

# **‘Where are all these students coming from?’ History lecturers’ perspectives on the preconceived ramifications of compulsory school history in South Africa**

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2025/n35a7>

**Zoleka Mkhabela**

University of KwaZulu-Natal  
South Africa

**Orcid:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1359-6629>  
[zoleka.mkhabela@gmail.com](mailto:zoleka.mkhabela@gmail.com)

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2025/n35a7>

**Hennades T Tabe**

University of Johannesburg  
South Africa

**Orcid:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4910-8659>  
[tabe4real@gmail.com](mailto:tabe4real@gmail.com)

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2025/n35a7>

**Raymond Fru**

Sol Plaatje University  
Kimberley, South Africa

**Orcid:** <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0507-5269>  
[raymond.fru@spu.ac.za](mailto:raymond.fru@spu.ac.za)

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2025/n35a7>

**Siyabonga Alex Qwabe**

**Orcid:** <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8131-3307>  
[alexqwabe@gmail.com](mailto:alexqwabe@gmail.com)

**DOI:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2223-0386/2025/n35a7>

## Abstract

On 5 May 2015, South Africa's former Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, announced a proposed transformative policy to make history a compulsory subject through to Grade 12. While aimed at fostering historical awareness and critical thinking, this proposal would have significant implications for educators at both secondary and tertiary levels. University lecturers, in particular, would face challenges adapting to increased enrolment, diverse student backgrounds (cultural, ethnic, socio-economic and academic differences among students) and varying levels of academic preparedness. This paper offers insights into the broader educational and pedagogical implications of the proposed policy shift. To achieve this, we focus on the challenges associated with managing potential increased enrolment numbers, shifts in curriculum focus, one of the student requests during the 2015-2016 student protest, and the need for adapting teaching methods to meet students' varied academic levels and interests. The research adopts a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews to capture the perceptions of six lecturers from different universities regarding this proposed policy shift to make history a compulsory subject in the Further Education and Training Band. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies key patterns and insights related to the impact of making history a compulsory subject. The research findings are viewed from two dimensions. On the one hand, there is an opportunity for lecturers to engage a broader range of students in historical inquiry, fostering critical thinking skills and promoting historical consciousness across disciplines. On the other hand, concerns are raised about the strain on resources, larger class sizes and the potential dilution of academic rigour. While broader studies on policy shifts address resource allocation at a macro level, the urgent need for localised institutional strategies are recommended to sustain pedagogical quality amidst rising student numbers.

**Keywords:** Compulsory subject; history education; inclusivity; pedagogy; policy shift; transformation.

## Introduction and background

South Africa has undergone profound political and educational transformations over the past three decades, resulting in significant shifts in curriculum development and the broader educational landscape (Wassermann, 2011). Under apartheid, education served as a mechanism for enforcing racial segregation and entrenching white supremacy (Welsh, 2010). Following the democratic transition in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC)-led government faced the dual challenge of addressing historical inequities and

rebuilding an education system that had been intentionally fragmented and unequal. Central to this process was developing a unified national curriculum that emphasised inclusivity, democracy and human rights (Fiske & Ladd, 2004).

Prior to 1994, the teaching of history in South Africa was primarily used to perpetuate the ideology of apartheid, reinforcing racial hierarchies and political subjugation (Russell et al., 2019). However, with the dismantling of apartheid, history was reconceptualised to align with the democratic ideology and constitutional principles of the new dispensation (Mhlongo, 2013). This reimagining of history education sought to address the divisive legacies of the past, while promoting unity and a more inclusive national identity. Similar patterns of history curriculum transformation aimed at nation-building and identity construction have been observed in other African contexts (Fru & Wassermann, 2020). The People's History Commission, established by the National Education Crisis Committee during apartheid, played a pivotal role in this transformation by advocating for an alternative history curriculum centring on marginalised groups' lived experiences (Shabangu, 2021).

Despite the prioritisation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects in the post-apartheid era, history gained renewed attention in 2015 when the former Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, announced plans to make the subject compulsory for learners up to Grade 12 (Davids, 2016; Mkhabela, 2018). This policy proposal, preceded by lobbying from organisations such as the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), sparked extensive debate (Mkhabela, 2018). SADTU's position, as outlined in their 2014 draft paper, underscored the need for South Africans to reclaim the narrative of their past. Drawing on Chinua Achebe's assertion that "until the lions have their historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter," (Achebe, 1994, n.p), SADTU emphasised the importance of ensuring that history is told from the perspective of those who experienced it, rather than from the colonial or settler viewpoint (SADTU, 2014).

Minister Motshekga justified the policy shift by highlighting its potential to contribute to nation-building, instil national pride, promote social cohesion and preserve cultural heritage (Phakathi, 2015). On 4 June 2015, the history Ministerial Task Team (MTT) was appointed (Van Eeden & Warnich, 2018) led by Professor Sifiso Ndlovu, with terms of reference to conduct a comparative international study to advise the Department on the possible introduction of history as a compulsory subject in Further Education and Training (FET) bands (Department of Basic Education [DoBE], 2015). The MTT conducted

comparative research into countries where history is a compulsory subject (Wassermann et al., 2023), such as Zambia and Cuba, and reported in their findings that such a policy could enhance learners' political awareness and civic engagement. Nevertheless, critics argue that these outcomes could also be achieved through subjects such as life orientation, which already addresses themes of democracy, citizenship and human rights (Davids, 2016; Sithole & Fru, 2024).

The urgency of this initiative was further underscored by contemporary social issues, such as the xenophobic violence that erupted in South Africa in 2007/8 and 2015 (Davids, 2016). These attacks, marked by looting and destruction of foreign-owned businesses, were interpreted as indicative of a lack of historical awareness and social understanding among the youth (Davids, 2016; DoBE, 2015; Wassermann et al., 2023). Proponents of the policy contend that a robust knowledge of South African history could foster critical thinking, empathy and a deeper appreciation of the country's complex socio-political fabric, leading to an advancement of responsible citizenship (Fru, 2015).

A dearth of research on the ramifications of history becoming compulsory for university lecturers has been conducted, hence the significance of this study. Introducing history as a compulsory school subject would present both opportunities and challenges. The possible increased enrolment in history raises critical questions regarding the adequacy of resources, the preparedness of educators/lecturers and the extent to which the curriculum can accommodate diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives. Furthermore, the politicisation of history education necessitates a careful and balanced pedagogical approach to ensure that the subject remains a tool for fostering critical inquiry, rather than an instrument for political indoctrination. As this possible policy is being considered, lecturers will be at the forefront of navigating its ramifications, grappling with the complexities of integrating a compulsory history curriculum into the broader educational framework. The objectives of this paper are:

- To examine the perceptions of history lecturers regarding the implications of making history a compulsory subject in South African schools.
- To examine how the policy change of making history a compulsory subject at school might influence the preparedness of students entering history programmes at the tertiary level.

## Literature review

This section reviews the literature on the implications of making history a compulsory subject in South African schools, focusing on the perceptions of history lecturers and the effects of policy changes on student diversity, preparedness and academic integration at the tertiary level.

### *Understanding compulsory education: Context and purpose*

One must first grasp the broader context of compulsory education and its purpose to understand the implications of making history compulsory. Education has long been regarded as a fundamental tool for shaping learners' growth within and beyond the classroom. As defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), education is:

*The entire process of social life using which individuals and social groups learn to develop consciously within and for the benefit of national and international communities, encompassing their full personal capacities, attitudes, aptitudes, and knowledge. This process is not confined to specific activities (Carney, 2022:7).*

This definition emphasises that education develops learners holistically, equipping them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to adapt to and contribute to a changing world. The introduction of compulsory education aimed to standardise this process, ensuring the state's ability to regulate learning for societal benefits (Katz, 1976). Historically, however, these benefits were often tied to broader political, social and economic agendas (Thrupp & Tomlinson, 2005).

In South Africa, the origins of compulsory education trace back to the Massachusetts Bay Colony's 1642 law, which required children to be educated to read the Bible, thus, aligning literacy with religious and social conformity (Katz, 2001). Over time, the rationale expanded to include teaching basic literacy and ensuring that children became productive, law-abiding citizens. The 1642 law institutionalised these goals by requiring communities to provide teachers, signalling the emergence of state-mandated education policies. Such policies laid the foundation for centuries of educational reforms aimed at shaping learners to align with societal and state expectations.

Compulsory education, by design, exists to mould learners' character, values and intellectual capacities to meet the state's perceived needs (Spiel et al., 2018). Kotin and

Aikman (1980) argue that the government historically used compulsory education to instil loyalty to prevailing political, religious and social ideologies. Similarly, schooling is often an instrument of social control, preparing learners to fulfil economic and political roles, while ensuring compliance with state authority (Spring, 2007). The addition of compulsory subjects, including history, fits this narrative. Like other mandated subjects, history is not merely academic; it carries moral and political agendas (VanSledright, 2008). Seemingly neutral subjects like numeracy and literacy often advance state-driven ideologies (Alexander, 2013). When history is made compulsory, it reflects a deliberate effort to instil collective memory, foster patriotism, and shape students' understanding of their roles within a nation's socio-political fabric (Sithole & Fru, 2024). For example, in South Africa, the compulsory inclusion of life orientation and mathematics in the curriculum underscores the government's goals of fostering democratic values, equity and social justice (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Similarly, the possibility of history as a compulsory subject would ensure learners understand their national heritage, the struggles of past generations and the importance of democratic participation (Fru, 2015; Wassermann et al., 2023). The emphasis on historical literacy aligns with the government's efforts to cultivate informed and engaged citizens who can contribute to societal development. However, as critics (Gatto, 2002; Golden & Katz, 2008) highlight, the compulsory nature of such education raises questions about its beneficiaries. Is the primary goal to empower students or to serve the government's interests? Gatto (2002) argues that compulsory education often prioritises making students "manageable" over nurturing independent thinkers. In the case of history, the question arises: whose history is being taught, and whose narratives are being excluded and silenced? Research on history education in African contexts has shown how textbooks and curricula serve as tools for constructing particular national identities, while marginalising alternative narratives (Fru & Wassermann, 2020).

The South African curriculum, for instance, emphasises inclusivity and redress through subjects like life orientation and history (DoBE, 2011). Yet, it also reflects the government's desire to promote social cohesion in a country still grappling with the legacies of apartheid. In mandating history as a possible compulsory subject, the curriculum ensures that students are exposed to shared national narratives that align with the state's vision of reconciliation and nation-building.

Nevertheless, debates about compulsory education persist, particularly concerning the balance between state control and individual autonomy. Carl (2009), Godsell (2016), Kotin and Aikman (1980) suggest that compelling students to study specific subjects like

history raises ethical and pedagogical questions about the role of education in shaping not just knowledge, but values and identities. These tensions highlight the complex ramifications of making history a compulsory subject, leaving lecturers at the intersection of competing educational and societal demands.

## **Theoretical framework: Pedagogical adaptation and policy implementation**

This study is situated within the interpretative paradigm, which acknowledges that individuals construct meaning through their interactions with policy, institutional contexts and professional roles (Potrac et al., 2014). Grounded in an adaptive theoretical framework that examines how university lecturers recalibrate their teaching strategies in response to policy mandates, such as the proposed policy to make history a compulsory subject through to Grade 12. The framework draws on educational policy implementation theory, particularly the work of Lipsky (2023), which conceptualises educators as street-level bureaucrats who respond to policy based on local realities and available resources. In this context, pedagogical adaptation becomes a central theme, as lecturers work to maintain academic standards while teaching increasingly diverse cohorts of students with varying levels of interest and preparedness. To address this, the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) highlights the importance of scaffolding and contextualised instruction using tools such as timelines, primary sources and visual aids to support students with limited historical inquiry and disciplinary thinking exposure.

The study further draws on Tinto's (2010) model of student retention to explore how lecturers address issues of motivation and persistence among students mandated to study history. On this basis, compulsory history lessons may result in disengagement among less-interested students, necessitating inclusive and engaging teaching methods. For instance, inquiry-based approaches like project-based learning can enhance student ownership and deepen their connection to historical content. Simultaneously, Kelchtermans' (2009) work on teacher identity and vulnerability highlights policy-induced changes' emotional and professional impact. Lecturers often renegotiate their sense of agency, balancing institutional expectations with their pedagogical values, while managing increased workloads and pressure to meet diverse learners' needs (McNaughton & Billot, 2016; Chaaban et al., 2021).

The adaptive framework further integrates transformative learning theory (Taylor, 2000) to explore how lecturers experience growth while adapting to policy changes. This

is vital because the possibility of making history compulsory at the school level and the expected increase in history students at tertiary institutions may prompt educators and lecturers to innovate course designs, experiment with teaching practices, and reflect on ways to make the subject relevant to students' lives. According to Taylor (2000), this theoretical lens helps illuminate lecturers' strategies, challenges and broader implications for history education. Situating the study within these frameworks provides a nuanced understanding of how policy shifts shape teaching methods, lecturer identity and student experiences within the discipline of history.

## **Research design and methods**

This paper adopted a qualitative research design to explore the perspectives of university lecturers on the ramifications of making history a compulsory subject at school level. According to Hammarberg et al. (2016), qualitative research methods are often used to conduct rigorous research, which generates an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon while focusing on its meaning. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with six lecturers from three South African public universities in KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng and the Northern Cape. Using grounded theory as a research approach, these institutions were purposively selected to represent diverse geographic, cultural and institutional contexts, allowing for the generation of a broad range of perspectives and the development of theory grounded in the data (Dworkin, 2012). The participants were purposively selected based on their direct experience as lecturers in history education at the undergraduate level (Campbell et al., 2020), particularly those who may be directly impacted by increased enrolment following the possible implementation of the policy to make history a compulsory subject in the FET Band. Online interviews were conducted through Microsoft Outlook, with participants' consent for audio recording to facilitate transcription, and all recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Each session lasted approximately sixty minutes and was conducted in-depth. The interview protocol included questions addressing the impact that higher enrolment of history students might have on the history classroom dynamics and institutional resources, changes in teaching strategies to accommodate diverse student backgrounds, perceptions of students' academic preparedness for university-level history, and broader reflections on the implications of these policy changes. Follow-up questions were posed during the interviews to ensure depth and clarity.

Thematic analysis was employed to identify and interpret patterns within the data. The analysis began with a thorough familiarisation process, during which transcripts were read multiple times to comprehensively understand the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Initial coding was conducted to categorise data into broad themes, including enrolment trends, teaching challenges, student preparedness and resource allocation. These initial codes were then reviewed and refined to uncover more specific themes, such as managing disengaged learners and adapting curriculum design. The final themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and linked to theoretical constructs, such as pedagogical adaptation and policy implementation, to provide deeper insight into the lecturers' experiences and strategies.

## **Ethical considerations**

Although formal ethical clearance was not obtained for this low-risk study, all ethical protocols were meticulously followed to ensure the research adhered to high ethical standards. Participants were fully informed about the study's objectives, the research process and anticipated outcomes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement, ensuring they understood their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were explicitly assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences (Millum & Bromwich, 2021).

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Participants' identities were anonymised using pseudonyms, and all data collected during the semi-structured interviews were securely stored to prevent unauthorised access. This is emphasised by Rahman (2016) that anonymity and confidentiality are fundamental to qualitative research, ensuring participants' privacy and safeguarding sensitive data while balancing ethical considerations like informed consent, cultural variations and potential dilemmas arising from limitations in fully guaranteeing confidentiality. Interview questions were designed to be non-invasive, respectful and sensitive to participants' roles as educators adapting to policy changes. The research team exercised due diligence in adhering to academic integrity and transparency principles. Data analysis was conducted objectively, focusing on thematic patterns without bias or misrepresentation. These measures ensured the research was conducted ethically, respecting the dignity and rights of the participants while generating valuable insights into the implications of making history a compulsory subject in South African schools.

## Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study, with participants identified using allocated pseudonyms (e.g., U1L1 for University 1 Lecturer 1 to U6L6 for University 6, Lecturer 6). Quotations were obtained from the participant's perspective, though not verbatim. The analysis is structured around three main themes to interpret the data comprehensively.

### *Theme 1: Student demographics and academic preparedness*

The study's findings consistently highlight a significant shift in student demographics following the possible implementation of history as a compulsory school subject. Across multiple participant responses (U1L1; U2L2; U3L3), there is consensus that such a policy may increase enrolment, particularly among Black students from varied socio-economic backgrounds. However, the extent of this diversity remains contested. While U3L3 notes a broadening of socio-economic representation, U4L4 and U5L5 suggest that the policy could reinforce existing enrolment patterns, with history students continuing to come predominantly from historically marginalised communities. This finding aligns with Fornahl et al. (2015), who argue that policy-driven educational expansion often leads to quantitative growth, rather than qualitative transformation. The debate over the depth of inclusivity underscores the need for further research into whether making history compulsory could genuinely broaden access to underrepresented student groups or redistribute existing enrolment patterns.

A key area of agreement among participants (U2L2; U3L3; U5L5; U5L5) is the challenge of academic preparedness. Many students entering university-level history courses exhibit limited historical literacy, critical thinking skills and scholarly writing abilities, which are essential for engaging with historical discourse. This opinion aligns with existing studies by Aidinopoulou and Sampson (2017) and Cubitt (2013), which emphasise that historical thinking requires more than routine memorisation. That is, it necessitates analytical reasoning, engagement with evidence and contextual interpretation. However, disparities in prior educational exposure exacerbate these challenges, as noted by U1L1 and U4L4, where the participants observe that students from historically under-resourced schools struggle more significantly. The South African education system's emphasis on factual recall, rather than analytical engagement (Salvioni et al., 2017) is identified as a significant impediment to student success. Furthermore, socio-economic disparities further hinder student engagement, including limited access to academic resources and

technology (Zimba et al., 2021). These structural challenges reinforce Tinto's Model of Student Retention, which posits that student success is heavily influenced by academic and social integration into university life.

Despite widespread agreement on these challenges, there is some divergence regarding institutional responses. U3L3 and U5L5 suggest that universities should implement preparatory programmes, such as bridging courses, to enhance students' historical reasoning skills. U4L4 emphasises the need for lecturers to adapt their pedagogical strategies to accommodate students with diverse levels of academic preparedness. This aligns with the Transformative Learning Theory, which underscores the role of pedagogical adaptation in reshaping student understanding (Kumanda et al., 2024). U1L1, however, raises concerns about whether universities can provide the necessary institutional support to bridge these gaps. These findings suggest that while the possible policy shift would broaden access to history education, it could also intensify challenges related to student preparedness, necessitating comprehensive curriculum reforms and targeted academic support interventions.

### ***Theme 2: Pedagogical adjustments and institutional challenges***

Regarding pedagogical adjustments and institutional challenges, the findings reveal that lecturers must adapt their teaching methodologies significantly to accommodate the anticipated increased enrolment and diverse academic preparedness of students. Some lecturers incorporate student-centred pedagogies, including Ubuntu-based learning and interactive methods, to foster engagement in large, heterogeneous classrooms (U1L1; U3L3). This shift aligns with Chigbu et al. (2023), who emphasise the need for context-specific pedagogical innovations in higher education. However, the anticipated increased student numbers would significantly strain classroom dynamics, affecting student engagement, assessment processes and grading workloads. While Nyagope (2024) highlights the importance of responsive teaching methodologies, there is a gap in research on how African institutions, particularly under-resourced universities, can sustain these pedagogical innovations amid rising enrolment.

A key concern raised across the findings (U2L2; U3L3) is the challenge of maintaining academic rigour while making history accessible to students with varying levels of academic preparedness. This sentiment can be rationalised from the study by Wassermann et al., (2018), which concluded that Grade 10 learners living in rural settings refuse to take history as a school subject, citing reasons such as a lack of prospects of landing decent jobs

or securing funding to study. They would rather take subjects such as mathematics, physical science and commercial subjects that they consider advantageous to their future prospects in the urban setting. This implied that many learners who took history approached the discipline in class with a lack of interest and a deficit mentality. This is the kind of mindset that contributes to poor academic rigour and affects classroom engagement and performance. Traditionally, history instruction relied on textual analysis and lecture-based pedagogy. Still, lecturers are now simplifying content and adjusting the teaching pace to support students with little prior exposure to the subject. This aligns with Wibowo et al's (2025) social constructivist theory of Vygotsky, which suggests that instructional methods should be adjusted to match students' prior knowledge and abilities. However, the increased enrolment would create logistical difficulties, with some universities struggling to provide adequate infrastructure and support, leading to large class sizes and online assessments. The strain on institutional resources mirrors findings from Nixon (2020) on the adverse effects of massification in higher education. However, unlike broader discussions on student population growth, these findings highlight subject-specific impacts on history education, emphasising the urgent need for curriculum flexibility and increased faculty support to ensure sustainable teaching practices.

Despite efforts to adapt pedagogy, lecturers express concerns that the possibility of making history compulsory may lead to passive student participation, rather than meaningful engagement (U3L3). This contradicts the views of Tabe (2021) and Tabe et al. (2021), who suggest that making history compulsory could improve learner performance and engagement by exposing students across disciplines to the subject, potentially shifting outcomes from lower to higher achievement levels, rather than fostering passive participation. Historical inquiry requires analytical and interpretative skills developed through sustained intellectual curiosity, and some lecturers fear that students who do not voluntarily choose the subject, may engage with it superficially (Godsell, 2022). To counter this, inclusive strategies such as collaborative learning, structured debates and Ubuntu-based pedagogy have been employed to maintain student interest. While pedagogical adaptation offers a viable strategy for navigating these challenges, Tinto's Model of Student Retention suggests that academic and social integration are critical for student success. Thus, institutions must adjust teaching approaches and provide targeted support, such as faculty development programmes and resource allocation, to uphold academic rigour while ensuring inclusivity in history education. This is further elucidated under the subsequent theme.

### ***Theme 3: Institutional support and policy implications***

The proposed expansion of history as a compulsory subject would significantly strain institutional resources, with participant U1L1 expressing concerns about overburdened staff, inadequate infrastructure and a lack of learning materials. This aligns with Nixon's (2020) argument that massification without proportional investment can undermine educational quality. The study reveals that a surge in enrolment would outpace institutional capacity, leading to overcrowded lecture halls, increased grading workloads and reduced personalised student support. Participants (U2L2; U6L6) emphasise the need for additional funding, more academic staff, and faculty training to manage the growing and increasingly diverse student body effectively. Despite institutional efforts to accommodate higher student enrolments, concerns remain about the potential dilution of academic rigour in history courses. Participant U1L1 notes that many students engage with the subject passively, rather than critically, raising questions about whether making history compulsory enhances intellectual engagement or merely expands access.

These findings echo the perspectives of Salvioni et al. (2017) on historical consciousness, which requires more than factual recall, but active inquiry and interpretation. The study underscores the tension between inclusivity and maintaining academic depth, with some participants (U1L1; U3L3; U4L4) fearing that history may lose its status as a discipline rooted in analytical rigour. To counter this, the study recommends hiring additional academic staff, revising curricula to balance accessibility with intellectual challenge and providing professional development programmes on inclusive pedagogy. At the same time, Donohue and Bornman (2014) discuss the necessity of resource-backed policy implementation. Still, there remains a gap in the literature on how compulsory subject policies impact tertiary education disciplines requiring critical engagement, such as history.

An increased student population would necessitate adjustments in teaching methods, yet resource constraints could hinder the effectiveness of interactive learning strategies. According to participant U1L1 large class sizes in their institution, sometimes exceeding seven hundred students, have forced lecturers to shift from discussion-based approaches recommended for a history lesson to lecture-heavy content delivery, limiting student participation. While constructivist learning theories (Wibowo et al., 2025) advocate for active engagement through debate and collaboration, the study shows that logistical challenges often prevent such pedagogical methods from being effectively implemented. Massification without parallel investment leads to declining academic quality. Institutional support, through hiring additional lecturers, integrating digital tools for engagement

and expanding physical and technological infrastructure would, therefore, be crucial for sustaining the policy's long-term viability (Shava et al., 2021). Future research should explore strategic frameworks that balance academic standards with expanded access, ensuring that compulsory history education fosters meaningful learning, rather than surface-level compliance.

In addition to the above three sub-themes, another aspect of the standard and curriculum adaptation surfaced, significantly contributing to the current study.

### ***Academic standards and curriculum adaptation***

While these academic adaptations referred to above foster inclusivity, participant U4L4 expresses concern that they may compromise the depth of historical inquiry, as many incoming students lack foundational analytical skills. This results in challenges, as massification often simplifies content, reducing engagement with higher-order historical thinking (Shava et al., 2021). The findings indicate that lecturers could respond by incorporating interactive teaching methods, such as role play and discussions, in line with social constructivist theory, which emphasises peer interaction and scaffolding in cognitive development (Wibowo et al., 2025). However, the effectiveness of these strategies would be constrained by large class sizes and limited opportunities for individualised feedback. Historical reasoning requires critical engagement with multiple perspectives, yet the current teaching environment prioritises breadth over depth (Aidinopoulou & Sampson, 2017). This tension underscores the need for structured academic support, including bridging programmes and targeted interventions, to maintain academic standards while promoting accessibility.

Despite shared concerns about the dilution of historical rigour, some participants (U4L4; U5L5; U6L6) view the policy shift as an opportunity to rethink how history is taught, advocating for a decolonised curriculum that integrates diverse historical narratives without compromising methodological depth. The findings, however, reveal a divide. While some participants (U4L4) fear that adapting to underprepared students may weaken disciplinary integrity, others (U5L5) argue that traditional history curricula have long excluded marginalised perspectives. The possible policy change presents an opportunity for pedagogical transformation. However, both perspectives acknowledge the pressing need for institutional support, such as additional teaching staff, smaller class sizes and professional development programmes focused on inclusive pedagogy. Drawing from transformative learning theory, the findings suggest that, rather than merely accommodating

new students, history education should aim to challenge existing frameworks, fostering a critical and reflective approach to the discipline. Ensuring this effective transformation requires investment in curriculum innovation that balances accessibility with the analytical rigour essential to historical scholarship.

## **Conclusion**

This article underscores the complex ramifications for university lectures on the possibility of making history a compulsory school subject, as recommended by the South African Basic Education MTT Report, revealing both exciting opportunities and significant challenges. While increased enrolment at tertiary institutions might promote inclusivity and an appreciation for historical discourse, disparities in students' academic preparedness, infrastructural limitations, and the strain on academic staff raise concerns about feasibility and sustainability. To circumvent the strain that such a policy will place on universities, this study suggests proactive curriculum adjustment and enhancement strategies that will include, amongst others, investment in faculty expansion, pedagogical training, and resource allocation to ensure that history remains a robust and intellectually stimulating discipline, even with the potential increase in student enrolments.

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