



# Multiperspectivity in the National History A Exams (Portugal | 2018–2024): A Critical Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the presence and operationalization of multiperspectivity in the national History A exams in Portugal, applied between 2018 and 2024, across both phases. Using a qualitative approach, the study examines the questions that explicitly require the comparison of contrasting perspectives, assessing the level of cognitive complexity demanded in student responses. The findings indicate that, although multiperspectivity is a consistent feature of the exams, the depth of engagement varies significantly, ranging from simple tasks focused on identifying differences (the majority) to more demanding exercises requiring critical analysis and historical contextualization. It is concluded that, despite its regular inclusion, there is still room to enhance the critical use of multiperspectivity in exams, to foster more reflective and complex historical thinking.

*Keywords:* multiperspectivity, national exams, History A, historical thinking; history education.

## La multiperspectividad en los exámenes nacionales de Historia A (Portugal | 2018–2024): un análisis crítico

## RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza la presencia y la operacionalización de la multiperspectividad en los exámenes nacionales de Historia A en Portugal, aplicados entre 2018 y 2024, en sus dos fases. A través de un enfoque cualitativo, se examinan las preguntas que solicitan explícitamente el contraste de perspectivas, evaluando el nivel de complejidad cognitiva exigido en las respuestas. Los resultados indican que, aunque la multiperspectividad es una constante en las pruebas, el grado de profundidad varía significativamente, oscilando entre tareas de mera identificación de diferencias (la mayoría) y ejercicios que requieren análisis crítico y contextualización histórica. Se concluye que, a pesar de su presencia regular, existe margen para profundizar en el uso crítico de la multiperspectividad en los exámenes, promoviendo un pensamiento histórico más reflexivo y complejo.

*Palabras clave:* multiperspectividad, exámenes nacionales, Historia A, pensamiento histórico, educación histórica.

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## 1. Introduction

In 2017, a headline from *Expresso* asked: «Why do students fail History more often?» That year, the subject History A had one of the lowest average scores among Portuguese national exams – 9.5 out of 20 – and a failure rate of around 14% (Silva, 2017). This reality sparked debates about the curriculum, teaching methods, and especially the assessment models in use. Six years later, results remain a topic of concern. In 2023, the average exam score slightly increased to 11.5, and in 2024, it rose to 12.4 (Economia e Finanças, 2024), approaching the overall national exam average. Still, the fluctuation of results and students' continued difficulties in constructing historically grounded answers raise important questions about the assessment tools and criteria being used.

Assessment in History – particularly in the national History A exam – plays a crucial role in the academic pathway of students in the Languages and Humanities track. More than testing factual knowledge, the exam is expected to assess discipline-specific skills such as source interpretation, historical contextualisation, and the ability to engage with multiple perspectives. In this regard, the way in which the exam incorporates multiperspectivity can reveal the underlying pedagogical orientation and the kind of historical thinking that is being valued.

It is within this context that the present study is situated. It examines the national History A exam questions from 2018 to 2024, aiming to understand how multiperspectivity is addressed in the exams and what level of cognitive complexity is expected of students. The analysis combines key ideas from History Education with a systematic reading of the questions and marking criteria, seeking to contribute to broader reflections on the purposes and challenges of external assessment in History.

### 1.1 History Education and Historical Thinking: Theoretical and Curricular Framework

The aim of History Education is to develop historical thinking and knowledge that are useful for making informed decisions and acting responsibly in everyday life. By the end of compulsory education, students should have acquired a conceptual framework that enables them to understand the world and engage with it in a conscious, informed, and ethical manner, within an increasingly complex and demanding social context.

As an epistemological field that brings together History, the Epistemology of History, and Educational Research, History Education seeks to reflect on what it means to learn History and to define pedagogical principles aimed at fostering a humanistic historical consciousness. In this light, it argues that educational practice – including assessment – should be student-centred, with learners viewed as active agents in their own learning process.

The goal is for students to develop a transformative historical competence, allowing them to navigate tensions, dilemmas, and conflicts, create value, and respond to future challenges in a responsible way, in alignment with the principles of human dignity and equity. Therefore, the planning, implementation, and assessment of teaching should be grounded in students' real-life contexts – their experiences, backgrounds, and ways of making sense of the world (Casanova-García et al., 2024).

Historical learning should be based on tasks that respect the methodology of historical inquiry itself, encouraging source interpretation for evidence construction, the articulation of substantive and metahistorical concepts, and the development of metacognitive processes that support a personal – yet socially mediated – internalisation of historical knowledge.

This approach aligns with the current Portuguese curriculum and the recommendations of international organisations such as the OECD and UNESCO. In 2017, the document *Perfil dos Alunos à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória* (Oliveira Martins et al., 2017) outlined ten key areas of competence to be developed across school subjects, including personal, social, and academic skills, aiming to prepare students for lifelong challenges. Among these, critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and responsible action are particularly emphasised within a holistic and humanistic framework.

In this context, Decree-Laws no. 54/2018 and no. 55/2018 introduced the principles of Inclusive Education and Curriculum Autonomy and Flexibility. In non-vocational education, all teaching and assessment practices are now guided by the *National Strategy for Citizenship Education* and by each subject's *Essential Learnings*, which define the areas, topics, subtopics, and specific competences to be developed.

In this logic, assessment is not viewed as the final stage of the learning process but rather as an integral part of it. If the curriculum places the student at the centre, then assessment must also function as *assessment for learning* – not merely *assessment of learning*.

According to the current curriculum, History is a compulsory subject from years 7 to 9 and part of the specific component in the Languages and Humanities track in upper secondary education (years 10 to 12). At the end of secondary school, students sit a national exam, which accounts for 30% of the final grade in the subject.

The *Essential Learnings* for History define the substantive content and specific competences for each school year, in dialogue with the metahistorical concepts of the discipline. These competences are grouped into three main domains: a) Interpretation of diverse historical sources to build evidence; b) Contextualised understanding of historical realities; c) Historical communication and narrative construction.

It is also emphasised that the sources used in learning activities should be diverse in form (written, visual, material), status (official, unofficial, private, clandestine, etc.), and message (convergent, divergent, complementary). This principle is directly linked to the concept of *multiperspectivity*, which is explicitly presented in the *Essential Learnings* as a skill to be developed.

Specific guidelines for History teaching at the secondary level include:

- Analysing historiographical texts and identifying the author's viewpoint as an interpretation that may be revised in light of new historical scholarship (Ministério da Educação [ME], 2022, p. 3);
- Comparing different historical ideas and perspectives, while respecting differences of opinion;
- Promoting multiperspectivity in History, within a framework of personal and autonomous development (ME, 2022, pp. 9–10).

Multiperspectivity is, therefore, a key metahistorical concept with significant implications for learning, teaching, and assessing History. To put this concept into practice, it is essential to clarify what is meant by *multiperspectival narrative* and how it can contribute to the development of a critical, informed, and intercultural historical consciousness.

In a relativist approach, there appears to be a close relationship between historical and fictional narratives, which may devolve into myths, as well as into forms of escapist, consolatory, or purely entertaining storytelling. Taken to an extreme, this type of narrative can become a tool of power and manipulation. In short, historical narrative may be treated as a literary cultural artefact – a mere possibility of the real – without concern for validation, since, in this view, everything is sign and symbol, and there is no “real” to be accessed. However, the (re)construction of human actions and interactions within a cultural context is a process of «experiencing» the reality we wish to understand, giving it meaning through narrative competence. The legitimate and natural existence of different perspectives in History does not mean, however, that all perspectives are equally valid.

From a narrativist standpoint, validating multiple perspectives requires more than merely verifying facts, as is commonly done by fact-checking platforms in the media. A narrative may contain no factual errors – it may be built on “truthful” information – and yet still not be considered historically valid if it omits essential elements needed for a comprehensive understanding based on available evidence. Omitting relevant data while emphasising the irrelevant approaches the realm of fiction – shaped by ingredients such as peculiar emotional appeals, victimisation, or conspiracy theories.

A historical narrative should be explanatory in itself, a means of reconstructing human thought and action, grounded in historical evidence and in the intelligibility of the explanation produced. It is essential to debate multiple perspectives based on reciprocal critique, contextualised rational scepticism, and evidence, in order to validate the most plausible and intelligible explanation – one that is, of course, always provisional. In doing so, we explicitly contribute to the “reading” of the many narratives widely circulated through the media – some more false, conspiratorial, or manipulative than others. Thus, in the debate between perspectives, it is necessary to think consciously and rationally about the historical whole, so that this experience contributes to decision-making and action that can expose «constructed alternative realities» – even if this means narrating what we would rather not confront.

The confrontation of perspectives can allow for an understanding of the world that does not rely on a master or official narrative, constructed in the name of cohesion, often anchored in a single, mythological narrative closely linked to Public History and a traditional historical consciousness. In the fields of History and Historical Education, the terms «master narrative» or «official narrative» refer to the dominant version of the past that is institutionally legitimized and socially shared, often serving to consolidate national, political, or cultural identities. This narrative tends to present a simplified and homogeneous history, emphasizing certain events, characters, and interpretations, while marginalizing or silencing other voices and experiences. According to many authors (Olick et al., 2011), master narratives operate as instruments of power, guiding collective memory and influencing the construction of public historical consciousness. It is a narrative aimed at social cohesion but that can simultaneously restrict plurality and critical debate about the past. Therefore, challenging and problematizing the master narrative becomes essential for developing a multiperspective approach that is reflective, critical, and attentive to the complexities and contradictions of History.

However, merely acknowledging the existence of multiperspectivity – as is sometimes suggested in both Public and Disciplinary History – without addressing the criteria for historical validity, within a framework of critical realism, seems insufficient given the complex times we live in. Today, we face the challenge of “untruths” and «alternative facts.» It seems increasingly necessary to understand historical narrative as *inter-perspectival* – that is, constructed with attention to the cultures of the actors involved, their viewpoints, intentions, interests, and purposes. Deconstructing narratives to understand, validate, and reconstruct them in a more informed and complex way appears to be the path forward. The aim is, therefore, to contribute to the development of an *intercultural historical consciousness*.

Several studies in History Education conducted across Europe have examined how students of different ages explain the existence of multiple perspectives on the same historical event. Their responses show varying degrees of sophistication. Some students recognise that there are different ways of telling the same story, explaining that some people know more than others and identifying similarities and differences. Others justify the presence of multiple perspectives based on the idea that everyone has a right to their opinion, but without questioning the criteria that would allow for the assessment of those opinions' validity. Some even argue that historians should reach consensus – creating a single narrative. Less frequently, students acknowledge the existence of multiple perspectives as something natural and legitimate in History, arising from different questions and interpretations of historical evidence, shaped by distinct ways of thinking. However, these narratives and perspectives must be validated according to the methodological standards of the discipline itself (Barca et al., 2025; Gago, 2005).

The findings of a study focused on how History teachers perceive the use of multiperspectivity in the classroom are also noteworthy. Most teachers believe that it should be used, encouraging tasks that highlight similarities and differences among different authors' viewpoints, with the ultimate goal of building a consensual narrative on the topic. However, some teachers argue that multiperspectivity should not be used, fearing it may confuse students (Gago, 2018).

It is clear that there is still progress to be made. History Education can – and should – help identify, analyse, and promote a more complex view of reality, enabling decision-making and action to be more historically informed and less influenced by specific agendas (nationalist, revisionist, populist, economic, political, etc.).

Grounded in this shared theoretical and curricular framework, this article proposes an analysis of the national *History A* exam questions, which are mandatory for students in the Languages and Humanities track of Portuguese secondary education.

In short, History Education – as defined by the current Portuguese curricular framework and the wider international literature – places strong emphasis on developing a critical, informed, and ethically grounded historical consciousness. Within this vision, *multi-perspectivity* emerges as a core competence, enabling students to recognise the diversity of interpretations of the past and to position themselves thoughtfully when faced with competing narratives.

By incorporating diverse sources, encouraging critical analysis, and fostering the confrontation of perspectives, the teaching of History supports not only academic development but also the cultivation of reflective and active citizenship. In this light, assessment must rise to meet these formative ambitions. It must go beyond rote memorisation or surface-level comprehension and instead embrace tasks that truly engage students in complex historical thinking.

It is from this rich theoretical and curricular foundation that the present study draws its purpose: to critically examine the *History A* national exams, and to assess the extent to which they do –or do not– incorporate the transformative potential of multiperspectivity.

## 2. Methodological Framework of the Study

This study is situated within the field of History Education and focuses on the analysis of *History A* national exams taken at the end of upper secondary education in Portugal, between 2018 and 2024. All exam papers analysed in this study were obtained from the digital archive of the Instituto de Avaliação Educativa (IAVE), the institution responsible for the design and administration of national exams in Portugal. These exams are publicly available, ensuring transparency and the reliability of both the question papers and the marking schemes used in the analysis<sup>1</sup>.

### 2.1. Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

- To identify the questions in the *History A* national exams (2018–2024) that explicitly refer to the concept of multiperspectivity;
- To analyse the types of historical sources and tasks proposed to students in those questions;
- To infer the underlying ideas about how multiperspectivity is addressed in the exams;
- To evaluate the consistency between these assessment tasks and the competences associated with historical thinking.

The overall objective is to determine whether the national exams promote historical thinking and the construction of multiple, contextualised, and evidence-based narratives – or whether they reproduce traditional models based on memorisation and the reproduction of a single, standardised narrative.

### 2.2. Methodology

This is a qualitative, interpretative, and exploratory study (Erickson, 1986), based on content analysis of the *History A* national exams from both the first and second sittings of each year between 2018 and 2024. In total, 14 exam papers and 56 question groups were analysed. The methodology involved:

- Categorising questions according to the presence or absence of explicit multiperspectivity.
- Transcribing all questions requiring the comparison of sources and perspectives.
- Identifying the titles and types of historical sources included in the document sets.
- Identifying the thematic group, the type of task (restricted or extended response), and the cognitive level involved.
- Constructing a systematised database, complemented by a summary table (year, phase, group, questions).

This database was enriched by an analytical grid inspired by the *Rubric for Evaluating Competence in History* (RECH), adapted to the specific context of the Portuguese exams (Chaparro-Sainz et al., 2024). The main categories of analysis included: original title and type of historical source (e.g., documentary, visual, narrative, statistical); cognitive operation required (identification, comparison, contextualisation, construction of historical explanation); and task complexity (simple recognition, integrated analysis, narrative comparison).

The methodological choice for a qualitative approach is grounded in a hermeneutic rationale, understood as a way of interpreting educational phenomena by exploring their meanings, intentions, and contexts. Rather than merely quantifying the presence of multiperspectivity in the exams, the aim is to understand the meaning behind the tasks, the historical visions they promote, and the competences they truly call upon. The exam papers are viewed not only as assessment tools but as situated cultural and educational

<sup>1</sup>Available at: <https://iave.pt/provas-e-exames/arquivo/arquivo-provas-e-exames-finais-nacionais-es/>.

practices that reflect epistemological and curricular choices. It is also recognised that the researchers themselves play an active role in constructing the meaning attributed to the data, through a critical and reflective interpretative lens.

### 2.3. Scope and Delimitations

The analysis focused solely on questions that explicitly engage with multiperspectivity – that is, those requiring the comparison of differing perspectives grounded in historical sources. Only the national component (*History A*) of the exam, mandatory for students in the Languages and Humanities track, was considered for both the first and second sittings. The special sitting was excluded.

Multiple-choice, matching, and ordering questions were excluded from the analysis, except in cases where they explicitly required the comparison of contradictory sources. The focus was placed on constructed-response questions – both restricted and extended – that require interpretation, contextualisation, and the development of historical arguments.

### 2.4. Structure of the History A Exam

Using the *History A* exam from the first sitting in 2024 as an example, the national final exam has a duration of 120 minutes, with an additional 30-minute tolerance period. The paper consists of 16 pages and includes a total of 14 items.

Of these 14 items, 10 are compulsory and contribute directly to the final score. The remaining four items are optional, and only the two highest-scoring ones are counted towards the final grade. The total score for the exam is 200 points. The exam is structured around four thematic groups:

- Group I: The Athenian Political Model in the 5th Century BCE
- Group II: The Crisis of the Ancien Régime: Power, Society, and Economy
- Group III: Political Ruptures and Economic Problems in Portugal in the Early 20th Century
- Group IV: The Geopolitical System of the Cold War and Its Resolution

Thus, the exam covers content from Classical Antiquity to the Contemporary Era, presented in chronological order. Each group includes different item types, such as selection items (e.g., multiple choice) and constructed-response items (restricted and extended responses)<sup>2</sup>.

Selection items are scored dichotomously (correct/incorrect) or according to performance levels. In the constructed-response items, marking criteria are organised by parameters with various performance levels. For the extended-response item (Group II – Question 1), the scoring parameters are: (A) Identification and Explanation; (B) Thematic Coherence and Organisation; and (C) Source Integration. The assessment of these items considers the accuracy of content, organisation of ideas, use of subject-specific terminology, and integration of information from the provided sources.

It is mandatory to clearly indicate the version of the exam (there are two versions); otherwise, the responses to selection items will receive zero points. The score for each item is specified at the end of the question.

## 3. Examining the Exams – Presentation and Discussion of Results

### 3.1. Starting Point: The Numbers

Between 2018 and 2024, fourteen *History A* national exams were administered in Portugal, corresponding to the first and second sittings of each academic year. These exams maintained a relatively stable structure, composed of four groups of questions (Groups I to IV), organised around different periods and themes of national and global history. A total of 56 groups of questions were analysed, with particular focus on constructed-response items (both restricted and extended), as these are the ones most likely to involve higher-order cognitive operations and the potential use of multiperspectivity.

The analysis identified 23 question groups that explicitly required students to engage with multiperspectivity, representing approximately 41% of all exam content between 2018 and 2024. The presence of multiperspectivity is neither uniform nor guaranteed across all exams, but it does occur with some regularity, allowing for the identification of trends in its distribution over time, in the themes covered, and in the types of tasks proposed.

Multiperspectivity was present in every year and phase of the exams during the study period, with at least one question per year explicitly requiring the comparison of divergent perspectives. In some years – notably 2020, 2022, and 2023 – the number of questions involving this metahistorical concept was particularly significant, appearing in more than one group of the same paper.

Regarding the distribution between exam phases, no major disparity was observed between the first and second sittings. Both included questions requiring source comparison, the analysis of contradictory discourses, or the construction of historical explanations that integrate multiple viewpoints. However, second sitting exams sometimes included tasks that were more demanding

<sup>2</sup>Selection items may take the following formats: multiple choice; matching; ordering; true/false; fill-in-the-blank.

from an interpretative standpoint and better suited to critical engagement with sources. This point will be revisited later in the discussion.

### 3.2. *Where? What? How?*

The analysis reveals that multiperspectivity is most frequently concentrated in Groups III and IV – those dealing with contemporary history (20th century) and the transition from the modern world to globalisation. Recent Portuguese history stands out as the richest domain for constructing exercises based on the confrontation of divergent discourses – particularly between regime and opposition narratives, post-25 April political forces, or opposing views on decolonisation.

Taking into account the typology of questions, the 45 questions identified as having potential or explicit multiperspectivity were grouped into three main categories:

- Source comparison questions (23).
- Integrative development questions (12).
- Source analysis and interpretation questions (10).

In many cases, these categories overlap, resulting in tasks of high cognitive complexity.

More than half of the analysed questions explicitly require students to compare two perspectives on opposing aspects, making this comparison the core of the task. Source comparison questions are where multiperspectivity is most clearly and directly articulated. A typical formulation is: «*Compare the two perspectives expressed in documents 1 and 2 in relation to two aspects in which they differ.*» This type of prompt requires students to:

1. identify each source's point of view.
2. select two contrasting aspects.
3. use excerpts from the sources to support their analysis. This is therefore a comparative analysis exercise that activates reading skills and the ability to extract and interpret information from diverse source types.

Integrative development questions require students to combine different sources with historical knowledge, often framed by guiding topics within broader themes. These tasks call for:

1. interpretation and synthesis of information from multiple sources.
2. integration of different perspectives into a coherent argument.
3. articulation of visual, textual, and statistical sources. Though less direct in confronting contrasting views, these questions allow for deeper engagement with multiperspectivity, promoting skills in interpretation, contextualisation, historical reasoning, and independent discourse construction.

Finally, source analysis and interpretation questions (though less frequent, highly relevant) ask students to interpret one or more sources by identifying intention, ideology, or symbolic function – often implicit. These tasks foster:

1. critical decoding of visual materials (e.g., cartoons, posters, photographs).
2. recognition of implicit narratives, discursive strategies, and production contexts.
3. inference skills and «reading between the lines». Such questions encourage critical and inferential reading of sources, including awareness of their ideological purposes.

### 3.3. *Degree of Complexity*

The analysis revealed significant variation in the level of complexity and depth required by different questions. While some tasks merely call for the identification of divergent opinions, others demand a well-founded historical explanation, involving the integration of sources, disciplinary knowledge, and competences such as critical source analysis and the ethical problematisation of historical narratives.

In general, most of the analysed questions fall between levels 2 and 3 of the RECH grid. These levels require, respectively, contextualised explanation and evidence-based argumentation, with an emphasis on competences such as historical perspective-taking, use of sources as evidence, and ethical awareness.

However, it is important to distinguish between:

- **Lower-complexity questions**, which ask only for the identification or listing of differences between sources, based on literal or descriptive reading. These questions do not require contextualisation or mobilisation of the student's historical knowledge. In such cases, the comparison of perspectives remains at surface level and can be solved through simple recognition or direct association.
- **Moderate-complexity questions**, which require students to articulate contrasts with some degree of contextualisation, even when the sources are brief and the level of inference is limited. These tasks involve interpreting the authors' intentions and relating them to the broader historical context.

- **Higher-complexity questions**, in which multiperspectivity is combined with more advanced cognitive operations such as evaluation, argumentation, problematisation, and critical positioning. These questions invite students to integrate divergent sources, make ideological or ethical assumptions explicit, and construct a coherent, well-supported historical explanation.

#### 4. Multiperspectivity at Three Levels of Complexity

Although multiperspectivity appears most clearly in questions requiring the comparison of sources with opposing viewpoints, the way this comparison is formulated and assessed varies significantly. The following section presents three illustrative examples – one for each level of complexity – in order to better understand the evaluative scope of the historical thinking competences involved in these exam items.

##### 4.1. Example of Lower Complexity

2024 | Second Sitting | Group III | Question 1

Group III of the 2024 second sitting *History A* exam is dedicated to political and sociocultural changes in the context of the First World War, including four questions that involve different types of tasks and cognitive demands. The group includes one extended-response question supported by documents (Question 1), followed by three short-answer questions that range from simple identification to thematic or aesthetic interpretation. Overall, the group balances formal diversity with a generally low to moderate level of complexity.

Question 1 stands out for including sources with opposing perspectives, representing a clear example of formally present multiperspectivity – though cognitively undemanding. Students are invited to compare two speeches delivered in 1919: one by Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau, head of the German delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, and another by Georges Clemenceau, President of the French Council of Ministers. The topic is the negotiations and consequences of the post-war peace settlement.

The prompt follows the standard model used in national exams:

«Compare the two perspectives expressed in documents 1 and 2 in relation to two aspects in which they differ. Support your answer with relevant excerpts from both documents.»

Although multiperspectivity is clearly invoked, the cognitive complexity required is quite limited. The positions expressed in the two speeches are directly opposed – the German delegation denounces the humiliation imposed by the Allies, while Clemenceau justifies the Treaty as fair and necessary – and the contrasts can be easily identified through a literal reading.

According to the official marking criteria, full marks can be awarded if the student compares two aspects and integrates relevant excerpts from the documents, without needing to mobilise external historical knowledge, analyse intent, or make critical judgments. The student may simply identify explicit contrasts – such as «imposed peace» versus “just peace” – and reproduce them with direct reference to the sources.

As such, the task only activates elementary cognitive operations such as identification, description, and direct association, placing it within levels 1 to 2 of the RECH rubric. While multiperspectivity is formally present in the prompt, its critical exploration remains limited, staying at the surface level of the text. Its value lies primarily in exposing students to divergent sources, but it does not promote truly complex historical thinking.

##### 4.2. Example of Moderate Complexity

2022 | Second Sitting | Group III | Question 1

Group III of the 2022 second sitting exam addresses the topic «*The crisis of liberalism in Portugal: from the fall of the monarchy to the establishment of the military dictatorship.*» Composed of four questions, the group includes different task types, combining short-answer questions based on factual knowledge, source interpretation, and one comparison question involving politically and ideologically contrasting discourses. Question 1 stands out as a task that clearly activates multiperspectivity, requiring inference, moderate contextualisation, and discourse interpretation.

Question 1 asks students to compare two political speeches from the First Portuguese Republic, both delivered between 1917 and 1918. The first, by Afonso Costa, defends the legitimacy of the republican government, the modernisation of institutions, and patriotic mobilisation during wartime. The second, by Alfredo Pimenta, strongly criticises the parliamentary regime, advocates Sidónio Pais' presidentialist model, calls for a stronger state, and supports renewed alignment with the Catholic Church.

The prompt follows the classic comparative structure:

«Compare the two perspectives on the Portuguese republican regime expressed in documents 1 and 2, in relation to two aspects in which they differ. Support your answer with relevant excerpts from both documents.»

Here, multiperspectivity is clearly stated and effectively operationalised. The divergence between the sources is deep, both ideologically and politically. The task requires students to identify key contrasts – for example, parliamentary democracy versus authoritarian presidentialism, or secularism versus rapprochement with the Church – and relate them to the broader context of instability during the First Republic.

Although the question does not demand explicit critical judgment, it requires the interpretation of political intentions, the recognition of the symbolic and programmatic roles of political discourse, and minimal contextualisation of the historical setting in which the speeches were delivered. The student must identify and articulate two significant contrasts, supported by well-chosen excerpts from the sources.

According to the marking criteria, the highest score (14 points) is awarded for a complex comparison that meaningfully integrates information from both sources, uses appropriate historical terminology, and presents a coherent narrative. External knowledge is not required, but inference and logical articulation of ideas are valued.

This question therefore clearly falls between levels 2 and 3 of the RECH rubric, representing a task of intermediate complexity. It requires the mobilisation of competences such as using sources to build historical evidence, identifying diverse perspectives, and analysing political discourse in times of crisis.

### 4.3. Example of Higher Complexity

2019 | Second Sitting | Group III | Question 5

Group III of the 2019 second sitting exam addresses the theme «*The Rise of Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism in Interwar Europe*», with a particular focus on the Portuguese Estado Novo regime. It comprises five questions, culminating in a comparative analysis task involving two opposing speeches on the concept of freedom, supported by ideologically rich sources. The structure of the group reveals a gradual increase in cognitive demand, culminating in a question that activates multiple dimensions of historical thinking.

Question 5 invites students to compare a speech by Oliveira Salazar, delivered in 1949, with a public statement issued by the MUD (Movement of Democratic Unity) in 1946. In his speech, Salazar justifies the suppression of party politics as a safeguard against «sick partisanship,» claiming that freedom under the regime is real and equal for all. In contrast, the MUD communiqué denounces repression, cultural control, and censorship under the Estado Novo, advocating for political participation and freedom of expression.

The prompt, following the now-familiar formula, states:

«Compare the two perspectives on the concept of freedom under the Estado Novo, expressed in documents 2 and 3, in relation to two aspects in which they differ. Support your answer with relevant excerpts from both documents.»

This is a highly complex question that requires not only identifying contrasting perspectives but also interpreting the ideological content of each discourse, understanding the repressive context of the regime, and constructing a critical and well-supported argument. The confrontation between state propaganda and political denunciation highlights the formative potential of multiperspectivity, here understood as a tool for ethical, political, and historical analysis.

The marking criteria reinforce this level of demand: to achieve the highest score (18 points), students must present a clear and complete comparison, integrate well-chosen excerpts, use accurate historical terminology, and, most importantly, demonstrate clear and coherent reasoning. This task calls for the mobilisation of several dimensions of historical thinking – critical use of sources, perspective-taking, and ethical reflection – and clearly fits within level 3 of the RECH rubric.

This example illustrates how, on occasion, national exams can propose tasks that go beyond literal reading or simple reproduction of information. These tasks require students to problematise the past, recognise the plurality of historical narratives, and develop interpretations that are both historically informed and ethically grounded.

## 5. Final Considerations

The analysis of *History A* national exams between 2018 and 2024 allows us to conclude that multiperspectivity occupies a stable and recurring place within the structure of these assessments, especially through questions that require the comparison of sources presenting contrasting positions. Its presence is particularly evident in Groups III and IV, which focus on themes in Contemporary History and often feature political, social, or ideological discourse comparisons.

However, the frequency of multiperspectivity does not necessarily correspond to the complexity of the cognitive operations involved. As demonstrated in this study, the level of historical depth and interpretative demand varies significantly – from tasks requiring only the identification of differences (solvable through direct association), to exercises that mobilise more demanding operations such as critical inference, contextualisation, source integration, and ethical positioning. This diversity of approaches is reflected in the different levels of the RECH rubric, with a predominance of level 2 questions (contextualised explanation) and less frequent appearance of level 3 tasks (evidence-based argumentation).

It was also observed that the formal structure of the questions alone does not ensure cognitive complexity. The same type of prompt – «*compare the two perspectives in relation to two aspects in which they differ*» – can lead to tasks of very different complexity levels, depending on the density of the sources, the wording of the assessment criteria, and the way the challenge is constructed. Although multiperspectivity is regularly included in the exams, the repeated use of the comparative formula may reduce its formative potential if not supported by tasks that demand deep, critical historical reading, and by marking schemes that reflect the task's level of challenge.

The conclusions of this study are consistent with research in History Education on how students justify the existence of multiperspectivity in History, and how teachers advocate for its use in the classroom. Thus, if assessment – as a key dimension of the teaching and learning process – more frequently demands lower-complexity cognitive operations, it seems natural that classroom tasks, and consequently students' historical reasoning, also tend to remain at lower levels of sophistication.

In summary, *History A* national exams increasingly include multiperspectivity as an essential dimension of historical understanding, but there remains room for its deeper and more reflective integration.

As with any qualitative and interpretative research, this study is situated within a specific context. The analysis focused exclusively on *History A* national exams, excluding tests from other educational cycles, subjects, or countries. It also concentrated solely on questions that explicitly required multiperspectivity, leaving out those that may indirectly foster plural readings or critical interpretation. Furthermore, the interpretative work was based on adapted RECH rubrics, which necessarily involve a degree of subjectivity in reading prompts and classifying levels of complexity.

Nevertheless, this approach has proven especially useful for understanding how national exams embody particular conceptions of History and educational practice. By analysing the structure of prompts, the types of sources used, the assessment criteria, and the degree of cognitive demand, the study helps identify trends, tensions, and opportunities in how historical thinking is assessed in exam contexts.

The main contribution of this study lies in its potential to foster critical reflection on assessment in History. It reinforces the need for tasks that engage with multiperspectivity in more complex ways – going beyond its formal presence – and instead translating it into activities that mobilise inference, judgment, and argumentation, as a contribution to the development of a more nuanced and informed historical consciousness.

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