

Reconstructing History Learning Through the 1968 South Blitar Event: Integrating Silenced Narratives into High School Classrooms

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Abstract. The exclusion of local historical events from formal curricula has fragmented students' understanding of the past. One such event, the 1968 South Blitar incident closely linked to the 1965 political turmoil remains absent from classroom discourse despite its regional significance. This study aims to reconstruct high school history learning by identifying pedagogical needs for integrating this local event into instructional materials. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from six history teachers through interviews and 118 students through questionnaires, complemented by classroom observations and document analysis in public high schools across Blitar Regency. Findings reveal a substantial gap between the national curriculum and students' lived historical context. Teachers and students expressed the need for materials that reflect local experiences, encourage critical engagement, and include marginalized narratives. Incorporating the 1968 South Blitar event into digital history resources can enhance historical literacy and democratize historical knowledge among high school learners.

Keywords: History Learning, Local History, 1968 South Blitar, Needs Analysis, Digital Textbook.

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, societies around the world have witnessed a growing concern over the diminishing awareness of local historical consciousness among younger generations. In the era of globalization and digital culture, historical narratives are increasingly shaped by global media and dominant national discourses, often marginalizing local events and lived experiences (Carretero, Berger, & Grever, 2017). This disconnect has contributed to a fragmented understanding of the past, where students fail to relate history to their own sociocultural contexts (Lévesque, 2020). In Indonesia, such marginalization is evident in how the 1968 South Blitar incident an event intertwined with the aftermath of the 1965 political violence has been largely excluded from classroom instruction.

In secondary education, history learning is still predominantly textbook-driven, offering linear and state-centered narratives that prioritize memorization over critical thinking (Sarkar, 2021; Claravall, E. B., & Irey, R. 2022). Students are often exposed to officially sanctioned content that overlooks controversial, complex, or locally significant episodes (Zajda, J. 2015; Herrera, L. J. P. (2025). This pedagogical approach has raised concerns not only about the effectiveness of history instruction, but also its role in fostering civic engagement, historical empathy, and reflective thinking (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Barton & Avery, 2016). The absence of localized and contextual content limits students' ability to connect personal and collective memory to academic learning.

Internationally, similar patterns can be observed. In South Africa, the overemphasis on Eurocentric and apartheid-era narratives in school curricula has led to student disconnection from indigenous and community histories (Saurombe, N. 2018; Veit, A. 2022). In Japan, school history textbooks tend to minimize contentious wartime actions, creating a sanitized version of the past that discourages inquiry (Sato, M. 2015; Lee, J. F. 2014). Meanwhile, in the United States, debates over race, slavery, and indigenous experiences continue to challenge educators to balance national narratives with historically silenced perspectives (Brown, A. L., & Au, W. (2014). These global phenomena demonstrate the need to reimagine history education by incorporating local voices, marginalized stories, and region-specific events into classroom materials.

Recent studies advocate for the integration of local history and community memory into formal history education as a means of promoting deeper engagement and critical historical consciousness

(Agostini et.al, 2002; Pattuelli, M. C. 2008). In the Indonesian context, research by Rahmawati, et, al (2020) highlights that students respond more actively to history content that reflects their immediate environment, cultural identity, and family memory. Furthermore, the use of digital media has been shown to enhance accessibility and interactivity in historical learning, especially among high school students (Suryani, 2016).

However, there remains a lack of structured effort to incorporate significant yet silenced local events such as the 1968 South Blitar incident into school-based historical instruction. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the pedagogical needs of teachers and students in reconstructing history learning that includes the South Blitar event. The research specifically aims to explore how digital textbooks can serve as a medium for integrating marginalized narratives into high school history classrooms. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a more inclusive, critical, and locally relevant approach to history learning that aligns with the lived realities of students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the pedagogical needs of history teachers and students in integrating local historical events specifically the 1968 South Blitar incident into high school history learning. The research focused on senior high schools (SMA) in Blitar Regency, East Java, Indonesia, with data collection conducted in five selected public high schools: SMAN 1 Kesamben, SMAN 1 Garum, SMAN 1 Sutojayan, SMAN 1 Srengat, and SMAN 1 Ponggok. The research subjects consisted of two groups: history teachers and twelfth-grade students. A total of six history teachers were purposively selected for in-depth interviews, based on their teaching experience and involvement in local history instruction. Meanwhile, a sample of 118 students from grade XII participated by responding to structured questionnaires designed to capture their perceptions, interests, and learning needs related to local history content.

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, questionnaire distribution, classroom observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with teachers to explore their instructional practices, challenges, and perspectives on incorporating marginalized historical narratives. The student questionnaires combined closed and open-ended questions to gather both quantitative trends and qualitative insights. Observations of classroom practices were carried out to identify the extent to which local history was being taught or omitted. In addition, relevant curriculum documents, textbooks, and instructional materials were analyzed to assess the representation of local historical events, particularly the 1968 South Blitar incident. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, needs, and gaps in history learning. The combination of teacher and student data allowed for a triangulated understanding of the current practices and potential interventions for reconstructing history learning in a more inclusive and localized manner.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

1.1 Results

The findings of this study indicate that history learning in public senior high schools across Blitar Regency remains dominated by conventional instructional practices, particularly the extensive reliance on government-issued textbooks and printed worksheets (*Lembar Kerja Siswa*). Based on in-depth interviews with six history teachers, it became evident that teachers frequently use textbooks as the primary and sometimes sole source of historical content. These resources, while standardized, are limited in their ability to present complex, contextual, and localized historical narratives. Teachers acknowledged that textbook-based teaching offers a straightforward path for curriculum delivery but fails to foster critical thinking or engagement with students' local historical environments. One teacher noted that "*the book guides the entire session*," suggesting a highly structured, text-driven pedagogy that leaves little room for supplementary materials or alternative interpretations.

This dependency on standardized textbooks is mirrored in the perceptions of students, as captured through questionnaire responses from 118 twelfth-grade learners. A majority of the students (56.1%) agreed that textbooks were the primary learning resource used in class, while 71.4% of the interviewed teachers confirmed that they use textbooks and LKS in almost every history lesson.

These findings highlight the rigid, top-down nature of history instruction in the studied schools, where both teachers and students engage with materials that largely exclude regionally significant events. Students reported that while the textbooks do provide summaries of major national events, the narratives often lack depth and context, especially concerning the post-1965 political period.

Crucially, both teachers and students expressed that the 1968 South Blitar incident a pivotal local event linked to the anti-communist purges during the New Order regime is entirely absent from the curriculum. This omission was viewed as a significant gap in historical instruction. Students described the textbooks as generic and inadequate in explaining the socio-political complexities of local experiences. Some students emphasized the need for richer content, with one stating: *“The textbook only contains summaries. It doesn’t go into the details of what actually happened in our region. We need more complete materials.”* Similar concerns were raised regarding the coverage of the New Order era, which many students felt was delivered in overly generalized terms, lacking any reference to Blitar or its historical role in that period.

The data further show that there is strong support for the development of digital learning materials that can supplement and, in some cases, replace existing print-based resources. All six teachers strongly agreed that digital textbooks should be developed to enhance students’ access to alternative narratives and foster engagement with historical learning. Among the students, 60.8% agreed with the idea, citing the flexibility, accessibility, and potential interactivity of digital materials. A recurring theme in the students’ responses was the desire for a more engaging and interactive learning environment that goes beyond memorizing timelines and events. Digital textbooks, particularly those incorporating images, videos, and historical evidence from local sources, were seen as vital tools in modernizing history education and making it more meaningful.

The perception that textbooks were insufficiently detailed was shared by 42.9% of teachers and an equal percentage of students, both of whom agreed that textbooks lacked sufficient information about local historical events. Although a portion of the teachers believed that textbooks were generally complete, many acknowledged that these materials should be supplemented with more regionally relevant content. The absence of the 1968 South Blitar event was seen as emblematic of broader curricular gaps, reflecting a centralization of historical narratives that marginalize local memory and identity. Students also emphasized the importance of simple and accessible language in digital textbooks. Many respondents expressed difficulty in understanding long, abstract texts and preferred materials that were concise, visually rich, and organized clearly. One student explained that *“reading long academic texts makes history boring; it’s better to have short explanations, visuals, and videos.”* This preference aligns with 71.4% of teachers and 64.9% of students who stated that digital textbooks should be written in a simple, user-friendly manner.

In addition to language accessibility, students and teachers agreed on the necessity of visual support, including images of historical figures, places, and documents relevant to the 1968 South Blitar incident. Approximately 92% of students and 71.4% of teachers favored the integration of visuals to reinforce learning. Similar support was recorded for the inclusion of video content, with 71.4% of teachers and 54.7% of students indicating that videos could enhance comprehension and interest in the subject. Furthermore, the idea of embedding local historical events into a digital textbook received overwhelming support. Among students, 92.5% either agreed or strongly agreed that a textbook focusing on events in their immediate environment would make history more relatable and engaging. Teachers echoed this sentiment, with 85.7% expressing strong support. One student summarized the potential of local history integration by saying, *“If we study what happened here, where we live, it feels more real. It connects us with the past in a personal way.”* The inclusion of the 1968 South Blitar incident was seen not only as a way to address curricular gaps but also to deepen students’ historical empathy and civic awareness.

Lastly, students voiced enthusiasm for interactive features within digital textbooks. These include gamified learning tools, audio narration, clickable maps, and integrated timelines. The goal is to transform history learning from a passive activity into an exploratory and reflective process. In line with this, both teachers and students emphasized the value of designing digital textbooks that are attractive, interactive, and accessible on multiple devices. Overall, the findings demonstrate a clear need to reconstruct history learning by developing digital textbooks that incorporate silenced local narratives, particularly the 1968 South Blitar incident. Such resources should be interactive, visually

engaging, and written in accessible language, aligning with the learning preferences of today's students. More importantly, they should fill the critical gap left by national textbooks, offering students a more inclusive, contextualized, and meaningful understanding of the past.

2.1 Analysis

The findings of this study reveal a critical disjunction between national historical narratives presented in Indonesian high school textbooks and the lived historical realities of students, particularly in Blitar Regency. Teachers and students alike noted the absence of the 1968 South Blitar incident a key local episode tied to the broader mass violence of 1965-1968 from official history materials. This silence reflects not only curricular centralization but also what Assmann (2011) refers to as a failure in cultural memory transmission, where significant events fail to transition from communicative memory (known through family or local oral history) to institutionalized cultural memory embedded in education. This curricular exclusion is symptomatic of what Cribb (2002) calls the "*politics of forgetting*", whereby the Indonesian state narrative has consistently suppressed uncomfortable truths about the mass killings of 1965-66 and their regional extensions. In the case of South Blitar, where the military conducted prolonged anti-communist operations well into 1968, the absence in school textbooks constitutes an active form of historical erasure a process that deprives students of the opportunity to understand the local consequences of national events.

The teachers interviewed in this study described a rigid pedagogical framework shaped by state-mandated textbooks and centralized assessments. They acknowledged that deviating from official materials was uncommon, as teachers feared straying from the national curriculum's sanctioned version of history. Such practices resonate with Agamben's (1998) notion of the state of exception, in which certain subjects and events are excluded from the legal and political order and rendered invisible within the structures of knowledge. The victims and survivors of the 1968 South Blitar operations and by extension, their stories occupy what Agamben terms the realm of bare life: existing outside institutional recognition, yet continuously shaping collective memory at the local level. The student data reinforce this condition of structural amnesia. A majority of respondents confirmed that their understanding of the 1965-68 events is shaped entirely by national textbooks, with 56.1% agreeing that learning materials never include locally specific narratives. This indicates that students' historical consciousness is mediated through what Melvin (2018) describes as the institutionalized silence of post-1965 Indonesia, in which educational systems replicate the epistemic exclusions of the New Order regime. Students' expressed curiosity about the 1968 South Blitar incident and their support for its inclusion in digital textbooks signals a generation desire to reclaim suppressed knowledge and reconstruct a more inclusive understanding of the past.

The teachers' and students' demand for digital textbooks thus represents more than a call for technological modernization it reflects a broader struggle for epistemic justice in historical education. Digital media, as Gomez, K., & Lee, U. S. (2015) note, have the potential to democratize access to plural historical narratives, allowing marginalized voices and local memories to coexist alongside national histories. Within this context, developing a digital textbook that incorporates the 1968 South Blitar event becomes both a pedagogical innovation and an act of historical restoration an effort to bridge the gap between lived memory and institutional representation. Moreover, students' preference for accessible, visually supported, and interactive digital materials underscores a shift in historical engagement from rote memorization to critical interpretation. Seixas and Morton (2013) argue that such engagement forms the core of historical consciousness, enabling learners to connect their personal and collective identities to broader temporal frameworks. In this sense, local history functions as an entry point for cultivating reflective citizenship, empathy, and moral understanding dimensions often absent from state-centered historical narratives.

Finally, by contextualizing these findings within the broader historiographical discourse on the Indonesian mass killings (Robinson, 2018; Melvin, 2018), this study demonstrates how education continues to reproduce the selective silencing of traumatic memory. The exclusion of South Blitar from curricular history is not a mere oversight but a continuation of what Robinson (2018) terms "*organized forgetting*" a systematic process through which the state curates collective memory to maintain legitimacy. Reconstructing history learning through localized, digitalized resources

therefore offers not only pedagogical renewal but also a form of historical redress, acknowledging the plurality of memory and the necessity of confronting the past to build democratic awareness among future generations (Annet, K. A. 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates a significant disconnect between Indonesia's national history curriculum and the lived historical realities of students, particularly in Blitar Regency. Through interviews with teachers and questionnaires from students, it became evident that local events such as the 1968 South Blitar incident despite their historical significance remain excluded from formal instructional materials. This absence reflects a broader politics of forgetting that shapes how history is curated, remembered, and taught. By identifying the pedagogical needs of both teachers and students, the study reveals strong support for the development of digital learning resources that integrate marginalized local narratives. Teachers expressed the need for flexible, multimedia-rich tools, while students preferred accessible, contextual, and visually engaging materials. Together, these findings affirm that reconstructing history learning through the inclusion of silenced local events is not only a curricular necessity but also a step toward restoring cultural memory and promoting critical historical consciousness. Developing digital textbooks that feature events like the 1968 South Blitar incident offers a concrete way to bridge the gap between institutional memory and community knowledge, and to empower students to engage with history in reflective, meaningful ways.

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