

Compass to History and Civic Education
Comparative Research of Content Regulation in Europe and Asia

Iránytű a történelemtanításhoz és állampolgári neveléshez.
Európai és ázsiai tartalomszabályozás összehasonlító elemzése.

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Absztrakt

A tanulmány egy folyamatban lévő összehasonlító kutatás első eredményeit mutatja be a neveléstudomány területén. A kutatás a Mathias Corvinus Collegium Tanuláskutató Intézete támogatásával alakult kutatócsoport munkája. A szakmai együttműködés legfontosabb célkitűzése feltáró elemzéseket készítése a történelem és az állampolgári ismeretek európai és ázsiai országban elfoglalt helyzetének összehasonlítására. A kutatás egy komparatív eszköz, a *történelem és az állampolgári ismeretek összehasonlító keretrendszerének* (CFHCE) kialakításával kezdődött, amely a vizsgált országok nemzeti tartalomszabályozási rendszereit holisztikus módon célzó elemző indikátorok sorozata. A nemzeti tantervekre, a kimeneti vizsgáztatásra, a deklarált kompetenciákra, a fejlesztési célokra és az előírt tananyagra összpontosít.

A tanulmány a történelmi gondolkodás területén végzett elméleti kutatásunk első eredményeit is összegzi. Az első feltáró elemzési szakasz eredményeként a történelmi gondolkodás komplex szintetizált modelljét mutatjuk be. A modell első változata a történelmi gondolkodáshoz szükséges részkompetenciák, diszciplináris tudáselemek, nézőpontok, módszerek és online felületek összegzését tartalmazza. A történelmi gondolkodás kutatásában a nemzetközi történelemdidaktikai diskurzus alapján összefoglalt összetevőkhöz kutatócsoportunk egy új elemet javasol: az információs és médiaműveltség fejlesztését.

Kulcsszavak: történelemtanítás, történelemdidaktika, állampolgári nevelés, összehasonlító elemzés, kontinentális fejlődésmodell

Abstract

The paper introduces the first results of an ongoing comparative research in the field of education science. Our research group at Mathias Corvinus Collegium Learning Institute was established to conduct a set of exploratory analyses comparing the position of history and civic education in Europe and several Asian countries. The research started with the establishment of the Comparative Framework of History and Civic Education (CFHCE) which is a set of analytical indicators targeting the national content regulatory systems of the reviewed countries in a holistic way. It concentrates on the national curricula, school leaving examination, declared competences, developmental aims and prescribed content of history.

The paper also examines the theoretical research concerning historical thinking. The first results of our research show a complex synthesised model of historical thinking. The first version of the model contains aspects of skills, knowledge, perspectives, methods and online interfaces of historical thinking. Among the components of historical thinking summarised on the basis of the international discourse of history didactics, our research group suggests a new element: development of information and media literacy.

Keywords: history education, history didactics, civic education, comparative analysis, continental model of development

1. Compass to whom?

Compass to History and Civic Education is an academic research project launched by the Learning Institute of Mathias Corvinus Collegium. Its objectives include comparing the aims and outcomes of teaching history and civic education in European and Asian countries, identifying the position of history and civic education in European, Atlantic, and Asian countries, highlighting the similarities and differences between national approaches to history and civic education and underlining current tendencies, recent debates and dilemmas of history and civic education.

2. Research methods

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, and external 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. In-depth analysis of the academic literature on historical thinking was conducted to synthesize existing approaches towards skill development in this field.

2.1. Comparative Framework of History and Civic Education (CFHCE)

The research group established a framework for comparing different history education systems in order 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. The Learning Institute formed a network of experts who collaborated, attended workshops, completed indicators and began crafting country profiles as academic papers. In the following sections we elaborate on the most significant indicators.

2.2. Reviewed countries

Three groups of countries are included in the comparative research: the Visegrad countries, four Western-European countries and five Asian countries. The three groups of countries represent different socio-cultural backgrounds and they may have different attitudes towards history education. Czechia, Poland and Slovakia can be considered close to Hungary in geographic, cultural and historical aspects. France, England, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland are reviewed to get a European perspective from both Continental and Atlantic education systems. China, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Turkey and Armenia provide a colourful mosaic of Nomadic, Confucian, Christian and Muslim heritage which suggests parallel approaches to history and civic education.



1. diagram, reviewed countries, own diagram

2.3. First results of the comparative analysis in the fields of history and civic education

On the following pages we summarise the results of the sixteen most significant aspects and indicators which cover general curricular position of the two researched subjects and more detailed perspectives of the content of history education.

History education is still compulsory in all the reviewed systems. It can be stated that every reviewed country puts an emphasis on History in education. Though it is visible from the other data gathered at this part of the research that the content and aims of History education differ in these countries, its place among the curriculums' compulsory subjects is unquestionable.

There is a clear difference in the length of compulsory History education - in the Visegrad countries students study history for eight years, whereas Western-European students learn history for 4.75 years on average. A trend can be seen amongst the Central European countries in that they all share the eight-year compulsory history teaching, since their school systems are built similarly. In Western European countries the years differ, in England it is nine years (Key stages 1–3) while Scotland, Ireland and France only teach History to every student for four years or less. In the reviewed Asian countries, Kazakhstan and Mongolia made History obligatory for eight years, similarly to the Visegrad Group, while in China though they learn about History in primary school. It is not a separate subject, but instead they study it in Chinese Language and Literature class, therefore the number of compulsory history learning years for pupils is only three, in lower secondary schools.

Among the reviewed countries, only Hungarian, Chinese and Kazakh students are obliged to take a school leaving exam in History. Even though History is a compulsory subject everywhere, it is not expected of the students in nearly all countries that they should take an exam when they finish their secondary level studies.

Polish, Hungarian and Western European systems offer advanced level exams in history. Whereas in Slovakia, Czechia, China and Kazakhstan there is no opportunity to take such an exam. *History is integrated with at least one further subject in three European countries.* It is integrated with Geography in France, there is no separate History subject in Scottish or Irish primary schools, as it is part of Social Studies.

Chronology is still predominant in most education systems, but several countries choose a thematic approach as the organising idea of historical content selection. The question was aimed at acquiring insight into whether a curriculum strictly covers national and world history so that the learners have a general overview of different time periods, or whether they choose several topics for in-depth analysis. In some Western European countries, history teaching is more about in-depth examination of certain periods and events, while also equipping their learners with an overview of local and world history, whereas the Visegrad and Asian countries focus more on summarising national and world history to the learners.

There is a broad range when it comes to the freedom of content selection. For example, the curricula of the British Isles set general themes and only suggest subtopics to a differing degree for the classroom. The English content regulation recommends “non-statutory” subtopics only.

Visegrad countries cover history up to the present day (last decade), while Western European regulations finish at the middle or end of the 20th century. Both in Hungary and Poland, the national curriculum covers history until the 2010s, with the last specifically mentioned events being the new Hungarian constitution entering force in 2012 and the Polish President’s plane crash in 2010, respectively. Also, Czechia and Slovakia’s curriculum still covers the countries joining the EU and the war on terror in the early 2000’s. The reviewed countries in the British Isles history curricula stop shortly after the Cold War, not venturing into the 21st century.

Textbook markets are more versatile in Western European states, while in the Visegrad region, history education systems have stronger state control. In the reviewed Central European countries, the limited number of textbooks suggests a stronger control of the state in education. For example, in Mongolia, a single version of textbooks is used in education. In Hungary, three textbooks are available, but two of them are published by the Educational Authority. In England, by contrast, several textbooks can be used in the classroom, just as in Scotland.

Three regulatory systems prescribe the national canon of historical knowledge including basic compulsory historical lexical items (dates, characters, concepts and topographic items). These data show how different states regard History teaching and the approach they take. Poland and Hungary on the one hand, prescribes a detailed list of lexical items for History education. In England, there are no state-prescribed items to teach. Irish regulations set themes and describe a limited set of fundamental lexical items within each theme compared to other curricula.

National identity as a declared developmental aim is present in the Visegrad countries and France. All the reviewed Central European nations declare that it is an important aspect to enhance national identity and patriotic feelings through history education. With the exception of France, no reviewed Western-European countries include this in their history curricula explicitly.

The Hungarian revolution of 1956 is the most prominent historical event covered in other countries. Though Hungary is not a large or extremely significant country in world history, some events in the country’s history make it into other nations’ curriculums. It is not surprising that all the Visegrad countries have found it necessary to learn about Hungary, as they shared historical experiences throughout history. So the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was significant enough to be part of their history education during the study of the Cold War to illustrate international conflicts and relations.

Most education systems include compulsory civic education. Civic education (or citizenship education) seems to be a stable part of every reviewed curricula. Although some national curricula do not devote a separate subject to civic education, several countries (Scotland, Ireland and China) incorporate certain knowledge and

competences of citizenship education, such as in *people and society, and political or social science*.

There is no compulsory exam in civic education among the reviewed countries. Even if civic education is taught in a separate manner, no country has made it a compulsory exam subject. However, it is possible to take an exam in most countries, demonstrating its acceptance as a subject or course.

Democratic rights and/or responsibilities are substantial parts of every country's civic education. Democratic values, principles and processes (e.g. elections), are included in civic education in all reviewed curriculums. As China does not have civic education classes, they learn about democracies from history and acquire knowledge about voting rights and elections in Political Science class, though they do not learn about contemporary democracies. However, the curricula of different countries vary widely methodologically in their approach to delivering these values.

Environmental challenges and sustainability are not universally included in civic education. The question of environmental problems and sustainability has dominated the public discourse in recent decades, and have also entered schools and their curricula. The curricular position differs from country to country. Environmental challenges are included in the curricula of Czechia, Hungary, Ireland, France, China and Kazakhstan, but they are not covered in England, Slovakia or Poland.

2.4. Methodological limits of the comparative analysis

Our research highlights general trends in the field of history and civic education between *Continental* Central European, *Atlantic* Western European and Asian systems. However, these preliminary results only summarise the analysis of the first set of our comparative framework. Our data is based on the answers of international partners and experts, and on the analytical work of the research team.

The second limiting factor derives from the nature of the document analysis research method. The relationship of national, regional and local regulation and teaching practice is always difficult to assess and research. The main ideas, declared objectives and developmental aims may be far removed from the privacy of closed classrooms. 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. Length and stage of compulsory learning, the presence of compulsory examination, optional advanced level evaluation 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.

3. A synthesised model of historical thinking

In our research project we also focus on a theoretical framework, a set of competences developed through history education known as *historical thinking*.

Historical thinking is the understanding and explanation of an individual event or situation in its historical context. It involves a general conceptual framework, as well as the use of competences that enable historical patterns and problems to be adequately addressed. It can be used to reflect on and systematise the knowledge already acquired, and to present arguments and facts in relation to these views. (Kojanitz, 2017). Historical thinking can be developed through critical thinking, problem solving and general skill development (Kaposi, 2017). It is the knowledge needed to contrast different meanings and to understand historical processes (T. Mills, 2013) Most generally, it is a complex cognitive process used by historians to reason about the past (Smith, 2017).

Historical thinking can be divided into two wide categories: disciplinary knowledge and skills. Adapting Catherine Duquette's (2015) model, skills are divided into two major areas: methods and perspectives.

Under methods, we have placed the attentive use of information and narrative competence. Narrative competence is one pillar of historical thinking, which enables students to recognize historical patterns and scripts (Kaposi, 2017). The components of narrative competence can be defined as a component of differentiated historical thinking, *'to flexibly adapt, in the triple dimension of the past, present and future, the constructs (schemes) offered by history and to use the examination methods of history (identification and formulation a historical problem; criticism; interpretation'* (F. Dárdai, 2010).

Historical thinking is further characterized by the research procedures of the discipline, namely close reading, sourcing, contextualisation and corroboration. During close reading, readers should take a closer look at the source itself and analyse its meaning, argument and narrative thoroughly. Sourcing is when readers identify the origin and aim of why the source was written, whereas with contextualisation sources are interpreted and inserted in their historical context for better understanding. Lastly, corroboration is the technique by which readers compare the analysed source with other documents (Stanford History Education Group, cited in Tóth, 2023).

On the other branch, we can see how attentive use of information defines the domains of information acquisition in the 21st century, thus making the model multi/transdisciplinary, removing the concept from the discipline of history exclusively.

Within research procedures of history, we placed *civic online reasoning*, which refers to strategies for the digital space, the adaptation of historical thinking in digital settings. Based on this, the components of civic online reasoning are:

- *click restraint*: an information search strategy that involves resisting the urge to click immediately on the first web hit, instead scanning through multiple search hits to make the most informed decision possible about what to click on.
- *taking bearings*: a strategy whereby the user is wary of unfamiliar pages and seeks features that identify the source, such as reading the "about us" section.
- *lateral reading*: a strategy whereby the user makes sure that he or she can believe the information on the page and therefore looks around on other websites (Stanford History Education Group, cited in Tóth, 2023).

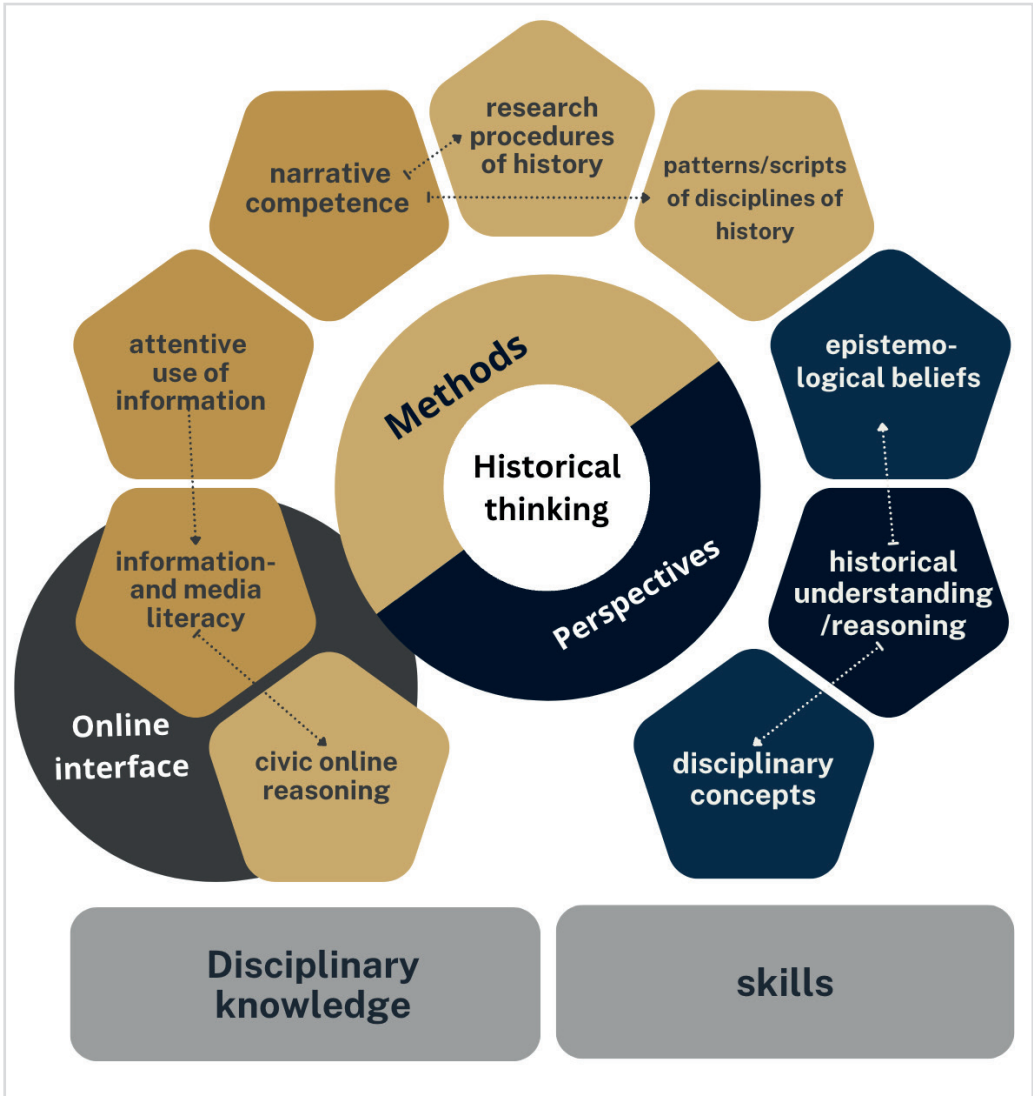
As for the attentive use of information in the digital space, the vast concepts of *information and media literacy* have been placed here, as it is "critical thinking skills that enable the audience to decipher information received through mass media and empower them to make independent decisions/judgments" (Sipos, 2014, 396) and "(...) allows users to analyze media messages broadcast through the media and the Internet, the ability to critically approach the received data and perceived information" (Khanina et al., 2021, 111).

Both civic online reasoning and information and media literacy are placed in an 'online setting', implying that the development of components of historical thinking are very much relevant in the digital world as well, especially with the fast emergence of artificial intelligence, whereby the filtering of valid information has become even more challenging.

Under historical reasoning has been placed historical reasoning, which is the ability to draw reasoned conclusions about second order concepts by "activating" first-order concepts (knowledge about dates, concepts, names) and third order concepts (epistemological beliefs) together (Rozendal & Boxtel, 2022). Thus, within historical understanding, second order concepts and epistemological beliefs can be seen.

The second-order concepts/historical thinking concepts (or as they are often called: 'the big six') (historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives, the ethical dimension, Seixas & Morton, 2013) are meta-concepts through which students' historical perspective can be developed. In other words, the complexity and depth of their understanding of historical processes, evidence and narratives depend on how deeply they attained these concepts.

Epistemological beliefs (third order concepts) can be defined as individual's ideas about knowledge and how it is being created (Majkić, 2022; Rozendal & Boxtel, 2022).



2. diagram, components of historical thinking - a synthesized model, own diagram

It is through the conscious development of all these components together that the development of historical thinking can be successful, which includes *skills and abilities that are essential not only for historical research but also for interpreting everyday information in the 21st century.*

4. Further steps

In the following timeframe of the research project, the team focuses on in-depth comparative analyses, dissemination and book editing. We start the editorial process of the academic paper collection on our international comparative analysis. Results concerning the curricular position of history and civic education are collected and discussed with experts of the research group and external partners during workshop seminars.

Interestingly, the Observatory on History Education in Europe, an international cooperation established by the French presidency of the Council of Europe has just published its first general report on the status of history education in its 16 member states (Observatory on History Education in Europe, 2023; Fodor, 2024). The report is based on a thorough and solid research focusing on a different set of countries without any Central-European states but detailing Spanish, Portuguese and South-East-European tendencies. Attention and reflections should be devoted to the work of the Observatory in future comparative research.

A significant aim is to identify current specific characteristics, similarities and differences between the archetypes of educational systems: the European Continental, Atlantic and Asian perspectives on education regulation.

Future objectives include empirical research on historical thinking accompanied by school visits, international classroom observations and interviews with stakeholders in education, as well as a comparative analysis of textbooks and virtual learning environments.

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