

Local History and Cultural Heritage in 21st-Century History Education: A Systematic Review of Pedagogy, Skills, and Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a systematic literature review on the integration of local history and cultural heritage in 21st-century history education, focusing on pedagogical models, competency development, and alignment with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11. Guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, the review synthesizes 17 peer-reviewed and indexed articles published between 2020 and 2025. Thematic analysis was employed to map dominant instructional approaches, learning outcomes, and persistent research gaps. The findings indicate that heritage-based history education is implemented through place-based learning, heritage inquiry, museum and community engagement, and digital pedagogy such as virtual reality and virtual field trips, all of which significantly strengthen historical thinking and broader 21st-century skills, particularly critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. The review further confirms a conceptual linkage between heritage-based history education and SDG 11 in fostering sustainability awareness, cultural preservation, and community participation. Nevertheless, the literature reveals fragmented curricular integration, limited longitudinal evidence on competency development, and insufficient systematic evaluation of the measurable contribution of history education to sustainability outcomes. By integrating pedagogical models, competency frameworks, and sustainability objectives within a unified analytical perspective, this study provides a structured conceptual foundation for advancing heritage-based history education in contemporary formal learning contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, education has shifted from a primary focus on content transmission toward the development of essential competencies that enable learners to

respond to complex global challenges [1]. Critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and digital literacy have become foundational skills within contemporary educational systems [2], [3]. Within this paradigm, history education is no longer viewed merely as the memorization of factual information, but as a strategic pedagogical field for cultivating historical thinking skills, civic awareness, and reflective understanding of social dynamics across time [4][5].

The study of history plays a crucial role in helping students understand their identities, values, and social responsibilities. However, a persistent challenge lies in ensuring that history education remains relevant to students' lived experiences and the demands of 21st-century learning environments [6]. One increasingly advocated approach to address this challenge is the integration of local history and cultural heritage as contextual learning resources. Local history allows students to interpret historical events through the lens of their own communities, while cultural heritage provides tangible and intangible evidence that enhances engagement and meaningful understanding of the past [7][8].

Local history and cultural heritage, encompassing both tangible and intangible elements, function as educational instruments that connect historical narratives to local socio-cultural contexts [9]. This contextualized approach encourages meaningful learning by positioning history not simply as a record of past events, but as an ongoing process that shapes communities and environments. Heritage-based learning also strengthens students' sense of cultural identity and community belonging, while fostering awareness of the importance of cultural preservation as an integral component of social sustainability [10].

Integrating local history and cultural heritage within a 21st-century educational framework is therefore essential for developing key competencies. Learning activities such as analyzing local historical sources, conducting site visits, and utilizing museums or digital archives support the development of historical thinking skills, including sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration [11][12]. Moreover, the incorporation of digital technologies into heritage education, such as virtual museums and digital storytelling, enhances digital literacy and promotes collaborative, inquiry-driven learning environments [13].

Recent studies indicate growing scholarly interest in using local history and cultural heritage as pedagogical foundations for contextual and experiential history learning. Rahayuningtyas & Alfajar (2022) demonstrated that integrating local history enhances students' historical awareness and engagement by aligning instructional content with their social realities. Similarly, Franza & Pratesi (2024) showed that school museums and local history collections provide authentic, evidence-based learning experiences that enrich history education. Nevertheless, these studies also highlight that heritage-based learning practices are often implemented sporadically and rely heavily on individual teacher initiatives, rather than being systematically embedded within 21st-century pedagogical frameworks.

Beyond pedagogical considerations, the study of local history and cultural heritage is intrinsically linked to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, particularly the objective of safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting sustainable communities [16]. Das et al. (2025) argued that the preservation of cultural heritage in urban contexts depends

significantly on educational efforts that cultivate community awareness and participation from an early age. In parallel, Roshid & Haider (2024) emphasized that the development of 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy requires pedagogical approaches that are contextual and socially relevant. These findings collectively suggest that local history and heritage-based education offers a strategic pathway for aligning history learning with broader sustainability agendas.

Despite the expanding body of literature, research on history education grounded in local history and cultural heritage remains fragmented. Existing studies often lack cohesion and fail to provide a comprehensive synthesis of pedagogical models, learning outcomes, and sustainability implications. Moreover, the relationships between heritage-based learning, the development of 21st-century competencies, and contributions to SDG 11 have not been rigorously or empirically examined within the context of formal school-based history education. The originality of this study lies in its systematic integration of historical pedagogy, 21st-century competencies, and sustainable development through a comprehensive literature synthesis.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1:** What pedagogical models and methodologies for history education grounded in local history and cultural heritage have been documented in the literature?
- RQ2:** How does local history and cultural heritage-focused education contribute to the development of 21st-century skills and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11?

2. METHOD

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize empirical research on the integration of local history and cultural heritage in 21st-century history education. The review adhered to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and replicability [19]. Data collection was conducted using a structured, replicable search strategy across Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, SINTA, and Google Scholar, targeting peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. Boolean search strings combining keywords such as local history education, cultural heritage education, heritage-based history learning, 21st-century skills, and history pedagogy were systematically applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords. All retrieved records were exported into a reference management database for duplicate removal and screening.

The study selection process was guided by clearly defined inclusion and exclusion criteria functioning as a validity blueprint to ensure the appropriateness and relevance of the reviewed literature. Included studies were empirical or systematic review articles written in English that examined formal history education at primary, secondary, or tertiary levels and explicitly addressed local history, cultural heritage, or heritage-based pedagogical approaches. Studies were excluded if they focused on non-educational heritage issues, lacked methodological transparency, fell outside the domain of history education, or did not report identifiable learning outcomes. The screening process consisted of title and abstract review, followed by full-text eligibility assessment. A total of 17 articles met all criteria and were included in the final synthesis, as documented in the PRISMA flow diagram.

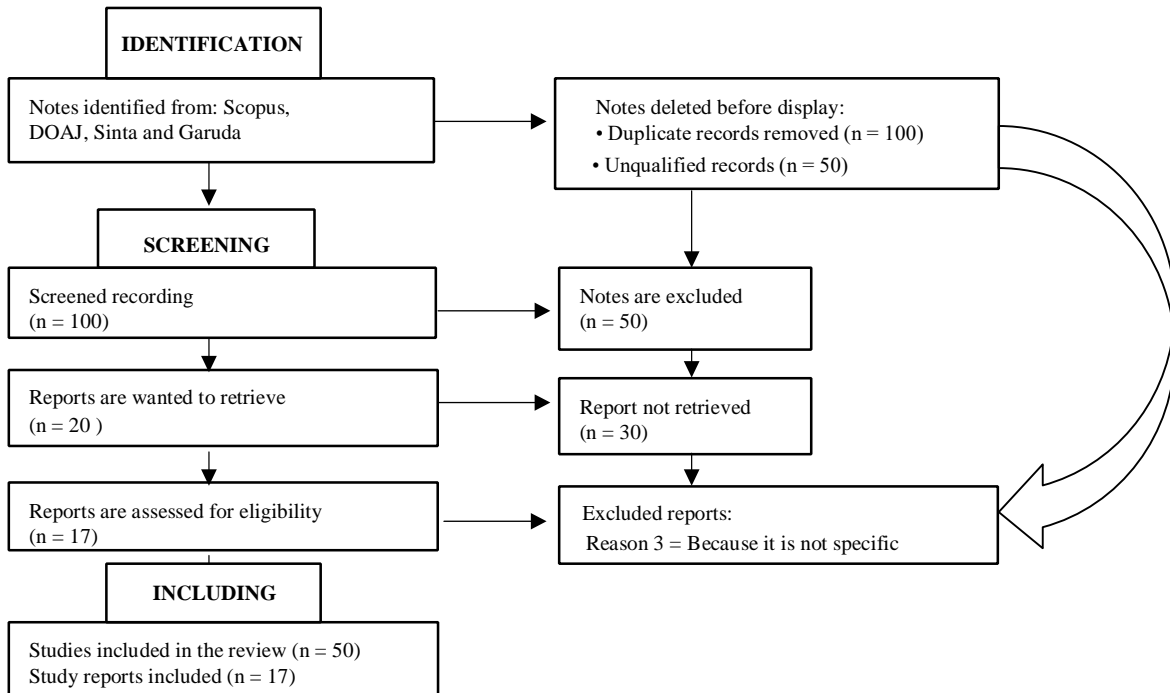


Figure 1. Research Identification Through Database

To ensure internal validity and analytical consistency, each selected study underwent a structured quality appraisal using predefined indicators: clarity of research design, alignment between objectives and methods, explicit description of instructional interventions, and transparency in reporting learning outcomes. Data were extracted using a coding matrix that categorized information into pedagogical models, instructional strategies, targeted competencies, assessment approaches, and sustainability orientation. The analysis employed thematic analysis with iterative coding procedures, including open coding, axial categorization, and cross-study comparison, to identify recurring patterns and conceptual relationships. These analytical procedures enabled systematic evaluation and interpretation of the collected data in alignment with the research questions, ultimately generating an integrated understanding of heritage-based history education within contemporary formal educational contexts.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

3.1. Literature Mapping and Identification of Research Gaps in History Education Based on Local History and Cultural Heritage

The systematic literature review yielded data through a rigorous selection process based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria, which were then organized into seventeen scholarly articles examining local history and cultural heritage-based history education and its relevance to 21st-century history pedagogy, as elaborated in the subsequent section:

Table 1. Summary of Selected Studies on Local History and Cultural Heritage–Based History Education

Title	Author(s) & Year	Educational Context / Participants	Pedagogical Focus and Key Findings	Identified Research Gaps Relevant to This Review
Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Cultural Heritage and Its Education Among Preschool Educators: A Convenience Sample from 11 Chinese Provinces	Zheng et al. (2025)	Early Childhood Education Teacher	Heritage literacy influences the quality of cultural learning	Lacks empirical examination of how heritage literacy is operationalized within formal history curricula and its impact on historical thinking skills.
The politics of heritage education: an analysis of national curriculum guidelines in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden	Immonen & Sivula (2025)	Policy documents	Policies influence heritage learning narratives and practices	The study does not adequately examine how heritage education policies are operationalized at the classroom level or their impact on instructional practices in history education
EthnoSTEM-based Learning Tools : Connecting Cultural Heritage with STEM Education	Listiyani et al. (2025)	Students	Interdisciplinary approach develops 21st century skills	Although interdisciplinary in nature, the study does not sufficiently address history-specific learning objectives, particularly the cultivation of historical thinking skills and contextual historical analysis
Development of Local History-based Virtual Reality Media to Improve Practical History Skills	Ofianto et al. (2025)	Students	VR improves historical thinking skills	The study lacks explicit analysis of how the instructional approach contributes to sustainability awareness and the protection of cultural heritage
Digital history pedagogy in higher education : a PRISMA-compliant systematic review of empirical evidence (2011–2025)	Korniienko, (2025)	Journal Articles	Technology enriches history learning	Provides limited discussion on the role of local history as a pedagogical framework within digital history education.
The Status of Didactic Models for Heritage Education: A Systematic Review	Valencia Arnica et al. (2023)	Journal Articles	There are various models of heritage pedagogy	The study lacks empirical evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the

Title	Author(s) & Year	Educational Context / Participants	Pedagogical Focus and Key Findings	Identified Research Gaps Relevant to This Review
				proposed approach in formal school settings
Virtual reality in heritage education for enhanced learning experience: a mini-review and design considerations	Zhao et al. (2025)	Journal Articles	VR increases learning engagement	Does not provide longitudinal evidence regarding the sustainability of learning outcomes generated through digital heritage pedagogy
Heritage-based Education 5.0: Zimbabwe's decolonial approach to higher education	Garwe, (2025)	Conceptual	Heritage strengthens local identity	The proposed model remains conceptual and has not yet been empirically validated through systematic research
Heritage education towards sustainable development in tourism: an inclusive systematic literature review	Romera et al. (2025)	Journal Articles	Heritage education supports sustainability	Does not specifically examine how formal school-based history education contributes to sustainability awareness and SDG 11 indicators
Heritage conceptions, perceptions, and learning context : research on primary and secondary schools in Andorra a n	Balleste et al. (2025)	Teachers & Students	Perception influences learning outcomes	The study places limited emphasis on history-specific pedagogy, particularly the development of historical thinking skills.
Heritage Preservation Education for the General Public – The role of Hands-on Education	Lobovikov-Katz et al. (2022)	Students	Public education is important for conservation	The study offers limited analysis of the role of schools in implementing heritage-based learning within formal education systems.
Field Studies in Heritage Education: Assessing Impact on Tourism and Sustainability at Bujang Valley, Kedah, Malaysia	Jusoh et al. (2024)	Students	Field learning enhances historical understanding	Fails to analyze the alignment between heritage-based field learning and formal history curriculum structures or learning outcomes
Utilization of Museum Collections as Media for Learning	Hamka et al. (2023)	History Teacher	Collections enrich historical materials	Does not explicitly assess the contribution of museum-based history learning to the

Title	Author(s) & Year	Educational Context / Participants	Pedagogical Focus and Key Findings	Identified Research Gaps Relevant to This Review
History at Ma Al-KhairatBatusuyaGo'o				development of 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy
Living museum sebagai sumber pembelajaran Sejarah (comparative studies in Bali and West Java)	Supriatna & Pageh, (2022)	Community	Effective experiential learning	The study's limited scale restricts the generalizability and transferability of its findings to other educational contexts.
Systematic Review of Integration of Local History in History Education in Indonesia Based on Learning Technology	Fikri et al. (2023)	Teachers & Students	Technology increases interest in learning	The study lacks longitudinal evidence to assess the long-term impact of the intervention on learning outcomes.
Utilization Balaputra Dewa Museum as an Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for Learning History at SMAN 18 Palembang	Fakhrudin et al. (2024)	History Teacher	Collections enrich historical materials	The study does not empirically assess the contribution of the instructional approach to the development of 21st-century skills.
Border Museums as Pedagogical Space	Simanjuntak & Rochmat, (2025)	Community & Students	Museums strengthen local identity.	The study lacks replication across diverse educational and socio-cultural contexts, limiting the generalizability of its findings.

Table 1 presents a systematic summary of the 17 studies included in this review, offering an overview of research contexts, participants, key findings, and identified research gaps related to local history and cultural heritage-based history education. The table serves as a critical analytical tool, enabling readers to map the existing body of literature and to identify dominant trends and unresolved issues within the field.

The summarized studies demonstrate that research on heritage-based history education has predominantly focused on pedagogical innovation, such as place-based learning, museum utilization, digital heritage technologies, and inquiry-oriented approaches. Across diverse educational levels and geographical contexts, these studies consistently report positive effects on student engagement, historical understanding, and identity formation. However, the table also reveals notable patterns of fragmentation, as most studies examine isolated instructional strategies without situating them within a coherent pedagogical or curricular framework.

Importantly, the research gaps identified in Table 1 have been refined to align directly with the objectives of this review. Rather than presenting generic limitations, the gaps emphasize three recurring issues: (1) the lack of systematic integration of heritage-based pedagogy within formal history curricula; (2) insufficient empirical evidence linking local history and cultural heritage instruction to the development of 21st-century competencies; and (3) the limited examination of how history education contributes to sustainability goals, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 11. By standardizing the number of included studies and sharpening the articulation of these gaps, Table 1 provides a clear justification for the present systematic review and its contribution to advancing an integrated pedagogical framework for 21st-century history education.

3.2. Cluster Visualization and Thematic Interpretation of Research

This study enhances the thematic analysis of the systematic literature review findings by providing a VOSviewer-style cluster visualization of keyword networks, illustrating the conceptual relationships among key themes in local history-based education and 21st-century cultural heritage. This visualization serves as an analytical tool to delineate the research's intellectual framework and identify prevailing thematic clusters arising from the synthesis of the literature.

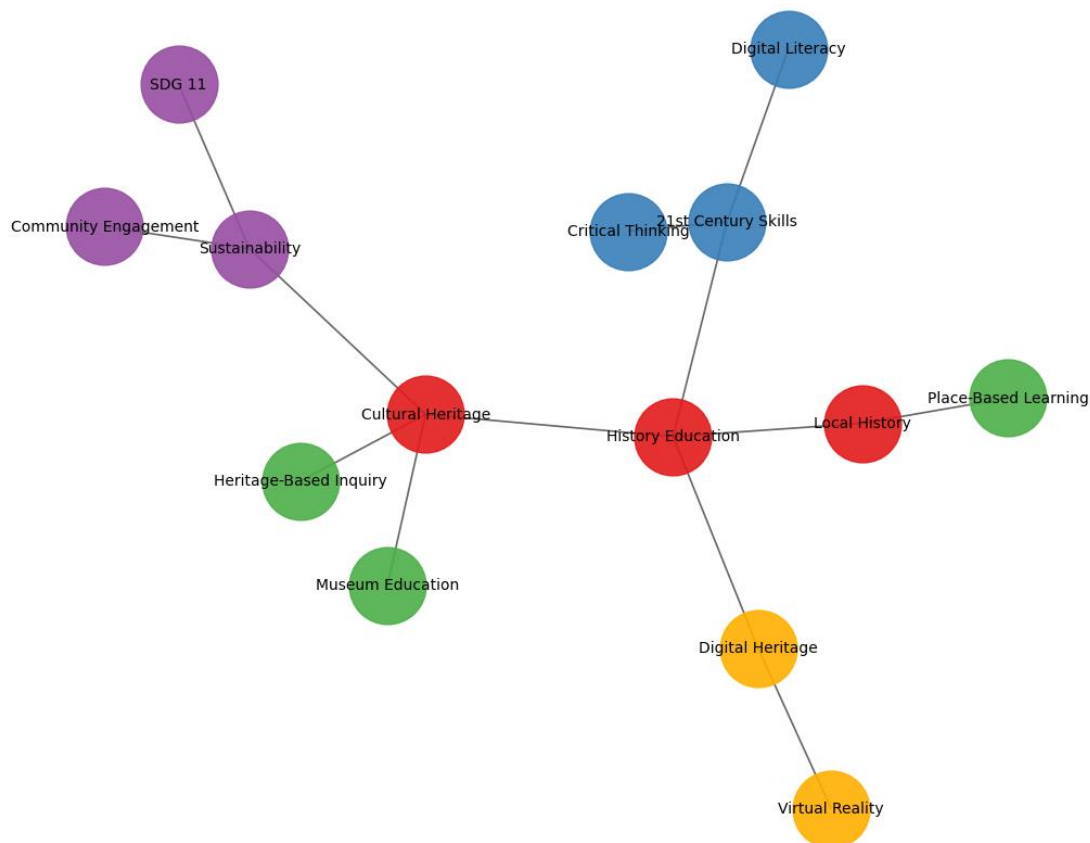


Figure 2. VoS Viewer-style Cluster Visualization with Color Coding

The visualization results reveal five primary, interconnected clusters that illustrate the thematic framework of history education research centered on local history and cultural

heritage. The red cluster occupies a central position within the network and embodies the fundamental pedagogy of history education, comprising the keywords “history education,” “local history,” and “cultural heritage.” The central position of this cluster affirms that local history and cultural heritage constitute the epistemological and pedagogical foundations of modern history education. This discovery suggests that diverse pedagogical methods, educational goals, and competency results in the literature arise from the amalgamation of the history education field and the local cultural context as a foundational learning framework.

The green and blue clusters signify complementary pedagogical dimensions and learning competencies. The green cluster represents contextual learning models, encompassing place-based learning, heritage-based inquiry, and museum education. It also illustrates the preeminence of experiential and inquiry-driven learning methodologies in the execution of heritage-focused history education. The direct link between this cluster and the core cluster affirms that leveraging the local environment, historical sites, and cultural institutions serves as the principal method for contextualizing historical education. The blue cluster signifies the 21st-century competency dimension, encompassing 21st-century skills, critical thinking, and digital literacy. This cluster underscores that history education rooted in local history and cultural heritage aims not only to comprehend the past but also to cultivate higher-order thinking skills and digital literacy within the history learning framework.

The yellow and purple clusters signify the dimensions of innovation and sustainability within historical education. The yellow cluster represents digital heritage pedagogy, defined by the utilization of digital technology and immersive media, including virtual reality, to enhance access to and learning experiences of cultural heritage. This cluster’s relation to history education illustrates that digital technology functions as a pedagogical enhancer, yet some literature still categorizes it as a supplementary tool, lacking full integration into a systematic curricular framework. The purple cluster signifies the sustainability dimension and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which includes sustainability, SDG 11, and community involvement. This cluster illustrates the conceptual connection among heritage-based history education, cultural heritage preservation, and sustainable community development. This cluster visualization indicates that, while the research’s thematic structure is generally coherent, there remains fragmentation in integrating pedagogy, cultivating 21st-century competencies, and advancing the sustainability agenda, underscoring the need for an integrated pedagogical framework within formal education.

3.3. Pedagogical Models and Approaches to History Education Based on Local History and Cultural Heritage

A systematic review of the literature indicates that history education grounded in local history and cultural heritage is implemented through several dominant pedagogical models that demonstrate a degree of consistency across diverse educational contexts. Despite variations in institutional capacity and socio-cultural settings, these models share a common objective: repositioning history education from content transmission toward contextual,

inquiry-based, and reflective learning. This section addresses Research Question 1 (RQ1) by synthesizing and critically examining the pedagogical models documented in the selected studies.

The first and most prevalent model identified is contextual and place-based learning, which utilizes local history as an entry point for understanding broader national and global historical processes. Research consistently shows that this approach enhances the relevance of history education by anchoring learning in students' lived experiences, including local narratives, community traditions, and regional heritage sites. By situating historical events within familiar social and cultural contexts, history learning becomes more meaningful and experiential rather than abstract or detached [37].

From a comparative perspective, place-based learning is particularly prominent in studies conducted in the Global South, where local history and community heritage often serve as primary instructional resources due to limited access to digital infrastructure. In these contexts, local traditions, oral histories, and community memory play a crucial role in fostering historical awareness and identity formation [38]. Conversely, studies from the Global North tend to integrate place-based learning within more formal curricular structures, often complemented by institutional partnerships with museums or heritage organizations. This contrast highlights differing pathways toward contextual relevance shaped by structural and resource-based factors.

Heritage-based inquiry learning positions students as active historical investigators through engagement with primary sources, museums, and local heritage, fostering key historical thinking skills such as sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration. In this model, teachers function as facilitators who guide inquiry and evidence interpretation, aligning with the goals of critical and reflective history education [39]. However, existing studies indicate that its implementation remains uneven, often relying on individual teacher initiative rather than systematic curricular or institutional support, which limits its scalability and sustainability in formal education systems.

The third model identified in the review is digital and technology-enhanced heritage pedagogy, which has gained prominence within the discourse of 21st-century education. Digital tools such as virtual museums, virtual field trips, and virtual reality (VR) applications are increasingly used to provide immersive and visually rich historical experiences. These technologies expand access to cultural heritage, particularly in contexts where physical site visits are constrained by geographical or economic limitations [40].

Comparative analysis indicates that digital heritage pedagogy is more systematically developed in Global North contexts, where technological infrastructure and institutional support enable broader integration into formal history curricula. In contrast, studies from the Global South often report experimental or pilot-scale implementations, with technology functioning as a supplementary tool rather than an integral component of pedagogical design. Moreover, across contexts, digital technologies are frequently treated as instructional aids rather than as elements of a reflective pedagogical framework aligned with long-term learning objectives [41].

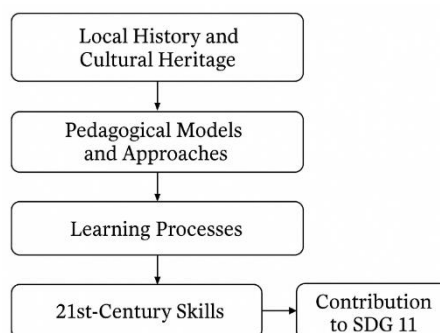


Figure 3. History Education and Cultural Heritage Framework Flowchart

Overall, the findings of this systematic literature review demonstrate that pedagogical models for history education based on local history and cultural heritage have evolved both conceptually and practically, yet remain fragmented. Few studies attempt to integrate contextual learning, inquiry-based pedagogy, and digital innovation into a coherent and transferable framework applicable across diverse educational settings. This fragmentation underscores the significance of the present study, which provides a systematic synthesis that clarifies existing pedagogical models and highlights the need for an integrated approach to heritage-based history education in the 21st century.

3.4. Contributing to 21st Century Skills and Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11

The synthesis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that history education grounded in local history and cultural heritage plays a critical role in fostering essential 21st-century competencies. By situating historical learning within students' immediate social and cultural environments, this approach encourages active engagement with the past while simultaneously developing skills necessary for contemporary life. Rather than functioning solely as a vehicle for content acquisition, heritage-based history education supports the development of higher-order thinking and social competencies that align with global educational priorities [42].

One of the most consistently reported outcomes of heritage-based history education is the enhancement of critical thinking skills. Learning activities such as examining historical artifacts, analyzing local narratives, and debating heritage-related issues require students to evaluate evidence, recognize bias, and interpret historical events from multiple perspectives. These processes encourage students to construct evidence-based arguments and engage in reflective reasoning, reinforcing the disciplinary foundations of historical thinking while simultaneously contributing to broader cognitive skill development [43].

In addition to critical thinking, heritage-based learning environments strongly promote collaboration and communication skills [27][44]. Group-based investigations of local history, collaborative interpretation of cultural materials, and community-oriented heritage projects require students to work collectively, negotiate meaning, and articulate their interpretations to peers and community members [45]. Through these interactions, students develop interpersonal competencies essential to democratic participation and social cohesion, further reinforcing the relevance of history education within 21st-century learning frameworks.

The integration of digital technology into heritage-based history education has also been identified as a significant contributor to the development of digital literacy. The use of virtual museums, digital storytelling platforms, and online archival databases allows students to access, evaluate, and create historical knowledge within digital environments. These practices enhance students' abilities to manage information critically, assess the credibility of digital sources, and participate responsibly in online spaces, aligning closely with contemporary expectations of digital citizenship [12].

Despite positive findings, existing studies show limitations in evaluating digital competencies, as most assessments are short-term and lack longitudinal evidence on the sustained impact of digital heritage pedagogy on students' digital literacy. At the same time, heritage-based history education is recognized as a strategic approach to advancing Sustainable Development Goal 11, as engagement with local historical sites, cultural practices, and community narratives fosters cultural awareness, strengthens students' sense of responsibility toward heritage preservation, and supports sustainable community development [46].

The literature further suggests that students who participate in heritage-based history education are more likely to engage in community initiatives and heritage conservation efforts. Through experiential learning and community-based projects, students come to understand the interdependence between cultural preservation, social identity, and sustainable development. In this way, history education functions as a bridge between cultural heritage protection and sustainable practices at the community level, reinforcing the social dimension of sustainability [46][47].

Nevertheless, the SLR identifies a critical gap in the explicit assessment of history education's contribution to achieving SDG 11. Few studies systematically evaluate the impact of heritage-based history education beyond the classroom, particularly in relation to municipal planning, tourism development, or community sustainability initiatives. Moreover, the institutional role of schools in advancing sustainability agendas through history education remains underexplored. These findings highlight the importance of integrating local history and cultural heritage into history education as part of a comprehensive and sustainable educational strategy that simultaneously promotes 21st-century competencies and contributes to inclusive, resilient, and culturally sustainable communities.

3. CONCLUSION

This systematic review demonstrates that integrating local history and cultural heritage into 21st-century history education constitutes a strategic pedagogical orientation capable of reconciling disciplinary rigor, competency development, and sustainability imperatives within a unified educational framework. Rather than functioning merely as contextual enrichment, heritage-based approaches reposition history education as a transformative space where historical thinking, civic consciousness, and future-oriented responsibility are cultivated simultaneously. Conceptually, the synthesis affirms that aligning pedagogical models with competency frameworks and the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 strengthens the epistemological relevance and social function

of history education in contemporary schooling. At the same time, the review underscores the necessity of moving beyond fragmented or incidental implementation toward coherent curricular integration supported by systematic empirical validation. Overall, this study contributes an integrative analytical lens that clarifies the theoretical and practical significance of heritage-based history education as a foundation for developing reflective, critically literate, and sustainability-aware learners in formal educational contexts.

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