

On History Education in Lebanon: a survey of capacities, training needs, and aspirations

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This study is conducted by the Lebanese Association for History to assess the needs of history teachers in Lebanon, with the purpose of designing capacity building programs that meet these needs and take into consideration teachers aspirations.

Methodology

Sample

This study comprised of 116 school teachers of which over 75% were females. A total of 113 out of the 116 teachers taught History. Over 60% of the surveyed teachers were 36 to 55 years of age and had a background of History, while the remaining had other backgrounds such as Social Studies, Arabic, etc. The majority of surveyed teachers predominantly taught at public schools, while the others taught at private ones and only a few, 8 teachers, taught at both types of schools. Of those who were public-school teachers, taught for 10 to 20 hours per week whereas those who were private-school teachers taught for around 20 to 30 hours per week. Only a few public-school teachers taught for more than 30 hours per week.

The majority of teachers had a bachelor's degree (50%), some had a master's degree (around 30%), and only a few (slightly less than 10%) had a teaching diploma. The great majority of interviewed teachers taught cycles 3 and 4 while only 10 and 30 teachers taught cycles 1 and 2, respectively. The number of teachers with different years of history teaching experience did not vary much across the different age groups of teachers. The majority of teachers read somewhere between 3 to 5 history books per year and slightly more than half of the teachers have attended history workshops. All of the participants aged up till 25 years had no more than 5 years of teaching experience whereas those aged 26 to 35 years had up to 10 years of experience at most. Further,

the majority of public-school teachers (33%) had 6 to 10 years of experience whereas the majority of private-school teachers (33%) had a maximum of 5 years of teaching experience.

Data Analysis

Pedagogy

The various teaching methods (i.e., fun classroom activities, rote learning, and historical thinking) were almost equally used by all teachers with an approximation of 30% of use per teaching method. Even though around 30% of teachers claim to use historical thinking as their teaching method of choice, which is not a traditional method of teaching, around 95% of teachers reported the use of school-assigned History books and the remaining 5% used other resources among which were the internet, maps, movies, and documentaries. Of this 5%, only 3% reported using such additional resources without the use of the school's History book. The predominant use of History books as the primary resource for teaching History creates a discrepancy between the reported teaching method and the resources used, for historical thinking as a method requires the active and critical engagement of students in creating accounts of the past whereas the mere use of History books usually complies with rote learning as a teaching method.

Among teachers up till the age of 25 years, fun classrooms activities were their teaching methods of choice (see Figure 1). The age group with the highest use of historical thinking as a teaching method was that of teachers aged 26 to 35 years, whereas the group that least used this method was the youngest age group, 0 to 25 years (see Figure 1).

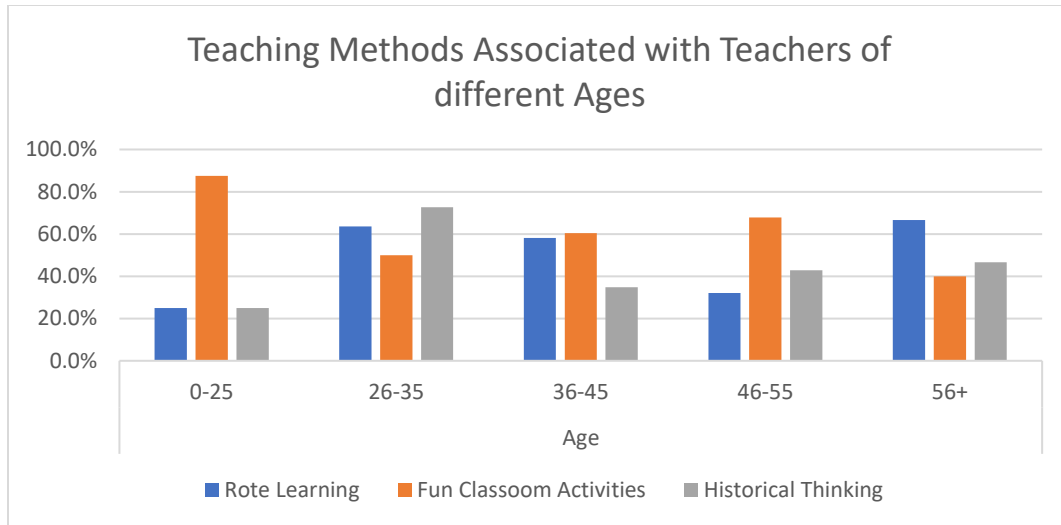


Figure 1 Graph showing the different teaching methods associated with teachers of different age groups

While the percentage of teachers using fun classroom activities and historical thinking as History teaching methods did not vary much between public-school and private-school teachers, 70% of the teachers who selected rote learning as their teaching method of choice were public-school teachers whereas the remaining were private-school teachers. Teachers with up to 5 years of experience almost equally used all three teaching methods (see Figure 2). Teachers with 6 to 20 years of experience favored the use of rote learning and were less likely to use historical thinking (see Figure 2). Teachers with at least 20 years of experience were the group that mostly used historical thinking as their teaching method (see Figure 2).

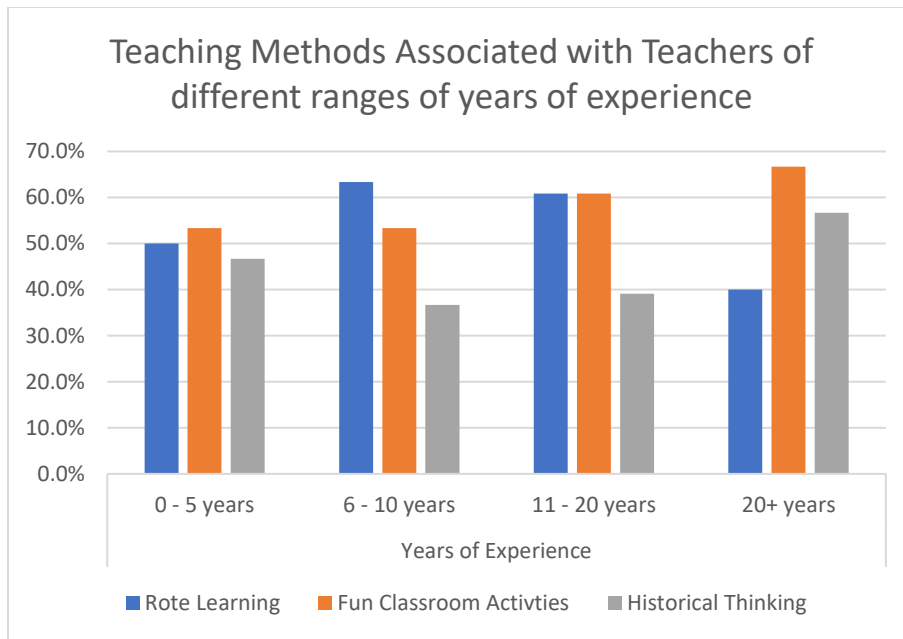


Figure 2 Graph showing the different teaching methods associated with teachers of varying years of experience

An analysis of the relationship between **age of teachers, teaching method of choice, and purpose of assessing History** revealed that none of the youngest teachers in the study (i.e., aged 0 – 25 years) chose [building historical arguments around the understanding of causation and change] as a purpose (see Figure 3) and all of them chose [recalling past historical events] instead with [fun classroom activities] or [rote learning] as teaching methods. This information suggests that those teachers’ understanding of the purpose of assessing History and their choice of teaching methods could be attributed to their rather few years of experience. Similar to the youngest age group of teachers, teachers of the eldest age group (56+ years) have also chosen recalling past historical events as the reason for assessing students on History (see Figure 3).

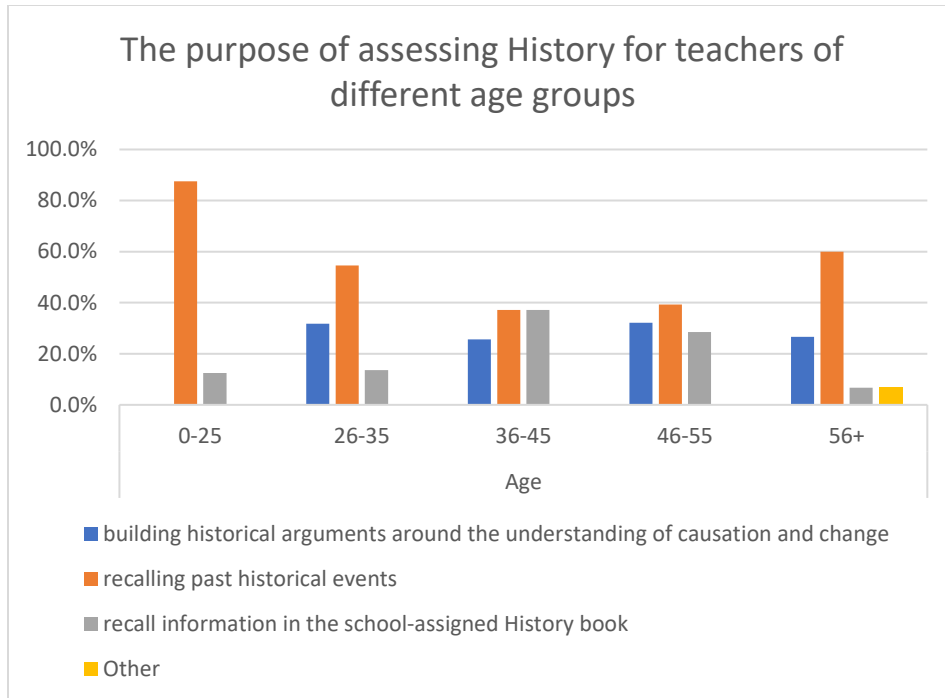


Figure 3 Graph showing the Purpose of Assessing History as perceived by teachers of different age groups

The majority of private-school teachers (39%) and public-school teachers (53%) found [recalling past historical events] as the purpose of teaching History (see Figure 4).

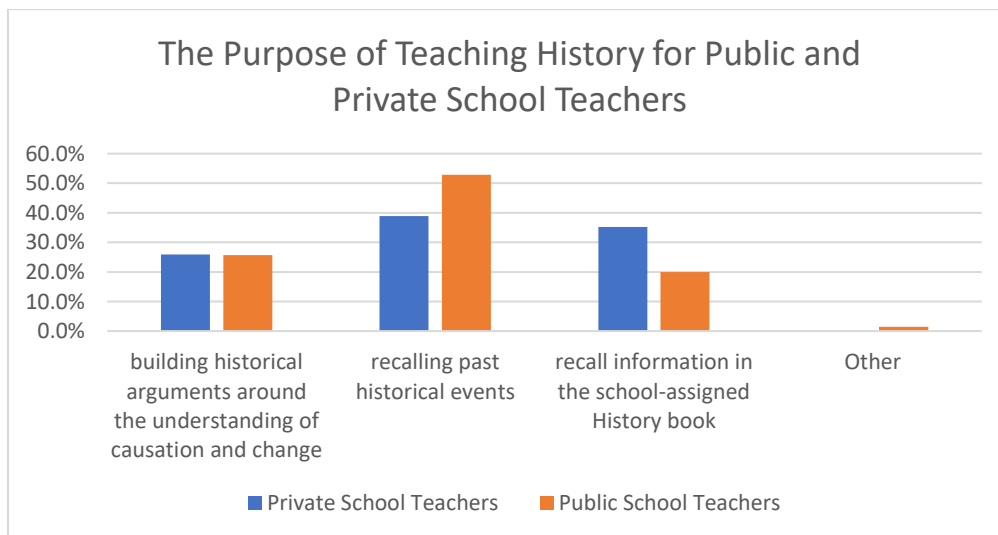


Figure 4 Graph showing the Purpose of Assessing History as perceived by teachers of public and private schools

The majority of teachers with up to 10 years of experience found [recalling past historical events] as the purpose of teaching History, whereas the majority of those with 11 to 20 years of experience found that the purpose should be to [recall information in the school-assigned History book] (see Figure 5). Teachers with at least 20 years of experience, however, predominantly found that the purpose of teaching History is to [building historical arguments around the understanding of causation and change] (see Figure 5).

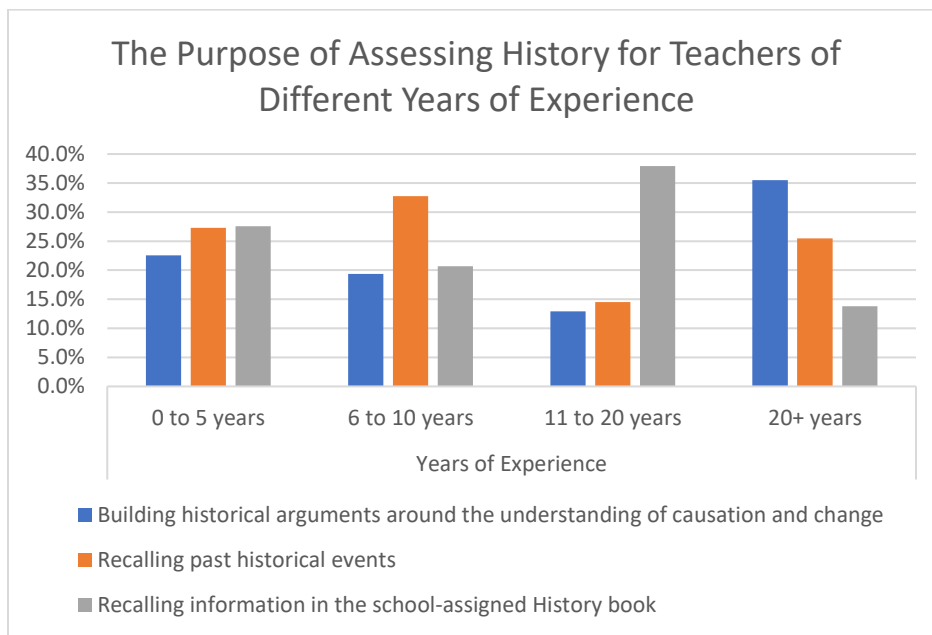


Figure 5 Graph showing the Purpose of Assessing History as perceived by teachers of varying years of teaching experience

When asked to rank the goals of history in order of priority, teachers generally abided by the following ranking (from highest to lowest priority): increase citizenship and identity; understand the past; build intellectual generation; develop mental and cognitive abilities; and increase historical thinking. Results of the study showed that most advocated purpose of assessing students on History was to recall past historical events (50%), followed by [building historical arguments around the understanding of causation and change] (25%), and recalling what was memorized from the History book (25%). This shows that around 75% of teachers believed the

purpose was mostly about recalling past events (i.e., to recall past historical events and what was memorized from the History book) and 25% of teachers realized historical thinking (i.e., [building historical arguments around the understanding of causation and change]) as the purpose instead, which reinforces how teachers have ranked the goals of History since indeed, “understanding the past” was higher in priority than “increasing historical thinking.”

Further, assessment tools were predominantly (56%) suitable for fixed-choice assessments (i.e., oral and written recitation) while others could be attributed to complex performance assessment (i.e., article analysis for historical thinking, group presentation, research). Interestingly enough, the content of assessment tools prepared by all age groups of History teachers were predominantly (65%) fixed-choice test questions (i.e., true and false questions, fill in the blanks, book-based essays) and the remaining ones were complex performance test questions (i.e., document analysis, historical essay analysis), which shows that though fixed-choice assessment tools were predominantly reported, they were still under-reported compared to the conveyed percentage of fixed-choice test content. Teachers who believed the purpose was to [build historical arguments around the understanding of causation and change], however, predominantly used document analysis and analysis of historical essays. The least used assessment tools among all teacher age groups were those of article analysis for historical thinking, group work and presentation, and research. The most widely used assessment tools were those of written and oral recitations.

Private-school teachers predominantly assessed students through written recitations (30%) and research (21%), whereas public-school teachers assessed them through both, written (36%) and oral (29%) recitations. No matter how many years of experience teachers had, they predominantly stuck to written recitation as their assessment tool of choice (see Figure 6).

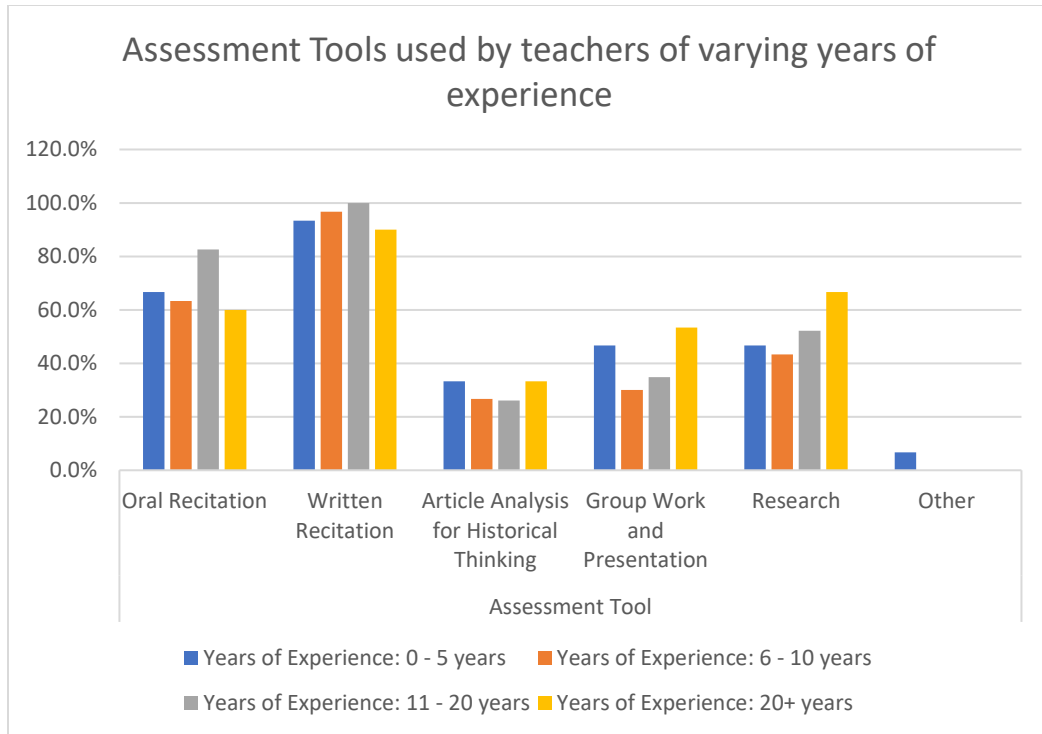


Figure 6 Graph showing the Assessment Tools used by teachers of varying years of experience

History Curriculum and Teaching the Civil War

The majority of teachers (around 58%) believed that society is ready to learn about the Lebanese civil war while others disagreed (see Figure 7).

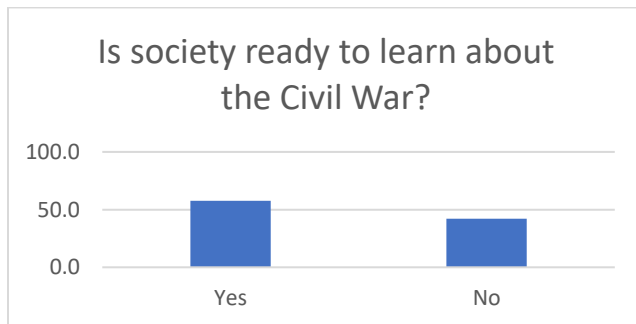


Figure 7 Graph showing all teachers' perception of society's readiness on learning about the Civil War

Of those who agreed, the majority (41%) believed that the best way to incorporate the civil war in the curriculum was through the unification of History books and presentation of the war from different perspectives (see Figure 8). Thirty-two per cent of teachers believed that the History

book should be unified and only one story should be told, 16% believed that a general curriculum should be devised without the creation of a national textbook, and a few believed that there should be consensus over one storyline that could be published across various published textbooks (see Figure 8).

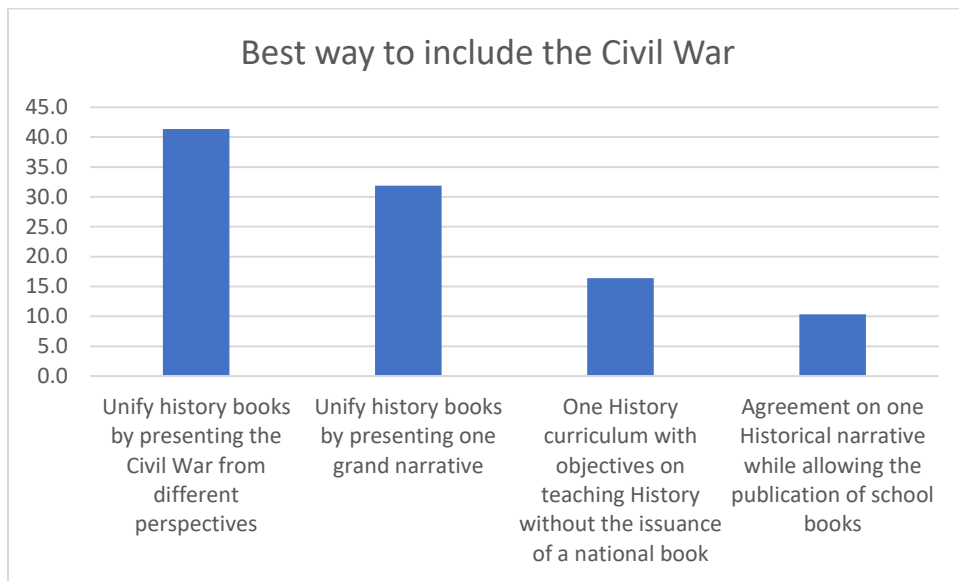


Figure 8 Best way for including the Civil War in the History curriculum

Of those who disagreed, the most frequent reason in support of their view was teachers' bias in addition to political sensitivities (see Figure 9).

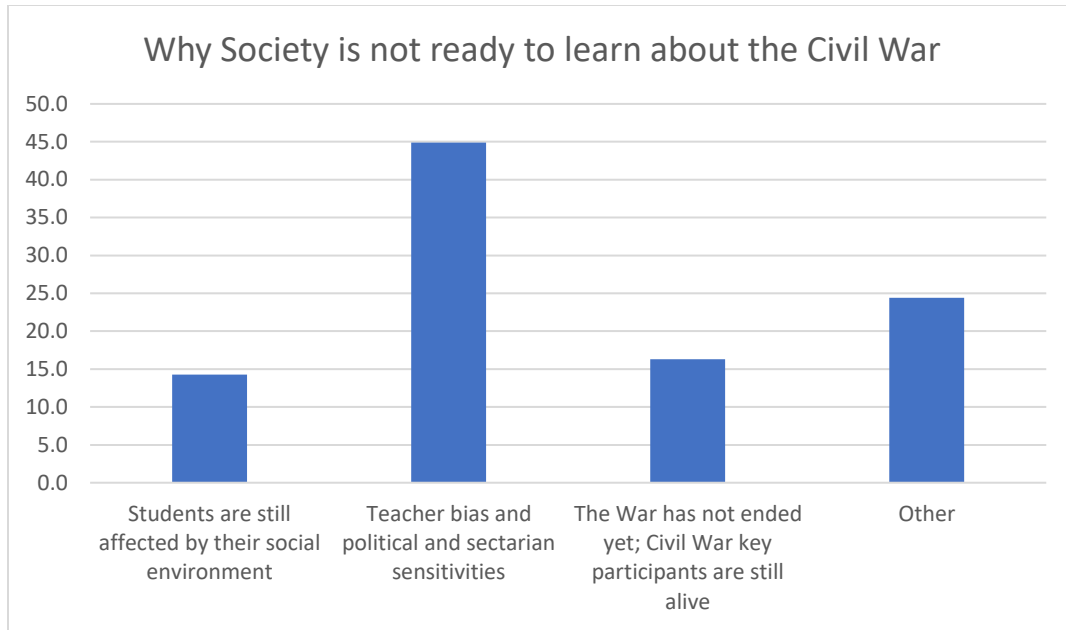


Figure 9 Reasons why society is not ready to learn about the Civil War

The majority of teachers viewed that neither religious sects nor political parties should be taken into consideration when designing a historical account of the Civil War (see Figures 10 and 11). The majority of History teachers up till the age of 35 years in addition to those aged 56 years and above believed that religious sects and political parties should be taken into consideration when teaching about the Civil War, while those aged between 36 and 56 years predominantly believed that religious sects should not be taken into consideration when designing a historical account of the Civil War (see Figures 12 and 13).

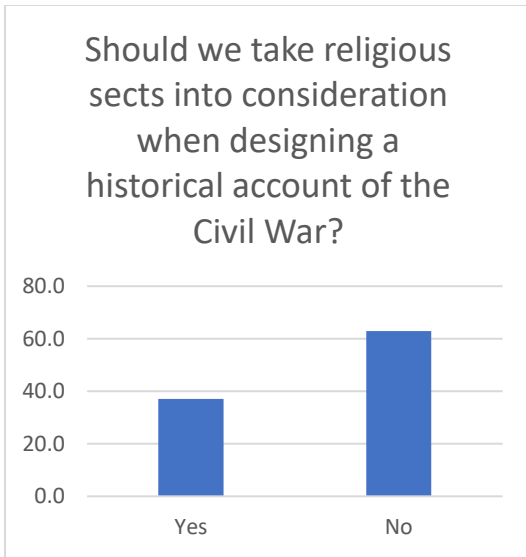


Figure 10 Importance of religious sects in the design of the historical account of the Civil War

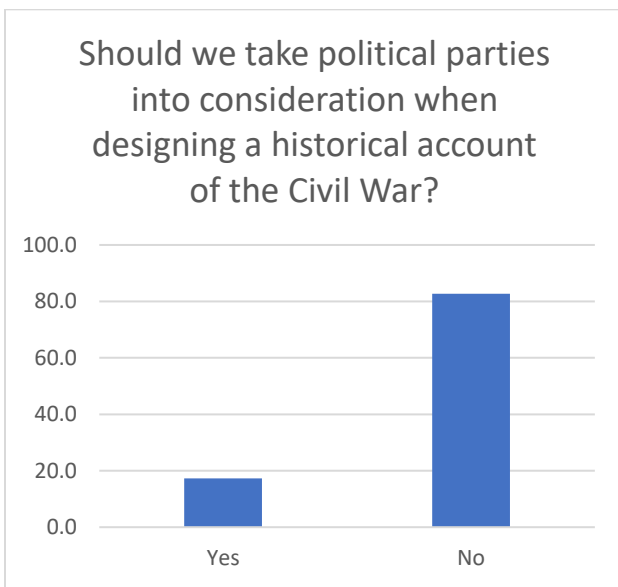


Figure 11 Importance of political parties in the design of the historical account of the Civil War

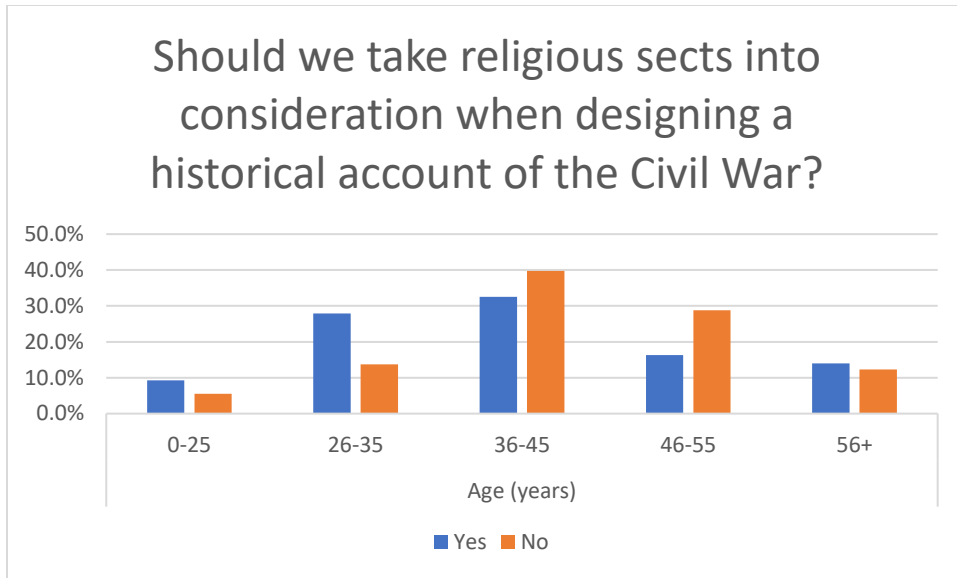


Figure 12 Importance of religious sects in the design of the historical account of the Civil War as perceived across teachers' age groups

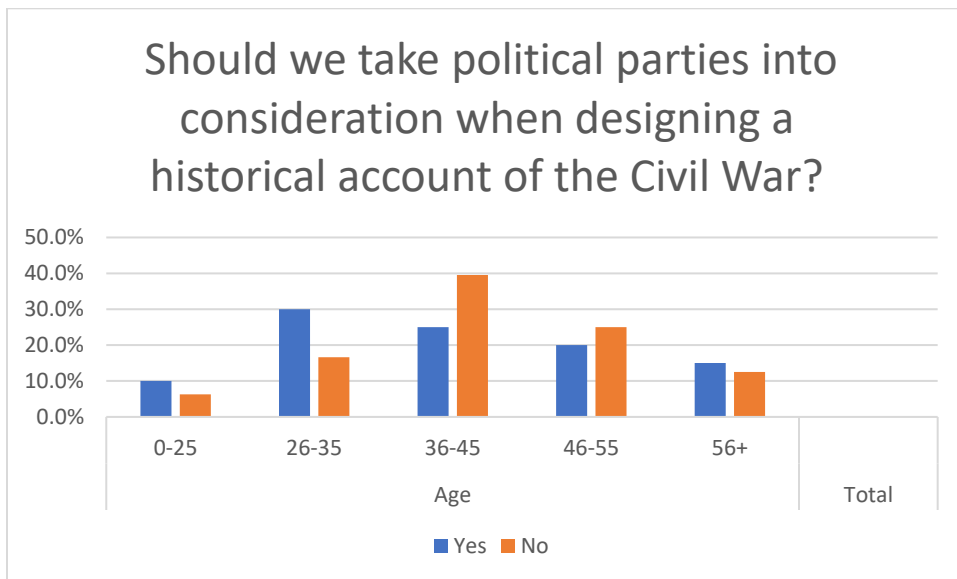


Figure 13 Importance of political parties in the design of the historical account of the Civil War as perceived across teachers' age groups

The majority of both, public-school (60%) and private-school (53%) teachers believed that society was ready to learn about the Civil War. Teachers with up till 20 years of experience

predominantly believed that society was ready to learn about the Civil War whereas those with more than 20 years of experience believed the opposite was true (see Figure 14).

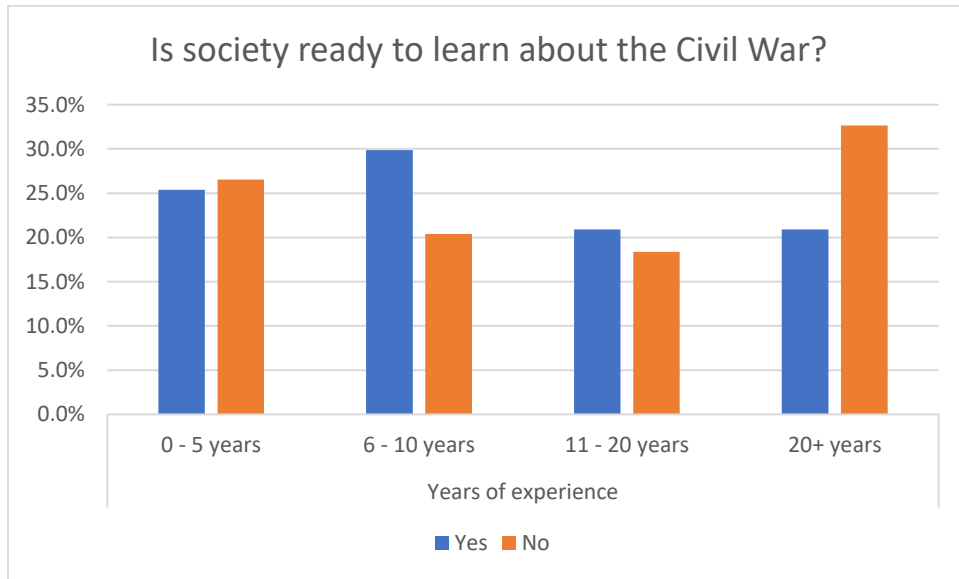


Figure 14 Graph showing the perceptions of teachers of varying years of experience on society's readiness on learning about the Civil War

When asked about the obstacles hindering the improvement of History education in Lebanon, the fact that there was no new curriculum was significantly (46%) ranked as the most important obstacle (see Figure 15).

	Most important reason stated by teachers
Incompetence of history teachers	7%
Lack of capacity building for teachers	3%
Multitude of history books	9%
No new curriculum	46%
Lack of History resources	2%
Lack of interest among parents	4%
One hour per week for history	6%
Dry subject for Students	7%
A slew of non-history professionals teaching history	16%

Figure 15 Table showing teachers' suggestions of obstacles that hinder the improvement of History education in Lebanon

Teachers made various suggestions to address the current curriculum, most prominent of which were to divide the History curriculum in such a way as to make it age-appropriate and relevant (40%), modify current teaching methods by using analysis more frequently and depending less on rote learning (35%), and editing history books (20%) by either rewriting them objectively, unifying them, or shortening them. Only two teachers have explicitly addressed the content of History books with one teacher suggesting incorporating the Lebanese civil war and the other one suggested to incorporate the Palestinian conflict.

When asked about who should design the new curriculum that includes the Civil War, the top three responses were History teachers and educators, History professors, and historians. However, of the 42% of teachers who believed that society was not ready to learn about the Civil War, around 45% accused the teachers' political and sectarian biases for this unreadiness (see Figure 9). In a sense, teachers generally viewed that History teachers can be hinderances in the way of a History curriculum reform, yet they can also be the key individuals in bringing about this reform. Further, when asked about what they would recommend for the professional development of History teachers, only 4% of teachers suggested sessions on objective History-telling, 5% suggested sessions on how to discuss the Lebanese civil war, 8% suggested they needed training on pedagogical content knowledge, and more than 50% suggested training on novel teaching methods in History, particularly methods that feature technology (see Figure 16). While teachers' bias was a major attribution to why society was not ready to learn about the Civil War, it received the least attention on the grounds of recommendations for professional development (see Figure 16).

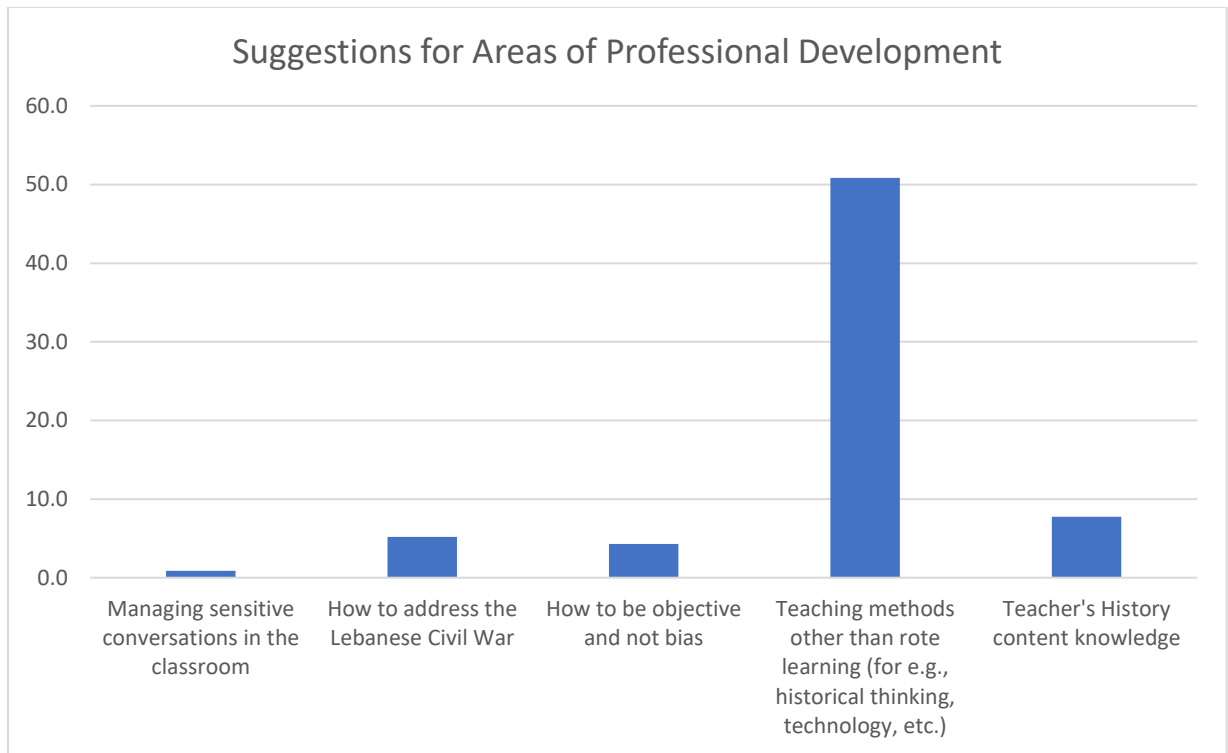


Figure 16 Graph showing teachers' suggestions for potential areas of History teacher professional development

It should be noted that even though teachers reported teachers' bias as a major issue in teaching History (see Figure 9), their choice of assessment tools is not a platform that supports their concern, for fixed-choice tests usually overemphasize factual knowledge and low-level skills at the expense of higher-order conceptual skills such as those of document analysis and historical thinking. Further, such assessment tools can be scored objectively even by machines and therefore have high reliability and little room for teachers' bias to manifest itself in. This shows that it is unclear whether teachers' concern was bias in History-telling or bias in scoring and evaluating students' work and achievement.

Capacity-Building and Networking

Results showed that only a few teachers knew of new initiatives for teaching history (around 35%) and even fewer were members of a history teachers network (17%). Of the 17% who were members of a History network, 40% were members of some form of social media group,

35% were previous members of LAH organization, and 25% were members of other institutions. Only 53% of teachers have attended History workshops and 40% of them have attended workshops via [Dar Al Muallimeen], 40% via LAH, and 20% via CERD and other institutions. Only 33% of teachers aged 56 and above have attended History workshops, which signifies that for the most part of their career, elderly teachers have not invested in their professional development. Further, the number of private-school teachers who know and do not know about initiatives for teaching History is the same. However, only 25% of public-school teachers know of such initiatives while a staggering 75% do not. Less than 5% of teachers have ever published a history article, which is the same percentage of teachers who were PhD holders.