

The Use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in History Education

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ABSTRACT

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research methodology used to understand the subjective reality of informants through their personal interpretations of life experiences and the meanings they derive from those experiences (Smith, 2011). Initially, IPA was widely used in psychological studies. Over time, and with the development of knowledge, IPA has been adopted in other fields, including education. This article seeks to describe the use of IPA by researchers in the study of history education. Specifically, the author explores aspects of collective national emotions, particularly nationalism, experienced and embedded in high school students during and after their history learning, especially in local history. I attempt to present a small example that IPA can indeed be very effective in describing students' learning experiences and the affective outcomes (emotions and attitudes) from learning that should ideally become ingrained within them. Regarding history education, the involvement of collective emotions such as nationalism should be embedded in students both during and after the learning process, ultimately shaping the national character of all students even after they have graduated. The results of this study indicate that using the IPA method in this research is quite meticulous and produces a significant amount of required data. It shows that high school graduates in Papua do not perceive local history learning as interesting and that it minimally evokes emotions, thus failing to foster or strengthen their Indonesian nationalism. In fact, according to their experiences, local Papuan history and nationalism are seen as taboo topics to discuss, explain, or even address, even in the school setting. According to them, not only students but also history teachers tend to avoid or are reluctant to delve deeply into the topics of local history and the nationalism of Papuan society.

KEYWORDS



Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, History of Education, Nationalism, Local History

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INTRODUCTION

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative approach to understanding the life experiences of informants (participants) to describe what a topic looks like for them in a given context (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2008; Smith, 2004). IPA expands simple descriptions and understands informants' life experiences by developing interpretive analyses of those descriptions in relation to social, cultural, and theoretical contexts. The results of the analysis offer "an interpretive explanation of what/how meaningful the experience is to the informant in their particular context" (Larkin et al., 2008, p. 113). If more and more researchers explore the history learning experience of students, explore the feelings and emotional involvement they experience, and explore whether the experience can leave a lasting impression on the hearts and minds of students or high school graduates, then it can be evaluated how successful history teachers are. In other words, it can be evaluated whether or not the goals of history learning are achieved. Experiences involving social and cultural aspects will strengthen a person's emotional attachment to a particular group or nation, especially when they contain historical elements relevant to national identity (Mufid, 2017). In the context of education, a meaningful learning experience is one that is able to provide meaning and relevance that is directly felt by students (Dinata et al., 2023; Krahenbuhl, 2016; Mcleod, 2023; Walad et al., 2024).

Science is strongly linked to three keys: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013). Phenomenology describes the "what" and "how" of phenomena experienced by individuals, developing descriptions of the essence of experience, but does not explain or analyze those descriptions (Creswell, 2013). Hermeneutics is an interpretive theory that concerns textual meaning, such as techniques used in speaking and writing that reveal the intent and context of the speaker/writer (Smith et al., 2013). Finally, idiography is concerned with detail and thorough analysis of small cases, which is different from general psychological studies that tend to be nomotetistic (Smith et al., 2013).

Smith (2004), a pioneer of science research in the field of health psychology, notes that the four main characteristics of science research stem from the three keys mentioned above. First, IPA is idiographic because a detailed analysis of one case is carried out before proceeding to the next. Second, science is inductive, meaning that research questions are structured broadly to allow for the emergence of unanticipated themes. There may be an interaction between induction and deduction in data analysis; however, an inductive approach is preferred. Third, the results are discussed using the existing literature, thus creating an element of interrogation. Finally, science researchers are influenced by their biographical background and knowledge of the existing literature and must interpret data through their own lens when developing themes (Smith, 2004).

IPA was initially widely used in the study of psychology. Over time and the development of science, science was finally used in other fields of science, including education. In research in the field of education, science has been widely used both inside and outside Indonesia. However, as far as the search is concerned, researchers have not found the use of science in historical education studies or research. In fact, history education is a discipline of knowledge that is difficult to separate from feel or emotion. For example, we can refer to the reference issued by the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia 2022 challenging the Learning Outcomes of History Subjects Phase E – Phase F for High School / MA / Package C Programs on History Subject Objectives. According to this BSKAP, History Subjects aim to: develop historical awareness; develop self-understanding; foster collective understanding as a nation; cultivate a sense of pride in past glory; cultivate a sense of nationalism and patriotism; cultivate moral, human, and environmental values; foster the values of diversity and mutual cooperation; develop an understanding of the human dimension, namely the ability to analyze thoughts, inner atmospheres, actions, and works that have meaning in history; develop an understanding of the dimension of space, namely the ability to analyze the relationship or relationship between events that occur locally, nationally, and globally; and develop an understanding of time, namely the ability to see events in its entirety including the past, present, and future dimensions, as well as analyzing development, continuity, repetition, and changes in human life.

The goals stated in points 1-6 are the items of achievement that greatly involve feelings or emotions. Points 3 and 5, related to the collective understanding as a nation and ultimately fostering nationalism and patriotism, are studies that the researcher specifically examines in this study.

It has been widely known in various studies that science is widely used to explore, research, and analyze feelings or emotions that are felt or that arise based on the experience of informants of certain phenomena. Nationalism in general is better known as a national ideology or ideology of the nation and state. This view may be accurate if we use a political and national perspective. However, developments in sociology and psychology, especially social psychology, have given birth to the finding that nationalism is very closely related to feelings and emotions. In the study of social psychology, the term collective emotions is known. If we

examine the history of the birth of nation-states on this earth, especially those born after the Second World War, it cannot be separated from the emergence of collective emotions that encourage collective consciousness, which is finally realized by establishing a country to realize common ideals. Especially if we talk about the historical context of the birth of the Indonesian state. Nationalism can be interpreted in a broad and narrow sense. In its broadest sense, the term refers to the whole of nation-oriented beliefs, expressions, and practices that are territorially bounded, and embodied in the political demands of a society that collectively identifies with a nation. This may or may not require the existence or demand of a separate national state, or be embodied in a self-conscious nationalist movement, although historically this has often been the end result of national identification.

The power of nationalism to motivate human actions, sacrifice, love, and hatred has not diminished. However, the current political, economic, and social conditions are very different from the conditions that gave rise to nationalism. What, then, explains the persistence of nationalism and its lasting influence on the hearts and minds of the people? This chapter provides some tentative answers to this question by examining the role of collective emotions in giving birth to nationalist commitments. There is an argument that if we are to improve our understanding of nationalism and its persistence in the years to come, then researchers will need to harness and creatively adapt the growing research on collective emotions, and their relationship to more instrumental social foundations and political life. It is only by grappling with the emotional appeal of nationalist identification, and exploring this in relation to group interests, rather than as an abstraction, that the resilience of national particularism in the 21st century can be fully appreciated. Given the explosion of nationalist sentiment we are witnessing today, there are some issues that are more politically important (Lloyd Cox, Springer's 2021 book *Nationalism*).

Local history has an important role in the formation of broader individual and collective identities, particularly in the context of nationalism. In this regard, the theory of social identity put forward by Henri Tajfel and further developed by John Turner is particularly relevant to understanding how local history can reinforce a sense of nationalism. Social identity theory argues that individuals form their self-identity not only based on personal characteristics, but also through their membership in certain social groups. Regarding collective identity, research from Van Laar et al. (2020) shows that the experience of collective identity, especially in culturally and ethnically diverse societies, can influence the way a person views national engagement as well as his or her national identity. The life experiences of high school graduates in Papua, which is rich in cultural heritage but often faced with complex national dynamics and realities, can be a factor influencing their attitudes towards Indonesian nationalism.

According to Turner, when individuals feel part of a group, they will internalize the values, norms, and history held by that group as part of their personal identity. In the context of local history, studying local historical stories, regional heroes, and local struggles in the face of various challenges will help individuals feel closer and connected to their group or community. This sense of attachment is not only limited to local communities but can also develop into a broader national identity when those local historical stories are integrated into the national historical narrative. Previous research by Van Laar et al. (2020) highlighted the role of collective identity in shaping national engagement, particularly within multicultural societies. Their findings emphasize how individual perceptions of national identity are significantly influenced by group-level affiliations and cultural experiences. Similarly, the study by Mufid (2017) focused on how meaningful learning in history can foster emotional attachment and collective understanding, underscoring the importance of affective elements in history education. However, both studies lack methodological depth in capturing the lived experiences of students through interpretive analysis, especially within the Indonesian context. Van Laar et al. employed survey-based quantitative approaches, while Mufid relied heavily on

conceptual framing without exploring personal narratives through qualitative methods. Moreover, no study to date has utilized Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to examine how emotional experiences in learning local history contribute to a sense of nationalism among Indonesian high school graduates, particularly in culturally rich and politically sensitive regions like Papua. This research fills that gap by applying IPA to uncover how students internalize and interpret their local historical learning experiences as a source of national identity and emotional connection to Indonesia. The aim of this study is to explore how emotional and reflective engagement with local history shapes the sense of nationalism among high school graduates in Papua. The research contributes theoretically by introducing IPA into the field of history education, and practically by offering insights for curriculum developers and educators to design more emotionally resonant and nationally integrative learning experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

Researchers discovered IPA when studying several methods that are suitable for the collection and processing of phenomenological data, especially related to the experiences of a person or group of people. When we read more about science, the scope of this approach is very suitable for use in phenomenological research related to feelings or emotional bonds that arise from learning experiences, especially in this case the experience of learning history in high school.

The researcher included 6 informants in this study because the object of this research is about the experience of learning history from high school graduates in Papua, so the researcher took six high school graduates who received education in Papua because currently Papua consists of six provinces, so the researcher took one high school graduate each from each province: one from West Papua Province, one from Southwest Papua Province, one from Central Papua Province, one from Mountainous Papua, one from Papua (parent), one from South Papua. These graduates are high school students who graduated between 2016-2024. Some of the curriculum used when they studied used the 2013 curriculum, some of which had used the Independent Curriculum. However, this difference in curriculum can be said to have no influence at all on the object of study being studied, because in principle the content of the material and the learning objectives taught are the same.

Table 1. Curriculum

Informant	Province of Origin	School of Origin	Graduation	Interview
AM	West Papua	Vilanova Manokwari Catholic High School	2022	Zoom
MD	Southwest Papua	Sorong Advent High School	2021	Face-to-face
YM	Central Papua	SMA 1 Nabire	2024	Zoom
NS	Mountainous Papua	1 Yahukimo High School	2016	Face-to-face
YV	Papua	SMA 3 Jayapura	2021	Face-to-face
KD	South Papua	SMA 3 Merauke	2023	Face-to-face

Next, the researcher developed a semi-structured interview guide. Here the researcher faces the first challenge in using IPA. It is true that researchers often have motives and biases based on their own biographies and contextual experiences (Fontana, 2005; Kozubikova

Sandova, 2015; Thornborrow et al., 2021; Zreik, 2019). There will be an element of subjectivity of the researcher's perspective here. So we have to be careful that subjectivity does not dominate in our research, especially when making interview guidelines. The question that the researcher developed and asked the informant was: "Did you get local historical material? To what extent/how much is local history material taught? Is the local history material interesting and memorable? After getting local history material, did you love Indonesia more? After getting local history material, did your sense of nationalism increase or get stronger? After getting local history material, do you become more and more convinced that Papua should indeed be part of the State of Indonesia? “.

After preparing the interview guide, of course, the next step is to conduct an interview. My six informants were interviewed one by one in depth one by one. *In-depth interviews* are indeed a necessity for science research, as well as another phenomenological research. With in-depth interviews, it is really possible to explore the experiences and emotional involvement of each informant. I conducted the interview in the period between May and September 2024. Some of the informants who are domiciled in Papua, the interviews were conducted via zoom (online). Some of the informants were interviewed face-to-face because they were studying in Jakarta and Bogor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I did this qualitative data analysis in three steps. First, it starts with the analysis of data/interview results at the individual level (person by person). Second, the data is grouped according to the categories studied, according to the questions and research objectives. Third, all data that have been categorized are analyzed for conclusions. Since there are only six informants, the entire data analysis process is carried out manually.

Table 2. General results of learning local history

INFORMATION	RESPONDENTS					
	AM	MD	YM	NS	YV	KD
Any/Not Local History	A	A	A	A	A	A
A Lot/ A Little	S	S	S	S	S	S

A = Ada

T = None

S = Little

B = Lot

Table 3. Special results of *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)* data

Feelings/Emotions	RESPONDENT					
	AM	MD	YM	NS	YV	KD
PULL	K	K	K	K	K	K
MEMORABLE	K	K	C	K	C	K
DULL	S	S	C	S	C	S
PROUD	S	C	S	C	S	C
NATIONALISM	K	K	C	K	C	K

From the results of the research category using Science Engineering, the graduates of Papuan High School showed varied experiences in learning local history. The material taught is often limited due to concerns of potential conflict and separatism. However, many students feel that local history provides insight into the struggles of Papuan figures, despite the lack of

in-depth learning and monotonous teaching methods. Learning local history also plays a role in fostering nationalism by instilling respect for the struggles of Papuan figures. However, less attractive teaching methods reduce the positive impact of this learning in generating a sense of pride and attachment to national identity.

The main purpose of attention to local history learning is to address concerns about the potential for separatism and to improve teaching methods that are often considered monotonous. Many students feel less interested in the material presented because it is only basic and not in-depth enough. This indicates an urgent need to develop innovations in teaching methods so that local history can be presented in a more engaging and relevant way for students. Today, local history material is often delivered in a limited manner with the aim of avoiding potential conflicts or sensitive polemics. Although some students find the local history material quite interesting, many of them feel bored due to the lack of creativity in its delivery. This creates a major challenge in learning local history, thus reducing its effectiveness in fostering interest, understanding, and a sense of pride in local and national history. Therefore, a more dynamic teaching approach, such as the use of technology, interactive media, and project-based activities, is needed so that students can be more actively involved and learning local history becomes more meaningful to them. Local history has the potential to shape the nationalism of the young generation of Papua by instilling a sense of love for the homeland.

However, the limitations of the material and monotonous teaching methods are the main obstacles. Students feel connected to Indonesia through local history, but the impact is still limited due to shortcomings in the teaching approach. Researchers believe that history education is education that is very closely related to students. Providing historical material to students is not only about cognitive, such as remembering the names of characters, dates, years and events. But no less important is to cultivate or nourish feelings related to nationalism, patriotism, love for the homeland, willingness to sacrifice for the nation and state, never give up, and so on.

CONCLUSION

Based on the experience of applying this scientific method in the study, it can be concluded that the approach is quite effective for research in history education, as it enables researchers to gather rich and relevant data directly from informants' perspectives. This method not only helps focus on the core research problems but also uncovers meaningful insights into the emotional and affective dimensions of history learning, such as nationalism, patriotism, love for the homeland, willingness to sacrifice, and perseverance—elements that go beyond mere memorization of facts and dates. Given these strengths, future research should further explore how interpretative and phenomenological approaches can be integrated into history education to deepen students' emotional engagement and national identity, possibly by comparing different regions or educational levels to identify best practices and contextual challenges.

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