

History Teacher Discourse in Teaching: The New Order Era in Indonesia

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Abstract

The history of the New Order era is one of the most controversial topics in Indonesian history education. The viral tagline “Enak Zamanku to” (Better in My Era), circulated with images of President Soeharto, has challenged history teachers to respond to students’ critical questions while navigating competing textbook narratives about the period. This study examines how history teachers discursively position themselves when teaching the New Order era. Using a socio-cognitive critical discourse analysis of interviews and classroom observations involving 20 history teachers in five Indonesian cities, the study identifies two overlapping pedagogical-discursive tendencies rather than fixed teacher types. The first is an official-narrative-oriented tendency, in which teachers rely on textbooks, classroom stability, and state-sanctioned accounts to manage controversy. The second is a multiperspectival-evidence-oriented tendency, in which teachers introduce alternative sources and competing interpretations while remaining cautious about evidentiary claims and classroom polarisation. The analysis situates these tendencies within New Order state-religion governance, post-1965 politics of memory, and developmentalist projects of schooling. The study concludes that teaching controversial history



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requires more than the inclusion of multiple narratives; it also requires pedagogical support for source-based reasoning, ethical discussion of violence and victimhood, and reflective awareness of how state narratives continue to shape classroom discourse.

Keywords: history; teacher discourse; New Order era; Indonesia

Introduction

Discourse on history teachers often centres on their role in shaping students' historical consciousness of the past (Ahonen 2005; Popa 2022; Savenije, Wansink, and Logtenberg 2022). Pedagogical approaches are required to address the various challenges they face in the classroom. History teachers are considered vital in fostering critical thinking and contextual understanding of historical events (Ahmad 2016; Leibovitch et al. 2025; López-Fernández et al. 2023). They help students connect past events with contemporary issues, encouraging an informed sense of nationalism. However, some discourses criticise history teachers for perceived biases (Djono and Salimi 2021; Kello 2016; Vella 2020), especially when teaching controversial topics such as wars, colonialism, or social movements. Accusations of “indoctrination” or pushing political agendas frequently arise (Tadege, Seifu, and Melese 2022).

History education itself has become a battleground for cultural debates (Aderoben and Darmawan 2023; Ahonen 2005). Teachers are often caught between delivering a “traditional” narrative and incorporating diverse perspectives (Ridhoi et al. 2022). While some demand “objective” history, others argue that all history is interpretative and should reflect multiple viewpoints.

Recent controversies, such as those involving theories of critical events or gender in history curricula, have placed teachers under intense scrutiny (Stitzlein 2025; Zanazanian and Nitsche 2025). The focus on “controversial history”, for instance, may expose students to some of the worst examples of inhumanity. One example is the history curriculum in England, which includes lessons on the Holocaust (Phillips 2009). While the horrors of these historical episodes may hold educational value, there is also the risk that Holocaust education becomes a mere catalogue of atrocities.

In the Indonesian context, history teachers' efforts to raise students' historical awareness through the teaching of controversial topics in the classroom have also been observed (Ahmad 2016). A notable case is the teaching of Indonesia's New Order era. The New Order emerged after the political turmoil of the Old Order, marked by the issuance of the Supersemar (11 March 1966), which granted Lieutenant General Soeharto the authority to restore stability (Ikhwan, Yulianto, and Parahita 2019; Sardiman et al. 2020). The regime was authoritarian, with power concentrated in the hands of the president, supported by the military through the Dwifungsi ABRI doctrine (the military's dual role in politics and security). Political stability and security became

the main priorities, often at the expense of freedom of expression, the press, and human rights.

Indonesian historiography during the New Order was characterised by the strong influence of the government in shaping historical narratives to legitimise Soeharto's rule (Hariyono and Leksana 2025; Kusno 2025; Purnomo and Kurniawan 2025). The New Order regime controlled historical writing through official narratives that emphasised the military's role, especially the Army, in "saving" Indonesia from the communist threat after the Gestapu events (Jones 2013). Official history textbooks, such as *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia* (SNI) compiled by Nugroho Notosusanto, became the primary reference. These narratives glorified the independence struggle, Pancasila, and Soeharto's role as a national hero (Hariyono and Leksana 2025). The government strictly censored historical writings considered contradicting the official narrative (Aspinall and Fealy 2010; Byrne 2004; Nur 2023). Sensitive events such as the G30S/PKI, agrarian conflicts, or human rights violations (for example, the Tanjung Priok case or the massacres in East Timor) are often overlooked or presented in a one-sided manner.

Indonesia's national framework positions religion as a constitutive element of citizenship while embedding it within Pancasila and state governance. In the New Order period, the state promoted religious harmony and moral order in schools while limiting independent political mobilisation through ideology, bureaucracy, and curriculum instruments (Hefner 2000; Ramage 2002; Van Bruinessen 2013). For this article, religion is not treated as a separate topic from history education, but as part of the discursive environment through which teachers make claims about order, morality, unity, and legitimate citizenship.

The distinction between Islam as lived plurality and Islam as a policy object helps explain why teacher discourse may acknowledge religious diversity while also reproducing state-sanctioned narratives of harmony and depoliticisation. This framing is relevant to the teaching of the New Order because classroom talk about political conflict, communism, and national unity often draws on moral and religious vocabularies, even when teachers do not explicitly present religion as the lesson's central theme.

The transition into the New Order was inseparable from the 1965–66 mass violence and the long-term repression directed at communists, socialists, atheists, and other marginalised groups. Following the events of 30 September 1965 and the subsequent consolidation of military power, mass killings, detention, and administrative exclusions were accompanied by sustained surveillance, stigma, and ideological policing (Cribb 1990; Roosa 2006).

These policies' afterlives shaped how the period could be narrated in public, including through curriculum and textbooks, where anti-Left narratives became central to regime

legitimation and civic formation. For history teachers, the topic is therefore not only “controversial” but embedded in a politics of memory that encourages euphemism, selective emphasis, and careful boundary-setting when responding to students’ questions about violence, responsibility, and victimhood.

The history of the New Order becomes more complicated in the classroom because teachers encounter competing narratives, uneven textbook representations, and students’ exposure to digital media and family memories (Pratama 2022; Purwanta 2024; Umasih 2010). Previous studies have shown that Indonesian teachers often regard the New Order and the 1965 events as unresolved and sensitive topics. However, much of this scholarship focuses on whether teachers are willing to teach controversial history, what sources they use, or how textbooks represent the period. Less attention has been given to the micro-level discourse through which teachers justify caution, invoke stability, negotiate evidence, and position themselves between official narratives and alternative memories.

Addressing this gap, this study asks: (1) What discursive strategies do history teachers use when teaching the New Order era as a controversial topic? (2) How do teachers position themselves in relation to official narratives, alternative sources, and students’ questions? (3) How are these classroom discourses shaped by wider politics of memory, state-religion governance, and developmentalist narratives of order and stability? The aim is not to classify teachers into rigid identities, but to analyse recurring pedagogical-discursive tendencies that reveal how controversial history is managed in Indonesian classrooms. This contribution extends research on controversial history teaching by showing how macro-level political memory is translated into everyday teacher talk and classroom decision-making.

Method

A socio-cognitive approach combined with critical discourse analysis (CDA) was employed to examine how teachers’ language, pedagogical choices, and interpretive positions reproduce or challenge broader power relations surrounding the New Order past (Jan 2022; Johnson and McLean 2020; McLeod 2024; Williamson, Given, and Scifleet 2018). These units were analysed at three connected levels: textual features (keywords, metaphors, labels, modality, and evaluative language), discursive practice (how teachers drew on textbooks, media, curriculum, and classroom norms), and socio-political context (how statements echoed state projects of anti-communism, national harmony, developmentalism, and depoliticisation) (Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 2013; Lu and Zhou 2024).

Analytically, the study followed four stages. First, interview and observation notes were read repeatedly to identify segments related to controversy, evidence, textbook use, classroom control, religion, violence, development, and political legitimacy. Second, open coding was conducted using both inductive codes emerging from the data (for example, “playing safe”, “fear of conflict”, and “need for documents”) and deductive

codes derived from socio-cognitive CDA (for example, legitimization, mitigation, nomination, predication, modality, and perspectivisation). Third, related codes were grouped into broader discursive patterns, particularly appeals to stability, official authority, pedagogical caution, source pluralisation, and evidence-based comparison. Fourth, these patterns were compared across cities, teacher generations, interviews, observations, and textbook references (Hefner 2000; Robison and Hadiz 2004). The two tendencies reported in the findings emerged from this comparative coding process: an official-narrative-oriented tendency and a multiperspectival-evidence-oriented tendency. These categories are heuristic and overlapping; they describe recurrent positions in teacher discourse rather than fixed identities attached permanently to individual teachers.

This study involved 20 history teachers from five Indonesian cities: Jambi (Jambi Province), Banjarmasin (South Kalimantan Province), Denpasar (Bali Province), Jember (East Java Province), and Semarang (Central Java Province). Participants were selected purposively through local History Teachers' Association networks because they taught senior high school history and had experience teaching the New Order topic. The five cities were chosen to provide variation in region, school context, teacher generation, and proximity to different local memories of the New Order and Reform period. The sample was not intended to be statistically representative; rather, it was designed to capture a range of professional voices within a shared epistemic community of Indonesian history teachers. Table 1 presents the profiles of the participating teachers.

Table 1: Profiles of history teachers

Research Sites	No. of Teachers	Average Age (years)	Status and Information	Average Years of Experience
Jambi	4	32.5	Senior high school teachers and members of the History Teachers' Association	10.5
Banjarmasin	4	36	Senior high school teachers and members of the History Teachers' Association	13
Denpasar	4	27.5	Public senior high school teachers and members of the History Teachers' Association. Most are recent graduates from state universities.	4
Jember	4	29	Public senior high school teachers and members of the History Teachers' Association. Most are recent graduates from state universities.	5
Semarang	4	26	Public senior high school teachers and members of the History Teachers' Association. Most are recent graduates from state universities.	2.5

Although the number of participants is limited, the teachers represent different regions and career stages. The study treats history teachers as members of an epistemic community whose professional talk is shaped by shared curriculum norms, textbook traditions, teacher association networks, and public debates about national history. This perspective allows the analysis to identify patterned ways of speaking about the New Order without claiming that all Indonesian teachers think or teach in the same way. The findings should therefore be read as analytic insights into recurring discourse tendencies rather than generalisable measurements of teacher belief.

Data were collected through unstructured interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of the textbooks and modules referred to by teachers. Interviews were conducted with the participating teachers to explore their experiences teaching the New Order, their views of textbook narratives, their responses to student questions, and their strategies for handling sensitive issues. Where permission was granted, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed; otherwise, detailed field notes were written immediately after the interview. Classroom observations were conducted during New Order lessons in schools where access was granted; observation notes focused on teacher preparation, opening activities, explanation of controversial events, student questions, use of sources, and assessment practices. Classroom observations were conducted during five New Order lessons across the research sites, with each observation lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, while non-recorded interviews were reconstructed from detailed field notes written immediately after the interview. The transcripts and field notes were then reviewed repeatedly during coding to ensure consistency between teachers' statements, classroom practices, and textbook references. Interview, observation, and textbook data were integrated through triangulation: Claims made in interviews were compared with observed classroom practices and with the textual resources teachers used. Ethical procedures included informed consent, anonymisation of teacher names, and removal of identifying school information. The researchers' positionality as history education scholars was also considered during analysis, particularly the risk of privileging critical pedagogy over teachers' practical concerns about classroom conflict and institutional expectations.

Results and Discussion

Views and Attitudes of Teachers Regarding the History of the New Order Era

Official-Narrative-Oriented Tendency

The first tendency identified in the data is an official-narrative-oriented position. This category should not be understood as a fixed personality type or as a simple generational label. Rather, it refers to moments when teachers manage controversy by relying on state-sanctioned textbooks, emphasising classroom order, and limiting discussion of politically sensitive events. Teachers displaying this tendency often use a didactic approach and frame the New Order through narratives of national salvation, stability, and development. In older curricula such as the 1975 and 1984 curricula, the New Order was often presented as a period of rescue from the communist threat after the 1965 Gestapu events, with strong emphasis on Soeharto and the military. Sensitive events such as the 1965–1966 massacres, the Petrus killings (mysterious shootings), or the Tanjung Priok case were omitted, softened, or presented in ways that protected the regime's positive image.

In this tendency, teachers generally employ lecture-based methods, explain events chronologically according to textbooks, and expect students to remember dates, figures, and key events such as the 1966 MPRS Special Session, the Supersemar decree, and

New Order elections. The discourse marker that appears repeatedly is not simply factual transmission, but legitimation through institutional authority: the textbook, the curriculum, and government guidelines are treated as safe and legitimate sources. Critical discussion is reduced not only because teachers lack information, but because they frame controversy as a potential threat to classroom stability and professional responsibility.

This perspective was expressed by Mr. Bagus, a 50-year-old history teacher from Jember, who stated:

In my opinion, when I teach the history of the New Order, I only rely on the material available in the textbooks without using teaching media or comparative sources, since the material is sensitive. I simplify it in order to maintain classroom stability.

This way, there is no conflict in the classroom if differences of opinion are not managed properly, because I believe that as a history teacher, I have the responsibility to teach according to government guidelines.

Bagus's wording illustrates this orientation. The phrase "only rely on the material available in the textbooks" positions the textbook as an authorised boundary for acceptable historical knowledge. His reference to the topic as "sensitive" functions as a mitigation strategy: It justifies limiting sources while presenting the decision as pedagogically responsible rather than ideological. The phrase "maintain classroom stability" echoes the New Order's own language of order and harmony, while "according to government guidelines" places the teacher within an institutional chain of authority. In CDA terms, his statement combines authorisation (the government/textbook as legitimate source), rationalisation (avoid conflict), and moral evaluation (responsibility as a teacher). Handayani's comments from Semarang reinforce this pattern: Reliance on government-issued textbooks is presented as a way to avoid student misunderstanding, but it also narrows the range of historical interpretations available in the classroom.

Traditional teachers rarely use media beyond textbooks, blackboards, and lectures. Occasionally, propaganda films such as *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI*, though outdated and monotonous, are used to reinforce the anti-communist narrative, since students are shown this film repeatedly year after year. Traditional teachers place greater emphasis on the transmission of facts rather than engaging students in deeper analysis or discussion, which often results in a one-sided understanding of history. This traditional approach reflects the constraints of the time when academic freedom was limited, and teachers often lacked the autonomy to present critical perspectives. As a result, the teaching of New Order history tends to be normative and supportive of the status quo.

This "playing it safe" orientation becomes especially visible when teachers encounter questions about religion and the 1965–66 violence. Teachers' emphasis on classroom stability and conflict-avoidance often draws on moral vocabulary and narratives of

“national harmony”, which resonate with long-standing state projects of managing religion and depoliticising contentious pasts (Hefner 2000; Ramage 2002). Similarly, reliance on textbooks, official labels such as “Gestapu events”, and the use of propaganda media can be read as strategies for managing the post-1965 politics of memory—a context in which speaking openly about victims, perpetrators, and responsibility has historically been constrained (Cribb 1990; Roosa 2006).

Multiperspectival-Evidence-Oriented Tendency

The second tendency is a multiperspectival-evidence-oriented position. Teachers in this tendency introduce alternative sources, encourage comparison, and invite students to examine evidence, while still recognising the sensitivity of the topic. This position is associated with more student-centred approaches under the Kurikulum Merdeka, but it is not limited to younger teachers or to a single curriculum period.

Within the Kurikulum Merdeka, the history of the New Order is included in the subject Indonesian History for Phase F (Grades XI and XII of senior high school/MA). The learning outcomes aim for students to analyse and evaluate historical events both diachronically (chronologically) and synchronically (within their contemporary context), including their relationship to global developments such as the Cold War. Students are expected to use primary sources (such as the Supersemar document) and secondary sources (textbooks, scholarly articles) to draw critical conclusions, rather than simply memorising facts.

Ira, a history teacher from Denpasar, explained that in teaching the New Order period she applies discovery learning, problem-based learning, and project-based learning. For example, students may conduct independent research on the transition of power from Soekarno to Soeharto, construct timelines of major events, or analyse the successes and failures of government policies through group discussions. Such activities encourage students to reflect on how the New Order continues to shape present-day issues, such as democracy and corruption. Students are also guided to view events from multiple perspectives, including the government, opposition groups, and victims (such as student activists or human rights abuse survivors). This includes examining the New Order’s legacy, for instance, the transformation of P4 indoctrination into Profil Pelajar Pancasila, which highlights values such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration.

Teaching the New Order as a controversial topic still presents challenges for teachers who adopt this multiperspectival orientation. Restu, a history teacher from Banjarmasin, noted that relying solely on government-issued textbooks is difficult because students often encounter alternative claims through mass media and social media. When classroom explanations contradict these sources, teachers risk being accused of misleading students. Restu’s discourse therefore shifts the source of authority from the textbook alone to “credible data, documents, and historical sources”. This shift is important: It does not claim that the teacher possesses a final objective truth, but

positions the classroom as a space where competing claims must be tested through evidence, comparison, and contextual interpretation.

At the same time, this tendency remains cautious. Teachers may introduce victims' perspectives, student activism, corruption, collusion, nepotism (KKN), and state violence, but they often do so through careful language designed to avoid polarisation. This ambivalence is analytically significant. It shows that multiperspectivity in controversial history teaching is not simply a matter of adding more sources; it also requires teachers to manage affect, family memory, institutional expectations, and the possibility that students may bring politically charged interpretations into the classroom.

Table 2: Comparison of teachers

Aspect	Official-narrative-oriented tendency	Multiperspectival-evidence-oriented tendency
Dominant pedagogical move	Transmission of textbook-based narratives; teacher-centred explanation	Comparison of sources; discussion, inquiry, and evidence-based interpretation
Handling of controversy	Controversy is simplified, postponed, or bounded to avoid conflict	Controversy is addressed through multiple perspectives, but with cautious moderation
Discursive markers	Stability, harmony, official guidelines, national salvation, development	Evidence, documents, alternative sources, comparison, victims' voices, Reform
Potential classroom effect	May preserve order but risks reproducing one-sided memory and limiting empathy	May foster critical thinking and tolerance, but requires strong facilitation to avoid polarisation

Classroom Observation

The New Order era (1966–1998) was the period of Indonesian history under President Soeharto's rule, beginning with the issuance of the Supersemar on 11 March 1966. This period was characterised by a focus on political stability, economic development through the Repelita (Five-Year Development Plans), and the implementation of the Dwifungsi ABRI doctrine (where the military played both political and military roles). At the same time, it also drew criticism for authoritarianism, corruption, and restrictions on civil liberties, which eventually culminated in the Reform movement of 1998. These themes are often taught in Grade 12 Indonesian History classes, with the aim of helping students understand political, economic, and social developments.

Observations were focused on three main aspects: teacher preparation, teaching process, and assessment. The observations were conducted participatorily, recording students' engagement, conceptual understanding, and collaboration.

For example, Lia, a history teacher from Jember, began her class with an apperception activity by showing a short YouTube video about the 1966 Tritura demonstrations. The lesson continued with a PowerPoint presentation outlining a timeline of the New Order period (1966–1998), including key policies such as Dwifungsi ABRI and the Repelita.

Teaching Aids and Learning Process

The teacher utilised an LCD projector and summary handouts as supporting materials. During the lesson, the teacher posed open-ended questions such as “How did the Supersemar change the political system?” to stimulate critical thinking. Student responses were observed: The majority were able to explain the transition from the Old Order, and many actively took notes. Some students asked about Soeharto's role in dissolving the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia), showing engagement with the material. The teacher then discussed key features of the New Order, including Dwifungsi ABRI (military officers occupying civilian positions), restrictions on political parties (limited to Partai Demokrasi Indonesia [PDI], Partai Persatuan Pembangunan [PPP], and Golkar), large-scale development programmes through Repelita, and a centralised government that encouraged foreign investment but also fostered corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN). A short video was also shown, illustrating the parliamentary elections from 1971 to 1997, all consistently won by Golkar.

Students were divided into groups to discuss the successes and failures of the New Order. One group highlighted economic achievements, such as stability supported by the IGGI (Inter-Governmental Group on Indonesia), while another group critiqued human rights violations and examined the collapse of the regime in 1998, triggered by the 1997 monetary crisis and student demonstrations demanding reform (the abolition of Dwifungsi ABRI, prosecution of Soeharto, and regional autonomy). Group interactions were lively, with approximately 80% of students participating actively.

The use of group discussions encouraged critical thinking, while visual media enhanced students' understanding of historical context. The teacher successfully linked the lesson to contemporary issues, such as post-Reform democracy. Observations showed that around 80% of students were engaged, and interactive questioning improved conceptual understanding. However, a minority of students remained less active, possibly due to the sensitivity of the topic. Time constraints limit the depth of discussion on the broader social impacts of the New Order.

Nevertheless, the lesson was effective in presenting historical facts neutrally and helping students grasp Indonesia's political transition. For future classroom observations, the integration of primary sources such as the Supersemar document and more explicit discussion of diverse perspectives is recommended to minimise bias. This

observation indicates that the topic is highly relevant for modern history education and contributes to the professional development of modern teachers.

History Textbooks as Context for Teacher Discourse

The textbook analysis functions as contextual evidence for the study's research questions rather than as a separate textbook study. Teachers repeatedly referred to textbooks as sources of authority, limitation, or comparison; therefore, examining the textbook narratives helps explain why certain discursive positions become available in classroom talk. Based on the analysis of modules and Grade XII Indonesian History textbooks aligned with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, the New Order era (1966–1998) is presented as a key topic in contemporary Indonesian history. The curriculum emphasises student-centred learning, historical context, critical analysis, and relevance to present-day issues such as democracy and corruption. However, the depth of discussion varies, especially regarding state violence, local experiences, religion, and the politics of memory.

Table 3: Comparison of textbooks in class

Aspect	Traditional Approach (New Order Textbooks)	Modern Approach (Post-Reform Curriculum)
Controversial Narratives	Descriptive, single narrative, glorification of Soeharto (e.g., as “saviour from communism”)	Analytical, multi-perspective, deconstructing bias (e.g., discussions on KKN and human rights)
Teacher's Role	Transmitter of official facts, teacher-centred	Facilitator, student-centred, critical
Sample Textbooks	Siswoyo/Idris (brief chronicles); Nugroho Notosusanto (structural, simplified)	Purwanto and Adam (integrating collective memory); 2013 Curriculum (scientific approach)
Teaching Implications	Limited empathy, risk of indoctrination	Encourages critical thinking, tolerance

The discourse surrounding the New Order in history textbooks remains contested. New Order-era textbooks supported regime legitimacy through a single developmentalist narrative, while many post-Reform textbooks open more space for critique but still avoid sustained discussion of sensitive issues. This matters for teacher discourse because textbooks provide both a resource and a boundary: Teachers can cite them to justify caution, but they can also use their silences as a starting point for critical comparison. The lack of local perspectives is particularly important, as teachers outside Jakarta must often connect national narratives to regional experiences with limited curricular support.

Discussion

This study's main analytical contribution is to show how Indonesian history teachers manage controversial history through recurring discursive strategies rather than through simple attitudes of support or rejection towards the New Order (Asrifan et al. 2025; Drake and Sherin 2006; Zohar 2023). The findings identify two overlapping tendencies: an official-narrative-oriented tendency that legitimises caution through textbooks, government guidelines, stability, and harmony; and a multiperspectival-evidence-oriented tendency that expands classroom sources while still carefully managing risk (Wu, Deng, and Greenier 2025; Zerai et al. 2023). This reframing responds to scholarship on controversial history teaching by shifting attention from whether teachers should teach difficult pasts to how they linguistically and pedagogically negotiate the boundaries of what can be said in class.

A political and economic reading further shows that New Order education and history policy operated within a developmentalist project that prioritised “order” and “stability” as conditions for economic growth. This project was sustained through alliances among bureaucratic-military elites and business interests, while schooling functioned as a site for citizen formation, labour preparation, and consent-building (Robison and Hadiz 2004). Official history narratives therefore did not merely transmit facts about the past; they normalised a model of governance in which political conflict was framed as threat and dissent was rendered illegitimate. The continued presence of this vocabulary in teacher discourse shows the afterlife of authoritarian language in post-Reform classrooms.

This framing explains why teachers frequently foreground stability, discipline, and national unity when discussing New Order achievements and controversies. Such language can reproduce state projects by aligning good citizenship with obedience, productivity, and depoliticisation, while treating religious politics and post-1965 violence as risks to harmony (Hefner 2000; Roosa 2006). However, the data also complicate a simple reproduction thesis. Some teachers partially resist these constraints by widening sources, inviting comparative discussion, and acknowledging victims' perspectives. Their caution should not be read only as ideological compliance; it may also reflect practical concerns about classroom polarisation, limited evidence, parental reactions, and institutional accountability.

Compared with previous studies on Indonesian controversial history teaching, this article adds a discourse-level account of teacher positioning (Hatfield 2025; Martikainen 2019). Studies on the 1965 affair and New Order textbooks have shown that the topic remains politically sensitive, but the present analysis demonstrates how sensitivity is enacted through specific rhetorical choices: mitigation (“sensitive material”), authorisation (“government guidelines”), rationalisation (“avoid conflict”), and perspectivisation (“from different points of view”) (Hatfield 2025; Martikainen 2019). These features reveal that history teachers do not simply transmit or reject official

memory; they negotiate between institutional safety, pedagogical responsibility, and the ethical demand to recognise historical complexity.

The tension between the two tendencies also points to important contradictions. Teachers who endorse multiperspectivity may still use neutralising language that softens responsibility for violence. Conversely, teachers who rely on official textbooks may still be aware of political interests behind the curriculum. These contradictions suggest that teacher discourse is situated, relational, and context-dependent. The categories presented in this article should therefore be read as positions teachers may move between depending on topic, student response, institutional context, and available sources.

The study has limitations. The sample is limited to 20 teachers in five cities, and the number of classroom observations depended on school access. The analysis also relies on teacher interviews and selected observations, so it cannot fully capture long-term classroom interaction or students' interpretations. Future research should include longer field-based observation, student perspectives, regional case studies, and comparative work with other post-authoritarian societies. Practically, the findings suggest that teacher professional development should focus on source evaluation, structured discussion of controversial issues, ethical treatment of victims' narratives, and strategies for facilitating disagreement without turning classrooms into spaces of intimidation or silence.

Conclusion

The discourse of history teachers in teaching the New Order (1966–1998) is shaped by the interplay of state-controlled narratives, state-religion governance, post-1965 politics of memory, and developmentalist education projects. The article contributes to international debates in history education by demonstrating that controversial history teaching in post-authoritarian contexts depends not only on curriculum reform or the availability of multiple sources, but also on the discursive conditions that make some interpretations feel safe, legitimate, or risky in the classroom. During the New Order, teachers were bound by a politicised curriculum that promoted Soeharto's regime as a stabilising force, aligned anti-communism and national harmony with moral citizenship, and marginalised alternative perspectives. In the post-Reform era, teachers have gained more curricular space for critical enquiry, but they continue to negotiate outdated textbook legacies, competing memories, and sensitivities around religion, violence, victimhood, and responsibility. The study's two analytical categories—official-narrative-oriented and multiperspectival-evidence-oriented tendencies—show how teachers move between caution and critique. For policy and practice, the findings point to the need for professional development that supports evidence-based reasoning, multiperspectival pedagogy, and ethical discussion of difficult pasts. Future studies should examine how students interpret these teacher discourses and how local histories reshape national narratives of the New Order.

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