

# Compass to History and Civic Education

*Comparing History Education  
in 16 European and Asian Countries*

Richárd Fodor, Judit Tóth, Áron Fekete (Eds.)



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The Learning Institute's Compass to History Education research group, led by Richárd Fodor, has carried out sustained comparative research on history and civic education in recent years.

This volume is a concrete outcome of this academic work, prepared with the valuable involvement and careful eyes of Judit Tóth and Áron Fekete, alongside a broad international network of experts.

The book is based on systematic content analysis of curricula, syllabi and examination standards, supported by a shared set of indicators.

15–20 years ago, the dominant weight of history education in school curricula was still taken for granted. Today, however, tectonic changes are taking place in the world, and taking stock has become strategically important. This book sets out to do exactly that. The international team-based research process is not a “background detail”: it is a key condition of credible comparison across different education systems.

The Asian studies are not only additional “examples” in this book: in several respects, they create instructive parallels for Hungarian and European readers.

The volume also documents current tensions in history education, including debates between traditional chronology-based and thematic approaches.

Its main contribution is to make differences and similarities visible in a structured way, without forcing simplified policy conclusions.

*Dr. János Setényi, education consultant,  
director of MCC Learning Institute*

“The findings shed light on broader educational and cultural patterns shaping the teaching of history in the 21st century, and offer implications for researchers, policymakers, and educators.”

[...]

“Across regions, the most consistently declared objective is the development of analytical and disciplinary competence, such as historical thinking, historical consciousness, and the ability to work with sources and interpretations. However, implementation remains uneven.”

[...]

“History education is simultaneously seen as a form of preserving cultural continuity and fostering critical, multi-perspective, and civic literacies. This dual role requires both curricular innovation and deeper attention to practice. The indicator framework developed in this study may serve as a basis for future longitudinal and practice-oriented research.”

Compass to History and Civic Education gives a useful comparative overview of how history and civic education are regulated and interpreted in different school systems around the world.

Although volumes of this kind inevitably start to become outdated at the moment of publication due to the swiftly changing regulations, they remain important “diagnostic” documents. They illustrate how global education research is viewed at a given moment. A strength of the book is that it applies a shared framework (indicators, document analysis), which makes the country chapters readable in comparison, not only individually.

The scope is also notable: 16 countries is a large selection in comparative curriculum research, and it allows broader patterns to be observed.

The combination of Central European, Western European and Asian cases is not only “colourful”, but also analytically relevant.

For researchers and teacher educators, it is an interesting point of orientation; for policymakers, it can function as a mirror, showing alternative institutional logics.

*Prof. Gábor Halász,*

*Professor Emeritus, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE);  
Head of Research at Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC),  
former president of CIDREE*



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**Compass to History and Civic Education  
Comparing History Education in 16 European and Asian Countries**

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## Preface: Compass for What?

Comparing history education systems has a long tradition in Europe dating back to the 19th century. After the First World War, the International Committee on Intellectual Co-Operation (predecessor of UNESCO) initiated collaboration and research in the context of history education. During the storms of the 20th century, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the well-known research centre, the Georg Eckert Institute, also participated in this effort. The need for comparative research still characterises the European context of history didactics with groups of authoritative researchers (Erdmann & Hasberg, 2011) and international multilateral cooperations (OHTE, 2023) continuing the traditions.

This volume was initiated by the objective of sharing the missing perspectives of several European and Asian countries in the international discourse.

*Compass to History and Civic Education* is the result of an academic research project launched by the Learning Institute of Mathias Corvinus Collegium, Hungary. It highlights the position of history and civic education in several European, Atlantic, and Asian countries, focusing on the similarities and differences between national and regional approaches to history and civic education, and underlining current tendencies, recent debates and dilemmas of history and civic education.

Contributors of the volume come from different academic backgrounds, ranging from PhD candidates and assistant lecturers to practising schoolteachers, experts and university professors. The editors have gathered 17 great papers along with a summarising study to provide a compass, a guiding tool for the complex landscapes of history education.

**(1. FRANCE)** Dorottya Kósa sheds light on the fact that the French education system is ‘renowned for emphasis on academic excellence, intellectual rigour, and egalitarian principles’. She highlights the history and current challenges of the French system which resulted in disparities in educational outcomes and the tension between national identity, the ‘grand narrative’ and the clash with diverse cultural perspectives on historical events and civic values. History teaching in France is strongly characterised by its integration with Geography (*histoire-géographie*) it emphasises themes such as the French Revolution, the age of Enlightenment, and the development of the Republic.

**(2. SCOTLAND)** Judit Tóth presents the Scottish education system as one that blends the Anglo-Saxon tradition with a forward-looking emphasis on 21st-century competencies. History and civic education in Scotland are embedded in the *Curriculum for Excellence* which promotes broad curricular capacities, including responsible citizenship, effective learning, and confident identity formation. History is not used as a tool for patriotic education, but rather for fostering critical awareness, with a cautious emphasis on heritage and identity, especially in the context of Scotland's status as an "emerging nation" within the UK. Tensions persist between national and global identities in Scotland, between performative accountability and moral purpose, as well as between heritage pride and critical historical understanding. Overall, while Scotland has embraced modern educational goals, the gap between curricular ideals and classroom realities reflects broader challenges in navigating post-national civic and historical education in a globalized era.

**(3. ENGLAND)** Richárd Fodor acknowledges the importance of professional autonomy in the Anglo-Saxon system of education as a primary force behind its development. He points out the phases and steps of the formation of the English National Curriculum and its loose framework of content knowledge compared to centrally regulated European and Asian systems. History exams are elective in English schools, organised by exam boards and differentiated between the levels of GCSE, Advanced (A level) and Advanced Supplementary (AS) level. Fodor argues that historical thinking is a significant field of development, also strongly present in the examinations. From recent education policy discourse, the questions and sins of the colonial past and the work of social movements are also dealt with in the paper.

**(4. IRELAND)** Judit Tóth highlights Ireland's decentralised education system, where schools and teachers enjoy significant autonomy. History and civic education hold a prominent place, supported by long-standing academic traditions and compulsory instruction. The curriculum promotes transferable skills, critical thinking, and identity formation, balancing knowledge acquisition with competence development. National exams include both Ordinary and Higher levels, prescribing some content while encouraging analytical skills. Civic education emphasizes democratic values and sustainability. Despite these strengths,

global challenges such as the weakening of citizenship education are also evident in the Irish context.

**(5. CZECH REPUBLIC)** Wojtek Ripka describes the decentralised Czech education system, where history and civics share a curricular domain but lack strong institutional support. History is taught across all levels but varies by school type, with gymnasiums offering the most. While the National Curriculum encourages historical literacy and multiple perspectives, implementation remains inconsistent in the view of the author. Teachers mainly rely on textbooks, often favouring traditional content-heavy approaches. Political history dominates, although recent efforts promote inquiry-based learning and critical thinking. Civic education, burdened by its communist past, focuses on factual knowledge with limited emphasis on skills and attitudes. There is a growing consensus on the need for constructivist, competence-based reform, but gaps persist between curriculum goals and classroom practice.

**(6. POLAND)** Jakub Mańczak offers an in-depth analysis of history and civic education in Poland, shaped by strong patriotic and cultural narratives. History is taught chronologically with a dominant national perspective, aiming to foster pride, duty, and a sense of historical continuity rooted in Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions. A set of recent political shifts replaced traditional civic education in secondary schools with a new subject, *History and Present*, which emphasised conservative social values and national identity—but as a clear example of the pendulum-like nature of educational policymaking, this subject has already been cancelled since the finalisation of the volume. While the curriculum encourages active methods such as project-based learning, museum visits and digital tools, it largely reflects the worldview of the former ruling party, prioritising national history over broader European or global contexts.

**(7. SLOVAKIA)** Mária Harmaňošová examines the marginalisation of history and civic education in Slovakia, often overshadowed by emphasis on measurable outcomes and employability. This neglect has societal consequences, including rising distrust. The current curriculum reform, introduced in early pilot schools, aims to revitalise humanities education by embedding history and civics within the “People and Society” field, promoting active citizenship and global awareness. Despite limited instructional time and systemic challenges, Slovakia has

seen a shift over the past two decades toward a more balanced, less nationalistic approach to history education. The new and old national curricula alike endorse the role of history in shaping pupils' historical consciousness as part of their broader personal development.

**(8. HUNGARY)** András Máté, Mátyás Rékli, and Judit Tóth analyse Hungary's centralised education system, where history is a core subject between grades 5–12 and a compulsory component of the Matura exam. The curriculum emphasises national identity, patriotic values, and chronological knowledge, with a strong focus on Hungarian history. While reforms since 2005 have introduced new teaching methods and source-based tasks, knowledge reproduction remains dominant. The revised Framework Curriculum (2020) includes over 400 historical concepts, reflecting a conservative content canon. Civic education, integrated with history and is taught in grades 8 and 12, addresses democracy, rights, institutions, and digital literacy. However, it emphasises knowledge over civic engagement, and classroom practices often lag behind curriculum ideals.

**(9. AUSTRIA)** Christa Bauer argues that Austria's education system, long shaped by the Enlightenment and the Habsburg legacy, is undergoing a profound transformation from content-based instruction to competence-oriented, civic-minded learning. Rooted in the tradition of generally compulsory education since Maria Theresa's 1774 reforms, the Austrian model now integrates strong academic and vocational pathways within a federally regulated framework. In recent decades, driven by EU policies, technological change, and PISA results, history education has shifted from teaching fixed national narratives toward developing students' analytical, reflective, and democratic competences. Renaming the long-standing subject History and Social Studies to History and Citizenship Education in 2023 symbolises this paradigm change. The reforms placed civic engagement and critical thinking at the centre of historical learning. Yet, as Bauer notes, many teachers still grapple with the new didactic demands, highlighting ongoing tensions between ambitious curricular innovation, political debate, and the realities of everyday classroom practice in Austria.

**(10. SERBIA)** Ana Radaković provides a picture of the Serbian regulation in which history is taught chronologically in primary schools, while high schools incorporate a mix of thematic and chronological approaches. Themes such as

“Migrations” and “Human Rights” are used to connect historical events across different periods, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of history. The curriculum prioritises Serbian national history, including contentious issues like the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Radaković makes it clear that educators have been facing issues like overloaded curricula, limited class time, and large class sizes. Additionally, there are tensions between promoting a multiperspective approach and traditional national narratives, particularly when addressing sensitive historical events.

**(11. TURKEY)** Muhammet Avaroğullari, Alpaslan Demir and Bibigul Akshulakova argue that Turkey’s education system is highly centralised, with the Ministry of National Education overseeing all aspects of schooling, including curriculum development, textbook selection, and teacher assignments. The same history curriculum is implemented nationwide, ensuring uniformity across the country. The history curriculum focuses on fostering national identity, unity, and patriotism. Historical topics are often framed within the context of Turkish national consciousness, with a strong emphasis on the history of the Turkish Revolution, ‘Kemalism’ (the heritage of Kemal Atatürk), and Ottoman history. History is a compulsory subject in high school and plays a crucial role in entrance exams for higher education.

**(12. ARMENIA)** Armine Mnatsakanyan and Péter Récsi show how Armenian history education remains shaped by the Soviet legacy and national identity politics. The centralized system emphasizes patriotism, statehood continuity, and national heroes, with history taught from grade 7 and ending in compulsory exams. Textbooks dominate instruction, focusing on memorization rather than critical thinking. Despite reforms supported by the World Bank, implementation gaps persist. Controversies around the portrayal of the Armenian Genocide, the origins of the Armenian people, and the role of the Church reflect broader societal debates on identity and historical memory.

**(13. KAZAKHSTAN)** Pocstar Moldir, Aray Ilyassova-Schoenfeld, Saule Anafinova, Bainur Yelubayev, Bibigul Akshulakova, Nursultan Assylov, Gaziza Aliyeva and Maira Klyshbekova provide an in-depth analysis of Kazakhstan’s history and civic education, highlighting its role in post-Soviet nation-building. History is taught as two compulsory subjects – “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” – emphasizing patriot-

ism, multiculturalism, and identity. The curriculum is centrally approved and combines national narratives with broader global perspectives, while also encouraging interdisciplinary links. Despite efforts at reform, Soviet-era pedagogical traditions and ideological influences remain strong, shaped by the background of many current educators. Civic education has evolved into a distinct subject, “Fundamentals of Law,” reflecting the state’s commitment to shaping responsible citizens.

**(14-15. CHINA)** Pu Yu and Yingjie Xu provide a comprehensive and historical perspective of civic and history education in China. The paper explores how both fields have evolved in tandem with the country’s political, social, and ideological transformations since 1949. History and civic education are tightly intertwined with the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) broader goals of national unity, ideological continuity, and patriotic identity formation.

Civic education has undergone three key phases: a post-reform era recovery period (the late 1970s–1990s), where the state reintroduced civic themes within the framework of socialist values and national loyalty; an exploratory phase, which began broadening the scope to include moral development and global awareness; and the current multidimensional improvement phase, starting in 2014, marked by the integration of legal education and a greater focus on civic responsibility. Despite these developments, civic education often struggles with superficial implementation, exam-oriented limitations, and a shortage of specialised teachers. Democratic values, though rhetorically present, are frequently misunderstood or underexplored, and civic instruction follows a largely top-down narrative. Similarly, Chinese history education has evolved through four political eras – from Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping – each shaping textbook content to legitimise the CCP’s rule and adapt socialism to China’s changing circumstances. History is a compulsory subject throughout basic education, and while its structure and scope have expanded, its ideological core remains focused on cultivating loyalty to the Party and fostering a cohesive national narrative. The 2017 unified textbook reform marked a significant shift, centralising textbook production and content to further standardize ideological messaging. Across all editions, themes of anti-colonial resistance, modernisation, ethnic unity, and China’s continuous territorial integrity are consistently emphasised. Both history and civic education function as tools of nation-building, aiming to shape students’ moral outlooks,

strengthen collective identity, and align youth with China's socio-political vision. The two analyses underscore how education in China remains deeply embedded in state objectives and how reform efforts, while visible on the surface, often fall short of transforming classroom realities. Together, the two papers reveal the central role of education in sustaining China's evolving political narratives and in preparing students to embody the values promoted by the state.

**(16. MONGOLIA)** Purev Ochir, Puntsagsuren Dagva, Tuvshinjargal Ganbaatar, Otgonbaatar Khajidmaa, and Tserendejid Dorjpalam examine Mongolia's general education system and its history and civic education curriculum. History is taught from grades 4 through 12, accounting for 14% of the total instruction time, and spans national and global content across ancient, medieval, and modern periods. The curriculum emphasizes patriotism, historical awareness, critical and creative thinking, and integrates both nomadic heritage and civic ethics. Despite centralized content regulation, it reflects a blend of national pride and international perspectives. Recent reforms aim to modernize history and civic education by aligning them more closely with Mongolia's cultural identity and global educational trends, while fostering deeper understanding of the country's historical ties and contemporary partnerships, particularly with nations such as Hungary.

**(17. KOREA)** Katalin Incze presents the evolution of South Korea's education system from its Confucian and Christian roots to one of the world's most competitive and modern structures. It traces how education, grounded in family values, discipline, and respect for learning, became central to national reconstruction after Japanese occupation and war. History education, from the early Confucian academies to today's digitalized classrooms, has consistently served the preservation of national identity. Through successive curriculum reforms – most recently in 2022 – history has maintained a key position, linking civic responsibility, critical thinking, and cultural pride. Now a compulsory subject and part of the national university entrance exam, it nurtures both patriotism and global awareness, balancing conservative values with the challenges of multiculturalism and globalisation in contemporary Korean society.

Richárd Fodor, Judit Tóth, Áron Fekete  
editors



# History and civic education in France

Dorottya Kósa

## Abstract

*France, renowned for its extensive historical heritage and global influence, prompts inquiry into the effectiveness of its history and citizenship education in the present context. This paper investigates the interplay between history, geography, and citizenship education within the French school system throughout an examination of curriculum structure and content. The analysis covers the role of historical narratives in shaping national identity and civic values, and addresses the development of French education and contemporary challenges. Furthermore, it presents the main themes of the subjects and related issues, as well as the educational objectives of the curriculum.*

*keywords: French education system, history teaching, citizenship education*

## Introduction

Situated in Western Europe, France vaunts a rich history that spans millennia, characterized by cultural, political, and intellectual contributions that have left an indelible mark on the global stage. From its ancient Gallic roots to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, France has been a vessel of innovation, art, and political upheaval (Crouzet, 2013).

With a population of approximately 67 million people, France ranks as the second most populous country in Europe (World Bank, 2022). A significant portion of this population is engaged in education, with over 12 million students enrolled in various educational institutions, ranging from preschool to higher education (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 2021).

The Prussian education system, developed in the early 19th century, was renowned for its emphasis on discipline, uniformity, and obedience (Ringer, 1979). It emphasized rote memorization, rigorous testing, and hierarchical classroom structures. The French education system, while influenced by Prussian ideas, has historically maintained a more knowledge-based approach, focusing on critical thinking, creativity, and intellectual ex-

ploration. (Krieger, 1957). Education in France is renowned for its emphasis on academic excellence, intellectual rigor, and egalitarian principles (Green, 2018). It is, similarly to the Prussian system, structured hierarchically, with a clear progression from primary to secondary education, culminating in the baccalauréat (often mentioned as “bac”) known as the graduation examination, which serves as the gateway to higher education. Central to the French education system is the concept of secularism, which guarantees the separation of religion from state affairs and fortifies the principle of equality in education (Cairns & Evans, 2020). When compared to other European systems, such as the more decentralized models found in countries like Germany or the more flexible and holistic approaches in Nordic countries like Finland, the French system is often seen as more traditional and standardized, that ensures a strong foundation in core subjects and a high level of academic attainment (European Commission, 2022).

French history serves as a rich framework for citizenship education, linking with the nation’s commitment to democratic principles and civic participation. From the French Revolution’s call for liberty, equality, and fraternity to the establishment of universal suffrage, key historical events have shaped French citizens’ understanding of their rights and responsibilities within society. Citizenship education in France emphasizes the importance of historical awareness in fostering an active and informed citizenry, drawing on historical narratives to promote values such as tolerance, solidarity, and civic engagement. Scholars argue that a deep understanding of French history not only provides context for contemporary social and political issues but also nurtures a sense of belonging and collective identity among citizens (Maitre, 2018; Cairns & Evans, 2020). The relationship between history teaching and national identity in France, focusing on the concept is the “grand narrative” (Maitre, 2018). The grand narrative refers to the overarching historical narrative that shapes a nation’s collective memory and identity. In the French context, this narrative often focuses on key events such as the French Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the construction of the French Republic. History education in France reinforces this grand narrative, emphasizing certain historical events and figures in order to foster a sense of national identity (Cairns and Evans, 2020).

Increasing diversity and social inequality resulted in recent reforms in citizenship education, including changes to the curriculum and pedagogical approaches, aimed at promoting greater inclusivity, critical thinking, and civic engagement among students in order to help them navigate and contribute to an ever more interconnected world (Cairns and Evans, 2020).

## Conceptual Background

Education – as being one of the most important spheres of socialization – has a central role in bringing up people who are active members of democratic societies and conscious of their own actions (Anyon, 1981). Both educators and policymakers realized the need to reform education systems so that they respond to novel encounters of our everchanging environment. Both Adam Smith and Foucault concur that knowledge equates to power, although in different ways (Weinstein, 2019). Smith suggests that enhanced information empowers individuals to make more proficient decisions. Drawing from the Aristotelian tradition, Smith asserts that quality education and effective institutional guidance cultivate virtuous individuals and societies. Consequently, education enhances human capacities to distinguish the values considered acceptable by societies, both morally and interpersonally, thus playing a pivotal role in fostering democracy. Individuals internalize societal norms through the process of socialization, with education, particularly in schools, serving as a crucial agent by imparting specific values. Foucault's theory of education shares some parallels with Smith's perspective. Foucault contends that increased knowledge affords individuals greater choices, though he does not define knowledge as a mere accumulation of facts, rather he views it as an access to dominant discourse within a given social framework. Here, education goes beyond equipping individuals with skills and capacities for better life options, since it also aids in their acculturation, socialization, and familiarity with societal norms. Bourdieu argued that education contributes to the establishment of shared values and norms, thereby aiding in the development of a collective identity (Llored, 2022). This highlights the importance of history and citizenship education in providing students with perspectives, enabling them to learn from the events of the past, and offering a cultural viewpoint. These subjects also play a crucial role in identity formation, equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate their society effectively.

The notion of citizenship is complicatedly layered, with its interpretation varying from one nation to another, and it has undergone significant evolution over the years. Nonetheless, there are specific perspectives that allow for an examination of this term. Da Silva et al. propose that citizenship can be delineated into three dimensions: legal status, engagement in political processes, and a sense of belonging (M.C. da Silva et al.,

2019). Firstly, legal status encompasses the entitlement of individuals to specific social rights and obligations. These rights are intertwined with democratic institutions such as education, healthcare, and various freedoms. Secondly, political participation embodies both a democratic entitlement and a duty or responsibility simultaneously. Through engaging in political processes, citizens can exercise their legal status. This entails the ability to vote for representatives and parties that align with their preferences and priorities and to be able to be voted for as well. Lastly, citizenship fosters a sense of belonging that unites individuals within a society. This dimension is the most important from the educational point of view, since citizenship facilitates the cultivation of shared realities and values, fostering unity within a community, society or state. Citizenship education encompasses the teaching and learning processes designed to equip individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for active participation in democratic societies. It goes beyond traditional academic subjects, aiming to cultivate critical thinking, social responsibility, and a sense of civic duty among citizens. Through citizenship education, individuals develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, learn how to engage in civil discourse, and acquire the tools to address societal challenges collectively. Research suggests that effective citizenship education fosters democratic values, promotes social cohesion, and contributes to the development of informed and engaged citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Torney-Purta, 2002 & European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023). Therefore, it is recognized as a possible solution for fostering knowledge, building skills and encouraging behaviour that entail young people to be agents of positive change.

History education serves as a vital cornerstone in the academic curriculum, offering students a window into the past to understand the complexities of human civilization, societal progress, and the lessons learned from historical events. It provides a platform for critical thinking, encouraging students to analyse primary sources, interpret historical narratives, and engage in discussions about the significance of historical events (Barton & Levstik, 2004). Through the study of history, students gain insights into the cultural, political, and social contexts that have shaped the world they inhabit today (VanSledright, 2010). Moreover, history education fosters empathy and a sense of interconnectedness by exploring diverse perspectives and narratives (Seixas & Morton, 2013), ultimately contributing to the development of informed and responsible citizens capable of understanding and navigating the complexities of the modern world.

## The French education system

Formal education in France begins at age three with optional attendance at preschool (ISCED 0) which is “pré-maternelle” (nursery) and “maternelle” (kindergarten). France has a longstanding tradition of pre-primary education. For the past twenty years, nearly all children aged three to six have attended “école maternelle.” Since 2019, pre-primary education has been mandatory. By age six, enrollment in school becomes mandatory. Primary school (ISCED 1) spans five years, from approximately ages six to eleven, followed by secondary education divided into two stages. During the first stage, “collège” (ISCED 2), students follow a unified curriculum until the age of 15. The curriculum covers four years for students aged eleven to fifteen, culminating in the “brevet des collèges”. Completion of lower secondary education is marked by the “Diplôme national du brevet” (DNB), although entrance to upper secondary level is not contingent on achieving success in the DNB. Specialization begins at the end of lower secondary education, where students are directed to either general, technological, or vocational lycées. Students attend lycée (high school) (ISCED 3) for the final three years, preparing for the baccalauréat (bac) qualification (Fulbright France, n.d. & European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023). Overall, formal education in France spans a total of 15 years from pré-maternelle through lycée (table 1).

Education level		Age range	Duration (in years)	Is history education mandatory?	Qualification
Pre-primary school	Pré-maternelle	3-4	1	no	none
	Maternelle	4-6	2	no	none
Primary School	École primaire	6-11	5	yes	none
Secondary School	Collège	11-15	4	yes	“Diplôme national du brevet” (DNB)
	Lycée	15-18	3	no	“Baccalauréat” (bac)

*Table 1: Structure of education system in France (Based on the information available found on the website of the French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport)*

The French education system is overseen by the Department for National Education, Higher Education, and Research, operating within the framework established by the Parliament. Traditionally centralized, the State regulates curriculum details, teacher recruitment, training, and inspections, and serves as the primary funder of public education. Additionally, it subsidizes “private schools under contract.” Despite this centralization, decentralization efforts since the 1980s have granted local authorities a growing role in ensuring the system’s logistical functioning, including infrastructure maintenance, school transport, and the provision of educational materials (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023).

## **Historical roots of the French education system**

The historical roots of the French education system trace back to the early modern period, with significant developments occurring during the French Revolution in the late 18th century. It was during this time that education in France underwent a transformation, marked by the implementation of compulsory education policies aimed at ensuring universal access to schooling. The “Jules Ferry Laws”, enacted in the 1880s, solidified the principle of compulsory education, making it mandatory for children between the ages of 6 and 13 to attend school. This legislation represented a pivotal moment in the democratization of education in France, laying the groundwork for the establishment of the modern educational system. The first schools in France were often associated with religious institutions, such as monasteries and churches, which provided education primarily to the clergy and the elite. However, with the rise of secularism and the separation of church and state, public schools emerged as the primary providers of education for the general population (Depaepe & Simon, 2003; Bancel et al., 2014).

Another significant milestone in the history of the French education system was the introduction of free education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The establishment of free, secular, and compulsory education represented a landmark achievement in the democratization of education in France, ensuring that access to schooling was not restricted by economic or social status (Depaepe & Simon, 2003; Bancel et al., 2014).

France’s education system is renowned for its rigorous academic standards and centralized structure, reflecting the nation’s commitment to providing equitable access to quality education. The system is characterized by its emphasis on comprehensive education from early childhood through higher education, with a strong focus on academic achievement and

cultural enrichment. At the heart of the French educational ethos is the principle of “laïcité” referring to secularism, which underpins the public education system and ensures the separation of religion from state affairs.

## **School funding and maintenance**

France implements a centrally regulated curriculum, allowing for limited local modifications. State schools, which are free, co-educational, and secular, offer compulsory education from ages 3 to 16, organized into four cycles.

The state provides partial funding to most private schools, which are attended by about 20% of pupils. These subsidized private schools operate under a contract with the state and adhere to the state curriculum. Homeschooling is allowed only under strict conditions. Textbooks are designed, published, and distributed by private publishers, relying primarily on teachers as authors. The French state does not control these publishers. Consequently, the state sets pedagogical guidelines and curricula, and oversees the recruitment, training, and administration of school management and teaching staff in both public schools and private schools under contract with the state.

The education budget encompasses various components, including teacher salaries, infrastructure maintenance, and educational resources, aimed at ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students across the country. Additionally, a separate ministry, distinct from the Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports, oversees institutions catering to children under the age of 3. This division of responsibility may hinder the formation of cohesive strategies across all early childhood education and care (ECEC) services (OECD, 2020). At 15, students are required to undertake the national school-leaving diploma, the brevet (DNB), after which they can progress to upper secondary education (lycée), vocational training, or technological education, culminating in the respective baccalaureate. Approximately 20% of students attend private schools, which receive partial state funding and adhere to the state curriculum through contractual agreements. Homeschooling is permitted under strict conditions. Private publishers, relying mostly on teachers as authors, develop, publish, and distribute textbooks independently, beyond the control of the French state (Bruillard, 2011).

Financial support for educational institutions primarily originates from public funds distributed through relatively transparent and cohesive mechanisms. Nevertheless, despite recent efforts, France still demonstrates a significant gap in per-student expenditure distribu-

tion between primary and secondary education, favouring the latter, as well as among various higher education institutions. While annual spending per pupil/student in tertiary education surpasses the OECD average in France, universities still face resource deficiencies compared to other higher education establishments (OECD, 2020).

In 2017, the French education system served approximately 15.2 million pupils, students, and apprentices, accounting for about 23% of the population. By 2022, domestic education expenditure reached 180 billion euros, or 6.8% of the GDP. In 2017, it was 154.2 billion euros, representing 6.7% of GDP (DEPP, L'Etat de l'Ecole 2023 in Eurydice, 2023).

While the Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports holds overarching responsibility for setting educational policies and standards, local authorities play a crucial role in implementing and complementing these policies at the regional and municipal levels (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, n.d.). This decentralized approach allows local authorities to tailor educational provision to the specific needs, priorities, and cultural contexts of their communities. Local authorities are responsible for managing and maintaining educational infrastructure, hiring support staff, and allocating resources to schools within their jurisdiction. Additionally, they may have the autonomy to develop initiatives and programs to address local educational challenges and promote innovation in teaching and learning (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Thus, while the central government provides a framework for education policy and funding, local authorities contribute to the diversity and dynamism of the French education system, ensuring that educational provision is responsive to the unique characteristics of different regions and communities.

## **Social function and curriculum of the French school system**

History, Geography and Citizenship education subjects mobilise history, geography, geopolitics and political science to provide students with the keys to understanding the contemporary world and provide students with skills that allow them to analyse the political system of democracy. (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, n.d.).

Textbooks in France constitute fundamental educational resources that are meticulously crafted to align with the curriculum guidelines established by the Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, n.d.). These textbooks are typically produced by but not limited to Hachette Éducation, Nathan, Bordas, and Hatier principles. Efforts have been made in recent years to ensure that textbooks

incorporate inclusive and diverse perspectives, reflecting the multicultural society of modern France (Crouzet, 2013).

Teacher autonomy in France is a key feature of the education system, allowing educators a degree of freedom in designing and delivering instruction within the framework of curriculum guidelines established by the Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sports (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports). While teachers are expected to adhere to prescribed learning objectives and standards, they have the flexibility to adapt their teaching methods and materials to meet the needs and interests of their students. This autonomy empowers teachers to employ innovative pedagogical approaches, tailor instruction to diverse learners, and create dynamic learning environments conducive to student engagement and achievement. In terms of teacher qualifications, individuals seeking to become teachers in France must typically hold a bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification, complete a teacher training program at a university or teacher training institute (École supérieure du professorat et de l'éducation, or ESPE), and pass the required certification examinations (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Additionally, candidates are evaluated based on their pedagogical skills, subject knowledge, and professional competencies to ensure they possess the requisite expertise to effectively educate and inspire students.

Concerning the key competencies, French education puts an emphasis on the development of digital skills, foreign languages, and science and technology. Cross-curricular activities and subjects aim to foster critical thinking, creativity, and civic education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023).

French students' digital skills are assessed and certified through the PIX certification at two stages: at the end of lower secondary education (grade 9) and upper secondary education. France also assesses digital competence through non-specific national tests during primary and lower secondary education to monitor the education system's quality rather than individual attainment levels. However, the assessment of digital competence through national tests is not very common across European education systems, particularly in primary and lower secondary levels (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023).

## **Content of history and geography curricula**

History, together with geography, is taught in three cycles in French public education (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports). The curricula and time-

tables of the subjects taught are set at national level. The distribution of lessons between subjects depends on the class attended. In France, the numbering of classes decreases as students progress through the educational system. In primary school, in the third cycle (grade 6), 3 hours of history and geography are taught per week, while in the fourth cycle, moral and civic education are added to history and geography, amounting to 3 hours per week in grade 5, 4 and 3.5 hours per week in grade 3 (Service-public.fr.n.d. & Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports).

In Cycle 2 (students between 6-8 years old) there is no history education, and history as such is not mentioned in the curriculum for this cycle.

In Cycle 3, also addressed as *collège* or *6ème* (sixth class), where students are usually between 9-12 years, the curriculum includes a section on history education, and it mandates the topics to be covered. Students in this cycle begin to develop their understanding of time and space through history and geography, gradually and explicitly. At the end of this cycle, civic education is introduced, building upon the knowledge gained. These two courses deal with common themes and concepts, sharing tools and methods.

In Cycle 4, which includes “*5ème*” (fifth class), “*4ème*” (fourth class) and “*3ème*” (third class) students will gradually understand how the disciplines of history and geography allow them to accurately reflect the time and space of human societies and to understand a wide range of social phenomena. The teaching themes ensure that pupils explore the complexity of the historical development and geographical organisation of human groups.

In “*Première*” or so-called “*1ère*” (first class) and “*Terminale*” (final class), grades determine 40% of the final diploma grade, while the baccalaureate exam grade counts for 60%.

With the new curriculum, it is possible to take lessons as a subject (and history-geography is part of it) during secondary school studies, but not compulsory, meaning that if the student does not choose the subject as an optional extra, he or she does not have to take a history exam at the end of secondary school. In this case, a “*contrôle continu*” comes into play, i.e. all the marks obtained in the history class are taken into account.

This interdisciplinary approach helps students understand the interconnectedness of historical events and contemporary societal issues. Each cycle has specific topics for which the curriculum makes subtopic recommendations (table 2). For example, in Cycle 4 there are three topics for each year.

		6ème	5ème	4ème	3ième
History	1st theme	The long history of humanity and migrations	Christianity and Islam (6th-13th centuries), worlds in contact	The 18th century. Expansion, Enlightenment and revolutions.	Europe, the main battlefield of wars (1914-1945)
	2nd theme	Founding narratives, legends, beliefs, and citizenship in the ancient Mediterranean region in the 1st millennium BCE	Society, church and political power in the feudal West (11th-15th centuries)	Europe and the world in the 19th century (industrial revolution, conquests and colonial societies)	The world since 1945 (independence and the building of new states, the bipolar world during the Cold War and the consolidation and implementation of the European project, and issues and conflicts in the world after 1989)
	3rd theme	The Roman Empire in the ancient world	The transformation of Europe and its opening to the world in the 16th and 17th centuries	Society, culture and politics in 19th-century France (democratic development, the Third Republic, the position of women in a changing society)	French women and men in a re-thinking republic 1944-1947: rebuilding the republic, redefining democracy (the Fifth Republic, from the Republic of Gaulle to alternation and cohabitation, and new social and cultural issues, political responses)

Geography	1st theme	Life in a big city (metropolitan)	The demographic question and unequal development (population growth and its effects and the distribution of wealth and poverty in the world)	World urbanisation and globalisation (the geography of centres and peripheries)	The territorial dynamics of France today
	2nd theme	Life in a sparsely populated area	Management and renewal of limited resources (energy, water, food)	Transnational human mobility (the world of migrants, and tourism and its regions)	Why and how should the area be developed? (planning responses to the growing inequalities between French territories at all levels, as well as the French overseas territories)
	3rd theme	Inhabitants of coastal areas	Risk prevention, adaptation to global change	Spaces transformed by globalisation (the maritime world, the adaptation of the US territory to the new conditions of globalisation, and the dynamics of a large African geographical entity)	France and the European Union (the European Union, a new area of relationality and belonging, and France and Europe in the world)

*Table 2: Subject content of history-geography in different educational cycles (based on the information available found on the website of the French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport)*

Overall, the French history and citizenship curriculum aims to provide students with a thorough understanding of historical events, their impact on modern society, and the development of civic responsibility. By integrating history with other related subjects and allowing for teacher autonomy, the education system ensures a holistic and adaptable approach to teaching history.

## **Content of Citizenship Education curriculum**

Introduced in 2015 at all levels of primary and secondary education, moral and civic education helps students to become responsible and empowered citizens, aware of their rights but also of their duties. It contributes to the development of their critical faculties and to the acquisition of ethical behaviour. It prepares them to exercise their rights as citizens and makes them aware of their individual and collective responsibilities. This teaching contributes to the transmission of the values of the Republic to all pupils. In France, moral and civic education aims to develop a moral and civic culture and critical thinking, so that pupils gradually become aware of their responsibilities in their personal and social lives. Moral and civic education thus combines values, knowledge and practices.

The aim of moral and civic education is also to ensure that pupils freely and consciously accept the values on which the republic and democracy are based: common values based on dignity, freedom, equality - in particular equality between the sexes - solidarity, secularism, a spirit of justice and respect, and the fight against all forms of discrimination, i.e. the constitutional values of the French Republic, as enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789 and in the Preamble to the Constitution of 1946. Moreover, moral and civic education within schools plays a crucial role in fostering education for national defence and security, along with media literacy, critical thinking, and the teaching of religious knowledge within a secular framework. This education empowers students to apply the values and principles they have acquired to comprehend various situations encountered both inside and outside the classroom, including boarding school experiences and school life in general. By providing opportunities for learning and reflection, moral and civic education encourages students to explore the foundations of interpersonal relationships in a democratic society, emphasizing the importance of individual commitment and decision-making for every citizen.

The first year of the secondary school moral and civic education programme broadens and deepens the second-year programme and contributes to the development of students' civic awareness. The programme associates a main theme to each of the three levels of public education: the "seconde" (second) class studies freedom, the "première" (first) class studies society and the "terminale" (final) class studies democracy. These three themes build on each other, allowing students to explore the meaning and scope of the values of the Republic.

The course is compulsory, but only once a week for 30 minutes. In addition, the structure of the course is flexible, it is up to the teacher to choose which of the topics he or she wants to discuss with the students. The program associates each of the three tiers of secondary education with a specific theme, and within each theme, two distinct areas are addressed (table 3). Teachers are tasked with designing their curriculum to encompass at least two of the suggested areas within each theme. The values, principles and concepts learned in moral and civic education are linked to people, thus creating a connection between contemporary events, places or problems. The selected pedagogical approaches, which include studies, presentations, and/or argumentative debates, are designed to foster deeper reflection among students. These teaching methods significantly contribute to the enhancement of oral communication skills, particularly through the practice of argumentation, facilitating the clarification of ideas and the articulation of reasoning to persuade others.

Additionally, to fortify the comprehension of values and principles, along with recognizing the challenges in their realization and the commitment required to uphold them, teachers may develop a "project of the year." This project can be conducted within the classroom or extended to activities outside, providing students with opportunities to explore various forms of engagement. Through its role in nurturing judgment, moral and civic education facilitates reflection on the various sources employed, including written texts, maps, images, artistic productions, films, music, and more, along with their creation, cultural significance, media utilization, and societal impact. This education exposes students to documentary research and its methodologies, acquaints them with the breadth and variety of media and modes of expression, and imparts lessons on complexity, autonomy, engagement, decision-making, and responsibility within the framework of the Republic. The annual theme is investigated through two avenues, each requiring coverage of at least two

suggested areas. To aid students in comprehending the concepts, the curriculum offers potential topics for them to delve into (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, de la Jeunesse et des Sports, n.d.).

	Main question	Related concepts	Possible educational objectives
Axis 1: Foundations and weaknesses of the social relationship	How are the foundations of the social cohesion weakening today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The relationship between general and particular interests</li> <li>• Commitment - Resistance</li> <li>• Inclusion - Exclusion - Rejection</li> <li>• Equality - Equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding information overload in social networks and the ability to select, recognise credibility and trustworthiness</li> <li>• Recognition and review of untruthful content:</li> <li>• Preparing for, acting on and protecting against the dangers of virtual communities and real communities as a mechanism of exclusion and harassment.</li> <li>• Avoiding lonely consumption practices and isolation.</li> <li>• Analysis and evaluation skills through the example of a city, a neighbourhood, a social group</li> <li>• Understanding social policies and care systems to question solidarity or adapt care. Possible fields of study: family policy; health policy; reducing unemployment; generational policy.</li> </ul>

<p>Axis 2: Rebuilding social relations</p>	<p>How do the ways of recreating social relations determine the new model of society?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Justice, equality, fairness</li> <li>• Social reporting - solidarity</li> <li>• Individual and collective responsibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring new ways of exercising citizenship in France and Europe</li> <li>• Discover new ways of mobilisation and political participation, such as petitions, tribunes, local referendums, collectives</li> <li>• Learning about new systems of civic engagement (civic service, national and international)</li> <li>• Recognising contemporary bioethical issues</li> <li>• Learning about the development of the social and solidarity economy through examples</li> <li>• Environmental responsibility and understanding of the interaction between man and nature and the protection of women's rights</li> <li>• Study of public policies to promote social cohesion (social and territorial policies, promotion of equal opportunities, intergenerational relations), using examples in context</li> </ul>
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*Table 3: Themes discussed in the moral and civic education course (based on the information available found on the website of the French Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sport)*

Citizenship curriculum mentions the operation and levels and actors of the national legal system but does not specify them. Regarding the functioning of democratic state, such as rights and responsibilities (e.g.: elections, representation, active participation) the curriculum includes information on mobilisation and political participation like pe-

titions, tribunals, local referendum or collectives. Furthermore, the curriculum includes topics that cover clubs, associations, social networks, communities, popular universities, self-help networks and volunteering, as well as it unfolds tools of solidarity and engagement such as the internet and social networks and participatory mechanisms.

The syllabus mentions circular economy and addresses the issue of individual and collective responsibility along environmental themes. Furthermore, it touches upon the topics of environmental protection and biodiversity preservation. It deals with the relationship between virtual communities and real communities: individualism, self-image, trust, mechanisms of ostracism and bullying.

Concerning national identity, connection to the importance of patriotism or home defence it is worth mentioning that the curriculum includes information about civic service responsibilities and opportunities, both national and international. The Law of 27 October 1997 on the reform of the national service requires the national education system to provide national defence education (the National Defence and Citizenship Day is part of the secondary school curriculum). Secondly, the Nationality Law of 16 March 1998 also requires the education system to provide information on the principles of French nationality.

The curriculum focuses on interconnectedness, global or supranational citizenship (e.g.: EU citizenship) through covering new ways of exercising citizenship in France and Europe. Additionally, topics related to social and territorial policies, gender equality and equal opportunities, intergenerational relations are also reflected through the programme.

The course includes approaches that encourage media literacy focusing on criticising journalists and experts to spreading fake news and creating so-called alternative “truths”. The curriculum also addresses the information production challenges of social networks such as confirmation bias, filter bubbles; information overload and selection; credibility and trustworthiness. It aims at providing the pupils with tools to recognise conspiracy and revisionism.

Therefore, the overall aim of the subject is to help students develop critical thinking skills, including the ability to discern truth, analyse different types of documents, and handle information carefully while also teaching them how to communicate in a clear and respectful way, as well as the value of cooperation and participation in group projects.

# History & Geography and Citizenship Education Examination in France

In France, the history and geography curriculum is typically integrated into a single subject known as “histoire-géographie” (history-geography), which is taught throughout secondary education. This integrated approach aims to provide students with a holistic understanding of the relationship between historical events and geographical contexts (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2015). While history and geography are taught together, they are typically assessed separately in the French Baccalauréat examination, allowing for separate assessments of students’ understanding and proficiency in each subject (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2015). During the examination, students may encounter questions that require them to draw on their knowledge of both history and geography to analyse historical events within their spatial and environmental contexts (Direction de l’Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance, 2017).

Citizenship education, known as “enseignement moral et civique” (moral and civic education), is typically integrated into the broader curriculum and is not assessed as a separate examination in the French Baccalauréat (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2015). Instead, it is taught alongside other subjects throughout secondary education, aiming to instil values such as democracy, human rights, and civic responsibility in students. While citizenship education is not evaluated as a standalone subject in the Baccalauréat examination, its principles and themes may be incorporated into assessment tasks within other subjects, such as history and geography (Ministère de l’Éducation nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2015). For example, students may be asked to analyse historical events from a moral or civic perspective, or to consider the ethical implications of geographical phenomena.

## Dilemmas

Addressing disparities in educational outcomes and fostering social and cultural diversity are pressing challenges within the French education system. The European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice report of 2023 sheds light on these issues, emphasizing the

persistent gap in academic achievement among students from different socio-economic backgrounds. This disparity underscores the need for targeted interventions to mitigate inequalities and promote educational equity. Moreover, the report underscores the importance of creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments within schools. Strategies aimed at addressing these challenges include implementing inclusive pedagogical practices, providing professional development for educators on diversity and inclusion, and developing curriculum materials that reflect the diverse cultural heritage of students (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2023).

The 2020 OECD report on French education mentions disparities in educational outcomes among students from different socio-economic backgrounds as one of the most present challenges the French education system is facing. It emphasizes the need to strengthen teacher training and professional development, and the imperative to adapt to the changing demands of the globalized economy.

In a multicultural society like France, leveraging history and citizenship education to bolster national identity and patriotism poses significant challenges. The multifaceted nature of multiculturalism brings forth diverse perspectives on historical narratives, values, and identities, often leading to clashes and tensions within society (Cairns & Evans, 2020). The question of integration versus assimilation further complicates efforts to cultivate a unified sense of national identity. While integration emphasizes the co-existence of diverse cultural identities within a broader national framework, assimilation promotes the adoption of a dominant cultural identity, often at the expense of minority cultures (Maitre, 2018). This tension between preserving cultural diversity and promoting a unified national identity presents a delicate balance for educators and policymakers. Moreover, historical narratives themselves can be contested, with differing interpretations of past events shaping individuals' perceptions of national identity and belonging (Cairns & Evans, 2020). Navigating these complexities requires nuanced approaches that acknowledge and respect cultural diversity while fostering a shared sense of citizenship and belonging among all members of society.

Although citizenship education is not assessed as an independent subject in the Baccalauréat examination, its principles and themes may be integrated into evaluation tasks within other subjects, such as history and geography. When students are asked to analyse historical events or geographical phenomena from a moral or civic perspective, there is a risk of introducing subjective bias. Different individuals or cultures may have

varying moral standards and ethical views, which can lead to differing interpretations of the same event or phenomenon. This subjectivity can potentially obscure objective analysis and factual accuracy. This might lead to moral relativism, where all viewpoints are seen as equally valid, regardless of their factual or ethical basis. This can dilute the importance of distinguishing between actions that are broadly considered just or unjust. Complex historical events and geographical phenomena might be over-simplified when viewed, which might result in a reductive understanding that overlooks the multifaceted nature of such issues, including economic, social, political, and environmental factors.

## **Conclusion**

Through the study of history (and geography), students learn to analyse past events, discern patterns, and comprehend the complexities of human behaviour over time and space. Lessons cultivate spatial awareness, map reading proficiency, and an appreciation for the interconnectedness of different regions and cultures by integrating historical and geographical knowledge. Citizenship education aims to provide students with a diverse range of skills essential for active participation in society and democratic processes. Emphasizing values such as liberty, equality, and fraternity. The curriculum cultivates critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and civic responsibility. Citizenship education in France intends to foster communication skills, teamwork, and empathy, enabling students to collaborate effectively and navigate intercultural interactions.

In conclusion, the examination of history and citizenship education within the French education system reveals the complex relationship between curriculum, societal values, and pedagogical practices. France's rich historical heritage, coupled with its commitment to democratic principles, underscores the significance of these subjects in shaping the collective identity and civic engagement of its citizens. Therefore, the French education system, rooted in centuries of historical evolution and legislative reforms, embodies the nation's dedication to providing equitable access to education, while aiming to respond to modern challenges which resulted in disparities in educational outcome and the tension between national identity and multiculturalism.

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# History and civic education in Scotland

Judit Tóth

## Abstract

*International educational strategies and policies of our time show that the focus of interest is on the efficiency of the efficiency of schools and the adaptability of the knowledge acquired in school, as is rightly reflected in the annual reports of the OECD or the documents containing educational guidelines published by the European Union. This focus on knowledge as an instrumental factor is also 'forcing' educational systems to change.*

*Currently the focus of international history didactics is on the development of historical thinking, multiperspectivity, personalised history teaching, competence development and the corporatisation of ICT tools. In terms of trends in history teaching, two fundamentally opposing directions can be identified, one of which has become a focus on the approach to learning history (substantive history) and the other on understanding historical thinking (disciplinary understanding). Postmodern interpretations of history teaching and citizenship education have transformed earlier traditions that go back several centuries especially in Western countries.*

*Scotland has taken an international lead in adapting wider 21<sup>st</sup>-century educational and extra-curricular skills. Thus, this paper aims to present the Scottish education system and the state of Scottish history teaching and citizenship education, addressing the current challenges, dilemmas, and good practices. When covering the national exams, this article focuses on the National 5 level (which is an equivalent of a basic exam, being taken at school-leaving age as a qualification), with occasional comments on how the higher levels (Higher, Advanced Higher) are different in nature.*

*keywords:* Scottish education system, educational assessment, history teaching, citizenship education

## Introduction

Scotland is a country in the United Kingdom, bordered by England to the south, the North Sea to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the west and north. There are nearly 5.5 million

people living in Scotland, 20% of whom are under 18. The distribution of the Scottish population is not evenly spread across the country, with most of the population living in the central area, which is the north and north-west of the country. The population has been growing steadily since the turn of the century, which experts attribute to migration into the country alongside an increase in births. Scotland is therefore an ethnically diverse country, with schools teaching a range of languages in addition to English, including Polish, Urdu and Gaelic (OECD, 2021).

## **The Scottish education system**

There are around 2,500 schools in the Scottish education system. Over 90% of these schools are publicly funded and locally maintained. The Scottish public-school system has roughly 96,000 pupils in pre-school (ECEC: early childhood education and care), approximately 398,000 pupils in primary school; 164,000 pupils in lower secondary school; and 127,000 pupils in upper secondary school. In addition, the school system employs over 49,000 teachers. Moreover, there are about 100 non-public schools in the country, with an additional 30,000 students (OECD, 2021). Approximately 5% of students attend independent schools, whether it is a preparatory, special, primary or secondary school. They can be a wide range: single sex, denomination or boarding schools as well (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007).

There are 114 state schools for children with special educational needs, with over 7,000 additional pupils attending these institutions, although the majority of pupils with SEND (special needs and disabilities) do not attend special schools but mainstream ones (over 30% of all pupils). The Scottish education system also includes a secondary school system with a medium of instruction in Gaelic, where pupils learn both Gaelic and English in primary and secondary education. There are only a handful of 'bilingual' institutions of this type in the country: 52 primary schools with a mixture of English and Gael and 32 secondary schools with a Gaelic specialisation (OECD, 2021). In Scotland parents have the right for school choice but catchment areas are also defined by education authorities (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007). Administrative control over education is obtained by the First Minister of Scotland appointed by the sovereign. This person is nominated by the governing political party (currently: Humza Yousaf, Scottish National Party, SNP) Another important body is the Learning Directorate supervising education through different agencies, boards, authorities

(e.g. Education Scotland) (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2021) A full description of the bodies can be seen in the annex in table 7.

The education starts at ECEC level, which is provided up to the age of five (ISCED 0) and, despite being not compulsory, it is taken up by 98% of eligible children aged three and four and is getting more prominent. For years, this has meant 20 hours of supervision, which the parliament plans to increase to nearly 40 hours. Broad general education is for children aged 5-12. It does not completely refer to the period when compulsory education occurs because it starts in early schooling and lasts until the age of 14. After the 7-year primary education ends, it continues with secondary education consisting of lower secondary and upper secondary stages. In Scotland, it is common not to organize entrance examinations. Lower secondary education (ISCED 2) refers to the three years after general education. This is divided into two stages. In the first two years, pupils are provided general education while the last year is a preparatory year for the national qualifications. At this stage, students learn a whole range of subjects every year, learning from a specialist in the field and sometimes they are taught in smaller groups. The next three years are upper secondary school. Most pupils continue their education beyond the compulsory age of 16 in upper secondary education. Upper secondary school is a three-year course (ISCED 3) for 15–18-year-olds. Its aim is to prepare young people for further education, higher education (ISCED 6-8) and the demands of the labour market and individual specialization. Further education colleges (ISCED 3) also offer vocational education and training opportunities for students to pursue vocational studies and higher education (ISCED 5-8), while alternative schools become more and more popular as well. (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2021; Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007). A detailed overview is provided in Table 1.

Age (years)	ISCED	Education level	Length of education level	Nature of education level	Institutions
2/3-5	0	early learning and childcare		optional	
5-12	1	primary school	7 years	compulsory	primary schools
12-15	2	lower secondary	3 years	compulsory	secondary schools

15-18	3	upper secondary school	3 years	compulsory	secondary schools, colleges of further education, independent training providers
			4-5 <sup>th</sup> years	optional	
	4	further education, higher education		optional	colleges
17+	5	higher education		optional	universities, colleges

*Table 1: Structure of education in Scotland (based on OECD, 2021, 21)*

Schools are open for approximately 190 days, depending on the local authority. School year is between mid-August and end of June. Weekly taught hours in primary schools are around 25 hours while in secondary schools this number is around 27.5 hours. (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007)

## **School maintenance, funding**

Although Scotland is part of the United Kingdom, (Scotland Act) it has had full legislative and executive powers in all areas of education since 1998. In government, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is also the Deputy First Minister and has overall responsibility for education in Scotland including Community Learning and Development. The Cabinet Secretary cooperates with other Ministers and relevant public bodies (e.g. the Learning Directorate, Education Scotland (education development and inspection), SQA (exam development, assessment and evaluation), Scottish Funding Council (funding for higher and further education as well as for training education and research). The Scottish Government, through the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, sets overall policy for all aspects of Scottish education. Scotland has 32 local education authorities that maintain schools and education is free for all (OECD, 2021; Stobbart, 2021; Gönczöl, 2015). From the 1980s parents, staff members and other members of local communities are elected to freshly established school boards in all education authority school located in Scotland. The 32 Local Authorities work closely with schools. (OECD, 2015). Parents' representation is so valued that a formal role for the parent council is maintained, the

aim of which has been to participate in the appointment of a new headmasters since 2006 due to the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

The country pours considerable money into education development (e.g. see presence of OECD or DYW - Developing the young Workforce - Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy program, see more: Gönczöl, 2019), placing it at the forefront of 21st century skills and capability development (Stobbart, 2021).

## **Social function and curriculum of the Scottish school system**

Scotland's core curriculum is called the *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Executive, 2004), which was introduced in 2004 and plays a crucial role in 21<sup>st</sup> century skills development (Stobbart, 2021). The preparatory work started in 2002 with a 5-month long consultation launched by the Scottish Executive (Government) and it has been compulsorily introduced in all Scottish schools since 2010 (Smith, 2018a). The curriculum contains aims and pedagogical values that should be emphasized in the education of pupils aged 3-18 (OECD, 2021; Gönczöl, 2019). The curriculum places particular emphasis on ensuring equity, equality and fairness, and specific programs are organised to address these. Curriculum for Excellence does not focus on subjects or prescriptive information, but gives a holistic approach to help students acclimatize to today's world in a complex multi-dimensional way (OECD, 2015; OECD 2021).

Apart from the Curriculum for Excellence itself, five more documents have been published under the name of 'Building the Curriculum' each aiming to specify subject areas, assessment, etc (Smith, 2018a)<sup>1</sup>. The four core objectives of the curriculum include becoming a successful learner, building confidence, becoming responsible citizens and developing effective participation/cooperation in students (Table 2) (OECD, 2021; Scot-

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<sup>1</sup> The additions are the following:  
Curriculum for excellence – Building the curriculum 1 – The contribution of curriculum areas, 2006  
Curriculum for excellence – Building the curriculum 2 – Active learning in the early years, 2007  
Curriculum for excellence – Building the curriculum 3 – A framework for learning and teaching, 2008  
Curriculum for excellence – Building the curriculum 4 – Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work, 2009  
Curriculum for excellence – Building the curriculum 5 – A framework for assessment, 2011 (Gönczöl, 2015, Smith, 2018a)

tish Government, 2009a). To each objective belong a set of capabilities and attributes, thus, history teaching and its aims are organized in a way to be in balance with the fundamental development of these capacities (Smith, 2018a). The curriculum includes eight curriculum content areas: Expressive Arts, Languages and Literacy, Religious and Moral Education, Social Studies, Mathematics and Numeracy, Sciences, Technologies, and Health and Wellbeing. Each content area focuses on the linear progression of skills development in that area. Each contains a list of principles and guidelines, and interdisciplinary and specific topics/themes are also introduced (e.g. sustainable development, global citizenship). Above all of this, seven curriculum principles exist (e.g. challenge and enjoyment, personalization and choice) which serve as organizational and classroom management factors (OECD, 2015). In social studies history, geography, civics and other similar subjects are placed (Gönczöl, 2015).

To enable all young people to become:	
<p>successful learners</p> <p><u>with:</u> (attributes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enthusiasm and motivation for learning</li> <li>• determination to reach high standards of achievement</li> <li>• openness to new thinking and ideas</li> </ul> <p><u>and able to:</u> (capabilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use literacy, communication and numeracy skills</li> <li>• use technology for learning</li> <li>• think creatively and independently</li> <li>• learn independently and as part of a group</li> <li>• make reasoned evaluations</li> <li>• link and apply different kinds of learning in new situations.</li> </ul>	<p>confident individuals</p> <p><u>with:</u> (attributes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-respect</li> <li>• a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing</li> <li>• secure values and beliefs</li> <li>• ambition</li> </ul> <p><u>and able to:</u> (capabilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relate to others and manage themselves</li> <li>• pursue a healthy and active lifestyle</li> <li>• be self-aware</li> <li>• develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world</li> <li>• live as independently as they can</li> <li>• assess risk and make informed decisions</li> <li>• achieve success in different areas of activity</li> </ul>

<p>responsible citizens</p> <p><u>with:</u> (attributes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respect for others</li> <li>• commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life</li> </ul> <p><u>and able to:</u> (capabilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it</li> <li>• understand different beliefs and cultures</li> <li>• make informed choices and decisions</li> <li>• evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues</li> <li>• develop informed, ethical views of complex issues.</li> </ul>	<p>effective contributors</p> <p><u>with:</u> (attributes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an enterprising attitude</li> <li>• resilience</li> <li>• self-reliance</li> </ul> <p><u>and able to:</u> (capabilities)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• communicate in different ways and in different settings</li> <li>• work in partnership and in teams</li> <li>• take the initiative and lead</li> <li>• apply critical thinking and new contexts</li> <li>• create and develop</li> <li>• solve problems.</li> </ul>
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*Table 2: The four core development areas of Curriculum for Excellence  
(Scottish Government, 2009a, iii)*

In Scotland standards are part of the core curriculum, under „statements of experiences and outcomes” levels to be achieved, with an emphasis on the “how” instead of the “what” (Reményi, 2015a). Standards are usually included in the national core curriculum when it is the only central document with regulative effect, and equality, objectivity, comparability and accessibility are defined as important educational policy objectives. Thus, the resulting content regulatory documents become product-oriented helping the planning process by demonstrating the expected learning outcomes. It also serves as a guidance for schools to prepare their own local curricula and as a reference point when assessment takes place (Reményi, 2015a, 2015b).

Schools also develop their own curricula (local curricula) based on this, putting development in the context of each school (Gönczöl, 2019).

Along with the Curriculum for Excellence, a framework (SQA’s Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work) has supported achieving the general goals stated in the core curriculum. In this document, the main skill areas are listed as well as the skill subsets (Scottish Government, 2009b).

The Scottish education system is course-based, meaning that students do not complete subjects but courses that correspond to credits (OECD, 2021; SQA, 2021a), so history is also taught along with courses. The flexibility of the Scottish education system is demonstrated by the conversion of qualifications into credits (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework), which help to make different qualifications comparable in terms of difficulty. The Scottish education system is also credit-based, with qualifications being converted into credits under the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), which helps to make different qualifications comparable in terms of difficulty. While credits indicate the level required to obtain a qualification, levels indicate the complexity of obtaining a qualification. The National 5 exam is ranked fifth out of 12 SCQF levels, with 24 credits out of 6-32 credits in the National Qualifications credit system (SQA, 2019b, SQA, 2017a; SQA, 2017b; SQA 2021c).

## **Teachers in the Scottish education system**

From the 20<sup>th</sup> century teachers have an important position in writing curricula and maintaining the examination system alongside the Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA), previously known as the Scottish Examination Board (SEB) and the Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), previously known as the Consultative Council on the Curriculum (CCC) (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007).

Teachers have a reduced workload (maximum 22.5 hours per week) and are required to attend 35 hours of in-service training per year. In Scotland, teachers' professional autonomy is stronger, as demonstrated by the General Teaching Council for Scotland, a self-governing, professionally representative body of teachers, to which all teachers are required to belong (OECD, 2021).

In Scotland, secondary teachers have to hold a degree in history if they intend to become a member of the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS), but this can be achieved in different ways: there are several ways to become a teacher in Scotland. After a BA degree, teachers can obtain an additional teaching qualification (PGDE, post-graduate diploma in education), which entitles them to teach in schools. Teacher qualifications can also be obtained by obtaining a BA in education and their specialising subject, without the need to undertake additional training (Smith, 2018a, OECD, 2021), including being able to conduct researches on their own (Réti, 2015).

## Historical roots of the Scottish education system

In the 15th century, Scotland already had three universities, and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, elementary schools had to be established in every parish. Due to the many schools being inaugurated in the country, literacy was common already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. From 1872, due to the Education (Scotland) Act, all children between 5 and 13 were given education which was funded by local property tax. This was the time when it was no longer the churches that were responsible for education but the School Boards (locally elected people). Primary education was not free until 1890, and compulsory education lasted until the age of 14 from 1901. By the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, over 200 more secondary schools had been founded and 36 local education authorities to replace School Boards. In the Education (Scotland) Act of 1936, primary education became 7-years long, providing education for students between the age of 5-12, and it got separated from secondary education. From the 1960s vocational further education also expanded, including full-time courses and new colleges (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2007, OECD, 2015).

The United Kingdom came into being in 1707 with the Act of Union, the union of England and Scotland, which had a major impact on Scotland's education system and led to the adoption of the British-style examination system in Scotland as well. In this system, examinations are highly prestigious and have a long tradition, but the role of internal assessment is low, i.e. teachers play a smaller role in assessment at a local level than they would normally in a continental education system. In the British tradition, in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Victorian England (a century earlier in universities), the state took control of the examination process, so that either direct (government-appointed bodies (Scotland) or direct examination boards (England) administer the examinations (Stobbart, 2021).

The Scottish examination system is characterized by the specific structure of secondary schools. Compulsory education lasts until the age of 16, the end of lower secondary school, when students sit their compulsory National 5 examinations. The broad general education ends when the qualification is obtained. The second three years of upper secondary school are made up of optional courses. As this is not a school leaving examination, students gain a qualification on completion of National 5 level. And for this qualification, there is no set age at which it has to be completed, so citizens can obtain these qualifications even after completing vocational schools (Stobbart, 2021, Gönczöl, 2019).

At the secondary level, examination preparation is more dominantly regulated by the national curriculum. Higher education starts at the age of 17, but today nearly 90% of students also take a Higher or Advanced Higher exam to increase their chances of further education and their choices (Gönczöl, 2015). Therefore, the removal of National 5 has been raised in the educational policy discourse<sup>2</sup>. Admission criteria for higher education are set by the universities themselves (OECD, 2021).

## Position of history education in Scotland

Before 2004, the so-called '*5-14 National Guidelines*' (SOED, 1993) the predecessor of the Curriculum of Excellence served as a curriculum on history education, and it was not compulsorily adapted. It did not prescribe time periods precisely (only main historical eras like the twentieth century), so it gave the teachers particular autonomy (Smith, 2018b). Although *5-14 National Guidelines* did not have a strong impact on everyday practice, the outcomes written in the core curriculum enabled history to become a socialising subject putting emphasis on employability to become responsible Scottish citizens (Smith, 2018b).

The Curriculum for Excellence implies a less critical attitude in heritage and identity formation, more emphasis is put on appreciation and assimilationism, which might be in relation with the core capacities defined in the curriculum. Since the curriculum puts much more emphasis on the "*utilitarian instrumentalist conception of knowledge*" (Moore & Young, 2001, cited in Smith, 2018b), competence-based learning is more valued than conceptual understanding in general and employability is very much valued. However, the curriculum tends to over-exemplify subjective concepts, focusing on 1-1 examples making broader understanding problematic, turning learning into being able to understand "a specific instance", "an international event" (Smith, 2018b). The content of the curriculum implied a discipline-oriented perspective, putting emphasis on how historians interpret the past. (Smith, 2018b)

The Curriculum for Excellence was introduced in 2004, where the position of history did not change, positioning history among the 'social subjects' alongside geography and modern studies (Smith, 2018a). Since the Curriculum for Excellence places special

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<sup>2</sup> For more see: <https://news.stv.tv/scotland/scotlands-fourth-year-national-five-and-national-four-exams-to-be-scrapped-under-radical-education-review>

emphasis on the adaptability of skills and citizenship as well, Scottish history and identity have become more significant. The curriculum does not, however, explicitly aim at developing national identity, or a patriotic historical view, and neither do the history courses in the Scottish education system (Smith, 2018b).

Before senior phase/upper secondary school, students learn history as a part of ‘social subjects’, and if they intend to achieve a certificate in history, they have a separate subject in senior phase (Smith, 2018a, Scottish Government, 2006).

Even though Curriculum for Excellence emphasizes interdisciplinary learning, transferable skills and citizenship education, it also implies a weakening of the teacher’s subject identities as well as the view of the purposes of a history education being more instrumental than before. (Smith, 2018a)

As a case for history and civics, under “*People, past events and societies*” it is stated in which level what skills are required, indicating the curriculum to be standard based. The learning outcomes are divided into 5 levels (early, first, second, third, fourth), each being different in their complexity (Education Scotland, 2017) (Table 4).

Second level	Fourth level
I can discuss why people and events from a particular time in the past were important, placing them within a historical sequence. (SOC 2-06a)	Having critically analysed a significant historical event, I can assess the relative importance of factors contributing to the event. (SOC 4-06a)

*Table 4: Social studies: People, past events and societies: experiences and outcomes (excerpt) (source: Education Scotland, 2017, 10.)*

The aim and rationale of social studies is summarized in the syllabus as the following: ‘*Through social studies, children and young people develop their understanding of the world by learning about other people and their values, in different times, places and circumstances; they also develop their understanding of their environment and of how it has been shaped.*’ (Scottish Government, 2006, 1)

Curriculum for Excellence can be interpreted as “*competency-based curricula which emerged in many countries in the first years of the twenty-first century. (...) these curricula are responses to pressures associated with globalizations, particularly in respect of economic competitiveness and citizenship which leads to a prioritisation of instrumental and functional aims.*” (Priestley & Biesta, 2013; cited in Smith, 2018a, 20), these new

approaches seem to have an impact on how history is taught and viewed by history teachers themselves in Scotland too (Smith, 2018a).

In Scotland, history is compulsory in primary education as a distinct subject but is taught as a part of Social Studies for several years, at 4 levels. If students intend to achieve a National 5 qualification in history, they study the subject for a further two years as a separate subject/course at lower secondary school. The enrolment for the 160-hour examination course is not compulsory (McLennan et al, 2020; SQA, 2021a).

In Scotland, there is freedom to choose textbooks. This is evidenced by the fact that there are 25-30 different publishers of textbooks. The most well-known of these are Leckie & Leckie and Hodder. In addition, in Scotland, the validation of textbooks is not dependent on the state, but it is endorsed by expert civil organisations (see for more: <https://collins.co.uk/pages/scottish-curriculum>). The role of textbooks is marginalized here, since they do not determine the content of the public education/regulatory curricula. The curriculum is competence-based and requires a high degree of teacher autonomy. (Réti, 2015)

## **History examination in Scotland (National 5, Higher, Advanced Higher)**

The National 5 examination course is compulsory for Scottish students aged 15-16, where history is an optional subject. The aim of this course is to develop an understanding of the past and present, responsible citizenship, attitudinal skills and the ability to analyse sources. It also develops disciplinary knowledge and understanding of historical processes, responsible citizenship, critical thinking, empathy and openness (SQA, 2021a). The course is built around skills development. The Scottish Qualifications Authority's (SQA) *Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work* cross-curricular document identifies the development of three main skills areas (literacy; employability and entrepreneurship, citizenship; thinking skills) for the subject of history (SQA, 2017a).

The Scottish education system is not characterised by the use of an oral examination component, so in history, two of the National 5 history subjects comprise a written component (Table 2), a pre-research academic essay (assignment) and a short essay question paper. 160 hours are allocated to complete the course (SQA, 2021a; SQA, 2021c).

The syllabus for the National 5 exam comprises three modules (Scottish, British and World History) and 20 topics. Each topic can be further subdivided into four sub-topics,

and the tasks in the examination paper are linked to these four sub-topics. For example, if we look at the topic 'Hitler and Nazi Germany, 1919-1939', we can break it down into four key issues (Weimar Germany, Nazi rise to power, Nazi Germany, National Socialist socio-economic policy) based on the National 5 course description (SQA, 2021a). The exam contains exercises for each sub-topic in chronological order (SQA, 2021a; SQA, 2021b). The topics are studied from multiple historical perspectives. World history is studied alongside British history, covering the curriculum up to 1989 (for more information on National 5 in History, see: Tóth, 2022).

Not all of these 20 topics are studied by the students, half of them belong to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is up to the school district or teacher to choose from them. Thus, the curriculum does not prescribe but suggests which key issues should be covered in the course. In addition, there are no prescribed tables of terms and names (SQA, 2021a, McLennan et al, 2020).

The curriculum consists of different aspects of history, including history of mentalities, political history, social and economic history and covers the origins of the nation (cultural-ethnic-linguistic-political) and important milestones of national history in a very versatile manner. The political position with England might give an explanation to the extensive nature of British history. Within the topic of the Cold War, the Hungarian revolution of 1956 is also included, which serves to exemplify international conflicts from this period (McLennan et al, 2020). The European Union is not included in the course material, because it is studied in other courses (e.g. Politics Higher, see later).

As for Higher level, the triple division of course material (British, Scottish, global history) remains, but the main themes and subtopics (key issues) are more abstract and require deeper understanding from learners (e.g. Church, state and feudal society, 1066-1406). At Advanced Higher level, the triple division of course material disappears, it is replaced by 10 fields of study, (e.g. Northern Britain from the Iron Age to 1034, Germany: from democracy to dictatorship, 1918-39). The 10 study areas are dealing with 9 countries, where Scottish history appears twice (SQA., 2020a; SQA, 2019a).

To indicate the extent to which the three courses differ in the competences they aim to develop, we list some objectives from the course syllabi. The objectives of the previous level are also part of the following examination courses of higher difficulty, but they are not listed again here.

National 5, Higher <sup>3</sup> :
<i>Candidates acquire breadth and depth in their knowledge and understanding of the past through the study of Scottish, British, European and World contexts in a variety of time periods. Options cover topics from the Medieval, Early Modern and Later Modern periods and include elements of political, social, economic and cultural history. The approach and understanding gained can be applied to other historical settings and issues. (SQA, 2021a, 2; SQA, 2020a)</i>
At National 5 level, students will develop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>a conceptual understanding of the past and an ability to think independently</i></li> <li>2. <i>the ability to apply a detailed historical perspective and evaluate sources in a range of contexts</i></li> <li>3. <i>a detailed understanding of the factors contributing to, and the impact of, historical events</i></li> <li>4. <i>the skills of investigating historical events and, on the basis of evidence, forming views</i></li> <li>5. <i>the skills of explaining and analysing historical events and drawing reasoned conclusions by completing the course. (SQA, 2021a, 2)</i></li> </ul>
At higher level, student will <i>also be able to analyse, evaluate and synthesize historical information</i> by completing the course. (SQA, 2020a, 2)

Advanced Higher:
<i>Candidates acquire depth in their knowledge and understanding of historical themes, and further develop the skills of analysing complex historical issues, evaluating sources, and drawing conclusions. The depth of study enables candidates to engage in historical debate and thereby develop a deeper appreciation of the forces which have shaped historical developments. (SQA, 2019a, 2)</i>
During this course, students develop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>a critical analysis of existing historical research, including identifying important lines of argument and evaluating schools of thought on particular historical issues</i></li> <li>2. <i>analytical skills through the use of historical sources relating to authorship and purpose, perspective and historical and historiographical context</i></li> <li>3. <i>synthesis through the use of primary sources and perspectives from historical research to analyse complex historical issues and sustain coherent lines of argument skills to adopt a relevant and structured approach to researching a historical issue,</i></li> <li>4. <i>drawing conclusions in a clear and well-reasoned way, while reflecting the complexity of the issue and the limitations of the available evidence. (SQA, 2019a, 2)</i></li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> The wording of the two levels are almost exactly the same.

## The position of civic education in Scotland

Citizenship education as a subject does not exist on its own in Scotland, but before the Curriculum for Excellence was introduced (as part of 5-14 National Guidelines), civics education was part of “People and Society”, and now is part of ‘People, Society, Economy and Business’ (Smith, 2018b).

Citizenship is one of the four main attributes in the Curriculum for Excellence and thus is put significant emphasis on during compulsory education. Citizenship is not interchangeable with civics or political literacy. *“While civics education develops a familiarity with the institutions of the state and civil society, citizenship education implies an induction into this society. Citizenship education, therefore, is inherently uncritical; it assumes the rationality of existing practices and socialises the student to conform to these.”* (Smith, 2018b 39).

Civic education in Scotland is integrated into most subjects in ISCED 1-3 levels, therefore, a separate ‘civic education’ subject does not exist. The content and methodology are specified by local authorities as well as schools in reliance to the Curriculum of Excellence (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017).

Citizenship is taught at different ISCED levels as a cross/inter-curricular aim, and is not compulsory in secondary schools, but it is covered in an integrated, cross-curricular manner (e.g. through Global Citizenship Education) before ISCED 3. Students can take the National 2 level internal course in social subjects in primary school, which involves geography, history, modern studies, classical studies. With completing this course, students can continue their studies with ‘people and society’ subject course on National 3 level and later with the 4 level (SQA, 2012a. 2014a). At National 4 level, the curriculum is divided into three compulsory units: Investigating Skills, Comparing and Contrasting, and Making Decisions.

At this level, students do not take exams but are assessed “naturally” while they gather different evidence during their learning period. Thus, this course is not externally assessed and can be completed by acquiring the skills defined in the three prescribed units (SQA, 2012b. 2014b. (see example in table 5).

Name of unit	Content of unit
Investigating Skills	In this Unit, learners will develop a range of straightforward investigating skills, including choosing suitable sources of information for an investigation, collecting information from sources of different types, and organising information. Learners will develop these skills through choosing, with guidance, key ideas for study which will allow them to acquire straightforward knowledge and understanding of people and society.
Comparing and Contrasting	In this Unit, learners will develop straightforward skills of using information to compare and contrast. Learners will develop these skills through choosing, with guidance, key ideas for study which will allow them to acquire straightforward knowledge and understanding of people and society.
Making Decisions	In this Unit, learners will develop straightforward skills of using information to make decisions. Learners will develop these skills through choosing, with guidance, key ideas for study which will allow them to acquire straightforward knowledge and understanding of people and society.
+Assignment	In this Unit, learners will choose an issue for personal study relating to at least one key idea of the Course. They will research their chosen issue and present their findings. Through this activity they will have opportunities to experience challenge and application as they further develop and apply the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired in the other three Units of the Course

*Table 5: Units and content of National 4 “People and Society” course (SQA, 2014b)*

During this interdisciplinary, skill-based course, students come across key ideas, including *behaviour, ethics, beliefs, heritage, cause, identity, change, interdependence, citizenship, need, conflict, power, consequence, responsibilities, co-operation, rights, culture, similarity, difference, society, diversity, technology, environment values and equality*. No content is defined, which allows flexibility and lets students study themes they are interested in. Each unit has to be covered in a way that is linked to at least three key ideas listed here (SQA, 2012b. 2014b).

Civic education is not included in the education system at ISCED 3-4 levels, the closest being the “Politics” course at Higher level only. It consists of three fields of study: Political theory, Political systems, and Political parties and elections.

*The course contributes to candidates’ understanding of society by helping them to develop an understanding of political theory, political systems in the UK and international contexts, and factors affecting the electoral performance of political parties. Candidates develop a critical awareness of the nature of politics and the relationship between political theories, systems and parties. (...) the course enables candidates to identify, explore and analyse political issues in order to develop their own views and perspectives. Candidates develop analysing and evaluating skills during the course which help them to interpret and understand political issues. (SQA, 2020b 2.)*

Thus, the main objective of the course is to give general understanding of the concepts, ideologies, parties, legal institutions discussed during the course and to analyse, synthesize and evaluate political events/decisions/etc through attentive source handling. (SQA, 2020b) However, reports on learning in the classroom are rarely available because both schools and teachers are trusted with high level of autonomy (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017). There is a big liberty in content selection. For example, in political parties, students have the choice to study 2 out of these 5 political systems: UK, Scotland, USA, European Union, China (SQA, 2020b). The task types appearing in question papers 1-2 can be seen in table 6.

Analyse questions	Students identify parts of an issue, the relationship between these parts and their relationships with the whole; draw out and relate implications.
Compare questions	Student have to identify differences and/or similarities.
Evaluate questions	Students are required to make a value judgement based on certain criteria.
Discuss questions	Students give their opinion on the statement written in the task. Analysis, multi-perspectivity, different view-points are marked here.
To what extent questions	Students are required to draw a conclusion in which (a) quantitative evaluative judgment on the statement written in the task is made.

*Table 6: Task typology in Higher Politics question papers (SQA, 2019c; SQA, 2019h; SQA, 2019i)*

## Dilemmas

There is an international trend to homogenize an instrumental/ business-friendly approach to education. Nowadays, it is argued that these processes of globalization made history education less important in Western societies (on this topic more e.g. Fink & Furrer & Gautschi, 2023), but this is not the case in Scotland. Since it is an “emerging nation” – nationalism (or even separatism) and globalization go hand in hand there (Smith, 2018b).

History teaching in Scotland is generally not viewed as a tool to enhance patriotism, it is much rather viewed as harmful indoctrination that should be avoided during classes. On the other hand, among older teachers, history is believed to serve to make students proud of their county, implying that ‘Scotland is a small country overshadowed by a more powerful neighbour’-narrative (Smith, 2018a, 30). Besides, there has been a strong emphasis on heritage preservation among students, which the following excerpt *‘develop my understanding of the history, heritage and culture of Scotland, and an appreciation of my local and national heritage within the world’* clearly shows (Scottish Government, 2006, 1). Similar emphasis on heritage, and a link (though less intense) between heritage and patriotism can be found in 5-14 Guidelines (Smith, 2018a). This also means that there might be tensions between policy (performativity) and moral purpose (achieving the purpose of history teaching e.g. enhancing social cohesion) (Smith, 2018a).

There is a mismatch between disciplinary history and the school subject history which has been formulated on various platforms (e.g. Smith, 2018a, Kojanitz, 2018), which poses further challenges which the other challenges of the present (see, for example, Popp, 2023; Nølgård et al. 2020) do not make easier.

Human rights education is integrated in all curriculum subjects (although rarely stated explicitly what the different concept means), which might not seem to be efficient enough (Daniels, 2018). As Smith 2018b cites: *“These distortions in practice are usually understood through the lens of performativity (Ball, 1998) following Lyotard (1984). Research into performativity in education is largely focused on a dominant discourse of ‘improvement’ in measurable ‘outcomes’ and the disciplining mechanisms which ensure teachers’ compliance with this discourse. These mechanisms, which Gerwitz (2002) calls ‘new managerialism’ are manifest in punitive*

*inspection regimes, performance related pay and other accountability measures. For this reason, performativity is almost always perceived as a negative phenomenon: Lyotard (1984) talks of the ‘terrors of performativity’ while Ball famously framed the neoliberal education reform as ‘a struggle over teachers’ souls’ (Ball, 2003). In this tradition, empirical work on performativity in education reports that teachers are riven by tensions – torn between the need to ‘perform’ in an education system which polices behaviour through rigid accountability and monitoring systems, and the need to stay true to a loftier vision of what education is and is for (Jeffrey & Tro-man, 2012).” (Smith, 2018a, 24)*

Global and active citizenship education (or GCE in short) has become a global educational concept in the previous decades (e.g. UNESCO agendas, the Global Education First Initiative in 2012, also see Halász, 2005, Kaposi, 2015) implying a paradigm shift: be responsible citizens in global matters. Although it has become apparent that the development of GCE is important, there is little mutual understanding on what the concept is and how it should be implemented and assessed. This also arises the problem of binary understanding of national and global citizenship and the relationship between the two posing different challenges all across the globe. (Akkari & Maleq, 2020)

Two trends can be identifiable: post-nationalism promotes interconnectedness, cultural diversity and interdependence. Still, nationalism, populism and other religious/ethical conflicts serve a good ground for hostility towards these notions beside global competencies (instrumental) and global consciousness (critical) approach. Postcolonial and decolonial perspectives can also be determinative (Akkari & Maleq, 2020).

Since Curriculum for Excellence is a cross-curricular document, all capacities can enhance global citizenship and human rights education, thus, teachers have responsibility in what and how they develop it in classes, since the curriculum gives little explicit guidance developing them. There is a trend that put rights and responsibilities together but the two terms cannot be used interchangeably, and the use of these two words imply inconsistency. However, there is a strong evidence that several content elements (e.g. culture, the environment) are taught through human rights. This implies the development of general values and not human right/global citizenship education in particular (Daniels, 2018).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Scottish education system has features of the Anglo-Saxon history education tradition due to its geographical-political position. In terms of social function of the curriculum, the education system is primarily concerned with the development of 21st century skills and competences and integration into society, as reflected in the pillars of Curriculum for Excellence.

History and citizenship education in Scotland therefore focuses on the development of general skills and identity as a general curricular goal. It is not prescriptive or detailed on lower levels, but rather seeks to capture the 'big general'. This is also supported by the fact that in history courses, simplified forms of historiographical insight (e.g. the use of source criticism) are used, while in courses such as civic education, the transmission of values, responsible decision-making, and the functioning of political systems are presented in a freely interpreted content framework also presenting history in a fractured manner.

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## Annex

body	role
The Scottish Government	determines national policy and overall direction of education policy
local authorities	provide education for all children in compulsory age, also responsible for the improvement of education in their area as an Education Authority
Education Scotland	its duty is to inspect schools, guide schools with developing curriculum at a local level, organizes professional trainings. It was founded in 2011, before that, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) and Learning and Teaching Scotland were responsible in these roles
Scottish Qualifications Authority	The body works on behalf of the government, but it is completely independent from it. It is responsible for organizing, reviving, entitling, and developing qualifications. It also organizes/implements the assessment of people working in education and training.
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership	This body is responsible for setting the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, integrating all the qualifications available in one framework (e.g. college, university, achievements earned in school, vocational training)
General Teaching Council for Scotland	independent body responsible for determining teachers' professional standards, supervises programmes in e.g. professional learning, student placement and it is also involved in the accreditation in Initial Teacher Education.
Scottish College for Education Leadership (SCEL)	organizes leadership programmes for the Scottish education system since 2014
Skills Development Scotland	a national body which works in partnership with schools to effective skills development in both people and business

*Table 7: Main actors in the Scottish education system (OECD, 2015, 39)*

# Insular Perspectives – History and Civic Education in England

Richárd Fodor

## Abstract

This paper examines the structure, evolution, and curricular characteristics of history and civic education in England within the broader context of the United Kingdom's decentralised educational framework. Unlike continental European models, the English system developed through a tradition of local governance and professional autonomy, shaped by reforms such as the 1870 Education Act and the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988. The study traces how the English National Curriculum balances central regulation with institutional independence, focusing particularly on history as a foundational subject. History teaching in England reflects the influence of historical thinking theory, emphasizing source analysis, interpretation, and critical reasoning rather than comprehensive chronological coverage. The analysis also explores civic education, rooted in Bernard Crick's 1998 report, as a statutory field aimed at fostering democratic literacy and active citizenship. Current debates—such as those surrounding national identity, decolonisation, and the balance between traditional content and inclusive perspectives—illustrate the dynamic and contested role of history and civic education in shaping civic consciousness. Overall, the paper argues that the English model embodies a continuing tension between autonomy and accountability, heritage and diversity, reflecting broader societal and political trends in contemporary education.

*Keywords:* history education, history didactics, Anglo-Saxon model of education, National Curriculum, GCSE

## Introduction

The education system of the United Kingdom developed according to a model significantly different from European continental structures, resulting in a diverse, decentralised framework with a high level of professional autonomy. The scope of this article does not allow a complete overview of the developmental process and actualities of neither the United King-

dom nor the English education system but focuses on some points where the differences from other systems may manifest.

It is essential to point out that the United Kingdom has not ever had a unified education system, but discussion should be limited to English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern-Irish systems. David Raffe and his colleagues referred to the complexity of the UK education system(s) with a football metaphor as '*home internationals*', in which the home countries are independent still specially interconnected actors. This expresses the limitations and difficulties of comparative analysis of the parallel systems (Raffe, Brannen, Croxford, & Martin, 1999). On the following pages the distinct features of the English system of education are introduced with special attention to the school subject of history.

## Historical roots of the English Education System

As in most European countries, it was the Catholic Church which established the first medieval educational institutions in the British Isles. Schools maintained by the Church through mainly monastic orders trained future members of clergy and administration. The first school of England is affiliated to St. Augustine who established a church and school in Canterbury at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century (Gillard, 2023). The first institutions were called grammar schools (*scholae grammaticales*) and focused on Latin language as the first element of liberal arts and the trivium. After the process of the Henrician reformation and dissolution of monastic orders, several institutions were closed or converted. Several endowed schools became known as *public schools*. The specifically English term means tuition fee charging elite school as Eton, Harrow or Rugby. The methods, principles and curricula of these institutions highly defined the upcoming centuries of the education system of England.

The first steps towards a general and free education came in 1870 when the Education Act was passed in Westminster Parliament. The act established school boards with complete authority over the curriculum. This regulation further strengthened local governance and regulation of education (Richardson, 2011). Governments after the second world war gradually raised school leaving age to 16, divided education to primary and secondary level and included a wider range of students with more funding dedicated to school boards. In the 1960's a new model, *comprehensive schools* were introduced. Previously, students had two alternative state funded institutions: *grammar schools* educated mainly future university students while *secondary modern schools* concentrated on vocational education and skilled jobs. With

the introduction of state funded comprehensive schools the aim was to end early selection (Pintér, 2018).

Universities in England are among the most well known in the history of global education. The first English university was founded in Oxford in 1096, while the second - on the bank of the river Cam, later known as - Cambridge was established in 1209. The two institutions ruled the English sphere of higher education until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the University of Durham was founded. The ancient universities of Oxford and Cambridge and further classical Oxbridge type universities as Brighton, Norwich, Colchester, and Canterbury still play a significant role in the English higher education. Traditionally their primarily conservative focus included philosophical and historical approaches. Halsey defined the functions of the classical universities in the following way:

*'The ideal of a university in England is accordingly either Oxford or Cambridge or a successful imitation of them. This means that the university should be (a) ancient, (b) autonomous, (c) collegiate, (d) dedicated to education rather than training, (e) national rather than provincial and (f) exclusive to a carefully selected group of students rather than open to all who should wish to attend.'* (Halsey, 1962, 91).

On the other hand, they are not exempt from new approaches and trends as the approaches of other universities. Their primary focus has also shifted from classical disciplines towards sciences and social fields. Although the rate of students trained in Oxbridge are decreasing due to the emergence of newer institutions, their prestige is still enormous in British elite education (Bell, 2000; Williams & Filippakou, 2010). As an example, 28 of the UK's former prime ministers had graduated from one of the Colleges of Oxford (University of Oxford, 2024).

The decentralized structure of the English education system, based on traditional professional autonomy, was first regulated by central examinations. Throughout their history it was higher education entrance examinations of the classical universities which influenced the teaching and learning process. In 1951, the *General Certificate of Education*, was introduced followed by the *General Certificate of Secondary Education* in 1984, abbreviated as GCSE. The declared aim of the central exam was to eliminate parallel exam structures (Richardson, 2011).

## **Origins of the English National Curriculum**

In the UK recent central regulation of education is connected to the Conservative Party and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The English National Curriculum exists since the Education Act of 1988, known as the *Baker Act* referring to its initiator, Lord Kenneth Baker. Prior

to the general elections in 1987 Thatcher promised to implement a set of reforms in education in the Conservative manifesto with the motto '*raising standards in education*'. Next to the need of a national curriculum the second and third suggestion demanded local control over education budget and increased parental choice (Conservative Party, 1987). Shortly after the election victory, a *consultant document* was drafted over the curriculum, which for the first time prescribed ten compulsory *foundation subjects* for all students. The subjects included Technology, History, Geography, Art, Music, Physical Education, Modern Foreign Language and three additional *core subjects*: Maths, English and Science. This dual terminology of foundational and core subjects has been present in regulatory documents ever since.

The 1988 Act introduced levels of students' academic and cognitive development called '*Key stages*' in the curriculum. Key stages define four levels of compulsory public education up to the age of 16. The law introducing the curriculum also brought about a change in the education of faith with content of Christian character. It required state-run schools to organize *collective worships* that were "partly or mainly Christian in nature." (Government of the United Kingdom, 1988; Gillard, 2023).

The most recent general reform of the English National Curriculum happened in the early 2010s, also under the Tory government, led by Prime Minister David Cameron and Education Secretary Michael Gove. The reform was initiated by a government white paper<sup>1</sup> entitled *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010).

The primary declared intention of David Cameron's government in education was to increase the professional autonomy of teachers and to reduce constraints and regulations. The white paper considered the previous regulatory document too "prescriptive" and set a new goal of producing a curriculum that was "*short, clear and authoritative*" (Department for Education, 2010, p. 42). During the preliminary social discussion phase, Tom Oates, lead researcher of the Statistics, Qualification and Curriculum Agency organized an expert forum with the participation of universities. The findings of the event were published in the form of an expert report entitled *Framework of the National Curriculum*. The report discussed aspects of the curriculum in ten points. It was partly based on international comparisons in which the best-performing education systems such as Finland, Hong Kong, Singapore, and New Zealand were paralleled to the English model. According to the report, the curriculum should develop three fundamental values: free-

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<sup>1</sup> *In the British legislative order public documents called white papers indicate the intention of government amendments, followed by public consultation.*

dom, responsibility, and fairness. In the view of the report, more freedom of choice was desirable in schools, only the most basic knowledge elements had to be defined, and the needs of highly talented students and students with learning disabilities had to also be considered (Department for Education, 2011). Contrary to the first objectives, the curriculum could not be introduced in 2013, but a year later it and it became effective in 2016.

## Fundamentals of the education system

English students attend general education at the age of five and finish secondary education level education when they are 18. Early childhood education, and primary and secondary level education are divided into five key stages.

Education is regulated by the Department for Education which is an umbrella organisation of 18 agencies responsible for different aspects and circumstances of the teaching and learning process. The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) is the coordinator and regulator but not the organiser of examinations. This duty is decentralised and administered by different professional bodies such as the Assessment and Qualification Alliance (AQA), Pearson's Edexcel, or OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations) which organisations set and mark most English GCSE exams.

Professional autonomy is considered an important aspect in the education system. Most English schools are maintained and governed by local education authorities (LEAs) which have a huge influence on the content and circumstances of education as well. Choice of textbooks is not restricted by the state. Textbook publishing is also a versatile field in England compared to narrower markets of several European or Asian countries. The English agencies do not validate or interfere with the content or format of school textbooks. The above-mentioned examination bodies are the ones which *endorse* or suggest books of different publishers for students who wish to take their exams. Among several publishers Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and Hodder Education are the largest, they all have textbooks endorsed by AQA.

The National Curriculum is a core curriculum type loose framework of compulsory learning outcomes, competence development and suggested topics of content. The document identifies three main key fields of learning which are *inclusion*, *numeracy* and *mathematics*, *language* and *literacy* (Department for Education, 2013).

## Position of History Education

### *National Curriculum*

Learning history in England is compulsory for every student for 9 years, but it is not compulsory to take a final exam in the subject. The status of history is in the foundational field of subjects (table 1).

*Table 1: Levels of education with compulsory history education, source: Department for Education (2013)*

ISCED Levels	Key stages	Prescribed content	
ISCED 1	KS1 (School year 1-3)	13 suggested historical figures	<i>Elizabeth I, Queen Victoria, Christopher Columbus, Neil Armstrong, William Caxton, Tim Berners-Lee, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, LS Lowry, Rosa Parks and Emily Davison, Mary Seacole and/or Florence Nightingale, Edith Cavell</i>
	KS2 (School year 3-6)	9 topics with non-statutory examples	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>changes in Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age</i></li> <li>2. <i>the Roman Empire and its impact on Britain</i></li> <li>3. <i>Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots</i></li> <li>4. <i>the Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor</i></li> <li>5. <i>a local history study</i></li> <li>6. <i>a study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066</i></li> <li>7. <i>the achievements of the earliest civilizations – an overview</i></li> <li>8. <i>Ancient Greece – a study of Greek life and achievements and their influence on the western world</i></li> <li>9. <i>a non-European society that provides contrasts with British history</i></li> </ol>

ISCED 2	KS3 (School year 7-9)	8 topics with non-statutory examples	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>the development of Church, state and society in Medieval Britain 1066-1509</i></li> <li>2. <i>the development of Church, state and society in Britain 1509-1745</i></li> <li>3. <i>ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901</i></li> <li>4. <i>challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day</i></li> <li>5. <i>Holocaust</i></li> <li>6. <i>a local history study</i></li> <li>7. <i>the study of an aspect or theme in British history that consolidates and extends pupils' chronological knowledge from before 1066</i></li> <li>8. <i>a significant society or issue in world and its interconnections with other world developments [for example, Mughal India 1526-1857; China's Qing dynasty 1644-1911; Changing Russian empires c.1800-1989; USA in the 20th century]</i></li> </ol>
ISCED 3	KS4 (School year 10-11)	not compulsory/ elective history course	
	KS5 (School year 12-13)		

The national history curriculum of England focuses on learning outcomes strongly based on the historical thinking concept of Seixas and Morton (2012) including secondary concepts of *continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity, difference and significance* (Department for Education, 2013, 245). History as a discipline is gradually introduced to English students. The first three Key Stages (1-9 school grades) increasingly shed light on historical events, methods and perspectives with only a short list of compulsory content items.

The phase of the first three school years (Key Stage 1) is an introductory period to historical concepts, events and people. The curriculum of KS1 history very briefly gives only 13 national and international significant personalities as suggestions. Key Stage 2 regulation describes a dual approach to historical learning involving *overview studies* focusing on long arcs and *case studies* with in-depth investigations of a certain period or concept. KS2 prescribes a list of 9 main themes which are detailed with non-statutory examples and suggestions. On this stage students learn history from the Stone Age until

the end of the Anglo-Saxon period (1066). Among classical civilizations, the Romans are the primary focus of study with their direct impact on the British Isles, while Ancient Greek culture and a selected further early civilization (Sumer, Egypt, China, etc.) are also compulsory. Learning about an additional non-European culture is obligatory too. Among examples, teachers are suggested to incorporate an Islamic civilization, the Maya Empire, or Benin. The last compulsory phase of history education is Key Stage 3 (school grades 7-9). During this period, students are required to further develop higher-level skills associated with historical thinking. Description of the learning outcomes highlights the process of understanding the nature and methods of history as an academic discipline. The English approach puts a strong emphasis on using historical interpretations and sources for inquiry-based learning. Concerning the set content of KS3, the list of topics starts with Medieval and Modern English and world history, trends and concepts until present day.

Examination of student achievement is nationally regulated on two levels but assessed by independent examination boards setting parallel exam criteria. English students usually start preparation to the exams at the end of Key Stage 3 (year 9) and continue for two or three years. It is compulsory to take GCSE exams in the core subjects (English Literature, Maths, Sciences). Students and schools can choose from a wide range of subjects from further fields such as humanities (as history), social sciences, business, arts and others.

Although civic education has strong connections to history education, they are not formally integrated into the English system. Civic education is compulsory at KS3 and KS4 (years 7-11). There are six main fields which the curriculum prescribes for teachers and students: (1) Democracy and government, (2) Citizen participation in democracy and society (3) Rights, the law and the legal system in England and Wales (4) The UK and its relations with the wider world (5) Identities and diversity in UK society (6) The economy, finance and money. The curriculum does not explicitly mention ecological issues or information and media literacy as key developmental areas as far as history and civic education are concerned.

## **Examination in History**

Developing historical thinking and the role of interpretation has a considerable English tradition in literature (Chapman, 2011, 2014, 2021; Chapman & Georgiu, 2021; Haydn, 2014, 2019).

624,975 students took GCSE in England in the 2023/2024 academic year (Ofqual, 2024). Students take this course-based exam at the end of secondary school in year 11,

usually at the age of 15-16. Among the students of the 2023/24 academic year, 64% passed the exam with a grade of C/4, meaning 'standard pass' or above and 26% got A/7 grades or above, suggesting excellent achievement. The subject content of the exams is set by the Department for Education (2014). However, exams are developed, organised and assessed by independent boards such as the AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance), OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations) or Pearson Edexcel. Besides administration and grading, GCSE syllabi with broad historical topics are also set by the exam boards.

The subject content of the history exams is wide and gives several options for the examinees. Depending on the board, exams may vary significantly. However, the primary nature of an essay-based assessment is shared. In the following section, I shed light on some aspects of the most common exam type, the AQA GCSE history exam as it is taken by most students.

History educators are given a set list of topics on which they can build their courses. Students are required to prove their knowledge in the framework of (1) a *wider world depth study* on a short time span global event (e.g. *Conflict and tension: The First World War, 1894–1918*) (2) a medium scale *period study* on a nation (e.g. *Germany, 1890–1945: Democracy and dictatorship*) (3) a long-time scale *thematic study* type essay on a historical concept or development (e.g. *Britain: Migration, empires and the people: c790 to the present day*) and (4) a *British depth study*, a short scale essay from national history (e.g. *Elizabethan England, c1568–1603*). These topics highlight the large themes from which a focused aspect is assessed at the exam.

In most cases, students are expected to solve comparative source-based tasks. Usually, two very short excerpts of textual historical sources and 1-2 visuals have to be compared in the short essays. The mostly primary text-based sources may contradict each other so the students have to use source criticism as well. Many propaganda posters and political caricatures are used as pictorial visual sources requiring critical thinking skills.

A-level (Advanced level) exams are taken by students dedicating two more years to the discipline and showing outstanding skills. Elective courses of advanced level history prepare students to demonstrate skills in analysing and evaluating sources and interpretations. By the end of the course, an individual historical research project has to be conducted by the student and submitted in the form of a 3500-4500 words essay. The work must focus on a very specific issue and address an inquiry question related to a

national or global historical development from a time range of 100 years. Students are required to submit their idea and get approval for their title in advance and consult a set of suggested exemplar topics (e.g. assessing the extent to which the Glorious Revolution successfully settled relations between Crown and Parliament in the context of the Stuart period) (for more see table 2) (AQA, 2019, 2019b).

*Table 2: Details of the AQA history exam types, source: AQA (2019, 2019b)*

Exam level	GCSE	A Level
Typical grade of examination	Year 11 (Key Stage 4)	Year 13 (Key Stage 5)
Focus of content	<p>Understanding modern world, shaping the nation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eras: Medieval (500-1500), Early Modern (1450-1750) Modern (1700-present)</li> <li>• Geographic context: local, British (min. 40%), European and or global</li> <li>• Type: period study (medium time scale essay on a nation), thematic study (long time scale essay on a historical development), wider world depth study (cca. 20-30 years range essay on a global event), British depth study (short range essay of cca. 30 years)</li> </ul>	<p>Breadth study, depth study, historical investigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Era: topics from a period of min. 200 years,</li> <li>• Geographic context: from British history (min. 20%)</li> <li>• at least 2 countries (United Kingdom + 1)</li> <li>• Type: Breadth study (historical development over a period of 100 years), depth study (major historical change), historical investigation (own historical research)</li> </ul>
Types of tasks	Source-based analytical-evaluative essays based on questions pointing to textual and visual interpretations	
Method of examination at AQA	2 papers with 2-2 essays from choices of 3-5 topics and 10+8 questions	2 papers with 2-2 essays and 4 (+2) questions

The English characteristics of the textbook market fit into the general approach of the English education model. With the relatively low level of curricular subject content regulation, national validation of textbooks would not be logical. Without central validation, the content and methods of textbook writing is characterised by the dual influence of both the popularity of the publisher and author, and the endorsement of examination boards. Boards endorse a range of textbooks from different publishers which they claim to be useful for preparation. Instead of the continental chronology and school year-based content selection approach, English textbook publishers follow the syllabi of the exam boards and prepare thematic textbooks dedicated to a broader or narrower topic (e.g. *Conflict and Tension: The First World War*). Among famous publishing houses Oxford, Cambridge and Hodder should be mentioned which all have textbooks endorsed by AQA.

As textbooks are directly preparing students for the interpretation and source-based essay-type questions of examination (table 3), they contain several techniques for developing skills dedicated to the target tasks. They include a wide range of sources such as political cartoons, propaganda posters and short parts of primary and secondary sources. The didactic toolkit of textbooks usually also includes practice questions imitating the question types of the examination.

*Table 3: task types of AQA history essays, source: AQA (2019, 2019b)*

GCSE history task types	A-level history task types
<i>How / Why do interpretations differ?</i>	<i>Assess the validity of this view. / Explain why you agree or disagree with this view.</i>
<i>How convincing are the interpretations?</i>	
<i>Explain the significance of...</i>	<i>Using your understanding of the historical context, assess how convincing the arguments are.</i>
<i>How far do you agree?</i>	
<i>Write an account of...</i>	
<i>How useful are sources...?</i>	

## Position of Civic Education

Citizenship education as a formal school subject in the UK has its roots in the work of British professor Bernard Crick. Crick's 1998 report, "Education for Citizenship and the Teaching of Democracy in Schools", argued for a systematic approach to preparing young people for active participation in a democratic society. His recommendations influenced not only England but also inspired the development of citizenship education programs across Europe.

In the English education system, citizenship education is a statutory subject for students aged 11 to 16, covering Key Stage 3 (KS3, Years 7–9) and Key Stage 4 (KS4, Years 10–11). Citizenship is classified as a foundation subject, meaning it is not one of the three core subjects (English, Mathematics, and Science), but it remains compulsory in state-maintained schools at KS3 and is also available at KS4 as an optional or examined subject (Department for Education, 2014). This framework ensures that students develop fundamental political, legal, and financial literacy from an early age.

The curriculum objectives emphasise preparing students for active citizenship. The 2014 National Curriculum specifies that citizenship education should: (1) provide knowledge of the UK's political system, government, and opportunities for civic participation; (2) develop understanding of the legal system; (3) encourage voluntary engagement and motivate participation in society; (4) foster critical thinking and the ability to question political issues; and (5) teach practical financial skills and personal financial planning (Department for Education, 2014B). Thus, citizenship education combines knowledge acquisition with skill development, encouraging both civic awareness and active engagement.

At the GCSE level, citizenship education is offered as an optional qualification for students aged 14–16. The GCSE specification covers six key themes: (1) Democracy and government, (2) Citizen participation in democracy and society, (3) Rights, the law and the legal system in England and Wales, (4) The UK and its relations with the wider world, (5) Identities and diversity in UK society, and (6) The economy, finance and money. The assessment consists of three components addressing contemporary British life, rights and responsibilities, active citizenship, and politics and partici-

pation, with a mix of short-answer and extended essay tasks designed to measure both knowledge and applied citizenship skills. This structure reflects the curriculum's broader aim of fostering not only understanding but also critical thinking, civic responsibility, and active engagement.

## **Trends and dilemmas**

The United Kingdom has not joined neither the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe (OHTE) initiated by the Council of Europe, nor the empirical research conducted by the Observatory. As a result, we lack important data and results concerning everyday teaching and learning methods and attitudes of educators to history didactics.

On a global level students of England and the United Kingdom are assessed among the higher performing pupils in standard international comparisons. Students scored over the OECD average according to the 2022 PISA results in all three fields of mathematics, reading and science. In reading 10 % of students scored Level 5 or above, which is 3% better than the average of OECD countries, while only 20% performed on Level 2 or below showing 6% better results than the OECD average (OECD, 2022). On the other hand, the statistics of high-performing student achievement by the so-called EBACC shows serious regional and ethnic differences indicating a widening gap between students (Tate, 2024).

Considering national dilemmas of history education, we might start with the disputed role of chronology in the history curriculum. The regulatory document of history education at both the second and third key stages prescribes the development of a 'chronologically secure knowledge and understanding of British, local and world history' (Department for Education, 2013, 3). However, it is an interesting aspect, how this three-layered knowledge base can be achieved with teaching and learning about a set of selected case studies from different periods and regions of world history.

Secondly, the last decade brought serious global debates of identity politics which strongly affected the field of (history) education as well. Education policy about national identity, traditionalist or modern ideas, the role of student skills and (classical) knowledge are not new (Smart & Harnett, 2009) but getting more and more intense. Recently the subject of history has been in the focus of ever-growing cultural and political discus-

sions or violent disputes with decolonisation movements as Rhodes Must Fall or Black Lives Matter (BLM) challenging historical eras and characters. England is in the centre of these social movements and political debates. The concept of *decolonisation of the curriculum* has emerged much earlier in academic debates than political and social movements. Terry Haydn shed light on the British historical context of decolonisation by analysing the concept of empire introducing narratives from Empire Day celebrations even in the 1950's to the story of guilt (Haydn, 2014, 2019). Haydn cites Secretary of State for Education Kenneth Baker and Michael Gove as the lead figures behind the curriculum and highlights their stances on the importance of teaching 'Britishness' and 'Our Island' (Haydn, 2014. 27).

During the last years several projects have been initiated by activist groups and organisations to include a stronger perspective of black and non-European citizens as the learning material titled *Diverse and anti-racist curriculum* (London Borough of Hackney, 2021). On the other hand, according to criticism of the methods of decolonisation movements, they reject not only contested historical figures but the whole concept of learning about the past of the nation and labelling history as 'white knowledge' (Williams, 2024).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the English education system reflects a complex interplay of tradition and decentralized structures focusing on professional autonomy of educators. From its origins in church-led institutions to the development of a national curriculum, education in England has undergone significant transformations. The introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988 marked a pivotal moment, standardizing subject content while still allowing considerable local level control.

The most recent reform of 2013 has also aimed to balance autonomy with clear standards, emphasizing core skills like critical thinking, historical analysis, and chronological understanding in the subject of history. Though compulsory up to grade 9, history exam is not mandatory, creating both opportunities and challenges in fostering deep historical understanding. The two-level history exams organised by private exam boards as AQA challenge students to engage with primary sources and historical interpretations, ensuring a deeper understanding of the discipline.

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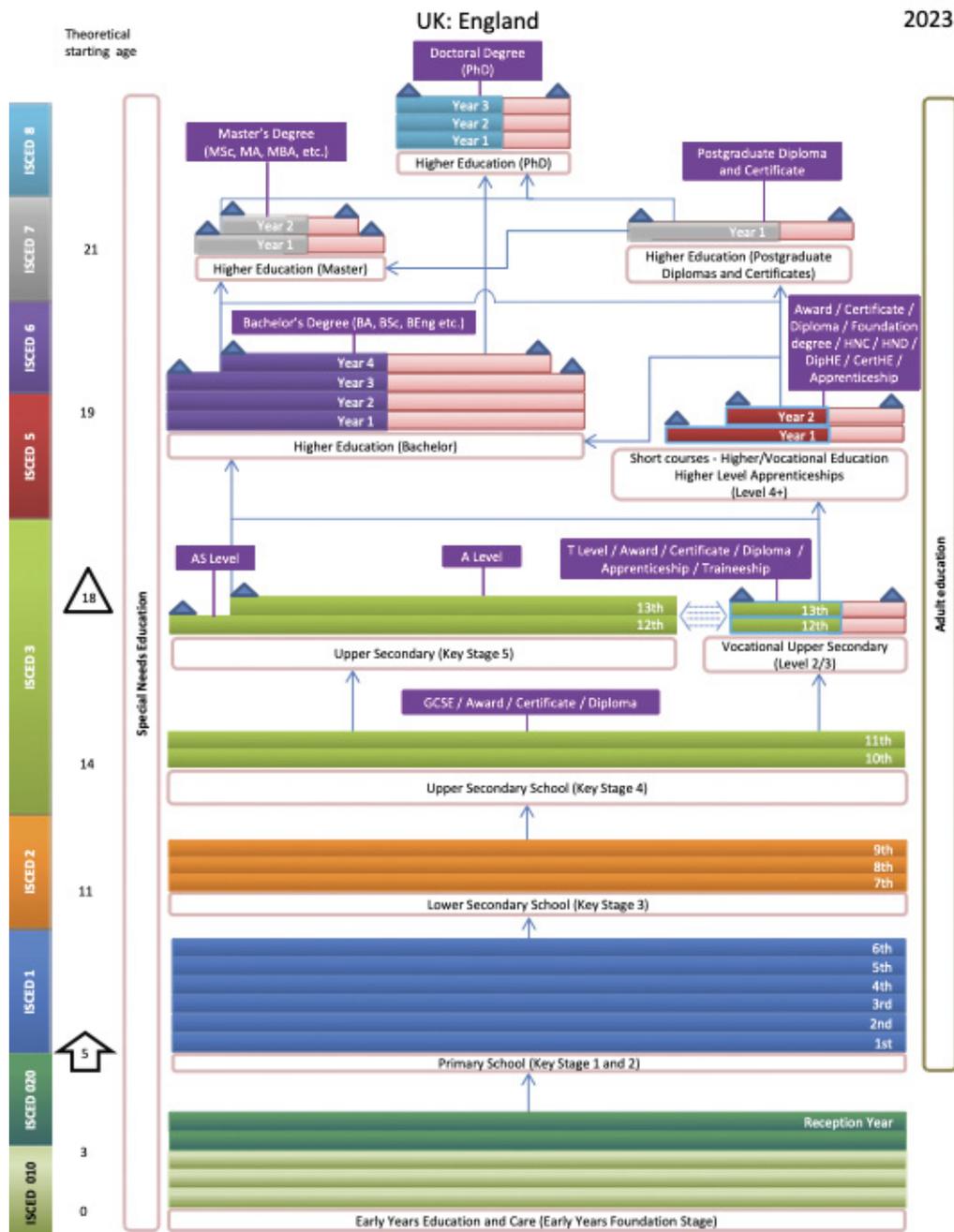
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# Appendix: OECD Education GPS England 2023

2023



# History and civic education in Ireland

Judit Tóth

## Abstract

*Current educational strategies and policies prioritize school effectiveness and the adaptability of knowledge. The question arises whether curricula focusing only on academic subjects are enough, considering globalization, migration, evolving labor markets, technology, and the rise of artificial intelligence. The emphasis on knowledge as an instrumental factor is compelling educational systems to change, causing new currents and challenges to emerge.*

*Some of the main foci in the international course of history didactics are the development of historical thinking, multiperspectivity, and personalized history teaching. Post-modern views on history teaching and citizenship education have challenged long-standing traditions in Western countries, raising doubts about their necessity.*

*Ireland puts special emphasis on both history teaching and citizenship education. Thus, this paper aims to present the Irish education system and the state of history teaching and citizenship education in Ireland, addressing the current challenges, dilemmas, and good practices. When covering the national exams, this article focuses on the Ordinary and Higher levels.*

*keywords:* Irish education system, educational assessment, history teaching, citizenship education

## Introduction

Ireland is a country located on the British Isles, bordered by Northern Ireland, the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. The full population of Ireland is approximately 5 million. Being one of the founder states of OECD, Ireland has always placed special emphasis on the constant development of its education system while also maintaining high quality (OECD, 2020).

## The Irish education system

Education is compulsory between the ages of 6 and 16 (or until students have completed more than three years of second-level education, so this could be 15 years old). Students can complete their 10th year as a transition student<sup>1</sup> (between 15 and 16) or continue their studies within the two-year Leaving Certificate Established programme (LCE), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) or Central Applications Office (CAO). Transition year is offered by almost 95% of schools, by targeting the need for the own students. The purpose of the Transition Year program is to provide students with comprehensive educational experience that helps them develop maturity before pursuing further studies or vocational training. Ongoing assessments can take various forms, including school-based evaluation of projects, portfolios, and different types of activities. (OECD, 2020, Council of Europe, 2023a; NCCA, 2019b).

Age (years)	ISCED	Education level	Length of education level	Nature of education level	Institutions
2/3-5/6	0	early childhood education and care (ECCE)		optional	
4-6	1	primary education: infant classes	3 years	optional	primary schools
6-12	1	primary education	6 years	compulsory	primary schools
12-15/16	2	lower secondary	3-4 years	compulsory	secondary/ vocational/ comprehensive/ community schools and colleges
15-16	3	transition year	1 year	optional	

<sup>1</sup> Transition years play an important role in orienting students both in their upper secondary education subjects and their future career choices. Approximately 72% of students entering the senior cycle opt for a Transition Year (TY) in recent years. (OECD, 2020).

15-18	3	upper secondary education	3 years	optional	secondary/ vocational/ comprehensive/ community schools and colleges
			4-5 <sup>th</sup> years	optional	
16-21	4	further education, training providers (post-secondary non-tertiary education)		optional	colleges
	5	higher education: Institutes of Technology/ Other third-level colleges	3 years	optional	universities, colleges
	6	Universities, Teacher training colleges, last year of Institutes of Technology/ Other third-level colleges	3-4 years		
	7		2 years		

*Table 1: Structure of education national system in Ireland (based on Eurydice, 2022/2023)*

The education system is both course and credit-based. In Ireland, upper secondary education includes a senior cycle, with different study paths (table 2). After this cycle, students can enter higher education once they collect enough scores to meet the entry criteria. (OECD, 2020) In upper-secondary education, the inclusion of students from disadvantaged communities and those with disabilities is focused on addressing language, cultural, and social differences. The DEIS<sup>2</sup> program offers extra funding and targeted support to schools based on the socio-economic background of their students. This program is successfully addressing educational disadvantages, where a large number

<sup>2</sup> Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

of students studying in DEIS schools have taken their Leaving Certificate exams (NCCA, 2019b).

	Leaving Certificate Established	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme	Leaving Certificate Applied
length	2 years	2 years	2 years
content, aim	balanced, general education	balanced, general education with development of vocational skills	vocational preparation, vocational education, and general education pre-vocational, for those not intending to continue in higher education
number of subjects taken	at least 5, usually 7 (Irish is compulsory) at Foundation/Ordinary/Higher levels	at least 5 subjects (two specific vocational subjects)	30 hour-long modules (44 to be completed)

Table 2: Senior cycle programmes in Ireland (OECD, 2020)<sup>3</sup>

## School maintenance, funding

Early childhood education is mostly privately funded since community and voluntary interests are significant where the language of instruction is both English and Irish. (Council of Europe, 2023a) Students can attend approximately 600 two-teacher/three-teacher/four-teacher-schools, out of the 3,250 primary schools,) and more than 80 fee-paying schools and semi-public schools.<sup>4</sup> State schools can be affiliated with religions and still follow the same curricula as state schools (Council of Europe, 2023a, 2023b; NCCA, 2019b.) Public education is free and mostly funded by the state.

The NCCA, a statutory body in DES (Department for Education and Skills), advises the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum matters and conducts reviews of education cycles to inform policymaking. The governance of the education system is under the Minister for Education and Skills, being responsible to the National Parliament. While the education system can be regarded as centralized, the central minis-

<sup>3</sup> <https://curriculumonline.ie/Senior-cycle/Curriculum/>

<sup>4</sup> These schools are publicly funded but not owned by the state but private bodies (Council of Europe, 2023b)

try (Department for Education and Skills) is responsible for maintaining the education system by providing both guidelines and frameworks that are relevant at local schools which enjoy a high level of autonomy due to the similarly high level of autonomy of local level of administrative bodies. Therefore, schools have the freedom to decide on which teachers to recruit or their budget. It is the Secretary General of the Department that is responsible for the management of the Department for Education and Skills including fulfilling monitoring policies (OECD, 2020).

## Social function and curriculum of the Irish school system

In primary education, 8 principles of learning, teaching and assessment are focused upon. These are: partnerships, learning environments, inclusive education & diversity, pedagogy, engagement & participation, relationships, transitions & continuity and assessment & progression. These are all general in nature, contain the valued aims, therefore, these principles are to be implemented by schools in various settings in education. The curriculum also suggests key competencies which are indispensable to interact successfully, to be adaptable and live the world (Figure 1). These are all in line with the knowledge, skills, concepts, principles acquired in classes. The attributes of each competence can be seen in the annex. (NCCA, 2023).



Figure 1: Key competencies (NCCA, 2023, 6), own edit

The curriculum contains 5 curriculum areas: Language; Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Education; Wellbeing; Arts Education and Social and Environmental Education. History belongs to the Social and Environmental Education area. The learning process is divided into 4 stages (Stages 1 and 2: Junior Infants –Second Class; Stages 3 and 4: Third – Sixth Class) (NCCA, 2023).

Ireland’s education system has a comprehensive view of its purpose: to foster the development of every aspect of the individual. Because of that, the ultimate purpose of the education system is to develop “all aspects”, namely the aesthetic, creative, critical, cultural, emotional, expressive, and intellectual ones, for personal and home life, for working life, for living in the community, and for leisure. Therefore, the senior cycle programmes in Ireland are in line with these general aims, also putting particular emphasis on preparing students for further education or vocational training, enhancing active citizenship. The Action Plan for Education (2016-2019, DES) focused on the development of critical skills, knowledge and competencies, well-being, greater subject choice, transitions, IT and language abilities. (OECD, 2020).

In the development of the history curriculum, local administrative bodies and other regional, civil organizations. representatives of minority groups help the DES. (Council of Europe, 2023b)

In Ireland, in the senior cycle the learning outcomes (as well as the syllabi of Leaving Certificates) are tailored to develop the five key skills, namely critical and creative thinking; information processing; being personally effective; communicating; and working with others. NCC, 2019b)

## **Teachers in the Irish education system**

Teachers in primary schools are expected to have more general training, secondary school teachers are required to teach history and maybe 1-2 subjects. Teacher training is decentralized, the curricula is not endorsed by government institutions. Here, the Teaching Council sets the entry criteria, teacher trainees are required to take their courses. The professional development of students takes place by education authorities, different NGOs, teachers’ associations or universities. The Department of Education involves a history team, and they also help the professional development of history teachers (in working hours) (Council of Europe, 2023b).

In Ireland, there are several ways to become a primary or secondary school teacher. For primary school teachers, a programme of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) has to be completed, which can be achieved in two ways: either with a 4-year-long bachelor's degree/undergraduate degree or a 2-year-long postgraduate degree during which the Professional Master of Education (PME) has to be acquired. Both paths include compulsory school practice. Those teaching History at second level are required to possess and demonstrate specific, subject related skills and knowledge as well (Council of Europe, 2023b).

The number of teachers teaching at ISCED 2 in Ireland with post-graduate degrees in education, specifically in 'civic, social and political education' (CSPE), is on the rise. To be recognized by the Teaching Council in CSPE, teachers must have a Bachelor's or a Master's degree in sociology and/or politics, showcase adequate knowledge and skills to teach the CSPE syllabus, and complete one or more methodology modules on teaching CSPE. At the upper secondary level (ISCED 3), teachers of the recently introduced subject 'politics and society', which is currently elective for students, hold degrees in politics, sociology, and related fields. (Council of Europe, 2023a). A master's degree is required for starting teaching, meaning history teachers usually complete a 3-4 year-long bachelor's degree in History, and then a master in pedagogy (Council of Europe, 2023b). Teacher training is not exclusively tailored to citizenship education, but still provides applicable knowledge and competences. The promotion of citizenship education is therefore offered through professional training (Council of Europe, 2023a).

As an indication of the prominence of history teaching in the country, the History Teachers' Association of Ireland, established in 1963, aims to improve the teaching of Irish history, to maintain the pre-eminence of history teaching, to provide professional support for history teachers in Ireland (locally and internationally) and to develop curricula, organize forums, study competitions, annual conferences.<sup>5</sup>

## **The position of history education in Ireland**

From 2023, History has become part of the Social and Environmental Education (SEE), in which the weekly, and minimum time allocations are prescribed in each learning cycle, being taught in 9/8/6 lessons when compulsory. Learning history is compulso-

<sup>5</sup> more: <https://htai.ie/> and <https://euroclio.eu/member/history-teachers-association-of-ireland/>

ry until the age of 14. In grades 1-2, history is studied in an integrated manner, while in ISCED 3 (upper -secondary education), the learning of history is not obligatory anymore, school-leaving exams can be taken from History, though (OHTE, 2023b).

In primary school, history is taught for 2 years as part of the social and environmental education, which is a multidisciplinary course. History as a separate subject is compulsory at lower secondary school (junior cycle), where students are assessed continuously through class work (in form of formative assessment), they also participate in assessment meetings to ensure the quality of work formulated in the national standards. In the upper secondary phase (senior cycle) the subject becomes optional as well as the exam students can take. History is not offered in Leaving Certificate Applied, so technical/vocational schools can decide whether to include it among the optional subjects or not. (Council of Europe, 2023b).

Teachers are offered a great level of independence when teaching history, including what resources they use (videos, textbooks) since the Department of Education states no requirements towards what textbook to use. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) can give advice on what to use and other services to support teaching work (Council of Europe, 2023a, 2023b).

The most popular textbook publishers<sup>6</sup> are Gill Education<sup>7</sup>, Eason Schools Books<sup>8</sup> and Edco<sup>9</sup>. History teachers can decide what resources (including textbook) are to be used. There is no regulation by the state what resources to be used, therefore the Department of Education is not responsible for approving or endorsing materials used in educational settings either, including quality control over these materials. The textbooks are financed by the state and families. Since 2023 September, primary and special schools, history textbooks are free, in secondary schools, a grant scheme has been introduced to help the financing of textbook if need be (Council of Europe, 2023b).

Regardless of the education cycle, both the primary and junior cycle curricula enhance skills that are necessary to conduct historical research and to approach historical documents as historians (these sub aims are referred to as “Working as a historian” at primary level and “The nature of history” at junior cycle level curriculum), at the lower secondary level digital literacy skills also play a pivotal role (Council of Europe, 2023a, 2023b).

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<sup>6</sup> The full list of textbook publishers can be found here: <https://schoolbooks.ie/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gilleducation.ie/secondary-history/secondary-history/modern-ireland>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.easonschoolbooks.com/category/Secondary-Books/Leaving-Certificate/History>

<sup>9</sup> [https://schoolbooks.ie/collections/secondary-school/class-year\\_1\\_leaving-cert+subject\\_history](https://schoolbooks.ie/collections/secondary-school/class-year_1_leaving-cert+subject_history)

Due to their shared history, relevant historical legacies (e.g. the Vikings), and local history are also part of the curriculum. The European integration is more dominant than the history of neighboring countries, even if they are considered important. Migration and diversity (minority groups, e.g. the Roma, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, national, religious or sexual/gender minorities) are also included topics. The most prominently present declared key competencies include *awareness of the cultural variety of past societies / cultural heritage, development of competences for democratic culture, developing of historical thinking competences. enhancing critical learning and 21st-century skills (e.g., problem solving, collaboration and creativity), promoting historical empathy and/or multiperspectivity, reinforcing labour market skills* (Council of Europe, 2023b).

## History examination in Ireland (Ordinary and Higher levels)

History (from the “Humanities” subject group) as a course can be taken up as part of the Leaving Certificate for 2 years at ordinary or higher level. History is compulsory as a lower secondary course and optional in the upper-secondary cycle. The grading is scaled and the markers are chosen by the government (Council of Europe, 2023b).

Both share the fundamental goal to give students an understanding of the usage of available historical sources to explore what might have happened in the past, using historiographical methods. Thus, the focus is on the critical use of sources, the examination of continuity and change, and to move away from a simple linearity in the interpretation of history. All of which contribute to the understanding and interpretation of the past, to the exploration of different historical interpretations, to critical thinking, to the development of positive values in students about history. (Government of Ireland, 2003)

At **Ordinary level** the exam consists of two large units (Early Modern History (1492-1815) and Later Modern History (1815-1993), one of which has to be chosen for studying, meaning that there are no prehistoric, ancient or medieval history topics in the course material at all. Each content area contains 12 sub-topics (6 Irish and 6 world history topics). Content requirements can also be found for the course syllabus. Teachers have to choose the 4 topics they study in greater detail (2 Irish and 2 world history topics) and these 4 topics are the questions during the exam. (Government of Ireland, 2003). The exam itself compiles 3 different sections. In section 1, document-based ques-

tions connected to Ireland (one primary, one secondary) are worth 100 points. There are four tasks and 10 questions are asked. Section 2: Irish history (1 of 6 topics to be answered) worth 100 points. Section 3: world history (2 of 6 topics to be answered) worth 200 points (State Examinations Commission, 2020a). The written exam (80% of grade) is taken in June in the exam period, and a project which is a research study has to be handed in Spring (around Easter). This research study can be of any topic, where students' work is supervised by their teachers (20% of grade).<sup>10</sup> In the question paper (written section), two primary and/or secondary sources can be found in the document-based section, no visual sources are included, as reading comprehension and finding information/identification from sources are emphasized. During the project the aim is to find historical sources that are worse/better in the study of chosen topic. (Government of Ireland, 2003, State Examinations Commission, 2020a).

**At Higher level** 24 topics (12 Irish history, 12 world history topics) are included in the course material, but not all of them are studied. Compared to the ordinary level, the topics here are more thoroughly understood and studied. There are 4 topics here as well to be studied, and the 4 questions are connected to them. The question paper is divided into 3 sections: section 1 contains document-based questions about Ireland (one primary, one secondary source) worth 100 points. Section 2 is again Irish history (1 out of 4 topics to be chosen and 1 question to be answered) which is worth 100 points and section 3 is world history (1 of 5 topics and answer 1 question from each) is worth 200 points. The other part of the exam is a research project (outline plan, evaluation of sources, extended essay) (State Examinations Commission, 2020b). In the written section, Part 1 concentrates on source processing with operations of varying complexity (interpretation, comprehension, measurement of lexical knowledge), while Parts 2 and 3 focus on 3 or 4 different task types (related to the second order concepts e.g. change, causation, significance).

The position of civic education in Ireland

The history of citizenship education stems from the power struggle between the Catholic Church which opposed, and educationalists who were for the introduction of civic education as a separate subject in the 1920s, and did not become part of the education system until the 1960s (Bryan, 2020). Due to the work of the Council of Europe

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<sup>10</sup> [https://careersportal.ie/school/lc\\_subject\\_detail.php?course\\_name=History&search1=history&search2=&course\\_id=19&lc\\_subject\\_group=4](https://careersportal.ie/school/lc_subject_detail.php?course_name=History&search1=history&search2=&course_id=19&lc_subject_group=4)

to promote citizenship Education, civics became obligatory as a separate subject in 1966 for students to be acquainted with their and the state's legal duties and responsibilities and also to promote patriotism. In 1993, CSPE (civic, social and political education) also became obligatory, as a junior cycle (lower secondary) subject, 70 hours in 3 years (O'Brien, 2023). In the eyes of the Roman Catholic Church, citizenship education was imagined to be a part of religious matters, thus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, religious matters and citizenship education had a marginal role in Irish curricula until the 1990s. CSPE was introduced in 1997, first organized around 7 concepts<sup>11</sup>, and from 2017 CSPE has become one of the four pillars of a well-being policy, indicating the importance of non-material aspect of it including responsible participation in public decisions, or being autonomous (Bryan, 2020). Citizenship education is stated under SPHE (social, personal and health education), so the CSPE has become compulsory at junior cycle (lower secondary schools), for a minimum of 70 hours (one 40-minute class each week, 300-400 hours during the 3 years of ISCED education, with schools having the right to allocate more time to CSPE) (Eurdydice, 2017, Bryan, 2020), and in 2012, CSPE has become part of the Wellbeing Programme. The goal of CSPE is *"...to inform, inspire, empower and enable young people to participate as active citizens in contemporary society at local, national and global levels, based on an understanding of human rights and social responsibilities"* (NCCA 2016, p. 5). (Bryan, 2020, 319).

Ireland puts special emphasis on global citizenship education, formulated in the Global Citizenship Education Strategy 2021–2025<sup>12</sup>, which is planned for students to successfully take challenges the fast-changing world put ahead of them (for more see table 3).

At ISCED 2, citizenship education is integrated into history, geography and science, and separate subjects are being offered at ISCED 3 level (Eurydyce, 2017). Citizenship education has been part of the curriculum under 'Civic, social and political education (CSPE) since the 1990s, being a generally taught exam course (Bryan, 2020).

National examinations in citizenship education were administered at the end of lower secondary education in Ireland, where taking the exam was mandatory under subjects including 'civic, social and political education' but it has not been compulsory since June 2018. The exam has become optional due to 'Politics and Society' being introduced as a new exam subject in the 2016/2017 academic year, results from a broad reform

<sup>11</sup> These are democracy, right and responsibilities, human dignity, interdependence, development, law, stewardship (Bryan, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Government of Ireland (n.d.). Irish Aid Global Citizenship Education Strategy.

of student assessment at lower secondary level, which aims to award more weight to classroom-based assessment as compared to external assessment (Eurydice, 2017, Bryan, 2020)

Topic 1	Power and decision-making in school
Topic 2	Power and decision-making at national and European level
Topic 3	Effectively contributing to communities
Topic 4	Rights and responsibilities in communication with others
Topic 5	Human rights and responsibilities in Ireland
Topic 6	Human rights and responsibilities in Europe and the wider world
Topic 7	Globalisation and localisation
Topic 8	Sustainable development

*Table 3: topics of learning outcomes in Politics and Society<sup>13</sup>*

In Ireland ‘interacting effectively and constructively with others’ in the Irish curriculum involves competences including responsibility (ISCED 1-2), autonomy (ISCED 1-3), respect for different opinions/beliefs (ISCED 1-2) and conflict management (ISCED 1) (Eurydice, 2017).

Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) is a subject (schools choose/decide), but can also be developed through other subjects (geography, religion, history, languages). Neither the course, nor the exams are compulsory, but if students opt for taking the exam, the 2-year-long (180 hours) preparatory course is obligatory.

The aim of the exam ‘Politics and Society’ is to equip students with the skills they need to succeed in the rapidly changing world of the 21st century. These include critical information processing (information literacy), active and responsible citizenship, understanding of today’s globalised-individualised world, openness to people from other cultures and social groups. The 180-hour long course syllabus is organised around four key topics: 1, Power and decision-making, 2, Active citizenship, 3, Human rights and responsibilities, 4, Globalisation and localization, while information processing, communicating, critical and creative thinking, working with others and being personally effective are the skills to be developed. Lesson materials thus include discussions, analysis of diagrams, everyday media materials, information gathering and analysis (NCCA, 2019a).

<sup>13</sup> <https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/politics-and-society/>

At Ordinary level, the written exam is made up of 3 subparts: a short answer questions, where 10 questions have to be answered out of 20 for 100 points, a data-based tasks section, where all (4) questions have to be answered for 150 points, and section 3 involves discursive essays, where 3 essays have to be written out of 6 options, each is worth 50 points. Besides, a report on a citizenship project has to be written. (State Examinations Commission, 2023a).

At Higher level, the three-part division of the exam paper (short answer questions, data-based questions and discursive essays) is retained, but the scoring is modified, with the first part worth 50, the second 150 and the third 200 points. In the short answers section, 10 questions must be answered, all data-based questions (2) must be answered, and in the essays, two out of the five questions must be answered. The main difference between the two levels is that while the questions at ordinary level focus on the level of understanding (explain, how), here the questions also include the assessment of application and evaluation (give examples, evaluate). In the other two parts, the analysis part requires more extensive and in-depth answers, and the sources are more complex (State Examinations Commission, 2023b).

## Dilemmas

Two identifiable trends include post-nationalism, promoting interconnectedness, cultural diversity, and interdependence. Nationalism, populism, and religious/ethnic conflicts provide a fertile breeding ground for hostility towards aforementioned ideas. Additionally, postcolonial and decolonial perspectives can play a decisive role alongside global competencies and global consciousness approaches (Akkari & Maleq, 2020).

Since citizenship education plays an important point in European education systems, in Ireland, teachers can specialize in citizenship education. Thus, they can facilitate teaching citizenship education as a separate subject while they also play an important role in passing down the knowledge to non-experts in order to enable them teaching the subject (Eurydice, 2017).

A 2009 cross-national study revealed the anomalies between official guidelines and practice in Ireland (and many other countries), on what is assessed in citizenship education. The results show that *'While the policy guidance states that all three citizenship dimensions should be developed and assessed, in practice the reality is that in terms*

*of assessment, most countries assess the cognitive (knowledge and understanding) dimension more frequently than the active and affective dimensions (participation, skills, attitudes and behaviours)' (Kerr et al. 2009, p. 45). (Eurydice, 2017)*

However, exams too have a high, back-regulatory role, which may not be in line with Irish expectations, in addition, a change of vocational direction would be important (OECD, 2020).

CSPE generally is considered to possess a not so prestigious status in the curriculum in the lower secondary cycle. It is a question how it is in the wellbeing programme. It is also problematic to make it relevant for students. According to Duggan (2015) *"CSPE failed to deliver informed and participative citizens."* (O'Brien, 2023, 15). Moreover, it would be crucial to incorporate the ideas and work of teachers when introducing a new education program (O'Brien, 2023).

There might be a discrepancy between self-reported civic participation and the intended one, latter implying low engagement in civic participation. CSPE seems to be an umbrella concept, a "timetable filler", and is considered less important. The introduction of Politics and Society exam makes the meaningful implementation to practice more difficult as well leading to an oversimplification of the teaching of such a subject. Besides the perceptual and structural dilemmas, the content of the subject is also questionable. Anomalies between the content regulatory documents and textbooks show great differences in their underlying philosophy. (...) *"while the rhetoric of the CSPE syllabus presents education for citizenship in terms of active participation, the empowerment of young people and reflective citizenship, the prevailing impression is of a largely liberal concept of citizenship"* (p.583), however, neoliberal interpretation is also prevailing. Besides, as Bryan, 2020, p. 312 puts it: *"The content of CSPE is further compromised of a failure to provide young people with access to knowledge about the structural dimensions of social injustices such as poverty and a tendency to promote apolitical, sanitized understandings of global problems (...)"* and it is not efficient in the formation to have meaningful and reflective conversations on today's power relations. In this sense, citizenship education is similar to a "public policy placebo" seemingly trying to educate students to deeply grasp social, economic and political injustice, and encourage them to take action, while it actually prevents them to do so.

Other challenges are emerged by the role of both history education and civic education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (fore more, see: Berhard – Popp, 2023, Nolgård et al 2020, Fink & Furrer & Gautschi, 2023).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Irish education system emphasizes cross-curricular concepts (e.g. being active citizens) and gives students the freedom to find their most fit study path.

Ireland's education system is decentralized, with teachers and schools enjoying a high degree of autonomy. History seems to have a prominent role in education, which is implied by the existence of various academic organizations, the length of compulsory history and civic education.

The Irish curriculum places an emphasis on the development of general, transferable skills and identity as a key objective within the broader field of history and citizenship education. At upper secondary level, certain lexical items (names, concepts) are prescribed, while the aim is to promote understanding and critical thinking. In the context of civic education, the transmission of democratic values and sustainable development are listed as possible topics of interest.

The regulatory documents therefore suggest that history teaching in Ireland exists with a balance between competence development and knowledge transfer. However, the emerging worldwide signs of crisis in citizenship education appear here, as well.

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## Annex

Being an active citizen	Being creative
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing an understanding of, and acting on, the rights and responsibilities of myself and others</li> <li>• Experiencing learning through democratic practices</li> <li>• Recognising injustice and inequality and ways to take action</li> <li>• Developing capacity to make choices and take action in favour of a sustainable future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in and enjoying creative and cultural experiences</li> <li>• Being curious</li> <li>• Being imaginative</li> <li>• Being innovative</li> <li>• Using creative processes</li> <li>• Exploring alternative ways of communicating</li> </ul>
Being a digital learner	Being mathematical
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicating and collaborating with others through digital technology</li> <li>• Accessing, analysing, and managing content using digital technology</li> <li>• Enabling content creation, problem-solving, and creativity using digital technology</li> <li>• Interacting ethically, critically, and responsibly with digital technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding the usefulness and beauty of mathematics</li> <li>• Thinking and communicating mathematically</li> <li>• Solving problems and making sense of the world using mathematics</li> <li>• Observing, estimating, predicting, and calculating</li> <li>• Recognising relationships, trends, connections, and patterns</li> <li>• Interpreting, processing, and evaluating information and data</li> </ul>
Being a communicator and using language	Being well

<p>Developing understanding and enjoyment of words and language</p> <p>Developing expressive language</p> <p>Reading for enjoyment and with critical understanding</p> <p>Writing for different purposes and for a variety of audiences</p> <p>Exploring and creating a variety of texts</p>	<p>Showing awareness of how to make good choices in relation to wellbeing</p> <p>Participating with growing confidence and skill in physical activity</p> <p>Being self-aware and resilient</p> <p>Acting responsibly and showing care towards self and others</p> <p>Being spiritual and having a sense of purpose and meaning</p> <p>Being persistent and flexible in solving problems</p> <p>Being able to assess risk and respond</p>
<p>Being an active learner</p>	
<p>Playing, learning, and working, both individually and with others</p> <p>Developing metacognitive skills and strategies</p> <p>Fostering and maintaining positive relationships</p> <p>Dealing with conflict</p> <p>Respecting difference</p> <p>Learning about others</p> <p>Caring for and showing empathy towards others</p>	

*Table 1: Attributes of key competencies (based on: NCCA, 2023, 12-13)*

# History Education and Civics in the Context of the Education System of the Czech Republic<sup>1</sup>

Vojtěch Ripka

## Abstract

The paper presents an analytical insight into history education at primary and secondary level schools in the Czech Republic. History education is analyzed in the context of the Czech educational system. Though not having a particularly strong formal position within teaching subjects, together with civics, history education is a socially widely expected field of education with somewhat excessive expectations regarding its impact on the creation of democratic culture.

The domestic Czech discourse on history education is summarized using the perspective of teachers, scholars, and politicians. The main concerns include the fact that modern history seems to overshadow all other periods in terms of the preparedness of innovative teaching tools and the attention of the wider public, the gap between the largely traditional transmissive practice and contemporary theory, which is partially reflected in the National Curriculum, as well as the blurry lines of civics and history education due to lack of systematic studies with an insight into the practice on the ground. History education has the potential to become weaponized, and some attempts to exploit this potential have already appeared, although they are still not decisive.

*Keywords:* Czech Republic, History Education, Civic Education

## Introduction

The Czech Republic is a middle-sized member state of the European Union. With its population of 10.9 million as of 2023, it has recently become slightly less homogeneous than the whole post-1945 period, facing a migration wave from Ukraine of over 400,000

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people between 2022 and 2023 (Czech Statistical Office, 2024). The Czech Republic is an industrialized, urbanized, modern country with a highly equal distribution of incomes in Europe. It has a relatively large public sector compared to the Central and Eastern European region, and its GDP (PPP) is at 80% of the average of the EU (Eurostat, 2024). The educational system is highly decentralized and complex with fragmented governance (Dvořák, 2021). Graeber's concept of interpretive labour is used. In the Czech Republic, from the very first days of the Velvet Revolution (November 1989) and there are large regional disparities (OECD, 2020).

## **Historical roots of the current educational system**

The Czech Republic was established in 1993 as one of the two successor states of Czechoslovakia. It builds on the tradition of Czechoslovak statehood and the traditional entity of Czech lands that enjoyed sovereignty as the Kingdom of Bohemia within the Roman Holy Empire between 1212 and 1526 and no autonomy during the following period of the Habsburg rule in the Holy Roman Empire, Austrian Empire, and Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which continued until 1918. In 1918, multi-ethnic Czechoslovakia was formed. The politically dominant self-declared Czechs (6.7 million in 1921) were followed by Germans (3.1 million), Slovaks (about 2 million), and Hungarians (700,000). Czechoslovakia was dissolved in phases in the pre-WWII crisis and was reunited in 1945. After a limited democracy till 1948, seeing the expulsion of most Germans and Hungarians, Czechoslovakia entered the "socialist camp" to become a Soviet satellite country until 1989. The communist period was characterized by thorough centralization, a nearly unparalleled nationalization of the economy, and heavy ideological influence in most public life venues (Kornai, 1992). After the fall of the communist rule in 1989, the country liberalized its economic system, opened competition between political parties, and introduced the rule of law. In 1992, the political elite dissolved Czechoslovakia, then a federation into two sovereign successor states.

The historical roots of the current educational system in Czech lands lie in the period of the arrival of Christianity by the turn of the first millennium. The first university was established in Prague in 1348, but education was restricted to a small elite of aristocracy and clergymen for the upcoming centuries. Compulsory education was introduced through the educational reform by Maria Theresa in 1774 for children between the ages

of six to twelve, and the goal was to learn “trivium,” which consisted of reading, writing, and arithmetic. This historically contributed to a sharp increase in literacy, reaching an almost full success in the nineteenth century (Průcha, 2007).

The main modern reform to the educational system before the advent of the communist system was the interbellum introduction of eight years of compulsory schooling. The system remained highly selective due to a stream of gymnasium (or so-called reálka) that comprised not more than 10% of the age cohort from 11 years. Entrance was based on talent but also heavily on the cultural capital of the parents, and generally, upper secondary schooling was a matter of privileged minority (Průcha, 2007).

Mediocrity and the centrally set unified structure of state-run schools with a detailed and heavily ideological curriculum (“osnovy”) and a socially engineered selection based on class and loyalty were the main characteristics of the communist educational system. The Marxist-Leninist ideology was removed from curricula and textbooks, where history, geography, and civics were particularly heavily influenced by the Marxist ideology (Průcha, 2007).

The current system largely builds on the tradition of the Austrian-Hungarian system and its innovations in interwar Czechoslovakia, which included prolonging the mandatory schooling period to eight years and undertaking nation-building endeavors. Other elements, such as multiyear gymnasiums for the talented, private, and denominational schools, were also reintroduced.

## **General description of the education system**

The Czech Republic’s general education system is dominantly public-run and highly decentralized, and it has not undergone major changes in the last two decades. There were 4,261 basic schools with 1,007,778 pupils and 1,294 upper secondary schools with 463,200 pupils as of 2023 (Ministerstvo školství, 2023). The cultural and ethnic homogeneity remains relatively prevalent in most regions. When it comes to foreigners, Ukrainian children make up 5% of pupils on average in basic schools (Slovaks and Vietnamese only about 0.5%) and all non-Czech only 3% on average, but the proportion of foreigners in both basic and upper secondary schools are distributed unevenly with way higher share in Prague, where the shares are 16% of non-Czech in its basic schools and over 6% in the upper secondary ones. Czech Roma form the largest cultural and ethnic minority,

with an estimated 250,000 people and about a 3% average share in schools. However, the school share for children with special needs is uneven (PAQ Research, 2023).

The pre-primary education starts at the age of 3, while younger children's facilities (creche) are considered to be "care" and fall under the supervision of the Ministry of Health. Alternatively, children from the age of six months until five years of age may become members of the so-called children's groups. The last year of the pre-primary education at the age of five marks the start of compulsory education. It is followed by compulsory school attendance from six to fifteen years of age. Basic education structure includes primary (ISCED 1) and lower-secondary (ISCED 2) education (for more see Table 1 in the Appendix). It lasts for nine years and overlaps with compulsory schooling, i.e., till age 15. However, the range of ages for which at least 90% of the population are enrolled is longer than the period of compulsory education and goes from the age of 5 to the age of 15 (OECD, 2020).

Most people acquire basic education in basic schools; only roughly 10% leave basic school for gymnasium. These are divided into the first stage (years 1 to 5), where each class has limited, unspecialized teachers, and the second stage (years 6 to 9), where teachers specialize in particular subjects, including history. As the postponement of the entry age into primary education is high, with about a quarter of the age cohort entering only at seven, preparatory classes set up by the basic schools have become common.

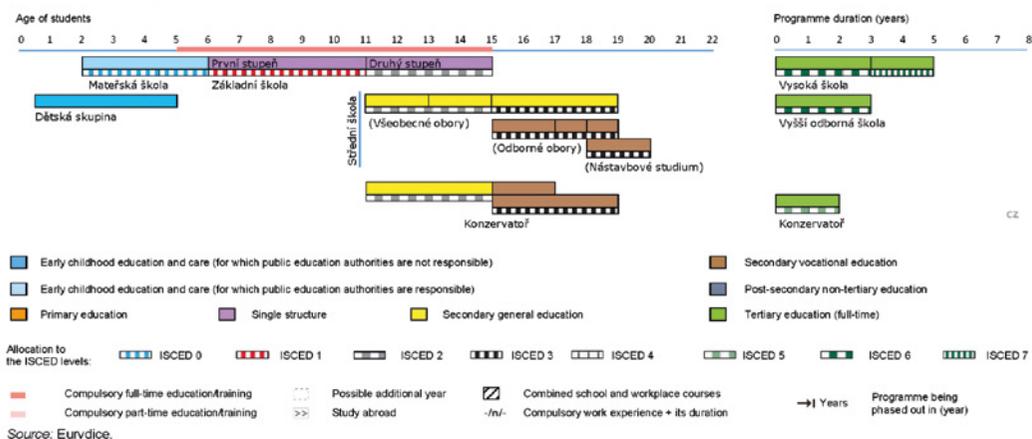
A highly selective stream of education might start at the fifth or seventh year with multi-year general schools (eighth or six years) after meeting the criteria of the admission process set for the state level in mathematics and Czech language and literature. Up to 10% of the age cohort enters this selective system, with a larger proportion being held in larger towns and cities (CSZO, 2023).

According to the current Educational law, which has been in force since 2005, Czech basic education should help pupils acquire essential learning strategies and foster their motivation for lifelong learning. It should also encourage creative thinking and problem-solving in children, help them learn how to communicate and collaborate effectively and teach them how to protect their physical and mental health, as well as cultural values and the environment. Furthermore, basic education should encourage them to be considerate and tolerant of other people and different cultural and spiritual values, and help them to recognize their abilities, possibilities, and limitations and apply them when deciding their future career path (Česká republika, 2004).

General or vocational high schools provide upper secondary education (ISCED 3), and most of the age cohort enters it. It usually starts at the age of 15 and lasts four years. Students might complete the study either with a "Maturita" examination (Abitur-type final exam) that qualifies them to enter the tertiary educational level or with a VET certificate. There are two types of upper secondary schools with maturita-secondary general school (gymnázium) and secondary technical school (střední odborná škola). The secondary vocational school (střední odborné učiliště) offers a VET certificate.

Figure 1: The structure of the educational system as portrayed in the ISCED classification

Czechia – 2023/2024



Source: Eurydice (2024a)

In 2021/2022, 31% of the age cohort was in general gymnasium-type general education, even though the demand is much higher. The nearly 70% share of technical and vocational training is very high in EU comparison, where the share is less than half on average (Eurydice, 2024a). The section on curriculum shows the extreme ramifications of the non-gymnasium programs.

Entrance into multi-year gymnasiums and upper secondary schools is conditioned upon completion of basic education at the relevant level and meeting criteria set by the school. As a national rule, at least 60% of the emphasis must be on the standardized Math, Czech language and literature examinations, which a state agency provides.

## The Czech Curriculum

For the longest period of Czech general education history, there was what Greger and Walterová call “the traditional curricular model.” This model includes “transmission of cultural experiences, national values and patterns of behavior usual in the domestic social environment. Centrally developed time plans and uniform syllabi were implemented compulsorily in every school. Teachers mostly played the part of transmitters, while the implementation of the unified curriculum was controlled by the schools’ inspectorate.” (Greger & Walterová, 2018, p. 26).

The traditional model underwent several changes after 1989, but a major reform only occurred in 2004-2006. It consisted of changes in the curriculum towards its decentralization and turning it towards a skill-based model. The new curriculum model consists of three levels: the national level set by the National Framework Programs (later National Curriculum), the school educational programs, and the actual curriculum fulfilled by the teacher implementing operationalized school educational program by teaching according to his/her teaching plans.

The most general National Curriculum set aims that should be met by pupils acquiring and developing key competencies within content areas. Content areas integrate traditional teaching subjects into larger sets defined by societal processes and demands (Greger & Walterová, 2018). The subject areas also set a group of expected outcomes compulsory in every school curriculum. Still, the national curriculum is rather general and sets only main aims and some limits. For instance, in civel education, one of the specific expected outcomes is to “assess and use examples to demonstrate the benefits of cooperation among people in addressing specific tasks and fulfilling goals in the family, at school and in the community” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 46)

School educational programs are much more detailed documents that also describe the content of the teaching subjects. The power of schools and individual teachers to model their detailed curriculum is vast. In theory, it is limited only by the supervising power of the Czech School Inspectorate, but in practice, it is limited by the school culture, and the expectations of the parents, etc.

The National Curriculum for basic schools and lower stages of the multi-year gymnasium is defined by the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education (Jeřábek &

Tupý, 2007). This document provides detailed goals for education. For instance, in the Medieval Europe and Christianity subject, one of the expected outcomes is to “describe the Great Moravian Empire, the internal development of the Czech state and these states’ positions within the European context” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 44). In the case of the upper secondary school, there is a single national curriculum for gymnasiums. There are 283 programs for technical and vocational schools, each specifically designed for the technical specialization. This is seen as an unwanted feature that decreases the governability of the system (NPI ČR, 2024).

## **School providers, educational governance, and its funding**

The dominant providers of basic schools are municipalities with about 95% share of the cohort of pupils. These are followed by a 2.5% share of private schools and less than 1% of denominational schools run by a church or denominational association. A larger share of institutions (7% and over 1% of schools, respectively) reveal that private and denominational schools are smaller on average. In the case of upper secondary schools, the dominant providers are regions with 81% share, followed by private providers (15%) and the Church (2%) (Ministerstvo školství, 2023).

The Ministry of Education (MoE) centrally governs and monitors the Czech education system. They are responsible for creating relevant educational policy documents and the National Curriculum. MoE also allocates funds to regional authorities. Local municipalities set up preschool education, basic schools, and facilities, while regional authorities establish secondary and tertiary professional schools. At the upper-secondary level, private and denominational schools are mostly represented and are set up by their founders. The Czech School Inspectorate independently controls the quality of every school at levels 0-3 (ISCED), regardless of the status of the school. Public schools are free, while private schools charge fees and receive funding according to a special regulation. Denominational schools receive subsidies directly from MoE. All schools’ funding was based on the per-pupil method until 2020 when a new system of the amount per pedagogical worker / one education staff member was introduced for public schools. This means the state guarantees the extent of teaching in teaching hours. Private and denominational schools remained within the per-pupil method of financing (Eurydice, 2024a).

Educational spending sharply increased from 2016/2017, now fluctuating around 5% of the GDP (Eurostat, 2024). However, a comparative view of the wages of teachers in parity of purchasing standards at the primary and secondary level across the EU reveals that Czech teachers' largely egalitarian state of payments is higher than that of most Central and Eastern European countries but still very low compared to that of most Western counterparts and teachers in the Baltic states (Eurydice, 2024b).

## History Teaching in the Czech Republic

Due to a new teacher acquisition crisis and the aging of the teacher population's, a large, one-time survey was conducted in 2019 at all the basic and upper secondary schools. There were 5,531 history teachers at basic schools, with 16,93 full-time equivalents. The average age was 46. Upper secondary schools had 2,249 history teachers with 777 FTE (full time), and their average age was even higher, 48 (Ministerstvo školství, 2019).

The period of compulsory history education depends on the track chosen by a pupil. The basic school period consists of two years at the primary level and one to four years of history education at the lower secondary level. In the generally oriented gymnasium, it is typically four years, while the more technical the school is, the less history education it offers. The school leaving exam in history education has a singular level. Unlike the Czech language and literature (compulsory for everyone), foreign languages, or Math (it is compulsory to choose from these), no specific guidelines are set centrally.

History education is a part of Humans and Society, a broader educational area the content of which is organized according to the National Curriculum document. Apart from history education, this area also includes civics/social studies. Regarding its position towards other subjects, history education and most of the other content-defined subjects should include cross-cutting themes that include Educating Democratic Citizens, Personal and Social Education, Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts, Media Education, and Multicultural Education for all levels up to upper secondary one (Janík et al., 2020).

Teachers and schools select textbooks for history education. The basic school can buy only textbooks certified by the Ministry of Education. Still, textbooks are optional at the basic and upper secondary levels. The certification procedure for the approved

textbooks consists of a series of reviews. Apart from the quality, it checks its unity with the principles of the general curriculum and especially its “expected outcomes,” and it must be renewed every six years. The process is centralized, often quite formal, and the textbook development is mostly not evidence-based (Greger, 2005, p. 117), which lowers the expected standards on the reviewers’ side. However, recent controversy and political pressure on the renouncement of the certification of modern history textbook by Fraus Publishing House (Pinkas, 2022) has proven the system to be robust and driven by expertise (CTK, 2023). The upper secondary level enjoys no such central regulation because textbooks at the upper secondary level are not subsidized, and the level is no longer compulsory.

In practical terms, the textbook market is very diverse. Even at the lower and upper secondary levels, there are over seven options. The leading publishing houses include SPN, FRAUS, DIDAKTIS, Nová škola, Fortuna, Scientia, and Fragment. Apart from these complex textbooks, several digital education tools and services with Memory of Nations educational activities (Vzdělávání Paměti národa, n.d.), HistoryLab online learning environment (HistoryLab.Cz, n.d.), “Moderní Dějiny” [Modern history] educational database (Sdružení Pant, 2024) or the recent Digitální pracovna [Digital Workshop] (Multikulturní centrum Praha, 2023). Most of these initiatives aim at modern Czech history and are initiated and run by NGOs.

The Czech National curriculum generally covers all periods of the past, from pre-historic ages theoretically to the present day. The ambition of the general curriculum is to cover both domestic and global history and should include multiple historical perspectives, including political, social, economic, cultural, and others. Still, political history remains prevalent. The multifocal approach is only partially becoming a norm. The upcoming general review of the National Curriculum aims to strengthen such multifocal aspects and stress historical literacy, focusing on different perspectives of historical actors. One example of a frontrunner is a Czech, inquiry-based textbook for the ninth year of basic school (Pinkas, 2022; Sixta, 2023). The textbook that was awarded the BELMA prize in 2022 (Belma Awards, 2022) is heavily influenced by the historical thinking approach by Peter Seixas and his colleagues (Najbert, 2020; Seixas, 2015; Seixas & Morton, 2012).

The usual endpoint for history education is around the end of the 1990s. This period includes significant events such as the division of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU and NATO. Some textbooks may even cover recent events such

as the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent “war on terrorism.” The creation and development of the European Union and the Czech Republic’s joining it are mandatory topics in history, with particular attention paid to them in civics.

The curriculum is mainly customized to the region, but sometimes it is presented from an ethnocentric and non-historical perspective. For instance, the position of the Czech lands in the Holy Roman Empire is often described oppositionally using the adjective “German.” Similarly, the Baroque culture is sometimes seen as alien and non-Czech despite its profound influence on the current Czech cultural landscape. The level of global context covered depends on the educational level. Primary education mainly focuses on regional and European contexts, while lower and upper secondary education expands on global contexts, with particular attention paid to them in civics. This is based on the principle of the zone of proximal development.

The taught curriculum mainly focuses on regional topics but sometimes presents them from an ethnocentric and ahistorical perspective. For instance, the Czech lands’ position in the Holy Roman Empire is often viewed as oppositional to the German identity. Similarly, the baroque culture, which has profoundly influenced the Czech cultural landscape, is often overlooked. The extent of the global context covered depends on the educational level. However, this is not a matter of the National curriculum but rather the traditional identity-related content and approach on the side of the schools and teachers, contradicting the conception of the National curriculum to some extent. Primary school pupils mostly learn about regional and European contexts, while lower (still basic school) and upper secondary school students are expected to cover European and global history per the General Curriculum.

Hungarian history is dealt with occasionally, with these notable exceptions being a regular part of the curriculum: Early Middle Age Hungarian conquest, St. Vojtěch’s (Adalbert) contribution to Central Europe, the Arpadian Kingdom, coexistence during the Habsburg era, WW1, confrontation during the division of Austria/Hungary, WW2 - Stalingrad, the Communist era, including the 1950s political trials of Rajk, the 1956 Uprising, and the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion, are regularly included in the curriculum.

The curriculum aims to foster national identity but in the sense of patriotism, and it is rather a matter of civics. According to its national curriculum, pupils should be able to “distinguish manifestations of patriotism and nationalism” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 50), and the expected outcomes should cover “our country – the concepts of homeland and

patriotism; interesting and commemorative sights, what has made us famous, prominent personalities; state symbols, national holidays, significant days “(2007, p. 50). Alois Ecker concluded that the Czech curriculum fulfills some nation-building goals and is, to some extent, built upon 19<sup>th</sup>-century historiographical concepts (Ecker, 2018). That is in sharp contrast to the National curriculum stating that history education should “cultivate the individual’s historical consciousness and to maintain the continuity of historical memory” (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2007, p. 42)

The general part of the National Curriculum (Humans and Society) sets a skill-based concept of history education: “Students are led to realize that history is neither a confinement of past times nor a conglomeration of facts and final answers. History is rather based on posing questions through which the present inquires about the past to learn about its nature and its possible future” (MŠMT, 2017, p. 43). However, the curriculum implemented by history teachers is often content-heavy. In contrast, history education remains the most frontal, transmissive subject both according to the Czech school inspectorate’s reports (Činátl et al., 2021) and academic scrutiny (Labischová & Gracová, 2016).

The systematic presence of digital technologies and the fostering of digital literacy did not have any particular concept and were not incentivized. The National Curriculum was amended in 2021 with a new concept of ICT education that impacted all subjects, including history education (and civics). History education should now “develop students’ digital competence by:

- “guiding pupils to select and make effective use of appropriate digital technologies when planning, implementing, and evaluating activities with digital historical resources, sources, and programs;
- introducing pupils to different ways of communicating activities and results of work with digitized historical realities through different digital technologies and tools for communication and sharing;
- emphasizing safe and effective communication, teaching students to behave responsibly in the digital environment” (NPI ČR, 2024a).

However, the reform is mandatory for all basic schools only from the school year 2022/2023 of primary and 2024/2025 of lower secondary. Hence, the effects of the impact have not yet become measurable.

The National Curriculum is very general, meaning that on the one hand, it does not even set chronologically ordered teaching plans. On the other hand, implementing the

National Curriculum faced some resistance and was partially formal (Straková & Simonová, 2005). In other words, some proportion of school educational plans are formal documents closely following textbook contents.

The only comparable data on history education (knowledge, skills) comes from the Youth and History project in the mid-1990s (Borries & Angvik, 1997; Klíma, 2001). Despite the lapse of time, at least one characteristic seems to persist—a relatively bad relationship between pupils and teachers in the sense of appreciation and respect. This applies not specifically to history education but to all subjects (Boudová et al., 2023).

## **The Position of Civic Education in the Czech Republic**

As mentioned above, civics share the “Humans and Society” educational area and thus have some common set aims and principles with history education. Civics are compulsory both at the basic school and upper secondary one. First, the education starts with an integrated subject of Vlastivěda (roughly “Local history”) in the years 4 and 5 of the primary part of basic school. Civics like občanská výchova ensue till year nine of basic school. All the educational programs of upper secondary education include civics to some extent, named Základy společenských věd [The Basics of Social Studies Education]. In 2019, there were 886 FTE civics teachers at the lower secondary education level of the basic school (about half of the history teachers) and 1168 FTE at the upper secondary school (150% of history teachers).

Civic education has suffered due to its subservient position in the communist system and indoctrination with Marxist-Leninist ideology. It has become a compromised subject, especially regarding its potential to indoctrinate students or even to contribute to forming opinions. As a result, as Hoskins et.al (2015)civic republican and critical/cosmopolitan models of citizenship. The results indicate that social justice values and citizenship knowledge and skills of students are facilitated within the Nordic system that combines a stable democracy and economic prosperity with a democratically based education systems in which teachers prioritise promoting autonomous critical thinking in citizenship education. In contrast, medium term democracies with civic republican tradition, such as Italy and Greece gain more positive results on citizenship values and participatory attitudes. This is also the case for some recent former communist countries that retain ethnic notions of citizenship. In a final step we go on to argue that the Nordic

teachers' priority on developing critical and autonomous citizens perhaps facilitates 14 years olds qualities of cognition on citizenship and the values of equality but may not be the most fruitful approach to enhance participatory attitudes or concepts of a good citizen which may be better supported by the Italian teachers' priority on civic responsibility. Crossref suggest, as a key to most ex-communist countries, the subject was sanitized and turned into a detached transfer of unbiased information about, for instance, the constitutional system.

Unlike history education, where no recent comparable data on stances, knowledge, and skills are available, civic education is scrutinized by the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. However, the Czech Republic has yet to participate since its first participation in 2009. Though outdated, this has reflected the wobbly character of civics, the detachment of youth from formal political participation, and the generally lowest level of what Hoskins et al (2015) call civic competence.

It is thus with no surprise that the key actors in the field agree on the key problem in civics: stress on transfer of information "without giving sufficient attention to developing skills and forming opinions" (Horák, 2022; cf: Nosková, 2023), or as Květina puts it, Czech schools should aim at "teaching democracy" instead of the current "teaching about democracy" (Květina, 2022, p. 37).

## **Dilemmas on history teaching**

One of the long-term features of history education in the Czech Republic is the gap between the high expectations of parents, media, and society and its actual capacities and ambitions. Charged with the state of civic virtues, resilience towards disinformation, or level of patriotism or nationalism, it seems that with only little exaggeration, history education (and to some extent civics as well) are seen as the root of much of the anti-democratic moods and stances today (Ripka, 2018). However, such an alarmist attitude and associating the results of historical education with the state of democracy is not new at all, specifically in the Czech Republic (cf. Wineburg, 2018). This section thus approaches the problems and dilemmas of history education rather analytically from the position of observation, not activism. Different angles are used, and the main issues identified by these perspectives are summarized. First, it is the view "from below", i.e., teachers and their problems as detected from their semi-organized activities online.

Second, key issues identified by the academic community of the so-called didactics of history. Finally, one issue in which history education recently became a matter of political debate is briefly described.

Let us, however, start with problematic conditions in which the debate on Czech history education unfolds: a blurred picture of the state of history education. Pinkas (2023) identified the insufficient availability of studies that give insight into the situation in schools as one of the key problems of the current curriculum. Even in most researched areas within history education, modern history, researchers face inaccuracy of empirical data, intentional use of surveys for ideological purposes, and marketing (Ripka & Hoření, 2017). This blurred or even misleading picture is periodically amplified by mass media, which persistently use a narrative about history teachers and schools avoiding teaching modern history on purpose due to their inability to organize and their fear of controversy. However, this narrative does not have any backing in systematic empirical research (Pinkas & Ripka, 2012).

A representative set of problems in history education identified “from below” could be found through Facebook self-help groups of history teachers (Najbert, 2023). Najbert has identified three approaches to the problems of history education in the three most prominent specialized online communities on social media based on the analysis of their online activity. These are commemorative history with a focus on the commemoration of personalities and events as well as the promotion of values; interesting history that aims at a playful and enjoyable experience for students; and literacy-based history where students don’t just learn historical facts but learn to think like historians by answering more challenging historical questions directed at cognitively higher dimensions of knowledge (Najbert, 2023).

We might use Najbert’s analysis to draw some lessons on the contemporary interests of teachers as reflected in their online activity. A major rift seems to be between the functions of history, where commemorative history education aims at - what Levesque (2009) calls History-Memory - and has a strong attachment to the nation-building process. The adherents of Interesting History are not specific. The history education aspiring to foster historical literacy is focused on non-modern history. The relatively good supportive net of tools, activities, and textbook-like material in this manner tackles modern history almost exclusively.

The full treatment of the set of key problems defined by the scholarly community extends beyond the scope of this article, and it got some coverage in the works of Gracová,

Labischová, Beneš, and Pinkas (Beneš & Gracová, 2015; Gracová & Labischová, 2012; Labischová & Gracová, 2016; Pinkas, 2023).

According to systematic studies, a great obstacle in realizing the skill-based part of the current history education curriculum and introduction of inquiry-based learning methods to foster historical literacy is the gap between the theory of inquiry-based learning and key competencies and its implementation (Černý, 2018; Činátl et al., 2021; Havlůjová & Najbert, 2018). The problems with this gap were especially pronounced in implementing inquiry-based learning and other active learning methods in a large recent experiment. The first experiment piloted the implementation of alternative curriculum at the gymnasium level and generally found relatively low interest of pupils in these new approaches when about half of the (pupil) treatment group preferred the traditional teaching methods (Labischová & Gracová, 2016,). The second experiment, Dějepis + [History +], ran in 2021/22 and 2022/23 aimed at developing critical historical thinking and research work with sources of historical information (Hubatková et al., 2021).

The key finding is that in the short term, even having a full spectrum of didactic tools ready to be used and a supportive net of learning communities might not be enough to bring about change in a single year of particular pupils' education. However, historical literacy has proved to be a legitimate educational objective that motivates children to see history and history education as relevant to their lives. Moreover, the project has shown that inquiry-based learning toward historical literacy works in different types of schools with talented and disadvantaged pupils (Münich et al., 2023). In the upcoming years, the supportive net might (Nosková, 2023), and according to Pinkas (2023) should be improved by advancing the definition of subject-specific skills directly in the revised National curriculum. These largely overlap with the History + concept of historical literacy.

There is a framing of historiography and history education that, in recent years, appeared in politics, mass media, and even from within the intellectual community: security concerns and hybrid warfare waged by Putin's Russia. The narrative of labelling part of the historiographical community as so-called neo-Marxists and the fifth column of Moscow was present for many years. It coincided with some methodological, or to be more precise, epistemological cleavages in the historiographic community, mainly positivism and proneness to the hagiography of anti-communist heroes versus postpositivism and stress put on a methodological frame of research (cf. Činátl et al.,

2017; Ripka & Sýkorová, 2023). One manifestation of an impetus for such a centrifugal polarization on this cleavage was the annual intelligence report of 2018, which identified these dangers within history teaching (Eberle & Daniel, 2023). This weaponizing approach to history and history education is feared by a part of the political spectrum but supported only by an intellectually minor group within the historiographical community and by none within the pedagogical scholars (Eberle & Daniel, 2023; Křístek, 2019; Perknerová, 2019).

The aforementioned controversy regarding the modern history textbook based on inquiry learning methods (Pinkas, 2022) and the role of students and the traditional canon runs roughly along a similar cleavage. Not only the robust system of reviews by the Ministry of Education (Černý, 2023) but also the consensus among the expert community in education (Belma Awards, 2022), both domestically and on the European level, prevented this attempt at political intervention (*17. března 2023 - Interview ČT24- Pavel Žáček*, 2023; *ZPRÁVA*, n.d.) into the educational system.

Despite the relative fringe happenings in this regard, combined with the War in Ukraine in 2022, this sentiment of weaponization of history education and its use for direct party-political purposes might gain momentum and indirectly impact the taught curriculum. Still, the more impactful factor is how the problems are felt and communicated at the levels of teaching and scholarly communities, mainly the gap between theory and practice and the lack of supportive nets.

## Conclusion

Czech history education and civics form a common educational field. Neither subject enjoys a privileged position in schools. Especially with civics, the damage done by its highly ideological status during the communist regime between 1948 and 1989 brought about skepticism towards its non-fact-based components. The current social standing, however, is increased by its presumed social function of preparing democratic citizens. This is associated with the allegedly low profile of modern history teaching in history education. More post-communist countries share these traits, but these seem even more pronounced in the Czech Republic, as we have shown based on some examples of international comparative studies.

The current National Curriculum is not problematic in these two subjects as an ob-

stale, but rather as a feeble support for the actual, taught curriculum. The upcoming curricular reform aims to improve the supportive role and should be more competence-based while providing particular best practices from schools and educational programs. Its implementation plan remains to be seen since the delivery may need to catch up, as in the case of the previous reform from 2006 onwards. Despite all skepticism, a consensus on the constructivist, inquiry-based learning style of teaching has recently been accomplished. Principles of evidence-based policy-making in these curricular reforms may reconcile the theory and the situation in the field.

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## Appendix

ISCED Level	Educational Stage	Age Range	Description	Czech School Name
1	Primary	6-11 years	Basic elementary education that provides fundamental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.	Základní škola - první stupeň (ZŠ)
2	Lower Secondary	11-15 years	Intermediate education that builds on primary education and prepares students for upper secondary education.	Základní škola - druhý stupeň (ZŠ)

2	Lower Secondary	11-15 years	Alternative pathway to lower secondary education.	Osmileté gymnázium (1. až 4. ročník)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	General or specialized education that prepares students for higher education or vocational training.	Střední odborná škola (SOŠ)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	General secondary education preparing for university entrance.	Gymnázium
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	Vocational training that prepares students for a specific profession.	Střední odborné učiliště (SOU)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	General education continuation from osmileté gymnázium.	Osmileté gymnázium (5. až 8. ročník)
3	Upper Secondary	15-19 years	Specialized secondary education focusing on music and performing arts.	Konzervatoř
3	Post-secondary Non-tertiary	19+ years	Follow-up study that extends vocational education.	Nástavbové studium

Table 1: *The structure of the educational system as portrayed in the ISCED classification*

# History and civic education in Poland

Jakub Mańczak

## Abstract

*This paper analyses the situation of history and civic education in Poland. It presents an overview of the Polish education system - the genesis, main features, structure and funding. It looks at the teaching content and goals of historical and civic education through the lens of curriculum translated by the author. There is an analysis of the primary school and secondary school history curriculum, primary school civic education curricula and newly (2022) introduced "History and Present" subject in secondary school. The new history curriculum was introduced in 2018 and slightly changed in 2022 after introducing a new subject, which has taken over the teaching about history after 1945 and the role of civic education. History education in Poland is taught in a chronological order from two perspectives - national and global. The national perspective is privileged. The main goals of history education in Poland are: patriotic attitude, sense of responsibility for the country, and national pride. Civic education begins with teaching the students basic social competences, like cooperation, searching and sorting information, understanding the media narratives. In secondary school socialisation is tied to specific cultural norms and a vision of the individual, family and society rooted in Christianity and Greek-Roman tradition.*

*keywords:* Polish education system, history education, civic education, History and Present

## Introduction

Poland is a country in Central Europe. There are 37,9 million people living in Poland according to the Central Statistical Office. 4,76 million of them are people in the age of 7-18 which is the age group under the obligation of education. (Statistics Poland, 2023). Population dynamic in Poland is defined by 2 main demographic trends - low fertility rate (1,26 children per woman), and high immigration rate, mostly from Ukraine. (Bukowski, Duszczyk 2022, OECD 2023).

## Historical roots of Polish education system

The symbolic beginning of the Polish State is placed at the end of the 10th century. In 966 Mieszko I, the first historically documented ruler of Poland, was baptized and he introduced Poland to the Judeo-Christian and Latin culture. The Piast dynasty united the lands that covered roughly the present territory of Poland. After uniting with Lithuania under the Jagiellonian dynasty in 1385, both countries ruled over vast territories situated between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The first Polish university (Jagiellonian University) was founded by the king Casimir the Great from the Piast dynasty in 1364.<sup>1</sup> (OECD 2021, JU 2023).

The National Education Day is celebrated in Poland on October 14. On this day in 1772, the Commission of National Education was established by the Sejm (Polish noble parliament), which is considered to be the first Ministry of Education in Europe created with inspiration from the ideas of Enlightenment. Its impact on society was limited due to the rapid decline of the Polish state which was partitioned by three neighbouring countries - Prussia, Russia and Austro-Hungary -, and ceased to exist as an independent political centre for 123 years. Poland returned to the map of Europe as an independent state after the First World War in 1918. During the Interwar period Poland tried to re-establish itself as a new state with a long history. Those efforts were interrupted by the Third Reich on 1 September 1939 with a military attack which began the Second World War. In the course of war, around 20% of Polish population were killed, economy and infrastructure were heavily destroyed and borders of the state reshaped by moving them to the West. The Soviet army stopped the Nazi occupation, but it installed a new regime with a puppet government. Poland stayed in the Soviet sphere of influence for the next 44 years (EC 2023).

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<sup>1</sup> The university is called the Jagiellonian University from the XIXth century because of the donations made by the king Jagiello and his wife to restored its functionality at the beginning of the XVth century (Jagiellonian University 2023).

## The Polish education system

The Polish education system was shaped after the political transformation (fall of the communist system) in 1989. Changes were made in all aspects: the core curriculum, as well as its structure, organization and management. As a result of the changes, its characteristic features have developed.

On the one hand, the Polish education system is centralized and all the main regulations are in the competence of the Ministry of Education and Science. There is a nationwide curriculum and system of external exams at the end of primary and secondary school. Exams are obligatory for the students finishing primary school and facultative for the ones who are finishing secondary school. Post-primary school exam is obligatory to take and it cannot be failed. Graduates of secondary schools must pass an external secondary school leaving examination (*matura*) to continue their studies at higher education level. The results of both exams have a decisive impact on the student's further educational path (OECD, 2023).

On the other hand, local government units are in charge of schools as such and they manage them under the supervision of the Ministry. At the beginning of 2022, the competence of the Ministry in this regard was enlarged by strengthening the role of the Ministry superintendent. Circumstances in which the headmaster of a school or educational institution evades or fails to implement the recommendations issued by the education superintendent has been specified. The superintendent will have the opportunity to summon the principal of the school to explain the reasons for not implementing the recommendations. If the principal still fails to implement the recommendations, the superintendent is able to submit a request to the school or institution's governing body to dismiss the principal during the school year, without notice. Also, the new law introduced an obligation for school principals to obtain detailed information about the action plans and outlines of classes and materials used in the classes offered, as well as to obtain a positive opinion from the education superintendent for the activities of such an organization at the school or facilities. The law was criticized by some circles by giving too broad competences to superintendents and making the school too dependent on the Ministry. (Skura, 2022, MES 2021)

The professional situation of all teachers employed by the state is regulated by the so-called Teacher's Chart. It contains principles of employing, remunerating and dismissing teachers, their duties and the path of professional advancement. (Sejma 2023).

The main document regulating education in Poland is the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) of 1997. It grants the right to education to all up to age 18. It also introduces an obligation in this regard. This obligation is carried out in school (full-time compulsory education) or non-school settings (part-time compulsory education) (European Commission 2023).

In the Polish education system, compulsory schooling and compulsory learning have been separated. Compulsory schooling (i.e. the obligation to attend an 8-year primary school) applies to children and youth aged 7-15. Compulsory education applies to young people aged 15-18 and may be implemented at school or outside school (e.g. through vocational training at the employer's). Also 6-year-old children are required to attend one year of preschool education (ECEC) (EC 2023).

The Polish education system contains 8 years of primary school (for 7-14-year-olds.) with grades 1-8 and 4 years of secondary school (for 15-18-year-olds) grades 1-4 or 5 years of technical secondary school (for 15-19-year-olds) with the same history curriculum. There are separate curricula for 7-9-year-olds (ISCED 1), 10-14-year-olds (ISCED 1+2) and 15-18-year-olds (ISCED 3) (OECD, 2023, MES 2022).

Age (years)	ISCED	Educational level	Length of education level	Nature of education level
3-5	0	early learning and childcare		optional
6	0	pre-school education	1 year	compulsory
7-14	1+2	primary school	8 years	compulsory
15-18	3	secondary school	4 years	compulsory
15-19	3	technical secondary school	5 years	compulsory
19-20	4	vocational school	1,5 - 2 years	optional
19+	5	higher education		optional

*Table 1: Structure of education in Poland (OECD, 2023, MES 2022)*

## School maintenance and funding

The education system in Poland is mostly sustained and funded by the state. According to an OECD report published in 2023, in 2020 Poland spent 4.6% of its GDP on education on all levels (primary, secondary, tertiary, including doctoral) of which 27% was dedicated to primary education, 24% to lower secondary education, 20% to upper secondary education, 1% to post-secondary non-tertiary education and 28% to bachelor's, master's and doctoral or equivalent programmes (OECD, 2023).

It is estimated that public funds represent 87% of funding in school education and 79% in higher education and early childhood education and care. This funding is also regranted to private or non-governmental educational institutions like non-public child-care institutions, nursery schools, and higher education institutions if they fulfil requirements laid down in national legislation (OECD, 2023).

## The position of history education in Poland

There are elements of history from the earliest stage of education (students between the ages of 7 and 9). In primary school (10-14 years), there is a separate history curriculum and 9 lessons/week to be completed throughout the education cycle<sup>2</sup>. For ISCED 3 meaning the 4-year secondary school there are 7 lessons/week<sup>3</sup> of history and 3 lessons/week of History and Present prescribed for the education cycle. Lessons can be unevenly distributed between 4 years of secondary school education, for example: 1 lesson of history and 2 lessons of History and Present per week in the first year, 2 lessons of history and 1 lesson of History and Present per week in the second year, 2 lessons of history per week in the third and fourth year. (MES 2022).

Depending on the particular year, the total number of lessons dedicated to history teaching slightly varies. In the school year 2023/24 there will be 36,8 learning weeks. In previous years the number of learning weeks ranged from 36 to 36,8. Generally speaking, it can be estimated that 36 learning weeks are certain plus optional hours which add up because of the unequal distribution of days in the week (Kalendarz 2023/24).

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<sup>2</sup> Education cycle in upper primary school is 5 years, in secondary school (pol. *liceum*) is 4 years, for technical school it's 5 years.

<sup>3</sup> One lesson is 45 minutes long.

There is a common curriculum for grades 4-8 with a common preamble with general goals of learning specified, but the 4<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum varies from the section devoted to grades 5-8. The preamble declares that: *We look at it [the history] through events and the people who participated in them. And we do this to understand today, to co-create a community of values. These values have been most fully expressed for centuries by the idea of freedom, constantly present in our history.* Therefore, it clearly underlines the connection of teaching history with the present and offers a particular, grand-scale interpretation of Polish history through the value of freedom. It also claims that:

School, even the best, will not teach everything. However, it will provide you with tools to expand your knowledge on your own, while maintaining the necessary criticism and ensuring the reliability of the message. Pride in the achievements of our ancestors should not turn into mindless apology, and criticism does not have to lead to denying the sense of the collective national effort, which has permanently rooted us, Poles, in the heart of Europe.

Attitudes and certain emotional relationship with the state, nation and national culture are encouraged: *It is important to develop ties with the home country, civic awareness, attitude of respect and responsibility for one's country, and strengthen the sense of dignity and national pride* (MES, 2023a).

History curriculum for 4th grade introduces students to basic understanding of history: it indicates ways of measuring time in history and chronological concepts; recognizes types of historical sources; distinguishes history from legends. Also, it prescribes knowledge about national symbols - colours, emblem, national anthem, public holidays and their meaning. Apart from national perspective, it also strives towards respect to local and family history: the student *“learns about the history and traditions of the area and people of particular merit to it; knows local monuments and describes their history”*. In this grade curriculum prescribes a collection of 25 historical figures from all historical periods to learn about. Among them are kings, Noble prize winners, WWII resistance movement members, leaders of national revolutions.

For accomplishing these goals there is one lesson of history per week, meaning approximately 36 lessons in the school year (MES 2023a).

Curriculum for grades 5-8 goes through the history of the whole world and Polish history. It prescribes 2 lessons per week in each grade, meaning 72 lessons per school

year in each grade, 288 lessons in total. There are three general objectives of history teaching in this education cycle:

1. Historical chronology (measuring time, basic chronological concepts such as era, BC period, AD period, millennium, century, year),
2. Historical analysis and interpretation (critical analysis, placing processes and events in space and time-lines, understanding the difference between descriptive, explanatory and evaluative function of text)
3. Creating a historical narrative (creating a historical narrative based on historical sources, presenting arguments justifying own opinion in relation to historical processes and figures).

Grade 5	Neolithic Revolution - XV <sup>th</sup> century
Grade 6	XV <sup>th</sup> century - Napoleonic era
Grade 7	Napoleonic era - eve of World War II
Grade 8	beginning of World War II - access of Poland to European Union

*Table 2: chronological scope of history curriculum for upper primary school (MES 2023a)*

It contains 42 main topics with 2-13 subtopics. Two perspectives are present - national history and world history (with the reservation that accent is placed mostly on the history of Europe). In terms of European integration there is one point about the history of the European Union: *presents the goals and main stages of development of the European Union* and one about the accession of Poland to it in 2004. The curriculum ends with a general remark considering "Conditions and methods of implementation": *Shaping and developing a patriotic attitude, while respecting the achievements of other nations, should be a priority at every educational stage in primary school. The propaedeutic solution used in class IV is transformed into a chronological description of the course of history in subsequent classes* (MES 2023a).

The history curriculum for secondary school (ISCED 3) includes 59 thematic sections with requirements from the regular and extended level. The regular level is obligatory for all students, whereas the extended one is for students who decide to pass the matura exam (school leaving exam) on the extended level. Just like in primary school, there are also two perspectives present here - the national history

and the world history focused mostly on Europe and from XXth century on global perspective. The following assumptions were made for the implementation of individual thematic sections in a given grade, taking basic and extended scope of education into account:

- 1) grade I – antiquity – Middle Ages;
- 2) grade II – until 1815;
- 3) grade III – until 1939;
- 4) grade IV of general secondary school/grades IV and V of technical secondary school - after 1939.

On ISCED 3 level there are 7 lessons/week per education cycle. That gives 252 lessons of history for the whole education cycle.

The general aims of history education are formulated in the curriculum preamble:

”The aim of history education is to learn the truth about the past of Poland and the world. Teaching history should help students achieve this goal by acquiring knowledge about the past of their country and the civilization circle to which Poland has belonged for over a thousand years. In this way, students gain help in shaping their patriotism, which means love for the homeland; homeland in a broad sense - starting from the political and cultural community, the emergence of which in our lands is closely related to the baptism of Mieszko I in 966, and has its sources both in the medieval universalism of Latin civilization and in the ideals of the classical era of Greco-Roman antiquity.” (MES 2023b, Introduction)

At the beginning there are seven main aims of history education:

”

1. deepening knowledge about important events in the history of the Polish nation and state as well as in the world history,
2. *strengthening the sense of love for the homeland through respect and attachment to the traditions and history of one’s own nation and its achievements, culture and native language; consolidating the awareness of the existence of ties connecting the Polish national heritage with a broader civilization circle resulting from the combination of the achievements of Greek philosophy, Roman law and the Christian religion;*
3. *shaping ties with the home country, civic awareness, attitude of respect and responsibility for one’s own country; strengthening the sense of dignity and*

*national pride; building respect for other people and the achievements of other nations and countries;*

4. *shaping respect for national heritage; developing a sense of care for national treasures and historical monuments;*
5. *encouraging interest in one's own past, the past of one's family and local and regional history;*
6. *developing historical thinking and moral and aesthetic sensitivity;*
7. *developing humanistic skills, language skills, the ability to independently seek knowledge and use various sources of information, and to critically formulate and express one's own opinions."* (MES 2023b, Introduction)

At the end of the curriculum there is a section entitled *Conditions and ways of implementation*. It states that:

"[...] it is important in the teaching process to use, whenever possible, forms of commemorating key historical events, such as trips to memorial sites and museums, including those located in the given region.

In the process of learning about the events concerning the tragic fate of repressed soldiers and civilians of the underground during World War II and the post-war years, it is important that the student understands the meaning of the terms: Pantheon of the Cursed Soldiers, Pomeranian Katyn, Golgotha of the East and Łączka.

In historical education, the key is to personalize the past as much as possible and to illustrate the issues discussed with iconography and audio-visual materials, so that students can learn about historical events while experiencing them. It is worth using various forms of extracurricular historical education as often as possible (trips, youth exchanges, projects, competitions, school academies, anniversary celebrations, historical reconstructions, multimedia museum exhibitions, games with educational value, e.g. board games, videos, etc.)." (MES 2023b)

Teachers have freedom in implementing the curriculum as long as they cover all of the subtopics. They are encouraged to leave the school building and use the offer of memorial sites in the vicinity or visit the ones which are considered the most important (Warsaw Uprising Museum, Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum in Oświęcim).

## Textbooks and teaching aids

The textbook market in Poland is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Science. There are 4 main publishing houses whose textbooks are allowed in schools. In general, there is a moderate plurality in this regard. Also, there is an electronic portal run by the Ministry of Education and Science called The Integrated Learning Platform which contains educational materials for all school subjects and is considered to be an auxiliary e-textbook for history, as well as for other subjects. Also, on this platform there are 4 officially admitted historical computer games. Three of them are designed specially to be an additional didactic help for schools.



*Figure 1: Screenshot from the Cypher's Game*

*Cyphers Game* (figure 1) is a game about the Polish-Bolshevik war in 1920. The history of this war is introduced through the task of breaking Bolshevik cyphers in a short point-and-click series of logical riddles. *Warsaw Rising* is a tactical game with RPG elements which portrays the Warsaw Rising in 1944.

The third game *Dignity, freedom and independence - cultural heritage of John Paul II* contains 18 missions which guide students through biographical milestones of the Pol-

ish pope and talks about the major historical events in the history of Poland. The fourth one *This war of mine* is a commercial production which is offered by the Ministry free of charge. It is about difficult moral dilemmas of civilian population in besieged city of Sarajevo in 1994. It is suggested as an auxiliary material for Polish language and ethic classes, although it contains some historical events (MES 2023f).

Examinations in Polish education system are run by the body called Central Examination Commission under the Ministry of Education and Science. The first centrally organised exam takes place after finishing primary school. All students after grade 8 take the compulsory exam called an eight-grader exam. It is a written test that aims at assessing the extent to which a primary school student meets the requirements set in the core curriculum for general education in the primary school. Obligatory exams are taken in Polish language, mathematics, modern foreign language and one out of the following five subjects: biology, chemistry, physics, geography or history. This exam cannot be failed and its results are one of the biggest factors in admission to post-primary schools (EC 2023).

The second centrally organised exam is the so-called matura exam which is obligatory after finishing secondary school. There are two oral exams - one from Polish language and one from a modern foreign language and four written exams - Polish language, modern foreign language, mathematics and additional subject on extended level. Among those additional subjects, students can choose history as well (MES 2023h).

## **Non-formal education and commemoration policies**

Considering the overall condition of history education in Poland, a few interdisciplinary initiatives are worth mentioning. The government allocated considerable funds for cultivating memories about specific events by creating long-term granting programs. They were run under the one, big hub - the multiannual governmental programme „Niepodległa” (“Independent”) for the years 2017-2022, dedicated to the national celebrations of the Centenary of Regaining Independence and restoration of statehood of the Republic of Poland. Apart from commemorating events, the programme co-funded plenty of various educational projects such as virtual walking tours, mobile learning apps, educational materials in which students were among the targeted audience. (MCNH 2018).

In terms of visiting memory sites, government run a subsidy programme called *Discover Poland* for schools of all levels to cover up to 80% of costs of school trips to the national memorial sites. It allowed smaller schools at risk of geographical or financial exclusion to participate in this cultural offer of the public institutions (MES 2023e).

## The position of civic education in Poland

Civic education is an obligatory subject in the 8th grade of primary school. There are 2 lessons per week, meaning 72 lessons in the school year. It introduces students to the basic concepts of politology, sociology, economy and psychology. The preamble to the civic education curriculum states:

The learning objectives (general requirements) of the subject have been formulated for four areas: knowledge and understanding; use and creation of information; understanding yourself and recognizing and solving problems; communication and cooperation. The implementation of the goals and the contents of education are intended to shape students' civic and pro-community attitudes. This content was constructed according to the concept of environmental circles - from primary social groups, through the local and regional community, the national and state community, to the international community. (MES 2023d)

Learning objective	Learning scope
Knowledge and understanding	typology of social groups (school, local community, nation), democratic procedures, political system of the Republic of Poland (bodies, authorities)
Use and creation of information	ability to find information about social life and formulate own opinion based on this information
Understanding oneself, recognizing and solving problems	needs, rights, aspirations, duties and identity of the individual
Communication and cooperation	ability to debate and formulate opinion, cooperate in a group and show the way to take care of simple official matters.

*Table 3: Learning objectives explanation of civic education curriculum in primary school (source: MES, 2023d)*

Those goals are achieved by 12 topics to be completed in the course of learning. In topic number 4 the notion of human rights is introduced in connection with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ratified in 1948 and the Polish Constitution from 1997. There are separate topics for family, school, local community (commune - *gmina*), regional community (district - *powiat* and voivodeship - *województwo*), the Polish political system, international communities (United Nations, NATO, European Union), and mass media. In connection with media critical analysis of media narrative is introduced (advertisements, difference between information about facts from comments and opinions). At the end the civic education curriculum defines specific teaching methods in the chapter "Conditions and methods of implementation": *educational situations should be created in which the student uses specific methods of self-presentation, solving conflicts and problems, and co-decision-making.* (MES 2023d) *Moreover, in order to develop communication and cooperation skills, various group work methods should be used, including student educational projects (each student should participate in two projects).* At the end, there is ICT mentioned as an important aspect to be introduced into students learning: *Information and communication technology should be used to develop competences in acquiring, collecting, organizing, analysing and presenting information about social life, including public life. It is important to use the websites of public institutions, including local government bodies, public authorities and social organizations.* (MES 2023d) *Additionally, if possible, it would also be important to obtain information during an educational trip (including a virtual one, using dedicated applications) to selected institutions, e.g. to the commune (city/district) office.* (MES 2023d) Therefore, just like in the history curriculum, the civic education curriculum also encourages school visits to places connected with the teaching content (MES 2023d).

## History and Present

In the school year 2022/23 a new subject called „History and Present” was introduced to secondary schools as obligatory one, replacing civic education on a regular level. History and Present subject is prescribed in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of secondary school in a total amount of 3 lessons/week of in the education cycle meaning 108 lessons in total (MES 2022).

History and Present curriculum preamble declares that: *History and Present is an interdisciplinary subject combining knowledge about human social life and its main insti-*

tutions with knowledge about the contemporary history of Poland and the world. The subject, implemented at the beginning of the education process in general secondary schools and technical schools, will enable students [...] for a conscious and responsible participation in public life. (MES 2023c, chapter: Introduction) Its chronological scope begins after Second World War in 1945 and ends in 2015. There are three general learning objectives: forming relation to the truth, good (understood as a moral ideal) and life. The truth relation means that students understand *the most important cultural, political, social and economic changes in Poland and the world after 1945 to the present day*. Relation to the good means that student *independently and fairly assesses the changes taking place in Poland and in the world since the end of World War II* and understands *the foundations from which our homeland grows, shaped according to specific cultural norms and a vision of human, family and society dating back to the classical Greco-Roman civilization and Christianity* (MES 2023c, chapter: Learning objectives – general requirements). In relation to life understood as a life of an engaged citizen, the student expresses interest in public life, takes responsibility and understands the importance of civic virtues, duties and rights of the citizen. Although it is not fully clear how those goals are going to be achieved. In the section of „specific requirements” apart from the first chapter „knowledge about the foundations of social life” other 6 topics introduce requirements in a similar manner to those from the history curriculum. There are two perspectives present - national and global - and several subtopics listed with dates, events, processes and persons to memorize. The ending chapter „Conditions and method of implementation” suggests methods like meeting with the witnesses of history, local memorial sites and places connected with martyrdom during the Soviet or Nazi regimes. Also, it encourages teachers to use the offer of Institute of National Remembrance, State Archive. Moreover, *Students should be encouraged to take care of the memorial sites in their school (e.g. memorial rooms, showcases, leaflets, murals, websites), know the history of their family, town or local community in which they grow up, and look for historical sources in their own surroundings. Young people should be supported in initiatives to preserve family and local memorabilia, record accounts of witnesses to history, and create amateur films and broadcasts on recent history.* (MES 2023c). So activation methods with creative component are encouraged as well as individual initiatives of the students.

The introduction of the new subject raised a lot of controversies. The Polish Historical Society published a negative opinion about the new subject’s curriculum. Numerous

objections concerning, among others, imposing the one interpretation of events, domination of memorizing facts while omitting the importance of skills development, media literacy and critical thinking. It also underlines that a particular vision of social relations and anthropology is promoted without a space for discussion or debate (PTH 2022).

The opinion from The Center for Citizenship Education was also unfavorable. It states that legal education was almost completely removed from the core curriculum (particularly its practical elements, such as the course of administrative and criminal proceedings in the Republic of Poland, the method of appealing against decisions and resolutions of administrative bodies, the rights of a victim, perpetrator and witness of a crime, or the bodies and institutions to which you can ask for legal assistance in Poland in specific situations), necessary for every young citizen, as well as information regarding the constitutional competences of state bodies or the functioning of the political system. Issues related to local self-governments and citizen participation in solving the problems of the local community are completely ignored. (CEO 2023)

An example of a one-sided interpretation can be seen in curriculum chapter VII - „The World and Poland in the first two decades of the 21st century”. The student *characterizes the main cultural changes taking place in the Western world on the example of the expansion of the ideology of ‘political correctness’, multiculturalism, a new definition of human rights, family, marriage and gender; is able to place these changes against the background of the cultural heritage of the West as reflected in Greco-Roman and Christian thought” or “points out the differences between tolerating and affirming cultural and social phenomena.* (MES 2023c) Suggested directions of interpretation can be seen in the use of certain phrasing with a negative connotation or through the selection of the content discussed (discussion of the issue of acculturation and assimilation of minority groups, omitting the integration process). (CEO 2023)

This function of suggesting a way of reading the content is also performed by the marginalization of international and global phenomena and processes in favour of the content related to the Polish context, presenting them in specific circumstances, for instance: *the student explains the concept of ‘defamation’; gives an example of a propaganda impact of a defamatory nature (aimed at Poland’s defamation campaign under the banner of “Polish concentration camps”),* including placing selected global phenomena in an incomprehensible or very narrow context (for example, when the process of changing the European Union in the period after Poland joined its structure focuses

exclusively on negative phenomena: *the student characterizes the process of changing the European Union in the period after Poland joined its structure (growing position of Germany, crisis phenomena related to immigration, instability of the eurozone, Brexit, COVID-19 pandemic; ideological controversies on the forum of EU institutions)*. (MES 2023c – Chapter 7, pt. 6; CEO 2023)

The separate topic is in the textbook for History and Present, especially the one written by professor Wojciech Roszkowski - one of available two and approved for use by the Ministry of Education. Currently, there is only one academic article analyzing this publication and the introduction of History and Present as a new subject written by Przemysław Ziółkowski.

The author assesses the idea of introducing the new subject positively. He indicates that because of the curriculum overload teachers don't have enough time to properly focus on the history after 1945. Also, he underlines the dominance of global history over national history. From his perspective those two perspectives should be more balanced. Lastly, he claims that far too much focus is placed on antiquity and medieval times whereas those ages have much less significance than contemporary history in the preparation of the students to a conscious and responsible life in a democratic society. (Ziółkowski 2023)

In some places the author of the textbook imposes on the reader some extreme and oversimplified views on history, not leaving space for other interpretations. The purpose of the textbook is to instil particular attitudes and beliefs in students. Author finds this the weakest aspect of the textbook for "History and Present". It shapes thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs in many clear-cut sentences; The textbook contains a message that is frequently based on the author's opinions and has nothing to do with the tolerance and respect that are the cornerstones of the school. For example, you can read about "gender ideology" or "European deviations" on page 19 and "child production" or "abominations" on page 226. (Roszkowski 2022)

In some places there are unjustified parallels made between past and present. For example, in the chapter describing undemocratic elections in communist countries in the years 1945–1953 and the general censorship then, the author illustrated it with a caricature of Vladimir Putin, who was just born at the end of this period - in 1952 (p. 77), and also commented in the text on the possibility of blocking access to information for 3.5 million Facebook users, an online portal, which didn't exist at the time. (Ziółkowski 2023)

In the chapter devoted to nationalism in years 1953-1962 the author uses anachronistic examples - on one hand he shows NSDAP gatherings from the 1930s, on the other Polish Independence Marches from 2018 and 2019. The first one proves the nationalistic nature of German society, the latter shows the patriotic, healthy attitude of Polish society. This way of proving the point with anachronistic examples persists through the whole publication. (Ziółkowski 2023)

The future of the subject “History and Present” remains unclear due to the political changes that occurred in Poland after the parliamentary elections on October 15, 2023. The new government formed by a broad coalition of parties opposed to Prawo i Sprawiedliwość declares a reversal of changes made by the PiS government for over 8 years. The new minister of education in Poland - Barbara Nowacka - claims that the subject “History and Present” can’t be taught with this kind of textbook, but the idea of the subject focusing on contemporary history is assessed positively<sup>4</sup>. (PAP 2023)

## Dilemmas

The political change that took place in Poland in 2015<sup>5</sup> had an impact on history education conducted in formal and informal settings. The importance of a history and memory policy was underlined from the beginning, and adequate strategies were formulated (CPRP 2015). A precise analysis of the actual impact of this political change on history education remains beyond the scope of this article. However, it is beyond doubt that concrete steps were taken in order to increase the value of history education like allocating financial resources in special grant programs mentioned in this article.

The liquidation of civic education in secondary school and replacing it with the History and Present subject was a controversial decision. The social competences present in the civic education curriculum were not transferred to the content of the History and Present curriculum. Also, introducing a new subject in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades created a situation in which students learn simultaneously about antiquity and contemporary history. This method may be confusing for some students, especially if we assume

<sup>4</sup> At the time of finalization of this article (January 2024) there is no information yet on the future of the subject History and Present.

<sup>5</sup> In that year national-conservative, Eurosceptical party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] won presidential and parliamentary elections in Poland, gaining the full political power (without the right to change Constitution). They held this power for over 8 years. PiS transformed most sectors of social life, such as public media, education, culture, courts.

that contemporary history needs a basic understanding of the previous events (PTH 2022).

Moreover, many professional organisations connected with history education, such as Center for Citizenship Education, Polish Historical Society, teachers' professional press assessed the History and Present core curriculum and the textbook negatively.

## Conclusions

The general impression from the lecture of Polish history curricula is that strengthening a positive attitude towards one's own country and its culture remains the main goal of history education. It is accomplished by underlining the importance of positive emotions (pride, respect, sense of dignity, love) and attitudes (duty, sense of responsibility) towards the homeland.

The Polish history curriculum shows different perspectives - political, social, cultural and economical. It is rather trying to show processes and persons than dates, battles etc. It underlines the connection of Polish history and culture with Judeo-Christian and Greek-Roman civilisations. In this recognition lies the method of history education which refers to the ancient categories of Good and Truth.

In terms of methods, Polish history education encourages teachers to take students outside the school, both in a declarative (curriculum) and in a practical sense (granting program for school trips) to visit memorial sites and museums.

In civic education and History and Present contemporary world problems like climate change, sustainable development or contemporary conflicts are not present. The curriculum of History and Present, which is supposed to be a replacement for the proper civic education, offers detailed anthropology and values some social changes (for example the cultural revolution of 1968) which can be contested by at least some parts of the society. Thus, it may raise questions about the real purpose of introducing this subject.

In general, Polish history education seems to reflect the conservative political views of the former ruling party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, which are shared with part of the Polish society. In content it is based on values, patriotic attitude, heroism, apology of the nation and seem to put national perspective over European or global one. It promotes various and innovative educational methods like introduction of computer games, e-learning materials, project-based learning, learning-by-doing.

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# History and civic education in Slovakia

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## Abstract

Humanities and civic education in Slovakia is an underemphasized component of general education compared to other educational fields. This state of affairs is due to several factors, namely international and national testing and pressure on so-called employability, while the values and attitudes of future citizens are rather ignored. The consequences of the undervaluing of humanities education are felt in society in the high level of distrust in the system and the power of science, the questioning of the basic values of the democratic system and the tendencies towards populism and authoritarianism.

The situation should be changed by the complex reform and introduction of the new curriculum, which is currently being introduced in the first schools. The new curriculum introduces an up to date narrative in History teaching within the educational field People and Society aimed at active citizenship opened to European and global issues.

This paper aims to present the history of the Slovak education system, the place of history and civics in it, current challenges and problems that need to be addressed in adapting the education system to the needs of the 21st century.

*Keywords:* Slovak education system, history teaching, civics, curriculum reform

## Introduction

Slovakia is a country in Central Europe, bordered by the Czech Republic, Poland, Ukraine, Hungary and Austria. The population of the country is approximately 5.5 million.

Slovakia has been an independent state since 1993 when it separated from Czechoslovakia. The distribution of population is higher in the south-west in and near the capital Bratislava and the second largest city in the eastern region Košice, the rest of the country is rather rural. Slovakia is ethnically diverse with the largest minority of Hungarians living along the southern border with Hungary, the Ruthenians living at the border

with Ukraine and the Roma living in numerous communities in eastern and central areas. The system offers education in the languages of the minorities as well.

## **Historical roots of the education system**

The school system in Czechoslovakia was built on the previous Austro-Hungarian tradition and reflected the ethnic structure of society. During the Second World War, Czechia was occupied by the Third Reich and Slovakia declared a state under the influence and control of Nazi Germany. Its school system was built on the principles of national socialism. After the liberation, Czechoslovakia was restored and after a short period of democracy, the Communist Party came to power in a coup d'état in February 1948, introducing a one-party system of government and a strong ideologisation of the whole of society, including education. On the one hand, education was supposed to be open to all, regardless of social status and gender, but on the other hand, access to higher education became a means of manipulation. The intention was equality between regions and genders, but access to quality and especially higher education became an object of reward for political loyalty and conformity. After the fall of communism, the education system has made several reform efforts to come to terms with the legacy of two totalitarian regimes and to transform itself into education for the 21st century, but it is constantly struggling with a lack of interest from political leaders and systematic underfunding. In 2023, the latest comprehensive reform of primary school education began its pilot year to achieve the necessary changes in a long-term process planned until 2035.

## **The Slovak education system**

There are more than 2,500 schools in the Slovak education system. Over 90% of these schools are publicly funded and locally maintained. About 5.5% primary schools are religious and 4.5% are private. The Slovak public school system has 266,000 pupils in preschool (3,137 kindergartens for early childhood education and care), 2,069 primary and lower secondary schools with approximately 282,500 pupils, and 670 schools and 200,000 pupils in upper secondary school. The school system employs over 117,700 teachers. The whole system is coeducational. Approximately 10% of students attend pri-

vate and church schools. They can be based on denomination - the majority is Catholic, the minority is evangelical and of reformed churches. There are 459 state schools for children with special educational needs, with over 13,500 additional pupils attending these institutions, and many Roma children from marginalized Roma communities attend these institutions. There is an ongoing discussion about the need for inclusion.

'Bilingual' schools with teaching in Slovak and one foreign language (mainly English, also German and Spanish, Russian and French) are popular institutions in the country.

Typical phenomena in the rural areas are small multi-grade schools with less than 50 pupils. There are 500 in total, which makes it 20% of all primary schools and they educate about 4% of the pupils. There is an ongoing discussion on streamlining their funding and merging.

The municipality shall designate school districts for individual elementary schools by general binding ordinance. In Slovakia the catchment areas are defined by local authorities, but parents have the right for their own school choice. Administrative control over education is obtained by the Minister of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic appointed by the president. This person is nominated by the governing political party (currently: Tomáš Drucker, Hlas - Social Democracy). The ministry manages several agencies - National Institute of Education and Youth responsible for formal, informal education, teacher training, national testing and Pedagogical Library; Research Institute of Child Psychology and Patopsychology, Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information etc. Another important body is the State School Inspection supervising education through school visits and observation (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2021).

Compulsory education starts at the age of six (ISCED 0) and it follows compulsory attendance in the last year of kindergarten. Primary education lasts 9 years, compulsory education lasts 10 years. Broad general education is for children aged 6 - 15: primary from (ISCED1) 6 – 10 years and lower secondary lasts (ISCED2) between 11 – 15 years. The 9-year primary education continues with upper-secondary education at various types of schools to complete 10 years of compulsory education. In Slovakia it is common to organise entrance examinations or combine their results with the results of nationwide Testing 9 in spring of the last year.

Upper secondary school is a four-year course (ISCED 3) for 15–18-year-olds. Its aim is to prepare young people for further education, higher education (ISCED 6-8) and the demands of the labour market and individual specialization. Further education colleg-

es (ISCED 3) also offer three-year vocational education and training opportunities for students to pursue vocational studies and higher education (ISCED 5- 8). Alternative schools have become more and more popular as well as homeschooling - especially after the Covid pandemic. (OECD, 2015; OECD, 2021). Within the age range of 20-64, 75% of the majority population achieved secondary education as the highest level of education. Among the Roma population, this share is only 18%. (EACEA)

## **School maintenance, funding**

### ***The governance of the school system***

School governance is fairly decentralised and involves three levels of administration: the central government, regions and municipalities. While the central government retains the key regulatory role the provision of public education services is mostly the responsibility of regions and municipalities.

### ***An important regulatory role for the central government***

The government and the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sports lately renamed to the Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic are responsible for national education policy and the overall strategy for the education system. The responsibilities of the Ministry include the supervision and development of the education system, establishing curriculum, the framework for student learning objectives (through National Education Programmes), defining the levels and terms of funding, setting the requirements for the professional and pedagogical competence of educational staff, determining salaries of teachers and managing the register of schools and school facilities which are part of the school network. The Ministry of Interior is also formally part of the administration of the funding to schools. In 2013, the management of education departments of regional state authorities (which mainly administer special schools), shifted from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Interior. Since then, all schools except those established by self-governing regions are financed from the budget chapter of the Ministry of Interior. However, the Ministry of Education is in charge of education budget negotiations and determines the terms for the funding of individual schools. The Ministry of Interior acts as an intermediary regarding the cash flow from the state budget to schools and provides mainly back office services for the Ministry of Education. (OECD, 2015)

Another significant stakeholder at the national level is the Slovak State Schools Inspectorate (ŠŠI) responsible for monitoring schools and school facilities and checking the conditions and results of the education they provide, the quality of their management, the efficiency of their use of resources and their compliance with binding regulations. The Inspectorate can also recommend the closure of schools or school facilities.

The Ministry is assisted in its work by a range of national-level agencies which are supervised by the Ministry and partially funded from its budget. These include: i) the *Slovak Centre of Scientific and Technical Information* (CVTI) (which was merged with the Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education, UIPŠ), which is the national information centre for science, technology, innovation and education (collecting and processing information on education); ii) the *National Institute of Vocational Education* (ŠIOV), which is responsible for work which informs policy development in secondary vocational education, including the development of educational programmes and methodological advice to vocational schools; iii) the *National Institute of Education and Youth* (NIVAM) which merged four former institutes and their responsibilities: the National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements (NÚCEM), which takes responsibility for the common (or state) part of the school-leaving examination (Maturita), organises national student assessments (in Years 5 and 9), and manages international student assessments; the *National Institute of Education* (ŠPÚ), which develops work to inform policy development in basic and general upper secondary education including the content of educational programmes and methodological advice to schools; the *Methodology and Pedagogy Centre* (MPC), which organises and implements professional development and in-service training courses for teaching and non-teaching staff, and the *Pedagogical Library*. NIVAM has eight regional centres in each self-governing region. The Curriculum Council is an advisory body to the Minister of Education and consists of experts from academia, organisations representing kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and educational establishments, experts working in the field of education and training in the Slovak Republic or abroad. The Curriculum Council is an expert, initiating and advisory body to the Minister in key areas of education and training, especially in the field of innovation of the content of education and training; reforms of the content, forms and conditions of education and, in particular, its task is to facilitate the continuity, systematic, participatory processes of change and development in the Department of Education.

### ***A decentralised provision of education services***

As part of their transferred competences in education, self-governing regions establish and close upper secondary schools and apprenticeship training centres. As part of their original competences, self-governing regions establish and close primary schools of art, language schools (other than language schools associated with basic schools), school facilities (e.g. free time centres, school farms and apprenticeship training centres, school dormitories) and school special-purpose facilities (e.g. school catering facilities, school service centres). As part of their transferred competences in school education, municipalities establish and close basic schools, covering both primary and lower secondary education. As part of their original competences, municipalities establish and close pre-primary schools, primary schools of art, language schools associated with basic schools, school facilities (e.g. school clubs for children, free time centres, school dormitories) and school special-purpose facilities (e.g. school catering facilities, school service centres). Education departments of regional state authorities are the founders of special schools (at all levels) as well as of some school facilities (e.g. dormitories, catering facilities). They also cooperate with school self-governing authorities and private school founders by providing guidance regarding the funding and organisation of schools and offering methodological guidance (e.g. training). In addition, they also manage professional advisory services which are provided to all schools in the respective region. The remaining providers are the church and other private providers. They receive public funding on a similar basis to state schools and benefit from considerable autonomy in managing their schools. In terms of funding, in basic and upper secondary education, founders serve as the link between the central level and schools. Founders distribute funds they receive from the Ministry to individual schools and are allowed to reallocate a certain amount among their schools.

## **Social function and curriculum of the Slovak school system**

The current curriculum - the Innovated National Education Programme (iNEP) has been in force since 2015. It is merely an updated NEP introduced in September 2008 as the first two-level curriculum in the Slovak Republic. Beforehand there were thematic plans binding for each subject and grade.

The lack of inclusion is significant especially regarding marginalised communities of Roma people who have been living in generational poverty for many decades. (EA-CEA). The Slovak education system has currently started a structural reform where inclusion is one of the most important starting points and pillars of the process of change.

## Historical roots of the Slovak education system

The establishment of the multinational absolutist Austro-Hungarian state in the 18th century led to the first general reform of schools on the initiative of the state, in which all levels of schools were reformed according to the Ratio Educationis (1777), establishing a relatively unified school system. According to this general order, three grades of elementary schools were established: *Trivial* - one- or two-class schools for the children of the rural and urban poor. The content of instruction was reading, writing, arithmetic, the rudiments of agriculture and religion. *Main school* was a three or four class school for each county to prepare pupils for further study. *Normal schools* were set up in the county towns.

The Latin schools were divided into three stages: grammatical, humanistic and philosophical. Instead of the two Jesuit universities, academies remained in Slovakia (Bratislava and Košice), which, like lyceums, provided the foundations for higher philosophical, theological and legal studies. In the Theresian period, higher vocational schools were also established to train specialists for new economic sectors and state administration - the Mining and Forestry Academy in Banská Štiavnica and the Collegium oeconomicum in Senec.

Although the state began to interfere in the educational system, the Catholic Church defended its monopoly in this area. The Protestant Church also maintained its system of education.

Joseph II divided the schools into folk and Latin schools; these were subdivided into grades and types of schools according to the social structure of the time. He made school attendance compulsory from 6 to 12 years of age, took an annual census of children, declared education free, and punished absence from school. These changes also affected secondary schools. The favourable development of education in Hungary was hampered by the bourgeois revolution in France.

The Ratio Educationis of 1806 (Schulkodex) implemented the teaching in Hungarian instead of teaching it as one of the subjects, and the Germanizing tendencies were replaced by Magyarization.

In the 1948 revolution of 1848 the Slovak representatives demanded political autonomy and the education in the Slovak language, but did not succeed. The Sunday schools, libraries and reading rooms remained the only available options of education in mother tongue (Kmeť). One of the leading figures was politician, writer and journalist Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856), who highly valued education as a condition for political freedom and social justice.

The October Diploma in 1860 allowed the representatives of the Hungarian nobility to make Hungarian a language of instruction. Slovak and German were used only as auxiliary languages. In this period, a more intense Magyarization of education began.

In 1861, The Memorandum of the Slovak Nation expressed the dissatisfaction of the Slovaks with the regulations in education and public life. It demanded that the Slovak language be recognized as the language of public schools and other school activities. After the failure of the memorandum, the Slovak intelligentsia transferred its activity to the cultural sphere. In 1863 the Slovak Matica was founded as a cultural and educational institute. The Slovaks tried to preserve the Slovak language in some of the older grammar schools, and from their own funds they established three Slovak grammar schools in Revúca (1862), Martin (1867) and Kláštor pod Znievom (1869).

All Slovak grammar schools and Matica were closed in 1875, a few years after the monarchy was divided in Austrian and Hungarian parts where education became a separate agenda of respective ministries. Under the Apponyi's Laws (1907) the teaching in Slovak schools was fully magyarised. Until the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, education in Slovak practically did not exist.

The development and evolution of the education system in the 20th century was influenced by major political events of the era. After the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic, conditions in Slovak education improved. The creation of the Slovak education system within Czechoslovakia became one of the fundamental tasks of the newly created country, elementary, secondary education and universities were founded. As a result of strong Magyarization at this time, there was a lack of Slovak teachers for the folk schools and secondary school professors in Slovakia, and the representatives of the state power in Slovakia asked for help from Czech teachers and

professors. The idea of Czechoslovakism was to create a Czechoslovak nation in a political sense. The Small School Act (1922) regulated education throughout compulsory school attendance extended to 8 years (6-14), previously it was 6 years in Hungary and 8 years in Austria. Comenius University was established in Bratislava in 1919,

The political changes after the Munich Agreement led to the declaration of autonomy of Slovakia in March 1939 which became a German satellite and all Czech teachers had to leave its territory. Education began to adapt to the new political reality and a Slovak version of national-socialist ideology. The teacher was to be a nationally and Christianly conscious prototype supporting the regime, a pillar of the national-socialist education and was obliged to participate in all religious activities (Kudláčová). Towards the end of the war 1944 all teachers and school staff became civil servants. The Jewish children and students were deprived of the right to education. Slovak language purism was introduced and required. The youth was organised in Hlinka's Youth (Hlinkova mládež). On the other hand, the Comenius University in Bratislava was renamed to Slovak University, Vysoká škola technická M. R. Štefánika was relocated from Košice - then occupied by Hungary - to Bratislava. Two new universities were established - technology at Vysoká škola technická and economy at Vysoká škola obchodná in Bratislava (1940).

After World War II Czechoslovakia returned to a democratic system of government. However, the power in Czechoslovakia was taken over by the Communist Coup in February 1948. In the period of socialism, the whole life of the society was affected by the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The system of education was unified, the church and private schools banned. The state created a monopoly for education with a pro-Soviet orientation which was to be transferred to the educational process. The youth played a key role in the communist ideology, and the teachers became an instrument of state ideology and their aim was to change the mentality of the people, to form "new socialist men", "nationally and politically conscious citizens of the people's democratic state, brave defenders of the homeland and devoted supporters of the working people and socialism" (Dendys, 128). Teachers were under the scrutiny of the competent and it was their duty to constantly improve in fulfilling their mission, which was "the ideological and political education of the youth". The state also asserted its power through the annual deployment of teachers - teacher transfers as punishment. Moreover, restrictions on access to especially higher education was one of the tools of the regime's pressure.

## After 1989 and 1993

Social and political changes after the Velvet revolution included major changes in the system of education including legal terms, financial support, autonomy of the teachers, content. Shortly after the political changes and the fall of socialism, the state curriculum was innovated as a temporary document. On the top of that, private and church schools were reintroduced and new universities were established. In May 1990, the universities became autonomous institutions and gained academic freedom. New approaches and new concepts of education evolved.

The first conceptual attempt to reform the education system, the *Spirit of the School* in 1991 sought to define new educational goals and how to realize them. In 1993 Czechoslovakia was dissolved and Slovakia established. The next attempt for reform was made in August 1994 with the *Project Constantine - The National Programme for Education*, which represented the first concept of a comprehensive reform. However, this attempt was unsuccessful because in December 1994 there was a change in the leadership of the Ministry of Education. After another change of Minister of Education in 1998, the issue of comprehensive reform reappeared. At that time, the Ministry of Education set up a commission to draw up a *Concept for the Development of Education and Training in the Slovak Republic* with an overview for the next 15-20 years. The result was the *Millennium Project* promoted to a binding reform document, although it was neither professionally nor conceptually completed and its concrete reform strategy was never implemented.

In 2008 a two-level curriculum was introduced and the schools were bound to create school curricula as their concretization of the state curriculum. A brand new element in the Slovak context was introduced in the form of performance standards (specific learning requirements) related to content standards. The aim was the transformation to a competence curriculum based on Bloom taxonomy. Two level curriculum was meant to give schools and teachers more autonomy. However, due to the lack of time and preparation of the teachers and school management, the school curriculum often ended as a copy-paste document and not much changed in teaching practices.

In 2015, the Innovated NEP was introduced, which was essentially a NEP with minor changes. The new curriculum was created in 2023 at the participatory level with broad cooperation of ministry agencies, academia, teachers and NGOs. The “new curriculum”

is already in practice at 39 pilot schools that started a deep and long-term transformation of the education system.

Teacher training at universities is discussed continuously (Vajda). There are 35 universities and colleges in Slovakia today, eight faculties offer the study of history in their respective departments, all of them with History didactics.

## National education system

School governance in the Slovak Republic is fairly decentralised and involves three levels of administration: the central government, regions and municipalities. While the central government retains the key regulatory role, the provision of public education services is mostly the responsibility of regions (upper secondary education) and municipalities (pre-primary and basic education). The large majority of children attend state schools, although Church and other private providers receive public funding on a similar basis to state schools. The content of instruction in the Slovak Republic is established at two levels. At the national level, the Ministry issues National Education Programmes (NEPs). Schools further develop School Education Programmes, which consist of the operationalisation of NEPs to fit the context of individual schools. The Slovak Republic has a mixed set of outcomes. Performance in international assessments indicates some improvement in reading at the primary level but some significant and growing challenges at the secondary level. There are also concerns about strong social selectivity and inequities in the education system, including misplacement of some students in special schools (OECD, 2015).

While the central government retains the key regulatory role in terms of the NEP, economic provision of public education services is mostly the responsibility of regions and municipalities.

The 2008 School Act defines the objectives of the education system as:

- Gaining a range of competencies (e.g. communication skills, mathematical literacy, social and civic competencies).
- Gaining English language proficiency and in at least another foreign language.
- Learning how to identify, analyse and solve problems.
- Preparing for a responsible life in a free society in the spirit of mutual understanding and tolerance; learning how to develop personally, engaging in lifelong learning, working in a team and taking responsibility.

Since 2008, a two-tier curriculum has been introduced in Slovakia, which gives schools more freedom in planning their locally implemented curriculum. At the same time, nationwide testing of grades 5 (cancelled in 2023) and 9 (named after the grades) has been introduced. Relative performance tests (norm-referenced) are being developed for Testing 5. These differentiate pupils according to their performance on the test, so that pupils' results can be compared with each other. (NÚCEM)

The aim of Testing 9 is to compare and differentiate pupils' performance in the Slovak language and maths and to provide feedback to schools on their level compared to other schools in Slovakia based on pupils' results. Under the Education Act as amended, secondary schools also admit pupils on the basis of the results of external Testing 9 therefore elementary schools invest most time in 9th grade to prepare pupils in Slovak language and maths and place less emphasis on other subjects.

Since 2005, the external part and the written form of the internal part of the matriculation examination in foreign languages and mathematics and, since 2007, in languages of instruction (Slovak language and literature, Slovak language and literature, Hungarian language and literature, Ukrainian language and literature) have been conducted.

In 2008, the National Institute of Certified Measurements of Education (NÚCEM) was established, which took over all tasks related to the preparation and implementation of the external and internal matriculation. At the same time, in 2018, the NÚCEM launched a testing model of online matriculation in selected schools.

## **Position of History education in Slovakia**

History as a school subject was introduced relatively late. The history of antiquity used to be part of the teaching of ancient languages. Ratio Educationis (1777) introduced the history of Hungary as a multiethnic country. All the pupils were to know History of the Old and New Testament, history and geography of Hungary. The 1806 modification of Ratio Educationis also emphasised moral education within history.

In the second half of the 19th century History didactics evolved together with History lesson plans, textbooks, time frame of 2 - 4 lessons a week. History as a school subject was in the interest of a state as a preparation of future citizens. Towards the end of the 19th century a Hungarian nationalistic narrative prevailed in History teaching. Some textbooks were translated to the languages of minorities.

In the newly established Czechoslovakia, school history was supposed to be a cementing element for the Czechoslovak nation and educate patriotism. The content was mainly Czech history with some comments on the past of the Slovaks and the textbooks were translated and adopted in Slovak (nationalised). The narrative traced the common history of Czechs and Slovaks such as the Great Moravia and the Hussite movement, National revival, regional history and historical monuments etc. The teachers for basic schools were prepared at teacher academies and the teachers for high schools at universities (Kmeť, p. 75).

During World War II the education was subject to national-socialist ideology with three pillars: Christian worldview, trade union solidarity, and nationalism. The content was deprived of Hungarian and Czech elements, the Slovak state was interpreted as a result of thousands of years of effort to gain national independence and became the protector of Christian and national community, bonds with German history were emphasised e.g. Great Moravia - Frankish empire, German colonisation in the Middle Ages (Kmeť, p.76).

After World War II Czechoslovakia was renewed and education proclaimed progressive traditions of Czech and Slovak nations, their relationships in history, the principles of people's democracy and Slavic reciprocity. Already in 1947, the new curriculum enhanced Marxist historiography and in terms of content emphasised Hussite revolutionary movement, history of workers movement, interconnections with the history of the Soviet Union. Even the Middle Ages were interpreted in the sense of class struggles.

In socialist Czechoslovakia the main emphasis was on the contribution of peoples to the progress of mankind, real socialism and socialist countries in Cuba, Asia and Africa, scientific approach to history and scientific atheism. The Ministry of Education of the Slovak socialist republic issued comprehensive publications on the function of history in the system of communist education. (Kmeť, p. 80) History was ideologized and politicised. History textbooks were not age appropriate, but social-politically schematic, with an overload of factography and ideological postulates, graphically and aesthetically on a low level. Innovative and experimental approaches were typical for the Czech part of Czechoslovakia. History was divided into world history and national history.

## After 1989

Social and political changes after the Velvet revolution also included major changes in the system of education. The history didactics absorbed current trends. Temporary curricula covered traditional topics and main eras with emphasis on competences, democratic values, humanism, and tolerance.

The first support for history teaching were temporary interpretative texts for modern history. It took some time to prepare modern History textbooks, the set for primary schools had been published since 1994, but high schools received the first textbook a decade later. Between 1994 - 2006 an almost complete set of synthetic-analytical type of history textbooks with workbooks and reading-books was introduced to basic schools. Since School Act 2008, history as a school subject has belonged to the educational field of 'People and Society' together with geography and civic education. This integrated structure applies to the lower secondary level (10–15) and upper secondary level (15–19).

The low importance of humanities education is also reflected in the proportion of teaching time in the framework curriculum. Negative change in history education in 2008 was the radical reduction of history lessons from two to one per week at elementary schools except the last grade. As a result, the curriculum was reduced and the greatest emphasis was placed on national history. As a consequence, a new set of textbooks was produced, for 5th - 7th grade by Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo and a team of historians with strong inclination to the Slovak state and nationalism. This set of textbooks is highly problematic in many ways, it is not conceptual, it is single-mindedly focused on Slovak history and does not respect scientific arguments (e.g. mentions statements such as *"Therefore, we can consider Svätopluk a king."* or presents a ban on divorces in the Middle Ages twice in the same paragraph.) Matica Slovenská published a textbook for 8th grade with the same characteristics as the previous ones. The textbook on the 20th Century in 9th grade was prepared by Orbis Pictus - the same publisher that issued the set of analytic-synthetic textbooks in the 1990s.

The textbooks for high schools were finished only a decade later by the same team that created 5th - 7th grade textbooks of basic schools. First there were two books for each grade - one for national, another one for world history, later on they were reduced

and merged into one that applied to both grammar schools and any high school in the system regardless of the number of lessons per week history was allocated. This set is also criticised by both academics and teachers including distorted information on Slovak history. The lack of quality textbooks, educational publications and material is a major phenomenon typical for the Slovak education system and especially History education at all levels.

This lack of quality textbooks is due to the fact that *“the state, through its long-standing strict centralized approval and publication of textbooks, has made it impossible for textbooks to function fully, which has a very negative impact on teaching which lacks a main medium to help students construct meanings rather than drive learning only to memorize meanings. The implication is obvious. At present, after more than thirty years, pupils in all types of schools have only nine history textbooks, which shows the complete failure of the state in this area and in the way they have been approved, published and generally funded in the context of the past three decades.”* (Kratochvíl b, s.35)

During the period of preparation for new history textbooks, mailings of the teaching texts *Old Nation - Young State* in 1994 and Milan S. Ďurica's encyclopaedic publication *History of Slovakia and Slovaks* in 1996 appeared in schools, giving readers a nationalistic view of Slovak history. The contents of these publications could only cause problems for teachers, who perceived the works of historians as necessarily correct bricks that “fit” into one construction of the image of the past. For most Slovak historians, the sending of the above-mentioned publications was perceived as an attempt to ideologically influence teachers and high school students. It was not until 2000 that the textbook *Dejepis* for the 1st year of grammar schools by Július Bartl, Miroslav Kamenický and Pavel Valachovič appeared, followed two years later by the textbook *Dejepis* for the 2nd year of grammar schools. Textbooks of history (national and world history) for the 3rd year were published only in 2005 (national history) and 2006 (world history). These new sets of textbooks contain not only facts, but also examples of sources with questions and topics to reflect on the events. The content of these textbooks does not fundamentally change the nature of history teaching, which is primarily concerned with the acquisition of lexical knowledge and not with working with sources or competing interpretations. Given their focus, they do not create the space for preparing students to write an argumentative paper either. The alternative approach (i.e. the task of writing an essay) to the final matriculation exam exists only in some bilingual high schools. (Šuch, s. 41)

The NEP describes characteristics of the history subject, and prescribes objectives and outcomes in the form of performance and content standards and themes based on the main historical eras.

*“The educational standard consists of the characteristics of the subject and the basic learning objectives, which are specified in the performance standard. It is a coherent system of performances that are expressed in cognitively graded specified objectives - learning requirements. These core requirements can be further specified, concretised and developed by teachers.”*

At the same time, this general objective is specified in three target areas. The first was the area of basic knowledge of historical facts and the second was the area of basic abilities, competences or skills to know diverse historical material. The third area included those learning objectives that were related to students’ value orientation and action and, at the same time, to the development of strategies in teachers’ teaching practices (Kratochvíl b, s. 17).

The NEP considers the purpose of history teaching to be national consciousness and core factual information which the Slovak republic, in the form of its legitimate state authorities, consider the spiritual glue for national cohesion. In other words: history is our story, our unique Slovak story, our history as embedded in its European context. We should learn it to know what we are collectively speaking about when we pronounce certain names, dates, places and events from history (Vajda, s. 144).

The content of the first year of history education (5th grade) is propaedeutic and subsequently the history curriculum covers the main historical eras chronologically. In the process of teaching history at primary school, special emphasis is placed on

- the history of the 19th and 20th centuries (iNEP)
- developing, correcting, cultivating and preserving historical consciousness
- understanding and respecting the cultural and other differences of people, different diversified groups and communities
- developing the values of a democratic society.
- the importance attached to the democratic values of European civilization.

Instruction time for social studies is combined with another subject at primary level and is part of the educational field of ‘People and Society’ at lower secondary and upper secondary level together with history, geography and civic education.

History at upper secondary level is compulsory in the course of three years, two lessons a week at grammar schools, one lesson per week for one or two years at other types of high schools.

History is an optional matriculation subject in Slovakia (maturita - Baccalaureate Examination). The aim of the History maturita examination is to determine whether the knowledge, skills and attitudes of students meet the requirements of the educational standards and the curriculum. A further aim is to determine the extent to which history has contributed to the formation and shaping of a critical historical awareness, on the basis of which pupils are to understand the past and present of the country they live in. The aim is to find out how they understand the historical transformations of Europe and the world, and the global problems of human society. The concrete structure of the objectives is formulated in three hierarchical levels from knowledge, understanding, application to analysis, synthesis and assessment in the content of the curriculum. The target requirements for the knowledge and skills are defined by the individual thematic units based on the current curriculum. They are arranged chronologically and structured to emphasise primarily essential historical concepts, phenomena, events and processes rather than individual historical facts and events. This approach draws attention to the internal structure of the learning content, which consists of three basic elements: concepts, generalisations and facts.

In 2023 a new curriculum was approved by the ministry of education. The document *Starting point to the changes in the new curriculum*, however, expresses belief that it is possible to “convey a clear message that socio-humanitarian knowledge should not play second fiddle in today’s technology- and science-oriented world”. The document is part of the comprehensive website *Education for the 21st century* which sets out a framework for all educational fields. People and Society educational field now integrates another educational field People and Values - Religion and Ethics. The main idea behind the change in the educational field is to reinforce its importance in the context of educational programmes. Its mission is to effectively and meaningfully link the social science content of the now separate subjects so that together they form a strong set.

In practice, the framework curriculum from the first year onwards allocates this educational field one lesson per week (compared with the current situation - one lesson of “prvouka”, which is an integrated subject of primary education, predominantly natural science with a minimum of social science content). Unfortunately, there is no increase of

weekly lessons in the second or third cycles, where it has been severely neglected since 2008 and highly criticised by the professional public even in the form of open letters to the Minister of Education several times since 2008.

The new curriculum has succeeded in linking the educational field both horizontally (four components) and vertically (three cycles) so that pupils can gain a holistic knowledge that they apply in their further education and life.

In terms of History the new curriculum works with the concept of historical literacy and inquiry based learning trends in History didactics. The 'new' curriculum shows signs of shifting away from a nation-oriented approach and moving toward a form of history teaching that is expected to promote a different type of social cohesion, basically within the limits of 'promoting social cohesion' (Vajda, p.147). All actors in the reform movement realise that the changes need wide professional support from academia, an update in future teacher training and teachers in practise training.

## **Position of civic education in Slovakia**

In each era and regime the civic education was the subject most under the influence of the political system. Hence in Czechoslovakia civics was a new compulsory subject at national schools introduced by the School Act in 1922 to promote patriotism - awareness of Czechoslovak citizenship, emphasising republicanism and democracy as principles alongside brotherly relationships between Slovaks and Czechs (Tonková, s. 224-5), then in the Slovak state during the WWII national socialism within "social education" instead of civics, and after the WWII Marxist-Leninist ideology which changed civics and history to utilitarian and propagandistic instruments of the regime. The topics then covered the socialist family, sessions of the Communist Party, required commemoration of the Victorious February (the Communist Coup in 1948) or the Victory of the Great October Revolution and even the Month of Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship (Tonková, p. 229). Civic education was subject to change depending on alterations in the school system and the length of compulsory school attendance. After the reform attempt in the 1960s, during so-called normalization (1970s and 1980s), civics became again very dogmatic. Only after 1989 civics got the chance to become democratic and competence based. Civics is taught 1 lesson per week from 6th to 9th grade at basic school (ISCED2) and 1 - 3 years at high schools (ISCED3).

The iNEP states the characteristics of the subject as:

*“The subject contributes to the formation and development of pupils’ social and civic consciousness. Through defined concepts and performances, it conveys the necessary knowledge, skills and acquisition of competences to enable them to orient themselves in the social environment and in everyday life situations. It enables pupils to understand themselves and helps them in their socialisation process. It leads them to learn about their family, school, municipality, region, Slovakia and the European Union. It teaches them to think and act democratically, to know their rights and duties and to defend the rights of others. It provides pupils with basic knowledge of the state and law, enables them to understand the economic life of society and leads them to active civic engagement, one of the important prerequisites of which is critical thinking.”*

*”OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE”*

*Pupils will*

- gain awareness of the uniqueness and inimitability of each person in society,
- realistically get to know themselves, evaluate themselves,
- learn the rules and norms of social interaction,
- become aware of their rights and responsibilities and defend their rights appropriately,
- take responsibility for their own opinions, attitudes and the consequences of their actions,
- recognise the basic principles of democracy,
- develop a tolerant attitude towards other views, attitudes, values and cultures,
- learn active citizenship and personal engagement,
- acquire a basic understanding of the socio-economic and legal functioning of society.

The main topics covered in the 6th grade are: my family, my school, my hometown, my country; in the 7th grade social relationships in the society - individual within society; in the 8th grade the topics are state and rule of law, human rights and freedoms; and in the 9th grade they are career choice, economic life of the society, and financial literacy.

The iNEP Civics curriculum for secondary education is criticised for being barely consistent and often tending to copy the structure of academic disciplines. The iNEP for high schools covers thematic units: Man as an individual, Man and society, Citizen and state, Citizen and law, Basic economic problems and their solutions, Market mechanism,

Labour market, Unemployment and its socio-economic impact, The world of work, The role of money and financial institutions.

A non-obligatory social-scientific seminar was introduced at grammar schools and secondary schools in the school year 1993/1994 with two lessons a week in the 3rd and 4th grade.

The School Act 2008 and follow-up directives imperatively emphasise high priority attributed by the national educational policy to civics at both levels, which is irreplaceable “in preparing students for life in its multidimensionality”, so it is somehow a paradox that at the same time, the national educational programme reduced its lessons allocations (traditional lesson per week for individual grades at primary schools changed to 0.5 hour for 8th and 9th grade, lessons of civics were reduced also in 1st and 2nd years at grammar schools, the 3rd year received two lessons and the 4th year one lesson per week). Reduced lessons allocations for humanistic subjects were and still are a fundamental problem (Tonková, p. 238).

Civics is one of the elective subjects of the Baccalaureate examination. The content of the final examination in civics consists of a selected knowledge from social sciences: psychology and sociology; law and political science; economics; philosophy and religious studies.

## **The School Act**

A new curriculum (2023) brings fundamental changes to civic education. The emphasis on civic education is from the very first grade within an integrated subject (former educational field) ‘People and Society’. This subject covers four components: geography, history, civics and ethics. The curriculum is divided in three cycles, in the first and the second one there is an integrated subject with all four components ‘People and Society’ and in the third cycle it can be taught as an integrated, partly integrated or separate subject.

The new curriculum is more competence based - even the content standards are largely formulated as activities. The pupils shall develop basic concepts in the first grade and gradually develop them in the second and third cycle. The educational field especially in civic component of the People and Society incorporates most of the cross curricular competencies (cross curricular “topics” in iNEP) and defines them in performance standards.

Civic education in primary (prvouka, vlastiveda) and secondary education (civics) in iNEP does not directly offer the opportunity to encounter the term citizen. Topics related to citizenship education are scattered in all three grades (rules in different environments: behaviour at the doctor’s, at the pharmacy; existence of (safety) rules at school and on the road; national

symbols; events in the village), but the intention *to get to know key persons, authorities or institutions important for life in the community and village*; the ambition *to make the pupil interested in his/her surroundings* or *to involve him/her in activities to improve them* does not emerge. The **civic component** is therefore an entirely new element in the curriculum. It covers the whole spectrum of topics related to citizenship. It is organised into five thematic units. Through *learning about the rules* at school and in the community, the pupil is introduced to *life in the community and community relations*, which should lead to the pupil's role as an active citizen of the community. It does not only focus on the role of institutions or services, but should *consider*, for example, the *use and maintenance of public space* and its *improvement*.

## Dilemmas

In the period between 1989 and now, there were many efforts to innovate and improve the curriculum at all types of schools, however, mostly non-conceptual and non-continuous. The results are, therefore, highly questionable and the change for a systematic approach is essential. Without exaggeration we can claim that the Slovak education system works on inertia. There is no public debate about the quality of education in the humanities in Slovakia. The education system is deformed for various reasons. One of them is international and national testing which in practice means that the main emphasis is put on Slovak language (as if other subjects did not develop reading literacy), and maths. The other circumstances are lack of instruction time for humanities (and not only), lack of qualified teachers, quality textbooks and teaching materials.

In general, there is no long-term systematic research in the field of didactics. For example, CVTI collects data in the field of education on teachers and their qualifications, but does not collect them in detail, so we do not know exactly how many teachers and how many lessons are taught in a fully qualified way. Especially, but not only, in humanities the situation has been critical for a long time, in history since the reduction of lessons in elementary education. Slovakia also faces a long-term problem of the aging of the teaching staff. Teaching as a profession is not seen as attractive, universities even cancelled entrance exams and accepted students without prior selection based on talents, inner motivation or psychological prerequisites for teaching profession. Didactics and pedagogy teachers at universities often lack experience with practical teaching, therefore, they often tend to give academic and theoretical lectures. A short internship in elementary school during university studies is not sufficient.

## Conclusion

The Slovak educational system builds on several different systems from the past with different focuses - the monarchist Austro-Hungarian, the democratic Czechoslovak and the post-war Czechoslovak one copying the Soviet model. The education system after the fall of socialism is gradually being transformed into a competence-oriented curriculum and is currently undergoing substantial reform.

The curriculum for history and civics constantly struggles with a lack of instructional time, setting goals toward the cultivation of civic competencies essential to navigate today's world and challenges.

Since in Slovakia there is a plural pedagogical system, especially regarding the teaching methods that are used in the classroom, the system has many positive elements. We can regard it as a positive sign that in Slovakia in the last twenty years we have been witnessing a significant shift toward a more balanced history teaching which concentrates on something other than the 'nation'. It is also good news that this idea is included in the Slovak National Curriculum, both in the 'old' and the 'new' ones alike: 'The main function of history is to cultivate the historical consciousness of the pupil as a holistic personality.' (Vajda, 2023 p. 150). The new curriculum moreover cultivates historical literacy as the main mission of historical education in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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# History and Civic Education in Hungary

András Máté – Mátyás Rédli – Judit Tóth

## Abstract

*This paper examines the Hungarian educational system, with primary focus on History and Civic education, mainly through the official regulating documents of the country. The National Core Curriculum and the Framework Curriculum provides a great deal of data towards understanding the position of these subjects, thus a short summary of the contents relevant to History teaching are presented together with the attitude that the country's system holds towards these subjects and their position within the Curriculum. An overview of the state-prescribed themes and notions are presented with emphasis on the different topics Hungarian students are taught in History and Civic Education subjects, while a very short insight into the changes of history teaching in Hungary over the past 30 years is also offered.*

*Keywords:* History teaching, civic education, Hungarian education system, National Curriculum, matura exams

## Introduction

Hungary is located in the Carpathian Basin and has a population of approximately 10 million (Eurydice, 2023). Although the country has a recognised population of thirteen ethnic groups, Hungary cannot be described as a multicultural society. Its education system can be placed in the Austro-Prussian-German model, therefore, it also contains several elements of this heritage (e.g. the structure of the school system, the function of external examinations).

## The Hungarian education system

Hungary's public education system consists of four different types of schools: kindergarten, elementary, secondary and higher education. The obligatory age for public education is from 3 to 16 (ISCED levels 0-3, *table 1*). Kindergarten starts at the age of

3, elementary school is compulsory from the age of 6 until the age of 14 (grades 1 – 8). Secondary school is 4 years, though it is possible to start secondary school at 5<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade. There are different types of secondary schools in Hungary, with the most common being the general secondary school providing secondary general education, while a surge in the number of applicants into secondary vocational schools and non-state schools (e.g. religious schools) is also present. Besides general secondary schools, students can also go on to vocational schools or vocational secondary schools, where they can either study a trade alone or study a trade and earn a school leaving certificate as well. These have a different duration from the four years of upper secondary school, but upper secondary school can also take 4-6-8 years.

Age	School	ISCED level
3-6	Kindergarten	0
6-14	Elementary	1 - 2
14-18	Secondary	3

*Table 1: Hungarian School system (source: Eurydice 2023)*

At the end of secondary education, the school leaving exam is called the matura exam, which is centrally organised by the state while also prescribing the required data and setting the standards for it. It is compulsory to take this exam in 5 subjects, namely, Hungarian Grammar and Literature, Mathematics, History, a foreign language and one additional subject chosen by the student. (Act on Public Education, 2011. 6 §) A number of changes has been implemented by the current government, for instance the lowering of the compulsory age for education, and the inclusion of religious and moral studies into the curriculum (Halász, 2015)

## **The social function of curriculum**

The system is regulated by the National Core Curriculum, a document which includes the general aims of education and the minor objectives of each subject individually. (NCC, 2020.) The first National Core Curriculum was introduced in 1995 (F. Dárdai & Kaposi, 2021). Currently the fifth NCC is in position, which came into force in September 2020. The Curriculum is narrowed down by the framework curriculum into several syllabi

bi in every subject where one can find the list of the materials students might encounter in the matura exam, thus has to be taught. This curriculum describes the compulsory lexical terms at the compulsory school-leaving exam in History. As Nahalka (2021) concludes, there has been a notable increase in state involvement and centralisation efforts in a number of areas, including maintenance, employment, content regulation and control of pedagogical work in recent years.

## School maintenance, funding

In public education, local governments were responsible for maintaining public institutions up until 2010. After that, the state has become the largest school provider, as well as a new system of school districts and supervision has been established (Varga, 2022). The government created the Klebelsberg School Maintenance Centre, which has been responsible for the maintenance and organisation of municipal primary and secondary school since 2013. Besides the state, churches, religious associations, minority self-governments, natural persons and organisations or foundations can establish and maintain public schools. (Eurydice, 2023)

## The position of History teaching

In Hungary History is a compulsory subject in the school years 5-8 and from 9 to 12 (ISCED levels 2 - 3). It is also part of the obligatory matura exam with an option to take an advanced level exam in it, where there is a larger pool of lexical items (compared to the intermediate<sup>1</sup> level) from which the students can be asked to remember data (Kaposi & Katona, 2023). The National Core Curriculum states that History teaching is mainly based on narrative understanding, meaning that the learner's "historical knowledge is nurtured by studying the stories, descriptions, schemes and interpretations' interaction and how they built upon each other." (NCC, 2020, 345)

The change of teaching approach in Hungary, came years after the change of system in 1989-1990. As Fischer-Dárdai and Kaposi assert, because even though for a time

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<sup>1</sup> Despite the name, the intermediate level is the first level. The name comes from the fact that the basic exam was to be the "basic level" to be taken at the age of 16 (see more: Csala Istvánné - Ranschburg Ágnes (2000): A 'Történelem és társadalomismeret' alapműveltségi vizsga történetéhez. *Iskolakultúra*, 9. 36-45.), but in the 1990s this idea was rejected while the name remained.

frontal work or even classroom dictation were the main modes of teaching, the address of challenges teachers faced at the time did not reach Hungary in the 1990's and the analyses of sources played a minor role in History classes. With the implementation of the new matriculation examination in 2005 new kinds of assessment were introduced in the school leaving exam. As a result, "source and activity-centred teaching increased" and new textbooks were also created, while new organisational learning methods like project works started to be used in Hungary, nevertheless, it did not immediately spread throughout the country (F. Dárdai & Kaposi, 2021).

The Framework Curriculum has, for the most part, a chronological way of structuring history, and as such, it deals with several topics in chronological order from both national and world history and it covers the periods from ancient times until modern-day Hungarian history.

Starting from the Ancient period, the students are taught about the ancient civilisations: Greece, Rome, the birth of Christianity and the Islam. All of these are accompanied by a set of subtopics with the lexical items related to the period and development aims. (Framework Curriculum, 2020a,) The world history section for the Medieval times has a more thematic approach than the previous Framework Curriculum had, while retaining the themes of larger empires during that time, but in their own topic (Framework Curriculum, 2020), rather than part of a singular chapter for the Medieval period as in the 2012 Framework Curriculum. The premodern and modern times in world history also appear, with such topics as 'Early capitalism' or 'Enlightenment' with the inclusion of political history among them, and the contemporary world history is also viewed from political and social perspectives. After 2005, the new version of the matura exam lowered the percentage of political history within the subject, although it still holds the dominant position.

The institutions of the European Union and their decision-making processes are also included in the History Framework Curriculum, however, only as a subtopic in national history. The history of other continents is rarely discussed, most of them happen when there is an encounter between European nations and other countries on that continent, e.g. the discovery of America or the colonisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but individual countries or regions' history do not appear in the Hungarian Framework Curriculum, with the exception of Japan and the Meiji-restoration.

The national history of Hungary takes approximately half of the Framework Curriculum, just as it is stated in the introductory section of the document.

The origin of the Hungarian nation is presented in a detailed manner by listing the linguistic and genetic findings alongside the theories as to who the ancestors of the Hungarians could be. The last historical topic is labelled 'Hungary and the EU', but the final event mentioned in the Framework Curriculum is the Hungarian Constitution of 2012 entering force.

The textbook market currently consists of three types of textbook options, two of them ordered by the Education Authority and one that was created by the Catholic Pedagogical Institution. Although they are different in certain aspects, all of them have to abide by the requirements of the curriculum defined in the Framework Curriculum, meaning that the compulsory data that is listed in the Framework Curriculum has to be included in each textbook, as those items are the ones that are assessed at the matura exam. The validation process of the textbooks is also handled by the Educational Authority (Act CXXV., 2012, 4§). The validated textbooks of the Education Authority are available on the internet for everyone on their website not just in Hungarian, but also in the languages of minorities which are acknowledged in Hungary.<sup>2</sup>

The Framework Curriculum in History, which gives a detailed account of what students need to learn in History classes and offers ideas about history learning and its goal. The Framework Curriculum, with a large focus on national identity, states that the main goal of history teaching and learning, is that:

Students should become familiar with historical facts, actors, events, stories and processes recognized as the most important by historical science and tradition and become aware of their national belonging. They learn about the most basic elements of the cultural code system that allows one to identify with the core values of our culture. The history curriculum focuses on the history of the Hungarian nation and Hungary. (Framework Curriculum, 2020a, p. 1)

Regarding competencies it declares that "the search for historical information and processing it, source criticism, drawing conclusions and other thinking procedures generally develop learning competences through their mediating effect" (p. 1) It also maintains that in order for the learners to have a "realistic and positive view of the Hungarian nation" they need to familiarize themselves with events from world history and they should be able to see the connection between national and world history events, while they can also take into consideration the history of ethnic minorities' living in Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> (<https://www.tankonyvkatalogus.hu/>)

Being aware of the history of Hungarians living in the neighbouring state is defined as a “prioritised goal” (p. 4), and with a positive and realistic view on Hungarian history the document says that it could strengthen their ‘feelings of patriotism’. (p. 1)

What is also prioritised - along with communication and orientation in time and locations - is the formation and enhancement of learners’ historical thinking. In connection with historical thinking the Framework Curriculum states that by the end of their studies the students could “organise learnt items in a problem-centred manner”, “form hypotheses about the drivers of the behaviour of historical persons, social groups and institutions”, “compare different, similar historical situations, processes and phenomena” or “recognise that the present is none other but social, economic, political and cultural relations developed as a consequence of past events and factors”.(p. 7.)

The Framework Curriculum in History prescribes the dates, characters, historical notions and topographic items that are to be taught. There are more than 400 concepts listed and more than 470 dates, characters and topographical items in the 2020 Framework Curriculum (Kaposi & Katona, 2023) that students need to be familiar with for the matura exam at the end of secondary school.

There is an option to choose themes in each section and an ‘in-depth’ set lesson can be dedicated to them to have the opportunity to delve into and analyse it in greater detail including different aspects (Framework Curriculum, 2020a). The Framework Curriculum also suggests different kinds of extracurricular/suggested activities for each topic, for example, organising trips to see the remnants of Ancient Roman Architecture for the classes that are studying about the ancient history of the country, or students delivering presentations about historically important figures from the 17th century, or even creating a tableau for all the major investments that happened in the second part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, which the previous Framework Curriculum did not include.

## **History examination in Hungary**

Hungary is one of the few countries where the matura exam in History is compulsory. Therefore, nearly 70,000 secondary school students take the exam at intermediate or advanced level.<sup>3</sup> At both levels, the exam consists of a written part (simple short-answer section and essay section) and an oral part.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ketszintu.hu/publicstat.php> (2024. 11. 5.)

In the 1990s, the development of the two-tier school-leaving examination system as we know it today involved a review of several foreign examination models (e.g. Scottish, French, German), which have a flexible task selection structure, focusing on the applicability of cognitive ability, applied knowledge, and incorporating other content perspectives in addition to political history (Kaposi, 2020). According to the recommendations of the Pedagogical Institute of Baranya County, for example: *'We would place great emphasis (especially in the written examination) on source recognition, source analysis (...). In both the written and the oral examinations, we would expect candidates to give an indication of their problem-solving thinking (especially at the advanced level)'* (Bernáth & Walz 1992. 39.).

In the second half of the 1990s, the Government Decree 100/97 on the regulations for the matriculation examination was drawn up in two stages, containing the general requirements for the subject (general principles). However, the reform of the school-leaving examination has been delayed for years, partly because of the fact that the alternating political forces sometimes helped and sometimes hindered the work on the development of the examination. During the development process, the philosophy of the examination was influenced by social control, i.e. whether the two-level history examination should be knowledge- or competence-centred (Kaposi, 2020).

As a result of the matura reform in 2005, the size of the Framework Curriculum for the examination has been significantly reduced, the proportion of knowledge on 20<sup>th</sup> century have increased, the number of lexical items to be studied has decreased, and new topics (such as the status of women) have been introduced into the Framework Curriculum (F. Dárdai & Kaposi, 2020). The topics have become more diverse: they cover not only political history, but also economic history, cultural history, history of mentality and history of life (Kaposi, 2015b). With the introduction of the standardised written exam, the exam has become more uniform and comparable across examination periods compared to the period before 2005.

In a series of mostly closed-ended items, there was a variety of task types with six Hungarian and six universal topics in chronological order, corresponding to the 12 topics of the matura, in a chronological sequence. Because of its structure, it was considered student-friendly, as the content was predictable. A variety of textual sources (textbook, historical work, legal text, scientific article, etc.) and visual sources (pictures, cartoons, maps/map sketches, posters, etc.) were used.

A further change is the introduction of a complex source analysis task in 2017. However, at the intermediate level, although these tasks do indeed consist of several items, from a cognitive point of view, the complex test tasks at the intermediate level do not or rarely measure source analysis, and taxonomically they do not differ from the other tasks, the sources also measuring text comprehension and the application of reproductive knowledge in the first place (Tóth, 2022). A change in content is the inclusion of financial, economic and labour knowledge in the 12th matura test, although this is rarely the case at intermediate level.

There were also changes to the essay tasks: the initial 8 essay topics were reduced to four, for a number of reasons. Out of the 8, three of which had to be completed, subject to the rules of choice. The assessment of the essay tasks is based on competency-based operations and related content elements. Each competency is linked to at least one operation and one content element (Makk & Kófalvi, 2007). The content elements linked to the operations are defined by the task topic and the operations by the competence. By 2012, problem-solving essays were linked to one source at intermediate level and the analytical essays to three sources (Csapodi, 2014). In addition, the period boundaries have been changed, the standard age has been changed and a new, fictitious boundary of 1849 has been added by the test makers. The naming of essays has also changed, with the focus on length the 'problem-solving' essay were now called 'short' and the analytical ones 'long'. In addition to the new designations, short essays refer to a universal topic and the long essays to Hungarian history. The requirement to complete two of the four essays has been changed from 45 to 50 points, with the universal essay always being 'short' and the Hungarian essay always being 'long'.

With the introduction of the 2020 NCC and framework curricula, rethinking of the matura requirements has become relevant, therefore, the next changes have been in practice since 2024 May. Under the new requirements, the scoring of the exam and the number of tasks have not changed in any part of the exam. However, the financial, economic and labour knowledge has been removed from the compulsory topics from 2020 and the twelve matura topics have been modified to seven, therefore the 12 tasks in the first section of the written exam are made up of these seven Hungarian-world topics. It seems that the types of tasks are more varied than in previous years, but there are more complex over-detailing diagrams in the intermediate level tasks and more questions on the interpretation of diagrams, maps and tables.

There was a change in the matura exam requirements in 2021 – due to the newly designed Curriculum and Framework Curriculum in 2020 - that has been in force from the 2024 exam period onwards. A comparison between the previous requirements and the new ones sheds light on how the state lowered the number of obligatory lexical items that could be asked of learners at the intermediate level (from 974 to 848), but significantly increased that amount for the advanced level in History (1223 lexical items in total). Moreover, around 40% of the items were included in the current and the previous two syllabi as well, which implies a more prominent emphasis towards knowledge acquisition (Kaposi & Katona, 2023).

## **The position of Civic education in Hungary**

Civic education was also very active in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This took place due to a paradigm shift, caused by the collapse of authoritarian regimes, globalisation and various ethno-national conflicts and has become a tool of social innovation (Halász, 2005).

Compared to history, civic (or citizenship) education plays a smaller but unique role in the Hungarian education system. It is compulsory in the 8th grade of primary school and in the 12th grade of secondary school, and the subject is integrated with history, so history teachers in Hungary are also responsible for civic education. The National Core Curriculum describes civic education as a subject that “provides pupils with important and useful knowledge about the functioning of the state and its institutions, as well as the economic role of the state and the family” (NCC, 2020, 342). The main aim of its teaching is to provide a foundation for social responsibility, to understand the interrelations between the legal system and everyday life, and to teach and analyse the duality of national and European identity. This subject is optional and can be chosen as a school-leaving examination.

The Framework Curriculum describes the components of civic education as covering a wide range of issues, from the country’s legal system to national identity and environmental issues. Within these topics, students are taught about issues such as the Hungarian Constitution and its main parts, voting rights and social norms. After working on these sub-topics, students should be able to understand the importance of fundamental human rights, while also being aware of their rights and duties as citizens. They are also taught about the different types of elections (parliamentary, municipal, European, referendum), the levels of the legal structure and the basic elements of the tax system, while being

aware of the meaning of concepts such as ‘tax ethics’, ‘sharing public burdens’, ‘source of law’ and who is considered a ‘natural person’ (Framework Curriculum, 2020b, 7).

Democratic values are also part of the curriculum, which aims to create and strengthen a commitment to democracy. It aims not only to foster positive attitudes towards democracy but also to develop a sense of loyalty to the nation. The curriculum states that it “recognises the importance of belonging to the Hungarian people of the world as a national community” and “recognises and values the role of local, regional and national public collections in preserving national cultural heritage” (p. 3). These topics are part of civic education, together with the role of the Hungarian Defence Forces, “understanding the components of national consciousness” and “the relationship between local patriotism and national patriotism” (p. 8). In addition, students will learn about the challenges faced by Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries and how the Hungarian state is committed to supporting these communities to preserve their Hungarian identity.

The incorporation of these patriotic ideals is an indication of how the state views these values and concepts and how it seeks to nurture them; to this end, it is proposed to devote four lessons to this segment of the curriculum.

Civic education also includes other aspects for becoming responsible citizens. Not only democratic values, but also environmental issues are part of the curriculum, where it is explicitly mentioned that teachers should develop and strengthen students’ commitment to protecting our built and natural environment, as well as teach them about consumer rights, financial literacy and skills, including information on how to get a loan, what constitutes a loan contract, banking or financial planning. In all sub-themes, emphasis is placed on digital literacy, given its importance in the 21st century. The importance of “developing digital competences” is repeatedly mentioned among the many objectives of the sub-themes of citizenship education. For example, it is also mentioned in relation to entrepreneurship and environmental issues (Framework Curriculum 2020b).

## **Dilemmas**

The challenges that History teaching in Hungary faces are manifold. Though there is an ongoing process where national history writing and teaching tries to be in sync with the international trends, there are multiple rewriting of History over the past 100 years which has taken its toll on Hungarian History education. (Kaposi, 2020.)

In history teaching, a fundamental issue is the mismatch between the written and the assessed curriculum, which is confirmed by research on history maturation at secondary level (Kojanitz, 2022) as well as empirical research (Tóth, 2024). A common phenomenon is the lack of definition of basic concepts, e.g. source, competence or complex. Therefore, the complex test tasks at the intermediate level do not or rarely assess source analysis<sup>4</sup>, and taxonomically they do not differ from the other tasks (therefore, they are not complex in nature). Moreover, the ‘problem-solving’ and ‘analytical’ tasks - regardless of their names - are mostly knowledge reproduction, which was confirmed by a number of scholars, including József Kaposi and Ágnes F. Dárdai (2006). Thus, contrary to the original intentions, the essay tasks of the school-leaving examination, in the words of László Kojanitz, “(...) *encourage students to reflect on what they have learned as accurately as possible, rather than to think independently. This also gives students the opportunity to write apparently meaningful texts about contexts they only half-understand (...).*” (Kojanitz, 2021, 129.)

Since the matura exam places the strongest impact on both the content and methodological apparatus of secondary school history lessons, these are essentially determined by it, which – in a hidden manner – enhances knowledge reproduction and knowledge-based operations with sources. Therefore, source analysis and critical thinking might rarely be fostered in classes, unless teachers decide to do so. There would be an urgent need for the continuous training of history teachers, a less frequently changing matura exam requirements, and such textbooks that follow the structure of the matura besides the refinement of cognitive apparatus of the exam tasks.

In terms of civic education, the curriculum framework of Hungary places more emphasis on knowledge acquisition whereas the development of civic values also requires the development of attitudes and skills as well, which take years and are essential for active citizenship (Kaposi, 2015a). It has been found that there is a low interest in public affairs (Kaposi, 2020), which may be related to the fact that active democratic decision making in Hungarian schools is not prevalent, Student Council/student self-government (DÖK) is either empty or titular (Jancsák, 2024), and students might pass on the passive decision-making culture they have seen there. On the other hand, it seems that ac-

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<sup>4</sup> Based on: Judit Tóth: A 21. századi készségek-képességek mérése a középszintű történelemérettségi komplex tesztfeladatainak tükrében oral presentation held in 2022, Pécs, Hungary.

tive citizenship is shifting to the online arena<sup>5</sup>, and good initiatives (Jakab, 2022) can be found at university-level as well.

## Conclusion

Overall, the Hungarian education system bears the marks of the former German-Prussian system, where primary school lasted 8 years and secondary school 4 years.

Hungary's public education system is centralised, as the state with the use of the National Core Curriculum and Framework Curricula prescribe a great deal of data to be taught to the students, and the state also centrally organises the secondary school leaving exam (matura exam).

History, a compulsory subject at ISCED levels 2-3, holds an important position in this system. In Hungary, the study of history is compulsory for a minimum for a maximum of eight years, which is outstanding at regional and global level, including the compulsory school-leaving examination. Not only is it a compulsory subject, but it is also among the obligatory matura exam subjects. Due to its position in the Curriculum, changes in the subject of History subject attract attention from the general public. In recent years, the new Core Curriculum and Framework Curriculum in 2020 introduced a number of changes (more activity-based lessons), however, it did not solve all the issues that were put forward over the years. Its dependence on factual knowledge over competencies were, to an extent, addressed, but not in a manner that would be deemed sufficient. Since the effect of the implemented changes cannot be fully evaluated, its effect on the lessons are yet to be measured. The changes that came after the introduction of the National Curriculum and the altered school leaving examination system from 2005 onward led to a slow change in the use of teaching methods, that started to deviate from the frontal teaching. New methods, an exam system that has standard elements, the growth in the use of historical sources in everyday classes are examples of positive consequences that have happened in recent years.

Civic education in Hungary covers a wide range of issues that citizens should be aware of, for example, the political and legal system, environmental issues, and banking, while their digital skills and other competences are also enhanced in the process. It is a subject taught to final year students both in elementary and secondary school.

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<sup>5</sup> Based on Mónika Balatoni: Társadalmi aktivitás új formája a fiatalok körében: „a fotelforradalmárok és a médiapolgárok” világa oral presentation held in Debrecen, Hungary (24.10.2024)

Nowadays, just as the Framework Curriculum and the matura exam requirements suggest, students are still obliged to be familiar with a rather large amount of lexical items during their historical studies, and since the topics are for a large extent in chronological order, the system could be considered more conservative in its approach concerning education. A drastic modification in the content canon of any kind is possible only by reaching a common consensus, especially with history, where the content canon is strong (Reisch, 2015).

The representative researchers of Hungarian history didactics (Ágnes F. Dárdai, József Kaposi, László Kojanitz, András Katona) have already outlined the basis for the renewal of history teaching (Kojanitz, 2018): historians and history teachers, while considering the needs of society, must cooperate when defining the goals, teaching methods and strategies of history (and civic) education.

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# History and Citizenship Education within the Austrian School System

Christa Bauer

## Abstract

Teaching in digital times is in general in a transition process. With knowledge available in seconds, it is the competence to distinguish fact from fake that is the key. This article tries to give an overview of the enormous changes having taken in place in the last 10 – 15 years in Austrian History and Social Studies /Citizenship Education curricula and didactics. In the long tradition of history education in Austria there is now a complete change of paradigm. Competence-oriented education was introduced instead of content-oriented teaching. Especially History teaching in Austria is in a decisive situation, one new curriculum following the other and leaving teachers behind. Since 1962, History has been combined with Social Studies, and as of 2023, this part has been dropped in favor of Citizenship Education, following a growing need in society. The curricula from 2007/08 first reacted to EU-policies, PISA-results and the changes in society, technology and internet applications by introducing competence-oriented teaching. The new approach was based on challenging the so-called historical facts, calling them constructed national narratives with an intention of justification and creating national identification. Only eight years later, in 2015/16, curriculum innovation went one step further. The whole curriculum was completely taken apart and organized in a new way, creating room for new competence areas and new content on Citizenship Education and Historic disciplinary competences. In this way, the tools of historic science are made available to children. Furthermore, the curricula are structured along basic concepts rather than chronology according to the Federal Law, amended in 2023 (BGBL)<sup>1</sup>. The question now is how to get teachers on board. Teachers agree there is a need for a different approach but struggle to get along and understand the new concept. We see the dilemma between societal needs, political intentions, modern, innovative didactics and teaching practices.

*Keywords:* competence-oriented education, methodology of history, Citizenship Education

## Introduction

Austria is a small country in Central Europe, the German speaking successor of the Habsburg Empire, which turned into a republic in 1918 after the abdication of the last emperor. 9 million people live here, with one big city, the capital Vienna, with 2 million inhabitants, and two more cities with around 300,000 (Graz, Linz) and the rest in smaller cities and villages in rural areas. The average age in Austria is 43,2 years, and there are slightly more women than men, 50,7%. There are slightly more people above 65 years than youngsters under 19 (roughly 1,7 million), most of the population, 5,5 million, is between 20 and 64 (Statistik Austria, 2023).

Statistics Austria say that 19% of the Austrian population are foreigners, this percentage has continuously risen from 9% in 2002, and is now 21,7% for people living in Austria but who were born in a foreign country.

There is a growing expertise in Austrian schools in teaching German as a foreign language and many efforts are taken especially in adult education to teach people who master neither our alphabet nor the language. But as the latest PISA-study shows<sup>16</sup>, children with migration background are still disadvantaged.

There is a problem of an aging population: having declined by about 10% over the last decade, the proportion of 6 -15-year-olds is projected to drop further to 9.46% of the population and increase again until it reaches a share of 9.67% in 2030 (Statistik Austria, 2014a). These trends will vary across the provinces. Vienna will experience a strong increase in the number of students due to its large share of relatively young immigrants, the size of the student population, however, is expected to stagnate or decline in other parts of Austria.

## The Austrian Education System

The Federal Republic of Austria has a free and public school system, with nine years of mandatory school education and one year of compulsory kindergarten. After four years of primary education, children – or rather, their parents - must choose between *Mittelschule* (general secondary) or *Gymnasium* (AHS, academic secondary), depending on marks in the last year of primary school. Through a series of recent reforms this

two-track-system has been made permeable and so good grades in Mittelschule allow children to get into upper secondary schools of their choice.

After 9 years of school, pupils can start an apprenticeship. Besides training on the job, they have to attend Vocational School (Berufsschule) for three years - a dual system, something which is a peculiarity in Europe. School can be attended either in block release (5 days a week for about four months) or day release (once a week in the same stretch of time as a normal school). On the days they are at school they do not have to go to work. At the end of three years, there is the final apprenticeship examination (Lehrabschlussprüfung). It is possible to go in for tertiary education after finishing the apprenticeship if they go in for “Berufsreifeprüfung”, a course with a final exam which entitles you to attend university (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022/BMBWF).

Pupils who want to go to university must complete four to five years in upper secondary at an institution of higher education (AHS) or a vocational college with higher education entrance qualification (BHS). Most of these schools require an entrance exam or demand good marks on the last school certificate. Upper secondary schools offer a series of vocational-technical and university preparatory tracks involving one to five additional years of education beyond the minimum mandatory level. The final exam for either one of those higher education institutions is matriculation (Matura). After that, you can go to university or an Applied Science University, though some subjects may require additional exams (e.g. medicine) (Federal Ministry of Education).<sup>4</sup>

The legal basis for primary and secondary education in Austria is the School Act of 1962 (SCHOG). Federal legislation plays a prominent role in the education system, and laws dealing with education effectively have a de facto constitutional status because, like Austrian constitutional law, they can only be passed or amended by a two-thirds majority in parliament. In fact, the provinces have influence on education, especially on the finances, primary and general lower secondary schools, the employment of teachers and the appointment of leading functions.

In 2016 a new law about compulsory training until 18 was passed, trying to solve the problem of youth unemployment and youths not fit for training. Youngsters who live in Austria and did not find a place as an apprentice or a job after finishing mandatory education, or failed in upper secondary school, have the obligation to go in for training or schooling until they are 18. If they do not comply, they will be fined. State institutions offer training or help finding a suitable school (Federal Ministry of Education, Flyer 2023).

In Austria, *vocational* upper secondary education plays an important role. 20% of 15-19-year-olds are enrolled in general upper secondary education and 43% in vocational upper secondary education. A further 3% are enrolled in lower secondary programs and 16% in tertiary programs. This compares to an OECD average of 37% enrolled in general upper secondary programs, 23% in vocational upper secondary programs, 12% in lower secondary programs and 12% in tertiary programs. Moreover, 54% of 25–34-year-olds have a vocational education and training (VET) qualification as their highest level of attainment, which is the highest share among all OECD countries: 35% at upper secondary level and 3% at post-secondary non-tertiary level and 15% at short-cycle tertiary level (table 1). (OECD, 2023)

## **School Maintenance, Funding**

The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for funding and supervising primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Primary and secondary education is administered, however, on the level of the federate provinces by the authorities of the respective provinces. In Austria, as of 2018, there were 5,661 schools with 1, 115, 318 pupils and 122,509 teachers (Statistics in a Pocket, 2019)

Across all levels from primary to tertiary education, Austria spends 17,744 USD annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power and including expenditure on research and development), compared to the OECD average of 12,647 USD, which means rank 4 out of 39.

In Austria, in full-time equivalent terms, there are around 10 students per staff member in general upper secondary programmes (OECD average: 14 students per staff member) and 10 students for every teaching staff member in vocational upper secondary programmes (OECD average: 15 students per staff member) (OECD, 2023).

## **School Autonomy 2017**

In mid-2017, the Austrian National Council adopted far-reaching measures for the education sector, including a special focus on the extension of school autonomy which also applies to VET schools. The reform gives schools and teachers more scope for measures for the organization of teaching. They are permitted to adjust class and group sizes,

depending on how they design pedagogical and didactic aspects of learning, there is no central specification. Resources, which remain unchanged overall, can be used flexibly in various locations (CEDEFOP, 2018)

The duration of periods of instruction can also be varied, with the 50-minute lesson only serving as a parameter of calculation for resource allocation: total teaching time for teachers and pupils, based on the applicable curriculum, does not change. This simplifies project-oriented teaching, block instruction and theme-centred teaching – which is asked for in the new curricula. The grouping of pupils and the forms of teaching can also be handled flexibly. School opening hours can be laid down for individual locations in school partnership agreements. This allows school infrastructure to be used in a flexible way (CEDEFOP, 2018).

Merging into so-called school clusters of two to eight school locations in a region is allowed. The individual school locations are still schools but are strengthened due to cooperation in the cluster. The school cluster management fulfils a cross-location function. Timetables and the distribution of subjects are set out centrally in the cluster in consultation with the locations. Individual school locations can still have one point of contact to support the cluster management on site. A specific advisory body for each school cluster gives the school partners in the cluster an additional opportunity to have their say (CEDEFOP, 2018).

In-service teacher training on demand conducted in-house is expanded to support individual development concepts. Teachers must have an electronic portfolio accompanying their career and documenting all the in-service and continuing education and training measures they undertake (CEDEFOP, 2018).

Another important point of the reform is a new attempt of depoliticization of school administration. School heads are selected using a national standardized procedure in which external experts will carry out evaluations. The heads of the school or school cluster carry out selection of newly employed teachers (instead of allocation by school authorities). Furthermore, new school heads will be assisted through specific programs. The public authority examines the formal requirements and assumes functions related to service legislation; it only intervenes in a regulatory capacity if no suitable applicants are found for specific locations. (CEDEFOP, 2018). However, four years later, political influence, especially in appointing leading functions in the school system is still the rule rather than the exception (e.g. Rechnungshofbericht, Reihe BUND 2021/37).

## Private schools

According to the Ministry of Education, private schools in Austria account for about 8% of the total number. Most publicly authorized private schools are denominational schools run by the Roman Catholic Church; in addition, there are some schools which teach according to a particular system e.g. Waldorf). Private schools are fee-paying establishments, teacher costs are paid by the state, however. There are also private teacher training colleges, but only of late a few private universities.

## Teachers in the Austrian School System

The aging can be seen among teachers as well. 40% of teachers in general upper secondary are aged 50 or older. Teachers in vocational programmes are on average older than their peers in the general programme and so are the teachers in post-secondary education.

Austria has a high percentage of female teachers under 30 in primary and lower secondary education, also the percentage of teachers under 30 in early childhood educational development and pre-primary are especially high in Austria (OECD, 2023) This coincides with a reform in teacher training in 2013 with the goal that teachers on all levels must have a master's degree (Bologna). This prolonged initial teacher training also in primary education from 3 to 4 years for the Bachelor, with one following induction year in schools with a mentor, and then one year to write the Master thesis either on the job or back at university. As there is a shortage of teachers, the Ministry of Education is currently (2023) reforming the reform by shortening study time and running a campaign for people to make a lateral career move into teaching: "Teacher: a Person with Class" (Lehrer:in Person mit Klasse) to avoid a crucial shortage in the near future. Until the full implementation of the reform there are still different service laws and salaries for teachers in different types of school. In all types of schools, Austria's teachers' salaries are among the highest in all OECD countries at ranks 2 and 3, especially teachers aged 55 and older who well rank 1. Also, principals' salaries rank high in international comparison (OECD country report Austria, 2023). After the implementation of the newly trained teachers there will be *one* public service law valid for all teachers of all types of school (Dienstrecht Pädagogischer Dienst) – a major innovation.

A recent OECD TALIS study 2023 showed that the *job and workplace satisfaction of teachers is above average*, but they feel they get less support in international comparison. They complain about too much administrative work and other side-activities like collaboration. They suffer most from *the growing diversity of pupils* and the loss of the idea of a homogenous group of children. Also, teachers note that for many pupils free time and free time activities are more important than education.

The growing numbers of children with migration background and poor knowledge of German constitute another problem. *Cooperation with Parents* also seems to get more difficult. Teachers today are definitely more than only providers of knowledge, they fulfil an important role as educators.

Teachers themselves would rather go back to times before the different reforms of the last decade: streaming instead of inner differentiation, they criticize school autonomy and demand less time stress in fulfilling curriculum requirements in extremely heterogeneous classes. Teachers meet with a lot of demands from all sides, but most of them take motivation from the work with the children: to see them grow and develop – often against all odds – and they hope to become the “one teacher that makes the difference”(APA- Science, 2023)

## **Social Function of Schools, Overall Goals and Curriculum**

According to the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law Article 14 - as amended (B-VG, Art. 14) democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace and justice, openness and tolerance towards everyone regardless of race, social status and financial background are fundamental principles of education in Austria.

In more detail the present Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) states these as the current goals of the Austrian school system: ‘At the end of their school education young people are self-directed and know about their strengths and talents. They can see their perspectives in a changing society in the digital era. They can grasp opportunities to help them master their private as well as their professional lives. They are active members of society and know the value of democratic participation and contribution. It is the goal of the Austrian School System to allow children find their own optimal development path within the educational system’ (Federal law: BGBl. SCHOG (§2, 2023)<sup>11</sup>.

## Social Outcomes

One of the social outcomes of the relatively expensive Austrian school system is stated in the OECD country report: “In Austria, below upper-secondary education’s average score for the perception of democracy and the importance given to citizens having the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums is relatively high, compared to other OECD and partner countries with available data. According to 2020 data Austria ranks 5<sup>th</sup> out of 24 countries, also, the rate of women and men between 22 – 29 years neither in employment nor in education is relatively low at 6.5%.

## Historical Roots of the Austrian Education System

Mandatory primary education was introduced by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria (1740–1780), ruling in 1774 that all children of both sexes from six to twelve had to attend school - statewide. To achieve this, schools had to be established in all areas — even rural ones, which were required to have a one- or two-class elementary school (known as Volksschule). Furthermore, textbooks were unified and teacher education was regulated. At that time, religious and moral education was still a large part of the curriculum; besides, schools also taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. Girls, however, were only fully allowed to enter secondary or tertiary education by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. (K12 Academics)<sup>11a</sup>

A school reform which is still in force today was introduced after 1918 by the President of the Vienna Municipal Education Authority, Otto Glöckel. All children should be guaranteed an optimum educational development regardless of gender and social circumstances. General secondary school was introduced in 1924, compulsory for all 10-14 year olds. (Ministry of Education and Science,2022)<sup>12</sup>

During the Nazi-regime (1938 – 1945) equality of the sexes was taken back again and schools became places of political influence, spreading Nazi ideology. The three pillars of Nazi influence on children were parents, schools and a free time youth organization “Hitlerjugend”. Within a very short time non-Nazi principals were replaced by loyal ones, Jewish teachers were fired, Jewish children forbidden to enter schools. All teachers were

objected to Nazi campaigns and trainings. Intellectual standards were lowered, the subject Sports was given more importance, in Biology and Geography teachers had to teach the Nazi genetic and race theory. All confessional schools and kindergartens were closed in autumn 1938 (Weigl,1988).

The history of the Austrian education system after World War II, in the Second Republic, may be characterized as an attempt to transform higher education in a way to provide more equal access for all social classes. Before the School Act of 1962, Austria had a rather strict “two-track” education system (see above) with disadvantages especially for the rural population. So, before the 1962 reform, the great majority of children, more than 90%, attended the then compulsory 8 years either in primary schools (8 grades in rural areas), or Hauptschule, where they were divided according to their performance in primary school into an “A group,” which was directed toward two- to four-year vocational-technical training schools after graduation from the Hauptschule and a “B group,” which was required – since 1967 - to complete one additional year of compulsory education before entrance into apprenticeship programmes or agriculture, or the workforce. Only less than 10% of elementary-school graduates enrolled in the Academic Secondary School at age ten.

In 1962 the Austrian school system was completely reorganized by an extensive school act. In addition to extending compulsory schooling to nine years, it also raised the level of compulsory schoolteacher training to an academic one at colleges of teacher education (*Pädagogische Akademien*).

Since 1993 inclusive education for children with handicaps was made possible in primary schools, since 1997 also in lower secondary. In 2009, another reform of the general secondary track introduced the New Middle School (Neue Mittelschule) with inner differentiation after a long period of piloting in experimental schools instead of Hauptschule with streaming. The process was finished by 2017/18. (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research).<sup>12</sup>

The 2017 Education Reform Act (Bildungsreformgesetz 2017), established a new governance model for the education system and *evidence-based quality assurance*, including:

- Definition of a comprehensive framework on school quality
- Regular collection of data on all aspects of school quality
- Availability of these data for all levels of the school administration

- Production of annual school reports, based on school programs
- New system of school inspection and school evaluation (Eurydice, 2023).

The school-leaving exam in Austria (Matura) was reformed in 2009. There is now a partly standardized, centralized Matura which justifies the successful completion of an academic secondary school or a college of higher vocational education and qualifies for university entrance. The goals of the new Matura (at Academic Secondary School-AHS) and Colleges of Higher Vocational Education) are to guarantee standardized basic competences and objectivity through standardized tasks and standardized assessment criteria as well as comparability and transparency of school performance, and Europe-wide comparison of degrees. The exam consists of three independent sections: a Pre-Academic Thesis (Academic Secondary School) or a Diploma Thesis (College of Higher Vocational Education) Written standardized exams in languages and math; not standardized oral exams in up to four subjects. (BMBWF, Educational Paths in Austria, 2023).

## **Position of History Education in Austria**

### ***On the History of the Subject***

There used to be a subject called “Historie” already in the Monarchy and the first curricula were formulated in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. History teaching starts in Primary School within the framework of “Sachunterricht” (Realities; it includes science, geography and history) and aims at giving children some ideas of the local history and some glances of past cultures.

With the school reform of 1962 (SCHOG 62)<sup>11</sup> a new combined subject was created for secondary education “History and Social Studies” (Geschichte und Sozialkunde, GS) and introduced. The idea was to convey some content of social sciences without increasing the number of school subjects.

Learning History is obligatory in secondary education and is taught in lower secondary from grade 2 – 4 (ages 11 – 14), in upper secondary in all four grades (14 – 18) until the final Matura exam. In vocational upper secondary colleges it is a compulsory subject as well, but there are fewer hours per week. It is sometimes taught in combination with other subjects and can be chosen for the final exam (Matura). The subject is called “History and Citizenship Education” starting from 2023 (Sitte C., et al)<sup>20</sup>.

In 1978, a general cross-curricular educational principle “Citizenship Education” was introduced. All teachers of all subjects were supposed to integrate CE content or cooperate in projects with other subjects to teach Citizenship Education content matter in adequate ways. In 1985, a new curriculum for History and Social Studies was introduced which was identical for both tracks of lower secondary and was downsized and reorganized into *core curriculum* and *additional content* in 2000, the idea of the ‘skeleton curriculum’ (Federal Law: BGBl, 1984). In 2008, competence-oriented curricula for history education were introduced in Austria as a consequence of the PISA-shock (BGBl., 2008). These tests showed deficits in pupils, especially in transferring and applying what had been learned to new cases (Brait, 2022).

Also, the aspect “Citizenship Education” was explicitly added, the subject name was changed into „History and Social Studies and Citizenship Education” and CE competences for grades 3 and 4 were introduced.<sup>17a</sup>

Since the new curriculum in 2016 the subject content has shifted from Social Studies to Citizenship Education and from 2023 the subject name has changed to History and Citizenship Education (GPB).

### ***The New Curriculum***

Zentrum Polis, Politik lernen<sup>20</sup>, which was founded as a gateway for teachers to support the implementation of the changes, explains the reason for the new curriculum like this: the government programme of 2013-2018 promised that Citizenship Education should be enforced by adding obligatory Citizenship Education modules to the history curriculum. An expert commission advised not only *adding* things but introducing a totally new concept. The new curriculum was piloted in several voluntary schools.

From 2015 the new curricula were developed in a new approach: they brought together experts and teachers from *all* types of school (primary, lower and upper secondary) to formulate educational goals and competences together to make clear what kinds of competences should be the result of eight years of schooling and how each type of school could contribute. The outcomes were still structured along general goals and competences and subject competences and theme-centred approaches, a consequence of the curricula reform 2000 which was never really put into practice (Kern, 2020).

In the general part of the curricula pupils’ cross-curricular competence goals are explicitly formulated: self -, social-, and learning competences which are new. Until then

they were found in cross-curricular principles, but with an output that was not satisfying. Above all, some of these competences are connected to subject specific topics. That means that competence description and goals in e.g. Citizenship Education, language education, entrepreneurship education are specifically connected with subject goals. Subject competences are still seen as important but the big and complex challenges in society e.g. climate change, migration, and digitalization should be addressed in a combined approach (Kern, 2020). The competence definition follows the model by Weinert (2001).

### **Content**

- In the old curriculum history was structured along chronology and focused more or less on Europe. In a nutshell content of grade 2 used to be a first insight into history from the origin of man until the end of Middle Ages, grade 3 started with Modern Times and finished with the end of World War I and grade 4 started with the end of WW I until Present Times. The curricula for both tracks were identical, but the learning goals differed.

The new curriculum is based on basic concepts and competences on history learning and historic disciplinary learning and Citizenship education. It lists content matter detailed where varied historic and methodological connections can be made to present times, e.g. aspects of globalization are not only a feature of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, but also of Discoveries in early Modern Times or the Roman Empire.

Basic Concepts are also included in the curriculum. These are central and recurring themes in teaching history, or rather the *concepts* that are included in them. There are basic concepts that

- reflect the origin of historic and political knowledge: evidence, constructivity, causality, perspectivity and selectivity
- regard time as a basic concept of historical thinking between continuity and change: the course of time, chronologic order, points in time
- focus on connections of human cohabitation: structure, power, communication, scope for action, living and natural environment, norms, work, diversity and distribution.

Basic concepts help teachers in designing their teaching and allow learners to understand connections when meeting similar or equal conceptional structures in different case studies. The different concepts are supposed to be combined. (Zentrum Polis)<sup>21</sup>

# Competences in Citizenship Education and History Learning

The competence model goes back to the work of Krammer (2008) and Körber (2007). It is applicable for all grades and all types of school. The curricula themselves are based on the work of Weinert (2001). He defines competence as „cognitive skills and capabilities available in individuals or to be learned by them in order to solve certain problems as well as the motivational, volitional and social skills and willingness to be able to use problem solving successfully and responsibly in variable situations“ (Weinert, 2001) So, instead of only cognitive learning pupils should acquire a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude and be able to apply their competence for solving (real world) problems.

The following competences are promoted in Citizenship Education:

The overall goal of competence-oriented history teaching is reflected and self-reflexive political awareness. It is *not* about teaching comprehensive knowledge, but creating learning situations which enable pupils to apply political thinking and action in relation to their living environment and experience.

- Competence of political judgement
- Competence for political action
- Methodological Competence
- Political Competence /Expertise

These four competence areas must be achieved by working on exemplified content. It is not lexical knowledge that dominates the learning but by learning from the example pupils should achieve political maturity and the competence for political participation so that without the help of third parties, they show civil courage, voter responsibility etc. The close connection with History and Citizenship Education is stressed by the goal that also there the teaching is designed in a way that allows students to achieve competences in asking historical questions, in historic methodology and in historical subject matter. (Zentrum Polis, 2023)

## Teacher Education and Didactics für GPB

Teacher students must achieve competences for History as well as Citizenship Education. There is little research on the history of didactics for History and Citizenship Education. Together with the reform of teacher education which was developed in teamwork with universities and teacher training institutions in four different regions in 2013 (Ministry of Education, Pädagoginnenbildung neu)<sup>24</sup> the government wanted to establish a professorship for History Didactics and Citizenship Didactics in each region which was partly implemented. All in all, there are four big didactic centres in Austria working at the further development of history teaching and also smaller departments in the University Colleges of Teacher Training. There are Centers for Historic Didactics at the University of Vienna, and especially important for its influence, the one at Salzburg University, which is now a part of the Federal Centre of Societal Learning at the University of Teacher Education Salzburg. From 2002 – 2018 there was also a magazine for history teachers “Historische Sozialkunde” (Historic Social Studies).

On their websites, also the publishers of schoolbooks show concrete teaching designs for various topics. It is also interesting to see how differently schoolbooks deal with the requirements of the new curriculum. Some of them are available online as digital documents (see annex section 1) (Zentrum Polis, 2023)

## Position of Citizenship Education in Austria

According to the Austrian Ministry of Education, Citizenship Education comprises human rights education and is closely related to similar educational principles and cross-curricular themes such as media education.

*Citizenship Education is a precondition for individual development as well as the development of society as a whole. It actively contributes to shaping society and to putting democracy into practice; it addresses the problem of what makes society recognize government and authority as legitimate. In a democracy, free appointment, control and impeachment of the governing by the governed serve to legitimate government and authority. Citizenship Education is committed to this conception of democracy. The more this notion of democracy is embedded*

*at all levels of society, the more successfully democratic government systems will work and the better society will be able to organize itself according to the concept of democracy. (BMBWF, General Ordinance, 2015)*

The Austrian school system offers a variety of school types with different focuses, especially in upper secondary level. Hence, there is a range of various curricula of citizenship education. In vocational colleges citizenship education is taught as a separate subject. The new curricula of the subject “History and Citizenship Education” in secondary level foresee compulsory modules for citizenship education from grade 6 on. Curricula also comprise teaching on topics of human rights.

Aside from curricula, citizenship education is defined as a cross-curricular educational principle (*Unterrichtsprinzip Politische Bildung*) which applies to all subjects and to all types of school, at each level. The content parameters are decreed as a basic principle, this means that every teacher can be called upon to teach citizenship education – even at primary level. In 2015 the general ordinance was brought up-to-date in terms of modern didactics for citizenship education. One of the support structures for teachers of every school subject and every type of school with the integration and implementation of citizenship education is the gateway Zentrum Polis Politik lernen. It strives to develop adequate activities for every age level (Zentrum *Polis*)<sup>16</sup>

## **Brief History of Citizenship Education**

In Austria the general right to vote for men was introduced and a formal introduction to political studies for citizens, called *Bürgerkunde*, was established. The goal was to create a positive attitude towards the existing social and political system. Primarily, information about the political system and related institutions was imparted (Wolf,1998).

Citizenship Education for adults was first organized by associations that were dedicated to workers and general adult education (*Arbeiter- und Volksbildungsvereine*) as well as by middle-class reading and literature clubs (*Lese- und Literaturgesellschaften*). The driving force behind these efforts was the emancipative goal of empowerment.

The time between the wars and the two World Wars themselves were not supportive to the development of a system of democratic education. On the contrary, a lack of identification with the Austrian state as well as authoritarian developments and the dictatorship made schools the procurers of legitimation for whoever was in power (Steininger)<sup>21</sup>.

A radical re-orientation in Citizenship Education after World War II was short-lived and the 1928 curriculum was reinstated basically unchanged. A Decree on Citizenship Education in 1949 focused on an education that promoted conscious 'Austrianness' (Wolf,1998).

In his article on the role of history didactics past 1945 Borries (2001) asks the question on whether history as a subject should support the self-conception of the state or the personal growth of students and mentions three dates when "historic opportunities" were missed on changing history didactics: 1949, 1968 and 1989.

In 1974, the Austrian Ministry of Education tried to introduce a new compulsory school subject in the final years of secondary schools: Citizenship Education; but the bill failed in parliament. So as a compromise, Citizenship Education was established as a cross-curricular principle. In difficult and time-consuming negotiations between the various stakeholders, a Decree on Citizenship Education in Schools was finally signed in 1978 and made it *one* of eight general teaching principles.

In 2007 the voting age was reduced to 16. This served as an important stimulus for Citizenship Education. A broad coalition demanded more Citizenship Education from an earlier age. All pupils and students should be prepared for responsible political participation during their compulsory schooling. In the school year 2008/09, the reformed subject History and Social Studies/Citizenship Education for the 8th grade entered into force. The new curriculum also introduced competence-orientation (Zentrum Polis)<sup>20</sup>. And in 2016, a curriculum reform resulted in further strengthening the part of Citizenship Education in the subject History and Citizenship Education. (Steininger)<sup>21</sup>

## Dilemmas

### ***Difficult Political Consensus in Education Matters***

Austria's education system is a political minefield. There is little agreement between the two major political parties, the conservative ÖVP and the social democratic SPÖ. The SPÖ has kept pressing for more fairness for underprivileged children with one of the highlights in 1973, the introduction of free school buses and schoolbooks for every child. One of the consequences is the impressive variety of schoolbooks in Austria (see annex 1). A major goal was also permeability in the two-track system, measures against failing a whole school year just for one negative subject, reform of the general secondary school into New Middleschool arguing for a comprehensive lower secondary system,

partly standardized Matura (see above). But school laws require a two-thirds majority in parliament ,and other political parties are reluctant to give up tradition. Hence, major reforms are difficult to undertake.

Therefore, also one of the structural problems of the Austrian education system still remains: the early selection process at 10 and the requirement of parents' attention to schoolwork. The latest PISA-results show again that children still do better at school if their parents have an academic background. The Pisa ranking 2022 saw Austria at rank 21 which is inadequate when it is at the forefront of expenditure. One of the interesting conclusions of the results of 2023 is that in almost all OECD-countries the results tumbled after the COVID-pandemic. In Austria the results went only slightly down in general, mostly in math, slightly in reading, and remained at the same level in science. The findings also confirm that children with migration background still do worse at school (Strobl, 2023).

## **The Gap between Science and Teaching Practice**

Already in the 1980s a certain hostility between practicing teachers and the university-based scientists was stated by pedagogical experts (e.g. Peter Posch, University of Klagenfurt), and school developers complained that Austria's teachers had century-old experience in resisting requirements that came from "above"/the authorities (Strittmatter). This still seems to be the case. With the introduction of the University Colleges of Teacher Education in 2008 it was hoped that this gap could be made smaller or bridged. Instead, some teachers might be under the impression that the grip of science on them was just fastening. Initial teacher education as well as further education and in-service teacher training must be science-based now and every teacher from elementary school to upper secondary must have a master's degree. Some teachers feel that the "knowledge of practice" is not appreciated any more.

## **Historic Knowledge versus Historic and Civic Competences**

In Austria, there have been repeated reforms of history curricula in recent years. These reforms have had the goal of implementing competence-orientation and content of Citizenship Education. Transmitting lexical historic knowledge is regarded today

as sharing (national) narratives (Kühberger).<sup>27</sup> However, a number of recent research studies have shown that history teachers are either not fully informed about the new curricula or do not fully understand the extent of the change, or do not know how to design learning processes that allow children to become competent. They find it difficult to implement the new standards – or are reluctant to give up on historical narrative, and incorporate the central theoretical principles of the curricula only partially into their teaching practice (Brait, 2022).

## **The Problem of Implementing a New Curriculum/ Modern Didactics vs. Teaching Practice**

Teachers in Austria take a long time to adapt to changes that come from “above”. Even though the teacher training colleges provided a great number of courses on the new curriculum, teaching practice seems to show little change from content orientation to competence orientation, which was the goal of the curriculum reform. Based on 85 qualitative interviews with Austrian history teachers, an unfamiliarity with the theories of the new history didactics is seen. Many history teachers are not aware or informed about the technical terms used in the curricula, and when manifestations of historical culture are considered in history lessons, they are rarely critically examined (Brait, 2022).

In 2014 Christian Pichler (2016) made a survey of 89 history teachers who taught at upper secondary schools in the province of Carinthia. Among other things he showed that most of them did not consider working with sources and historical representations, or the development of methodological competence and it was explained by a lack of time. He found that more than ten years after the FUER competence model was first introduced, many history teachers were still unfamiliar with it, as Roland Bernhard (2019b) documents in his study. Kipman and Kühberger (2019) suggest in their work that most history teachers do not try to develop the orientation competence in their classrooms. For example, 61.7 per cent of the 277 teachers from three federal states surveyed in their study stated that they thought subject-specific competence orientation to be ‘important’ or ‘very important’, but 68.7 per cent of the respondents explained that they had not yet become fully familiar with it (Kipman and Kühberger, 2019: 89–90). Also, the final examinations (Matura) as shown in another work 2018 in Carinthia by Pichler (2020) displayed exam tasks at mostly a factual knowledge level

and examinees only at a competence level that should be achieved at the end of lower secondary (Brait, 2022). An explanation might be the fact that continuous education is not compulsory for teachers and they can attend courses according to their own choice.

## Textbooks vs. Curriculum

The reforms were intended to put an end to the predominant content orientation of teaching (Ammerer, 2009). It must be said that the four competence areas, the FUER competence model (Körper et al., 2007) are only briefly explained in the general part of the subject curriculum with one paragraph each. Maybe with such a change of paradigm one paragraph in a curriculum is not enough to change a complete paradigm of teaching

Teachers in Austria, however, are textbook-oriented rather than curriculum-oriented and textbooks are slow to change. Analyses of state-approved textbooks are already available, and they show that education reforms including competence orientation has only been partially implemented (Bernhard, 2016; Eigler and Kühberger, 2018; Mittnik, 2018; Bramann, 2019; Buchberger, 2020; Brait, 2022). Since Austrian curricula are committed to a critical approach towards historical culture, in addition to a source-based approach, the inclusion of historical representations is necessary to meet state requirements.

So, there is a new and innovative curriculum with a complete change of paradigm and teachers who know very little about it or are reluctant to apply their knowledge. The question for the future will be how to implement this modern curriculum into teaching practice.

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- <sup>25</sup> BMBWF, General Ordinance 2015: Citizenship Education as a Cross-curricular Educational Principle., [Externer Link: [www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:bdb06320-6227-49ee-853c-d06fe8725e39/2015\\_12\\_en.pdf](http://www.bmbwf.gv.at/dam/jcr:bdb06320-6227-49ee-853c-d06fe8725e39/2015_12_en.pdf)] Accessed 30/12/2023
- <sup>7</sup>CEDEFOP, 9.3.2018. Education Reform brings increased autonomy retrieved 8/12/2023 <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news/austria-education-reform-brings-increased-autonomy>
- <sup>15</sup>Eurydice.Network. European commission, official website [www.eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu](http://www.eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu) country report Austria, Key Features of the Education System Austria,; retrieved 10/12/2023 (<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/austria/overview>)
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- <sup>18</sup> Kern, A. (2020). medienimpulse, Jg. 58, Nr. 1, p 4 ff
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- <sup>8</sup>Rechnungshofbericht, Besetzung von Pflichtschulleitungen in der Steiermark Reihe BUND 2021/37
- <sup>11</sup>Bundeskanzleramt: SCHOG, Schulorganisationsgesetz, §2; <https://ris.bka.gv.at>
- <sup>1</sup> Statistics Austria, <https://www.statistik.at/statistiken/bevoelkerung-und-soziales/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsst>, retrieved 4/12/2023
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- <sup>2</sup> Statistik Austria, Februar 2023 Anzahl der Ausländer in Österreich nach den zehn wichtigsten Staatsangehörigkeiten zu Jahresbeginn 2023, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/293019/umfrage/auslaender-in-oesterreich-nach-staatsangehoerigkeit/>
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- <sup>26</sup>Wolf A. (Ed.). 1998. Education in Austria. Der lange Anfang. 20 Jahre ‘Politische Bildung in den Schulen’, Vienna: Sonderzahl Verlag, p. 16. Quoted in Steininger
- <sup>20</sup>Zentrum Polis, Politik lernen, (<https://www.politik-lernen.at/gskpb/faqs>) access 7/12/2023

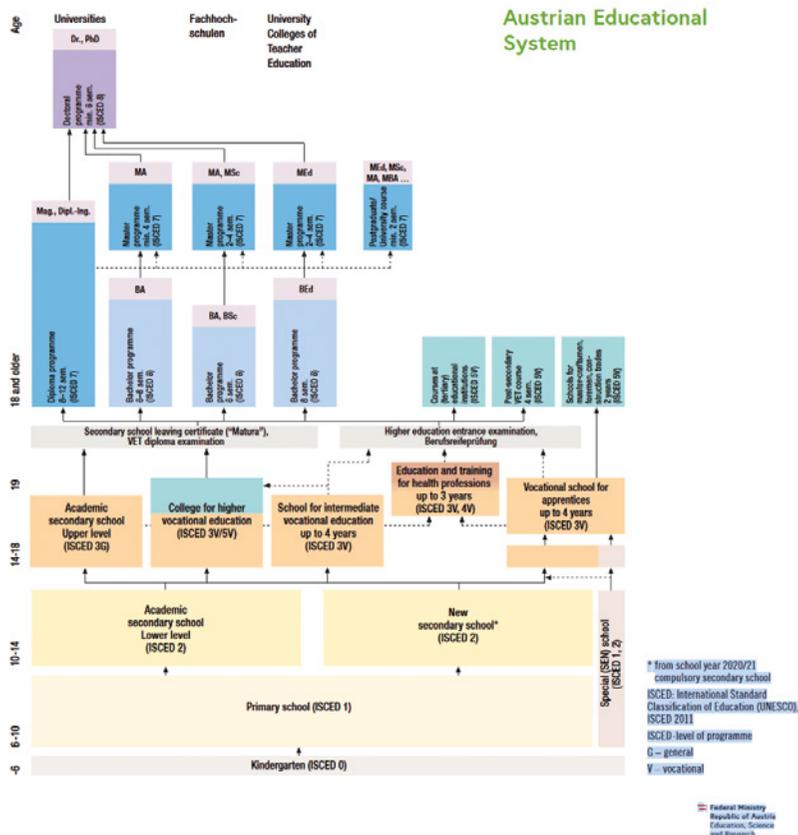
<sup>19</sup>Zentrum Polis, FaQs: <https://www.politik-lernen.at/site/grundlagen/politischebildung/haeufiggestelltefragen>, access 6/12/2023

<sup>21</sup>Zentrum Polis, Politik lernen. Fragen zum Kompetenzmodell Politische Bildung, [www.politiklernen.at/site/grundlagen/politischebildung/haeufiggestelltefragen/article/105727.html](http://www.politiklernen.at/site/grundlagen/politischebildung/haeufiggestelltefragen/article/105727.html)] Access: 30/12/2023.

## Annex

Schoolbooks are partly available as digital documents. Schoolbooks for the new curriculum in History and Social Studies and Citizenship Education were published by the following Publishers (in alphabetical order): Bildungsverlag Lemberger Österreichischer Bundesverlag, Hölzel, Jugend & Volk, Manz Verlag, Olympe Verlag, Trauner Verlag, Veritas and Westermann.

II. Table 1: Overview of Austrian School System, Statistics in a Pocket<sup>2</sup>



# History and Civic Education in Serbia

Ana Radaković

## Abstract

*This paper offers an in-depth exploration of the Serbian education system, with a primary focus on teaching History and Civic Education. By examining official documents governing curriculum and instructional practices, alongside insights from educators gathered through various inquiries, the paper aims to elucidate the challenges and perspectives within Serbia's educational landscape.*

*With a particular emphasis on teachers' experiences, the paper delves into structural constraints, pedagogical dilemmas, and socio-political dynamics impacting History and Civic Education instruction. By identifying key challenges and proposing avenues for teacher support and professional development, this paper seeks to improve quality and equity in Serbian schools.*

*Keywords:* History teaching, Civic Education, education system, teachers

## The Serbian education system

The educational system of the Republic of Serbia is divided into primary and secondary education. Primary education is both mandatory and accessible to all residents of the country. It spans eight years, comprising eight years of primary school and several months of preparation before entering the first grade, known as mandatory preparatory courses.<sup>1</sup> This educational cycle culminates in a national examination known as the "mala matura" (the junior baccalaureate, state national exam). This examination is compulsory; pupils must pass it to complete the first education cycle. Depending on the average academic results obtained during primary school and the results achieved in the "mala matura," pupils can apply to continue their studies. Secondary education lasts for three or four years. High schools have a four-year duration and offer students

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<sup>1</sup> Before commencing primary school, children are required to spend several months in a preschool institution (which may be integrated into the primary school or exist as a separate institution) where they prepare for the first grade. Although formal primary school education spans eight years, due to the period spent in these preparatory courses, it can be considered to extend beyond this duration.

three tracks: social sciences and languages, natural sciences and mathematics, as well as a general orientation. Meanwhile, vocational high schools can last three or four years and provide a wide range of educational profiles. The prerequisite for pursuing higher education is the completion of a four-year secondary education. The entire educational system in the Republic of Serbia is regulated by the Fundamental Law on the Education System of 2017.

The Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development is the principal executive body in the field of education in the Republic of Serbia. However, since 2005, the main technical tasks have been entrusted to two educational institutes composed of numerous experts, including university professors, researchers, and experienced teachers. The Institute for the Improvement of Education is responsible for preparing curriculum plans and programs, approving textbooks, and providing professional development for teachers. The second institute, the Institute for the Evaluation of Education Quality, is tasked with developing educational performance standards and preparing tests for the national primary school leaving examination (*mala matura* or the junior baccalaureate) and soon for the national secondary school leaving examination (*velika matura* or the baccalaureate). Regarding textbooks in all subjects, they must adhere to prescribed curricula. The textbook market has been open to private publishing houses since 2003, and there are now several textbooks for each level in the same subject. If a textbook meets the required standards and is approved by the Institute for the Improvement of Education, it is brought to market. It is solely the responsibility of the teachers to select the textbook used in the classroom.

The majority of primary and secondary schools are public. The results of the research conducted by the Republic Institute for Statistics in 2022 show that there are 454 public and 67 other secondary schools in Serbia (Republic Institute for Statistics 2022), so the ratio is 87:13. Furthermore, the right to have education in their mother tongue is guaranteed to all national minorities living in the Republic of Serbia by the Constitution (2006). The Fundamental Law on the Education System from 2017 also prescribes the following – “The program of primary and secondary education for members of national minorities on the proposal of the National Minority Council and the opinion of the National Education Council, is adopted by the Minister” (Službeni glasnik RS 2017, article 67), as well as the Law on Textbooks from 2018 where it is stated that all national minorities should have textbooks in their native languages (Službeni glasnik RS 2018, articles 5, 11, and 12).

## History teaching in Serbia

### *General information*

The subject of History holds the status of compulsory education both in primary schools and in various types of secondary schools. In primary school, history is taught in the upper grades (from fifth to eighth year). In high schools, it is studied for four years in general and social-linguistic tracks, for three years in scientific and mathematical tracks, and one or two years in vocational secondary schools. Many history teachers in high schools often supplement their mandatory curriculum with optional subjects such as Civic Education (which they may teach at the primary school level), Language, Media and Culture, Individual, Group and Society, Foundations of Geopolitics, Religions, and Civilizations. Furthermore, Serbian history, from medieval times to the contemporary state, is also studied as part of the Nature and Society subject in the fourth year of primary school.

In 2019, a decision was made at the national level to create specialized classes for students with particular aptitudes in geography and history in several high schools across Serbia. According to the plan and curriculum established for students in these classes, 539 hours of history per year are provided, along with 107 hours of basic geopolitics (which is not an optional subject for them) and 74 hours of language, media, and communication subjects. It is noteworthy that, according to the official announcement from the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia, the objective of these classes is to “prepare students for more effective studies in the fields of social sciences and humanities, as well as those studying the impact of man on nature and the impact of nature on the human community, without preventing them from accessing study programs in similar or completely different fields” (Ministry of Education 2019).

The structure of the school curricula for all subjects in primary and secondary schools is defined by the framework of the Fundamental Law on the Education System. The curricula are in accordance with the general framework of education in the Republic of Serbia, including objectives, outcomes, and educational principles. They are also aligned with both general and specific competencies (in high schools) as well as student performance standards for each education cycle. History programs include the following

elements: 1. In the introductory part: specific competencies and performance standards; 2. The subject's objective; 3. The domains and themes studied in that class; 4. Key concepts of the content; 5. Educational outcomes at the class level; 6. Instructions for the didactic and methodological implementation of the program, including planning and implementation of teaching and learning, as well as assessment and monitoring of teaching and learning (Prosvetni glasnik RS 2020).

In addition to the prescribed curricula, teaching history in Serbian schools is primarily defined by student performance standards for each education cycle (primary and secondary). According to those of primary school, questions are formulated for the combined examination for the primary school leaving diploma,<sup>2</sup> while those of secondary school will be used for the examination for the secondary school leaving diploma, and the implementation is planned in the next two years. Student performance standards represent the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities students must possess at the end of a given education cycle. There are three levels of performance: 1. Basic, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, and abilities that 80% of students can master; 2. Intermediate, which can be achieved by 50% of students; and 3. Advanced, which expects the participation of 20 to 25% of students. The standards, both for primary and secondary school, are divided into domains. For primary school, there are two domains: historical knowledge and historical research and interpretation; while for secondary school, a third domain, the historical foundations of contemporary society, is added to the second domain which also includes presentation (Institute for the Evaluation of Education Quality 2010, 2015).

Concerning history textbooks, the Institute for the Improvement of Education assumes responsibility for assessing their quality and endorsing them to the Ministry of Education, which subsequently compiles a catalog of approved materials for the following school year (Službeni glasnik RS 2018, articles 24-30).<sup>3</sup> Solely those materials sanctioned and licensed by educational authorities are eligible for inclusion.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, supplementary teaching materials and digital resources remain beyond official over-

<sup>2</sup> The primary school leaving diploma examination (the junior baccalaureate) consists of three tests: the native language, mathematics, and one elective, in which students choose a school subject — biology, history, geography, physics, or chemistry.

<sup>3</sup> On the Institute for Improvement of Education website, there is a list of all approved textbooks. <https://zuov.gov.rs/baza-udzbenika-i-nastavnih-sredstava/#1553601043059-9f7d4633-9ebe>

<sup>4</sup> These are the publishers whose textbooks are mostly used in history classes: KLETT, DATA LOGOS, АРХИКЊИГА (Arhiknjiga), ВУКЛАН издаваштво (Vulkan izdavaštvo), ЕДУКА (Eduka), БИГЗ школство (Bigz školstvo), НОВИ ЛОГОС (Novi logos), ФРЕСКА (Freska), ЗАВОД ЗА УЏБЕНИКЕ (Zavod za udzbenike) - the only state-owned publishing house.

sight. As outlined in the Ohte General Report of 2023, Serbian educational standards dictate the obligatory utilization of history textbooks in conjunction with primary documentary and visual sources, such as paintings, photographs, and illustrations. Additionally, pedagogical encouragement extends to the incorporation of artefacts, audio recordings, audiovisual presentations, oral testimonies, cinematic works, and historical documentaries, alongside historiographical references, literary works (including historical narratives and graphic novels), local cultural heritage exhibitions, museums, regional customs, and traditions. However, video games, historical applications designed for tablets and smartphones, and printed or digital media featuring historical narratives in popular periodicals are allowed within instructional contexts (Ohte 2023).

Upon completion of elementary school, as stated in the introductory segment, students are expected to undertake the initial state national examination, commonly referred to as “mala matura,” to advance to secondary education. These culmination assessments are conducted in written format and encompass inquiries about history. Question formulation adheres to predetermined educational standards aligned with pupils’ proficiency in history at the primary school level, evaluating historical content comprehension and critical historical thinking capabilities, including the critical analysis and validation of evidence, formulation and justification of historical arguments, and considering diverse perspectives. Assessments encompass a variety of question types, spanning open-ended, close-ended, source-based, and multiple-choice formats. Education authorities also require other kinds of assessments during the school year, such as essays, oral presentations/exams, written reports, and research projects (Ohte 2023).

### ***Objectives, methods, and approaches***

According to the primary school curriculum, the objective of the History course is “to lead the student, through the study of historical events, phenomena, processes, and personalities, to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the contemporary world, develop critical thinking skills, and adopt a responsible attitude towards oneself, one’s personal and national identity, cultural and historical heritage, society, and the state in which one lives (Prosvetni glasnik RS 2019, 118).” Similar definitions are found in high school programs, with the addition of “developing a responsible attitude towards respecting human rights and cultural differences (Prosvetni glasnik RS 2020, 75, 96, 296-298, 524-532).”

In addition to the officially assigned objective of teaching history in the schools of the Republic of Serbia, this discipline is part of an informal group called “national importance school subjects” alongside the following subjects: mother tongue (Serbian), as well as literature, geography, music, and visual arts. On the official website of the Institute for the Improvement of Education, which serves as the main source of information for teachers and anyone wishing to follow or participate in the educational process, there is a special section dedicated to “Educational Resources for the Preservation of Serbian People’s Culture and the Development of National Identity,” where history course resources are placed in the forefront. It is worth noting that no similar section is dedicated to preserving the culture and identity of national minorities living in Serbia.<sup>5</sup>

According to the prescribed curriculum, history courses are structured chronologically, thematically, and through a competency-based framework (OHE 2023). While elementary school history courses adhere predominantly to a chronological approach, modifications have been introduced in secondary school history education. In 2018, a curriculum overhaul for history subjects was initiated across all high school programs. Although officially finalized in 2020, its implementation remains ongoing, with its comprehensive impact anticipated to materialize during the preparation and culmination of the secondary school leaving diploma (the baccalaureate). With the introduction of student performance standards within the educational framework of the Republic of Serbia, this reform marks the most substantial alterations in the methodology of history instruction since its inception as a subject in Serbian educational institutions.

In accordance with this reform, the revised high school history curriculum is envisioned to be founded upon specific skills, alongside fostering lifelong learning competences and promoting competences for a democratic culture (Council of Europe, 2016). Given Serbia’s characterization as a post-conflict society, these proficiencies, coupled with the Council of Europe’s recommendations for history education in conflict and post-conflict settings (2008), advocating for intercultural dialogue and the nuanced portrayal of “the other” in historical pedagogy (2011), in addition to the principles and directives for quality history instruction in the 21st century (2018), serve as the bedrock of the updated curricular frameworks (Marić & Jovanović 2017).

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<sup>5</sup> The official website of the Institute for the Improvement of Education <https://zuov.gov.rs/nacionalni-resursi/>

In addition to prioritizing the cultivation of the aforementioned proficiencies, the revised curricula have shifted emphasis from mere content delivery to tangible educational outcomes, emphasizing what students are expected to comprehend and accomplish by the conclusion of each academic year. This transition has been practically facilitated through the integration of secondary key concepts (per Stradling 2001) or concepts of historical thinking (as outlined by Seixas & Morton, 2013) within the curriculum. These conceptual frameworks mirror the methodological rigor inherent in historical inquiry and acquaint students with the intricate processes involved in historical research and reconstruction. While Robert Stradling delineates these secondary concepts as continuity and change, causality, chronology, comparison, and evidence, Peter Seixas and Tim Morton conceptualize them slightly differently as elements of historical thinking, encompassing the establishment of relevance, utilization of primary historical sources, identification of continuities and changes, analysis of causal relationships, negotiation of divergent historical perspectives, and discernment of the ethical dimensions underlying historical events and constructs. Consequently, the principle of multi-perspectivity has been systematically integrated into the revised curricular paradigms.

Education experts affiliated with the Institute for the Improvement of Education have adeptly assimilated these innovations by introducing a thematic approach to history instruction within high school settings. Under this framework, each academic year revolves around the exploration of a singular thematic axis, representative of a protracted historical process or phenomenon manifest across diverse historical epochs. This pedagogical approach necessitates educators and students to traverse disparate historical periods annually, facilitating comprehensive readiness for the history baccalaureate examination.<sup>6</sup> The amalgamation of chronological and thematic approaches not only endows teachers with enhanced autonomy in course design but also affords opportunities for applying project-based pedagogical strategies, teaching outside the classroom, and combining multiple themes and different lessons (Šuica & Radaković, 2020)

### ***Content of the history programs and textbooks***

The previous discussion focused on gradually introducing a thematic approach to history education in certain forms of secondary education, but it is pertinent to commence with primary education. History is strictly taught chronologically in the upper classes of

<sup>6</sup> The researchers were of the opinion that the previous curriculum, which involved studying a different historical period each year, led to a situation where students remembered little of what they had learned in previous years by the end of the fourth year.

primary school, with lessons organized around teaching themes (broader chronological periods) and teaching units (more specific lessons within teaching themes). In the fifth year, which marks the first year of history study, the period from prehistory to the fall of the Western Roman Empire and the arrival of new peoples in its territory is addressed. Emphasis is primarily placed on the states, political systems, and society of antiquity. In the sixth year, representing the second year of history study, the focus shifts to the history of the Middle Ages, particularly the history of the Middle Ages in countries inhabited by Serbs. Chronologically, this period culminates in the history of the Serbian people in the early modern era, specifically the Ottoman conquest and life in the Ottoman Empire. While the rest of Europe and Mediterranean countries are also discussed, these lessons are much shorter and highly fragmented, often leading to inadequate understanding of unique historical events and processes that influenced the Serbian population and other peoples. Similar trends can be observed in the seventh and eighth years. In the seventh year, marking the third year of history study, lessons commence with monarchies and European sovereigns. Subsequently, social and political revolutions that characterized the early modern period in Europe are addressed. However, most textbook pages are dedicated to uprisings and struggles for the liberation of the Serbian people from Ottoman rule.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the 2018/2019 school year, there was a shift in the chronological boundary between the seventh and eighth years. The former boundary, which was set at lessons on the Congress of Berlin and the independence of the modern Serbian state (1878), was moved to the First World War (1914-1918). The rationale for this significant change in content was to allow more time and space to study Yugoslavia's dissolution and the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s in the eighth year. This subject is considered extremely delicate and controversial, prompting policymakers in education and experts from the Institute for the Improvement of Education to deem its effective inclusion in the curriculum necessary.

Regarding the content of history education in high schools, this depends on the type of school and the number of years in which history is taught as a compulsory subject. In vocational high schools, where education lasts only one or two years, the content

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<sup>7</sup> These are some of the textbooks currently in use in the 7th grade of the elementary school: Milivojević, U, Lučić, V. & Pavlović, Z. (2020). *ISTORIJA 7. Udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za sedmi razred osnovne škole*. Beograd, BIGZ školstvo; and S. & Leovac, D. (2020). *ISTORIJA. Udžbenik sa odabranim istorijskim izvorima za sedmi razred osnovne škole*. Beograd: Freska.

mainly focuses on the history of the territory of the contemporary Serbian state and the Serbian nation, thus emphasizing the learning of national history. Conversely, there have been slight changes in general high schools in the past five years. The content continues to be distributed chronologically across the years, but each year introduces the study of a long-term historical phenomenon across different epochs. Each of these themes carries contemporary significance that can be recognized and analyzed in a daily context, thereby contributing to the implementation of historical thinking concepts in teaching.

According to the official curricula for high school (Prosvetni glasnik RS 2020), the theme is “Migrations” in the first year. Emphasis is placed on the historical dimension, causes, and consequences of migrations from prehistory to the present day, with a focus on major migratory waves, including those involving the Serbian nation. The second year’s theme is titled “Myth, Legend, and History as a Scientific Discipline” and is studied to understand and distinguish the boundary between history and pseudo-history, between past reconstruction based on methodological principles and the manipulation or abuse of the past. This entails the significance and role of myths and legends in the past and their influence on historical phenomena and processes. The third year addresses the theme “Communication - Then and Now” and examines the historical context and importance of communications for individual and social needs in the past. This theme discusses intercultural relations, geopolitical, economic, and ecological consequences of changes in communication modes, from ancient times to the present. Finally, in the fourth year, the theme is “Individual and Group Rights - Then and Now.” The main objective of this theme is to raise students’ awareness of the rights of individuals and groups in different historical periods, focusing on the development of human rights from the 19th century to the present.

Each theme seamlessly integrates with the chronological period intended to be studied that year, namely the history of the 20th century and the learning of human rights violations, discrimination, and struggles for the rights of different groups and their protection. The chronological division of content per year is quite similar to that of primary school. It is important to mention that the history curriculum differs considerably in specialized high schools for students with particular aptitudes in geography and history. In addition to having an extra hour of class devoted to the analysis of age-appropriate historical sources and the historical period studied, the thematic approach is absent. In July 2020, the National Education Council, the body responsible for adopting curriculum

programs previously prepared and proposed by the Institute for the Improvement of Education, established an entirely new commission tasked with revising history education for these classes. This commission, composed of historians with little or no prior experience in writing educational documents and materials, developed a strategic document that provides guidance for these programs and is entirely contrary to the idea outlined in the curriculum reform. The thematic approach was abandoned, historical thinking concepts were neglected, and the content was enriched with a greater amount of information (names, toponyms, facts) compared to regular high school classes.<sup>8</sup>

## Teachers

History educators, both in primary and secondary education settings, undergo specialized training tailored specifically for the teaching of history. This training is offered within the history departments of universities located in Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Kosovska Mitrovica, where prospective history educators enroll in a comprehensive initial teaching program. This program spans two academic years, encompassing both bachelor's and master's levels of study. In addition to core history courses, aspiring educators are mandated to accrue credits in pedagogy, didactics, psychology, and methodology, alongside completing a practicum in a school environment to gain practical teaching experience. Participation in continuing professional development courses is obligatory, with several accredited programs available through various educational stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, university faculties, non-governmental organizations, history teachers' associations, and the Institute for the Improvement of Education. These courses cover diverse topics, including Jewish culture and history, antisemitism, multiperspectivity, the modern history of southeastern Europe, and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. Feedback from educators surveyed by the Observatory on History Teaching in Europe reveals three primary areas of professional development in high demand: national history studies, European and global history studies, and the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) with innovative teaching resources (OHE 2023).

<sup>8</sup> *The Guidelines for the development of curricula for subject history for special classes* (Смернице за израду програма nastave и учења за предмет историја у специјализованом смеру гимназије за ученике са посебним способностима за историју и географију) are not dated but the text of the document contains the date of the session of National Educational Council (16.07.2022) which adopted the alternated history curricula for the specialized class and the number of the note to the Ministry about the positive decision (612-00-00009/46/2020-07

In contrast, the landscape for civic education teachers presents some nuances. In primary education, educators may come from various academic backgrounds, including pedagogy, psychology, philology, social work, or disciplines such as history, geography, or literature (Prosvetni glasnik RS 2012, 2013). At the secondary level, instructors of Civic Education may also teach other subjects within that educational tier. The principal prerequisite for teaching at both levels is the completion of the prescribed training program for Civic Education educators, aligned with regulations governing the continuous professional development and qualification of educators and professional associates. Alternatively, candidates may have completed specialized training programs such as those for Civic Education teachers, interactive training or teamwork sessions, courses on child development, communication skills, active learning methodologies, non-violence education, fostering empathy and inclusion, promoting critical thinking skills, educating on children's rights, facilitating debate clubs, ensuring child safety, addressing issues of child abuse and neglect, or promoting holistic well-being (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2022).

## **Civic education in Serbia**

### ***General information***

Civic Education is an obligatory elective subject in both primary and secondary educational systems, requiring students to choose between Civic Education and Religious Studies courses. Once selected, students commit to their chosen subject for the entire duration of their academic trajectory, leading to a potential 12-year instruction in Civic Education with an average of 35 to 37 classes per year.

The overarching educational objective of Civic Education, consistent across elementary and high school levels as outlined in the curriculum, aims to cultivate in students an understanding of their rights and responsibilities, sensitivity towards individual and communal needs, and readiness for active societal participation while upholding democratic values (Prosvetni glasnik RS 2019, Prosvetni glasnik RS 2020).

A distinctive feature of Civic Education is its integration within the broader education framework for democracy and civil society. Consequently, it establishes connections with other academic disciplines, extracurricular activities, and the overall ethos of the educational institution. In the instructional planning process, educators are primarily guided by desired learning outcomes for pupils. Activities designed for both teachers

and pupils are versatile, allowing for multiple applications. For example, various activities across different subject matter areas can contribute to the attainment of outcomes related to communication skills, empathy, and sensitivity to diversity.

Achieving the stipulated outcomes requires the utilization of diverse interactive teaching methods and techniques. Teachers can employ a range of strategies, such as workshops, simulations, role-playing, case studies, debates, discussions, projects, research assignments, and presentations. The assessment of Civic Education programs emphasizes the significance of products created by pupils, including posters, audio-visual materials, research presentations, and performances. These products serve not only as tools for content integration and pupil evaluation but also as platforms for self-assessment and public display within the school community and beyond.

While the program is descriptively evaluated, ongoing monitoring of pupil progress is imperative. Progress assessment begins with an initial evaluation of individual pupil proficiency levels, against which subsequent advancements are measured. Each instructional activity provides an opportunity for assessment and feedback, empowering students to evaluate their own progress towards achieving subject-specific objectives, as well as that of their peers.

Civic Education courses offer an exceptional environment for fostering self-reflection and promoting self-regulated learning processes. Key indicators of progress within this elective program include an increasingly precise utilization of democratic terminology, the articulation of opinions through reasoned argumentation, non-violent communication, acceptance of diversity, demonstration of empathy, initiative, and cooperative engagement. In the school leaving examination, there is no provision for a test in Civic Education, and there is no final assessment for this school subject. The Law regulates textbooks for Civic Education in primary and secondary schools on textbooks (Službeni glasnik RS, 2018).

### ***Content***

When discussing the curriculum content of Civic Education programs, elementary school curricula typically delineate four primary topics, while secondary school curricula organize content into two overarching themes. Over the span of twelve years of instruction in these courses, a multitude of issues are addressed. For instance, in the seventh grade of primary school, emphasis is placed on elucidating the operation and

hierarchical levels of the national legal system, alongside an exploration of the organizational structure and key stakeholders within the national political system. Under the rubric of “democratic society”, pivotal topics encompass lessons on political pluralism within a multi-party system, including examinations of governing and oppositional political parties, the mandates and functions of the National Assembly and its members, parliamentary factions, as well as the dynamics of parliamentary debates and legislative processes (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2019).

Moreover, “active citizenship” emerges as a central focus in the fifth-grade curriculum, wherein pupils are indirectly instructed on the principles of active citizenship. Through this curriculum, students are tasked with planning and executing school-based initiatives to promote children’s rights. This process entails several procedural steps, including problem identification, solution exploration, action plan development, analysis of potential outcomes, implementation and assessment of actions taken, and the collective reflection and evaluation of group efforts (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2018).

Integral to Civic Education programs are themes of political engagement and activism. In the third year of high school, prescribed topics and subtopics such as “human rights”, “citizens and democracy”, and “peace and threats to peace” are examined. Here, students delve into the characteristics and evolution of human rights, civic solidarity, volunteerism, anti-war civil activism, peace as a fundamental human right, and the multifaceted challenges and threats to global peace. Additionally, the curriculum addresses environmental concerns and sustainable development, digital citizenship, and the cultivation of digital literacy skills (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2020).

In the fourth year of secondary education, a key topic pertains to “the right to healthy environment”. This section explores the foundational values underpinning the right to reside in a healthy environment, the trajectory of sustainable development initiatives until 2030, the incorporation of sustainable development principles into national legislation and policy frameworks, individual and collective responsibilities for environmental degradation, and citizen engagement in environmental conservation efforts and animal welfare advocacy (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2020).

In the sixth grade of primary school, thematic instruction revolves around “processes in the contemporary world”, encompassing lessons on the responsible use of the internet and mobile technology, the impact of social media platforms on individual cognition and behaviour, and the perils associated with digital violence and violations of children’s

rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Pupils are also educated on appropriate responses to instances of digital violence, alongside their personal and institutional responsibilities within the school environment (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2018).

Furthermore, the curricula underscore the significance of global and supranational citizenship. Topics broach the subject of globalization, with an emphasis on the economic dimensions of globalization juxtaposed against social and political rights, as well as the intricate interplay between globalization and the actualization of human rights. Students also familiarize themselves with international organizations, their mandates, and their contributions to the interconnected global landscape. It is noteworthy that the Civic Education curriculum does not explicitly articulate aims related to the cultivation of national identity or the promotion of patriotism or homeland defense (Prosvetni glasnik RS, 2018).

## Challenges

Respondents participating in the OHTE survey identified several technical challenges encountered in history teaching. These challenges include constraints related to time allocation within the curriculum, an overloaded curriculum, and large class sizes, with an average of 30 pupils per class (OHTE 2023).

In a related initiative, the EuroClio project ePACT conducted a survey in 2016 and 2017 among history teachers in post-Yugoslav states, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The survey aimed to gather insights on various aspects of history education, including initial teacher training, curricula and textbooks, employment procedures, professional development, school environment, and teaching practices, particularly regarding controversial topics. Findings from the survey revealed that while most teachers perceive initial teacher training as valuable, they note a lack of pedagogical, didactical, and practice-oriented courses. History teachers expressed a desire for more comprehensive training in these areas. Moreover, they highlighted concerns about the transparency of employment procedures and their limited participation in significant educational processes and changes. Teachers advocated for greater democracy within schools and increased involvement of teachers in decision-making processes, which could lead to more informed educational policies and foster a sense of ownership among educators (Marić & Jovanović, 2017).

Regarding teaching sensitive and controversial historical issues, the survey indicated that dominant national discourses often prevail, perpetuating narratives of victimhood and ethnic biases. Teachers emphasized the importance of including minority perspectives in the historical narrative, particularly regarding the conflicts of the 1990s and the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Jovanović & Marić, 2020).

Subsequently, in December 2021, a research project conducted within the EuroClio initiative Learning History that is not yet History II focused on creating educational resources for teaching the recent history of the Western Balkans. This project aimed to address the challenges faced by history teachers in the region and ensure that educational materials met their needs. Teachers identified several obstacles, including social challenges related to community narratives and student emotions, structural challenges such as inadequate support from authorities and deficiencies in curricula and textbooks, and personal challenges, including gaps in factual knowledge and concerns about managing emotions, both their own and those of their students (Radaković & Savitsky, 2022).

In the realm of Civic Education, challenges persist at a technical level. Various initiatives, both from within the teaching profession and civil society, continue to address these challenges, with a focus on systemic support for civic education. Proposals for improvement include advocating for the subject's recognition and compulsory status within the education ministry, as well as establishing grading systems to evaluate learning outcomes effectively (Civic Initiatives, 2019).

## Conclusion

In terms of educational objectives and content, both History and Civic Education instruction in Serbia have made notable strides towards incorporating competencies essential for lifelong learning and democratic engagement, as well as addressing topics that prompt critical examination of pupils' opinions, attitudes, and perspectives. There has been an improvement in the inclusion of historical sources, as well as the integration of European and world history into history lessons, and discussions on globalization and international organizations in civic education curricula. However, despite these advancements, Eurocentric and primarily national viewpoints continue to dominate. While the concept of multiple perspectives is introduced, it often remains superficial in implementation.

When considering the role of teachers, although the latest curricula reforms provide significant autonomy; various analyses indicate a lack of institutional support, recognition, and visibility for educators. Training emerges as a crucial need, encompassing diverse aspects to enhance teaching effectiveness. Priority areas for teacher training include strategies for managing strong emotions in the classroom, such as conflict de-escalation techniques, and addressing extremist views when they arise. Additionally, training on employing a multiperspective approach to teaching, particularly in discussing contentious historical or social issues, is essential. Moreover, educators would benefit from instruction on media literacy to equip students with skills to critically analyze information sources, question their authority and bias, and formulate informed opinions based on a range of perspectives. Such training equips teachers with fundamental tools to navigate potentially challenging situations and effectively engage with diverse viewpoints in the classroom.

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# History and civic education in Turkey

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## Abstract

The contemporary era has witnessed a remarkable expansion in the accessibility of information, including historical data. This ease of access to information has not only transformed the landscape of history education but also influenced the broader field of education. Since the advent of the 20th century, the evolving understanding of history has profoundly impacted the discipline, initially challenging the narrow perception of history as solely political and subsequently prompting the incorporation of methodological concepts beyond the basic tenets. These methodological concepts can be expressed as historical thinking skills. Upon examination of the basic documents related to history teaching in Turkey, it becomes evident that historical thinking skills are strongly emphasized. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the practical implementation of these skills. The primary link between history education and citizenship education in Turkey is the development of individuals who are capable of critical thinking and questioning. Citizenship education, on the other hand, is largely left to the discretion of the social studies course. In Turkey, where the education system is highly centralized, the same history curriculum is used throughout the country. In addition to the curriculum, textbooks are also determined by the Ministry of National Education. Although history education begins in the eighth grade of secondary school, it is mainly taught in high school. The fact that history-related questions are included in both high school entrance exams and university entrance exams demonstrates the importance of this course. History is taught with a hybrid approach, integrating both thematic and chronological methodologies. This pedagogical approach reflects the inherent tension between the teaching of historical content and the development of critical thinking skills, which is a significant challenge in the context of history education in Turkey.

*Keywords:* Turkish education system, History education, Citizenship education

## Introduction

Turkey is a country located in western Asia and eastern Europe, with borders to Bulgaria and Greece to the west, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran to the east, and Iraq and Syria to the south. The country encompasses territories in both Asia and Europe. According to 2023 data, the population of Turkey is just over 85 million (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024a). The 0-17 age group constitutes 26 percent of the total population (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024b). Despite the country's continued population growth, Turkey's population growth rate has been on a steady decline. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute (2024c), the population growth rate was 1.1 per thousand in 2023. In 2023, 93% of the Turkish population resided in provincial and district centers, while 7% lived in towns and villages.

## Structure of The Turkish National Education System

The Turkish education system has a centralized structure organized at national level. Not only public schools, but also private schools must operate according to the Basic Law on National Education and the regulations issued by the Ministry of National Education. First of all, no educational institution can be opened without the permission of the Ministry of National Education (Regulation of the Ministry, 2017). The Ministry of National Education determines the courses to be taught in all educational institutions, including schools, and the curricula are also prepared by the Ministry (Regulation on the Board of Education, 2022). All public-school teachers are civil servants. The Ministry of National Education decides which teacher will work where. The Ministry of National Education has directorates in each province and district center. The main task of these directorates is to ensure that the system runs smoothly throughout the country. Decisions made centrally by the Ministry are implemented unchanged throughout the country under the supervision of the provincial and district directorates. There is also a hierarchical relationship between the provincial and district directorates. Provincial directorates have the authority to make minor adjustments to local needs throughout the province, and the district directorates do so within the district. Teachers' salaries, school maintenance and repairs, and any other conceivable needs are met by the

central government (Basic Law of National Education, 1973). The duration of a lesson in secondary schools is 40 minutes. Rest periods between classes are determined by the school administration.

The Turkish education system starts with a non-compulsory kindergarten education. This is followed by 12 years of compulsory education. Students study for 4 years in primary school, 4 years in middle school and 4 years in high school in this education system. Students who have completed primary education attend general or religious middle schools, and students who have completed middle schools attend vocational high schools, general high schools known as Anatolian high schools, science high schools and social science high schools, depending on the results of their exams. Apart from these high schools, there are also art and sports high schools, which are attended by very few students according to the General Directorate of Upper Secondary Education (2021).

## **The place of history teaching in the Turkish National School System**

Although students are exposed to historical content in “Knowledge of Life” and “Social Studies” courses from primary school, the first course they take under the name of “history” is “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism” in grade 8 (ISCED level 2) in middle school (Ministry of National Education, 2021). In high schools, history is a compulsory subject in all high schools in grades 9, 10 and 11 (ISCED level 3). The history of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism is also reintroduced as a compulsory subject in grade 12 in all high schools, with a more comprehensive content than in grade 8.

General high schools, where the majority of students are enrolled, also offer elective history courses. In Anatolian and Science high schools, “Contemporary Turkish and World History” and “Turkish Culture and Civilization” are elective history courses. These courses are compulsory in social science high schools (General Directorate of Upper Secondary Education, 2021). However, in order to limit the content of this article, the curricula of these courses will not be discussed here, but only the ones of the history courses (9th, 10th, and 11th grades) and the history of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism courses, which are common compulsory courses taken by all students.

## Structure and Content Selection in the History Curriculum

The first issue to be addressed regarding the structure of the history curriculum is to determine whether it is chronological or thematic in nature. According to the statement in the curriculum, “Chronological and thematic approaches were taken together in the preparation of the History Curriculum” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b: 8). This approach was used in most, if not all, parts of the curriculum. First of all, it is clear that the curriculum focuses on chronology. The curriculum begins with the prehistoric period and ends with the ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary periods. This is a clear indication of the attention given to chronology. On the other hand, there is an attempt to study some topics within these periods. For example, when dealing with the Middle Ages, agriculture and trade, the lifestyles of societies and law in the Middle Ages are dealt with separately (Ministry of National Education, 2023b: p.21). It should be noted, however, that the thematic approach integrated into the curriculum is still in its infancy. For example, a separate treatment of foundations in Ottoman society could be seen as a theme within the chronology. However, for a complete thematic approach, foundations would have to be considered as institutions operating from the past to the present, and certainly during the Ottoman period. This concept could have been used as a scaffolding from which a window could have been opened on all historical topics from the Middle Ages onwards. However, due to the dominant chronological tradition and the sense of responsibility to educate citizens, i.e. to create a national identity, this does not seem to have happened. In summary, it would be appropriate to characterize the history curriculum as a chronological curriculum that has been given a thematic appearance from time to time.

The curriculum consists mainly of political history. However, social and cultural history is also given ample space. The curriculum tries to avoid teaching about wars, peace and political conflicts as much as possible. However, it is believed that they could not fully realize this due to the established tradition. While historical thinking skills are emphasized in the explanations section of the curriculum, it is unclear how to gain these skills in the achievements section (Şimşek, 2016). Moreover, the period covered is so long and the geography so wide that it seems impossible to give less space to political history.

Some selected examples of how social and cultural history is incorporated into the curriculum are listed below:

Students will be able to:

- Explain the changes in human history brought about by the invention of writing.
- Analyze the socio-cultural impact of the Turkish migrations to Anatolia.
- Analyze the activities of science, culture, arts and crafts in Ottoman geography and the resulting changes in social life (Ministry of National Education, 2023b).

Other social science disciplines have been used in the curriculum where appropriate. Many outcomes in the curriculum require an interdisciplinary approach. Some of these outcomes are presented below as examples.

Students will be able to:

- Analyze the critical impact of geography and climate on the lives and livelihoods of people in the First Ages
  - Relate the sources of political power in the early period to the forms of political administration.
  - Explain the religious and human sources that were effective in the formation of early legal systems. (Ministry of National Education, 2023b).

## **Central Control Over the Historical Content**

The history curriculum published by the Ministry of National Education clearly and precisely states what teachers should teach. It is not possible for teachers to go beyond this curriculum. Not only are the topics to be taught given in general terms, but the way in which these topics are to be treated is also described. For example, in the 11th grade curriculum, students are asked to “analyze the efforts to prevent the dissolution of the Ottoman state administration and social order”(Ministry of National Education, 2023b p.33). But it does not stop there; it also describes how this analysis should be done. The only freedom given to the teacher is to choose the appropriate teaching method.

When we look at the issue of having a detailed list of compulsory dates, characters, topographical items in the curriculum, we see that the curriculum makers were very pragmatic. If the curriculum writers had aimed to teach a detailed list of people, events, dates, or places, they would have contradicted their own philosophy. For they them-

selves stated that the focus of the curriculum was to teach historical thinking skills. On the other hand, the fact that the events, people, and dates of the previous curriculum were not included in this document could also lead to criticism. For this reason, an eclectic approach was chosen, and it was requested that important events and dates be shown on a timeline at the beginning of each unit, but that there should be no detailed teaching on this subject and that dates should not be memorized. “There should be no lecture on the events and facts listed and they should not be memorized” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b: 32). However, the curriculum states that the lives and careers of historical figures should be taught in relation to the achievements in the program.

## **Periodic Focus**

The curriculum covers periods from prehistory to the 21st century. The content of the history course begins in grade 9 with the study of prehistoric times. The first unit is called “The Early Periods of Humanity. In the next unit, the study of antiquity is approached primarily from a global perspective. The curriculum aims to enable students to recognize the main civilizational basins of the ancient world. Then, in the unit entitled “The Turkish World in the Early and Middle Ages,” Turkish national history in antiquity and the early Middle Ages is discussed. 4 of the 6 units of the 9th grade curriculum, excluding units 1 and 2, are devoted to the Middle Ages. This includes not only Turkish and Islamic history, but also European history (the fall of Western Rome, the Hundred Years’ War, the Black Death).

The teaching of the Middle Ages continued in the 10th grade curriculum. Although the focus is on Turkish history, developments in medieval Europe are also covered in this period.

With the 11th grade subjects, we are now approaching the modern periods. The 11th grade curriculum always deals with the same topic under different titles: the situation of the Ottoman state in the face of the developing world and Europe. This grade ends with an examination of the socio-economic life of Ottoman society in the 20th century.

However, the history topics do not end there. At the end of the history curriculum, students in 12th grade take another course called History of Turkish Revolution and Kemalism. This course covers Turkish history from the beginning of the 20th century to

the present. In fact, 12th grade History of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018b) have common topics with the 8th grade History of the Turkish Republic and Kemalism curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018a). However, the 12th grade curriculum also includes contemporary periods to the present day.

The final learning achievement of the 12th grade course requires the study of the Central Asian republics that gained independence from the Soviet Union; EU-Turkey relations; the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina; developments in the Middle East, including the Gulf War and the Arab Spring; the September 11 attacks; and the refugee problem caused by developments in Iraq and Syria. The last topics of the textbooks are also in line with the curriculum. The last topic of the textbook prepared by the Ministry of National Education (Çevik, Koç, Şerbetçi, 2021) is titled “Syrian Refugees”. The last topic of the textbook prepared by Semih Ofset Publishing House (Erdoğan, 2019) is titled “Developments in Syria”.

## **Hungary in the Curriculum**

Hungarians appear in the curriculum both as a brotherly nation and as a formidable enemy. For example, in the 9th grade curriculum, the Hungarian nation is presented as a sister nation with a common origin with the Turkish nation. On the other hand, in the 10th and 11th grades, where the struggle of the Ottoman Empire against the Europeans is discussed, it is portrayed as one of the nations that most strongly resisted Turkish expansionism (Kaplan, Can, Karakaya, 2023).

In Unit 4 of the 9th grade curriculum, which is a unit on the origins of the Turks, the phrase “The change of political structures in Asia and Europe with the migration of tribes is shown on the map and Turkish states and communities (Avars, Bulgarians, Khazars, Hungarians, Oghurs, etc.) are briefly introduced” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b p. 22) is included. But in the 10th grade curriculum, the battle of Mohaç is mentioned and this time the Hungarians are the enemies. Finally, the 11th grade curriculum includes the statement: “Examples of the impact of the intellectual movements that emerged with the French Revolution on the political life of the empires (Austria-Hungary, Russia and the Ottoman Empire) will be mentioned” (Ministry of National Education, 2023b p.34).

The textbooks give more space to the Hungarians than the curriculum. For example, in the 9th grade history book published by Tuna Publishing House (Tüysüz, 2019), there is a short chapter on Hungary among the various nations discussed under the title “Other Turkish Communities”. On page 127 of the same book, it is stated that the Huns are one of the elements that make up the ethnic structure of the Hungarians. This statement is important because the Turks see the Huns as part of their national past. The general attitude among Turks is that the Huns were Turkish and Turkish-speaking people like themselves. Therefore, the statement that the Huns are one of the elements that make up the Hungarian identity is actually meant to emphasize that there is a kinship between Turks and Hungarians. The 10th and 11th grade textbooks (Yılmaz, 2019; Yılmaz, 2022; Yüksel et al., 2021) also contain information about Hungary. Most of this information is about the Ottoman wars with the Hungarians and Austrians.

## **Key Competencies in the Curriculum**

At the beginning of the history curriculum, as in the curricula of all other subjects, reference is made to the Turkish Qualifications Framework (Ministry of National Education, 2023b). According to this framework, students should acquire competence in eight subjects. These are (1) communication in the mother tongue, (2) communication in foreign languages, (3) mathematical competence and basic competences in science/technology, (4) digital competence, (5) learning to learn, (6) social and civic competences, (7) initiative and entrepreneurship, and (8) cultural awareness and expression.

According to the history curriculum, the main competency that students should acquire through the study of history is the ability to think historically. The historical thinking skills are listed as follows: 1) chronological thinking, 2) historical understanding, 3) historical analysis and interpretation, 4) research based on historical investigation, 5) historical problem analysis and decision making, 6) historical empathy (Ministry of National Education, 2023b; 12). How these competencies should be understood is explained in detail in the curriculum.

Embracing national identity is another competence that the history curriculum wants students to acquire, but it is not directly stated. For now, it should be noted that in the 12th grade History of Revolution and Kemalism curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018b), the link between history education and citizenship competences is more

explicit. According to the curriculum of this course, the task of the History of the Revolution courses in the dimension of citizenship education is to educate individuals with national identity, national unity and solidarity, patriotism, knowledge and use of their rights, sensitivity to national history and culture, and interaction with other cultures in the world.

Another striking point in the curriculum is that there is not much reference to multiculturalism or inclusive education. Of the total 13 objectives in the history curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2023b), 6 are related to historical thinking skills, 6 are related to national identity, and only 1 is partially related to multiculturalism and inclusion. Thus, it can be said that the aims of the history curriculum are generally based on historical thinking and national identity. The history curriculum contributes to citizenship education in two dimensions. The first dimension includes national identity, social unity and solidarity, and sensitivity to cultural heritage, while the second dimension includes critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making skills.

## **Selection of Textbooks**

Textbooks are selected nationwide by a single authorised institution. This institution is the Board of Education under the Ministry of National Education. The Ministry of National Education can procure textbooks in four different ways. The first and most common method is to form a commission of teachers and have them write a textbook. The second common method is to use books produced by private publishers according to criteria set by the ministry. Thirdly, the ministry may have textbooks printed by commissions, institutions or organizations. Finally, and perhaps it is the least frequently used method, the Ministry can purchase books written or translated in Turkey or abroad (Ministry of National Education Regulation Textbooks, 2021).

The Ministry of National Education has determined 5 books for the 8th grade History of Revolution and Kemalism course, 4 books for the 9th grade History course, 2 books for the 10th grade History course, 3 books for the 11th grade History course, 5 books for the 12th grade History of Revolution and Kemalism course, 2 books for the Contemporary Turkish and World History course and 1 book for the History of Turkish Culture and Civilization course to be used in the 2023-2024 academic year (Board of Education 2023).

Students, teachers, principals and parents have no say in the choice of textbooks to be used in the classroom. At the beginning of the semester, school principals report the number of students in their schools to the Ministry of National Education through the district and provincial directorates of national education. The Ministry buys the books on its own initiative and sends them to the schools for distribution to the students.

## **Place of History Course in Exams**

In Turkey, there are no exams for the transition from primary to secondary school, but there are exams for the transition from secondary school to high school and from high school to university. It should be noted that participation in both the secondary education transition exams and the university transition exams is entirely voluntary. A student who does not take the university entrance exams is considered to have waived his or her right to university education and is therefore unable to study at any private or public university. Conversely, a student who has not taken the high school transition exam can enroll in the high school closest to his or her home and with an empty quota. Students take the high school entrance exam in order to enroll in high schools that are designed to offer a more rigorous academic curriculum, such as science high schools. Both the university entrance and high school entrance exams consist entirely of multiple-choice questions. The weight of the history course in both the upper secondary and university entrance exams is as follows:

In the high school entrance exam, there are 10 questions on the history of the Turkish revolution and Kemalism. There are no questions on general world history or other periods of Turkish history in this exam. The reason for this is that students have only taken the History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism course during this period. (Ministry of Education, 2023a). The university entrance examination, on the other hand, consists of two stages. The first stage is a basic skills test. 5 of the 120 questions at this stage are history questions. The second stage consists of four tests with a total of 160 questions. 26 of the 160 questions at this stage are history questions (Board of Higher Education, 2023). In conclusion, it can be said that the history course has a quite important place in both the high school and university entrance exams, especially for candidates who prefer verbal subjects.

## The Place of Citizenship Education in the Curriculum

As discussed above, the history curriculum is not completely isolated from citizenship issues. However, when analyzing the Turkish education system as a whole, the basic subjects related to citizenship education are taught in the course Human Rights, Citizenship and Democracy in the fourth year of primary school at ISCED 1 level and in the social studies courses in the fourth year of primary school and in the fifth, sixth and seventh years of secondary school at ISCED 2 level.

The Social Studies course is the main course that takes responsibility for citizenship education. In the curriculum, 18 objectives are listed as specific objectives of the course, and all of these objectives are related to citizenship education (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). It is noteworthy that in defining the objectives, it is emphasized that students should “grow up as citizens who love their homeland and nation as citizens of the Republic of Turkey, know and use their rights, fulfil their responsibilities and have national consciousness” (p.8), which shows the determining role of citizenship education in the social studies course.

According to the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c), students should acquire 27 skills. Many of the skills listed in the curriculum overlap with the historical thinking skills that secondary school history courses aim to develop. Social studies skills such as ‘understanding time and chronology’, ‘research’, ‘critical thinking’, ‘awareness change and continuity’, ‘using evidence’, ‘decision making’ and ‘problem solving’ are fully compatible with the historical thinking skills. The main reason for this congruence is that both curricula share the same philosophy of citizenship education, i.e. the understanding of educating a citizen who can think and decide in a healthy way.

The content of the social studies course is organized into seven learning areas. While each of these learning areas addresses citizenship education, the classical sense of citizenship education, which involves students learning about the formation of groups, institutions, and social organizations and the mechanisms that influence and control them, is concentrated in the “Active Citizenship” learning area. (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

## **The Functioning of The Legal and Political System**

The 6th grade social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.22) includes the statement “Explain the relationship between the legislative, executive and judicial powers in the Republic of Turkey”. In teaching this outcome, teachers are asked to “emphasise the principle of separation of powers and that each of the legislative, executive and judicial powers has its own powers and responsibilities” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c, p.22)

As regards the functioning of the political system, elections and political parties are mentioned. However, there is no detailed approach in the textbook (Yıldırım et al., 2019). For example, the qualifications required to be elected to the parliament or the application and election process for parliamentary seats are not discussed in detail. There is also no introduction of political actors. For example, the mandate of the president or the speaker of parliament is introduced (Yıldırım et al., 2019), but there is no information about the president himself or other political leaders. Similarly, other individuals who occupy important positions in the state apparatus are not introduced.

## **The Functioning of the Democratic State**

The Social Studies course in Years 6 and 7 deals with the functioning of the democratic system (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). In Year 6, systems of government are introduced and compared with democracy. Students are introduced to the concepts of democracy and democratic government. It then focuses on the functioning of the legal and political system in Turkey and how individuals can participate in governance. According to the curriculum, the methods of active participation taught to students are political parties, non-governmental organisations, media and individuals (public opinion).

There is no specific section on the history of political participation in the curricula. However, elections and political parties, which are one dimension of political participation, are discussed. The 7th grade social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.25) aims for students to be able to explain “the emergence of democracy, its stages of development and its importance today” and “Atatürk’s contributions to the development of Turkish democracy”.

The rights and responsibilities of individuals in a democratic state are also included in the curriculum. The issue of rights and responsibilities is stated at the very beginning of the curriculum as the first objective of the course (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). It can be seen that the rights and responsibilities of the individual as a member of society are mentioned in the learning area of “Active Citizenship”. Apart from this, the issue of rights and responsibilities is also mentioned in different contexts, such as consumer rights and responsibilities in the learning area “Production, Distribution and Consumption” and rights and responsibilities in the communication process in the learning area “Individual and Society”. Therefore, the issue of rights and responsibilities is addressed in the curriculum on a line starting from school and family and extending to a constitutional point (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

Although there are references to democracy and democratic governance in the curriculum, the concept of ‘election’ is not mentioned at all. However, when we look at the textbooks, we see that there are many references to elections starting from the textbooks (Ayantaş 2023; Evirgen, Özkan, & Öztürk, 2019).

## **Financial Competencies**

Although not included in the history curriculum, financial education is included in the social studies curriculum. In particular, the learning area ‘Production, Distribution and Consumption’ discusses economic activities in society and aims to develop students’ financial skills. The fact that ‘financial literacy’ and ‘entrepreneurship’ are among the skills to be acquired in the social studies curriculum gives an idea of the approach of the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

The curriculum for Grade 4 (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.15) aims for the student to be able to ‘distinguish between wants and needs and make conscious choices between them. In grades 5, 6 and 7, the curriculum requires the concept of financial literacy to be taught from the dimensions of production, career choice, citizenship and digital technology (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). On the other hand, it is also noticeable that practical issues such as obtaining bank loans and credit card transactions, which will be needed in everyday life, are not sufficiently covered.

## **Environmental Issues**

Environmental issues are included in the “People, Places, Environments” learning area of the social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). Among the objectives of the course, students are expected to “recognize the general geographic features of the world and the environment in which they live, explain the interaction between humans and the environment, and develop their spatial sense” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.8) and “recognize the limits of the natural environment and resources, try to protect natural resources with environmental sensitivity, and have a sustainable understanding of the environment” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.8), which shows the importance of the subject in terms of social studies. In addition, one of the skills to be acquired is “environmental literacy”(Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

Regarding environmental problems, natural disasters and preparation for natural disasters are mentioned in the 4th grade curriculum, in addition to natural disasters in the 5th grade, the reasons for the emergence of environmental problems are investigated, and in the 6th grade, the value of sensitivity to the natural environment is gained (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). The concept of environmental problems and sustainability, which is not directly included in the curriculum, is included in the textbook (Açıl et al., 2019).

## **Digital Citizenship and Digital Skills**

One of the skills that should be acquired by students within the framework of social studies at the secondary school level is the skill of “digital literacy”. Digital literacy is also one of the 8 skills identified in the Turkish Qualifications Framework, which is included in the first part of all curricula. Although it is not fully explained what digital competence is, if we look at the way it is addressed in the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c), it is understood that it includes the safe use of digital technologies, but the main focus is on digital citizenship. For example, it is stated that the development of digital technologies “has created new situations (digital citizenship, e-government, cyber commerce, social media, etc.) and problems (digital divide, identity theft, privacy of personal information, cyber fraud, cyber bullying, etc.) related to citizenship rights and responsibilities” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.9)

In high school history courses, the use of digital resources was mentioned when discussing the issues to consider when implementing the curriculum. Teachers are advised to diversify their resources, and to use digital resources in this context. They are warned against plagiarism but there is no mention of digital literacy (Ministry of National Education, 2023b).

## **Media Literacy**

One of the skills not included in the history curriculum but included in the social studies curriculum is media literacy. The 5th grade learning area ‘Science, Technology and Society’ discusses ‘the reliability of information in the media’, the 6th grade learning area ‘Global Connections’ discusses the impact of media tools on culture, and the 7th grade learning area ‘Individual and Society’ discusses the relationship between media literacy and students’ freedoms and responsibilities (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). In addition, students are expected to “exercise their rights” and “fulfil their responsibilities” when using communication tools, and it is stated that “the relationship between the right to privacy, freedom of expression and the right to accurate information and the freedom of mass communication will be discussed” (Ministry of National Education, 2018c p.22).

## **National Origin and National Identity in the Curriculum**

The 4th chapter of the 9th grade history curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2023b) asks teachers to explain the meaning of the name Turk and show on the map the areas where the first Turkish states were dominant. However, there is nothing in the curriculum about how the Turkish nation came to be. For example, an approach such as the Angles and Saxons united in England and the present English nation emerged cannot be said for the Turkish nation. According to the curriculum, it is as if Turks existed from the very beginning. The same is true for the Turkish language. There is no such subject as which languages Turkish came from and in what combination, Turkish has always been there.

The acceptance of Islam by the Turks is mentioned as an important turning point in Turkish history. In addition, important turning points for the nation, such as the arriv-

al of Turks in Anatolia, the establishment of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey, are also included throughout the curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2018c).

The adoption of a national identity is a goal that is not explicitly stated in the history curriculum. The history curriculum argues that it does not focus on citizenship education, but rather, or in addition, on thinking skills (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). However, the underlying philosophy and general aims of the curriculum show that there is also a strong emphasis on identity building. (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). On the other hand, the secondary school social studies curriculum (Ministry of National Education, 2023b), while listing the objectives of the course, explicitly includes expressions aimed at gaining national identity.

If we examine the issue of patriotism and national defense, we can see that the concept of patriotism, which is mentioned only once in the history course in the context of the patriotism of Turkish societies in ancient times, is included in various areas of learning and as a value to be acquired in the social studies course (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). Participation in homeland defense is not included in neither history nor social studies curricula.

## **Global Approach in Curriculum**

First of all, it should be clearly stated that the curriculum does not include a supranational identity. This may be because Turkey is not part of a supranational organization such as the European Union. The only emphasis that can be perceived as transnational, besides the Turkish identity, is the statement that Turks are part of the Islamic world. But even in this case, Islam is not defined as a supra-identity.

The concept of interdependence is not included in the history curriculum. In the social studies curriculum, on the other hand, the “Global Connections” learning area addresses cooperation among nations and tries to give students a sense of being part of a global society (Ministry of National Education, 2018c). Finally, the 12th grade “History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism,” curriculum briefly mentions the creation of NATO and how Turkey became a member of it (Ministry of National Education, 2018b).

## Dilemmas

This chapter represented the most challenging aspect of our research. Prior to this chapter, we had adhered to the historical education curriculum in Turkey, which is based on the country's official historical sources. However, there are instances where discrepancies exist between the information presented in these sources and the actual practices observed in real life. For instance, Article 125 of the 1936 USSR Constitution, also known as the Stalin Constitution, asserts that citizens' freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly and demonstration are guaranteed. However, it is highly unlikely that citizens were able to exercise these freedoms during the Stalinist era. In Turkey, the significance and the source of this significance in the history curriculum may differ from the significance and the source of this significance in real-life history lessons.

History is a crucial subject that occupies a significant position in the curriculum, is reinforced by a variety of elective courses, and is assessed in central examinations. However, in this section, it may be necessary to go beyond the enumerated curriculum aims and principles and address the actual nature of history. In Turkey, the primary objective and fundamental rationale for the significance of education in general and history in particular has consistently been to facilitate the development of an individual's identity (Kirit, 2020). The concept of utilizing schools and history, and in the meantime history teaching, in the formation of identity, which originated in the Ottoman period, continued in the republican era (Akinci 2014; Vurgun, 2021). The frequent alterations to the curriculum are indicative of these attempts to foster identity. Almost every political party that has assumed power has initiated changes to the curriculum with the intention of fostering individuals who align with its worldview. The current ruling party has continued this practice. In conclusion, the significance of history education in Turkey is not intrinsic, but rather instrumental in the formation of identity. It is also important to note that there is a significant group of academics in Turkish universities who argue that history education should not be solely instrumental in nature, but should also aim to provide students with a basic understanding of historical concepts and skills. The curriculum was modified to include an emphasis on the development of intellectual skills, as previously discussed, due to the influence of this group. Nevertheless, the discrepan-

cies in practice and some inconsistencies in the curriculum are the consequence of the conviction that the conventional instrumental function of the history course in identity formation should persist.

## Conclusion

In this study, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades History of the Turkish Revolution and Kemalism curriculum, the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade history curriculum, and the social studies curriculum have been examined.

At the secondary level, students first encounter history topics in the social studies course in grades 5, 6 and 7. This course includes the teaching of history as well as civic education and citizenship. It can be seen that the social studies program emphasizes citizenship education, national consciousness, protection of cultural heritage, analytical, critical and historical thinking, questioning skills, values and democracy with an interdisciplinary approach.

The curricula of the History of Turkish Revolution and Kemalism courses (8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades) state that the aim is for students to acquire the concepts of historical thinking and the concepts specific to the content of the course, and to grow up as citizens of the Republic of Turkey who love their homeland and nation, know and use their rights, fulfill their responsibilities, have national consciousness, and adopt national, spiritual, and universal values.

The history curriculum for secondary education (grades 9, 10 and 11) was updated in 2023 with an approach that combines chronological and thematic approaches (MoNE, 2023). The new approach emphasizes historical thinking skills rather than knowledge, and aims to help students develop skills such as evaluating evidence, critical thinking, and problem solving. The teaching of history in secondary schools covers a period from prehistory to the present day. Obviously, the focus of the course is Turkish history, but this history begins with the history of the Huns before Christ and ends with the history of the Republic of Turkey, covering a wide area from China to Central Europe, from Siberia to North Africa.

Although topics related to globalization receive attention in middle school social studies programs, such a perspective is absent from high school history programs. In addition, while digital citizenship and media literacy are emphasized more in mid-

dle school social studies courses, these topics are not found in high school history courses.

The aim of teaching history in primary, middle and high schools in Turkey is to provide students with historical knowledge, historical thinking skills and historical awareness in order to raise generations that have gained a sense of national unity and solidarity, are sensitive to national history and culture, and exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. High school history programs, which try to teach the themes within a general chronology, aim at the development of historical thinking skills in addition to the acquisition of national identity. The best citizenship education is understood as the one based on the acquisition of thinking and decision-making skills.

In Turkey, curricula are changed or updated at short intervals. It is quite possible to encounter a brand-new history curriculum within a year or two. The authors of this chapter believe that the following four factors will determine the future of history education in Turkey. The first is how long the ruling party will remain in power. Second, the situation of immigrants from Muslim-majority countries, especially Syria, will be crucial. Third, the future of history education will be determined by the issue of academic freedom in universities to freely discuss education in general and history education in particular, and finally, by the limits of the effectiveness of researchers who argue that the purpose of history education is not only to teach what happened in the past but also to provide intellectual skills. In the following, we will briefly discuss how these four factors may affect the trajectory of history education.

The ruling party has been in power in the country for the past twenty-two years. This party is a conservative party that incorporates Islamic values (Demirkol 2023; Özer, 2019). One of the key tenets of this political party is the concept of Neo-Ottomanism. Neo-Ottomanism is defined by İnanç and Haji as “Neo-Ottomanism is based on three pillars: Firstly, there is the matter of Turkey’s reconciliation with the Islamic civilization and its multicultural and multi-ethnic Ottoman past. The second objective is to overcome the inferiority complex that has been perpetuated by two centuries of Westernization and to move forward with confidence and pride, inspired by the glorious and magnificent Ottoman cultural and imperial heritage. The third pillar of Neo-Ottomanism is to continue to open up to the West while establishing a balanced relationship with it based on mutual equality and distance” (p. 155). This identity of the ruling party is a point of emphasis for numerous researchers, including Gülbay (2023), Kamalı (2018), and Os-

manbaşoğlu (2018). As with previous ruling parties, the Justice and Development Party reflects its own understanding of the education system and aims to raise individuals who share the same values as it does (Balci, 2021; Yolcu, 2022). This understanding has been reflected in the field of education through the prioritization of conservatism and Islamic sensitivity (Durubaşa & Karapehliven, 2018). Given the substantial allocation of time to Ottoman and Islamic history in history curricula, the existence of elective courses related to Islamic history and the prominence of religious education, it can be reasonably concluded that: As long as the Justice and Development Party retains its position in the government, the Ottoman state and Islamic values will continue to be accorded greater prominence in the history curriculum and history education. The extent to which this emphasis will be maintained is a matter that will become clear as events unfold.

Turkey is one of the most immigrant-receiving countries in the world. According to the Ministry of Interior's Directorate of Migration Management (2023), the number of Syrians under temporary protection decreased from 3,737,369 in 2021 to 3,259,853 in October 2023. Again, according to the Migration Administration, there are 1,115,246 Syrians between the ages of 5 and 18, i.e. school age. According to data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for the year 2021, all of Turkey's immigrant countries are Muslim countries. This situation serves as a facilitating factor for the Justice and Development Party, which has adopted a more Islamic approach to education. The cultivation of individuals with heightened Islamic sensibility will both create the requisite psychological milieu for the acceptance of incoming Muslim immigrants and facilitate the anticipated future integration. As Kocabaş and Alpaydın (2021) observe, "when the goals and objectives of national education, as determined years ago, are compared with the trends of an increasingly globalized world, it becomes evident that Turkish national education requires newer and broader perspectives. It is similarly essential to reconstruct the human model targeted by an education system that has been able to digest the reality of migration in all its dimensions, considering the phenomenon of migration" (p. 33), a perspective that aligns closely with the views of the Turkish government.

The concept of academic freedom in universities is a topic worthy of further discussion. The future direction of history education is contingent upon a discourse concerning the quality of education and the trajectory it should pursue. However, the question remains as to whether and how this discussion can take place within faculties of education

and history departments. According to the Academic Freedom Index (2024), Turkey experienced a decline in academic freedom from 2013 to 2023, with a loss of 0.241 points, resulting in a score of 0.09 and a ranking of 166th out of 179 countries. In light of these circumstances, it appears that it is not feasible to develop a comprehensive vision for the future of history education in academic circles other than through the lens of the country's administration's policies.

Finally, as previously stated, there is a considerable body of scholars in Turkish universities who argue that history education in Turkish universities should extend beyond the study of political history and identity formation to encompass the acquisition of certain intellectual skills. For instance, Demirciođlu (2009), Kiriř-Avarođulları (2014), Vurgun (2014), Dilek and Dilek (2015), Safran and Ata (1998), řimřek (2016) Belenli (2021), and Karabađ (2017), among others, strongly advocate the inclusion of intellectual skills in history teaching. These endeavors have also influenced curricula, with a notable emphasis on the inclusion of thinking skills in the curriculum. Nevertheless, the impact of these thinking-based emphases in the section that explains the philosophy and aims of the curriculum is diminished in the achievements section. The longevity and extent to which this camp will maintain its effectiveness against the camp that advocates the teaching of political history for the purpose of gaining identity will be pivotal in determining the future of history education in Turkey

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# Memory Politics and School system in the Postsoviet space

## Changes and Challenges in the History education of Armenia

Armine Mnatsakanyan – Péter Récsei

### Abstract

Armenia has a long history and tradition of education. Since its inception, Armenian education has served both as a bulwark for the political and economic existence of the country and as a guarantee for its advancement. The brief first Republic of Armenia (1918–1920) gave rise to the existing educational framework, which was subsequently developed during the Soviet era (1920– 1990). Armenia’s school system consists of the following factors: firstly, the collection of educational initiatives that support continuing education at various levels and domains as well as the state’s education standards. Secondly, the list of many types of educational institutions that are putting certain programs into practice. Finally, the system of educational management bodies, together with the organizations and entities that report to them.

The education system in Armenia is financed and organised by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports. The Armenian Apostolic Church has historically played a significant role in the education of Armenia.

The teaching of Armenian history starts in grade 7 and ends with examinations in grades 9 and 12.

The following topics are described as the final knowledge that a student should acquire at the end of the course: national (homeland, language, religion, family), spiritual and moral values, the role of traditions in the perpetuation of Armenianness; important achievements of national culture and their role in Armenia and the world in the context of culture.

The teaching material covers regional history as a necessary field to study. Students should gain knowledge on regional and global political situation; the current foreign and

domestic political situation of Armenia, learn about the relations between neighbouring countries and the world as well as the people thereof, familiarise themselves with various interstate unions, organizations, find up-to-date diverse connections with the world, supply relations and historical alternative versions of developments, predict their consequences.

*Keywords:* national identity, monastic schools, Sovietisation, History of the Armenian Church, History of Armenia and world history

## **Context of the education system**

### ***Historical-geographical and philosophical context***

The creation of the Armenian alphabet in the fifth century by Mesrop Mashtots was of historically significant importance since it opened a world of possibilities for the establishment of universities, scientific research facilities, and schools (Koryun, 1941). The higher education institutions of Khor Virap, Tatev, Sanahin, Haghat, Gladzor, Haghartsin, Nor Getik (Goshavanq) and other monasteries had conducted a great deal of scientific work in the 6-14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Abeghyan, 1975).

The first Republic of Armenia established the foundations for the current educational system in the country, which was then developed during the Soviet era. The mass illiteracy of the 1920s and 1930s vanished as a result of these changes. The Resolution of 17th of December of 1921 was called the “Liquidation of Illiteracy in the Soviet Union” (Planned economy, monthly political and economic magazine, 1940). According to this resolution all the illiterate people aged 16-50 had to learn grammar in their native language. The Soviet Government had a popular public platform called “Daloy Negramotnost”- “Get rid of illiteracy!”, and with the help of public organizations they were implementing and showing the ongoing process of giving free education to everyone under the age of 16-50 (Planned economy, monthly political and economic magazine, 1940).

The introduction of compulsory elementary education in 1932 made it possible to reduce the percentage of the illiterate population from 83% to 16% in just 7–8 years. The goal was to create collective memory and to design and shape the ideology of a Soviet Person (Bournoutian, 2013). Additionally, the widespread establishment of schools in the 1960s allowed the transition to secondary education being required. Armenia had only a state education system with preschool, vocational, secondary vocational, and

higher education components during the 70 years of Soviet rule, which guaranteed the republic's advancement in socioeconomics, culture, and science.

It is important to highlight that contemporary education system in Armenia still relies on the Soviet heritage. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the significant advancement in the Republic of Armenia's educational system in the "Project of Development of Education of the Republic of Armenia 2001-2005" (State Education Development Program, 2001-2005) was approved by the National Assembly. The RA law approving both the "2008-2015 state program of education development of the Republic of Armenia" and the "state program" suggests that the growth of the educational system, maintaining its quality, and boosting its competitiveness in the global arena are the most significant state and national issues (State Education Development Program, 2008-2015).

## **General description of the education system**

### ***General education***

The education system of the Republic of Armenia is an ordered set of educational institutions and establishments, the main components of which are: pre-primary education provided for children from 3 to 6 years of age; primary general education from 6 to 10 years of age, basic general education from 10 to 15 years of age, secondary general education, secondary vocational education from 15 to 18 years (Figure 1).

Graduates of basic and senior schools have the right to continue their studies in primary, secondary and higher professional educational institutions. There are also non-state educational institutions, schools, colleges, universities, etc. operating in the Republic of Armenia, which not only provide educational services, but also make a significant contribution to the development of the education system as a whole.

The Republic of Armenia ensures the right to education - regardless of nationality, race, sex, language, religion, political or other views, social origin, property status or other circumstances. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Armenia, general education is compulsory, except for cases prescribed by law. A higher level of compulsory education may be established by law. Primary and secondary education in state educational institutions is free of charge and compulsory. The principles of self-governance of higher educational institutions are defined by law. The procedure for the establishment and operation of educational institutions is established by law. Every citizen has the right to receive free education in

State higher and other special educational institutions on a competitive basis in accordance with the procedure established by law. The State, in cases and according to the procedure prescribed by law, provides financial and other assistance to higher and other educational institutions carrying out special educational programmes as well as to their students.

In 1999, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia approved the Law “On Education”, thus contributing to the development of the education system. This document also ensures equal rights of men and women to receive education. As in Soviet times, primary and secondary education in Armenia is free of charge, and completion of secondary school is compulsory.

A 10-point grading scale is applied in the educational institutions of the Republic of Armenia. According to the data for 2021, 31 thousand teachers taught more than 380 thousand pupils in 1353 schools in the Republic as a whole. (Система образования в Армении права и обязанности – Education system in Armenia Rights and obligations).

History currently falls under the subject area “Society, social sciences”. The “Curriculum and subject list” is approved by a decree of the Minister of Education and Science each year. In Armenia’s schools there are 34 weeks in an academic year and one lesson is 45 minutes long. Institutions that monitor school curricula in Armenia include the National Foundation for Educational Development and Innovation, the Assessment and Testing Center, the National Center for Educational Technology and the Psychological-Pedagogical Center.

Age (years)	ISCED	Education level	Length of education level	Nature of education level
3-6	0	pre-primary education	3 years	compulsory
6-10	1	primary general education	4 years	compulsory
10-15	2	basic general education	5 years	compulsory
15-18	3	secondary general education	3 years	compulsory
15-18	3	initial vocational training	3 years	compulsory
15-17	3	advanced vocational school	2 years	compulsory
18+	6-7	higher education	BA 4 years MA 2 years	optional

Figure 1. Armenian education system [https://education-profiles.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/ISCED\\_Armenia.jpg](https://education-profiles.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/ISCED_Armenia.jpg) (09.12.2023)

The main goal of general education is the comprehensive and harmonious development of children’s mental, spiritual, physical and social abilities, and the development of their correct behaviour. (RA Law on Education, 2015) According to the State General Education Curriculum, it is envisaged to introduce secondary general education in Armenia in a 12-year – the transition to 12-year education began in 2006–2007 – three-level secondary school with the following grades:

- a) primary school, 4 years (grades 1-4)
- b) secondary school, 5 years (5-9 grades)
- c) high school, 3 years (grades 10-12).

The main objective of primary school is to develop the pupil’s mental, spiritual and physical abilities, language skills, literacy, logic and basic work skills. The primary school provides the necessary learning environment, and the level required to continue to a secondary school. The main purpose of the secondary school is to provide pupils with knowledge of man, nature and society, the skills and abilities to apply this knowledge in life, and to acquire the level of moral and spiritual values necessary for pupils to pursue secondary education or vocational training and age-appropriate work, whereas the primary purpose of high school is to provide students with vocational education, knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for their own lives (Система образования в Армении права и обязанности).

### ***The school authorities***

In Armenia, the education system is organized by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport (MESCS). Below is a list of some key organisations and their functions in the Armenian education system (see annex for more details): School Boards/School Districts, School Boards/School Districts, Local Municipalities, Church, Private Educational Institutions, International Organizations and NGOs.

### ***Education reform efforts***

When defining the quality of education, legislators generally aim to define measurable educational outcomes, which vary somewhat depending on the country and the context, although they generally try to align them with the logic of the documents on the quality of education adopted by various UN structures.

Section 5 of the “State Programme for the Development of Education in the Republic of Armenia until 2030” (March 2023) underlines that the main priority of public educa-

tion and vocational training is to improve quality. The World Bank also tried to define the quality of education in its report “Education Priorities and Strategies” (1995) with the following formulation: “The quality of education is difficult to define and measure. An adequate definition should include student knowledge outcomes. Many educators may include in the definition the educational experiences that help produce those educational outcomes, in other words, the educational environment (World Development Report, 1995, 46.).

At the legislative level, RA school education is assessed as sufficiently developed, but there are gaps in the implementation of this legislation. As a result of the political affiliation of school principals, the main problem is the politicization of schools, which should be addressed through the improvement of legislation. The current system of funding based on the number of pupils in a given school promotes good performance in some schools but creates problems for smaller schools struggling to maintain a minimum level of operations. The needs of schools that cannot be met with the help of the state budget often fall on the shoulders of parents and teachers (Availability of school education in Armenia, 2012).

The success of reforms in the school education system mainly depends on the performance of teachers, as they are the “main carriers of reforms”. Most of the respondents emphasize the urgent need to change educational methods, adapting them to the modern environment, new standards and implemented programs. There is a mismatch between the demands of reforms and the current conditions in schools. The use of new methods requires the presence of appropriate conditions in schools (Availability of school education in Armenia, 2012).

## **The Position of History and Civic Education**

### ***Soviet legacy and external actors in Armenian history education***

History education in Armenia today bears the legacy of Soviet Armenian education. The Soviet period provided an opportunity for member republics to create their national history. The narratives were all discursively similar: they started from the ethnogenesis. The development of the nation, followed by the development of the nation’s consciousness and the struggle for national liberation, leading to the development of class consciousness towards which they were guided by communism itself as a better form of social organization.

The teaching of history was also highly centralised, with only one textbook approved per subject and per grade. The aim of teaching history was to ensure that students memorised the historical texts to be taught based on the textbook. After each question, the lesson was designed to test whether the student had memorized the information, as well as the ideological bias that was supposed to indicate the student's adherence to communist ideals (World Bank, 2003).

The independent Armenia had the opportunity to put its history education on a new footing. The reforms of the education system were largely financed by World Bank loan projects. The first project - the "Education Financing and Management Reform Project" 1998-2002 - was designed to develop textbooks based on the existing curriculum but to filter out Soviet ideological content and expand content on Armenian culture. Accordingly, new textbooks were needed, and the methodology and curricula were not detailed. The textbooks were stripped of the ideals of internationalism, and nationalism was given prominence instead. The historical narrative remains strikingly similar to its Soviet predecessor, beginning with the ethnogenesis and then the struggle for national liberation, culminating this time in autonomous nationhood (World Bank, 2003).

The second World Bank-funded project - the 2004-2009 "Quality and Relevance in Education Project" - addressed the curriculum issues left out in the previous phase. As a result of this project, a new National Curriculum Framework as well as the "Subject Standards and Subjects" for all subjects and grades were developed in 2003-2004. Textbooks and teacher's guides were also produced and provided in all schools in the country, and the introduction of the new curriculum in schools started in the 2009-2010 school year.

The 2009-2015 "Second Education Quality and Relevance Project" did not address curriculum reform and textbook production, but advocated a competency-based approach. The results have not been very successful, especially in the integration of subjects (Khachatryan, Petrosyan and Terzyan 2013).

The fourth World Bank-funded project - the "Education Development Project" - was implemented between 2014 and 2019 and has a strong curriculum component. A report on the project in March 2017 stated that *'The curriculum feasibility/needs assessment study has been completed and the draft of the National Curriculum Framework has been developed with the support of the International Curriculum Expert'* (World Bank, 2017, 15).

The involvement of external actors in the shaping of education has also appeared in relation to history. Indeed, the European Association of History Teachers (EURCOLIO) has for several years been leading projects in the Black Sea region, involving Armenian teachers, aimed at training history teachers in critical thinking and teaching multiple perspectives, as well as the joint publication of educational resources. Projects on oral history and memory will play a prominent role in this context. However, these are approaches that are alien to the current closed framework of Armenian education. This is because the state-controlled political narrative is the only legitimate body of historical knowledge in education. (Neyzi and Kharatyan 2010.)

### Curriculum and textbook

In public schools, teachers have the flexibility and freedom to choose the teaching methods and content within the time allocated to the subject. Teachers are free to consider or present examples in more depth and to use different approaches and perspectives in teaching history. Teachers conduct lessons according to their own lesson plans. Books and lesson plans remain the most popular teaching tools. The history curricula in Armenia fall under the subject area “Society, social sciences”. Figure 2 provides a more detailed breakdown of the history subject by grade. (Pandemics and Natural Disaster as Reflected in History Teaching).

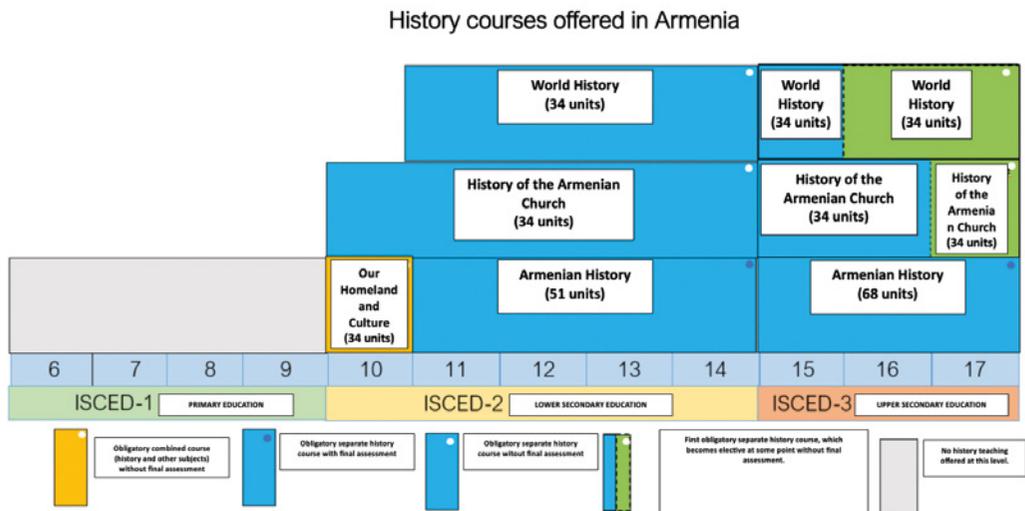


Figure 2: History courses offered in Armenia (own editing, source: OHTe General Report on the State of History Teaching in Europe, Volume 2. 2023, 15.

The subject “Armenian History” is taught in two cycles, chronologically from ancient times to the present day. In secondary school, the basic subject of history (1.5 hours per week, for a total of 51 hours per year) is repeated in secondary school with a more advanced and broader study of history (three hours per week in grade 10, for a total of 102 hours per year, five hours per week in grade 11, for a total of 170 hours per year, and eight hours per week in grade 12, for a total of 272 hours per year). A study commissioned by the Centre for Educational Programmes of the Ministry of Education in the framework of the World Bank-funded “Education Development Project” points out that this repetition could be replaced by an integrated subject of “Armenian history” and “World history”, and by selecting separate subjects from the two subjects in order to develop analytical and critical thinking skills and independent research skills in more depth (EV Consulting and Ayb Educational Foundation, 2016.).

For grade 9 students, there is a state final examination (graduation) in Armenian history, which includes only an oral part. In grade 12, there is a written examination in Armenian history, which takes 120 minutes.

The centralized final examination is organized and conducted by the Appraisal and Testing Centre (ATC). The list of examination centres, heads of centres, ATC representatives, organizers and subject committee members are approved by the ATC director.

The “Subject Standards and Subject Curricula” for both secondary and high school students include a list of primary sources and studies, effectively limiting textbook authors in what they can write. The state is involved in the process of approving history textbooks. The textbooks are not accompanied by a workbook, but there are check questions at the end of the textbook lessons, and what sources they can use. However, the textbooks themselves lack a section on sources. Overall, the ‘subject standards and subject syllabuses’ for middle and secondary schools remain largely ideological and revolve around the development of patriotism and national consciousness, leaving out many important aspects of history learning, such as historical thinking and reasoning, critical thinking, exploring the continuity and changes/interruptions in history, and independent research. (Bilmez, Çayır, Çaykent Karapetyan, Sayan, 2019.)

The textbooks’ single narrative, presented through the authoritarian voice of the textbook authors, focuses primarily on the history of political elites and the wars they fought. This may seem paradoxical in the context of the absence of an Armenian state throughout an extended period of history; the textbook addresses this discontinuity

through a metanarrative of the continuity of statehood or the presumed desire of the Armenian people. The introduction to the grade 10 textbook argues that during the absence of the state, there were different formations that possessed the main features of statehood (power structures, armed forces, etc.) (principalities, melikdoms, semi-independent mountain communities). Thus, even in the absence of Armenian statehood, the textbooks resist a re-centering on social or cultural history, and instead build a continuity of a political elite through the struggles for Armenian statehood, arguing that these political elites throughout the various empires and centuries were aware that their united efforts shall build a future Armenian nation-state. The historical narrative of the textbooks is thus constructed from a narrow perspective, presenting a patriotic image of a people fighting for independence and nation-building. According to the introduction to the 10th grade textbook, the centuries-long struggle to preserve or restore freedom and independence is the axis of Armenian history. In the context of national liberation, textbooks consistently portray Armenians as victims. As Armenian history is taught as a separate subject, without contextualising it in world history, a narrative of repeated subjection to empires and conquests emerges. (Melkonyan, Avetsiyan, 2014).

Textbooks are predominantly just one type of “activity” - “Questions and exercises”, most of which are simply questions. These questions often ask for technical information, such as “How many times did Lenk Temur attack Armenia?” or “Write out the dates from the text and make a timeline”. In general, many questions refer to the text of the lesson and learners are assumed to retrieve the answers from the text and recite them. This is very much in line with the “Teacher’s Manual”, which states that “methodologically, questions and tasks primarily aimed at mastering the content of the textbook are very important.” (Ashot, Gyulbudaghyan, 2013). Armenian history education is primarily dominated by learning the texts of the textbook. There are sources in the textbooks, but there is no analysis or activity linked to these primary sources. The vast majority of these extracts are presented without analysis; and students are not asked to analyse them, either (Bilmez, Çayır, Çaykent Karapetyan, Sayan, 2019).

### ***Study material***

At the end of 2023 the Observatory on History Education in Europe (OHTE), the Council of Europe’s history education organisation, published its first report which summarises the state of history education in the Observatory’s 16 member countries, based on

a survey of thousands of participants. The survey included participants from Armenia. The survey shows that respondents consider the Armenian curriculum to be sufficiently flexible and effective in teaching history. Teachers from Armenia (89%) indicated that political and military history is the field of history they teach most often in their lessons. 36% of the teachers in Armenia indicated emphasis on national history as relevant (OHTE, 2023.)

The main purpose of teaching Armenian history is to strengthen national identity. The preservation of Armenian identity is highlighted in the National Security Strategy of Armenia (2007), which defines national identity as a composite of Armenian language, literature, history and culture, aimed at ensuring the continuity of the Armenian intellectual heritage. In addition, it stresses the importance of education in strengthening national identity. “The morals and doctrines of patriotism should begin at home and continue through the formal levels of education.” (RA National Security Strategy, 2007).

The teaching of Armenian history begins with an introduction to the ancient Kingdom of Urartu. Based on the selected criteria, it can be said that all topics and periods are covered. There are periods that are covered in a separate subject. The most detailed and multifaceted history of Armenia in the Middle Ages is presented at school. (Table 3.) Civic education is not included in the curriculum.

The following topics are described as the final knowledge that a student should acquire by the end of the course:

- National (homeland, language, religion, family), spiritual and moral values, the role of traditions in the perpetuation of Armenianness
- Important achievements of national culture and their role in Armenia and the world in the context of culture

The teaching material covers regional history, as a necessary field to learn about:

- The student should gain knowledge on the regional and global political situation.
- The current foreign and domestic political situation of Armenia, learn about the relations between neighbouring countries and the world, as well as the peoples thereof, with various interstate unions, organizations, find up-to-date diverse connections with the world, supply relations and historical alternative versions of developments, predict their consequences.
- The student should separate national problems and the challenges Armenia’s facing, offer suggestion for their resolution and ways to overcome these, predict

their results and consequences, evaluate his/her own role and the need for participation in the establishment of a strong and competitive Armenian state.

- Development of analytical, critical and creative thinking, research, collaboration, self-expression, autonomous learning and working skills and abilities is defined as one of the aims of each topic included in the curriculum
- Observation of turning events in history, phenomena, social and domestic life and customs, relationships between individuals, societies and civilizations from the perspective of the individual, nation and humanity is described as one of the General Crossing Concept of each topic included in curriculum.

### ***Age shift and the emergence of themes in Armenian history***

The subject of History of Armenia begins with the description of the ancient Ararat or Urartu Kingdom. Ancient Global History is mentioned within the frames of relations of the ancient Armenian Kingdom and its geopolitical relations with Assyria, Persia, Parthia, etc. Armenian medieval history covers the course of the development of Armenian civilization, compares and analyses the phenomena, prominent figures, important historical and social facts, events, their results and consequences of the period (8<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries), evaluates the achievements and failures of the period, the place and role of Armenia in history. For the global history section, the curriculum mentions the following countries of the period: the Arab invasions, the Byzantine Empire, the Mongol invasions, the Seljuk Sultanate, the Golden Horde, Georgia, as well as their relationships, prominent personalities, and important historical events.

The course covers the topics related to the development of Armenian civilization in the premodern and modern stages of national history, the liberation of Armenia and the restoration of the state in the period from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, compares the manuals introduced for this purpose, discusses the prominent figures, important historical and social facts, phenomena, events of the period, analyzes their results and consequences, evaluates the achievements and failures, their place and role in Armenian history. In the curriculum, this period is referred to as “Armenia on the road to independence”. The division of Armenia between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, the periods of Persian, Ottoman and Tsarist Russia, the First Republic of Armenia and the Sovietisation of Armenia, as well as the Armenian question and the Armenian Genocide are central themes. Such events as the Turkish-Persian wars, and

the Russian-Turkish, or the Russian-Persian wars, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, as well as the USA, countries of Europe are mentioned to give a comprehensive geopolitical picture of premodern and modern era.

The curriculum also covers contemporary national history. The curriculum deals with contemporary history from the period of the Sovietization 1921-1991, Armenia's independence in 1991, the Harabakh movement of 1989-1994, the geographical and geopolitical realities of Nagorno-Kharabakh, the Armenian diaspora. It deals with historically and socially important facts, phenomena and events, analyses their results, consequences, causal links, interdependence of historical events, finds and maintains the interrelationship of important events and phenomena of contemporary historical processes. The curriculum mentions World War 2, Armenia's role in the anti-fascism war, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union.

In Armenia, there is no civic education as a separate subject.

### ***Relevant debates on topics of the „Armenian History” textbook***

#### ***Changing the narratives: Armenians as the native habitants of the Armenian Plateau***

Different interpretations of Armenians being native habitants or newcomers back in times to this huge geographical area is one very popular discourse around Armenian History textbooks. The reason for this discourse is the different interpretation of the origins of the Armenian people, presented in various textbooks. In textbooks published before 2023 it is highlighted that Armenians are the natives of Armenian Plateau which – together with the Iranian Plateau and the neighbouring territories – was considered to be the native land for the Indo-European civilization. Under the subtitle “Armenian Plateau: fatherland of the Armenians” there is a description “The formation of the Armenian nation happened in the Armenian Plateau. According to the sources, for 4-2 millennia the Plateau was inhabited by different tribes. The majority of those tribes belonged to the Indo-European language family.... Not only Armenian, but also German, Russian, Greek, Indian, and Persian ancestors inhabited the East of Asia Minor, the Armenian Plateau, and the North-West of the Iranian Plateau.” (Armenian History Textbook 6., 2018.)

It is important to note that Armenians being the native habitants of the Armenian Plateau had been the only narrative or theory presented in history textbooks until the latest textbook was published in 2023 edited by Smbat Hovhannisyan. In the book of

2023, another theory of origins rather than theory of being autochthonous habitants is presented. “According to the Balkan theory the ancestors of the Armenians are from the Balkans, that is, they were Phrygian colonizers who migrated to the Armenian highlands”. Following the description of the origins of the Armenians the textbook suggests another theory as well that is closer to the “traditional hypothesis”; “Another point of view about the origin of the Armenians is based on the myth told by Movses Khorenatsi (Armenian historian of the 5<sup>th</sup> C.). This approach presupposes the hypothesis of the formation of the Armenian people as locals. The fact that the formation of the Armenian people took place in long-term interactions in the territory of the Armenian highlands is also confirmed as a result of modern genetic research. (Armenian History Textbook 7., 2023.) Then in the same paragraph the textbook discusses the origins of Indo-Europeans relying on “steppe” and “South Asian (Armenian)” theories. As there is a discourse in Armenia right now about this textbook, it is important to note that teachers are not satisfied with the terminology of the text and the ideas described there.

### ***Changing Narratives – The Armenian Genocide***

The Armenian Genocide is presented in the textbooks of 8<sup>th</sup> grade (2023). The problematics of the Armenian Genocide topic is discussed by many historians and teachers in Armenia. The most obvious weakness of the topic is the absence of causality of the events that created the foundation which led to the organized ethnic massacres by the Ottoman Empire (Young Turks’ party) in the borders of the empire. In one of his last interviews of 2020, Artak Movsisyan, historian and head of Armenian History Department in Yerevan State University (2016-2020) has shared his concerns about changing the narratives on the topic of the Genocide and excluding patriotism from “Armenian History” textbooks.

Indeed, the only contextual part in the textbooks covering this period is the one and half page of a small chapter titled “The Caucasian Frontline of World War” (Armenian History textbook 8., 2018.). And then the contextual history about events concerning Armenia is continued with a discussion of the Bolshevik Revolution in Armenia. It is clear that Armenian textbooks of Global History cover more facts and events of this period, especially the aftermath of the First World War, but still, there is a reason why Armenian historians evaluate texts of schoolbooks about this period not equal to their expectations to a deep and more contextual Armenian History. Also, the chronology of

events is not well organized, because as we see in the textbook, there are sharp skips from one decade to another, and then back to the previous period. Thus, this chaos can cause “aversion to Armenian History textbooks and Armenian History in general among the students...when editing and publishing such books the benchmarks of Armenian history had not been discussed with professors from YSU, the Pedagogical University, or the National Academy” (Artak Movsisyan).

Research and the monitoring of relevant interviews and publications shows that there is an inevitable confrontation towards Armenian History textbooks, especially in topics about the origins of the Armenian people, and questions concerning the Armenian Genocide (why this becomes less and less in pages with every new edition of the textbook), and the aftermath of the First World War. According to the new criteria of history textbooks in 2020, the history of the Armenian voluntary partisan movements in the Ottoman Empire from 19<sup>th</sup> century until the First World War was decreased as well, as Artak Movsisyan says.

### ***Renaming the subject “Armenian History”***

In January 2024 the Armenian media space had been filled with the news that there is a suggestion to rename the school subject “Armenian History” into “History of Armenia”.<sup>1</sup> In Armenian language the textbook is called “Hayots Patmutyun”- verbatim it is translated as Armenian History. Even though in foreign languages Armenian history textbooks are called “History of Armenia” and are presented with this title in international platforms, the Armenian name for the textbooks is “Armenian History”.<sup>2</sup> According to the public comment of Armenia’s National Science Academy’s History Institution, it is unknown who came up with the idea of renaming the subject. Even so, the Ministry of Education and the Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan assured that they had received such a request (again, the identity of the author of that proposal is unknown). Later the project about the Changes in Decision N. 439 of April 8, 2010, of The Government of The Republic of Armenia had been installed in the official page of the Unified website for the publication of legal acts’ drafts. (On the change of the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Armenia N. 439 of April 8, 2010). Armenia’s Ministry of

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<sup>1</sup> In Armenian language the subject is called “Hayoc Patmutyun”, which is translated as “Armenian History.”

<sup>2</sup> In this article the title of Armenian history textbooks is given as “History of Armenia”, whereas Armenian equivalent for the school textbooks is “Armenian History”

Education, Science, Culture and Sport has clarified that by changing the name of the subject “History of Armenians” to “History of Armenia” “the inconsistency in the definitions of Articles 33 and 35 of the National Academy of Sciences has been eliminated. As a result, the name of the subject becomes clearer, within the framework of which the events that took place in different periods of the history of the Armenian statehood and the Armenian people will be studied.” (The Ministry of Education – Project. It is proposed to rename the subject “History of Armenians” into “History of Armenia”.)

### ***Relevant debates on the topic of “Armenian Church History”***

The debates on the subject of the history of the Armenian Church in the Armenian educational and public domain have intensified in recent years. In 2020, the RA Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports issued a statement that changes are expected regarding the teaching of the History of the Armenian Church. Although in the speech of the Minister of Education and Science it was mentioned that the subject will be taught according to the state standards of general education on the principle of integration with other subjects, and it will be a separate subject only in higher grades, the wave of public dissatisfaction rose. Due to the published information on the relevant topic, while discussing the issue in this section, we will also rely on the publicly available public demands, open letters, meetings and discussions held by the Armenian Apostolic Church and the Armenian Apostolic Church on this topic.

“In general, we have changed the approaches to the formation of the curriculum. In the fifth and sixth grades, we have certain integrated subjects, which will soon be discussed. In the fifth and sixth grades, the subject will be taught as a part of the Mother Language and Social Studies subjects, and in higher grades, as a separate subject,” said the Deputy Minister of Education and Culture, Zhanna Andreasyan. In response to this, teachers wrote an open letter to the Minister of Education and Culture, Araik Harutyunyan, saying: *“History of Armenian Church cannot be included in other subjects, because of the educational criteria. Today, we are losing Armenianness in every field. What is Armenian is shrinking, giving way to foreign imports. We are not against reforms, but we want to move forward, preserving the Armenian, taking what will not harm our roots.”* (Harutyunyan)

Armenian Church History has been a separate subject in Armenian schools since 2007. However, the changes have happened during the last three years and now the

History of the Armenian Church subject (former 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade material) is integrated in the textbook of Armenian History 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

The new (2023) Armenian History textbook for 7<sup>th</sup> grade of middle school has provoked many discussions and contradictions as we have already analysed. The educational criteria of the Armenian Church History, which was integrated into this textbook, has awoken enough contradictions as well. Recently, on December 26<sup>th</sup> the press conference was held in Etchmiatsin organized by the educational committee of Mother See of Holy Etchmiatsin. The committee discussed worries and fears of the National Church around the new textbook of Armenian History and the reduction of topics about the Armenian Church included in the textbook. *“This textbook is not acceptable. Not only because materials there are wrong, but also because the textbook has changed all the approaches and methods of education of Armenian church History”* says Father Mikayel, leader of the Diocese of Shirak. The topics of the Armenian Church History that had to be included in the textbook were established in the General education “History of Armenians” subject learning concept (project) of 2020. According to that project the topics are.

1. Foundation and spread of Christianity.
2. Christianity as a pillow of Armenian Civilization
3. Christian Doctrine
4. Holy Bible
5. Increase of the role and influence of Armenian church in the region
6. Structure of the Church
7. Church Councils
8. Armenian Church in 7-8 CC., and during Bagratuni dynasty (“History of Armenians” subject learning concept, 2020.)

In conclusion, it is important to note that the Educational Committee of Etchmiatsin has foreseen such threats when there was a decision to integrate Armenian Church History subject into Armenian History subject. It is obvious that it is not possible to include a 2-year plan of materials of a separate subject into one year textbook.

*There are so many topics that are missing from the book, and those topics are important for our generation to learn. Armenia was a part of the Soviet Union and the Armenian Church faced many difficulties and challenges back then. To me it was important to fill in the gap left by the Soviet heritage in the collective memory of the people of the Independent Armenia. It would be good to bring changes and*

*developments in the field of education and in projects of Armenian Church History. However, everything that we see now happening with these new approaches are not going to become positive changes.”* (from an interview with Dr. Edgar Hovhannisyan, historian, Dean of the faculty of History and Social Sciences, ASPU)

## Conclusion

Armenia has a long history and tradition in education. Since its establishment, Armenian education has served as both a bastion of the country’s political and economic existence and a guarantee of its development. The short-lived first Armenian Republic (1918-1920) created the current educational framework which was later developed further during the Soviet era (1920-1990). Education has long been highly valued in Armenia. Maintaining the competitiveness of the education system on the global stage and its continuous improvement is now a governmental and national priority.

Armenian history education is also about cultivating national identity. Accordingly, prominent role is given in history education to the study of national heroes, historical kingdoms and the teaching of detailed church history is emphasized in the cultivation of Armenian identity. Cross-curricular links are also found in social sciences (world history) and natural sciences (geography). The country has a rich ancient tradition, so the curriculum covers this in detail, as well as medieval and modern history. The curriculum also reflects the issues and challenges of national survival. The importance of the history subject is reflected in the compulsory state examinations in grades 9 and 12. The freedom of the textbook market is regulated by the public authorities, which prescribe and determine the compulsory subjects to be taught. Textbooks play a prominent role in the teaching of history, providing the didactic basis for lessons by requiring students to learn and recall the factual material contained in them. There are no worksheets or exercises in the classical sense; students have to answer the questions in the textbook lesson. External experts point out the lack of didactic versatility and the problem of the division of history into several subjects.

Recent research puts Armenia on the map of education in Europe. The country participates in the work of the European Observatory on the Education of History in Europe (OHTE), the Council of Europe’s organisation for history education.

However, as it can be seen from the analyses of interviews and reports of specialists of leading historical educational centres, representatives of the Armenian National Church changes

and transformative tendencies around the criteria of Armenian History textbook, it can weaken historical narratives in minds of younger generations. As several historians like Eduard Hovhannisyan, Artak Movsisyan have noticed, changes in historical narratives are a part of politics of history for Armenian society. Hence, "the restrictions of texts about national heroes, historical kingdoms, geographical origins of a nation, the isolation of the National Church from the frames of Armenian history textbook can become a reason for erratic self-identification and an unstable position in regional geopolitics". (Movsisyan–internet source).

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Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport (MESCS)	The ministry is responsible for formulating and implementing educational policies in Armenia. It oversees the entire education system, from pre-school to higher education. The ministry plays a crucial role in curriculum development, teacher training, and educational standards.
School Boards/School Districts	The education system is more centralized, and individual schools typically operate under the authority of the Ministry of Education.
Local Municipalities	Local authorities may provide additional resources or support for schools, but the overarching educational policies are set at national level.
Church	The Armenian Apostolic Church has historically played a significant role in education in Armenia. Some educational institutions in Armenia may be affiliated with the church, particularly at the higher education level.
Private Educational Institutions	These institutions operate independently and may have their own governing bodies. They often have more flexibility in terms of curriculum and organizational structure.
International Organizations and NGOs	They may provide support, resources, and expertise to improve educational outcomes, particularly in areas such as curriculum development, teacher training, and infrastructure improvement.

*Table 1. Armenian school authorities (own editing)*

# History and Civic Education in Kazakhstan

Moldir Pocstar, Aray Ilyassova-Schoenfeld, Saule Anafinova, Bainur Yelubayev, Bibigul Akshulakova, Nursultan Assylov, Gaziza Aliyeva, Maira Klyshbekova

## Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of history and civic education within Kazakhstan's secondary school system. Utilizing qualitative content and document analysis, the study examines state-mandated curricula and history textbooks for grades 5–11 used during the 2010–2022 period. The research evaluates several critical indicators, including the institutional status of the discipline, chronological focus, declared key competencies, content selection, and the integration of civic education via the “Fundamentals of Law” subject. Findings reveal that the current curriculum successfully provides a coherent chronological narrative of human development, effectively balancing national history with global processes. While the “History of Kazakhstan” curriculum explicitly focuses on fostering patriotism and national identity, the “World History” curriculum is designed to promote multiculturalism, tolerance, and respect for global diversity. The study highlights significant structural developments, such as the inclusion of “Local History” for grades 5–7 and the move toward interdisciplinary connections with geography, literature, and law. Furthermore, the evolution of civic education is marked by the formalization of law as a standalone subject, incorporating essential modern skills like financial literacy. However, the analysis identifies a persistent tension between reformist goals and the lingering Soviet legacy. Despite efforts to decolonize historical narratives and reassess the revolutionary era, the educational landscape remains influenced by traditional Soviet pedagogical approaches, specific ideological terminology, and a teaching workforce primarily trained in the late Soviet period. The paper concludes that while the transition to a modern, competency-based framework has been substantial, the process of distancing Kazakhstan's historical narrative from its Soviet past remains an ongoing and complex nation-building project.

*Keywords:* Kazakhstan, history education, civic education, curriculum analysis, Soviet legacy, nation-building, “Fundamentals of Law.”

## Introduction

The teaching of history and civic education is important for the democratic development of any country, as it equips citizens with the knowledge and skills necessary to build democratic and prosperous societies. Dahl (1992) addresses the problem of ensuring high-quality civic education in contemporary days. As written by Dahl (1992):

If democracy is to work, it would seem to require a certain level of political competence on the part of its citizens. In newly democratic or democratizing countries, where people are just beginning to learn the arts of self-government, the question of citizen competence possesses an obvious urgency. Yet even in countries where democratic institutions have existed for several generations or more, a growing body of evidence reveals grave limits to citizen competence (p. 45).

While the challenge of ensuring quality citizenship education exists in all countries, this chapter aims to contribute to the understanding of the role of education in the upbringing of democratic values and patriotism in the context of Kazakhstani secondary education. The present article analyzes key aspects of Kazakhstan's history and civic education, examining an array of critical indicators that shed light on the country's educational landscape as of 2023.

## Context of the education system

### *Historical-geographical-philosophical context*

In the former Soviet Union, of which Kazakhstan was a part, history textbooks served as a tool of indoctrination; perceptions of history, society, and culture were distorted according to the tenets of Marxism-Leninism, which presented the Russian colonial conquests of the republics as voluntary and friendly accession. Thus, the Ministry of Education in Moscow was responsible for approving and regulating what was taught and disseminated in history in 15 diverse republics. In general, history education served to support the ideology of the Soviet state and paid little attention to what the republics were (Kissane, 2005). Accordingly, Soviet history textbooks presented history as a stream of indisputable facts, emphasizing only the positive aspects of the Soviet colonization and industrialization and disregarding the negative consequences

of Soviet rule. Thus, in the process of the so-called “Russification” or “Sovietisation” the main goal was to subordinate the cultures and histories of the individual republics to strengthen the friendship between the peoples and create a common Soviet identity (Kissane, 2005).

Towards the end of the USSR, the situation began to change gradually, and in 1990, the Kazakh government developed a new program on the History of Kazakhstan, which was by then separate from the USSR history program. Before this, the History of the Kazakh SSR had existed as an optional course, usually taught only in Kazakh-language schools in the southern regions where such schools existed. After 1990, it became a compulsory subject throughout the Republic (Kissane, 2005). The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a surge of interest in curricula and pedagogical reforms. Thus, the government of Kazakhstan initiated changes in the teaching of history, proposing a list of corrections to past material and changes to old curricula. The program required new historical facts, more questions about the revolution, and a reassessment of what had previously been presented as Kazakhstan’s voluntary accession to Russia. Thereby, history education in the country became a potentially powerful tool in the new nation-building project (Kissane, 2005). Thus, in Kazakhstan, as in most former Soviet republics, a process of de-Sovietisation and de-Russification began.

De-Sovietisation refers to the process by which nationalizing political systems remove symbols, political institutions, and representatives of Soviet power from the social and political landscape and replace them with new, national ones. De-Russification, in turn, means the abandonment of Russian as the main language of communication in the republic and a shift in emphasis from Russian history to the history of Kazakhstan. Accordingly, every history program published after 1991 emphasizes the need to move away from a curriculum in which European and Russian history dominates over Eastern and Kazakh history. Moreover, teachers were also encouraged to shift their focus to the cultural and historical contributions of Central Asian countries (Kissane, 2005).

After the dissolution of the USSR, the post-Soviet republics faced the need to replace the source of common values and goals with something new. A defining feature of post-Soviet historical narratives is the concept of territoriality, which frames all ancient inhabitants of a republic’s current land as the direct ancestors of its modern-day citizens. In this way, the newly created borders became historical realities long before

the Soviet period. In this regard, Kazakhstan is no exception, where the territorial aspect plays a fundamental role in the construction of the country's past. The central idea forming the official history of Kazakhstan is that all peoples who lived on the territory of modern Kazakhstan played a role in the formation of the Kazakh people, and therefore, they have a place in the history of the country (Emre Gürbüz, 2013, pp. 3). However, territorial inclusiveness has its limits and does not include ethnic groups that migrated to Kazakhstan after the 18th century, such as Russians, Ukrainians, Uighurs, Koreans, and others. Only those people who lived within the modern borders of Kazakhstan before the formation of the Kazakh Khanate are considered to be the ancestors of the Kazakh nation. However, today, the inclusiveness of all ethnic groups of Kazakhstan is manifested on another level when all citizens of the Republic are *Kazakhstanis* (Emre Gürbüz, 2013). Thus, the continuity in the territorial understanding is partly related to the very need to anchor the state within existing borders. It should be noted here that the traditional territorial understanding cannot be seen only as an external influence adopted from the Soviet period, as it is also driven by internal needs. Therefore, the main task became to assert the legitimacy of the state within the given borders (Emre Gürbüz, 2013). Today, there is a tendency in Kazakh historiography to go beyond territoriality. For example, the study of the Kipchaks outside of Kazakh borders, Sultan Baybars, ruler of Egypt, or Attila, Khan of the European Huns. Thus, Kazakh historiography is on its way to becoming a field that studies not only the past of the peoples who lived on the territory of modern Kazakhstan, regardless of their ethnic origin but also the past of all Kazakh tribes, regardless of the land on which they lived (Emre Gürbüz, 2013).

### ***General description of the education system***

The Republic of Kazakhstan has undergone significant transformations in its post-independence education system, with a substantial emphasis on revising curricular content and pedagogical methods, especially in teaching the nation's history. The education system is categorized into several levels: preschool education, primary education, basic secondary education, general secondary education, technical and vocational education, post-secondary education, and higher and additional education. Each level incorporates history education in some form, ensuring a continuous and comprehensive understanding of Kazakhstan's history from a young age. The curricu-

lum of history and civic education in Kazakhstan is structured around Bloom’s taxonomy to develop knowledge, understanding, and critical thinking regarding the ethnic, political, socio-economic, and cultural history of Kazakhstan. Finishing grade 11, students undergo the standardized university entrance test, called the Unified National Test (National Testing Centre, 2010). The Unified National Test consists of two main blocks. The first block has mathematical literacy, reading literacy, and the history of Kazakhstan. This block includes multiple-choice questions, with 10 questions each for mathematical and reading literacy, while the history of Kazakhstan has 20 questions. The second block consists of two subjects of a student’s choice, and several questions as well as the type of answers depends on the subject of choice. For example, world history can be chosen in combination with fundamentals of law, geography, or foreign language subjects (National Testing Center, 2010).

*Table 1. Educational areas in the content of school education (“Instructional and methodological letter”, 2023).*

No	The level of school education	Educational areas	The content of historical and civic education in educational areas	ISCED level equivalent
1	Primary education Grades 1-4	“Language and Literature”, “Mathematics”, “Natural Sciences”, “Man and Society”, “Art”, “Technology”, “Physical Culture”	The educational field of “Natural Sciences” includes subjects: “Knowledge of the world”, “Natural Sciences”	ISCED 1 (age period of 6-10 years)
2	Basic secondary education grades 5 – 9	“Language and Literature”, “Mathematics and Computer Science”, “Natural Science”, “People and Society”, “Art”, “Technology”, “Physical Culture”	The educational field of “Natural Science” includes subjects: “Geography”, “Biology”, “Physics”, “Chemistry”  The educational field “People and Society” includes subjects: “History of Kazakhstan”, “World History”	ISCED 2 (age period of 11-15 years)

3	General secondary education Grades 10 – 11	“Language and Literature”, “Mathematics and Computer Science”, “People and Society”, “Natural Science”, “Technology”, “Physical Culture”	<p>The educational field of “Natural Sciences” includes subjects: “Geography”, “Biology”, “Physics”, “Chemistry”</p> <p>The educational field “People and Society” includes subjects: “History of Kazakhstan”, “World History”, “Fundamentals of Law”, “Self-knowledge”</p> <p>The educational field “Physical culture” consists of subjects: “Physical education”, “Initial military training”</p>	ISCED 3 (age period of 16-17 years)
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The main providers of school education in Kazakhstan are government-funded public schools operating under the guidance of local educational authorities and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The education system is also supported by various specialized educational organizations, such as the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (NIS), the country’s flagship schools.

Education in Kazakhstan is primarily funded by the central government, as indicated in the “Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan”. The government allocates resources for the development of educational infrastructure, curriculum development, teacher training, and other essential components of the education system. This centralized funding approach ensures equitable access to quality education across different regions of the country, allowing for a consistent educational experience for all students. Since 2020, public schools in Kazakhstan have been funded using the principle of “per capita funding”, referring to the amount of money allocated for each student within a given educational institution (“On approval of the Methodology of per capita regulatory financing...”, 2023). However, according to a recent news article (“Schools in Kazakhstan: uneven funding...”, 2022), the budget for one public school in 2022 was 159 million Kazakhstani tenge, which is approximately 353,586 USD. This was 3.7 times less than the budget of one NIS school, which was 592.1 million Kazakhstani tenge, which is approximately 1,316,720 USD.

## **Position of history and civic education**

### ***General Aspects***

As per analysis in 2023, the Law on Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State Obligatory Standard of Education are the primary legal normative documents regulating the education system. The National Academy of Education, named after Ybyrai Altynsarin of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, is a scientific centre that carries out methodological and scientific-methodological support of the education system and the educational processes. This centre forms the basis for state compulsory education standards, model curricula, and study programs. “History of Kazakhstan” is a compulsory subject from the 5th to the 11th grades, with an annual load of 72 hours per year, except in the 10th and 11th grades, where it is studied once a week for 36 hours per year in a shortened format. History is integrated with other subjects under the educational field of “People and Society”, which includes “World History”, “People. Society. Law”, and “Self-knowledge”. Textbooks for “History of Kazakhstan” are either recommended or approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, ensuring quality content suitable for different age groups. “History of Kazakhstan” is a mandatory subject for the final certification in the 11th grade. The certification assesses students based on Bloom’s taxonomy, covering knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This process aims to develop in-depth knowledge of key issues in Kazakhstan’s history, cultural-historical development, and historical thinking skills (Educational areas in the content of school education (“Instructional and methodological letter”, 2023).

## **Periodic Focus of History Education**

### ***History of Kazakhstan***

The curriculum of the subject “History of Kazakhstan” covers the ancient history of the country. It examines the development of nomadic pastoralism in Kazakhstan, as well as ancient nomadic confederations. Specifically, it analyzes such ancient confederations as the Sakas, Huns, and Sarmatians and their associated archaeological findings, worldview, art, and social structure. The curriculum also examines individual historical figures

of the period, such as Tomyris and Attila, and certain historical events, such as Alexander the Great's campaign into Saka territory and the Huns' westward migration (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The medieval history of Kazakhstan is also covered in the curriculum by examining the states and their socio-cultural features from the Turkic Khaganate to the Kazakh Khanate and listing some significant historical events. Within these topics, the history of Kazakhstan between the 6th and 17th centuries is explored by examining the emergence of the first Turkic states, such as the Turkic Khaganate and the Oghuz and Kimak states, and the cities that emerged along the Silk Road are also discussed. The curriculum also analyzes the process of the Islam's penetration into the region and related events. Moreover, the Mongol conquest of the territory and the subsequent formation of the Kazakh Khanate are examined (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The curriculum then considers premodern and modern national history, studying the period from the Kazakh Khanate in the 17th century to the collapse of the USSR. Thus, this segment includes the main historical developments, such as the growth and decline of the Kazakh Khanate and its subsequent subjugation to the Russian Empire, as well as an analysis of the numerous national liberation movements and attempts by Kazakh intellectuals to restore national sovereignty after the 1917 revolution. The curriculum then examines the establishment of the Soviet rule in Kazakhstan and subsequent events related to it, including the repression of local intellectuals, participation in World War II, and the general sociocultural changes that occurred in the country during the Soviet period (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

When it comes to contemporary national history, the curriculum covers the period from the end of World War II to the present day. In particular, various periods of Soviet Kazakhstan are studied, including the so-called "thaw", the "era of stagnation", and so on. In the end, several topics about Kazakhstan after 1991 are discussed in detail. Thus, this segment examines Soviet Kazakhstan's historical events. It first considers Kazakhstan after World War II and then in the respective eras of the "Thaw", the "Era of Stagnation", "Glasnost", and "Perestroika". It then examines Kazakhstan after 1991 as an independent subject of international relations and the major events that occurred in the country, including privatization, the first presidency, the relocation of the capital, and various national economic and social programs (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The last topic in the History of Kazakhstan curriculum is “The Culture of Contemporary Kazakhstan (from 1991 to the present).” This topic examines major developments in national science and education and explores culture within the context of globalization. It also deals with state educational policy and the differences between traditional and extremist religious worldviews (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

### ***World History***

The World History curriculum covers the prehistoric period of human development, examining the period from hunter-gatherers to farmers and pastoralists. This topic studies the origins of humanity through various theories and explores prehistoric human communities. Early religious beliefs such as animism, fetishism, and totemism are also examined, as well as the concept of the “Neolithic Revolution” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). Further on, the curriculum separately studies ancient world history, examining civilizations such as Ancient Egypt, Ancient India and China, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire. These topics examine the social and political structure of ancient societies, as well as their mode of production. The emergence of the first scientific disciplines and the influence of agriculture on their development are also analyzed. In addition, such phenomena of the ancient world as ancient Egyptian temples and pyramids, the Indian caste system, Chinese moral teachings, and the Athenian democracy are discussed (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). In the curriculum, the Middle Ages segment covers topics from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the Reformation. This segment begins by analyzing the reasons for the collapse of the Roman Empire and the formation of feudal societies. A separate topic then examines the history of Islam and the Golden Age of Islamic culture. The differences between the absolutist monarchies of the West and the East are also explored. This is followed by a discussion of the effects of the plague and the great geographical discoveries (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). In the World History curriculum, the pre-modern and modern periods include major historical events in the world - from the English and Industrial Revolution to World War II. This segment covers a very wide range of topics, from European revolutions and their colonial invasion of the East to the Enlightenment movement. The resistance of China and India to colonization and the abolition of slavery in the United States, Atatürk’s war of liberation, and the causes of both World Wars are also examined. In addition, a separate topic examines the

development of 19th and 20th-century art and literature (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The curriculum then covers contemporary world history, analyzing historical events from World War II to the present day, such as the Cold War, the process of decolonization, the creation of international organizations, and more. Accordingly, this segment covers various topics related to contemporary global history by analyzing the political and economic map of the world after World War II. It examines the causes of the Cold War and the subsequent formation of two opposing blocs, decolonization movements in former colonies, and the creation of international organizations such as the United Nations. In addition, a separate topic looks at Asia, particularly the economic phenomenon called the “East Asian Miracle”. The relationship between national identity and the effects of globalization is also examined (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022.). The final topic in the World History curriculum is “Culture in the second half of the 20th century and the first half of the 21st century”. The topic explores the influence of mass media on the cultural development of nations, as well as trends in contemporary world culture. It also examines the concept of digital society and the new art forms associated with it (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

## **Declared Key Competencies in History Education of Kazakhstan**

### ***History of Kazakhstan***

The curriculum of the “History of Kazakhstan” is directed towards equipping the students with a set of specific competencies and skills that develop their understanding and knowledge of history. The main aim of the curriculum is to develop the students’ basic historical thinking skills, such as interpretation of historical sources, orientation in time and space, and skills of historical analysis and explanations (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). These specific competencies and skills are formed based on historical concepts, which include: 1) change and continuity, 2) cause and effect, 3) proof, 4) similarities and differences, 5) significance, and 6) interpretation (p. 3210).

As per analysis in 2023, in the curriculum of “History of Kazakhstan,” it is stated that “The content of the subject “History of Kazakhstan” allows understanding the unique-

ness of the culture of our ancestors, the place and role Kazakhstan in world history, its contribution to the development of the global civilization” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022, p. 3208). The aim of developing patriotism is highlighted in the curriculum, and it is interwoven with the development of such complex analytical skills as “development, research, thinking, communication skills” (p. 3208).

According to the report by Hoskins et al. (2008), the competencies of the curriculum can be divided into affective (identity, values, attitude) and cognitive (knowledge and skills) competencies (p. 21). In the statement of objectives of the curriculum of the “History of Kazakhstan,” the values and identity competencies are combined in one set. Thus, it can be seen that the curriculum aims to develop a patriotic citizen, proud of one’s national history. One important element of Kazakhstani history curricula is that patriotism and love for the homeland are not positioned in contrast to universal human values but are complemented as a set of competencies necessary for the development of the national identity of a Kazakh citizen.

*Table 2. Competency groups adapted from Hoskins et al. (2008).*

	Competence	Competence type	Description
1.	Identity	Affective	“Sense of personal identity, sense of community identity, sense of national identity, sense of global identity” (p. 21)
2.	Values		Values include “human rights, democracy, gender equality, sustainability, peace/non-violence, fairness and equity, valuing involvement as active citizens” (p. 21)
3.	Attitude		Attitudes include “political trust, political interest, political efficacy, autonomy and independence, resilience, cultural appreciation, respect for other cultures, openness to change/difference of opinion, responsibility, and openness to involvement as active citizens, influencing society and policy” (p. 21).

4.	Knowledge	Cognitive	Knowledge about “human rights and responsibilities, political literacy, historical knowledge, current affairs, diversity, cultural heritage, legal matters and how to influence policy and society” (p. 21).
5.	Skills		Skills including “conflict resolution, intercultural competence, informed decision-making, creativity, ability to influence society and policy, research capability, advocacy, autonomy/agency, critical reflection, communication, debating skills, active listening, problem-solving, coping with ambiguity, working with others, assessing risks (p. 21)”

The curriculum of “History of Kazakhstan” provides a more concrete competence of “consciousness,” which implies the development of the attitudes listed by Hoskins et al. (2011). It states that “Historical consciousness is the knowledge of history, the interpretation of historical experience and the lessons derived from it, social forecasting (based on an understanding of the essence of the present, the invariance of the past, and the alternativeness of the future), and the awareness of historical responsibility for one’s actions. Historical knowledge, which is an important component of the educational process, contributes to the development of the individual as a citizen and a patriot” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). Thus, the competencies of historical consciousness and historical knowledge are connected with the development of attitudes of responsibility and societal involvement, as well as cultural appreciation.

The curriculum of the “History of Kazakhstan” divides the knowledge competencies into three groups: knowledge about the main stages of the societal development in Kazakhstan from the ancient period to modern days, knowledge about the formation of national values throughout history, and the knowledge of main historical events and processes in Kazakhstan (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). Following Hoskins et al. (2008), the curriculum of “History of Kazakhstan” divides the “Skills” into five main categories, including critical analysis, making judgments based on historical facts, research, and communicative skills. Overall, 2022 curriculum of the

“History of Kazakhstan” is directed towards equipping the students with a set of specific competencies and skills that develop their understanding and knowledge of history.

### ***World History***

While history teachers are engaged with encouraging their students to think historically by involving them in “interpreting and analyzing historical artefacts” (Waring & Robinson, 2010, p. 22), the teachers of the World History discipline are faced with a slightly different task. According to Manning (2003), World History is “the story of connections within the global human community” (p. 3), and he further adds that such terms as “connections and human community” (p. 3) are usually associated with World History. Similarly, Girard and Harris (2013) posit that World History “can be seen as a catch-all course title that might include a regional approach, a current affairs approach, a “Western civ” approach, or a global approach” (p. 440). In other words, the World history discipline seeks to address “global interconnections, multiple perspectives, and inquiry into global issues” (Girard & Harris, 2013, p. 438). As World History goes beyond the usual historical narratives and takes a “global approach” (Girard & Harris, 2013), we will look at the curriculum of World History in Kazakhstan from a competency-based perspective.

The curriculum of World History discipline explicitly and clearly states the aims and objectives, the competencies to be developed as well as the expected learning outcomes. Upon reviewing the curriculum, it became clear that it indeed focuses more on globality, multiculturalism, and universal human values. In other words, the key competencies the students learn in this discipline revolve around the development of such skills and values as respect and tolerance towards other cultures. To be exact, the main aim of the World History discipline is to teach students a sense of history, tolerance, and respect for the culture and history of different countries, instill universal human values developed over many centuries, and develop their research, thinking, and communication skills (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022, p. 3306). It is also highlighted that the subject is aimed to develop “historical thinking” in students, which is based on the conceptual understanding of the following: “1) change and continuity; 2) cause and effect; 3) proof; 4) similarity and difference; 5) significance; 6) interpretation” (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022).

The content of World History discipline builds upon the main four sections: Section 1: the development of social relations includes such topics as social structures and inter-

action; Section 2: the development and interaction of cultures, including religion, art, science, and philosophical systems; Section 3: the development and interaction of political systems including government characteristics, structures, forms of government, empires, wars, uprisings, and revolutions; Section 4: the development of economic relations including economic systems, evolution and interaction, and historical models of economic systems (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022, p. 3308).

The students are expected to develop such competencies as analyzing and evaluating historical examples, explaining the cause and effect of historical events, providing arguments and evidence based on analysis of historical events, comparing historical events and facts, justifying the significance of historical events, and explaining different points of view on historical events (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2022). The aforementioned competencies are expected to be developed on a gradual basis from 5th to 9th grades. For example, there are 10 sections in grade 5 each of which is concentrated on a certain civilization, i.e. Ancient Egypt, Ancient India, Ancient Greece, Ancient China, and The Roman Empire. The students are expected to explain and describe certain events that took place in these civilizations. Also, in the first five sections, the students are expected to understand, explain, and describe, then towards the next sections the students are expected to also define, characterize and compare certain events. In grade 6 the students learn about the impact of religion on certain historical events, the Renaissance period and Scientific Revolution. Grades 7 and 8 include learning about India and the United Kingdom in the 18th century, the French Revolution, European colonial dominance in the 19th century, the power increase of the United States of America, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. Grade 9 covers Globalization, the development of Asian countries, science, education, technology, and culture from the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. Starting from grades 6 to 9, the students are expected to analyze, evaluate, interpret and provide arguments, and draw conclusions. From this, it is evident that the curriculum is not only learner-centred but also develops the students' competencies and skills from a broader spectrum to a more precise and, in some cases, demanding spectrum. It is also clear that the curriculum covers the history of various civilizations by introducing the students to different religions, cultures, and perspectives.

## Structure and content selection

This section reviews history textbooks for the 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades in both Kazakh and Russian language comprehensive schools, including the specialized Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools (Kabuldinov et al., 2020ab; Kabuldinov et al., 2018; Kumekov et al., 2017; Omarbekov et al., 2018; Oskembayev et al., 2019ab; Dzhandosova, 2019; Akhmetova et al., 2017; Bukayeva et al., 2017; E-textbooks, 2021).

The curriculum (2022-2023) covers Kazakhstan's history, including its cultural heritage and its development in the context of global history. The curriculum for grades 5-9 on the subject of "History of Kazakhstan" is broken down into periods in chronological order, from ancient times to the present day. The taught content is designed to give students an in-depth knowledge of key issues concerning the political, socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural history of Kazakhstan across different eras. It includes various sections such as "The Development of Social Relations," "The Development of Culture," "The Development of Political Systems," and "Economic Development." Meanwhile, a course titled "Local History" has also been integrated into the content of the "History of Kazakhstan" subject for grades 5-7. The teaching materials for the latter course educate students about the main stages of various historical processes on the territory of Kazakhstan while also informing them about its natural resources, historical monuments, and cultural sites. In addition, there is content on traditional crafts, cultural and literary heritage, as well as notable people, many of whom are famous across different regions of Kazakhstan (Altynsarin Academy, 2022).

Although the history curriculum in Kazakhstan is not fully interdisciplinary, efforts are being made to connect the subject of history with other disciplines, such as geography, culture, literature, art, music, law, economics, and politics, to promote a more holistic understanding of the country's historical events and cultural heritage. For example, linking history with geography could potentially help students gain a better understanding of the spatial contexts of certain historical events, which often have geographical significance. The history textbooks can thus give readers a strong grasp of territories and the ability to read maps (e.g. when studying the migrations of ancient cultures) while providing information on the locations and descriptions of fossil fuels, agricultural developments (e.g. Saks' gardening culture, and virgin lands), tools and utensils for

everyday use, jewelry, stone monuments (e.g. Balbal stone sculptures), and architectural monuments of each covered period (e.g. the Aisha Bibi and Khoja Ahmed Yasawi Mausoleums) (Kumekov et al., 2017a, 2017b). Elsewhere, the development of poetry (*jir/jirau*) culture (e.g., Qoblandy Batyr and Qarabek Batyr) is also taught, where, as well as historical accounts, information about knights' hunting and archery are also provided (Kumekov et al., 2017ab).

The study of historical periods often involves exploring the art, literature, and music of the times, thereby providing students with a comprehensive understanding of the given era. For example, the school textbooks supplement details of historical events with evidence from literature (for example, "The Disaster of Otyrar " by M. Shakhanov is referred to as the famous battle between the Mongol army and Turkic tribes in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). Furthermore, historical events are often interconnected with social, political, and economic factors. With that in mind, the curriculum integrates social studies concepts to help students grasp the broader societal implications of such events. For instance, students are taught the basics of law and legislation through "Jeti Jarǵı" (Seven Charters) introduced by Tauke Khan (Omarbekov et al., 2018). Moreover, the school textbooks for grades 8 and 9 demonstrate links between history and other disciplines like economics (e.g. industrialization and the Turkestan-Siberian Railway (Turksib) development, as well as literature and music (e.g., composers including Qurmanghazy, Dauletkerey, and Abai). In addition, the curriculum covers the more recent trends and developments in Kazakhstan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century too, and mentions Nazarbayev University (the country's flagship university), the state-funded Bolashak Programme, and the Kazakhstan-2030 Strategy (Oskembayev et al., 2019).

The "History of Kazakhstan" curriculum for the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is arranged differently. It is ordered thematically, albeit chronology is maintained within the individual chapters (Dzhandosova, 2019). The curriculum does not place a particular emphasis on political history, with the historical events covered evolving around the following four main themes: historical events and leaders; the formation of Kazakhstan; colonial and Soviet Kazakhstan; and independence and modern history. For 10<sup>th</sup> grade, the basic content of the curriculum is divided into four sections: "Civilization: Features of Development," "Ethnic and Social Processes," "Wars and Revolutions," and "Cultural Development" (Al-tynsarin Academy, 2022, p. 200). Meanwhile, the "History of Kazakhstan" curriculum for 11<sup>th</sup> grade is essentially a review of all courses taught from 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grade (Kabyldinov

et al., 2020). At this stage, students undergo preparations for the standardized university entrance test, the Unified National Test (National Testing Center, 2010). In 11th grade, the basic content of the curriculum for this subject comprises the following four sections: “Civilization: Features of Development,” “Political and Legal Processes,” “Development of Socio-political Thought,” and “Development of Education and Science.” These sections are divided into subsections that contain grade-level learning objectives in the form of expected outcomes (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, p. 200).

By the standard “History of Kazakhstan” curriculum for students in grades 10 and 11, as well as for those who pursue the social and humanitarian elements in the “World History” curriculum, there is research to be conducted at the end of each academic quarter (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, pp. 202, 210). The recommended topics for research papers for students in the 10th grade in the “History of Kazakhstan” subject are: (1) The Great Steppe in the History of World Civilization; (2) Ethno-social Formation of Kazakh Society; and (3) The Evolution of Kazakh Statehood; (4) Culture and Traditions as the Genetic Code of the Nation. Moreover, for research papers in 11th grade, the following four topics are recommended: (1) Features of the Economic Development of Kazakhstan in Different Historical Periods; (2) Ethnic Groups of Kazakhstan: History and Destinies; (3) The Consolidating Role of Socio-political Thought; and (4) Contributions of Figures from Kazakhstan to the Development of Science and Education (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, pp. 202-203).

In the curriculum 2022-2023, there are also elective courses on both the “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” subjects that include issues related to historical eras, states, historical figures, economic, political, cultural, and social issues of history, and the works of historians. Additional materials for both the “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” subjects can be reviewed in the following sources: Bilimdiler Sayti, 2014; Grishin, n.d.; Index Group, n.d.; Nikolayev, 2000; QazContent, 2022; and Zlygostev, 2002. In addition, recommended topics for elective courses for “History of Kazakhstan” are: (1) The Golden Man as a Cultural Monument; (2) Turkic Scientists of the Middle Ages; (3) History of Traditional Kazakh Life; (4) Cultural and Historical Foundations of Kazakh Folk Crafts; and (5) The Alash Movement and its ideas (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, pp. 202-203). Meanwhile, topics for elective courses in the “World History” curriculum are (1) Masterpieces of Advanced World Culture; (2) History of World Museums; (3) Nomadic Civilization in the Eurasian Space; (4) Historical Demography; (5) Globalization

Processes: Theory and Modernity; (6) Socio-political Movements in World History: Communist, Socialist, and New Democratic Movements; (7) The Scientific and Technological Revolution and its Influence on the Social and Spiritual Sphere; and (8) Western Civilization: Problems and Development Processes (Altynsarin Academy, 2022, p. 211).

## **Civic Education in Kazakhstan**

As per analysis done in 2023, civic education in Kazakhstan is represented by the subject “Fundamentals of Law”, which is offered as a compulsory course for grades 9-11. However, it is an elective subject for students taking the standardized university entrance test, the Unified National Test (National Testing Centre, 2010). In total, each grade receives approximately 36 lessons per year dedicated to civic education, but in grades 10-11, with the humanities focus the amount doubles.

As per analysis in 2023, the basic curriculum for grade 9 includes seven major sections: law and the state, constitutional law, civil law, labour law, family law; administrative law, and criminal law. For grades 10 and 11, the curriculum further extends to cover public law, private law, fundamentals of procedural law, and international law (“Fundamentals of law subject books for grade 9, 10, 11”, 2019).

At the end of each academic quarter in grades 10 and 11, students are expected to engage in research work, researching topics such as the evolution of forms of state and law; characteristics of the features of branches of public law; the role of private law in ensuring legal protection of private property. Also, in grade 11, the financial literacy component aims to provide students with basic but essential knowledge about banking operations, loans, and credit systems, as well as budgeting and financial planning (“Instructional and methodological letters for Kazakhstani schools”, 2023). This part of the curriculum equips students with the skills to make informed decisions that will affect their long-term financial health, empowering them to be more responsible citizens. However, the curriculum of the “Fundamentals of Law” subject does not cover digital citizenship nor the development of digital skills (“Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11”, 2019).

The portrayal of political participation and activism reflects the historical context of the nation’s political landscape. The textbooks primarily emphasize the existence of six officially registered political parties in Kazakhstan, highlighting the formalized structure

of the country's political system. Within this framework, citizens are largely described not as active participants of the democratic system but rather as passive mediators between these political parties and the government. They can exercise their political rights to the freedom of association, to manage public affairs, and to participate in peaceful demonstrations. Political rights in these textbooks are mentioned briefly. The absence of a dedicated chapter on political activism may indicate a limited historical emphasis on grassroots movements or civil society organizations in the country's political development ("Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11", 2019).

Also, state-approved "Fundamentals of Law" textbooks appear to allocate limited space to discussing environmental challenges and sustainable development. While they do acknowledge that one of the responsibilities of citizens is to care for the environment and natural resources, this topic seems to receive relatively scant attention. It's worth considering that the limited coverage of environmental challenges and sustainable development in the textbooks (years?) may be due to the existence of separate subjects or courses that explore more deeply into these issues. In educational curricula, topics like environmental science, ecology, and sustainable development are often taught as standalone subjects ("Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11", 2019).

In "The Fundamentals of Law" textbook (2019) in Kazakhstan, readers will discover a strong patriotism. The textbook employs powerful symbols such as the Kazakh flag with its bright blue sky, which represents freedom and openness, and the golden steppe eagle, a revered national symbol embodying strength and resilience. These symbols, deeply ingrained in Kazakhstan's history and culture, serve to evoke a profound sense of national pride and unity among its citizens. Additionally, the emphasis on the legal framework and the Constitution within the textbook underscores the significance of the rule of law in preserving the nation's sovereignty and fostering civic duty, further instilling a deep sense of patriotism and responsibility in its readers. The textbooks make a concerted effort to nurture a sense of national identity by referencing historical figures like Al Farabi and Abay, who are celebrated for their contributions to Kazakh culture, philosophy, and literature. Furthermore, the textbooks place a significant emphasis on the role of the family within civil society. By highlighting the family as the primary institution, the curriculum underscores the importance of strong familial bonds in shaping individuals' values, ethics, and social responsibility, ultimately contributing to the broader national identity and the well-being of Kazakhstan as a whole.

In the 11th-grade textbook, a notable section explores the concept of interconnectedness through global or supranational citizenship. Kazakhstan aspires to join the ranks of developed nations, positioning itself as a subject of international law with its ambitions aligned with its global standing. The curriculum underscores Kazakhstan's active engagement on the international stage, highlighting the country's global partnerships with other nations and its membership in various prominent world organizations. These affiliations demonstrate Kazakhstan's commitment to collaborating on a multitude of global issues, reflecting its role as a responsible and active participant in the international community ("The Fundamentals of Law subject books for grades 9, 10, 11", 2019). Additionally, the textbook mentions the existence of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, a unique institution in the country's socio-political landscape. This assembly is designed to promote interethnic harmony and inclusivity, reflecting Kazakhstan's commitment to fostering unity among its diverse population. By including this institution in the curriculum, the textbooks underscore the nation's dedication to embracing and celebrating its rich cultural mosaic as a fundamental component of its identity and global citizenship aspirations.

## **Dilemmas on history and civic education in Kazakhstan**

There are some worthwhile observations to make here on the reviewed history textbooks. During the comparative analysis, some debatable statements were found in the textbooks. For example, Burkhanov and Sharipova (2023, pp. 4-5) state that "the History of Kazakhstan textbook for 5th grade narrates about commonalities between the Shumer and ancient Turkic writing systems." According to scholars, this statement was initially made by the Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov (Artykbayev, Sabdanbekova, and Abil, 2010, pp. 11, 92). Another important example was taken from the 7th-grade history textbook, where some of the content on the periodization of the ancient Turkic writing system was questionable (Zholdasbayev 2012, p. 44).

Elsewhere, history textbooks by Toledubayev, Zhanuzak, and Koigeldiyev (2010, p.69) and Sadykov and Toledubayev (2011, p.155) explain the term "anthropology" as a physical anthropology, thereby referring to a traditional Soviet understanding of it. Moreover, in some textbooks, terms such as "ethnos" and "nation" were still interpreted by a traditional Soviet or Stalinist understanding (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2023, p.5). Ethnicity and iden-

tivity issues started to appear in textbooks from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade in a short section called “Formation of the Kazakh Ethnicity” and then in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in a chapter called “Beginning of the Formation of Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan.” Meanwhile, the textbooks for grades 10 and 11 contained two sections, one called “Formation of the Kazakh People” and the other named “Ethnic Composition of the Kazakh People” (Burkhanov & Sharipova, 2023, p.12). All the reviewed history textbooks were written by different researchers. Previously, history textbooks looked more like scholarly works with many dates, facts, and names that required memorization by heart and no illustrations or pictures. Relatedly, Burkhanov and Sharipova (2023) claim that many history textbooks written for schools were criticized for being too complex for school children as they had been prepared by academic researchers rather than school educators or teachers (p. 4). To sum up, the Soviet legacy still affects history education in Kazakhstan through the contents of its textbooks, as well as through the terms used, ideology taught, and teaching approaches taken.

While the reforms to history and civic education in Kazakhstan have been positive since independence 1991, some experts argue that more needs to be done to promote critical thinking and analysis skills in the classroom. For example, some teachers may still be using traditional teaching methods, and some textbooks may still contain biased information. Also, teachers’ teaching styles and pedagogical approaches are still largely influenced by the Soviet legacy. The reason for that is that most public-school teachers were raised and educated in the late Soviet period. Fimyar and Kurakbayev (2016) argue that in the teaching community, the Soviet system of education was still often referred to as being “successful, fundamental and the best in the world” (p.86). Kashkimbaev (2013) argues that one of the main problems with teaching history in Kazakhstan is that textbooks still contain a significant amount of Soviet propaganda. For example, the narratives from neighbouring regions, such as Astrakhan in Russia, sometimes might overshadow local perspectives. This leads to an education that may not always be neutral or comprehensive, thereby affecting students’ understanding of their heritage and global history (Valieva, 2013). Also, the coexistence of Russian and Kazakh languages in the educational system is a testament to the close cultural ties between Kazakhstan and Russia. However, this linguistic diversity poses its own set of challenges. The majority of educational materials, particularly in history, are often available in just one language, hindering those not proficient in that language from accessing critical educational resources (Kashkimbaev, 2013).

Additionally, local authors (Valieva, 2013; Kashkimbaev, 2013) identify several other challenges facing the teaching of history in Kazakhstan, including a lack of resources, such as textbooks and other teaching materials, large class sizes, a high workload for teachers and a lack of support for teachers to develop their skills.

While the Kazakh educational curriculum 2022-2023 does cover essential civic topics, such as financial literacy and private/civil law, there's a missed opportunity for contextual depth. For example, Grade 11 students learn about banking, loans, and contracts but often without the historical backdrop that would enrich their understanding of these subjects. This detachment from historical contexts can result in a lack of comprehensive education. With a young national identity, Kazakhstan faces the tricky balance of fostering national pride while ensuring an unbiased historical narrative. The call for a unified approach to teaching history often leans towards a government-endorsed version of events, potentially stifling critical thinking and creating an uneven educational landscape across different schools.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this paper has extensively introduced a collection of works on history and civic education in Kazakhstan. It has applied qualitative content and document analysis to examine the history curriculum and textbooks used at public schools to provide a deep understanding of history education in Kazakhstan. This method incorporated different indicators such as the position of history education, periodic focus, declared key competencies, structure and content selection, civic education, and, finally, the dilemmas concerning history and civic education. The data for this paper included history textbooks used in grades 5-11 that were in use in Kazakhstan during the 2010–2022 period.

By providing a general description of the secondary education system in the country, it conveys specific knowledge of history and civic education in Kazakhstan, its general aspects, periodic focus, key competencies, content, and dilemmas. Even though the Kazakh government has initiated changes to the old history curriculum, not all such reforms have gone smoothly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Upon gaining its independence, a new Kazakhstan history program was developed by the Kazakh government in 1990, in which an attempt was made to distinguish it from the USSR history program.

The new program required some correction of historical facts and the reassessment of some issues concerning revolutions and periods of colonialism. Kissane (2005) argues that history education in the country became a potentially powerful tool in the new nation-building project (p. 50). That process, according to an article by Burkhanov & Sharipova (2023), is still ongoing.

A comprehensive content analysis of the history curriculum 2022-2023 here has helped to clarify which periods are covered in the “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” basic secondary education. The main finding is that the curriculum provides students with a comprehensive understanding of history, presenting a logical and coherent account of human development as well as national history. Moreover, the history curriculum encompasses all historical periods of note in both Kazakh and world history, breaking them down into separate segments for examination, from the prehistoric period to the present day.

The “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History” curricula clearly state the aims, key competencies, and learning outcomes for students. Specifically, the “History of Kazakhstan” curriculum states more explicitly that it aims to develop patriotism in school students, while the curriculum for “World History” clearly sets out to develop multiculturalism and tolerance towards other cultures. Moreover, the subjects seem to develop not only cognitive competencies, such as knowledge and skills, but also affective competencies, such as values, attitudes, and intended behaviour, through instilling a blend of patriotism and multiculturalism. As a result, various competencies seem to complement each other across disciplines, developing gradually from grades 5 to 9.

While exploring structural and content aspects of the history curriculum, it was identified that a course titled “Local History” has been integrated into the taught content for the “History of Kazakhstan” subject in grades 5-7. The teaching materials therein provide details about the main stages of the historical processes from ancient times to the present day while also covering natural resources, historical monuments, and cultural sites. In addition, cultural and literary heritage is included, as well as famous people. Although the history curriculum is not fully interdisciplinary, some efforts are being made to connect history with other disciplines, such as geography, culture, literature, art, music, law, economics, and politics, to encourage a more holistic understanding of historical events and cultural heritage. Indeed, there is a close interdisciplinary connection between the “World History” and “History of Kazakhstan” subjects, which helps to avoid duplication

of educational material. In addition, it allows the history of Kazakhstan to be taught in the context of historical global processes. The historical periods described in the school textbooks for both subjects are identical.

Civic education has undergone significant changes in recent years. The most notable aspect of this evolution has been the introduction and enhancement of civic education as a separate subject in secondary schools, under the title “Fundamentals of Law.”

A key feature of Kazakhstan’s education system is its history curriculum, which includes both compulsory subjects such as “History of Kazakhstan” and “World History,” centrally approved by the Kazakh Ministry of Education. Even though there have been some changes made to the content of the history curriculum, the teaching style and pedagogical approaches are still largely influenced by the Soviet legacy. The reason for that is that most public school teachers were raised and educated in the late Soviet period. The Soviet legacy still affects history education in Kazakhstan through the contents of its textbooks, as well as through the terms used, ideology taught, and teaching approaches taken.

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# A Historical Review of Chinese History Textbooks since 1949: Evolution, Structure, and Ideational Orientation

Yingjie Xu

## Abstract

This article provides a comprehensive overview of the eleven history textbooks used in the People's Republic of China (PRC) from its founding in 1949 to the present year. Because of the way history textbooks are divided in reference to China's political generations, this overview also divides China's history textbooks into four periods: the Mao Zedong era, the Deng Xiaoping era, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, and the Xi Jinping era. Through a literature review, and a comparison of textbook revisions in different editions, the study found that history education in China has gone through three major stages of development: the start from 1949, the new curriculum reform in 1978, and the unified textbook reform in 2017. Since the year of 2019, the scope of history education in China has now expanded from junior high school in the compulsory education stage to higher education levels including senior high school, undergraduate programs, and graduate studies. The subject of history has always existed in Chinese classrooms as a compulsory subject, except for some students who did not choose history as a subject for the college entrance examination after the division of high school into different subjects. The study also found that the shape, structure, and content of Chinese history textbooks have undergone large-scale changes. In addition, the paper summarizes the commonalities among all the textbooks, arguing for the legitimacy of the rule of the Communist Party of China, adhering to the socialist ideology, and cultivating patriotic sentiments to enhance the sense of national identity.

*Keywords:* Chinese history textbooks, history education, textbook reform, socialist ideology

## Introduction

Textbooks hold a unique position in school education, serving as a primary subject of analysis in educational studies and playing a crucial role globally in shaping national identity. In the Asian region, the significance of textbooks is further emphasized as they are considered as tools for the government's official interpretation of history (De Giorgi, 2009). In PRC, history textbooks have always been the embodiment of the national will and the nation's central ideology. The writing of history textbooks is a major event in the long-term strategic interests of the country (Li et al., 2007), deeply intertwined with the strategic interests of the nation.

Since 1951, China's history education system has undergone two major structural changes, and 11 editions of history textbooks have been developed. There are many reasons for the multiple revisions in less than 80 years, but the main reason is to adapt to the political needs of different periods. This analysis is structured around the divisions in Chinese political generations, namely, the Mao Zedong era, the Deng Xiaoping era, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, and the Xi Jinping era. By dissecting these textbooks, the paper seeks to elucidate the development and transformation of history education in China, using the textbooks as a lens to understand the state, manner, and evolution of history education in the country.

Despite a growing body of scholarship on history education and textbook studies in China, existing research has often focused on individual periods, specific policy reforms, or single editions of textbooks. Comparatively fewer studies have provided a systematic, longitudinal analysis of Chinese history textbooks across multiple political eras from 1949 to the present.

This study examines eleven officially published history textbook editions and situates their modifications within the broader framework of China's political and educational transformations in an effort to bridge this gap. Using a generational political division—the Mao Zedong era, the Deng Xiaoping era, the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao eras, and the Xi Jinping era—this study investigates how the structure, content, and ideological orientation of history textbooks have evolved over time. By employing this approach, the study intends to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving role of history textbooks in China's educational system, particularly with relation to the institutional continuity of history instruction, national identity formation, and state ideology.

## The Chinese Education System and the Institutional Context of History Education

The history education system in China underwent significant changes over the years. After 1949, education in China was under the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MOE). During the Mao Zedong era, education in China was developed on the Soviet model, popularizing Marxist pedagogical theories and emphasizing science and technology, and in 1955 the college entrance examination system was established.

During the Cultural Revolution, the education system was destroyed on all fronts, and students were called to leave the cities and go to the countryside for re-education through labor. The college entrance examination was discontinued and universities accepted only recommended students. Non-scientific subjects such as history were significantly reduced or disrupted. This situation continued until 1977.

In 1985, the Central Committee of the CCP issued the Decision on the Reform of the Education System, which established the principle of implementing basic education under local responsibility and hierarchical management (Ou & Yi, 2018). Since then, education in China has been managed at four levels: central, provincial, municipal, and county. In terms of the school system, there have been a ten-year system, a twelve-year system and a special system during the Cultural Revolution. The current system generally consists of six-years elementary school, three years junior high school and three years senior high school, established in 1986. However, a few regions implement a five-year primary school and four-year junior high school system, such as some cities in Shanghai, Beijing, Shandong, and Heilongjiang. Of these, the three-year senior high school is not part of compulsory education, and the main purpose of the senior high school is to train students to enter university through the college entrance examination. At the senior high school level, depending on the policies of different provinces, history is one of the six optional subjects for the college entrance examination, and students may choose to study it or not.

In 1986 the Law of the People's Republic of China on Compulsory Education was enacted, which stipulates that in the People's Republic of China, all children and adolescents between the ages of six and fifteen years old must be subjected to compulsory education, and that parents have the obligation to have their children receive compulso-

ry education<sup>1</sup>. Compulsory education has now basically been realized throughout mainland China and is moving towards full free public schooling (Zhang, 2020).

According to the law, compulsory education in China is currently financed through a system of centralized financial allocations, supplemented by a variety of local channels of financing education. Wang (2003) compiled a list of six major channels of financing compulsory education: financial allocations supplemented by the levying of taxes (fees) for education, the collection of tuition fees for non-compulsory students and miscellaneous fees for compulsory students, and the development of school-run industries, support for school financing and donations, and the establishment of education funds. According to the People's Daily, fiscal compulsory education funding in 2021 will be 2.29 trillion yuan<sup>2</sup>. Per-pupil funding for primary schools will be 14,458 yuan<sup>3</sup>, and per-pupil funding for middle schools will be 20,717 yuan<sup>4</sup> (Sun, 2022).

## History of the Chinese History Education

In the early years of PRC, history courses were introduced in the curriculum of primary schools, advanced primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. The educational system at that time followed the twelve-year system inherited from the period of the Republic of China (Zhu, 2010). In 1951, the system was modified to a ten-year format, replicating the Soviet model<sup>5</sup>. It was later reverted to the twelve-year system. In 1956, China formulated and promulgated the first formal outline for the teaching of history in primary and secondary schools, marking the preliminary formation of the Chinese history education system (Lu, 2003).

Entering the 1960s, political upheavals affected the education sector, leading to comprehensive disruptions. In 1963, the MOE issued a new curriculum for high school history education, but it's not in operation (Sun, 2008). After 1966, the Cultural Revolution erupted on a massive scale. The educational system was shortened, reducing primary

<sup>1</sup> The Law of the People's Republic of China on Compulsory Education, 1986 version (revised in 2015), Article 2. See: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb\\_sjzl/sjzl\\_zcfg/zcfg\\_jyfl/202110/t20211029\\_575949.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_sjzl/sjzl_zcfg/zcfg_jyfl/202110/t20211029_575949.html)

<sup>2</sup> Based on data from the People's Bank of China, on December 21, 2021, 1 euro was equal to 7.1824 yuan. Therefore, 2.29 trillion yuan was approximately 318.83 billion euros that year.

<sup>3</sup> approximately 2,012 euros

<sup>4</sup> approximately 2,884 euros

<sup>5</sup> At that time, China completely adopted the Soviet system in the field of education. The compulsory education system copied the Soviet ten-year universal compulsory education system, which consisted of 3 years of primary school and 7 years of secondary school.

education from 6 to 5 years, while junior high school (3 years) and senior high school (3 years) were combined into a 3–4-year secondary school (Sun, 2008). History courses were canceled, and textbooks were discontinued.

After the Cultural Revolution, the study of history was reinstated at the secondary school level. However, history courses were excluded from primary education until today. In 1978, the “Full-time Ten-year School Secondary School History Teaching Outline (Trial Draft)” was drafted, aiming to rectify the distorted and damaged history education system from the Cultural Revolution, and to rebuild it anew (Shi, 2001).

In 1980, the Ministry of Education (MOE) released the “Full-time Ten-year School Secondary School History Teaching Outline (Trial Draft) (Second Edition)” establishing the division between modern and contemporary history (Liu, 2008). In 1985, the decision for an education system reform was made by the Central Committee of China Communist Party (CCP). The MOE was renamed the State Education Commission of the PRC (SEC)<sup>6</sup> leading to the cancellation of the advanced primary school system in 1986. The basic education system was universally changed to a six-year primary school and three-year junior high school format. In the field of history, a new “Full-time Secondary School History Teaching Outline” was promulgated. After the reform and opening-up, the new compulsory education curriculum standards eliminated history courses at the primary school stage and reorganized junior high school and senior high school history textbooks (Lu, 2003).

From 1988 to 2001, the SEC piloted and then fully implemented the “New Curriculum Reform,” known as “One Outline, Multiple Textbooks.” Various versions of history textbooks appeared, such as the Beijing Normal University Press version, Shanghai Education Press version, and Yuelu Press version. The new curriculum reform has realized the diversification of history teaching materials and the emergence of history elective courses, reflecting the principle of teaching students according to their abilities (Chen, 1999).

In 2017, the MOE incorporated the history subject into the national unified textbook system for primary and secondary schools, restoring the tradition of having history textbooks nationwide written by the People’s Education Press (PEP). At present, China’s history education system is divided into three levels: the compulsory education level,

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<sup>6</sup> In 1998, the First Session of the Ninth National People’s Congress adopted the “Decision on the Reform of State Council Institutions,” which renamed the SEC back to the Ministry of Education.(Lin, 2022)

the general high school or secondary vocational school level and the undergraduate level<sup>7</sup>. Except for the university level, all current history textbooks are written and published by the PEP, who holds a central role in the creation and dissemination of history textbooks, with a single version used nationwide, reflecting uniformity across diverse regions and ethnicities.

Looking back at the history of history education in China, we three major periods of history education are commonly recognized. The first is from 1949 to 1978. History education during this time was in the initial construction period, with a great deal of exploration and tortuous development, and even a brief period of stagnation. Then there was the period from 1978 to 2017, when the school system was fixed with the implementation of the nine-year compulsory education system. The history education syllabus was replaced by the curriculum standards, and the history education system in China gradually stabilized, forming the basic features of the junior high school history special chronology + topic and the senior high school history module + topic. Finally, there is the ministry-edited version of the teaching materials from 2017 to the present, and new requirements have been put forward for history education. The history curriculum in compulsory education requires students to develop the five core qualities of the materialistic view of history, spatio-temporal view of history, historical evidence, historical interpretation, and national sentiment, guided by the Marxist view of materialistic history (MOE, 2022).

## Position of History Education

China places great importance on history education, especially the content of textbooks. China's history is crucial to the legitimacy of the CCP's rule (Weatherley & Magee,

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<sup>7</sup> The history curriculum for primary and junior secondary schools falls under the compulsory education stage and currently follows the 2022 edition of the compulsory education history curriculum standards, see: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/202204/W020220420582345700037.pdf>

General high schools currently implement the 2017 edition (revised in 2020) of the general high school history curriculum standards, see: <https://shorturl.at/1lepZ>

The history curriculum for secondary vocational schools currently follows the 2020 edition of the curriculum standards for ideology and politics, Chinese language, and history in secondary vocational schools, see: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/s8001/200303/W020200401347866068700.pdf>

The "Outline of Chinese Modern and Contemporary History" course at universities is part of the ideological and political education curriculum. It has been offered in undergraduate and junior college institutions across China since the spring of 2007 and currently follows the 2020 edition of the "Implementation Plan for the Reform and Innovation of School Ideological and Political Theory Courses in the New Era." See: [http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/jcj\\_kcjggh/202012/t20201231\\_508361.html](http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A26/jcj_kcjggh/202012/t20201231_508361.html)

2018). History textbooks are often successful in convincing readers to accept narratives that are consistent with China's communist ideology (Du, 2022). Since 1949, Chinese history textbooks have undergone eleven major reforms and numerous local modifications. Chinese scholars widely believe that textbook reforms are politically motivated, aiming to enhance national identity, patriotism, and to safe guard ideological security (Lee, 1996; Hui, 2022), which some scholars argue makes the reforms more political than educational (Yu, 2013; Xu, 2021).

History teaching in China is centrally governed, with the national government setting standards and the provinces implementing them. In the junior high school, general high school or secondary vocational school history is a compulsory subject in the graduation examination for all students. Furthermore, history is also an optional subject in Gaokao for a part of the students. At the university, modern Chinese history as an important part of the ideological and political course is a compulsory course for all undergraduate and specialized students.

The curriculum spans from prehistoric times to contemporary history, presenting multiple historical perspectives, including national, global, and various historical periods. The concept of the 'Middle Ages' is not applied in Chinese historiography.. Chinese history has been divided into four main periods: primitive society until the 21<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century B.C. - ancient history from the establishment of China's first dynasty, the Xia Dynasty to 1840 - modern history from the first Opium War in 1840 to 1949 - contemporary history after the founding of the new China in 1949.

The development of national identity, a patriotic view of historical events, and analytical abilities related to historical learning, such as historical consciousness and critical thinking, are all stressed in the Chinese history curriculum. Digital literacy and media-related abilities in history education, as well as multicultural or inclusive viewpoints, are somewhat underemphasized in the curriculum. The curriculum is primarily disciplinary rather than transdisciplinary from a structural standpoint. Chinese history textbooks cover historical events from a variety of angles, including social, political, economic, and cultural. They comprise listings of significant events, figures, and geographical details, prescribe specific in-depth themes and topics, and often follow a chronological order. In an effort to give thorough treatment of crucial historical material, the curriculum also describes important historical ideas and concepts.

## Themes and Focus of Textbook Content

### *The Mao Zedong era (1949-1976)*

The Textbook Editing and Review Committee was established in Beijing on April 8, 1949. The Propaganda Department of the CCP required all committee members to study dialectical materialism and political economy. Later, the PEP was placed directly under the jurisdiction of the CCP's Propaganda Department (Yu, 2013).

Against this backdrop, the PEP authored and published the first set of nationally standardized textbooks in the fall of 1951. This series of textbooks continued the writing norms of the Republic of China (ROC) era, using traditional characters, vertical layout, and a reading sequence from right to left. Subsequently, as the MOE adjusted the educational system from twelve years to ten years and then back to twelve years, the second to fourth sets of nationally standardized textbooks were introduced in the falls of 1954, 1961, and 1963, respectively. Notably, starting with the third set in 1961, the PEP textbooks transitioned to simplified characters, adopted horizontal layout, and changed the reading sequence from left to right<sup>8</sup>.

During this period, history textbooks were divided into advanced primary schools, junior high schools, and senior high schools. According to a list of purchased Chinese history textbooks preserved by Yukari Arakawa<sup>9</sup>, no new editions of history textbooks were published in the 1960s to 1970s. This could be attributed to the impact of the Cultural Revolution. Due to a lack of available literature, we cannot confirm when history textbooks from this period ceased to be in use.

In terms of content, the history textbooks of that time were consistent with textbooks from other subjects, strictly adhering to the guidance of *Mao Zedong Thought*. *Mao Zedong Thought* was first proposed by Wang Jiaxiang in an article titled "*The Chinese Communist Party and the Road to China's National Liberation*," published in the *Liberation Daily* in 1943. In 1945, the 7th National Congress of the CCP established *Mao Zedong Thought* as the guiding ideology of the CCP and incorporated it into the party constitution. In 1956, during the 8th National Congress, this provision was abolished, but in 1969, during the 9th National Congress, it was reinstated. *Mao Zedong Thought*

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<sup>8</sup> Detailed descriptions of early textbooks are taken from the official website of the People's Education Publishing House. See the table in the appendix for details

<sup>9</sup> See: <http://www.wang-xueping.com/document2009.pdf>

became the sole guiding ideology of China. History textbooks at the time followed Mao's worldview, incorporating anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist ideas while continuing the nationalist ideology developed during the Republic of China. According to Culp (2007), Jones (2005) and Vickers (2009), "the surprising continuity of nationalism from the Republican period right through to the reform era of the PRC persisted. The textbooks focus on the need for a strong national consciousness in order to obtain full sovereignty, to save China from foreign intervention and to make China an independent and strong player in the world community." (Yu, 2013, p. 683).

In international affairs, Mao Zedong underwent a transition from "completely leaning toward the Soviet Union" to "uniting with Third World countries and resolutely struggling against both the Soviet Union and the United States." In the early stages, Mao Zedong engaged in deep cooperation with the Soviet Union during the Stalin era, extensively emulating the Soviet system in terms of institutions. For example, in 1949, the textbook "*Foreign Geography*" in the areas controlled by the CCP faced criticism for not dividing the world into capitalist and socialist camps and not emphasizing that the Soviet Union was the most progressive country in the world. (Yu, 2013). However, the relationship between China and the Soviet Union took a downturn after Nikita Khrushchev delivered the secret speech "On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences" in 1956. The CCP led by Mao Zedong criticized Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" as "Soviet revisionism", later escalating to labeling the Soviet Union as "Soviet imperialism". Mao began to portray the CCP as the true inheritor of Marxism. Consequently, he formulated the concept of the "Three Worlds", categorizing the United States and the Soviet Union as the first world, other capitalist countries as the second world, and all other nations as the third world. The CCP aimed to continue spreading revolutionary ideas, leading the third world in resistance against the first world countries.

The writing of history textbooks during this period reflected the turbulent political situation. In 1953, before the completion of the high school-level modern world history textbook, the Chinese translation of the Soviet textbook "*Soviet Modern History*" was directly used as the national textbook in China (Yu, 2013). The *1956 History Teaching Outline*<sup>10</sup> depicted the Soviet Union as the leader responsible for countering imperialist countries. This reflected the government's call for the comprehensive study of the political trends in the Soviet Union among the Chinese people. However, in the *1963 His-*

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Education of China, Chinese History Syllabus for Higher Secondary Schools (Draft), PEP, 1956

*tory Teaching Outline*<sup>11</sup>, the leader responsible for countering imperialist countries was changed to China, and the Soviet Union was portrayed as an imperialist country similar to the United States.

After 1966, the Cultural Revolution broke out. “Red Guards” were formed in primary and secondary schools to carry out revolutionary campaigns, storming local governments at all levels, and suspending classes in all types of schools throughout the country. On June 30, 1966, the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council forwarded a report from the Party Committee of the MOE, titled *Regarding the Handling Suggestions for Political, Chinese, and History Textbooks for the School Year 1966-1967*. The report stated, “Currently, history classes are temporarily suspended... Whether in primary or secondary schools, students must study the works of Chairman Mao. In primary schools, students in each grade should learn Mao’s quotations, and in junior schools, they can study the ‘Three Old Articles’ (*Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains, In Memory of Norman Bethune, Serve the People*). History classes in middle schools are temporarily suspended” (Wang Benzong & Qizhi, 2020).

When classes gradually resumed, universities only reinstated education in science and engineering. Because the People’s Daily published Mao’s instructions: “It is still necessary to have universities: here I refer mainly to colleges of science and engineering.”<sup>12</sup> Primary and secondary schools extensively incorporated works by Mao Zedong, Mao’s quotations, and other materials that catered to the political struggles of the time into textbooks. Teachers are replaced by politically reliable but academically unqualified individuals. This situation persisted until 1976 (Saywell, 1980).

### ***The Deng Xiaoping era (1978-1989)***

The Cultural Revolution thoroughly disrupted China’s education system. After Deng Xiaoping returned to power and effectively became China’s top leader in 1977, he introduced the concept of *liberating thoughts and seeking truth from facts*. This initiative led to a comprehensive rectification in the field of education and science in China, removing the negative impacts of the Cultural Revolution, particularly in the education sector (Chen, 1996). Under Deng Xiaoping’s guidance, China restored the national college entrance examination in 1977. In 1978, several landmark documents were issued, includ-

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<sup>11</sup> Ministry of Education of China, Full-time Secondary School History Syllabus (Draft), PEP, 1963.

<sup>12</sup> People’s Daily, July 22, 1968.

ing the *Trial Draft of the Full-Time Ten-Year Compulsory Education Program for Primary and Secondary Schools*, which aimed to bring China's basic education back on track.

In the autumn of 1978, Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai regions adopted the fifth edition of textbooks from PEP<sup>13</sup>, marking the first appearance of color printing in textbooks by PEP. Based on the trial experience and the nationwide adjustment of the education system to six years of primary school and six years of secondary school, China began using the new sixth edition of textbooks from PEP from the autumn of 1982<sup>14</sup>.

However, as the government continued to emancipate thinking, the unified textbook publishing system could no longer meet the practical needs of education in China. In 1982, Beijing Normal University compiled May-Fourth system textbooks for affiliated secondary schools (Yan, 2009). In 1988, based on the maturity of local textbooks and the promulgation of the *Chinese Compulsory Education Law* two years earlier, the State Education Commission formulated the Nine-Year Compulsory Education Textbook Compilation Plan. The commission established the National Committee for the Review of Textbooks for Primary and Secondary Schools, separating textbook writing from the review process and breaking the monopoly of PEP textbooks nationwide. During this period, varying textbooks, including the Beijing Normal University version, emerged under the umbrella term "Eight and a Half Sets", reflecting the diverse landscape of textbooks based on different local school systems. This marked the seventh reform of history textbooks.

Simultaneously, history education was gradually phased out from primary school classrooms and became a subject introduced only in secondary schools. According to a list presented by Yukari Arakawa (2009), the last edition of history textbooks for the Chinese primary school stage was the third edition published by PEP in April 1992. Considering that the compulsory education curriculum outline designated the learning of history to begin in junior high school, it is reasonable to infer that history education in China was phased out from the primary school stage in the 1990s.

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<sup>13</sup> In its introduction, the PEP emphasized that this set of textbooks had done its best to exclude the influence of "left-leaning errors". See: [https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831\\_843604.shtml](https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831_843604.shtml)

<sup>14</sup> The edition is based on two sets of materials designed for rural and urban areas at the primary level, and two sets of materials for mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology at the secondary level, which are divided into two sets of materials of higher difficulty and basic requirements. See: [https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831\\_843605.shtml](https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831_843605.shtml)

In terms of content, textbooks during this period emphasized patriotic education. Because of the June 4 Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the CCP leaders worried that the reform and opening up for economic development would allow capitalist ideology to take advantage of the situation. In order to protect the ideology of socialism, the CCP leaders paid more attention to ideological education in history education (Dai, 2007). According to the *Full-Time Primary School History Teaching Outline* issued by the State Education Commission in 1986, history textbooks were expected to “provide students with patriotic, revolutionary traditions, and internationalist education, thereby inspiring students’ patriotic enthusiasm and contributing to the establishment of lofty ideals for a communist life” (Zhang Huanting. et al., 1989: 349-350).

### ***The Jiang-Hu era (1990-2011)***

During the periods when Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao served as China’s state presidents, the country maintained a degree of political openness, continued economic reforms, and achieved remarkable successes. Textbook policies during this period transitioned from a single standard to multiple ones, improving the quality and diversity of textbooks (Dai, 2007). In May 1985, the CCP issued the “Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on the Reform of the Education System” and in June, it decided to establish the State Education Commission abolishing the Ministry of Education. In April 1986, the “Compulsory Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” was promulgated, implementing a nine-year compulsory education under the leadership of the State Council, with local responsibility and graded management<sup>15</sup>. Simultaneously, the “National Textbook Approval Committee for Primary and Secondary Schools” was established to approve the national teaching outlines and textbooks, marking the transition from the unified “one syllabus, one textbook” system to a competitive “multiple syllabi, multiple textbooks” system (Xie, 2000).

In 1990, the State Education Commission issued the *Adjustment Opinions on the Current High School Curriculum* and revised the teaching outlines for eight subjects in secondary schools (Deng et al., 1990). Based on this, PEP revised or newly compiled textbooks for high schools. The eighth edition of history textbooks from PEP underwent a comprehensive revision. The eighth edition consists of five books: Modern Chinese History Volumes One and Two, Ancient Chinese History, and World Modern History Vol-

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Education of China, 50 Years of Education (1980-1989). See: [https://www.edu.cn/edu/jiao\\_yu\\_zi\\_xun/fa\\_zhan\\_shi/da\\_shi\\_ji/200603/t20060323\\_156315.shtml](https://www.edu.cn/edu/jiao_yu_zi_xun/fa_zhan_shi/da_shi_ji/200603/t20060323_156315.shtml)

umes One and Two. The first two volumes are mandatory readings, while the latter three are optional.

The history curriculum continued to follow a chronological order but now focused on Chinese history from 1840 to the end of the Cold War. The introduction of this set of textbooks was primarily a response to the significant impact of the 1989 Eastern European upheavals on the Chinese socialist regime. The revised curriculum aimed to strengthen ideological and political education, with the goal of safeguarding the ideological security of socialism. Compared to the old edition, the new textbook changed China's official historical narrative from focusing primarily on domestic enemies, such as landlords and capitalists, to foreign invaders. By making China a victim of Western imperialism (Wang, 2008), Deng Xiaoping constructed a new ideology to replace the class struggle ideology that had been crushed at the end of the Cultural Revolution (Xu & Zhao, 2023).

The new textbooks significantly reduced or rephrased content related to ethnic conflicts. For example, the term *struggle* was removed from the section on the Qing Dynasty's efforts to consolidate the unified multi-ethnic state in the third volume of the old junior high school textbooks. This change aimed to counter the impact of Western ideas about national self-determination. By emphasizing the concept of the "Chinese nation", the revised curriculum sought to strengthen national unity and maintain territorial integrity.

Since September 2001, the new People's Education Press experimental textbooks for compulsory education gradually entered various experimental zones. In September 2004, experimental textbooks based on the high school curriculum standards were introduced. These textbooks are known as the tenth edition of People's Education Press textbooks. The tenth edition innovatively adopts the format of thematic units, replacing the traditional chronological approach to history. The new textbook series consists of three required textbooks and six elective ones. The compulsory courses are composed of History I (with an emphasis on politics), History II (with an emphasis on socio-economic and social life) and History III (with an emphasis on thought, culture, science, and technology). The elective textbooks are also organized by themes, such as Major Reforms in History, Democratic Thoughts and Practices in Modern Society, War and Peace in the Twentieth Century, Comments on Chinese and Foreign Historical Figures, Exploring the Mystery of History, A View on World Culture Heritage, and others (Fan, 2011).

This textbook format has received significant criticism. Some teachers argue that the new edition's historical outcomes are too predetermined, while actual historical facts are

insufficient (Yan et al., 2021). This implies that the historical narrative becomes excessively linear, and revolutionary processes are portrayed as inevitable outcomes of history. “In other words, without presenting the full range of historical facts, such comments on the revolution further politicize historical events in order to shape the political opinions of young people in very specific ways” (Yan et al., 2021, p. 180).

This has created a dilemma for history teachers—while they want to supplement more details, they must strenuously avoid adding details that may generate viewpoints different from the conclusions in the history textbooks. For instance, the textbooks introduce the Boxer Rebellion during the late Qing period as a manifestation of China’s peasant class spontaneously organizing to resist the colonial invaders, showcasing the revolutionary nature of the peasant class in modern China. However, the Boxers were an organization with severe racial discrimination, comprised solely of Han Chinese, with the initial goal of overthrowing the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty. The textbooks, however, only depict the Boxers in the later stages cooperating with the Qing rulers, jointly resisting the invasion of European colonizers. This narrative overlooks the intense ethnic conflict between the Han Chinese and the Manchu during the late Qing, constructing an image of multi-ethnic unity resisting foreign invasion (Yan et al., 2021).

### ***The Xi era (2012-)***

Unlike Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping has not adhered to the governance model proposed by Deng Xiaoping of national leaders serving a maximum of two consecutive terms. Since coming to power in 2012, Xi has continuously created political conditions favorable to consolidating power. This includes strengthening ideological and political education, leading to the implementation of new textbook reforms (Xu, 2021).

The purpose of this textbook reform is clear, “inculcating students with CCP-prescribed knowledge, positions, and values” (Xu, 2021: 6). According to the State Council document (2016), this reform involves only three subjects, each having “strong ideological attributes and [was a] concentrated expression of the state’s will and socialist core values.” (Xu, 2021: 6)

In order to achieve this goal, the Ministry of Education abolished the “single curriculum standard, diverse textbooks” policy established in 1988. In 2017, the National Textbook Committee was established, giving this committee more authority than the MOE to decide on textbook-related issues. Simultaneously, the new edition of unified textbooks began to be implemented. By 2020, the new edition of unified textbooks had been introduced nation-

wide for compulsory education, and high schools in 21 provinces and cities had started using the new textbooks (Ren & Zheng, 2020).

The current textbook reform places particular emphasis on the reform of history textbooks. According to reports, there are a total of four chief editors for the three subjects, with two of them being chief editors for history. Zhang Haipeng, the chief editor of high school history textbooks, stated, “The key learning content of high school history textbooks focuses on four aspects: first, over 5,000 years of Chinese civilization. Second, more than 170 years of the struggle history of the Chinese people and over 90 years of the struggle history of the CCP. Third, education on national sovereignty and maritime awareness. Fourth, education on national unity and progress” (Zhao & Lin, 2019, p. 1).

In terms of content, the current reform strengthens ideological and political education. The new textbooks highlight “the outstanding role played by the CCP in the nationwide united resistance against Japanese aggression, revealing that the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the socialist path are historical and popular choices, guiding students to recognize that walking the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is a historical necessity.” (General high school history textbook development team, 2019, p. 1). In comparison to the old textbooks, the new ones omit the role of the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) during the resistance against Japanese aggression, emphasizing the Kuomintang government’s passive resistance and active opposition to the Communist Party. The existence of the Kuomintang army is downplayed, and the victorious Kuomintang forces are uniformly referred to as the “Chinese army”<sup>16</sup>. The CCP’s anti-Japanese battles are expanded from operations in the enemy’s rear to both the front and rear battlefields. In terms of socialist construction, various political movements before the Cultural Revolution are deleted. In the retained content related to the Cultural Revolution<sup>17</sup>, the erroneous statement about Mao Zedong’s motivation for launching the Cultural Revolution is removed<sup>18</sup>. In summary, the

<sup>16</sup> In the MOE edition, ninth-grade textbook (Part 1), pages 69-72. The troops under the jurisdiction of the Kuomintang are collectively referred to as the Chinese army. However, the units controlled by the Communist Party are specified by their different designations, such as the Eighth Route Army, the New Fourth Army, the Hui People’s Detachment, and the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army.

<sup>17</sup> In the MOE edition, ninth-grade textbook (Part 2), pages 35. The old textbook had a full page on “The Great Leap Forward”, which was reduced to a single sentence and removed the illustrations.

<sup>18</sup> In the MOE edition, ninth-grade textbook (Part 2), pages 36-37. Whereas the old textbook had a whole chapter on the Cultural Revolution, the new textbook has been shortened to two pages, describes Mao’s campaign as “preventing the restoration of capitalism”, discusses only the political struggles at the top level of the CCP, removes descriptions of the destruction of people’s livelihoods, and adds a positive reference to the scientific and technological advances of the period. The accompanying picture has been changed to a festive image of “people celebrating the crushing of the Gang of Four”.

narrative structure is further simplified, negative impacts are downplayed, achievements in construction are highlighted, and the legitimacy of the CCP's rule is reinforced. However, the drawbacks of this discourse have already appeared in the tenth edition of the PEP textbooks, and the eleventh edition continued to expand on this approach: "the new history textbook explicitly emphasizes the superiority of China's centralized political system and its effectiveness at maintaining social stability" (Yan et al., 2021, p. 186).

The new textbooks place greater emphasis on topics and narratives that are intended to resonate with a broad public audience.. The CCP had previously described the Anti-Japanese War of the past eighty years as the Eight-Year War of Resistance, but the new textbooks have changed it to the Fourteen-Year War of Resistance. The coverage of the Nanjing Massacre is expanded, and content about the refusal of the Japanese right-wing government to apologize is added, guiding students to develop anti-Japanese sentiments. In the sections on political history and economic history, both junior and senior high school levels have increased negative descriptions of the United States. Politically, the global development trend is described as multipolar, but the United States is attempting to establish a unipolar world dominated by the United States. Instances of the United States causing regional conflicts after the Cold War are highlighted, such as the U.S.-led NATO bombing of Yugoslavia for 78 consecutive days and the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. Economically, it emphasizes President Trump's trade war against China and his counter-globalization stance.

The new textbooks have changed the concept of ethnic integration to ethnic blending. The previous notion of ethnic integration could potentially raise concerns about the gradual disappearance of minority ethnic groups after integration. However, the expression "ethnic blending" in the new textbooks reflects the idea that various ethnic groups, after interactions, develop and progress together. This is a departure from previous versions. For example, Yue Fei, an ancient Chinese military general who resisted the Jin dynasty, has traditionally been regarded as a Han Chinese hero. In the new edition of the seventh-grade textbook (Part 2)<sup>19</sup>, he is only referred to as an "anti-Jin hero," with the term "national hero" removed. Additionally, the same page includes more positive descriptions of the Jurchen people of the Jin dynasty. In terms of historical evidence, the materials related to ethnic blending are overly simplified and lacking in details, possibly to avoid students forming different opinions after a more in-depth understanding of historical details.

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<sup>19</sup> MOE edition seventh-grade history textbook (Part 2) P53.

The new textbooks have also introduced education on national sovereignty and maritime awareness. In addition to continuing to emphasize that Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and their affiliated islands are an integral part of China's territory, the new textbooks have added the South China Sea islands region. In the unit "Silk Road: Communication between Chinese and Foreign Civilizations" in the first volume of seventh grade, it provides a detailed introduction to how, as early as the Qin and Han periods, the Chinese people were active in this region. China was the earliest country in the world to discover, name, and use the South China Sea islands and the corresponding waters, exercising jurisdiction and sovereignty there first, peacefully, continuously, and effectively. This addition is likely in response to recent territorial disputes between China and countries such as the Philippines, Japan, and Vietnam in the South China Sea. Consequently, the history textbooks were promptly updated to assert China's sovereignty over the South China Sea islands. Moreover, the new textbooks also assign the entire disputed border region with India to China.

Education in ethnic minority areas has also been impacted by recent changes to Chinese history textbooks. For instance, schools in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region are now obliged to utilize central government-published textbooks instead of those written in regional ethnic languages. Official statements state that all subjects taught in ethnic languages using centrally issued textbooks will be evaluated in Mandarin beginning with the junior high school graduation exams in 2023 and the senior high school exams in 2025. Additionally, by 2025, the regional government hopes to have an 85% Mandarin proficiency rate across the entire territory. These modifications show a move toward textbook content standardization and a rise in the usage of the national language in official evaluations. In Inner Mongolia, earlier textbook editions were either made for use in ethnic minority languages or were available in those languages. The central government-mandated curriculum content, which includes sections on national unity, ethnic regional autonomy, and historical narratives that highlight common growth among ethnic groups, is preserved in the new textbooks.

## **Findings and Discussion**

By reviewing the eleven editions of Chinese history textbooks before and after, this study identifies that the reasons for the evolution of textbooks primarily include changes in the educational system and the political needs of different periods. However, de-

spite these changes, due to the continuous control of textbook review authority by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the various editions of history textbooks still share some commonalities.

***Extensively discusses the legitimacy of the CCP's rule***

The modern history perspective in Chinese history textbooks is distinct from the Western perspective. In the West, modernity is generally defined as the historical period after the Middle Ages, roughly beginning with the end of the European Renaissance in the 16th century. In China, however, the starting point of modern history is considered the Opium War in 1840, and the establishment of the PRC in 1949 marks the beginning of modern history. This division is based on the initiation and substantial conclusion of China's colonization by Western imperialist countries. Over these 110 years of history, the Chinese Communist Party has constructed a logically coherent and seamless chain of evidence to argue for the modern historical perspective that only the CCP can save China.

Starting with the Opium War in 1840, the isolationist state of the late Qing Dynasty was broken by the British Empire. Subsequently, eight imperialist countries including Britain, the United States, Germany, France, Russia, Japan, Italy, and Austria-Hungary successively invaded China, forcing the late Qing government to sign unequal treaties and cede or forcibly lease Chinese territory. These historical facts compelled the Chinese people to embark on modernization, seeking national independence and fulfilling the historical tasks of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism. During the process of modernization, various social ideologies entered China, and almost every political system underwent experiments, all of which were deemed failures. The late Qing Dynasty experimented with constitutional monarchy; Yuan Shikai and Zhang Xun attempted to restore the monarchy twice after overthrowing the Qing Dynasty; during the Beiyang government, parliamentary and multi-party systems were implemented; and during the Nationalist government, a presidential system was adopted. All these political systems were phased out by history, and only the Chinese Communist Party established the new China, completing the historical mission of anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, and the salvation of the Chinese nation. While the length and emphasis on historical events may vary in different versions of history textbooks, the overall design of chapters and the narrative process remain consistent. This is the modern historical perspective conveyed to students.

***All versions of history textbooks have upheld the ideological framework of socialism***

During Mao Zedong's era, the CCP engaged in large-scale communist construction practices, which not only failed to rapidly achieve the goals of communism but also caused significant damage to China. In the post-Mao period, Deng Xiaoping, to safeguard the ideological security of the CCP, introduced the theory of the primary stage of socialism. This reframed Mao's practices as the exploration period of socialist construction and divided it into three stages: positive outcomes in exploration, the coexistence of successes and mistakes in exploration, and exploration entering the wrong path. Historical textbooks during Deng's era referred to Mao's period as "in the early stages of socialist construction (Zhong, 2014, p. 23)", emphasizing the challenges faced by the CCP during this exploratory phase, acknowledging both successes and mistakes but downplaying its destructive and negative impact on China. In subsequent history textbooks, the correctness of *Mao Zedong Thought* is separated from the mistakes he made in his later years (Jin & Chen, 1992). *Mao Zedong Thought* was explained as the correct early ideology led by the CCP collectively, and Mao's mistakes in his later years were attributed to his failure to adhere correctly to *Mao Zedong Thought*. Furthermore, the historical evaluation of Mao emphasized that it should be based on the principle that the merits outweigh the demerits.

Following this, Deng Xiaoping introduced the concept of the "theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Deng, 1984), which included Deng's own theory and subsequent political concepts proposed by the highest leaders of the CCP. This theoretical framework reflects differences from *Mao Zedong Thought* but still emphasizes that China's ideology remains socialist, representing the inheritance and development of Marxism-Leninism and *Mao Zedong Thought*. The significance of Chinese characteristics lies in the continuous discovery and establishment of the latest achievements in adapting Marxism to China's conditions. This ensures that it can provide scientific guidance for the development of the party and the country's cause in different historical periods.

The latest edition of the textbooks explicitly states that since the 18th National Congress of the CCP, socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The party has engaged in theoretical innovation, establishing Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, providing scientific guidance for the development of the party and the country's cause in the new era. Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is an integral part of the theoretical framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

### ***All versions have cultivated patriotic thinking and emphasized national unity***

The patriotic concept constructed by the CCP is an abstract macro concept. The country notion of CCP's Patriotism narrative does not refer to a specific political regime but encompasses all geographical concepts formed in the process of modern China's territorial development. Thus, in ancient China, dynasties frequently changed, but the concept of China remained constant. China is depicted as an uninterrupted entity, and other minority regimes that existed within modern China's territory in early history textbooks are considered part of the China concept. For example, Han ethnic regimes were often overthrown by minority groups, including the Mongols and Manchus, who conquered China entirely. However, historical textbooks tend to emphasize the narrative of ethnic integration while downplaying aspects of ethnic conflict. The Yuan and Qing dynasties actively adopted Han culture and assimilated into the Chinese nation.

In early history textbooks, the ancient history section generally presented the perspective of the Han ethnic group. The narrative at that time focused on unity among different ethnicities based on the theory of class struggle, emphasizing the existence of oppressed and oppressor classes in every ethnicity and the need for unity among the oppressed. Despite abandoning the theory of class struggle during the Deng Xiaoping era, the government did not reject the historical narrative that had developed from this theory during Mao's era. While subsequent top leaders of the CCP continually introduced new ideological concepts, the fundamental understanding of history remained unchanged. The trend in textbook revisions reflected an enhancement of national unity and a tendency to conceal ethnic conflicts.

Especially after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the CCP reaffirmed the importance of socialist ideological security, blurring the concepts of the CCP, PRC, and the Chinese nation into a single category. In the Xi Jinping era, Xi proposed the Chinese Dream concept of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, which represents the latest form of merging patriotism and national unity discourse.

## **Conclusion**

This article has methodically analyzed the development of Chinese history textbooks from 1949, showing how the political environments of various Chinese eras have influenced these textbooks. History teaching in China has mirrored changes in

political goals and educational policy from the Mao Zedong to the Xi Jinping eras. According to the analysis, the CCP's leadership in national independence, industrialization, and defense against foreign aggression have all been highlighted in Chinese history textbooks (Xu, 2021; Lee, 1996). Additionally, a robust intellectual framework of socialism has been offered in the textbooks, which have evolved from Mao Zedong Thought to the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, adapting Marxist concepts to the historical and social circumstances of China.

The cultivation of patriotic sentiment and the emphasis on national unity have been persistent themes in these textbooks. The CCP's narrative of patriotism encompasses a broad conception of China as a continuous historical and territorial entity, ethnic integration and unity are emphasized, but previous ethnic conflicts are rarely discussed (Hui, 2022).

In conclusion, the history of Chinese history textbooks is not just a record of educational changes but also a reflection of China's political and ideological shifts over the past decades. It underscores the vital role of education in shaping national identity and ideological alignment, demonstrating the intricate interplay between education, politics, and societal values in China. This study illustrates the interaction between education, politics, and societal values by highlighting the important role that history education plays in forming national identity and ideological alignment.

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## Appendix

*Table 1 Overview of successive reforms of the compulsory Chinese history textbooks*

Version	Year	Leader	Publisher	Characteristics
1	1951	Mao Zedong	PEP	Transitional textbook from the early years of the founding of the Republic of China. It continues the writing standards of the Republic of China period, using traditional Chinese characters, vertical layout and right-to-left reading order. The applicable school system is the twelve-year system.
2	1956	Mao Zedong	PEP	Revised in accordance with Mao Zedong's instructions on education at a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1953.
3	1961	Mao Zedong	PEP	Revised to coincide with the change in the academic system to a 10-year system. Simplified Chinese characters are used, horizontal layout is adopted, and the reading order is changed to left-to-right.
4	1963	Mao Zedong	PEP	In accordance with the instructions of the Central Government's "Education Revolution", the ideological errors of the "Great Leap Forward" were overcome, and the school system was changed to a twelve-year system in line with the revision.
5	1978	Deng Xiaoping	PEP	It is based on the Ten-Year Compulsory Education Program for Full-Time Primary and Secondary Schools (Draft for Trial Implementation). The textbook endeavors to eliminate "leftist" influences in order to correct the errors of the "Cultural Revolution".

6	1982	Deng Xiaoping	PEP	In conjunction with the revamping of the new 12-year school system. That is, a general nationwide change to six years of elementary school and six years of secondary school. This textbook focuses more on rational segmentation between junior high school and senior high school.
7	1988	Deng Xiaoping	“Eight and a half”	The textbook system for primary and secondary schools in China has been transformed from a national customized system to a validated system. Diverse textbooks can be published throughout the country, breaking the nationwide monopoly on PEP textbooks.
8	1990	Deng Xiaoping	PEP	It has been reorganized in accordance with the “Opinions on the Adjustment of the Current High School Curriculum”. The subject curriculum takes the form of both compulsory and elective courses. The structure of the curriculum consists of two parts: subject courses and activities.
9	1993 and 1997	Jiang Zemin	PEP	Primary and secondary school textbooks were published in 1993 on the basis of the Compulsory Education Full-time Primary and Junior Secondary School Teaching Program (Trial Draft), and high school textbooks were published in 1997 on the basis of a revised version of the Full-time General Upper Secondary School Curriculum Program (Trial) and the syllabi of each subject (for trial use). This constitutes the first set of teaching materials for compulsory education.

10	2004	Hu Jintao	PEP	People's Education Publishing House new version of the experimental textbook for compulsory education. The format of thematic units has been innovatively adopted to replace the traditional method of teaching chronological history. The new textbook series consists of three compulsory textbooks and six optional textbooks. The compulsory subjects are History I (focusing on politics), History II (focusing on socio-economics and social life) and History III (focusing on ideology, culture, science and technology).
11	2020	Xi Jinping	PEP	A new edition of the unified textbooks for compulsory education has been introduced nationwide. This edition uses only Chinese as the language of the textbooks.

The information in this table was compiled from the official website of the People's Education Publishing House: [https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831\\_843601.shtml](https://m.pep.com.cn/gyrj/jc/201008/t20100831_843601.shtml)

# Civic education in primary and secondary schools in China

Pu Yu, Yingjie Xu

## Abstract

This paper provides a general picture of the evolution and transformation of civic education in China's primary and secondary schools, tracing its trajectory since the country's reform and opening up. The research examines how civic education has adapted and integrated within the expansive tapestry of China's socio-economic and political metamorphosis. Through a literature review, the study articulates the progression of civic education through three distinct phases: recovery, initial exploration, and multidimensional improvement. The recovery phase, following the reform and opening up, marked the rejuvenation of civic education, aligning it with the renewed socio-political ethos of China. Civic education was primarily centered on socialist values and fostering a sense of collective identity. The initial exploration phase signified a critical period of curricular transformation, which emphasized nurturing students with a broader understanding of their roles in society, underscoring moral development, social responsibility, and global awareness. The multidimensional improvement phase, commencing in 2014, represents the most recent and perhaps the most transformative period in the evolution of China's civic education. This phase is marked by the incorporation of legal education into the civic education curriculum, representing a novel approach that intertwined legal consciousness with moral education. The evolution process is showing China's broader aspirations to modernize and engage actively in the global community necessitating a civic education system consistent with the era of development.

*Keywords:* China; civic education; course reform; transformation

## Introduction

Civic education in China's primary and secondary schools has experienced a complex and evolving journey. Civic education in China began in the early 20th century (Liu, 1998), influenced by the cultural exchange and collision between China and the West

in modern times. Many educators in China started to advocate for the implementation of civic education. Around the time of the May Fourth Movement in 1919, democratic education ideals and pragmatic education theories were introduced into China, leading to significant shifts in civic educational thought (Asia for Educators, 2020). Civic education's foundational approach during this time underscored the interconnectedness of the individual, society, and nation, fostering a democratic spirit (Yu, 2010). Despite these advancements, the civic education movement faced setbacks due to the societal upheavals of the era, including the war against Japanese aggression and the subsequent civil war, leading to its marginalization (Zhu & Feng, 2006).

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 heralded a new phase in the evolution of civic education. The trajectory of civic education in primary schools mirrored the nation's constitutional developments and shifting policy landscapes (Wang & Hung, 2008). The early years of the new republic saw an emphasis on political education, with civic education taking a backseat (Zhang, 2009). The Common Program of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (1949), acting as a provisional constitution, first introduced moral standards. While in this policy, the national was designated as the primary bearer of fundamental tasks, only the people were acknowledged as the primary holders of basic rights. This distinction underscored a conceptual gap in the understanding of citizens' rights (Wang & Hung, 2008). The promulgation of the People's Republic of China Constitution in 1954 clearly defined the rights and obligations of the citizens, legally establishing civic status and forming the basis for civic education.

During this era, the socialist ethical framework, epitomized by the "Five Loves" (love for the motherland, the people, labor, science, and public property), along with a focus on duty and responsibility, became predominant in civic education curriculum of primary and secondary schools (Wang, 2014). These curricula, heavily infused with ideological content, aimed to foster individuals with steadfast political views and ideological consciousness, embodying virtues such as self-abnegation, complete devotion to others, and selfless contribution (Li, 2011).

Between 1957 and 1976, civic education in China's primary and secondary schools was significantly shaped by various political movements (Zhang, et al., 2013), such as the Cultural Revolution. Political education courses during this period were predominantly centered on socialist ideology, particularly focusing on the narrative of China's communist revolution (Han, 2014). The prevailing educational goal in schools shifted to-

wards nurturing the working force (MoE, 2019a), and the marginalization of the concept of citizenship in educational policies. During the Cultural Revolution, civic education was dramatically influenced from primary and secondary schools.

Since the economic reforms and opening-up policies of 1978, China's education system has become stable, civic education has re-emerged as a critical educational component, aligning with the era's demands and receiving a renewed emphasis in the curriculum. The curriculum aimed to shape responsible citizens well-versed in their roles within the wider spheres of society, the nation, and the global community (Feng, 2015). The emergence of globalization, market economy advancements, urbanization, civil society, and private sector prominence in the 1990s further underscored the relevance of civic education in contemporary state-building (Liu, 2005). Civic education in China is often integrated into courses like Ideology and Morality, Morality and Life, Morality and Society, and Morality and Law and Politics, which are synonymous with Ideological and Political Education (Wu, 2013), with civic morality as its cornerstone (Science Bulletin, 2002). Despite its broad thematic scope, China has yet to establish an independent civic education course. Instead, its principles also permeate various subjects, including Chinese language, history, and geography, reflecting the curriculum's dynamic adaptation to contemporary societal needs.

In summary, since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the primary conduits for civic education in Chinese primary and secondary schools have been through political subjects, specifically ideological and political education, as well as moral education. However, the curriculum has demonstrated a blend of both change and continuity. A constant feature has been the subject's foundational aim to develop holistic socialist builders and successors (Dai, 2019). Nonetheless, there has been a significant evolution in both the content and the structure of the subject.

Originally, the curriculum was narrowly focused on specific ethical standards in students, with an emphasis on national identity and duty. However, following the Reform and Opening Up initiative, there was a considerable expansion in the breadth of moral education within the civic education framework, accompanied by a marked decrease in ideological emphasis. The educational goals shifted from the focus on political education to a more balanced approach that included moral education and respect for the law, addressing both societal needs and the combined necessities of personal development. The curriculum became more aligned with students' real-life experiences,

concentrating on their holistic development and psychological well-being. The teaching methods evolved from the previous slogan-centric approach to political education, becoming more nuanced and varied (Tan & Chen, 2018). Additionally, there was a tighter integration of curriculum design and disciplinary structure, leading to greater standardization and a more scientific foundation. Teaching methods also became more adaptable and varied, and the evaluation of teaching grew to be more diverse and open-ended (Zeng & Li, 2019). Course changes are summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. The course names and changes at each stage*

Year	Names of civic education courses for each school age group		
	Primary school	Junior secondary school	Senior secondary school
1978	Political course was offered in the grades 4-5	A brief history of social development (grade 1) Common sense of scientific socialism (grades 2-3)	Common sense of political economy (grade 1) Common sense of dialectical materialism (grade 2)
1980		Youth cultivation (grade 1) Political common sense (grade 2) A brief history of social development (grade 3)	Common sense of political economy (grade 1) Dialectical materialism common sense (grade 2)
1981	Political course changed to ideology and moral education		
1985		Politics course changed to the ideological and political course	
		Socialist citizen (grade 1) A brief history of social development (grade 2) Common sense of socialist construction (grade 3)	Revolutionary outlook on life (grade 1) Economic common sense (grade 2) political common sense (grade 3)

1986		The textbook title has been slightly adjusted	
		Citizen (grade 1) Common sense of China's socialist construction (grade 3)	Communist outlook on life (grade 1)
1992		The teaching objectives of junior and senior secondary schools are distinguished and collectively referred to as ideological and political.	
2001	Ideology and moral education changed to morality and life (grades 1-3) morality and society (grades 4-6)	The name of the textbook was changed to ideology and morality	Continue to use political ideology
2014	It is proposed to incorporate legal education into the national education system.		
2016	Collectively referred to as morality and law	Collectively referred to as morality and law	Continue to use political ideology

This article, through a comprehensive literature review, analyzes the developmental characteristics of civic education curricula in ordinary primary and secondary schools in China since the reform and opening up (1978). The evolution of the curriculum is summarized into three stages: the revival, preliminary exploration, and multi-dimensional enhancement stages (the course names and changes at each stage are shown in Table 1). The aim is to offer a deeper understanding of the nuances and progression of civic education in China's primary and secondary schools.

## **Development and Characteristics of Civic Education Curriculum in China**

### ***Overview of the Chinese Education System and Civic Education Curriculum***

The education system has undergone significant transformations since the founding of the People's Republic of China. A pivotal moment was the reinstatement of the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) in 1977, which marked a return to aca-

democratic meritocracy and stabilization and progressive reform in China's school education system, following a period of socio-political turmoil.

In 1986, a landmark educational policy was implemented in China, mandating nine years of compulsory education. This framework typically encompasses six years of primary education followed by three years of junior secondary education. However, some regions have adapted this structure to five years of primary and four years of junior secondary education (MoE, n.d.). After completing this compulsory phase, students usually advance to three years of senior secondary education. Within this structure, civic education plays a crucial role, spanning the entire educational journey from primary through to senior secondary education and integrating key concepts and values at each stage. In 2016, the curriculum for moral education within the nine-year compulsory education system (grades one through nine) was uniformly renamed Moral Education and Law (Zhao, 2019). And in senior secondary education named Ideological and Political Education.

The general position of civic education within the curriculum is depicted in Table 2. It is mandatory for primary and junior secondary education, as well as the first year and the first half of the second year of senior secondary education. However, the practical teaching schedules for senior secondary education may vary across different provinces and offer more flexibility. This course is compulsory for examinations that transition students from junior to senior secondary school, though it is optional for the national college entrance examination (MoE, 2021). The curriculum comprehensively covers the operational frameworks of the national legal and political systems, the mechanics of a state, and the dynamics of political participation and activism. It also emphasizes the development of national identity and the importance of patriotism, alongside fostering values associated with democracy and human rights. The curriculum also points out environmental challenges and the imperative of sustainable development. The content tailors its objectives to progressively match the demand suitable for each school-age level. Despite its breadth, the curriculum does not specifically tackle areas such as daily financial competencies, digital citizenship, or methods and critical thinking. Although it engages with themes of global multipolarity and economic globalization, including China's role within these contexts, it does not intensely focus on the broader concept of global citizenship.

Table 2. Position of civic education in the curriculum

Position of civic education in the curriculum		Aspects / options
General aspects	Is civic education integrated in the history subject?	No
	Is civic education compulsory?	Compulsory for grades 1-10.5
	ISCED levels / number of years of compulsory/ elective civic education	ISCED 1-3/10.5/1.5
	Is civic education optional in the school leaving exam?	Compulsory for senior secondary school entrance examination. Optional for college entrance examination.
Declared aims	The Curriculum covers the operation and levels of the national legal system	Yes
	The curriculum covers the detailed operation, levels and actors of the national political system	Yes
	The Curriculum covers the functioning of democratic state (rights/responsibilities e.g.: elections, representation, active participation)	Yes
	The curriculum covers the history of political participation and activism	Yes
	The curriculum covers everyday financial competencies, eg. banking, loan, credit	No
	The curriculum covers environmental challenges, sustainable development	Yes
	The curriculum covers digital citizenship, development of digital skills	No
	The curriculum aims at developing national identity, connection to the importance of patriotism or home defense	Yes
	The curriculum focuses on interconnectedness, global or supranational citizenship (e.g.: EU citizenship)	No
	The curriculum covers values (democratic state, human rights)	Yes
The curriculum includes approaches that encourage critical thinking and analysis (e.g.: media literacy)	No	

### ***Revival Phase of Civic Education (1978-2000)***

China witnessed significant transformations in its economic, cultural, and educational landscapes in this phase. This era, characterized by stability and openness, facilitated the advancement of civic education curricula in primary and secondary schools (Liu, 2018). The Ministry of Education, recognizing the importance of aligning education with societal needs, initiated several reforms to embed moral and ideological education into the school curriculum.

In 1978, the Draft Plan for Full-Time Ten-Year Primary and Secondary School Teaching was issued (MoE, 2019b), introducing political education into the fourth and fifth grades of primary schools. Initially focused on basic communist ideology and political knowledge, this curriculum faced criticism for its overt political bias. Consequently, in 1981, the primary school political education course was replaced by the “Ideology and Morality” course (MoE, 2019c), which shifted the focus to the socialist citizenship morals and behavior standards.

The Ministry of Education further solidified this direction in 1982 with the “Outline for Ideology and Morality Courses in Full-Time Five-Year Primary Schools (Draft)”. This outline aimed to instil communist moral values and good behavioural habits in primary school students, laying an ideological foundation for nurturing future successors to the socialist cause (Hu, 2008). The “Five Loves” became the core content of the Ideology and Morality courses, with textbooks developed and used across various regions. In 1986, the curriculum was formalized with the publication (Gu, 1998) of the “Outline for Ideology and Morality Courses in Full-Time Primary Schools” and accompanying with entrust the relevant units with the preparation of several sets of textbooks. Recognizing the evolving needs of society, subsequent outlines such as the 1986 “Outline for Ideology and Morality Courses in Primary Schools” and the 1990 and 1992 drafts for nine-year compulsory education, were introduced to refine and update the curriculum.

Secondary school political education also underwent significant changes. The “Ministry of Education’s Opinions on Improving and Strengthening Secondary School Political Education” in 1980 restructured the secondary school politics curriculum into a three-year sequence covering “Youth Cultivation”, “Political Knowledge” and “A Brief History of Social Development”. For senior secondary education, courses on “Basics of Political Economy” and “Basics of Dialectical Materialism” were introduced (Feng, 2018). In 1985, the National Education Commission advocated transforming political education courses into more comprehensive ideological and political education.

The implementation of the Compulsory Education Law in 1986 marked a pivotal shift, integrating junior secondary school education into the compulsory education system. In 1992, the “Syllabus of Ideological and Political Classes in Full-time Secondary Schools (Pilot Draft)” was published, which for the first time defined the objectives of teaching in accordance with the junior and senior secondary schools respectively, and no longer separated the titles for each grade, collectively referred to as “Ideological Politics” (MoE, 2019).

A significant milestone was reached in 1997 with the issuance of the “Curriculum Standards for Ideology and Morality Courses in Primary Schools and Ideological and Political Courses in Junior Secondary Schools”. For the first time, curriculum standards replaced teaching outlines, unifying the moral education of primary and junior secondary schools with clear objectives and content. These standards emphasized the development of moral qualities and civilized behaviors, showcasing the depth and breadth of moral education (MoE, 2019). Throughout this period, civic education curricula were characterized by a focus on civic virtues, with minimal emphasis on citizens’ political rights (Tang & Wang, 2021).

### ***Preliminary Exploration Phase of Civic Education (2001-2011)***

During the period from 2001 to 2011, civic education in China’s schools underwent a phase of rapid development and preliminary exploration. This era was marked by the implementation of the “Outline for Basic Education Curriculum Reform (Trial)” in June 2001, which set forth new curriculum standards and proposed a comprehensive design for a consistent nine-year compulsory education curriculum. This reform initiative significantly altered the landscape of primary education with the introduction of “Morality and Life” for grades 1-3 and “Morality and Society” for grades 4-6. These curricula represented a notable departure from the previous Ideology and Morality courses, emphasizing activity-based and integrated learning to foster moral development, a spirit of exploration, and a zest for life (MoE, 2019).

“Morality and Life” is crafted as an activity-based integrated curriculum, centered around children’s experiences. It is structured around three key dimensions: the child’s relationship with self, society, and nature. On the other hand, “Morality and Society” is designed based on children’s social experiences, aiming to promote students’ moral development and socialization through six modules: “Growing Up”, “Family”, “School”,

“Community”, “Being Chinese”, and “Approaching the World”. In 2011, these national curriculum standards were revised to better align with contemporary societal needs and requirements.

The 2001 (MoE) “Outline for Basic Education Curriculum Reform” also marked a pivotal shift in junior secondary school education, transitioning from “Ideological and Political” education to “Ideology and Morality”. This change was further solidified in 2003 with the publication of the “Ideology and Morality Curriculum Standards (Experimental Draft)”, which initiated experimental curriculum reforms in selected areas. The culmination of these experiments was the “Compulsory Education Ideology and Morality Curriculum Standards (2011 Edition)”. This curriculum is tailored to junior secondary school students’ lives, focusing on guiding their moral development and preparing them to lead active, healthy lives as qualified citizens. It encompasses modules like “My Growth”, “Me and Community”, and “Me and the Nation/Society”.

At the senior secondary school level, significant curriculum reforms were undertaken as part of the “General Senior Secondary School Curriculum Reform Plan (Experimental)” initiated in 2003. In line with the new senior secondary curriculum reform requirements, the “General Senior Secondary School Ideological and Political Curriculum Standards (Experimental)” were released in 2004 (MoE). These standards incorporated fundamental Marxist-Leninist views, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the “Three Represents” into the ideological and political courses. The curriculum included compulsory modules like “Economic Life”, “Political Life”, “Culture and Society”, “Life and Philosophy”, and elective modules such as “Knowledge of Scientific Socialism”, “Economic Knowledge”, and “Legal Knowledge in Life”. The “Ideological and Political” course for senior secondary education, while retaining its name, shifted its focus to a blend that addresses students’ developmental needs and life experiences.

Textbook management during this phase adopted a “one outline, multiple textbooks” approach, allowing for the simultaneous selection and use of multiple sets of textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education’s Textbook Review Committee for Primary and Secondary Schools. The content of these textbooks exhibited two main characteristics. Firstly, civic consciousness education was formally recognized at the policy level. In 2001, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the “Outline for the Implementation of Citizen Moral Construction”, establishing a civic moral code and underscoring the importance of citizen morality. The Seventeenth National

Congress report of the Chinese Communist Party in 2007 and the “National Medium and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan Outline (2010-2020)” further emphasized strengthening civic consciousness education. Secondly, education on citizen rights consciousness made its way into national textbooks. Between 2002 and 2004, the People’s Education Press published “Morality and Life” and “Morality and Society” textbooks, which included concepts of freedom, equality, rational rights, and responsibilities (Wang, 2004). In 2004, the textbook of senior secondary school “Political Life” was introduced, signifying a significant step in incorporating citizen rights consciousness into the curriculum (ICTR, 2004).

### ***Multidimensional Enhancement Phase of Civic Education (2014-Present)***

Since October 23, 2014, civic education in China has entered a phase of multidimensional enhancement, marked by significant policy decisions and curriculum reforms. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of China’s “Decision on Several Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Advancing the Rule of Law” (CPCNEWS, 2014) set a new course for civic education. This decision underscored the importance of a dual approach to governance, combining law and virtue, and mandated the integration of legal education into the national education system, starting with primary and secondary schools.

In June 2016, a collaborative initiative by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice, and the National Office for Promoting the Rule of Law culminated in the issuance of the “Outline of Legal Education for Young People”. This outline called for a revision of the moral education curriculum standards in primary and secondary schools to align with its teaching content requirements. Consequently, from the autumn term of 2016, national curricula for primary schools’ “Morality and Life” and “Morality and Society”, as well as junior secondary schools’ “Ideological and Moral”, were rebranded to “Morality and Rule of Law”. This shift marked a significant evolution in the content and focus of the curriculum.

These textbooks emphasized fostering virtue in the new era and strengthening education in traditional Chinese culture, rule of law, and ethnic unity. The Ministry of Education, adhering to a “one outline, one textbook” policy, organized and compiled these textbooks, which were subsequently reviewed by the National Textbook Committee for nationwide implementation. Starting in 2017, these unified textbooks began being used in first and seventh grades, expanding to second and eighth grades in 2018, and by

autumn 2019, they achieved full coverage across all grades. Notably, this was the first instance since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 that the term "rule of law" was featured in the names of compulsory education courses (KKNEWS, 2016).

In the realm of senior secondary education, the "General Senior Secondary School Ideological and Political Course Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition)" were published in 2017, introducing significant refinements in the core competencies of the subject. These curriculum standards restructured the modules of senior secondary education ideological and political courses to better reflect the contemporary socio-political landscape of China. The compulsory courses were designed around the theme of socialism with Chinese characteristics and included four key modules: "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics", "Economy and Society", "Politics and Rule of Law", and "Philosophy and Culture". Additionally, selective compulsory modules such as "Contemporary International Politics and Economy", "Law and Life", and "Logic and Thinking", along with elective modules like "Finance and Life", "Judges and Lawyers", and "Philosophers in History", were introduced. These senior secondary school ideological and political textbooks, also organized and compiled by the Ministry of Education, began being used in general senior secondary schools across various provinces including Beijing, Tianjin, Liaoning, Shanghai, Shandong, and Hainan from September 2019 (MoE, 2019).

## Discussion

The evolution of civic education in China's primary and secondary schools since the reform and opening-up represents a transition from structural revival to systematic exploration. This transformation, aligned with contemporary requirements and grounded in China's specific context, has established a distinct framework for the nature, objectives, and methodology of civic education. However, as the curriculum enters a more sophisticated stage, it encounters a multifaceted landscape of developmental opportunities and practical considerations.

A primary focus in the current stage is the coordination between curriculum design and pedagogical implementation. While standards have been continuously refined, a localized gap persists in how these concepts are translated into classroom practice. To further enhance the synergy between school culture and civic principles, there is an

ongoing need to strengthen the professional development of the teaching force, which remains a cornerstone for the subject's practical effectiveness. Furthermore, in the context of China's exam-oriented educational system and the heavy academic burden on students, civic education often becomes relegated to mere rote memorization for exams. This approach neglects the subject's fundamental role in guiding personal behavior and advocating for legitimate rights and interests. Consequently, the practical integration of civic education faces the risk of being overshadowed by intensive academic requirements (Chen, 2018). The overemphasis on intellectualization, curricularization, and scientification of moral education in schools often leads to an evaluation system that prioritizes knowledge acquisition over the development of students' personalities, moral consciousness, emotions, and behavioral habits (Wan, 2003).

Overall, while China's civic education has made significant strides in aligning with contemporary societal needs, it still faces critical challenges in terms of practical implementation and teacher training with the development of civic consciousness and values. There is a need for a more holistic approach that integrates civic education more deeply into students' learning experiences and personal development, moving beyond theoretical knowledge to foster a well-rounded understanding and practice of citizenship. Addressing these issues is crucial for the development of a civic education system that not only resonates with China's specific socio-political context but also prepares students for the complexities of the modern world.

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# Providing Insights into History and Civic Education Curriculum in Mongolia from a Systematic Perspective

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## Abstract

The study aims to provide a concise explanation of the characteristics of the education system in Mongolia, as well as the curriculum of history education within the broader framework of general education.

In the study, the historical and modern conditions and features of Mongolia's education system, the results of a review of the content of the history curriculum at the elementary, basic, and secondary levels of general education in the country, as well as the problems in history and civic ethics education are discussed.

The focus of this study lies in the analysis of Mongolia's education system, encompassing its historical and modern characteristics. It thoroughly reviews the content of the history curriculum at the elementary, basic, and secondary levels of general education in the country. Additionally, the study delves into the issues faced in history and civic education.

The content of history education is defined considering the continuity, chronology, and needs of students of ancient, medieval and modern history of Mongolia and the world. The current education system in Mongolia is structurally divided into formal and informal education at the horizontal level, preschool (4 years), primary (5 years), secondary (lower secondary 4, upper secondary 3 years) and higher education (bachelor 4 years) at the vertical level.

History education in the country is studied in Grade 4 & Grade 5 of Man and Society, in Grade 6 to Grade 9 of Mongolian and World History, and in Grade 10 & Grade 11 of Mongolian history. In Grade 10 to Grade 12, Mongolian and World history are studied selectively. The study of history accounts for 14 percent of the total of more than 9,000 lessons studied in the current elementary, middle, and high school curricula. The history

curriculum includes 86 learning objectives for Grade 6 to Grade 9, 45 learning objectives for compulsory study content for Grade 10 & Grade 11, and 219 learning objectives for optional study content for Grade 10 to Grade 12.

The study program entails a comprehensive analysis of the history education system, encompassing various periods such as the Ancestral period, Mongolian antiquity, World antiquity, Medieval Mongolia, Medieval world, Modern Mongolia, Modern world. This analysis is conducted within the framework of the content. In light of these general indicators, it is crucial to further expand the analysis of the history education system and its content in our country.

*Keywords:* Mongolian education; history and civic ethics education; curriculum; methodology; material resources; assessment.

## **Introduction**

With a history spanning over 2,200 years, Mongolians stand as one of the oldest civilized nations and ethnic groups in the East. It was in 1206 that Genghis Khan played a pivotal role in unifying Mongolia, ultimately paving the way for the establishment of the renowned Mongol Empire.

Mongolia shares its borders with the Russian Federation in the north and the People's Republic of China in the south. With a population of 3.4 million, Mongolia spans an area of 1,564,116 square kilometres. Currently, there is a mix of nomadic and settled civilizations, with 53.0 percent of the population residing in rural areas and 47.0 percent in metropolitan cities (MES, 2019 p. 28). Children make up 38 percent of the total population. It is anticipated that the school-age population (6-17) will continue to grow until 2030 (MES, 2020, p.43).

## **General concept of education system of Mongolia**

### ***Educational traditions and reform conditions***

The Mongol Empire, under the leadership of Genghis Khan and his successors, had a significant impact on global history during the 13th and 14th centuries, effectively initiating the process of globalization as we know it today (Weatherford, 2012).

Over the course of history, Mongolians have prioritized the education and upbringing of their children, employing a hands-on approach that involves teaching through practical work and imparting the meaning behind various aspects of life. They used diverse tools, including games, to instil proper behaviour and paid close attention to the overall development of their children. These principles of child-rearing, such as emphasizing the importance of one's role within the family, avoiding excessive privileges, and providing love and protection, align closely with the modern educational missions and recommendations put forth by international organizations (Tsanjid, 2023a).

Mongolian traditional education has a twofold purpose. Firstly, it primarily focuses on instilling work ethics and self-sufficiency for future livelihood. Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of building a family, raising children in a healthy manner, and providing them with a quality education. Ultimately, this education strives to cultivate proper behaviour in public settings and effective communication skills, empowering individuals to actively engage in social interactions (Tsanjid, 2023b, p. 43).

Furthermore, Mongolians have long embraced the timeless tradition of classic nomadic animal husbandry ("the five snouts"), hunting, and archery. Their way of life, culture, customs, education, and upbringing have all been deeply influenced by these practices (Purev, 2021).

These factors shape the characteristics of education and training in Mongolia, influencing their origin, development, and evolution. Historical sources have highlighted that Mongolians have a unique approach to education, starting from a young age. It is mentioned that children as young as two or three years old are taught horse riding and archery using specially designed bows (Purev, 2021). Moreover, Mongolians place great emphasis on the intellectual and practical development of their children and youth, fostering skills, cooperation, and helpfulness. This is evident in their sayings such as "Labour makes a man, long ride makes the best horse" and "Families have a life unit, neighbours have a common ground/idea." Through these methods and wisdom, the younger generation is taught and nurtured (Tsanjid, 2023b, p. 43). For instance, children are trained to herd lambs and calves at the age of 3-4, ride horses and care for them at 6-7, and also engage in household chores like collecting dung and fuel. By the age of 15-16, boys receive comprehensive training in animal husbandry. Additionally, girls are taught skills like sewing and the production of milk and dairy products. Mongolia has a rich tradition of education and training, encompassing home-based learning, public schools, and spe-

cialized student training programs, some of which are still practiced today.

The inauguration of the initial primary school took place on November 2, 1921, in the capital city. It offered a curriculum encompassing eight subjects, including Mongolian language, politics, world affairs, and history.

Children and adolescents residing in Mongolia’s urbanized society have progressively embraced digitalization, owing to the impact of information and communication technology. Consequently, their focus has shifted towards the importance of education, knowledge, and culture to foster global citizenship (Government of Mongolia, 2024).

**Overview of the current education system**

The education system in Mongolia is currently organized into formal and informal education at the horizontal level. At the vertical level, it is further divided into preschool (4 years), primary (5 years), secondary (primary 4, full secondary 3 years), and higher education (bachelor 4 years).

This system comprises various subsystems within the hierarchical structure of education in Mongolia, involving different educational institutions and student populations (MES, 2024, p. 21).

*Table 1. Hierarchy of Mongolia’s vertical education system, educational institutions, and number of students*

Terminology of educational hierarchy	The number of organizations in hierarchy	Enrolled students (number, thousands)
Kindergarten	1410	274.0
General education school	871	771.7
Technical and vocational education institutions	76	36.3
Higher education institutions	64	165.3

In Mongolia, even though universal general education is provided at no cost and basic education is obligatory, an analysis which was conducted on the distribution of general education schools across bags (the smallest administrative division of Mongolia), soums, and provinces between 2009 and 2018 outlines that:

- There was an increase in the number of primary, middle and high schools in bags,
- In soums, the number of high schools saw a rise, while the number of middle and primary schools experienced a decline.
- Meanwhile, at the centre of provinces, there was an increase in the number of high and primary schools and a decrease in the number of middle schools (MES, 2020, p. 43).

### ***Role of school and teacher in education and training***

The practice of traditional home schooling in Mongolia can be traced back to 209 AD, during the Hun dynasty. However, with the advent of the 20th century and the era of “socialism” in Mongolia, the establishment and growth of modern public and civil schools took place. This led to a significant increase in literacy among Mongolians in general. In recognition of their achievements, the United Nations honoured them with the prestigious “Golden Medal” named after N.K. Krupskaya in 1970 (Mongolian Academy of Science, 2003, p. 343).

Mongolians have bestowed the title of “the student’s teacher” upon educators, highlighting their significance. The educational work, professional value, and role of the teacher are greatly valued. In the country, a total of 54,200 teachers are currently employed in schools at various levels, including the capital, districts, provinces, and soums (MES, 2024). These teachers are committed to improving their profession, qualifications, education, and skills through their dedicated efforts at their workplaces and by actively pursuing opportunities in professional teacher education institutions and universities.

### ***About Education Funding***

Education in Mongolia is primarily financed through the state budget, and supplemented by other sources. The country currently dedicates 4.0% of its national GDP and 18.0% of the state budget towards education. However, there is an urgent need to augment the funding and overall budget allocated to the education sector. In comparison to developed countries, Mongolia’s GDP is relatively modest, yet a significant proportion of the population participates in both formal and non-formal education across all levels. Despite this, the expenditure per student remains low. For instance, the cost per primary school student ranges from \$1-1.5 and universities face a lack of government budget and financial support. Furthermore, expenditures other than wages and bonuses account for 48 percent of the total expenditures in Mongolia. (MES, 2019, p. 37).

# Mongolian general education research in history education

In the primary education curriculum, the subject of Human and Society is taught during Grade 4 & Grade 5. Students dedicate 2 hours per week to this subject, resulting in a total of 64 hours of instruction throughout the school year. Moving on to secondary school, history is studied for 1 hour per week in 6th grade, and then 2 hours per week from Grade 7 to Grade 9. This accumulates to a total of 238 hours of history education per academic year. Finally, in upper secondary education, Mongolian history is explored for 1 hour per week in Grade 10 & Grade 11, amounting to 68 hours of study per academic year (MES, 2019, p. 5).

## ***Goals and objectives of history education***

The purpose of history education is defined as “the student acquires the knowledge and ability to independently interpret historical phenomena and events, process sources and information, and use historical values, methods, and thinking to make decisions” (MES, 2019, p.133-148).

Objectives of history education:

The student will acquire the following knowledge:

- Main events of Mongolian and world history;
- Historical chronology and evidence;
- Change and continuity, cause and effect.

Students will have the following skills.

- Chronology of events, and events in Mongolian, regional and world history,
- change and succession, cause and effect, and spatial relationships

Students will be able to

- analyse and explain history with facts and evidence;
- Ask historical questions correctly and search for themselves to answer historical questions and learn how to do so.

The following approaches will be developed:

- Using historical thinking, the problems of the society in which they live to reflect;
- Reviving and strengthening the collective memory of the Mongolian nation;
- Be proud of our history and love our country (MES, 2019, p.133-148).

Through the implementation of the history and social studies curriculum, students will learn analytical methods and acquire the following skills.

*Table 2. Inquiry approach and target skills*

Skills	Grades VIII-IX
Asking questions, arousing problems and assumptions	Historical, social events and phenomena cause, course, effect and connection, relationship, influence, to detect changes independently raise questions, problems, make assumptions
Action planning, data collection	Advanced problems and assumptions to resolve performing actions and activities plan and require relevant source of information search and collect from sources
Information processing	Collected information processing. They choose the means to classify and analyse it, then put forward by summarizing the problem and hypothesis.
Discussing the results, generating new ideas	Produce analysis results, discuss, present, new ideas, problems and hypotheses put forward and explain it

*Note: Table 2 is taken as an example of from Grade 6 to Grade 9 Social Science curriculum for basic education (MECSS, 2015, p. 141-143).*

### **Content of history education**

The curriculum covers the prehistoric period of humanity (Stone, Bronze, Iron Ages)

– Prehistoric period (from 800,000 years ago to III millennium BC)

Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic periods, the origin and development of mining and sampling industry, the origin and development of rock paintings, art and worship, and the origin and development of manufacturing industry (MES, 2019, p.133-148)

For example, the discovery of 800,000-year-old stone weapons in the dung settlement of the Nariin River valley in Bayan-Ovoo Soum, Bayankhongor province, provides compelling evidence of the presence of ancient inhabitants in Mongolia. Additionally, the White Cave in Bayanlig soum, which dates back 730,000 years, stands as another significant relic to the ancient people who once resided there. Particularly:

The curriculum covers the ancient history of the country

- Ancient citizenship

Artefacts of ancient towns and villages, The origin and development of tools (iron weapons) and literacy, rock paintings and artefacts in Mongolia.

The curriculum covers the ancient global history

- Ancient countries of the world

Life, cultural heritage and historical monuments of the two rivers and Egypt, ancient Greece, Rome, China and India.

The curriculum covers the medieval global history

- The ancient state of Mongolia (4th century BC-1125 AD)

Archaeological monuments of Noyon Mountain and Duurlig Pine, the emergence, strengthening and decline of the post-Hun states, agricultural, social, cultural and technological progress of the ancient Mongolian states.

- Great powers and empires of Mongolia

The existence of the Great Yuan State, the Golden Palace, Tsagadain, and the Ilkhan State, the relationship between the Mongol Empires, and the reasons for their division. (MES, 2019)

- Other countries during the Great Mongolian Empire (XIII-XV centuries)

The curriculum covers the medieval global history

State, society and economy, religion, and culture of medieval China, India, and Japan, state, society, economy, and culture of indigenous peoples of the Americas, Arab economy, Islam, culture and education of the Arab caliphate, features of Western European feudal society, urban population, their occupation, religion, history of some named countries of Eastern Europe, medieval European churches, crusades, culture of Western European countries.

- Mongolia and the world after the Mongol Empire (15th-18th centuries)

Mongolia in the middle of the XV-XVIII centuries: Great geographical discoveries, Colonization, Religious renewal movement, Renaissance, Enlightenment, England, France, Manchu Qing. life and culture of countries such as the Mughal Empire, Japan, and Korea.

The curriculum covers premodern and modern national history/history of the country

- Mongolia and the world at the beginning of the XVIII-XX centuries  
Napoleon Bonaparte and the French Empire, the social and political situation in the East, the colonial policy of the empires, the life and culture of the peoples of the West and the East.
- The revival of the Mongolian state and the world (1911-1924)  
Revolutions of 1911 and 1921, The history of Mongolia's independence, historical figures who fought for independence, World War I and the "October Revolution" in Russia in 1917.

The curriculum covers contemporary national history

- Mongolia and the world during the socialist period (1924-1990)  
The Soviet Union implemented various policies to exert its influence in Mongolia. These policies aimed at establishing the Republic of Mongolia and formulating its first Constitution. As a result, there were significant changes in the administration and economic situation of the Republic. Additionally, the Soviet Union implemented policies concerning culture, education, health, social security, and religion during the period of socialism in Mongolia. This era also witnessed political repression and the emergence of people's struggle and movements against socialism. Furthermore, the impact of World War II and the establishment of the United Nations played crucial roles in shaping Mongolia's history. Ultimately, the collapse of the capitalist, socialist, and colonial systems had profound consequences for the country.

With the assistance of the Republic of Hungary, a bio-combinate and a sewing factory were successfully established in Ulaanbaatar during the age of the Mongolian People's Republic

- Democratic Mongolia and today's world (from the 1990s to now)  
The study focuses on the examination of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist system, as well as the subsequent changes in Mongolia's political, social, economic, and spiritual aspects. The analysis specifically delves into the impact of the Democratic Revolution's triumph in 1990 on the country's overall transformation.

The curriculum covers contemporary global history to clarify the subject matter of history education pertaining to global and European history.

Particularly, the reform of the United Nations, regional cooperation (ASEAN, European Union, etc.), those corporations, and the contents of Europe are studied. Particularly, to adhere to Mongolian foreign policy on the “third neighbour” and “neutrality,” it is mandatory to delve into the history curriculum, specifically focusing on the collaboration between the United Nations and various international organizations in the upper secondary education. (MES, 2019, p.135).

Mongolia has actively pursued an open and independent foreign policy emphasizing peace since 1990, leading to significant developments in its foreign relations. The country’s foreign policy’s conceptual framework is based on the multi-pillar approach, with 6 pillars identified to guide its interactions. Notably, four of them outline relationships with non-state actors. The presence of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the United Nations and its specialized organizations, and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in this list highlights their connection to the regional institutions that have historical ties to the former socialist system. In 1998, Mongolia became a participant in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), a forum dedicated to discussing political and security concerns within ASEAN. Subsequently, in 2005, Mongolia became a member of the ASEAN Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.

Hence, the specific contents are studied in Grade 10 & Grade 11 including the division of Germany, the Cold War in Europe, NATO, Warsaw Pact Organization, the formation of the socialist system, the Korean War, the Cuban Revolution and the Missile Crisis. (MES, 2019, p.136). From the perspective of global and regional history and conflict, conflict and peace, the revolution in European socialist countries and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the factors that influenced them, social and economic reforms in former socialist countries in the 1990s are studied.

Moreover, global issues such as economic inequality, trade wars, poverty, hunger, terrorism and environmental problems, population growth and food shortages, diseases, civil wars, as well as natural disasters such as tsunamis, earthquakes, floods are included but not limited to.

Furthermore, it also studies the following content about Hungary. King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary has been a strong patron of artists and intellectuals, providing them

with unwavering support. (Altanbagana & Bayarmaa, 2019, p.51). The Republic of Moldova witnessed significant development under the guidance of the Soviet Union and socialist nations like Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Romania, and Poland. (Amarsanaa & Batsaikhan, 2019, p.72). The 1989 uprisings and democratic movements in Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania marked a significant turning point in their respective histories. (Gantulga & Altanzaya, 2019, p.130)

### ***Methodology of history education***

The history course has equipped every student with the skills to analyse and interpret historical phenomena and events on their own. Nevertheless, considering the varying levels of independent learning abilities among students, it is crucial to acknowledge these differences and ensure that the teacher serves as the student's closest mentor.

Every history lesson will be meticulously designed and delivered in a manner that ensures equal participation among students, allowing them to develop and expand upon their existing knowledge and learning strategies. Bridge the gap between the past and the present, while nurturing a deep-rooted belief and spirit in the preservation and continuation of traditions and culture.

Through the act of observing and analysing historical occurrences, both ancient and contemporary, students will actively contribute to the protection of the environment, aiming to prevent pollution and minimize the potential risks posed by human activities. Develop the skill to effectively communicate your perspective on the future, anticipate what lies ahead, evaluate your current lifestyle, proactively take charge, and make prudent choices to shape your desired future (MES, 2019, p.147).

### ***Materials for history education***

- Primary and secondary sources of history;
- Cases, examples, video clips, film clips showing historical events;
- History map;
- Historical and social literature and works of art;

The history program's implementation entails the active involvement of local institutions and governments, working hand in hand with the administrative unit. Together, they will curate a list of significant local historical sites that are mandatory to be included

in the itinerary. The school and teachers will assume the role of guiding and supervising the trip, among other responsibilities (MES, 2019, p.148).

### ***Assessment of history education***

The objectives of the assessment implementation of the history curriculum are the same as aims of the program, which is directly related to the achievement of goals and results. It includes:

- Discovering the knowledge and understanding of historical phenomena, events, causes and connections of historical problems
- Detecting mastery of methods of working with historical facts, sources, and information, explaining (interpretation) problems with reasons and evidence
- Discovering the maturity of thinking and attitudes to love and protect history, cultural heritage and values. Assessment of history education is carried out through process and outcome assessment, both oral and written. (MES, 2019, p.148).

The assessment is characterized by its purpose of identifying and evaluating the student's mindset towards critical thinking, historical events and processes, and their level of interest, motivation, and effort in the history lesson (Otgonbaatar, 2021).

The Education Evaluation Centre is responsible for organizing entrance and graduation exams across the country. These state exams serve as an external evaluation and monitoring of the implementation and academic achievement of primary, intermediate, and secondary education curricula. Additionally, they provide fundamental information for assessing the effectiveness of education and enhancing academic performance (MES, 2018).

More importantly, Minister's Order No. A/425 in its article 4.0 establishes the education quality assessment and organization structure for end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary evaluations. It determines that learners will be assessed by national exams and these examination results will inform on the quality of national education. The organization and content of these examinations is presented in Table 3:

*Table 3. National end-of-year assessments for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.*

Level of education	Grade	Number of exams	Exam contents/subjects
Primary	5	3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mongolian language</li> <li>2. Mathematics</li> <li>3. Human and nature</li> </ol>
Lower secondary	9	4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mongolian language (Comprehensive content)</li> <li>2. Mathematics</li> <li>3. Selected content Natural science (Comprehensive content) Social Science (Comprehensive content)</li> <li>4. Foreign language</li> </ol>
Upper secondary	12	4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mongolian language (Comprehensive content)</li> <li>2. Mathematics</li> <li>3. Selected content/subjects (natural science or social science and history)</li> <li>4. Foreign language</li> </ol>

Further, this Order establishes that for Grades 5 and Grade 9, the examinations will be based on the national standards for primary and lower secondary education. It determines that the Education Evaluation Centre will oversee the organization and administration of these exams. It also states that the grade 12 national exam can be used as the

university entrance examination if the student so chooses, and that this grade 12 exam should be administered twice a year, and students could sit for the exam up to two times if they wish to do so (Otgonbaatar, 2021).

## **The overview of studies in Civic education in Mongolian general education**

Since 2006, the integration of Civic Education into extracurricular activities has been in effect. Following this, in 2010, the President of Mongolia issued Decree No. 103, which marked the commencement of the “Civic Education” curriculum’s development and implementation in secondary schools. The curriculum aimed to encompass the essential aspects of Mongolian traditional ideas and origin of the Yin and Yang (MECS, 2011, p. 9).

The subject known as Civic Education and Civic Ethics Education has been studied for 1-2 hours per week since 2010 (MECS, 2015, p.141).

*The content of Civic Ethics education curriculum covers three major contents including* 1) Discover your true self; 2) Let’s show respect and bring joy to others; 3) Let’s learn from national heritage and culture;

Through the exploration of tradition and heritage, students will gain a fundamental understanding of Mongolian heritage, ethics, and morals by engaging with the curriculum of primary education. By immersing themselves in the content of basic education, students will mature into responsible Mongolian citizens. The curriculum of secondary education will further nurture their sense of national identity and instil a deep connection or pride in their homeland

### ***The methodology of the Civic education curriculum***

The methodology sets the environment for learning to be a source of joy and excitement, empowering students to embark on their educational journey from a place of self-awareness. Together, students will evaluate, contemplate, scrutinize, criticise, articulate their thoughts, attentively listen to differing viewpoints, and engage in meaningful discussions.

### ***The assessment of the Civic education curriculum***

The assessment focuses on the progression of moral development and its implementation. Teachers are responsible for supervising and guiding the student who is elabo-

rating individually or collaborating on pure notions or strategies for ethical education. The consideration of diagnostic, progress, annual, and humanitarian assessments for creative use all shared the same set of criteria.

### ***The learning environment and tools of the Civic education curriculum***

The successful implementation of the “Civic Education” subject in general schools heavily relies on the collaboration between teachers, local citizens, and the community. By leveraging the knowledge and respect of a senior citizen, some specific contents can be effectively cascaded to students, parents, and the school community (MES, 2019, p.15-30).

## **History of general education in Mongolia and problems in civic ethics education**

### ***Issues and discussion in history education***

The new approach to reforming and reshaping the general education program of Mongolia emphasizes the importance of formulating a history curriculum that is specific to Mongolia itself. This can be achieved through in-depth comparative analysis of history education in both domestic and foreign contexts.

Furthermore, apart from incorporating national historical knowledge, skills, and historical thinking into the curriculum of history education, it is also feasible to explicitly incorporate the relevant historical content of foreign nations within the context of globalization and the advancement of international relations.

To effectively enhance certain competencies, it is essential to carefully curate the content of the history curriculum by integrating the history of Mongolia and showcasing the fundamental achievements of Mongolian and world historical studies.

### ***Issues and discussions in civic ethics education***

The current Civic Ethics Education Curriculum for Grade 1 to Grade 12 has been heavily criticized that it is exclusively centred around Mongolian heritage culture, traditions, customs, and Buddhist knowledge. However, this approach is deemed inadequate in terms of both content and methodology, as pointed out in the “Open School Newspa-

per” in 2023. Hence, it is crucial to consider this criticism for the future enhancement and revitalization of the civic education program.

Civic education is not a one-size-fits-all concept and can differ in terms of goals, content, methodology, and evaluation. These variations are influenced by factors such as a nation’s historical trajectory, the characteristics of its civilization, and the current and future needs of children and youth. In the case of Mongolia, the unique combination of nomadic and settled.

“Open School Newspaper”, 2023, No. 05, 06, p. 2

This education aims to cultivate citizens who possess the skills necessary for a modern democratic society, including critical thinking, reflection, and active participation. To achieve these objectives, it is considered appropriate to introduce and discuss the philosophical concept of employing two different approaches.

Even today, in the rural areas of Mongolia, the upbringing of children and young people continues to revolve around Mongolian pastoralism and the nomadic pastoralist culture. This enduring tradition allows them to gain insights from the pastoral culture and adopt a lifestyle that positively impacts their cognitive alertness, physical health, and mental well-being. However, it is worth noting that rural schools in Mongolia are experiencing a rapid influx of modern culture and the integration of information and communication technologies.

## Conclusion

The education system in Mongolia has a unique blend of nomadic and settled civilizations, which has persisted throughout history. Even today, the rural areas of Mongolia predominantly consist of children and young people who are born into the Mongolian pastoralism and nomadic pastoralist culture. They continue to learn from the pastoral lifestyle, which has a profound impact on their mental agility, physical fitness, and overall mental alertness. As a result, their strong bond with nature instils a sense of love and responsibility towards the environment.

In the curriculum of primary, lower, and upper secondary school classes of general education in Mongolia, students dedicate 14 percent of their 9,000 hours of study to history education. The main objective of history education in Mongolia is to cultivate

students' awareness of mankind's history, instil a sense of pride in it, and foster patriotism, as well as develop their attitude, historical thinking, and creative thinking. Through the study of Mongolian, regional, and global historical phenomena and events, students explore the concepts of chronology, change and succession, cause and effect, and spatial relationships. Furthermore, the curriculum also delves into world and European history, examining notable figures such as King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary, Robert I of Scotland, Louis IX of France, Béla IV, and Elisabeth, queen of the Hungarians, etc. The development of the Republic of Moldova with the assistance of Hungary, and the democratic movement that unfolded in Hungary in 1989.

In light of the new approach to reforming and transforming the national education program, it is imperative to formulate and elaborate on a history curriculum that is tailored to our country's expectations, while drawing insights from comparative studies on history education both domestically and internationally. Consequently, it is anticipated that a more comprehensive and structured representation of the historical and cultural connections between Mongolia and Hungary, along with their present-day collaboration, can be achieved.

In Mongolia, there is a widely accepted viewpoint that it is necessary to devise and engage in a new framework for implementing the national traditional civic education system and the modern civic education system.

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# The Korean Education System

## From the Beginning to the Present

Katalin Incze

### Abstract

The foundation of Korean society is based on close family and national unity. And this unity was preserved, among other things, by the work invested in learning. After the Japanese oppression and the Korean War, the country needed stability and rapid reconstruction. The development of the education system was among the first, and today it already holds a leading role in the OECD rankings. In recent decades, numerous curriculum modifications have been implemented, and textbooks have been made digitally available, sparing no financial resources. However, the main aspect of history education has always remained one: preserving identity. To preserve it from the oppressor, to keep national values open to multiculturalism.

The study aims to show how all this can be supported by history education. In the light of national curricula, can a conservative education be realized that serves the survival of nations in a globalizing world with modern methodology and tools?

*Keywords:* South Korea; education; school, tradition; globalization; history didactics

### Introduction

South Korea's education system is an exciting research topic in many ways. It has leapt the biggest of the "little tigers", and in the meantime, its modernized education system is rooted in the past. History education itself is particularly interesting. Let us think that in elementary school, children become acquainted with the origin myth of his people (Samguk Sagi, Samguk Jusa<sup>1</sup>) almost at the same time as learning to read, and by the end of his secondary school studies, they are familiar with their national past and can position themselves in the world of the 21st century.

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<sup>1</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup>-century Samguk Sagi records the history of the Three Kingdoms in classical Chinese, and the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Samguk Jusa also contains early Korean legends written in classical Chinese.

It is not an easy task for history teaching to cope with the fact that the borders of a nation do not always coincide with its political borders. It is through understanding and accepting this that the concept of the nation, and the nation itself, can survive the boundaries set by politics.

## Historical roots of the education system

Before presenting the education system of the Republic of Korea (hereinafter South Korea), it is necessary to mention the informal environment of education and its role in society, the family. The role of the family in the life of the nation is still unusually strong for European eyes (respect for tradition, passing on customs, preserving and passing on national values regardless of social division). Today, the so-called strong family has developed. Its basis is thrift, hard work and appreciation of learning (Csáki, 2022). In Korean families, upbringing was initially closely intertwined with education. Buddhism, then Confucianism, and Christianity had a strong influence on this family bond.

### *From the beginning to 1897*

The oldest educational institution in Korea was the Confucian-inspired Tehak, established in the Goguryeo Kingdom. The purpose of education here was to train officials (Jong, Lee, 2018).

The education of boys and girls was separate from the beginning. Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, girls were educated at home, and only those who studied to read sacred texts in Buddhist monasteries went to school. The most important curriculum for girls was household management and the management of servants. Thus, their curriculum primarily concerned cooking, making the family's clothing, and they also learned to play the musical instruments of the time. Naturally, they became obedient and loyal wives.

In noble yangban families, the father or the older brother was responsible for teaching girls to read and write in classical Chinese characters (hanja) until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and then did so in the newly created Korean alphabet (hangul<sup>2</sup>) from the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The main purpose of their teaching was to teach them to read and apply religious texts in practice, as well as to learn correspondence and poetry (Deuchler, 1992).

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<sup>2</sup> It The alphabet of the Korean language, the creation of which is attributed to King Sejong the Great in the 1440s.

Boys could study in a three-tiered school system during the Goryeo (918–1392) and Joseon periods (1392–1897). At the lowest level, all social classes could attend the village school (sodang) for free. Education took place in the teacher’s house or in a small local building. Here, students could acquire the basics of literacy, which, in addition to reading and writing, also included learning Chinese characters and basic Confucian works. They concluded their studies with a local preliminary examination, which was held annually, and most of them passed it. However, completing the school was not enough to take the civil service exam, the gwageo (Cho, 2014).

After passing the exam, they could continue their studies at the state-run Confucian-oriented schools, the hyanggyo. A teacher’s recommendation was also required for enrolment. Due to their social status, this school was primarily chosen by those of noble, yangban origin. Family support was essential for this, as tuition fee fell on them. Therefore, the talented, but poorer yangban did not receive an education appropriate to their social status.

These schools operated throughout the country, there were a total of 107 institutions. The main goal of students here was to pass the exam, which would allow them to enter the sahak.

The sahak was a private school in the capital, Hanseong later known as Seoul, where the most talented yangbans studied. The students prepared directly for the civic service exam.

This often meant that the family also moved to the capital, so only the wealthiest could afford it. The civil service exam was held in the royal palace, which was formally attended by the king himself. The exam consisted of two parts, an oral and a written part. The latter was a political essay, which still serves as an important source of Korean history today. The questions were related to political and social problems that concerned the leadership of the time. Importantly, the candidates were expected to propose solutions to the problems based on Confucian principles (Seth, 2010).<sup>3</sup> This form of problem-solving has become a fundamental element of Korean education, and its success is still reflected in OECD surveys today (OECD, 2024).

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<sup>3</sup> The examination system, introduced in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, enjoyed its heyday in the 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The position of a civil servant was exclusively accessible through it. It then lost its power by the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and was finally abolished in 1894 with the Gabo reforms.

### ***The emergence of private schools***

A new phase of Korean education began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of private schools, the seowon. These schools provided ample opportunity for teaching ethics through Confucian readings. The institutions served a dual function, as they also served as memorial sites. These were dedicated to the spirit of a former scholar or a deeply respected official (Teekah, 2024). It follows that sacrifices were also regularly offered. Therefore, it is clear that the importance of expressing faith and respect, which is not only tested during studies, but also practiced, appears in this educational system. This was accompanied by a moral commitment, which meant an unspoken vow. They were loyal to their ruler and teacher, respectful of their parents and ancestors (the effect of this is still reflected in the teacher-student relationship, in mutual respect, see Tallis, 2018), and tried to live their lives during and after their studies according to the ideals of moderation, honesty, and strict self-discipline. To keep an example to follow in mind, these words were also posted on the school wall.<sup>4</sup>

### ***The emergence of Christianity***

A new stage in the development of Korean education lasted from the emergence of Christianity (from the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century) to the beginning of the Japanese occupation (1910). In 1614, the encyclopaedic work of the Korean diplomat Yi Su-gwang (1563-1628), the *Jibong Yuseol* was published, in which Christianity was first mentioned.

With the arrival of Christian missionaries, the spread of religion also led to the emergence of Christian education.<sup>5</sup> Christianity, in advocating for equality, extended it to the realm of education, making it accessible to all. In contrast, according to Confucian views, learning was tied to rank, a privilege of the ruling class. As a result of the inevitable religious confrontations, the practice of Christianity was banned in 1795. Thus, the following century was characterized by the persecution of Christians, which claimed thousands of victims. The ban was only lifted in 1896 (Lee, 1999).

During the persecution and ban, missionaries risked their lives to establish secret Bible schools and hold Bible classes. In 1886, the ban was lifted, as a Protestant missionary nun, the American Mary. F. Scranton, founded a school for girls in Seoul, named Ewa

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the education system can be found on the UNESCO World Heritage Site. [https://en.k-seowon.or.kr/?utm\\_.com](https://en.k-seowon.or.kr/?utm_.com) last downloaded: 2025. 07. 29.

<sup>5</sup> In his work, Yi Su-gwang also analyzed the works of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a Jesuit missionary of Italian origin who served mainly in China.

Haktang.<sup>6</sup> The institution was a modern girls' school in its time, because in addition to the traditionally taught Korean language, history, music, needlework and etiquette, two new and optional subjects were offered: mathematics and English. The school's ethos was based on Christian values, and the girls' school could operate without class distinctions. However, wider social acceptance was hampered by the fact that the acquisition of traditional female tasks were expanded to include so-called "boys'" subjects. The founder accepted that society still believed that the main task of girls was to marry and maintain a harmonious family home. However, she also insisted on modern education by introducing new subjects. This made it possible for this first educated generation to become qualified midwives, doctors, housekeepers, teachers and lecturers (Ewha Womens University Archives, 2005).

### ***The Japanese occupation (1910-1945)***

Ewa Haktang survived and expanded during the turbulent decade of history. From 1914, it also operated a kindergarten. It not only accepted more and more students, but also continuously modified and modernized its education. Thus, education during the Japanese occupation reached the level of a college. During the transitional period, in 1946, the college was granted university status. As a result, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the changed political and economic circumstances, several elementary and high schools were founded in accordance with its spirit (Ewha Womens University, 2025).<sup>7</sup>

During the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), Korean education underwent a major change, which included the mandatory study of Japanese culture and language. Korean was initially allowed as a separate subject, but was then completely banned, as well as the use of the Korean flag and national symbols was also prohibited. The intention was to suppress Korean identity. This also applied to the use of the Japanese equivalent of personal names.

The colonial period also affected history education: the teaching of Korean history and literature was banned. Instead, the teaching of Japanese history and the imperial period, in which Korea was already part of Japan, was made mandatory (Muraközy, 2020).

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<sup>6</sup> The name Ewha, meaning pear blossom, was bestowed upon the school by King Gojong (1864-1897), recognizing the institution's work and symbolizing the purity and beauty of girls.

<sup>7</sup> Ewha Womens University, Founding Spirit & History <https://www.ewha.ac.kr/ewhaen/intro/foundation.do#menu> last downloaded: 2025. 07. 29.

During the Japanese occupation, compulsory schooling for Koreans lasted until the age of 12. The main goal was industrial labour training. Therefore, the level of education in Korean schools was low. Only privileged Korean children could attend Japanese schools, so only they had the opportunity to complete secondary and higher education.

### ***The Transitional Period (1945-1953)***

During World War II, the role of education occupied a special place in the history of Korea, as its development did not stop even during the war. The so-called War Educational Needs Act allowed for certain curriculum reforms, and an attempt was made to standardize high school entrance exams (Csáki, 2022).

This practically laid the foundation for the tasks of the transitional period that led from the armistice to the founding of the Republic of South Korea (1948). After 1945, the modernization process was launched that went hand in hand with political, social, and economic transformation. This period of quantitative (increase in the number of schools) and qualitative (modernization of teacher training) expansion was stopped by the outbreak of the Korean War.

In summary, it can be stated that education in the Republic of South Korea grew out of Confucian principles and the principle of Christian equality. This is what the centralized educational management, school structure, mandatory curriculum, and related textbooks are based on. At the same time, the government, in addition to state education management, maintains the diversity of school providers (state, private, church, auxiliary private), and the possibility of multi-tiered financing (budgetary support, regional revenues, tuition fees).

## **Changes in national curricula**

With the end of World War II, Japanese colonial rule ended, but until the peace negotiations, Soviet military occupation remained in the North and American in the South. Reestablishment made it possible to gradually remove pro-Japanese politicians, teachers, and textbooks. Politically, the way was clear for the redesign of national education. The goal was to build university undergraduate programs on modernized educational foundations. All this in a way that would make the opportunity to learn accessible to all Korean citizens.

The Ministry of Education, established in 1948, brought the first major change with the Education Act of 1951. This became the cornerstone of modern Korean education. The school system that is still in force today was finalized based on the Japanese model (Muraközy, 2020, 185), a 6-3-3-4 school structure (elementary school – lower secondary school – upper secondary school – university). The law made it mandatory to complete 6 grades, thus establishing the compulsory school age inherited from the Japanese. It also regulated teacher training and strengthened and further developed the operating framework of state, municipal and private schools. Although schooling was now free in principle, parents still had to provide the necessary equipment for learning. In 1945, only 22% of South Korean society could read and write, and only 2% of them studied further. During this period, distance learning and correspondence education were established at secondary and university levels in accordance with the need (Csáki, 2022).

In 1955, content regulation took place with the publication and mandatory nature of the first national curriculum (NCICESK, 2021). Secondary school history education was given a central place in the curriculum.

Development was already noticeable from the 1960s. The number of primary schools increased by one and a half times in 15 years, as a result of compulsory education, the number of students increased by more than two and a half times, and that of teachers tripled. However, the rapid growth resulted in high class sizes, a lack of well-equipped schools and well-trained teachers. Thus, strong competition developed for access to secondary school (Csáki, 2022). In 1960, the ‘two-year training’ for primary school teachers was established at university level, followed by the training of high school teachers in 1962 (Park, 2019). A regional school inspectorate system was organized. Its task was to supervise the content and methodology of teacher work (Choi-Park, 2016). In 1963, the second revision of the national curriculum resolved the control and supervision of experience-based education.

The mottos of the 1960s and 1970s, “*Education for economic development*” and “*Education that advances modernization*,” adequately reflected the idea what the government expected from education in the long term. Education was evaluated as a long-term investment for post-war construction and intellectual growth. The country needed well-educated people to advance economically and achieve technological progress (Cho, 2024). At that time, in 1974, the national curriculum was revised for the third time.

1963-1979 was a period during which the emphasis in the curriculum shifted towards preserving and maintaining national discipline and unity. Within this, history teaching itself was given a prominent role. Special attention was paid to state supervision of the content of textbooks.

At that time, universities still organized their own entrance exams, and history appeared as an elective subject. This was primarily the case for teacher training and humanities faculties (Choi-Park, 2013). Between 1971 and 1973, the “lottery system” applicable to all types of schools was gradually abolished (Seth, 2002).<sup>8</sup>

The 1980s were already marked by quality education. Modern technical equipment was introduced, and a separate TV network was built to serve the distance education system. To operate it and cover the costs of further planned reforms, they were forced to introduce an education tax. Thus, 17% of the national budget was spent on education. Coeducational education was introduced in early 1980 (Csáki, 2022).<sup>9</sup> From 1981, university education was increased from two to four years (Park, 2019). In 1982, the Social Education Act was adopted, which strengthened lifelong learning.<sup>10</sup> This made it possible to introduce continuous further training, which brought rapidly changing developments into the lives of all employees. This affected skilled workers, employees with secondary education, and university graduates. The goal was to educate responsible, conscious and useful citizens. In 1985, a law regulated that compulsory education is the completion of primary school (6 years) and lower secondary school (3 years), so the compulsory age is 15 years of age (Mani, 2018).

In 1987, the curriculum was revised again, paying special attention to emphasizing the national spirit, and scientific and artistic secondary schools were launched.

Several legislative amendments were made in the 1990s. In 1997, the seventh curriculum amendment was adopted. This is of particular importance. The comprehensive examination affected the kindergarten, primary, secondary and vocational secondary school curricula. In this version, they sought to partially break with the previous methodological aspects and tried to prioritize new challenges. The curriculum thus became competency-based. This was intended to emphasize the importance of a student-orient-

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<sup>8</sup> A provision introduced to reduce competition between schools, so students were randomly assigned to secondary schools, rather than based on their performance.

<sup>9</sup> This was a departure from the established form of education. This explains why in 1996 only 5% of high school students attended such an educational institution.

<sup>10</sup> „Lifelong education”.

ed education system that considers individual talent, aptitude and creativity. In the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades, students could choose the subjects they saw as the foundation for the success of their future plans (NCICESK, 2021). This placed the emphasis on a competency-based methodology. During the 2009 curriculum review, there was a change in the distribution of hours, and history was now an independent, but still optional, subject. The structural framework was unified in terms of the number of hours and thematic units (KICE, 2011).

In the last two curriculum changes (2015, 2022), the subject of history was given a special role: knowledge-based education appeared, emphasizing creative and competence-oriented thinking (Cho - Huh 2015), and in addition to the importance of national identity, the need for a more factual representation of history also appeared.

## **General description of the education system**

The public education system in South Korea consists of three main cycles. Primary education lasts for six years, followed by a three-year lower secondary school, and ends with a three-year upper secondary school (Molnár, 2014).

Children start primary school at the age of 6. Here they learn the most basic knowledge from the main subjects: moral education, Korean language, English language, social studies, mathematics, natural sciences, physical education, music, and art.<sup>11</sup> Private and international schools may also offer additional subjects.

In the first two years, a teacher, who is also the class teacher, teaches Korean and mathematics, as well as the three subjects (“Good Life”, “Wise Life”, “Happy Life”) that develop study skills, creativity and problem-solving (NCCE, 2022). From the third grade, specialized subjects are taught by specialized teachers (e.g. foreign languages, arts, and sciences).

In 2022, according to the ministry, there were 6,163 elementary schools, 73 of which were private elementary schools (Ministry of Education, 2023). Parents can choose between public and private schools (Ministry of Education, 2023). The minimum number of teaching days per year in middle school is 220.

In 2022, the enrolment rate in grades 7-9 was 98.2%. In this stage of life, the government placed greater emphasis on education, because identity formation is a signif-

<sup>11</sup> In this, traces of early teaching can be recognized.

icant part of education here. At that time, the number of main subjects expanded, and history also appeared independently in the curriculum. In the 9th grade, they have to decide what kind of secondary school they will continue their studies in (state or private, church-run or non-Korean-run; general, vocational, or special school) (Varga, 2014). This decision is helped by the fact that students have already discovered their own abilities, as they have learned to collect information, organize it, solve project tasks independently, not only to work in a community, to take responsibility for their decisions and to be able to choose, for example, to get to know a topic from history in more detail. In addition to the compulsory subjects, they also study elective subjects, in order to successfully continue their studies later (e.g. robotics, a second foreign language).

Students in lower secondary school have two exams per academic year, one at the end of the semester and one at the end of the year. The exam results are decisive for applying to upper secondary school.<sup>12</sup>

In 2022, 94.5% of students enrolled in upper secondary school. This is broken down by the number of students who chose which type of school to attend, such as regular high schools, vocational high schools, autonomous high schools, special-purpose high schools. This stage is no longer mandatory, but the government is trying to financially support students and their families so that as many people as possible can choose this level. From the second semester of the 2019/2020 academic year, the last year is free, and from 2021, the entire training period, the 3 years, is tuition-free (Ministry of Education, 2023). Despite making high school graduation free, South Korean parents still spend significant amounts on their children's education, at 15% of their gross national product (Dalporto, 2013). As a result of the tuition exemption, the higher education enrolment rate reached 73.3% in 2022, the highest in the world (Ministry of Education, 2023).

There are two types of preparatory schools, hagwons<sup>13</sup> (4 p.m. to 10 p.m.) (Korea Times, 2009), one for catch-up and one for the CSAT (College Scholastic Ability Test). The school management often employs foreign teachers, especially language teachers, to ensure quality education. The prep schools are mostly private schools from the point of view of the maintainer, and a small number of them are state-owned. This means that

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<sup>12</sup> Compulsory subjects: Korean language, mathematics, English language, science, history.

<sup>13</sup> A South Korean private educational institution. After compulsory school, parents send their children to a private tutor. You can choose between individual and group lessons.

the financial situation of the students significantly influences the number of students.<sup>14</sup> Yet, it has grown into an “industry,” so to speak (Gordon Győri, 2020).

This also affects the teaching of history, which is permeated by the curriculum in all grades with narratives about strengthening their sense of national identity. The events of Korean history are studied in chronological order, while world history is also learned chronologically, but grouped into topics (ancient civilizations, medieval society, events of the 20th century).

The inclusive attitude in the curriculum is reflected in the appearance of respect for diversity. This is a requirement both in theory and in practice. It is hoped that through history, different cultures can be learned, which can also have an impact on today’s events. Therefore, for example, knowledge of ancient civilizations is necessary (History Curriculum, 2022).

## **Funding, maintenance of schools**

The Ministry of Education operates on the basis of centralized education management. The ministry is supported by a 100-member Policy Advisory Board. The board’s task is to analyse educational policy changes in the world and, through this, to help continuously improve the state of education. The ministry is responsible for operating the primary and secondary school system through the regional Education Office, developing national curricula, registering related textbooks, approving private textbooks, and publishing textbooks.<sup>15</sup>

17 regional Education Offices operate the school system. The offices are responsible for the budget and control of schools. This task can only be performed by an official who has 3 years of professional experience or has already worked in education administration. All schools under the authority have a school council, the operation of which is regulated by elaborate rules. 50% of the council members must have at least 10 years of teaching experience. Parents can also be members of the council and participate in decisions affecting the life of the school (NCCE, 2022).

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<sup>14</sup> Parents, if they can, prefer to take on extra jobs or the father goes abroad to work and then moves back home after the child finishes school. This also places a great emotional and physical burden on families (Lee, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Health and Welfare works with the Ministry of Education for children under 5 years of age.

In 2022, there were 2,625 secondary schools, of which 633 were private schools. The state finances 75% of the budget of public schools. The remaining 25% is made up of two parts: regional funds and non-compulsory upper secondary school tuition fees. At the same time, the government has set a goal of making all secondary education free (textbooks and tuition fees).

Private schools are also financed in two parts: they receive state subsidies, so they cannot charge tuition fees for compulsory education, and in upper secondary school, tuition fees cannot exceed those of public schools (Ministry of Education, 2023).

There is a significant difference in the employment method between public and private schools in terms of teacher recruitment. Public school teachers are recruited by the ministry and are mandatorily transferred from one school to another every 4-6 years. In private schools, the institution concludes an employment contract with the teachers for an indefinite period. Thus, private school teachers are exempt from rotation, which means stability for both the teacher and the student (Law Viewer, 2019).

Private schools include church-run schools, so their budgets and teacher recruitment are similar. The national curriculum is mandatory in all school types, regardless of the maintainer. The only exception to this is foreign-founded schools. They may deviate from the national curriculum, charge higher tuition fees, but they do not receive any state support.

## **Dilemmas of Korean Education**

### ***In the Light of PISA Surveys***

South Korea joined the OECD in 1996, and the first PISA survey was published in 2000. Based on this, it can be seen that South Korea produced outstanding results already in the first survey. Compared to the OECD average of 500 points, it was in 1st place in science with 552 points, in 3rd place in mathematics with 547 points, and in 6th place in reading with 525 points. (Figure 1).

690,000 students from 81 countries participated in the survey conducted in 2022. In South Korea, 100% of 15-year-olds, 428,000 people, were represented by 6,454 students selected from 186 schools (OECD-Korea, 2024, 9).

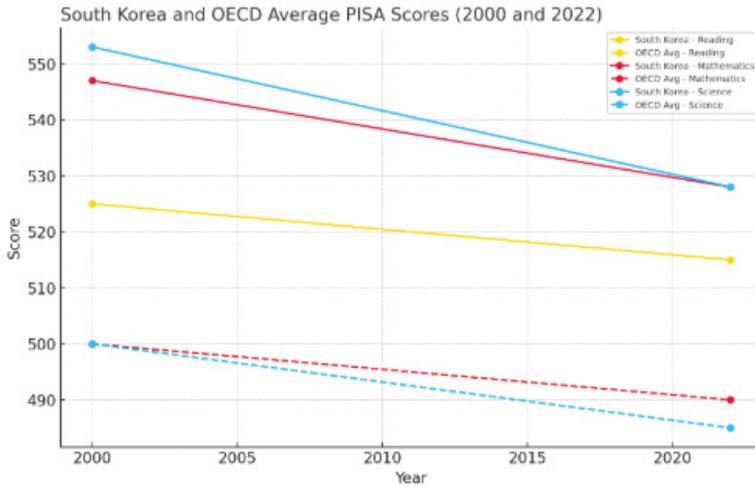


Figure 1: Average PISA scores between 2000 and 2022

For comparison, based on the OECD results known since 2000, a slow decline can be seen in the case of all three subjects, although the OECD shows above-average performance. The students finished 5th in science with 528 points, 6th in math with 527 points, and 4th in reading with 515 points.

Subject	OECD average scores	South Korean students score	Ranking
Science	485	528	5.
Mathematics	472	527	6.
Reading	476	515	4.

Table 1: South Korean students’ performance in the PISA survey in 2022

One of the dilemmas is that students’ reading skills are deteriorating, because in 2000 they finished in 6th place (with 525 points compared to the OECD average of 500 points), and in 2022 they finished in 4th place with 515 points. The big question is how to create a balance between traditional textbook use and creative thinking. From this perspective, it is worrying that while students’ reading skills have deteriorated compared to themselves, they have still advanced in international comparison. In 2022, the creative thinking skills of 15-year-olds were measured for the first time, which helps

them navigate the rapidly changing world and adapt to the challenges of the age. These skills, in turn, require quick, logical and creative insights (for more see Table 1).

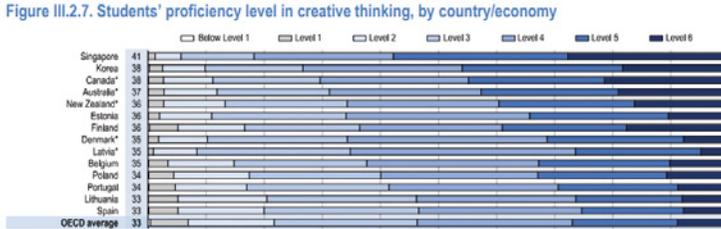


Table 2. Level of creative thinking proficiency among countries performing above the OECD average

The proportion of top-performing students in South Korea is exceptionally high, at 45%. This result has only been achieved by Canada, and only Singapore has surpassed it with 58%. Based on scientific problems and social issues, students are able to draw new conclusions from the data and sources they have learned, evaluate them and, if necessary, develop them further. They receive help from the education government by introducing the exam-free semester from 2016. This has allowed room for project work and the development of creative thinking (OECD, 2024, 91-93, table 2).

### Changing composition of society

The emergence of multiculturalism in education is a serious problem. South Korea was a homogeneous nation-state for a long time. However, since 1980, this situation has changed, with more and more people settling in the country.<sup>16</sup> This naturally results in mixed marriages becoming multicultural families, and children born in this way often encounter disadvantages that are difficult to overcome in many respects. This can even have an impact on later employment through social integration.

Examining the demographic data of Korean society, it is clear that the society is aging. Every third teacher is 50 years old or older, and therefore Korea may face a shortage of teaching careers. At the same time, due to the decreasing number of children, fewer

<sup>16</sup> By 2019, before the pandemic, nearly 5% of the population, that is, 2.5 million people, were foreigners. The settlement process accelerated after the pandemic: according to the latest figures for this year (June 2025), 2.73 million, or 5.28% of the population, are foreigners (Choi, 2025). Based on this, every twentieth person in the country is a foreigner. The most common settlement permit can be obtained for two reasons: through marriage and through investments by high-income earners (HanGuk Visa, 2025). Another important condition is an official language exam certificate from the TOPIK language exam center.

teachers may be needed in education. However, the change in the number of children born in mixed marriages is fundamentally influenced by the fact that children born in mixed marriages reach compulsory school age. Therefore, it is important to assess the social status of teachers.<sup>17</sup> The emergence of multiculturalism therefore also poses a new challenge in teacher training.

In teacher training, the quantity and quality of the curriculum, and its structure, special attention should be paid to social studies and history teaching. This is already evident, as “respect for diversity and inclusiveness” has been included in the curriculum. This is why in 2006, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MEHRD) announced the Educational Support Plan for Children from Multicultural Backgrounds (ESP) (Lee, 2013). In recent years, there has been a continuous need for measures that consider both teachers and students from mixed families.<sup>18</sup>

Overcrowding is a serious dilemma for public education as a whole. Private after-school tutoring and exam preparation schools, known as hagwons, play a prominent role in this. International surveys prove that the number of hours spent studying is far higher than average.

## Dilemmas of History Teaching

In South Korea, history is one of the most important subjects. From the beginning of the Korean history, great emphasis was placed on introducing the events of the past for students. Through this, it gives the individual a compass to find his place in the world, to form a group, to develop a sense of belonging to the community,<sup>19</sup> and a national consciousness. It is therefore necessary for the student to know the language, culture, and civilization of his country well, and thus to be able to contribute to its rational development as an adult.

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<sup>17</sup> However, it is encouraging that 67% of teachers agree or strongly agree with the statement that changes are needed and that society values their work. Therefore, the number of teachers leaving the profession is very low (Talis, 2018), which also contributes to the attractiveness of the teaching profession for young people.

<sup>18</sup> The curriculum was then revised to take this into account. In recent years, the number of students from mixed families has continued to increase, from 46,000 in 2012 to 160,000 in 2021. Since immigrant children are subject to the same expectations as Korean children, they have more difficulty meeting them (Van den Broeck–Demanet k–Van Houtte, 2015), and their chances of continuing their education are also lower. The role of teachers is important in how they can involve students in the classroom community and provide support in learning, primarily in learning the Korean language (Kim, E., 2024, 1-14).

<sup>19</sup> Jörg Rüsen (Kaposi, 2014, 13)

History teaching indirectly provides a curriculum for civic education, and therefore serves to educate for civic responsibility. This also justifies its being taught together with the teaching of natural sciences, arts, and mathematics (Tate, 2023). This gives it its “usefulness”, which is often questioned by society and sometimes even politics itself these days.

History teaching is actually a special dialogue with the past. It follows from the nature of this dialogue that the importance of contact lessons cannot be reduced by the emergence of digital teaching tools. However, in addition to the continuous renewal of teacher training, it is necessary to preserve and apply traditional and well-established didactic elements so that the need to learn about “the beautiful, the good and the truth” (Tate, 2023) becomes a lifelong need for all students.

One of the pillars of modern history teaching is the transformation of the results of historical science into teaching materials and textbook sections, which is also a serious moral challenge. This is where the dilemmas that are rooted in the specific geopolitical situation of the Korean nation arise (the relationship between China and Korea in the early Middle Ages, Japanese colonization and its consequences – the situation of comfort women and compensation, the Japanese Shinto shrine–) (Lyu, 2017).

Another dilemma is the teaching of the life and development of a nation in two states (ancient origin stories, the Korean War). A special and unique problem of this is the specific situation of dissident children, who have already learned about national history, but not from a South Korean perspective. An example of the search for a solution in educational guidance is the program developed for the education of children of dissidents, which is implemented at Hangeore High School within the framework of a special curriculum program (Chai, Hyun Jin (Hangeore High School).

Another dilemma in history teaching has emerged from the nation-state becoming a host state in the education of immigrant children. For this conscious education of citizens, it is essential to develop a position/curriculum that is acceptable to both parties between national identity and multiculturalism. This was helped by the adoption of the Educational Support Plan for Children with Multicultural Backgrounds (ESP).

In Korean history education, precisely in the interests of the above solutions, a new challenge is to establish the proportions of national and world history in a way that simultaneously educates children of native and immigrant parents to have a strong national consciousness and civic responsibility (national history, world history; multicultur-

alism, ethnopluralism). All of this leads to an ever-current question: is a mandatory final exam necessary for history teaching? Under the current circumstances, it seems that politics, education management, and society have reached an agreement, because they have gone from not being necessary through optionality to accepting a mandatory final exam (Shin, 2018).

The goal of history teaching is to prepare students (conservative)/help them prepare (competence-based) for civic responsibility. I find the formulation of the purpose of history teaching, and within and apart from this, Korean history teaching, best captured by a quote from a renowned Hungarian historian József Kaposi: “Studying history delights the senses, excites the imagination, embellishes and expands culture, enriches the language, sharpens judgment about things, and imperceptibly develops intelligence.” (Kaposi, 2022, 5). Jörn Rüsen, a well-known German historian adds: “The purpose of history education is not only to explain the world, but also to give individuals and groups a framework to find their place in this world.” According to Rüsen (Kaposi, 2014, 13)

## **Curricular Position of history teaching**

The teaching and learning of history is practically as old as the establishment of school. It has retained its role in identity formation. This role has sometimes been strengthened, sometimes weakened, and largely depended on its relationship to political power (Muraközy, 2020). Therefore, it is understandable that during the Japanese occupation (1910-1945), the role of Korean history teaching increased – it would have if the colonialist had allowed it. It banned it or shaped it according to its own interests. In the so-called transitional period (1945-1953), history teaching had to be freed from all these problems and placed on new foundations. From 1953 by 2022, the Korean society reached the point where the current situation of history teaching was formed through multiple curriculum changes. The continuous monitoring and development of curricula has made it possible to align the challenges of the age with the knowledge to be acquired, thus reflecting the most modern spirit (Csáki, 2022).

History is a state-mandated subject, and is therefore mandatory in all types of schools and subject to examinations according to age.

In the first six years of primary school, history is not an independent subject, but appears integrated into social studies. Through the most basic concepts – family,

old and new stories – through simple historical personal names and processes, they reach the chronology and the basic elements of history. In grades 5-6, they learn from ancient times (e.g. the Three Kingdoms) to the events of the 20th century (e.g. the Japanese occupation, the Korean War) and then about the changes in economic (industrialization alongside agriculture) and social processes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Various teaching methods are implemented. Storytelling is used through the lives of famous historical figures, events are systematized by creating a timeline, and teaching is made lifelike with the use of external history lessons. In parallel, the role of the use of images, diagrams, and animations increases. By combining these with movies, the emphasis is placed on visuality. In accordance with age, the development of family, community, and national self-awareness is emphasized, as well as the introduction of culture, thus developing problem-solving skills. The first six years do not end with an oral exam, but with a written assessment based on teacher observation.

In lower secondary school, the national core curriculum groups the main topics as follows.

*1st diagram - topics and themes of history education in Korean lower secondary schools*

World History	Korean History
The emergence of civilization and the formation of the ancient world	The formation and development of a nation-state
The spread of world religions and the development of local cultures	Unified Silla and Baekje
Interaction and change in the regional world	The formation and development of Korjo
Imperialism and the movement to build the nation-state	The founding and development of Joseon
World Wars and Social Changes	Changes in Joseon society
Developments and challenges of the modern world	Transition to modern society

The curriculum then provides guidance for each sub-topic, highlighting their main units, but does not list concepts, names, or dates separately (Korean History Curriculum,

2022). This regulation is centralized by the state, which cannot be deviated from at the local level.

In lower secondary school (grades 7-9), history is taught in chronological order from the beginning to the 20th century. The emphasis of the cycle is on identity building to introduce, understand, and master what it means to be Korean. Who, when, and how people fought for the nation's independence, how the Korean nation-state is built and developed.

Based on the curriculum structure, Korean history in grade 7 covers the curriculum from the formation of the nation-state, then from the Three Kingdoms (18 BC) to the end of the Koryo period (1392). In world history, ancient civilizations (Egypt, China, India) are presented.

In 8th grade, Korean history begins with the Joseon Dynasty, with a special focus on the relationship between King Sejong and science and culture. This is presented in a separate lesson. This period ends with the threat of Japanese conquest (1897). World history begins with an introduction to ancient Greece and Rome, which is concluded by an introduction to medieval societies and trade routes.

In 9th grade, Japanese colonization is the first unit, followed by independence movements, then the Korean War and modern South Korean development are included as units of national history. World history is built up from the major events of the modern world, the First and Second World Wars, the Cold War, the North-South conflict and the units of globalization.

In upper middle school (grades 10-12, the last 3 years of middle school), events are studied in more detail from the Korean War until the establishment of modern Korean statehood. The curriculum consists of 6 major units: Japanese colonization, the Korean War, the Lee Sin-man regime, learning about the concept of "liberal democracy", and the Jeju 4.3 uprising, which presents the events most accurately since the last curriculum amendment, is also included. Thus, the material concludes with the history of the Modern Republic, the problem of comfort women, and an account of Japanese war crimes (Kim, H, 2024).

World history is optional and not offered in all schools. At this time, the emphasis is on World War II, including Japan's participation in the Pacific arena, while European events are included as a general overview.

In addition to patriotic education, the curriculum also provides opportunities to learn about international relations. The greatest emphasis is placed on the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centu-

ries. Competency-based education appears in the form of tasks such as debates, project assignments, and source analysis. The processing of the curriculum is also facilitated by ready-made lesson plans (Korea Society, 2025). In this way, public education aims to ensure that Koreans become healthy, independent, creative and moral individuals (Csáki, 2022).

History has been mandatory for all students in upper secondary school since 2013 and 2017<sup>20</sup>, respectively, and has become also part of the College Academic Aptitude Test, CSAT. Successful completion of this exam is the basic requirement for university studies. Students can gain admission to university after successful completion of this exam.

Special schools are attended by students with special needs who do not plan to pursue higher education, thus preparing them for the labour market. The basic events of history (e.g. early Korean state formations, the Goryeo and Joseon periods, the Japanese occupation period, the history of modern Korea) are still taught, only in a simpler formulation, and in fewer lessons. In vocational schools, the “Reform Plan for the Vocational Education System Vision 2020: Vocational Education for All” adopted in 2005 set the goal of having a better educated workforce than before. It adjusted the curriculum to this end, making world history optional. Therefore, in addition to the vocational subjects, general subjects remained compulsory, including history (Varga 2014). Here too, the emphasis was on 20<sup>th</sup>-century Korean history (Japanese occupation, Korean War, modern development, democratization).

### ***Examination in History***

The Centrally Organized High School Diploma Examination (CSAT, Korean: 수능, Suneung) is a written exam for all subjects.<sup>21</sup> The exam duration for history is 30 minutes. During this time, 20 questions must be answered. A maximum of 50 exam points can be achieved (KICE–Suneung, 2025). Due to the type of exam, open-ended questions and essays are not included.

In terms of content, 10% of the exam concerns ancient civilizations, 30% covers the Goryeo (10<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century) and Joseon periods (15<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> century) along with Confucianism, 20% is about the period of Japanese occupation, 30% is about the Korean War,

<sup>20</sup> The first draft of the introduction of history as a compulsory exam subject was published during the administration of Park Geun-hye, which was confirmed by Moon Jae-in in 2017.

<sup>21</sup> The exam subjects are: Korean language, mathematics, English, history, second foreign language.

in which it examines the Cold War context, and 10% presents and analyses the last decades of the 20th century and modern democratization.

In recent decades, the esteem of the history subject has decreased. In 1994, history was still an optional subject in the high school leaving exam, and then in 2006, due to low interest fewer people chose it, the subject disappeared from the compulsory elective list. This step meant a rapid decline in students' awareness of history, which also affected their national identity. Therefore, in 2009, as a first step, it was made optional again, and then, when the 2015 national curriculum was revised, it was made a compulsory subject again, and it was introduced as such from 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2013). This was an attempt to change the low level of historical knowledge and the weakened sense of identity. In addition, the possibility remained that history could be studied at a higher level within the framework of the faculty.

## **Civic Education**

Civic education belongs to the social studies subject field in terms of content and methodology. Accordingly, it appears as a separate, non-compulsory, freely elective exam subject in the CSAT. Separated from history, but building on what has been learned from history, forming 9 different blocks (Everyday Life and Ethics, Ethics and Philosophy, Korean Geography, World Geography, East Asian History, World History, Law and Politics, Economics, Society and Culture).

In South Korea, citizenship education is taught in elementary school, in ethics, history and social studies, but it does not appear as a separate subject, nor does it in middle school. It is taught only in high school, where the curriculum is based on these elements for 3 years. There is overlap between history and geography, the latter of which is also part of citizenship education, but they form a unit in the curriculum.

The most important goal is to develop students' active interest in social issues. In this way, they should strengthen their sense of belonging to the community, nation and world, and "cultivate" their sense of citizenship. They should know and understand the concepts of politics, democracy and forms of government. To do this, they need to get to know political actors, the meaning and authority of the political statuses they hold. The aim of this is to participate responsibly in elections as citizens. At the same time, it is also necessary to get to know international networks. Students get to know the actors

in the countries involved in certain conflicts. With their knowledge, they can conduct research in the process of deepening their knowledge, analyse the materials they find, and, evaluating these together, ask each other questions. The value of the curriculum is that subtopics are also listed. This makes it visible what previous materials the new knowledge is based on (Social Studies Curriculum, 2022). The conscious use of media also appears as a requirement in the curriculum. However, this does not apply to the development of digital technology or digital skills, because their conscious use is included in the IT curriculum.

## Conclusion

In summary, the South Korean education system has deep historical roots. Starting from the family, through public, private, and then church schools, education has become accessible to everyone over the centuries. The first centralised national curriculum published in 1955 standardized expectations in all school types. Then, a law passed in 1985 established the mandatory completion of 9 grades, thus encouraging families to complete as much schooling as possible in order to become useful citizens of the country.

The most recent history curriculum amendment, adopted in 2022, introduced the importance of strengthening national identity, as well as a multicultural aspect. The primary goal of competency-based education is to acquire skills that can be used in practice.

The very existence of the subject itself has become questionable in the past 50 years. Since 2017, it has been a compulsory subject and part of the examination in public education, and in the final exam. Its aim is to foster national identity and responsible citizenship through a more thorough and deeper understanding of the Korean past, thereby contributing to the preservation of their national unity. As historian Pak Un Sik (1859-1925) puts it: *“The ancients said that a country can be destroyed, but not its history. It exists physically, but history exists in the consciousness of the people. [...] The preservation of consciousness will result in the country itself being resurrected.”* (Csoma, 2021, 21-22.)

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- [https://www.moe.go.kr/boardCnts/viewRenew.do?boardID=339&boardSeq=51083&lev=0&m=020101&opType=N&page=108&s=moe&utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.moe.go.kr/boardCnts/viewRenew.do?boardID=339&boardSeq=51083&lev=0&m=020101&opType=N&page=108&s=moe&utm_source=chatgpt.com)
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# Crossroads of Clio

## Comparative Analysis of 16 European and Asian national systems of history education

Richárd Fodor - Judit Tóth - Áron Fekete

### Introduction

History education is one of the universal languages of human culture, which has always been a central part of every classical curriculum, including the Hellenic, Roman, Judeo-Christian and Confucian education approaches. But what is the situation currently of this dialogue with the past in the school systems of different regions of Europe and Asia?

Editors of this volume have a Central European perspective, being socialised, educated and working in the Hungarian public education and teacher training. In this context, the academic discipline of history is a fundamental compulsory subject with a mandatory Matura exam for nearly everybody enrolled in the education system. Sharing this background creates an ultimately false view that history education is still a universally respected and globally learnt field of the humanities. Our goal as editors was to reach out to and investigate both neighbouring communities of Central Europe, Western Europe and also look at further regions of Asia. Ultimately, the volume serves as a compass or guide for researchers, educators and policymakers of history education who are interested in the rich world of understanding the past.

History education has been in a shifting status in recent years, with significantly different curricular positions in European and Asian countries. As a consequence of the New History discourse (Strandling, 2000), new themes and methods have emerged which offer new perspectives for students. The past is conveyed by analysing diverse types of sources with strategies of enquiry and aims of developing competences of critical and historical thinking, information and media literacy and civic online reasoning. Amid various professional and political debates, the support for—and standing of—traditional, content-focused history teaching that reinforces national identity has strengthened

again, including in Western countries. Looking at different history curricula, one finds traditional themes of political history and social approaches including minorities, the environment or the Anthropocene era. A fault line between competence and content-oriented education systems can be observed in which the role and place of both history and civic education vary. In today's knowledge-oriented economy, the development of competences is emphasised - sometimes - as an opposition to disciplinary concepts, meaning to preserve cultural values. In this paper we shed light on the complexities of history and civic education in the 21st century. A time when, although the decline of the historical profession (and social sciences in general) can be experienced, history and civic values remain inevitable.

### ***International context***

Today international trends in history teaching indicate several challenges: these include the notion of master narratives, the aim of history teaching in general, as well as the devaluation of history teaching, especially in Western societies (Furrer & Gautschi & Fink, 2023). These challenges are also due to the decline in national values and culture, school values globally, which are associated with the paradigm shift induced by globalization (Akkari & Maleq, 2020). New perspectives appear in connection with the Anthropocene epoch too, as well as teaching history in the global era (Retz, 2022; Popp; 2023a; Nolgård et al. 2020, Taylor, 2020, Lamassoure, 2023). The process of delegitimization is relevant for identity formation and shaping national sentiment of the subject (Knausz, 2015, Tomka, 2018), but also because history (and civic education) offer skills required for effective information acquisition and source analysis which have become essential in the information "tsunami" of the 21st century.<sup>1</sup> The study of the past leads to a specific historical knowledge, the literature of which has been synthesized by many scholars including Rösen (2004), F. Dárdai (2006), Yılmaz (2008) and Majkić (2022). Following the work of Seixas (2017), three directions in international history didactics – British empirical research, German philosophical and North American pragmatic aspects of adaptable, transferable literacy transmission – form the basis of research foci. In contrast, the interpretation of history teaching is very diverse (Gyáni, 2015; Knausz, 2015; Stoddard, 2017; Majkić, 2022). Jancsák (2019) and Kojanitz (2019) distinguish two directions:

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<sup>1</sup> The "Digital Inquiry Group" led by Sam Wineburg no longer considers historical thinking as the primary skill to be developed, but rather skills such as lateral reading, critical ignoring, or civic online reasoning which are all essential when encountering information online (Wineburg, 2018, Kozyreva, et al 2023).

those where the primary focus is on the development of historical thinking and those where the development of collective memory is the main concern.

Learning History also contributes to the development of historical consciousness, to the understanding of different ethnic groups and religions, and to the prevention of deviant behaviour (F. Dárdai & Kaposi, 2021). Therefore, in the 21st century, the focus of history didactics is increasingly on the development of *civic competence*, which is “*a combination of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which enable people to act successfully in civil society, representative democracy and everyday life based on democratic values.*” (Hoskins & Crick, 2008, p. 7). In addition, the global challenges of the 21st century (e.g.: the impact of the Anthropocene era), global history, decolonisation, the impact of social media, the contrasts between the principles of curriculum design between neoliberal and national approaches (e.g.: attitude towards reproductive knowledge) are brought to the fore. As well as the possibilities and dangers of artificial intelligence and social media (Popp, 2023. Philipp & Popp, 2023b). The development of media and digital literacy, and even non-traditional methods such as video games, has become essential in fighting misinformation and enhancing responsibility. The teaching of history has a key role to play in this, as it may better prepare future students to navigate the digital world with the enhancement of historical thinking skills (Popp, 2023, Tóth, 2023, Dujkovic Blagojevic, 2023).

In Europe, the role of history teaching is very heterogeneous regardless of the level of school and whether the subject is taught in an integrated or stand-alone way.

Students usually already have a knowledge of history before starting to learn it by the time the subject itself is introduced. In most countries in the EU, history is introduced in lower-primary school, Greece being among the earliest ones where it is already introduced in the third grade. In Germany, the subject is typically introduced in the 5th or 6th grade, and in most European countries it is 5th grade. It differs, however, whether these countries follow chronological or thematic syllabi. In primary education, history is usually a compulsory subject, but it becomes optional at ISCED level 3<sup>2</sup>, as well as the school-leaving exam being also optional. The historical canon revolves mostly around contemporary (20<sup>th</sup> century) topics. When history is integrated, it is typically integrated with Civics, Geography or other social study subjects. Due to the fact that the objectives

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<sup>2</sup> ISCED is the abbreviation of International Standard Classification of Education, a framework of UNESCO to compare education systems.

of teaching history depend to a large extent on the cultural-social context of the country, in some countries critical thinking is emphasised, while in others the development of historical consciousness is highlighted (e.g. Slovenia, France). Besides, there seem to be two trends on teaching national and world history: in some countries either the teaching of national or world history is common, while in other countries, both national and world history topics are dealt with because the syllabi are designed to show links between the national and world events (Erdmann, 2010). The teaching of national history has, with the strengthening of decolonisation and neoliberal trends, in many places represented the weakened position of history teaching.

### ***Methods***

#### ***Observatory on History Education in Europe***

In the field of content regulation, the OECD and the European Commission's Eurydice comparative reports have a long tradition providing a basis for a comparative understanding of different educational systems. Upon the emerging need for comprehensive comparisons, several international initiatives have been launched in the last few years to outline the picture of the European context of history education (OHTE, 2023; Lamassoure, 2023) from which the Observatory on History Education in Europe is outstanding. The Observatory was established by the Council of Europe upon the initiation of the French presidency in 2021 with the aim of depicting the map of European history education. The Observatory is operating in the legal framework of an Enlarged Partial Agreement with 18 (+2 observer) states at the moment. The cooperation involves scientific research carried out primarily by EuroClio – a European Association of History Educators and supervised by the Scientific Council.

The first general report of the Observatory (2023) examined the state of history teaching in Europe from six perspectives using quantitative and qualitative tools, experts and questionnaires. Topics included history curricula, textbooks and materials, teaching practice, learning outcomes and assessment, teacher training and certification.

The research was conducted using a complex methodology and a diverse sample. A questionnaire was prepared for the staff of the relevant public authorities (Education Authorities' Survey) and analysis of teachers' responses (Teachers' and Educators' Survey). The latter ultimately had more than 6500 participants. In addition, online and offline focus group discussions were also organized.

Among the results it is important to highlight that in all examined states<sup>3</sup>, history education is compulsory. On the other hand, the length of the compulsory period is highly varied. History is often not an independent subject, but is positioned within the framework of a multidisciplinary subject (mostly humanities, socio-political studies, or even geography).

In lower and upper secondary schools history is included as an independent compulsory subject in 10 of the states studied (Armenia, Cyprus, Greece, Georgia, Serbia, Slovenia, Turkey, Ireland, Malta, Spain). In other states, it is included in an integrated, multidisciplinary form, compulsory or optional, in varying forms based on different learning paths and specializations. In France, history is studied and taught in primary and secondary schools in an integrated way with geography.

Participating educators in the research still consider the textbook to be the most emphasized and widely used teaching tool. 83% of European teachers surveyed use it in every lesson.

Serbian and Turkish teachers still prioritize national history, only 42% of teachers in Luxembourg consider it important (OHTE, 2023). This could be connected to an international process that is shifting the way history is taught, moving away from a binary view of national and world history.

### ***Developmental models of history education***

Comparative research usually leads to the creation of typologies trying to connect characteristics of education systems. The establishment of modern education systems can be traced back to the Enlightenment, when nations were being formed. In the nineteenth century and beyond, it was the nation that was responsible for organizing social and political affairs, with the state playing a more prominent role (Bray et al. 2014).

Europe's educational systems were categorized into two models in terms of the level of centralization and state involvement, namely Archer's substitutive and restrictive models (Archer, 1979). Both models of development begin with a shared starting point: a dominant social group, typically a church organization with monopoly on controlling the content and organization of education. As a second step, competing groups emerge to challenge the existing system and propose alternative ideas. They may come from

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<sup>3</sup> Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Cyprus, France, Georgia, Greece, Luxembourg, South-Korea North Macedonia, Malta, Ireland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey

the middle classes, the peasantry, the aristocracy or even from the state bureaucracy. The emergence of new alternatives leads not only to competition but also to conflict for control over education. In the substitutive model, competing groups create their own schools, leading to a general expansion of education. Parallel networks of institutions coexist and eventually become national through negotiation and bargaining. Examples include the Anglican Church in Britain, the urban bourgeois schools, the schools of the British labour movement and Denmark's Lutheran denominational schools. In the restrictive model, one competing group can use state power to create an exclusive system based on its ideology. This results in a highly centralized, homogenous national model, similar to the French, German (Prussian, Habsburg) and Tsarist Russian systems of the nineteenth century.

Outlining a similar dichotomy, Kozma (2006, 2012, 2015) and Németh (2013, 2015) distinguish between centralized *European continental* models and *decentralized Anglo-Saxon/Atlantic models*, focusing on geographical regions and philosophical foundations. The continental model includes the Hungarian, German and French education systems, while among the Atlantic systems, countries with close political, historical and cultural links with England are identified. The French education system is still highly centralized, along with other examples in Eastern Europe (OHTE, 2023). Countries with decentralized education systems today include, among others, English-speaking countries with close cultural links to them. The authors distinguish between the two models of education systems based on several aspects (e.g. historical roots, the basic social function of education), but the most important difference is the level of centralization in the regulation of curricular content. In this respect, the regulatory documents of the Atlantic model are more flexible, less prescriptive and typically curricular compared to the continental system. Education actors (e.g. school districts or school boards, teachers) are characterized by greater autonomy, with limited involvement by the state. Nahalka (2020) refers to the curricula of substitutive/Atlantic education systems as autonomous, while normative prescriptive curricula are also referred to in the English literature as 'teacher-proof curricula'. These two 'poles' are still identifiable today, since after the Second World War, the developed English-speaking countries essentially implemented neoliberal curricula. In the latter case, the involvement of the state decreased due to the marketisation of the education system. However, due to several new global phenomena, the education systems of our time can no longer be clearly divided into two categories

based on these typologies and instead should be seen more as hybrid systems resulting from different development models. As a result of these changes in education systems, the purpose of teaching history has also become more complex. It is now inconceivable to define subject objectives in terms of nation-building alone.

The dichotomic models focus nearly exclusively on European education, neglecting several global perspectives, including the Asian experiences.

Confucianism is a complex cultural phenomenon, generally considered a philosophy from ancient China, that emphasises moral values, respect for elders, family loyalty, and social harmony (see Yao, 2000). It has deeply influenced many Asian societies, especially in education, politics, and family life. It emphasises the importance of learning, self-cultivation, and moral development. Teachers are highly respected as moral guides, and students are expected to be humble, disciplined, and eager to learn. This view helped shape merit-based civil service systems in imperial China and influenced educational traditions across East Asia, where respect for teachers, academic effort, and moral education remain strong values.

History is deeply rooted in the Asian societies and strongly supported by Confucian foundations (Jones, 2005). With the spread of Confucianism to Korea and later Japan, classical knowledge became increasingly important. History held a prominent role, allowing people to learn from the loyalty, faith, and wisdom of past figures. However, rulers used history to legitimize their power, leading to subjective documentation influenced by dynastic pressures. In the 18th century, Confucianism faced the challenge of Western expansion. The Far East initially resisted Western intellectual products and modernization, which conflicted with Confucian values. Eventually, they adopted Western ideas, including Leopold von Ranke's source-based historical research. This undermined Confucianism, as respect for subjective ancient writings was shaken.

China, in particular, faced a lengthy journey in developing its current history education with many changing paradigms. Its first huge education reform of the 20<sup>th</sup> century started after the defeat from the Japanese and the rebellion. In the 1920's the ruling Kuomintang started using history education as a tool for legitimisation, similar to the emperors of previous dynasties. They focused on the glorious past and fighting against Western imperialistic influence leading to the strengthening of Chinese national identity. The communist regime also took on this paradigm and developed a national ministry and printing house, issuing centralised curriculum and textbooks for students with

history education as a significant priority. This approach was abruptly stopped by Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution, a period when history education was entirely eradicated. It was only after Mao's death that history was reinstated (Jones, 2005).

## **Research methods: Comparative Framework of History and Civic Education**

The research group used content analysis of national regulatory documents as the primary source of data. National and local curricula, course syllabi and examination standards were reviewed. Experts from the covered countries were also involved, while a framework of indicators and a set of further guidelines were established to enhance the comparability of the results. The set of indicators were developed based on the list of dimensions used in the OHTE (2023) report.

The research group established a framework for comparing different history education systems to elicit useful data about history and civic education in the reviewed European and Asian countries. The framework comprises a collection of indicators describing different aspects of the given regulatory system. The indicators can be divided into five categories: (1) general aspects, (2) time and space, (3) declared competences, (4) content selection, (5) aims of civic education (for more see appendix). The Learning Institute formed a network of experts who collaborated, attended workshops, completed indicators and began crafting country profiles as academic papers. Scholars, history educators, PhD students were invited to provide feedback on the set of questions listed in our partially adapted set of indicators, where the participants highlighted both the scientific value and limitations of such work, both will be commented upon later.

### ***Reviewed countries***

Three groups of countries (diagram 1) have been included in the comparative research: six Central-European countries, four Western-European countries and six Asian countries. The three groups of countries represent different socio-cultural backgrounds and they may have different attitudes towards history education. Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary are part of the so-called Visegrád Group of Central Europe which are expanded to the West by Austria and to the South by Serbia. France, England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland are reviewed to get a Western European perspective from both

Continental and Atlantic education systems. China, South-Korea, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Armenia provide a colourful mosaic of Asian Nomadic, Confucian, Christian and Islamic heritage which suggests parallel approaches to history and civic education. In the following sections we elaborate on the most significant indicators.



Diagram 1: Map of the reviewed countries and regions

## Dimensions of content regulation

### *General aspects*

In the general aspects, respondents were asked about content regulation principles, the compulsory nature of the subject/course, whether history as a subject is integrated or a standalone, about matriculation examination, ISCED levels, and the textbook market. As regards the compulsory nature of the subject history, in most reviewed countries, some form of history is compulsory for a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 8 years (e.g. integrated - social studies) (figure 2). At ISCED 2 level, integrated study of history is still common, but at ISCED 3 level (where history can be taken as an exam) the subject is also available as a separate subject. Citizenship education is also part of curricula at ISCED level 3 in most reviewed countries (figure 3).

History is not compulsory as a subject for the final school-leaving examination in most countries (table 1), except in countries where history is highly valued for its traditional identity-building role, such as Hungary, Turkey, and Asian countries such as China, South-Korea, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Mongolia.

Years of compulsory history education in 16 countries

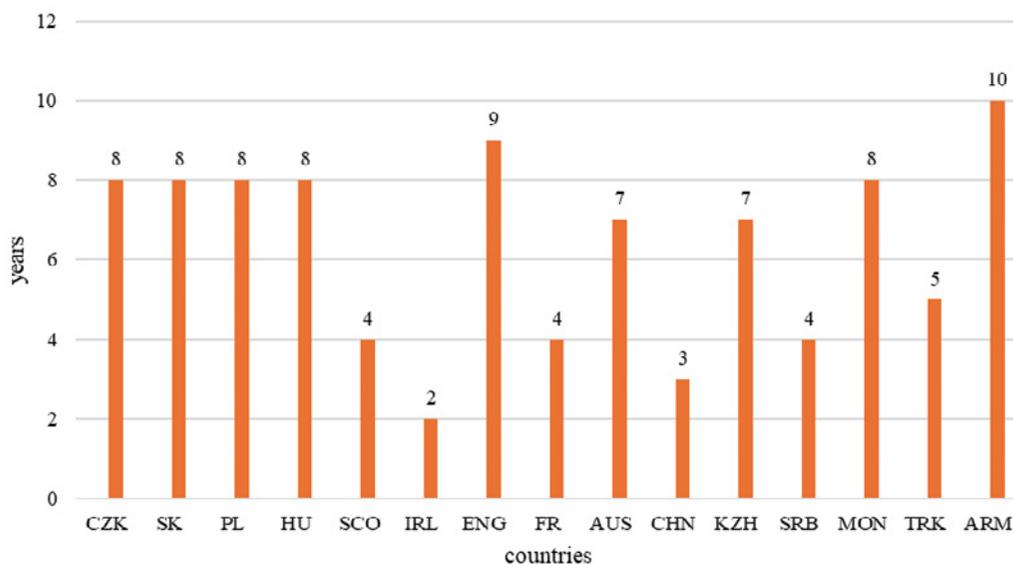
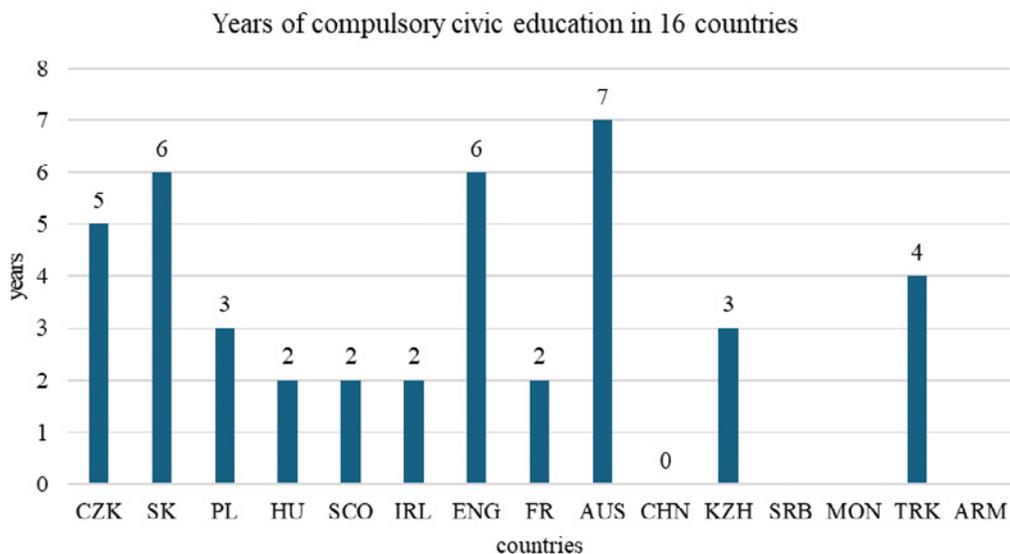


Figure 2: Years of compulsory history education in 16 countries \*

*\*(Local specificities occur)*



*Figure 3: Years of compulsory civic in 16 countries\**

*\* (Local specificities occur)*

History	compulsory matriculation exam	Advanced level exam available
CZ	no	no
SK	no	no
PL	no	yes
HU	yes	yes
SCO	no	yes
IRL	no	yes
ENG	no	yes
FR	no	yes
CHN	no	no*
KZ	yes	no
SRB	no	no
MON	yes	yes
TR	yes	
ARM	yes	

*Table 1: Compulsory matriculation exam taken in history in 16 countries*

The textbook market is very diverse (table 2). In the reviewed Western European countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia there is a usual availability of more than 7 textbooks for every grade. Hungary and Poland are in the middle of the spectrum, while in the Far East (e.g. China, Kazakhstan) the figure is usually one. However South Korea is an exception as the institute responsible for textbooks currently approved seven history textbook series.

History	Versatility of textbook market Number of available textbooks / grades at ISCED 2/3:
CZ	7+
SK	open textbook market since 2020, 3 publishers
PL	3
HU	3 textbook series
SCO	7+
IRL	7+
ENG	7+
FR	The government does not license materials
AUS	7+
CHN	Until 2017: 12; since then gradually 1
KZ	(?) approved by the ministry
SRB	between 2-7 publishers
MON	1 textbook series with ministerial approval
TR	5–1, varies by grade level
ARM	state approval; sources from a narrow list; presumably 1 series

*Table 2: Versatility of textbook market in 16 countries*

### ***Periodic focus***

In the periodic focus section, we asked about the historical periods over which the history course/subject is taught. Antiquity is not a compulsory period everywhere, and the emphasis also differs: in Western Europe and parts of the British Isles it tends to appear within a world-historical narrative, whereas in many parts of Central and Eastern Europe and Asia it is presented in connection with national origins or early national history. Scotland and Ireland are exceptions in that antiquity does not appear there as a separate topic.

The picture is really varied. In the reviewed Western democracies, the teaching of history is presented from the Middle Ages, with a focus on more contemporary topics. In Central Europe and in Asian countries, antiquity is part of the curriculum as well, whereas in Western Europe this is not emphasised. Hungary appears as a kingdom or a country in several history syllabi, typically in related topics (e.g. ancient history of nomadic people, Ottoman wars, where the Hungarians are included), and the 1956 revolution appears as one of the examples of conflict in the context of the Cold War. Generally speaking, where the history school-leaving exam is not compulsory, history is typically taught in an in-depth manner.

### ***Declared competencies and civic education***

The trends observed in the teaching of history and civic education in the countries we examined appear in different ways and to varying extents. These competencies reflect specific educational priorities in each reviewed country, while sharing some of their objectives. For instance, national identity is a declared educational objective, particularly in the Visegrád region and certain Asian countries (table 3). The European scale is varied. While, for example, Austrian regulation does not strive to achieve this objective among Central European countries, France, representing Western Europe, seeks to promote commitment to republican values.

Some countries such as Poland, Serbia, France, Hungary, Turkey and Mongolia and South Korea try to foster national identity not only within the framework of classroom lessons but also through extracurricular activities. These activities include various projects, educational games, and study trips. In this regard, an intriguing and distinctive form of study trips has emerged in Hungary, comprising visits to former Hungarian historical sites and Hungarian minority communities in neighbouring countries.

Civic education	Democratic values, human rights	Environmental protection	Financial literacy	Digital skills, media literacy
CZ	yes	yes	no	yes
SK	yes	no	yes	no
PL	yes	no	no	no
HU	yes	yes	yes	yes
SCO	no	no	no	no
IRL	yes	yes	no	yes
ENG	yes	yes	no	no
FR	yes	yes	no	yes
AUS	yes	no	no	no
CHN	yes*	yes*	yes*	yes
KZ	yes	yes	yes	no
SRB				
MON				
TR	yes	yes	yes	yes
ARM				

*Table 3: Competence areas included in the curricula of the 16 countries\**

*\*white=no data*

In many countries, the perspective of neighbouring countries is not appropriately represented. The absence of a multi-perspectival approach is not limited to countries where the construction of national identity is more emphasized. Nevertheless, this phenomenon can pose a serious problem, as the diversity of perspectives presented in the curriculum significantly influences students' understanding of history and their worldview (Van Boxtel et al., 2022). In addition to the multi-perspectival approach, inclusive and multicultural perspectives are not explicitly listed among the declared competencies in most of the examined states. However, these aspects can be found, either implicitly or explicitly, as general objectives, within curricular goals, or in the declared aims of other subjects (e.g. civic education, world history).

The presence of analytical skills related to history learning (e.g. historical thinking, historical consciousness, use of interpretations) represents the largest common denominator among the curricula. With the exception of Armenia, such elements are included in the curricula of all states. However, this observation should be treated with caution,

as, for instance, in Turkey, the aforementioned document provides no clarification on how students are expected to acquire the skills necessary for historical reasoning.

In addition to the teaching of history, our volume also focused on the state of civic education from the perspective of the countries featured in the studies. Although the role of this subject has somewhat increased in importance in 21st-century Europe, this trend is primarily explained by globalization, international and regional integration efforts, the continuous decline in the social activity of younger generations, and the emergence of various conflicts (Kaposi, 2015). The main aspects of the subject differ from country to country, as reflected in the diversity of the thematic content of each state's curriculum. These differences are most evident in the emphasis placed on digital skills, environmental protection, and financial literacy. Despite these differences, it can be concluded that none of the countries we examined require a final exam in civic education. At the same time, human rights and responsibilities form an integral and stable part of civic education in all the countries studied.

### ***Limitations***

Our research highlights general trends in the field of history and civic education between *Continental* Central European, *Atlantic* Western European and *Asian* systems. Data is based on the answers of international partners and experts, and on the analytical work of the research team. This has led to different interpretations, as the wording and interpretation of some of the statements in the indicator list has been found to be culture/context dependent. At the same time, certain concepts (e.g. democracy, civic education) are also culture-dependent, including the spatial / time perspective, as is the context in which history and civic values are taught. This methodological difficulty is also mentioned in the OHTE (2023) report. Thus, in order for the indicators to be interpreted in a nearly uniform way, certain questions and statements have to be rephrased<sup>4</sup> and a common framework has to be used during analysis to help the understanding of the results (e.g. Rösen (2004) typology on historical consciousness).

The second factor of limitation derives from the nature of the *document analysis* as a research method. The relationship of national, regional and local regulation and teaching practice is always difficult to assess and research. Principles, declared objec-

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<sup>4</sup> It is to be mentioned that so-called "comment" sections were added among the more complex questions, but the answers listed there would have stretched the boundaries of this interpretation.

tives and developmental aims may be far from the teaching practice in the privacy of closed classrooms. This way we cannot get a deep picture on everyday practices from such regulations. Therefore, in the future, showcasing case studies would be particularly important, since they would indicate different pedagogical phenomena and would show the gap between content regulation (intended curriculum) and practice (acquired curriculum).

On the other hand, observers and researchers of an educational system cannot ignore the role of the so-called *washback effect*. Outcome-oriented central regulation has a huge influence on the whole teaching and learning process. The length and stage of compulsory learning, the existence of a compulsory examination, optional advanced level assessment and centrally set lists of concepts and task types unquestionably determine the role and position of a subject in the curriculum.

Summarising and comparing these factors and aspects may serve as a solid basis for future in-depth, practice-oriented and holistic comparison of the reviewed countries, in which the indicator list could be used as an observational grid.

Finally, the most significant limitation of the comparison is rooted in the countries missing from the study. As a small-scale initiative, the coordinators of the comparative project and the editors of this volume managed to reach several voluntary scholars and educators from numerous countries, but faced several difficulties with professionals from other regions of the world. A lot of European and most Asian countries and regions are not reviewed, not to mention the whole continents of America, Africa and Australia. The objective of this first endeavour was to start a dialogue, experience the similarities and differences, and create a network and platform for future, wider collaborations in the field of the comparative analysis of history education.

## Conclusion

Our comparative study set out to investigate the current state of history and civic education across sixteen countries in Central Europe, Western Europe, and Asia. Drawing upon a unified indicator framework and content analysis of national curricula, the research highlights both convergences and significant divergences in the structure, focus, and declared goals of history and civic education systems. The results are in line with previous research findings (OHTE, 2023) and reports. The findings shed light on broader

educational and cultural patterns shaping the teaching of history in the 21st century, and offer implications for researchers, policymakers, and educators.

In connection with the Curricular Structure and Regulation all reviewed countries include history in their national curricula as a compulsory subject at the lower secondary level (ISCED 2), but its position weakens significantly in upper secondary education (ISCED 3), where it often becomes optional or is integrated with other subjects. Only a limited number of countries—such as Hungary, Turkey, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and South Korea—require history as a school-leaving exam subject, which reflects a higher level of institutional commitment to the subject’s traditional civic and cultural role.

In terms of subject integration, Western European countries tend to incorporate history into broader interdisciplinary modules (e.g. with geography or civics), while Central European and Asian countries more commonly maintain it as a separate discipline. Despite the spread of competence-based approaches, textbook dependency remains high — 83% of surveyed teachers in Europe report using textbooks in nearly every lesson. However, the textbook market shows considerable variation, from more pluralistic systems (France, Czechia, England, South Korea) to highly centralized, single-textbook regimes (China, Kazakhstan).

There is a clear regional variation about the temporal and content focus, in which historical periods are emphasized. Reviewed Western European curricula typically prioritize modern and contemporary history, often beginning with the Middle Ages. In contrast, Central European and Asian systems frequently include Antiquity and early national histories, reflecting a chronologically more extensive approach. National narratives maintain a strong presence, especially in countries where history serves as a tool for identity-building and national cohesion. This is evident in the prioritization of national topics in Serbia, Turkey, Hungary, and Mongolia, while Western countries place less curricular emphasis on national history. Interestingly, symbolic content (e.g. national revolutions or cultural milestones) often transcends the classroom, with Hungary offering study trips and extracurricular projects to reinforce historical identity.

Across regions, the most consistently declared objective is the development of analytical and disciplinary competence, such as historical thinking, historical consciousness, and the ability to work with sources and interpretations. However, implementation remains uneven. For example, while Turkish curricula mention these goals, they do not specify learning progressions or assessment practices.

In terms of civic goals, fostering national identity remains central in many systems, particularly in the Visegrád countries and Asia. This can be seen not only in lesson content but also in state-supported memory practices. At the same time, a multi-perspective and inclusive approach to history is still insufficiently embedded in many curricula. While such perspectives are promoted in Western Europe, they are often absent or only implicitly mentioned elsewhere, which may limit students' exposure to diverse viewpoints and narratives.

*Civic education* appears in nearly all countries, often within integrated modules or as a cross-curricular theme. However, it is universally absent as a final examination subject, suggesting a lower institutional status than history. There is considerable variation in civic education content: while Western curricula emphasize democratic values, digital literacy, and global citizenship, others (e.g. Turkey, Mongolia) prioritize national duties and social cohesion. Despite differences in form and emphasis, the presence of human rights as a curricular element is a near-universal feature, although framed differently in each national context. The rising importance of civic competence is tied to broader global challenges—such as declining youth participation, the rise of disinformation, and increasing social polarization.

The results confirm existing *theoretical typologies* that distinguish between Atlantic (Anglo-Saxon) and Continental (Central-European) educational traditions. Atlantic systems tend to be decentralized, competence-oriented, and flexible, while Continental systems are usually described as more centralized, content-driven, and prescriptive. However, these typologies are increasingly challenged by hybridization and convergence.

In all cases, the goals of history education are no longer limited to nation-building. The emergence of global perspectives (e.g. the Anthropocene, decolonization, digital citizenship) demands an expanded educational purpose that includes both cultural preservation and transformative civic engagement.

The role of history education has been decreasing which is shown by our 16-country-comparison as well. It can be seen that standardisation (the expectations of the labour market overwrite curriculum regulation aspects, or the reform of the content - image of the individual, personalisation vs. standardisation) is in line with the traditional/postmodern approaches to history and civic education.

However, regional differences have to be mentioned. In Western Europe there is a diverse cultural background, so it is more difficult to teach “one” history, therefore (par-

tially) more emphasis is placed on transformative and adaptive skills. In Central and Eastern Europe, history has a higher place in identity-building and the preservation of culture (through the legitimisation of lexical knowledge), and in the shared identity. Civic education focuses more on responsibilities within their own country.

Globalisation has brought numerous advancements in education, the seemingly less importance placed on culture and tradition has had irreversible effects. Therefore, it is crucial to engage in solutions that might work in different educational settings, enabling students to be equipped with such knowledge and skills that are needed for the preservation of culture and transformative skills.

The comparative results underscore both common challenges and regional specificities in history and civic education. In a rapidly changing global landscape—marked by social fragmentation, digital transformation, and shifting notions of identity—history education is simultaneously seen as a form of preserving cultural continuity and fostering critical, multi-perspective, and civic literacies. This dual role requires both curricular innovation and deeper attention to practice. The indicator framework developed in this study may serve as a basis for future longitudinal and practice-oriented research.

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## Appendix

### *Indicator table*

Position of history teaching in the curricula / educational system		Aspects / options
General aspects	(National) document regulating/ guiding the content of history teaching	(URL link + date)
	ISCED levels / number of years of compulsory history teaching	
	Is history a compulsory subject in matura /secondary school leaving exam?	yes / no
	Is there an advanced level exam of history?	yes / no
	Is the history subject integrated with other disciplines/subjects?	yes / no
	Are there any closely related subjects to History (social studies, political studies, cultural studies, geography etc.)	details in short
	What is the basis of textbook selection? Does the state centrally validate textbooks?	(English) name of authority
	How versatile is the textbook market?	Number of available textbooks / grades at ISCED 2/3: 0: only 1 textbook option 1: 2-3 textbook options 2: 4-7 textbook options 3: 7+ textbook options + Name of the publishers
	Does the state centrally organise the school leaving / matura exam?	yes / no
	Does the state centrally prescribe and sets the standards for the school leaving / matura exam?	yes / no

Periodic focus	The curriculum covers the prehistoric period of humanity (Stone, Bronze, Iron Ages)	<p><i>0 doesn't include,</i></p> <p><i>1 mentions the era,</i></p> <p><i>2. introduces the era in a separate topic</i></p> <p><i>3. presents from multiple historical perspectives (political AND social OR economic history)</i></p> <p><i>+ please give details in the comment cell</i></p>
	The curriculum covers the ancient history of the <u>country</u>	
	The curriculum covers the ancient <u>global</u> history	
	The curriculum covers the medieval history of the <u>country</u>	
	The curriculum covers the medieval <u>global</u> history	
	The curriculum covers premodern and modern <u>national</u> history/history of the country	
	The curriculum covers premodern and modern <u>global</u> history	
	The curriculum covers contemporary <u>national</u> history	
	The curriculum covers contemporary <u>global</u> history	
	What is the last-mentioned event/theme/topic of history?	title of topic

	The curriculum covers milestones of the creation of the European Union	0 doesn't include, 1 mentions the era, 2. introduces the era in a separate topic 3. presents from multiple historical perspectives (political AND social OR economic history) + please give details in the comment cell
	The curriculum covers leading bodies + (decision making) processes	0 doesn't include, 1 mentions 2. introduces it in a separate topic 3. presents from multiple perspectives + please give details in the comment cell
	The curriculum covers further aspects of the European Union	please specify
	The curriculum covers the origins of the nation (cultural-ethnic-linguistic-political) and important milestones of national history	0: doesn't include, 1: introduces the cultural-ethnic origins of the nation / OR origins of the language / OR important milestones of the national history 2: introduces 2 aspects (ethnic origins of the nation / OR origins of the language / OR important milestones of the national history) 3: introduces all of the 3 aspects + details in short
	The curriculum covers the regional history of the country, the perspectives of the neighbours in conflicts and peaceful encounters	no / yes (include an example)

	The curriculum covers the global history and perspectives of other continents	0: doesn't include, 1: introduces global history only as background /connected to national history 2: introduces topics of the Western hemisphere 3: introduces global historical topics of most continents (please specify)
	Representation of the Hungarian history in the curricula	examples of the Hungarian past in the curricula
Declared key competences	The curriculum explicitly aims at developing national identity, patriotic historical view	yes / no  Please specify
	The curriculum aims at developing complex analytical skills connected to history learning (historical consciousness, historical thinking, use of interpretations etc.)	yes / no  Please specify
	The curriculum aims at developing multicultural / inclusive views	yes / no  Please specify

Digital technology	The curriculum places emphasis on digital skill and media literacy development generally in the curriculum	yes (how?) / no
	The curriculum places emphasis on digital media literacy skill development in history education	yes (how?) / no
Structural, content selectional aspect	The curriculum follows an interdisciplinary approach (includes the elements and aspects of multiple subjects and fields) i.e. social sciences, geography etc.	yes/ no
	The curriculum is based on mostly political history	yes/ no
	The curriculum includes aspects of social and cultural history	yes/ no
	The curriculum is based on a selection of in-depth themes/topics (give an example)	no/ yes
	The curriculum is based on the strict sequence of chronological units	yes/ no
Central control over the historical content	The curricula make suggestions for the main historical themes	yes/ no (number)
	The curricula prescribe the historical themes and subtopics	yes/ no (number)
	The curricula prescribe the most significant notions/historical concepts	yes/ no (number)
	The curricula prescribe the detailed list of compulsory dates, characters, topographic items	yes/ no (number)

<b>Position of civic education in the curriculum</b>		Aspects / options
General aspects	Is civic education integrated in the history subject?	yes/ no
	Is civic education compulsory?	yes/no
	ISCED levels / number of years of compulsory/elective civic education	
	Is civic education optional in the school leaving exam?	
Declared aims	The Curriculum covers the operation and levels of the national legal system	yes/ no
	The curriculum covers the detailed operation, levels and actors of the national political system	yes/ no
	The Curriculum covers the functioning of democratic state (rights/responsibilities e.g.: elections, representation, active participation)	no/ yes (examples)
	The curriculum covers the history of political participation and activism	no/ yes (examples)
	The curriculum covers everyday financial competencies, e.g. banking, loan, credit.	no/ yes (examples)

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