

Report on Conference
Talks about Transformations and Approaches to Teaching History in Lebanon
January 28 – February 10 - March 17 (2021)

The Lebanese Association for History (LAH) organized, in partnership with the Peace Building Program at UNDP-Lebanon, a conference entitled "A Conversation around Transformations and Approaches of Teaching History in Lebanon" in January - March 2021. The conference brought together a group of professionals involved in history education in Lebanon. The group included University Professors from History and Education Departments as well as teachers from LAH who came together to reflect on the most effective ways to develop history education in Lebanon.

An academic committee, formed by LAH, contributed to the success of the conference. The committee which contributed to the conceptualization of the conference and its program included: Dr. Bassel Akar, Jamal Arafat, Dr. Amin Elias (Conference Coordinator), Nayla Hamadeh, and Dr. Maha Shuayb.

The committee configured five main objectives for the conference:

- 1- Launching a scientific discussion among specialists to contribute to the curriculum-making process at the national level.
- 2- Launching new conversations with the aim of developing a new approach to designing the history curriculum.
- 3- Reflecting on the teacher-training programs for history teachers at different Lebanese universities and ways for these programs to meet the new discussions.
- 4- Evaluating the newly suggested approach advanced by LAH through its training program.
- 5- Raise interest in research in the field of teaching history and encouraging it.

Along with the participation of history professors across Lebanon, the academic committee sought to involve academics from the departments of history and civics in different Lebanese universities, such as the Lebanese University, Saint Joseph University, American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University, Manar University, and the Lebanese International University, in order for this conference to be a space for meeting and reflecting on how to prepare history teachers and develop new approaches to teaching history in Lebanon. The conference highlighted the reality that coordination between history departments and education departments (in charge of teacher education) is either non existing or quite weak. which has repercussions on history teacher preparation in Lebanon. It is also worth mentioning that both the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) and the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD) were represented at the conference. Dr. Nada Hassanon behalf of Mr. Fady Yarak, Director General of MEHE; Mrs. Ghada Al Ali on behalf of Mr. George Nohra, CERD President.

The conference comprised three sessions:

The first session (January 28, 2021) focused on different approaches to teaching and learning history at schools. Participants discussed the aims of teaching history in schools through three axes: 1) citizenship, building identity, and a sense of belonging; 2) Freedom of thought among teachers and students; and, 3)

building the knowledge, concepts, skills and competencies necessary for the individual to be a contemporary free-thinking person. Participants focused on the importance of developing higher-order thinking skills for students, intelligently reconstructing the history program, reading history conceptually and from varied perspectives, as well as changing the description of the official exam, provided that the professor is at the engine behind the learning process; i.e, that teachers are well trained, qualified and free to help students develop and build their expected features. Some of the discussion noted the importance of the teaching-learning process being based on scientific knowledge production, so that the scientific reference is the basis. Moreover, the professors did not fail to point out to the challenges facing such ideas, especially the obstacles stemming from political interference in the teaching of history, and that these obstacles could be overcome in two possible ways: first, the reappropriation of history education by specialists; Second, by developing a new curriculum that is flexible and capable of accommodating multiple narratives, whereby historians supervise its development and implementation based on scientific knowledge rather than political interference.

In the second session (February 10, 2021), representatives of the Lebanese, Jesuit, American, and Lebanese-American universities presented the programs for preparing history teachers, and then a joint discussion took place on the ideas that could be put forward in order to develop this teacher-preparation process. Among the most prominent of these ideas are: 1- That the education departments accompany new teachers in school for a whole year after their graduation; 2- Linking promotion to the progress made by the teacher through continuous monitoring and evaluation. 3- Defining the history teacher features and developing coordination and cooperation between the history and history departments; 4- Development of scientific research in the field of history education. 5- Revisiting with the help of the CERD how school administrations view the subject of history; 6 – Lobbying by universities to increase weekly history classes at schools; 7- Establishing specialized laboratories to promote scientific research on history and teaching history in universities. 8- Collaborating among universities in order to establish a "house for Human Sciences" whose interests include hosting and organizing conferences, seminars and activities related to the humanities and social sciences and thus creating a space for specialists in these fields; 9- Establishing a museum for the youth; 10 – Building partnerships with various schools that are genuinely aware of the importance of history teaching and allow the university students to sense the challenges in the field of History education . 11- Supporting teachers wishing to return to the university to obtain a teaching diploma; 12- Working to increase job opportunities for graduates specializing in history and teaching history in Lebanon.

The third session (March 17, 2021) focused the discussion on the curriculum in Lebanon and the possibility of creating a new curriculum. This discussion started from the fact that there is a great politicization of history, as each faction imposes on this discipline the contradictory ideologies existing in Lebanon. This politicization falls within the framework of the permanent overlap between politics and academic affairs. Some participants also pointed out to the fact that education in Lebanon has been lagging other countries, as evidenced by the fact that many Arab countries preceded us in this field. Accordingly, participants concluded that educational specialists need to reappropriate education in general and history from politicians. Based on this, History professors and specialists in history and its teaching in Lebanon are supposed to form a nucleus of pressure that will be in the educational decision-making circles for the sake of this recovery process. This discussion takes us inevitably to talk about the current curriculum in Lebanon (1968), which does not include any clear objectives. Hence, the need to work on a curriculum that focuses on the following

three essential axes: ideology, content, and aims.

Regarding ideology, all participants unanimously agreed that it should embrace the Lebanese diversity, with emphasis on the primary belonging to Lebanon while embracing the arab identity and culture and universal values and human rights, and that the curriculum is closer to the science of history. Regarding content, the discussion revolved around the importance of methodological development through the pedagogical means proposed such as a variety of texts and documents, and action verbs that address levels of higher-order thinking among students. Regarding aims, participants unanimously agreed that the aims need to be anchored around building the profile of the new human empowered to live in the era of modernity and accelerated development, promoting the idea of a free communicative individual researcher, critical thinker, interlocutor, leader, creative, able to work within a group, and able to accept the other and his/her thought.

The discussion among participants ended with a set of recommendations that will be collected by LAH and shared with participants for their feedback before publication and diffusion to stakeholders, hoping that it will be a first step on the path that will lead to the revision of history teacher education programs in Lebanon, so that teachers form the solid base needed for the creation of a new history curriculum whose ultimate goal is to build modernistic humanistic individuals who are affected by and impacting on human civilization.