

CIVIC EDUCATION IN LEBANON

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Abstract. Since 1925, the Lebanese government has attempted to foster harmony and nationwide social cohesion by creating a standardized national civic school curriculum. This investigation aims to explore the method of instructing the national civic curriculum. Then it will examine students' civic learning experiences in the classroom and any related education issues and gaps. Then it will address the opinions of young citizens' toward the supports of their civic school teachers. The investigation's goal is to provide baseline information to school policy makers, administrators, and educators as they plan, implement, and coordinated civic educational programs that can that inspires and motivates Lebanese youth. Data for the study was obtained from extensive literature reviews and questionnaire surveys of 70 high school students. The investigation was conducted in the fall of the year 2013. The result of the study showed that most Lebanese kids find civic education boring and irrelevant to their lives; they do not understand the benefit of engaging in this education nor why they should learn it. This raises the urgent need to put into practice an effective civic education program that inspires and motivates young citizens.

Keywords: civic education, curriculum, Lebanon, young citizens

Introduction

Lebanon is a small democratic country with a population less than 4 million and a wide range of diversity. Lebanon is composed of a mixture of Armenians, Greeks, Kurds, Turks, Syrians, Circassians, Arabs and more that are affiliates of at least eighteen different religious sects, and nineteen different political parties.¹⁾ And instead of seizing benefit of this diversity, the Lebanese citizen created separate identity groups based on their ethnic, religious, and/or political following that are not tolerated or accepting of the others. This has produced much tension where each group desired to create a country that is custom-made to suit its wishes ignoring the needs of the others. This produced many clashes in the country, some of which lead to civil wars. The investigation's goal is to provide baseline information to school policy makers, administrators, and educators as they plan, implement, and coordinated civic education program that inspires and motivates young citizens.

Literature review

Lebanon's ethnic and religious diversity

Lebanon is a small democratic country with a population less than 4 million and wide range of diversity. There are at least eighteen different religious sects, and nineteen different political parties. However, instead of seizing benefit of this diversity the Lebanese citizen created separate identity groups based on their ethnic, religious, and/or political following that are not tolerated or accepting of the others. This has produced much tension where each group desired to create a country that is custom-made to suit its wishes ignoring the needs of the others. This produced many clashes in the country, some of which lead to civil wars.

Lebanese civil war

Lebanon has witnessed two civil wars since its independence in 1943; a short one (1958), and a protracted one (1975-1990). Recently, Lebanon has managed to escape the threat of internal divisions and conflicts during the 2006 war and in 2008. Ever since the last civil war, the Lebanese people have become more attached to their ethnic, religious, and/or political affiliations than to their citizenship; their loyalty to their different ethnic, religious, and/or political leaders took over their loyalty to Lebanon.

Political violence

The Lebanese constitution affirms human rights; however, after thirty years of war and violence, Lebanon failed to carry on the true meaning of democracy. Violence includes physical, verbal and mental oppression becoming a common phenomenon, which affects the Lebanese family and society as well as institutions. Many of the government officials have strong ethnic, religious, and/or political influence in their job sector. They greatly benefit from ethnic, religious, and/or political power. Often they are given the privilege to those who are in the same party. Sometimes their appointment and promotion depends on their ethnic, religious, and/or political activities, not their personal qualities; so when they recruit then they become biased and give privileges to a certain ethnic or religious group.

National civic education

Lebanon's education systems are the central institutes that build up the younger generation. Schools affect not only the academic maturity of students, but their mental, emotional, and social development as well. The Lebanese government acknowledge of the education system as an influential tool. Following the French mandate (1918-1943), the Lebanese government established necessary transitions towards an independent republic through design-

ing standardized curriculum. Since 1925, the Lebanese government has attempted to foster harmony and nationwide social cohesion by creating a standardized national civic and history school curriculum in order to shape the way our children view each other, and help prevent the impact of persistent divisions and misconceptions (Frayha, 2003). Civic education in Lebanon became a statutory subject and it is formally taught for 30 hours per year across all grade levels, from grades one to twelve (Frayha, 2003). The Civics textbook throughout all Lebanese schools is an identical text published by the Ministry of Education and it is obligatory by the Ministry of Education. The Lebanese Civic Education last updated in 1997 as part of the revised of the Lebanese National Curriculum. Its primarily focus is the knowledge of civil rule, relations, Lebanese and Arab identities (Frayha, 2003).

Main aims of civic education

The nine main aims of the *Lebanese Civic Education* is to emphasize on the values of peace and justice and effective involvement in the social and political life. The following highlights these themes in each of the nine main aims: (1) humanistic standards within each community and nation as a well; (2) gratitude attitude to work and workers; (3) make a contribution to world development; (4) accept the others; (5) social attitude that is enriched with a diversity of ideas; (6) involvement in civil life; (7) characteristic of Lebanese identity through unified democratic structure; (8) characteristic of Arab identity and open to the whole world; (9) regardless of any differences (Akar, 2007).

Research study

Methodology

This study investigates the civic education programs at Lebanese school. The investigation examines students' civic learning experiences in the

classroom and any related education issues and gaps. This effort led to an understanding that can guide governments, professionals and educators evaluate, modify, and develop civic educational programs at the Lebanese schools. The research results were based on the findings of the data gathered from the questionnaire surveys and the interviews. The survey instrument of the study was a paper survey that was used to gather data from 70 students from eight different schools. The researcher chooses to explore students in grade ten and grade eleven. Each student completed a ten minute questionnaire survey. The survey was conducted in the fall of 2013. The questionnaire surveys were administered in Arabic language.

The schools chosen for this study were an array of ethnicities and socioeconomic levels. The students from all the different schools were treated as a single group; therefore no distinction was made between the schools. This study was conducted in a manner that protected the confidentiality of the participants. The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire administered in paper and pencil form. Survey items were developed based on an extensive literature review as well as querying participants using an exploratory questionnaire. The study gathered quantitative data to answer the research questions.

Research questions

The objective of this research was to determine issues and the gaps in the Lebanese school civic education programs and practices. The results can strengthen our understanding and guide governments; professionals and educators evaluate, modify, and develop school Civic programs in the Lebanese schools. In this research study, the following research questions were addressed: *Research question 1*: how civic education is taught in Lebanese schools; *Research question 2*: what are some of the weaknesses of the school's civic education programs; *Research question 3*: what are the actions

need to be taken in order to plan, implement effective and fully functioning school civic educational programs at Lebanese school.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire administered in paper and pencil form. Survey items were developed based on an extensive literature review as well as querying participants using an exploratory questionnaire. The instrument used in this study was administered in Arabic language and translated to English to serve up the research documentation. The instrument addressed the issues, and gaps in civic educational programs in the Lebanese schools. The survey was one page in length and took approximately 10 minutes to finish. In order to validate the content of the survey, three expert professors were asked to evaluate the survey questionnaire. The data collected was entered into the computer and analyzed.

Data collection and analysis

Survey implementation and collection

We conducted a survey in eight schools from October to November 2013. The schools chosen are in the different districts area and include both public and private schools in order to capture the issues, and gaps in civic educational programs in the Lebanese schools. Also young citizens' attitudes and understanding about peace and democracy and sense of security. The researcher visited the school's principals who agreed to participate. The school's principals were given the opportunity to be involved in the study; the school's principals who decided to participate were acknowledged verbally that this study was voluntary and that it was understood that all information would remain confidential. The researcher administered the survey to grade ten and eleven at the school who agreed to participate. By the mid November 2013, the researcher collected 70 survey questionnaires from 8 different

schools. The data collected from the survey was entered in the spreadsheet software and then transferred to SPSS software, for further analysis.

Survey objectives

The specific objectives of the survey were the following: (1) identify how civic education was taught in Lebanese schools at the time of the study; (2) capture the opinions of young citizens' toward the supports of their civic school teachers; (3) identify some of the weaknesses of the school's civic education programs.

It is our hope that this report will assist policy makers to develop coherent and integrated an effective civic education programs that promote peace and social coherence among the Lebanese people.

Research design

The survey instrument was designed to collect quantitative data on seven topics. The instrument was first developed in Arabic and it was translated to English in order to serve the purpose of writing this report.

Research instruments

The survey instrument covered four topics including: (i) demographic information; (ii) methods of instructions in the civic education classroom; (iii) active learning in civic education classroom; (iv) supportive of the civic school teachers.

Data results

Demographic information

A total of 70 surveys were conducted in eight different schools within the Beirut area. The researcher administrated the survey to grade ten and eleven. Therefore, the results for the selected group may not be representative

of the attitudes of all Lebanese students. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the respondents. The ratio of female-to-male respondents was almost equal (54 percent of respondents were female).

Table 1. Demographic data

Gender of the respondents	Frequency	Percent
Male	31	45.71
Female	38	54.29
Total	70	100.0

How civic education is taught in Lebanese schools

In this section we aim to gain insight and understand the teaching styles and methods of civic curriculum at Lebanese school. The student questionnaire included 11 items that were designed to evaluate the civic education teaching approach, the open climate for classroom activities, and Supportive of the school teachers (Table 2).

Table 2. How civic education is taught in schools
(Never / Sometimes / Often/ All the time / Don't Know)

Civic Education Methods of Instructions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher lectures civic education and the students take notes or listen silently to their lecturer • The teacher asks questions and the students answer • The teacher lectures material from the civic textbook • Memorizing dates and facts is the best way to get a good grade in civics classes
Adapting Active learning in civic education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher integrates debate in class about different civic topics • Students work on projects that involve gathering information outside of school • Students work in groups and prepare presentations to class • Students participate in role play and simulations
Supportive School Teachers

- Teachers respect students' opinions and encourage students to express political or social issues during the class
- Teachers encourage students to develop their minds about political or social issues
- Teachers encourage students to discuss political/ social issues with people how have different opinions

Civic education methods of instructions

Civic education methods of instruction in Lebanese schools are generally teacher centered traditional lecture. Instructors use an excessive amount of time lecturing (100%). Learners take on a passive role in the education process; they listen silently to their lecturer; hardly ever query what is presented, and mimic information dictated by the instructor, who uses textbooks as main sources of instruction. All the respondents (100%) described that the teacher lecture material from the civic textbook all the time or most of the time. The students take notes all the time (100%). Memorization of information is greatly emphasized in Lebanese schools, particularly for the objective of passing the exams; (100%) of the respondents reported that memorizing dates and facts are the best way to get a good grade in civic education classes all the time or most often, (Table 3, Fig. 1).

Table 3. Civic education methods of instructions

		Teacher lectures and the students take notes or listen to their lecturer	The teacher asks questions and the students answer	The teacher lectures material from the civic textbook	Memorizing is the best way to get a good grade in civics classes
N	Valid	70	70	70	70
	Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean		4.0000	3.4143	3.9286	3.9143
Range		.00	2.00	1.00	1.00

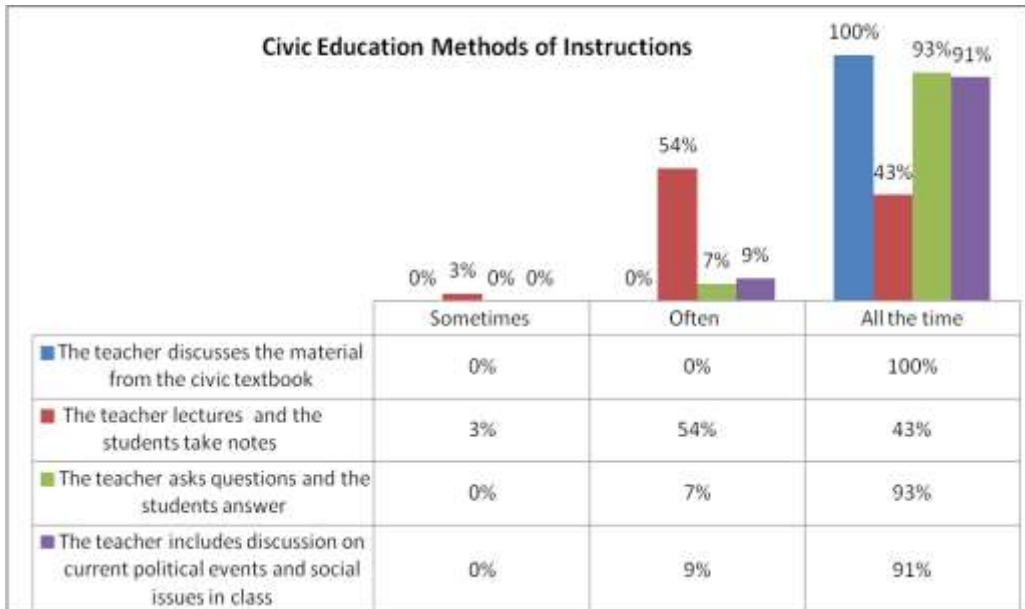


Fig. 1. Civic education methods of instructions

Active learning and civic education

A very small percentage of the respondents reported they were only sometime involved in an active educational process during civic education lessons. 89 % of respondents reported that their teacher never integrate debate in class. 81 % reported that they never work on projects that involve gathering information outside of school; 84 % commented that they never worked in groups to prepare presentations to the class; and 97 % mentioned that they never participate in role play and simulations (Table 4, Fig. 2).

Supportive civic school teachers

None of the respondent felt that they were supportive of their civic education school teachers. 97 % of respondents reported that their teacher never respected students' opinions or encouraged them to express political or social issues during the class. 86 % reported that the teachers never encouraged students to develop their own minds about political or social issues; and 86 %

mentioned that they were never encouraged to discuss political or social issues with people have different opinions (Table 5, Fig. 3).

Table 4. Active learning and civic education

	Teacher integrate debate in class about different civic topics	Students work on projects involve gathering information outside of school	Students work in groups and prepare presentations to class	Students participate in role play and simulations
N Valid	70	70	70	70
Missing	0	0	0	0
Mean	1.2429	1.3143	1.2429	1.1143
Range	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00

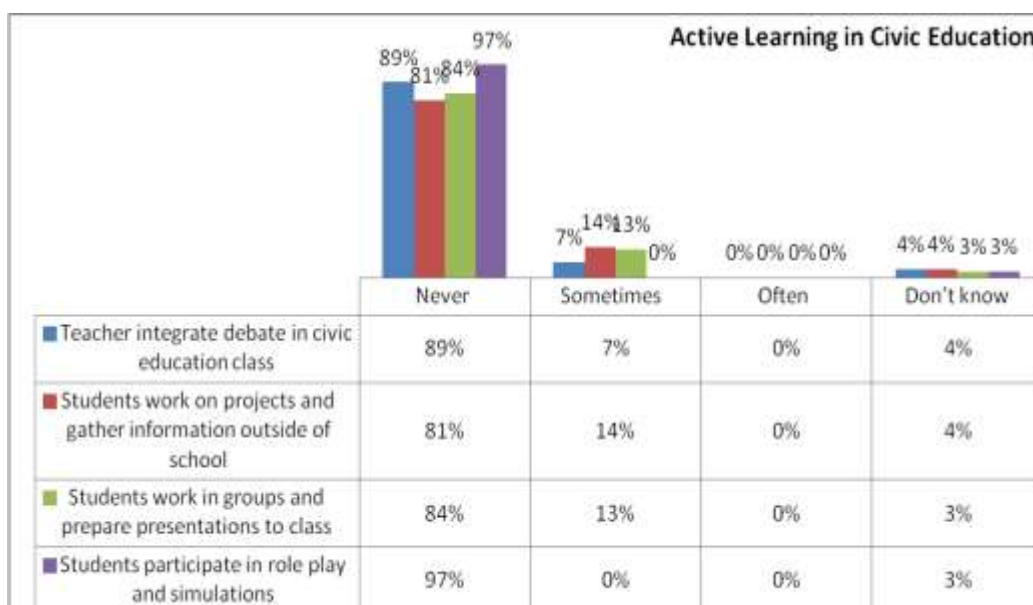


Fig. 2. Active learning and civic education

Table 5. Supportive civic school teachers

	Teachers respect students' opinions and encourage students to express political or social issues during the class	Teachers encourage students to develop their minds about political or social issues	Teachers encourage students to discuss political/ social issues with people how have different opinions
N Valid	70	70	70
Missing	0	0	0
Mean	1.1143	1.6714	1.4857
Range	4.00	4.00	4.00

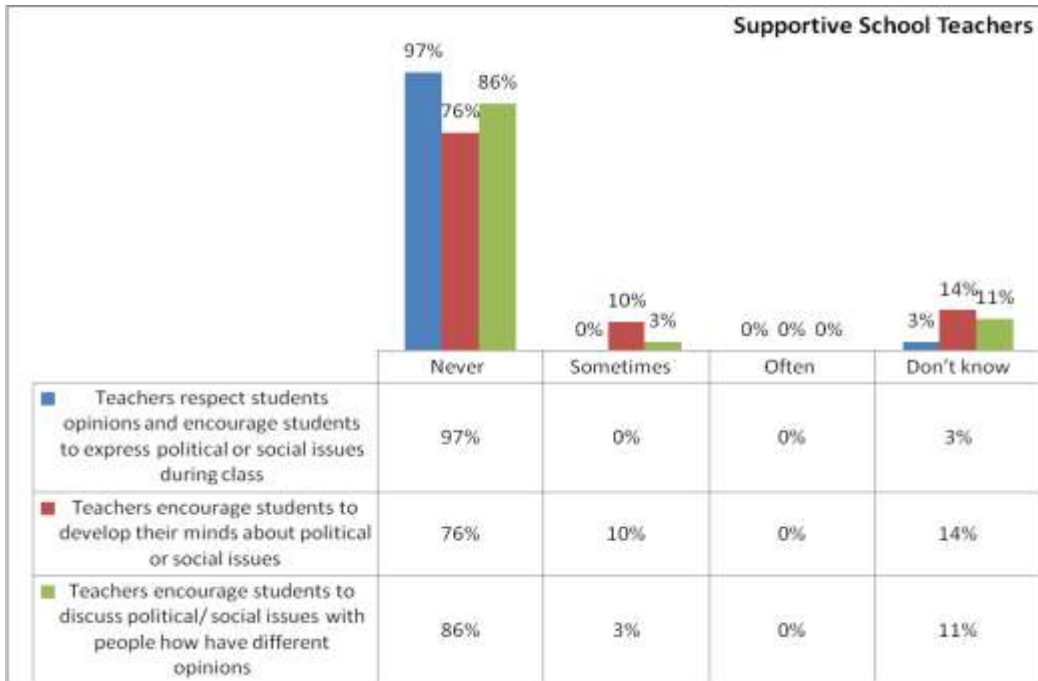


Fig. 3. Supportive civic school teachers

Discussion and conclusion



Fig. 4. Lecture in the classroom

The civic education methods of instruction in Lebanese schools are generally teacher centered traditional lecture (Fig. 4). Instructors use an excessive amount of time lecturing, Learners take on a passive role in the education process; they listen silently to their lecturer; hardly ever query what is presented, and mimic information dictated by the instructor, who uses textbooks as main sources of instruction. Active learning teaching methods hardly use during civic education lessons. And most of the time, students did not feel that they were supportive of their civic education school teachers. The following is summarized of the finding: (i) All the respondents (100%) described that the teacher lecture material from the civic textbook; (ii) The students take notes all the time (100%); (iii) Memorization of information is greatly emphasized in Lebanese schools; (iv) 100 % of the respondents reported that memorizing

dates and facts are the best way to get a good grade in civic education classes all the time or most often; (v) 89 % of respondents reported that their teacher never integrate debate in class; (vi) 81 % reported that they never work on projects that involve gathering information outside of school; (vii) 84 % commented that they never worked in groups to prepare presentations to the class; (viii) 97% mentioned that they never participate in role play and simulations; (ix) 97 %) of respondents reported that their teacher never respected students' opinions or encouraged them to express political or social issues during the class; (x) 86 % reported that the teachers never encouraged students to develop their own minds about political or social issues; and (xi) 86 % mentioned that they were never encouraged to discuss political or social issues with people have different opinions.

As we examine the output of this research data, it has become apparent that a number of barriers and obstacles are facing our young citizen from actualizing citizen skills that were proposed by the national civic curriculum. Many researches confirm that passive learning leads to a limited retention of knowledge by students. Schools should be viewed not only as institutions that pass on civic facts and skills to young citizens, but also as a setting that permit young citizens to socialize all aspects of democratic life. Ehman (1980) articulated that “the manifest curriculum (i.e., direct instruction involving courses and texts in civics, government, and other social studies courses) is not as important as the latent curriculum in influencing political attitudes. This latent curriculum includes how classes are taught, not the subject matter itself. This classroom climate is directly manipulable by teachers and represents a potentially important level in the political education of youth” (Ehman, 1980). In the usual course of events, institutions that train young citizen the ability to participate actively in social skills, they educate social and democratic principles not only in lecture, but also in action with their peers, teachers, and the school culture as a whole. Berman (1997) stated:

[g]ive young people the opportunity to participate in decision-making about meaningful issues can have an impact on their sense of responsibility ... their pro-social behavior, their understanding of democratic values and processes, and their personal and political efficacy ... participatory and democratic school culture makes a significant difference in some of the key building blocks of social responsibility” (p. 135).

Traditionally, educational institutions can serve as key elements within students’ educational experiences. Students can learn about democracy and civic skills through the ways that decisions are made in their schools. Berman (1997) presumes that when it comes to civic education, it is not as much of important what students are taught rather than the method how it was taught.

The Lebanese civic education classroom is the traditional lecture classroom format. Overall, the teacher considered to be wise, respected, never contradicted, outline student paths, and always right. Lebanese learners expected to speak up only when invited to do so by the teacher, to follow a strict order, to respect the teacher at all times, to listen to the teacher giving lectures. Large numbers of Lebanese learners see civic learning as a task that is forced upon them by powers outside their control. These classroom environments fail to teach students much about democratic processes and how to function within them, (Berman, 1997). Ehman (1980) reveals that active learning classroom enhanced civic skills, supported democratic values, and encouraged efficacy and participation. Leming (1992) commented that ‘curricula that involved peer interaction, most often through group discussion and activities where students were actively involved in the collective exploration of attitudes and values in an open and democratic atmosphere, were found to be consistently effective in producing attitudinal change.’ Educational institutions have to adapt educational approaches designed to ground civic educational mission in the life of our young citizen. When these approaches to learning and education

are done well, they can aid to prepare our young citizen to understand how can they play a functional role in the life of the community and contribute more to democratic society. Connect the school's civic curriculum to the life of the local community is very critical, which can come in the form of preparing students to be active citizens in their local communities and developing a sense of appreciation for the local culture. If the young citizen is not trained how to relate to others during their years of schooling, then when will they? The risks are definitely high. Educating the democratizing forces in our schools is one way of protecting our national security and harmony.

NOTES

1. <http://countrystudies.us/lebanon/41.htm>

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