating their relevance for history teaching in IPS contexts. By doing so, the research not only clarifies the distinctive role of history within the broader framework of social sciences but also provides practical insights for educators to improve the proportional delivery of historical content. The novelty of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the theoretical foundations of historical science with pedagogical applications, a connection that remains underexplored in the current literature.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the basic concepts of historical science, focusing on five key elements: historical events, historical sources and evidence, historical facts, historical narratives, and historical interpretations.

A library research method Fenton & Baxter, (2016) & Murphy & Dingwall, (2017) was used to collect data from relevant literature, including textbooks on historical theory, academic journal articles, Social Studies curriculum documents, and works by prominent historians such as Sartono Kartodirdjo, Kuntowijoyo, Peter Carey, and M. C. Ricklefs.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, involving categorization and thematic interpretation (Carreiras & Castro, 2012; Migdal, 2018). Historical events were examined within temporal and spatial contexts, while historical sources and evidence were classified into primary and secondary materials and assessed for authenticity (Hillman & Radel, 2018). Historical facts were selected based on validity and significance, historical narratives were constructed from available data, and interpretations were evaluated based on historians' perspectives, acknowledging diverse viewpoints on similar events. To ensure reliability and objectivity, source triangulation was employed by comparing multiple historians' accounts of the same event, while peer debriefing with two experts in history education was conducted to validate interpretations. In addition, a systematic audit trail was maintained to document decisions in source selection, coding, and thematic categorization, thereby enhancing transparency and replicability of the research process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Definitions and Perspectives on History

History has been defined in numerous ways, making it difficult to classify its meanings into fixed categories (Dong, 2024; Marino, 2024). Etymologically, the Indonesian term *sejarah* derives from the Arabic word *syajaratun*, meaning "tree," symbolizing genealogy or lineage (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023). In contrast, the Greek term *historia*—commonly used in academic discourse—refers to knowledge acquired through inquiry. Consequently, history is often understood as the systematic study of human events arranged chronologically.

Jönsson et al., (2025) & Siliuto, (2023) proposes two approaches to understanding history:

- a. History as objective reality—all events that have occurred, whether recorded or not, communicated or not, form part of history.
- b. History as intellectual activity—the reconstruction and reinterpretation of past events through scholarly analysis.

- c. This perspective places history at the intersection of human experience and its social consequences, encompassing diverse aspects from large-scale conflicts such as wars to spiritual phenomena like religion and morality.

## 2. Historical Events

From an academic perspective, not all past events are considered historical (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). Only those with significant social impact qualify as historical phenomena. To classify an event as part of history, it must be supported by authentic evidence, especially primary sources, to meet the principles of validity and objectivity.

For instance, Xu et al., (2025) & Mori et al., (2021) interprets colonialism not merely as cultural destruction but also as a process of re-civilization, where colonial powers reshaped societal structures through systemic governance and centralization. Supported by verified documents, this view illustrates how historical studies can uncover complex social dynamics shaping the present.

Similarly, Power & Baxter, (2025) describe history as a chronological discipline that interprets and gives meaning to events through systematic methods, while Tadesse et al., (2024) emphasizes that an event gains historical status only when it carries significant value for society.



## 3. Historical Sources and Evidence

Historical sources are materials used to reconstruct past events, including written documents, artifacts, and other cultural remains (Beatty et al., 2025; Tsourlaki, 2020). The historical method involves heuristics (the search for sources) and source criticism to verify authenticity and reliability.

Jan Romein classifies sources into:

- a. Direct sources (sumber cerita), including deliberately preserved records such as charters, decrees, and monuments.
- b. Indirect sources, or unintentional remains, such as:
  - 1) Human remains, fossils, and skeletal evidence
  - 2) Artifacts like tools, pottery, and currency
  - 3) Cultural residues, e.g., traces of feudalism or colonialism
  - 4) Linguistic elements, including proverbs and idioms
  - 5) Written materials like inventories, receipts, personal letters, and diaries

These historical relics, whether physical objects (Bulkeley, 2020; Ledger et al., 2025), written records, or intangible heritage, provide invaluable insights into past societies, technologies, and belief systems.

**CONCLUSION**

Understanding the basic concepts of historical science requires recognizing its multidisciplinary nature, integrating perspectives from social sciences, archaeology, anthropology, and pedagogy. History is not merely a record of the past but a dynamic intellectual process of reconstructing, interpreting, and giving meaning to human experiences. For educators, a deep understanding of historical methodology and its integration into IPS curricula is essential. Teachers must balance academic rigor with pedagogical adaptability, ensuring that history teaching remains accurate, contextual, and meaningful for learners. This study contributes to the field by clarifying how the basic concepts of historical science—events, sources, facts, narratives, and interpretations—can be systematically connected to the practice of history education within IPS curricula. By bridging theoretical historiography with practical pedagogy, the research offers a framework that helps teachers deliver history content proportionally to students' cognitive development. However, this study is limited by its reliance on library research and content analysis, without direct classroom observations or empirical testing. Future research should therefore investigate how these conceptual frameworks are applied in actual teaching contexts, including teachers' challenges and students' responses. Comparative studies across different educational levels and cultural settings would also enrich the understanding of how historical science can be effectively integrated into social studies education.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflict of interest. All procedures, data collection, analysis, and interpretations were conducted independently and objectively. There were no financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could have influenced the outcomes of this study.

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