

Toward Meaning-Making Historical Consciousness: An Analysis Sinnbildung Gen Z

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Abstract: Historical awareness is one of the fundamental objectives of history learning because it is closely related to the development of students' skills in interpreting the relationship between the past, present, and future. This study aims to analyse students' historical consciousness, based on Jörn Rüsen's theoretical framework, in response to international conflict phenomena. This study uses a qualitative research model with an instrumental case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using photo elicitation with four 12th-grade high school students from two Muhammadiyah institutions in East Jakarta. The findings will use a data analysis model based on the Values Coding model. The results of the study show that there are three variations of historical awareness: traditional-exemplary, critical-transitional, and genetic. These findings lead to the conclusion that the meaning of history is influenced by experience, values, and individuals, making Rüsen's theory quite relevant as an analytical framework for understanding the development of narratives and orientations in participants' thinking. This study implies the importance of history learning that encourages students' skills in interpreting and reflecting on various historical materials.

Keywords: historical consciousness; historical education; Jörn Rüsen

Abstrak: Kesadaran sejarah merupakan salah satu dasar dari tujuan pembelajaran sejarah karena berkaitan erat dengan pembentukan skill peserta memaknai relasi antara masa lalu, masa kini dan masa depan. Penelitian ini ditujukan menganalisis *Historical Consciousness* peserta didik berdasarkan kerangka teoritis Jörn Rüsen dalam menyikapi duna fenomena konflik Internasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan model penelitian kualitatif dengan design studi kasus instrumental. Data dikumpulkan lewat wawancara mendalam berbasis elisitasi foto terhadap empat siswa SMA Kelas 12 dari dua Perguruan Muhammadiyah di Jakarta Timur. Hasil temuan akan menggunakan model analisis data coding dengan model *Values Coding*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan terdapat variasi berbeda kesadaran sejarah, yaitu tradisional tradisional-eksemplar, transisi kritis dan genetik. Temuan ini memberikan kesimpulan bahwa pemaknaan sejarah dipengaruhi oleh pengalaman, nilai dan individu sehingga teori Rüsen cukup relevan sebagai kerangka analitis untuk memahami perkembangan narasi dan orientasi berfikir para partisipan. Penelitian ini mengimplikasikan pentingnya pembelajaran sejarah yang mendorong skill peserta didik agar dapat melakukan interpretasi dan refleksi terhadap berbagai materi sejarah.

Kata Kunci: Jörn Rüsen; kesadaran sejarah; pendidikan sejarah



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Introduction

The research topic of historical consciousness and students' temporal orientation has received significant attention in the global history education literature. Several previous studies have shown that an individual's understanding of history goes beyond memorizing past events, but rather serves as a vital tool for students to connect their experiences with present-day realities and project the future. A frequently used theoretical framework to track these dynamics is Jorn Rusen's theory of historical consciousness, which views history as the basis for narrative competence in constructing meaning (*Sinnbildung*) and practical orientation in life (Sokip et al., 2024). This is in line with the findings of Levasque & Clark (2018) who revealed that the concept of historical consciousness initiated by Jorn Rusen has a strong basis between narrative competence and students' practical orientation to form perceptions and expectations through complex interactions within individuals or students.

In discourse on issues or topics related to pedagogy, school subjects, especially history lessons, bear a very fundamental moral responsibility in linking historical narratives with contemporary reality (Wijaya et al., 2026). In the empirical, research-based dimension, several researchers have attempted to further explore the interconnectedness of time and its relationship to humans. Van Straaten et al. (2019) attempted to connect the past and the present through a comparative case study approach to explore how students use and utilize knowledge (especially historical knowledge) to orient themselves in contemporary reality (van Straaten et al., 2019). At the same time, Ammert et al. (2020) also specifically explained their efforts to investigate students' temporal orientation and moral reflection using four typologies of Jorn Rusen narratives: traditional, exemplary, critical, and genetic (Ammert et al., 2020). This is where the role of historical materials and learning plays a crucial role in fulfilling their understanding and knowledge in determining orientation and actions in social life. History education has a sacred duty to transform the raw information consumed, especially by Gen Z, into a meeting point, a learning medium, and rebuild collective consciousness to spark a noble sense of empathy, considering that global developments and AI influence the development of the current generation (Widiadi, 2025).

These three research articles demonstrate a strong foundation for the use of historical consciousness theory in history education research. However, a research gap was identified in the three previous studies. Van Straaten and Ammert's research remains fixated on historical events that have already been chronologically defined, such as the use of memories of refugees or victims of genocide during World War II. Furthermore, the methodological approach used by Ammert et al. (2020) to stimulate student responses still relies on rigid and conventional texts. Meanwhile, Levasque & Clark (2018) acknowledge that the current dominant historical framework is often criticized for failing to provide sufficient consideration of positionality, identity dynamics, and the intellectual condition of subjects when confronted with history.

The connection between general understanding of geopolitics and the formation of Gen Z's identity as individuals or students will be the main focus in modern history education going forward (Hajisoteriou et al., 2024). Based on these findings, this article offers a novelty to fill the gaps in previous studies or findings. First, instead of placing past events as the main object of study, this study uses ongoing contemporary events or phenomena as the medium and main object of studying historical consciousness. Second, to address criticisms about the limited space for the subject, this article positions individuals by combining Rusen's narrative typology and Freire's levels of consciousness to sharply reveal how the subject (namely students) positions memory and perception. Finally, this study presents a methodological innovation by using photo elicitation techniques as a visual stimulus medium inherent in digital culture and information processing of Gen Z, especially students in grade 12, as an alternative instrument

besides conventional text to explore the depth of perception and historical consciousness that Gen Z have (Gala, 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to analyse students' historical consciousness—based on Jörn Rüsen's theoretical framework—in response to international conflict.. In addition to offering ideas and innovations in research around historical consciousness, this study has a pressing urgency amidst the flood of fragmented information from online and social media, especially highlighting major events such as geopolitical crises that are viewed by Gen Z, especially 12th grade students. Understanding how students construct memory constructions and initial perceptions is crucial to avoid shallow and naive historical understandings. Theoretically, this article will contribute significantly to expanding the discourse on historical consciousness by crossing Freire's critical pedagogy with historical objects that are still ongoing and unfinished. It is hoped that these findings can provide in-depth insights for educators or history researchers about the importance of bringing contemporary issues into the classroom or active dialogue so that history does not stop as a science of the past. Methodologically, the use of photo elicitation is expected to enrich the treasure trove of valid and rich qualitative data collection on the characteristics of subjects who are digital natives (Burgos-Videla et al., 2025).

Research Methods

This research adopts a qualitative research design with an approach model of Study Case Instrumental to explore in depth how the subjects in this study, namely students, responded to each topic of discussion during the research (Robert, 1995). Conceptually, this study uses 2 main theories as research analysis tools, the first is the theory *Pedagogy Critical* Paulo Freire and the second one was *Historical Consciousness* Jörn Rüsen. This research will explicitly focus on the initial stages of the second phase of the theory, namely historical memory and the forms of consciousness within the subjects. Through this perspective, the researcher seeks to describe the articulation of critical consciousness emerging from the research subjects, regardless of the sociological or environmental factors of the informants (Oranga & Matere, 2023).

This study uses a model sampling technique *Purposive Sampling* This study involved four key informants who were students from two different educational ecosystems but with the same label or roots: Muhammadiyah 11 High School Rawamangun and Muhammadiyah 23 High School Duren Sawit, East Jakarta (Tajik et al., 2024). The purpose of this research location was to determine whether there were differences in perspectives in responding to topics surrounding the global constellation, starting from knowledge to the learning environment. The involvement of these four informants also allowed for a representation of the number and majors available at each of these universities.

This research used in-depth interview techniques to collect primary data. in depth interview and integrated with visual elicitation method based on photographic media or used to call photo elicitation (Shaw, 2021). The use of this visual stimulation aspect is intended as a catalyst to trigger and elicit the subject's reaction from historical memory (stage of experience) as initial step also serves to stimulate the subjects' reasoning skills, as they often struggle to respond to purely verbal questioning (Xu et al., 2025). The interview process also utilizes specific devices, such as noise-cancelling audio capture devices, during data collection. The use of this specific device is crucial for achieving optimal and pure audio capture, free from external noise, and enabling the verbatim transcription process to capture the emotions, pauses, and emphasis of each informant's attitude in its entirety.

The data analysis process in this article specifically applies a coding model (coding) primary stage atau first cycle code (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis focuses on extracting

subject narratives and affective indicator patterns to map each individual's cognitive experience (Value Coding). This step was taken to maintain the purity of the subject's voice in interpreting international geopolitical phenomena before the data was further abstracted to the stages of the interpretation process to orientation in the research cycle.

Research Result

Historical Narrative Construction of the Phenomenon of Military Aggression (Russia–Ukraine and Israel–Palestine)

This study used two main topics as a mapping of the Experience stage (knowledge, memory, and facts) to understand the origin and background of the subject regarding two key phenomena, namely Israel's military aggression against Palestine and Russia's against Ukraine. This process began by conducting in-depth interviews using open-ended question models to obtain deep data and findings from all four participants. Next, to deepen the intent, meaning, and purpose of each interview transcript excerpt or dialogue with participants, First Cycle Coding was carried out to show that the subjects' memory is not neutral but varied and highly dependent on how they traced and understood the topic. This is particularly relevant regarding history lessons, including the social and educational ecosystem they learn daily.

All participants were asked to describe and narrate the history they knew descriptively, particularly how each phenomenon or conflict first started and progressed. Based on the results of repeated observation, reading, and analysis. The coding results show that two participants experienced a kind of indication of memory fragmentation, namely a condition in which their historical memory appeared vague, biased, and not meaningful when facing historical causality based on simple questions. Meanwhile, one participant tended to be more critical and able to narrate every question, and one last participant demonstrated high performance in constructing narratives, responding to questions, and taking a clear and critical stance.

The disparity in mastery of the material, topic, and narratives can be seen in each of the following interview transcript excerpts.

Table 1. Transcript Interview about Topic Israel - Palestine

Topic Israel - Palestine	
Main Question: "What do you know? Can you explain a <i>short history</i> about this topic?"	
Participant	"The war continues without end."
N-N-F	"In my understanding, the news and other social media platforms at school are constantly connected, and the root of the problem is now emerging. I don't know the root cause, but I'm more aware of the current situation."
Participant	"At that time, I also read that the two sides (Israel and Palestine) had been at war for a long time. Initially, it was small, spreading to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and recently, it has begun to escalate. They (Israel) have begun carrying out military aggression to occupy several areas, and they (Palestine) have also started using missiles and bombarding Israel. This also triggered public outcry when the hashtags "All Eyes on Rafah" and "All Eyes on Palestine" rose, and that's what prompted (the source) to check social media."
Participant	"I know, but I don't understand the details or the root cause."
F-C	"As far as I know, the essence of the war. Because the real origin, as far as I know, was that they were originally one region. Then they differentiated between the Arabs as Palestine, and the Jews as Israel. So, these differing views have been going on from the beginning. And this has been going on for centuries, maybe 100 years."

Participant V-N	"Regarding the issue of Israel and Palestine, Israel actually exists because of the teachings of Theodor Herzl called Zionism. This teaching emphasized that the Jewish people must create a Jewish state for their own people. However, this teaching was actually opposed by the Jews themselves. However, due to World War II and the storm of persecution, many Jews exodus, fleeing Europe and forced to live in Palestine. Because of the influx of so many, the seeds of nationalism that the Zionist group had been waiting for finally began to grow and sparked a national movement within Israel at that time."
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Source: Research Data, 2026

Based on these findings, the researcher conducted a further breakdown using a coding process or First Cycle Coding, capturing significant patterns related to how the phenomenon of geopolitical crisis is embedded in the participants' memory or understanding. When asked to provide a short history of the origins, the first two of the four informants gave responses that were quite different from the two others. The first two participants (Participants N-N-F and M-A-N) showed that their understanding of the Palestine-Israel conflict was drawn more from exposure to actual information than from a holistic understanding, including literary, historical, or rooted in the underlying causes of the issue. Although the narrative of participant N-N-F differed from that of participant M-A-N, both exhibited a similar pattern of relying on external formal texts as their primary source of information about the conflict or topic.

Then, according to Rusen's perspective, memory is a process in which someone links or connects the past to reality to build an understanding of an event. In both participants, memory of the Palestine-Israel conflict showed a relatively similar pattern, namely being shaped more by exposure to contemporary information than by a fundamental and in-depth understanding of the context of the crisis. Explicitly, participant N-N-F admitted that they had limited knowledge, with most information obtained through social media, while participant M-A-N showed some effort to understand through reading and following developments through digital media. Neither participant showed significant use of historical material to identify a historical chronology of the phenomenon. Within the framework of historical consciousness, Rüsen refers to this condition as Present Experience, an orientation based on present-day experience as the basic frame of reference (Haapala, 2024). This later had an impact on history not yet being fully used as an interpretive framework to explain the situation that occurred and tending to be fragmentary.

Then, the last two participants (Participants F-C and V-N) repeated the pattern from Values Coding. Both showed a similar pattern of knowledge affirming that the Palestine-Israel event or conflict has deeper roots and a historical background, and therefore cannot be understood merely as a contemporary event. Although the depth of the narratives presented differed considerably from that of the previous participants, the two also displayed a fairly significant difference between each other. For instance, participant F-C viewed the conflict as a prolonged crisis, stating that both sides had been in conflict for a very long period and estimating the chronological basis of the phenomenon occurred around 100 years ago. Meanwhile, participant V-N provided a much more systematic and dense explanation, mentioning the Zionist movement, the figure of Theodor Herzl, the experience of Jewish persecution in Europe, and the events of World War II, which were considered to play a major role in the emergence of the Palestine-Israel conflict. This validates that the participants held an equally important belief regarding the historical dimension as a fundamental basis for understanding the conflict, even though the two of them had quite different levels of literacy.

These findings also indicate the use of memory in Rüsen's perspective, where the last two participants had moved beyond an understanding limited to the orientation of current events. Participants F-C and V-N demonstrated that their memory connectivity linked historical events into causal relationships, enabling them to explain the dynamics of the conflict. Therefore, they used historical memory as an orientational framework for understanding present-day reality, although there was a difference in quality in how each of them formed this historical orientation. This difference also indicates that the experience of acquiring historical knowledge, or Historical Experience, plays an active role for individuals in constructing historical memory and using it as a basis for interpreting ongoing events or conflicts.

The next section continues the topic, shifting to the following phenomenon: the Russia-Ukraine Aggression in February 2022:

Table 2. Transcript Interview about Topic Rusia - Ukraine

Topic Rusia - Ukraine	
Main Question: "What do you know? and can you explain a <i>short history</i> about this topic?"	
Participant N-N-F	"War"
	"Both countries are at war and seem to want to colonize each other."
Participant M-A-N	"I know about Ukraine, there's a war going on with Russia."
	"It was 2022, and I've forgotten a bit, so it's still a bit hazy and I don't really know."
Participant F-C	"I don't know the details yet, but I mean, what I mean by the peak of the past is that they started the war in 2014. Then it peaked between 2022 and 2023. Then they fought over each other's territory."
Participant V-N	"As far as I know, both sides (Ukraine and Russia) were part of the same country, the Soviet Union. But after its dissolution, they eventually split apart. Especially during the time of the Ukrainian president before this—I forget his name. Many said he was like Putin's dog. And why the war? Because the president is no longer Moscow's or Putin's dog. Now, he's led by Zelensky, who is much more stubborn, so Russia chose to initiate the attack."

Source: Research Data, 2026

In this session, the topic shifts from the previously popular phenomenon among the Indonesian public (the Palestine-Israel conflict), to a less popular phenomenon (Russia-Ukraine conflict). This difference in topic also revealed a fairly striking variation in responses, particularly regarding the depth of the narratives conveyed by the participants. Among the first two participants (Participants N-N-F and M-A-N), a fairly brief and relatively limited explanation was found regarding the chronological account or origins of why Ukraine and Russia became involved in conflict as fellow former Soviet states. Participant N-N-F, for instance, described the situation as "both wanted to colonize each other," without providing further explanation regarding the historical background or the factors triggering the conflict. Although the statement that both sides wanted to seize control of each other's territory is valid, this made it difficult to determine what the two countries actually intended to do, based on participant N-N-F's explanation. Participant M-A-N also initially stated that they knew what was happening, but when asked to explain in more detail or depth, was only able to recall the year the conflict occurred (around 2022) and forgot the details.

Based on the Values Coding process, findings and conclusions indicated that the narratives provided by participants N-N-F and M-A-N reflected a foundation of understanding and knowledge that was not very deep, with the majority leaning more toward Event Recognition rather than a full understanding of the historical background of the conflict. The

memory and experience possessed by the first two participants tended to be limited to recognizing the war or crisis as a contemporary event. Therefore, the narratives produced and constructed by both had not yet moved toward explaining the chronological process. The underlying factors or a more contextual narrative had not been activated at all.

Next, participants F-C and V-N narrated considerably more weight and actively provided explanations on the topic or phenomenon of Ukraine-Russia. Participant F-C, for example, stated that the war that broke out in 2022 was part of a series of conflicts that had been ongoing since 2014 (Gardner, 2016). Therefore, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was understood as an escalation of a historical process that had occurred previously. Furthermore, participant V-N also explained the conflict by linking the historical and cultural relationship between Russia and Ukraine as part of the former Soviet Union. This was followed by an explanation of the strong relationship between Ukraine's domestic political dynamics, the shifting orientations of the Kyiv government, and the diminishing role and influence of Russia in Ukraine.

Based on Values Coding, the narrative findings indicate a more advanced orientation of knowledge to connect various events and historical contexts in explaining the conflict occurring between Ukraine and Russia. From Rösen's perspective, this also indicates that the memory and experience possessed by these last two participants are broader. It also enables the construction of a historical understanding to be more concrete, contextual, and coherent as a basis for understanding and unpacking the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Both showed a tendency to understand the conflict as a historical process, not merely as an event that emerged in 2022.

Photo Elicitation and Visual Meaning

In this sub-section, the research analyzes findings based on the Photo Elicitation technique used in the study to explore how visual stimulation influences participants' historical narratives or understanding (Zhang & Hennebry-Leung, 2023). Unlike the previous session, which relied on individual memory and knowledge, the use of photographs in this research method is intended to activate participants' memory, experience, and the associations of meaning regarding the two topics or phenomena. Each individual's responses not only reflected their ability to recall a story or historical event, but also revealed how each participant constructed and developed historical meaning after interacting with the visual display (Copes et al., 2018).



Figure 1. Several Images Used for the Photo Elicitation Method

Source: Research Data, 2026

Next, to assess and observe how the four participants responded, Table 3 shows interview excerpts responding to the two photographs during the dialogue session:

Table 3. Transcript Interview about Topic Palestine - Israel

Topic Palestine - Israel	
Main Question: "What do you think about this photo (<i>photo of Adolf Hitler's quotes</i>)? How does it relate to the topic we're discussing?"	
Participant N-N-F	"I don't know" "I'm confused"
Participant M-A-N	"At the time, I also thought that person was a backward race. I don't know why he said that, but the important thing is that he hated Jews to the point of building concentration camps. There was also something like the Holocaust, the mass slaughter of Jewish Israelis."
Participant F-C	"In my opinion, her words are more of an affirmation, so she knows what she thinks is true or not."
Participant V-N	"I think it has something to do with Jews in Israel"
	"Invalid" "For me, right now, I don't have any negative sentiments toward Jews. And that makes this quote actually inaccurate. In reality, not many Jews, nor all Jews, are disgusting. Not all Jews are cruel. Not all Jews are Zionists; in fact, many are willing to live in friendship and coexist with other communities (Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims, and others). And we can't generalize about an ethnic group, right? So, it sounds flawed to me. It sounds funny."

Source: Research Data, 2026

The first photo depicted a popular quote attributed to Adolf Hitler, widely circulated in Indonesia. The first two participants (Participants N-N-F and M-A-N) reacted to the quote as this visual stimulus quite differently. The first participant, for instance, appeared confused when trying to give an answer or explanation about the photo or quote. This was different from the second participant, who attempted to respond that they did not yet fully understand the reasoning behind the statement shown in the photo. Nevertheless, the second participant was still able to make connections to several historical references, such as the concept of concentration camps, and even mentioned the Holocaust (Port, 2017). Therefore, an initial conclusion can be drawn that the visual stimulation succeeded for one of these first two participants in triggering an association with a historical event already known to them, though it had not yet developed into a complete and substantive explanation.

Using Values Coding, the responses of participants N-N-F and M-A-N showed that the process of understanding the photo or visual was still at the stage of recognizing symbols and historical events previously learned. The aspects of Belief and Value that emerged had not yet developed into a deeper assessment or interpretation of the historical message contained in the quote. Based on Rüsen's perspective, the reaction to the visual stimulus was still limited to recalling a particular figure or event. Meanwhile, the historical experience they possessed was not yet sufficient to construct a more mature narrative.

The discussion continues with participants F-C and V-N, who showed different abilities in constructing meaning and narrative from the visual stimulus. Participant F-C interpreted the quote as reflecting a firm stance or attitude on the part of Adolf Hitler, relating it to the participant's own belief about which side was considered right and which was considered wrong. Furthermore, the participant connected the quote to the history of the Jewish people, linking it to the present-day context of Israel. On the other hand, participant V-N gave a response that stood in fairly sharp contrast to the other three participants by rejecting the validity of the quote (Nilsson, 2019). In their understanding, the argumentation was weak because it

generalized the Jewish group or community. Participant V-N emphasized that no sentiment was held against Jewish people, but also rejected the use of such generalization to justify various sentiments or actions directed at a particular group.

The results of the subsequent Values Coding show that the responses of the last two participants (F-C and V-N) not only reflect their ability to connect visual stimulation with each individual's historical knowledge, but also reveal an orientation of Values and Attitudes in evaluating historical information. Participant F-C, for example, constructed meaning through the relationships between figures, events, and groups involved in history, while participant V-N carried out a more critical evaluation process by daring to assess the substance of the argument contained in the quote without generalizing the identity of an ethnic group or community. Using Rösen's framework, both participants' narratives show a more adequate memory and Experience. This also enabled them not merely to recognize history as symbol, but to use it as a basis for interpretation and assessment of the historical representation displayed through a photograph. These findings also indicate that the activation of memory through visual stimulation can produce differing levels of meaning-making, determined by the breadth of experience and understanding held by each participant.

Tabel 4. Transcript Interview Topik Ukraine - Rusia

Topik Ukraine - Rusia	
Main Question: "What do you think about this photo (<i>the Special Military Operation meme photo</i>)? How does it relate to the topic we're discussing?"	
Participant N-N-F	"War" "This isn't true. They're at war, not Russia as a military nation (military operations)."
Participant M-A-N	"You know, this is probably another name for war, right? So, since I know about this war, I think it's funny. but I understand the context."
Participant F-C	"In my opinion, this is indeed a war, sir." "Because when they go to war, we are also affected, right?"
Participant V-N	"In my opinion, this is normal, especially for a <i>Superpower</i> country. You see, America often does things like this. For example, in Vietnam, they never officially called it a war. Instead, they called it a special operation or something like that."

Source: Research Data, 2026

The last photo concerned the meme referencing the term "Special Military Operation," a term that became quite popular when Russia's military aggression was launched against Ukraine in 2022. This meme was used to elicit responses and narratives, beginning with the first two participants (Participants N-N-F and M-A-N), who tended to reject or negate the claim embedded in the photo. Participant N-N-F openly stated that they rejected the framing of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as merely a military operation, and that this was in fact a form of war. Meanwhile, participant M-A-N was already familiar with this "funny" term and responded to it as another form of war in itself. There was even a tendency toward political humor that seemed to draw the second participant's interest. However, when asked to explain further the concrete reasoning behind the use of this term, informant M-A-N admitted to not yet understanding the context underlying the event. These findings indicate that both participants were able to recognize a distinct term often used to disguise the true underlying intent, but had not yet developed a significant understanding of its meaning or historical background.

Based on the results of Values Coding, the responses of participants N-N-F and M-A-N showed a fairly clear belief that this conflict is more appropriately understood as a war rather than merely a military operation. However, this belief had not yet been supported by strong and comprehensive argumentation, particularly in terms of historical explanation in the political, social, or conflict-specific context. Viewed through Rüsen's framework, the visual stimulation succeeded in activating memory regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but the historical experience remained limited to an initial recognition of the event and the popular term. As a result, the narrative presented had not yet moved toward a contextual historical explanation or a deeper understanding of the meaning of the term.

Next, participants F-C and V-N showed more developed responses when reacting to this visual stimulus or photo. Participant F-C firmly stated that the Russia-Ukraine conflict constitutes a war, then explained that one indication of this is that the impact of the conflict is felt by other regions or countries. In their understanding, war does not stop at affecting only the parties directly involved in the conflict, but also carries consequences for the wider region or the international community (Hazer & Gredebäck, 2023). On the other hand, participant V-N interpreted the use of the term "Special Military Operation" as a normal and common practice among superpowers or great powers to justify their military actions. Participant V-N drew a comparison between the events involving Russia and Ukraine and the actions of the United States in Vietnam. The participant used this as an example of how large and powerful nations tend to avoid using official terminology to build political legitimacy for their actions (Kolmašová & Kolmaš, 2026).

The results of Values Coding show that the responses of participants F-C and V-N did not merely reflect a belief regarding the status of the Russia-Ukraine conflict as a war, but also demonstrated an ability to form judgments through historical experience and comparisons between events. Participant F-C developed meaning based on the consequences of the war, while participant V-N showed a reflective orientation through comparison with the historical experience of other countries as reflected in the political terminology used for the unilateral military actions of their respective states. Based on Rüsen's perspective, both participants demonstrated a more adequate historical memory, one that allowed them to connect their experience with contemporary phenomena. Therefore, the photo not only triggered a process of recollection but also encouraged the formation of a more contextual historical meaning, particularly regarding the phenomenon of Russia and Ukraine (Olmo-Extremiera et al., 2024).

Typology of Consciousness and Critical Reasoning in Subjects' Responses to Conflict

After translating all the findings and analyzing the data, the next step is the process of examining the data using two foundational frameworks from the study: a) Historical Consciousness by Jörn Rüsen, and b) Critical Pedagogy by Paulo Freire. In Historical Consciousness, Rüsen introduces a narrative diagram concept (Narrative Typology) to identify the orientation and meaning behind each dialogue or narrative constructed by individuals on how they treat their historical memory or knowledge. Below is a table showing the stages of narrative according to Jörn Rüsen (Rüsen, 2005).

Table 5. Rüsen's Typology of Historical Narratives

Narrative Type	Memory of	Continuity as	Identity by	Sense of Time
Traditional narrative	origins constituting present forms of life	permanence of originally constituted forms of life	affirming pregiven cultural patterns of self-understanding	time gains the sense of eternity

Exemplary narrative	cases demonstrating applications of general rules of conduct	validity of rules covering temporally different systems of life	generalizing experiences of time to rules of conduct	time gains the sense of spacial extension
Critical narrative	deviations problematizing present form of life	alteration of given ideas of continuity	denying given patterns of identity	time gains the sense of being an object of judgment
Genetical narrative	transformations of alien forms of life into proper ones	development in which forms of life change in order to establish their permanence dynamically	mediating permanence and change to a process of self-definition	time gains the sense of temporalization

Source: Adapted from Rüsen (1987)

Using the table 5 above as the basis for measurement, table 6 shows participant code names, findings from sub-sections 1 and 2, the characteristics of narrative typology, followed by interpretation:

Tabel 6. Typology History Narrative

Code	Indicator (Sub-topic 1 & 2)	Characteristic	Interpretation
N-N-F	Explaining the phenomenon simply, confusion regarding visual stimulation, mentioning the term (Special Military Operation) as a single event or war	Traditional	Provides a brief and descriptive explanation, oriented towards recognizing events or facts without connecting to the historical context.
M-A-N	Recognizing all topics or conflicts and mentioning certain events (Holocaust), mentioning the term (Special Military Operation) as a “pseudonym for war”, there is no historical explanation	Traditional => Exemplar	Starting to connect historical experiences as the basis for narrative, but still in episodic form and not yet developed into a complete explanation
F-C	Linking factual events with chronology (2014-2022), linking Hitler's quotes to the Jews, explaining war from the perspective of its impact on society or other countries.	Exemplar => Critical	The narrative that emerges shows the ability to use historical knowledge and experience to explain topics or phenomena and to dare to interpret the meaning of a historical event.
V-N	Rejecting generalizations and sentiments, comparing two events (Russia and the US) as historical events,	Genetic	Narratives are contextual and often comparative, capable of bridging various

connecting the conflict to
history (Russia-Ukraine)

experiences across
space and time to
evaluate phenomena
reflectively.

Source: Research Data, 2026

Overall, the combined findings from sub-sections 1 and 2 reveal variation in the quality of narrative held by each participant. This variation is not limited to the ability to explain the origins of the conflict in each of the two events, but can also be observed in how participants responded, particularly during the Photo Elicitation, in connecting their experiences and then forming judgments about the issue. From Rüsen's perspective, this difference shows that each participant possesses a distinct orientation of historical thinking, ranging from a purely descriptive form to one capable of building a narrative bridge regarding historical change more reflectively and contextually.

These findings also reinforce the argument that a broadening and developing tendency is found in the quality of historical narrative constructed by participants. This corresponds to a parallel development in their ability to connect experience to present-day issues, particularly explanations grounded in historical understanding. Therefore, Rüsen's narrative typology not only helps the study identify the narrative characteristics of each participant, but also provides a picture of the various orientations of historical thinking that emerged during the interview process. These findings further strengthen the theoretical foundation that the process of historical meaning-making (Sinnbildung), previously analyzed through the tracing of memory and experience, results in differing narrative orientations. It is determined by the breadth of experience and historical knowledge, particularly the ability to connect context, including participants' reflection in making sense of each topic.

Next is Paulo Freire's *Conscientização*, which classifies consciousness into 3 stages: Magical, Naïve, and Critical Consciousness (Freire, 2005), as shown in the following figure:

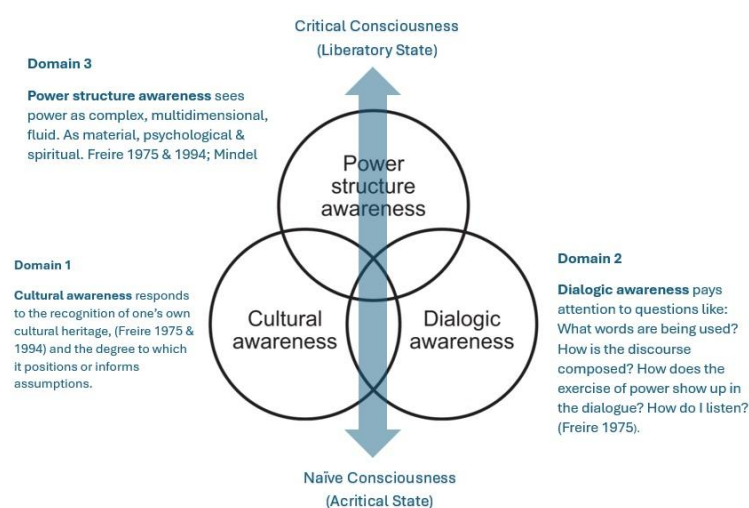


Figure 2. Freire's Levels of Consciousness Diagram
Source: Adapted from Roche (2024)

To simplify the explanation and continue from the previous discussion, Table 6 provides measurements and categories of each participant according to the type of consciousness they exhibit:

Tabel 7. Freire's Characteristics of Consciousness All Participants

Kode	Indication
N-N-F	Consciousness that leads to recognition of facts and events without detailed or in-depth reflection (<i>Naïve Consciousness</i>)
M-A-N	There is a pattern of reflective consciousness through historical experience, but it is not yet possible to connect the structure or connection completely. (<i>Naïve Consciousness</i>)
F-C	Demonstrate development towards critical consciousness through the ability to explain the relationship between history and phenomena. (<i>Semi Critical Consciousness</i>)
V-N	Demonstrates the characteristics of strong arguments through reflection, evaluation and understanding of issues as part of a dynamic historical process. (<i>Critical Consciousness</i>)

Source: Research Data, 2026

Table 7 illustrates that the quality of participants' narratives developed in stages, starting from narratives still based on factual recognition, up to narratives capable of reflectively connecting various historical contexts. From the perspective of Freire's *Conscientização*, this development in narrative typology tends to align with an increase in the quality of participants' critical consciousness. Historical narrative no longer functions merely as a process of recalling the past, but develops into an instrument for building a more critical understanding of social reality. In this study, the complexity of historical narrative typology is proportionate to the tendency of participants to display characteristics of critical consciousness, such as historical experience, evaluation of arguments, avoidance of generalization, and situating contemporary conflict within a broader historical context. All of these findings mutually reinforce one another, showing that Rüsen's typology concept and Freire's *Conscientização* concept can be understood as two complementary frameworks that together provide a roadmap and a measure of the quality of participants' understanding (Takona, 2025).

Conclusion

This study shows that the historical awareness of the participants, who are students at each school, does not move evenly or similarly. Instead, there are variations in thinking orientations that can be understood through Rusen's typology of historical awareness. The four informants showed quite different tendencies in creating meaning about the past, ranging from traditional, exemplary, to genetically critical. This variation also indicates that the ability to understand historical facts or events is not determined by mastery of information, but there are also individual aspects that play a role in connecting experiences with values, identities, or principles held regarding the present and future. Therefore, understanding history cannot be reduced merely to the activity of remembering facts or chronology, but the process of understanding history is a process of forming meaning influenced by experience, reflection, and the ability to interpret social reality.

The findings of this study also show us that participants can demonstrate varying levels of rational complexity when confronted with historical phenomena that possess different characteristics or emotional affinity. These differences in their understanding of phenomena reaffirm that historical awareness is dynamic and influenced by individuals' interpretations of their experiences within their own frameworks of thought. Therefore, Rusen's narrative typology concept cannot simply be a classification tool but serves an analytical function to further understand the development of participants' ways of thinking. This also reinforces the fundamental view that history education needs to embrace and provide space for interpretive, dialogical, and reflective activities so that students can develop a more complex thinking

orientation to understand the relationship between the past, present, and future, rather than simply reproducing history.

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