



CHAPTER 9:

Improving Civic and Citizenship Education in Latvia¹

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Abstract The chapter characterizes citizenship education in Latvia within the national education system and on the level of public interest and involvement. The article particularly focuses on a large school education reform carried out in Latvia since 1991. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research in the field of citizenship education in Latvia, as well as for policymakers. As regards possible policy changes, the author suggests raising civic competence, and replacing the sometime exaggerated manifestations of patriotism with awareness about security issues, individual and democratic values, and the sense of belonging at different levels. In addition, an aim should be to enhance the ability to critically assess political and economic developments.

Introduction: General Background Information

Latvia has participated in international comparative studies since the restoration of independence in 1991. This includes the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) studies such as IEA's TIMSS and PIRLS,² and OECD's TALIS and PISA.³ Further, since 1999, Latvia has taken part in all of the IEA's civic and citizenship education studies: first, the Civic Education Study (CIVED) and then the International Civic and Citizenship Education Studies (ICCS). In CIVED 1999, students' level of citizenship achievements was very low. Students' achievements in citizenship knowledge have improved somewhat over the last two ICCS surveys of 2009 and 2016. These results are considerable for a new democracy after 50 years of a completely different political system.

The author of this chapter, Ireta Čekse, has participated in the IEA ICCS studies since 2007, working as a data processing manager in ICCS 2009 and as the national research coordinator for ICCS 2016.

IEA ICCS is the largest study in Latvia covering local, national, and international levels of citizenship education. However, there are also specific studies in the area being carried out to measure knowledge levels and explain attitudes in particular domains of citizenship education. For instance, before launching the pilot project of a state defense subject in schools, the Center for Security and Strategic Research of the National Defence Academy of Latvia organized focus group interviews with students where they were asked about their attitudes towards patriotism. In this case patriotism was defined as a constructively critical and active engagement in political processes with the aim to promote the common good, the well-being of the state and the people, as well as growth (Bērziņa 2018, p. 9). The study showed that 10 to 15-year-old students were keener to be engaged in state matters and they were less critical of politics compared to adults. This implies a civic patriotism potential, which according to the researcher Ieva Bērziņa could be further fostered by offering advanced classes in politics and citizenship education. In 2014, a case study was conducted to analyze how well newcomers and children of re-immigrants

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2 TIMSS = Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study; PIRLS = Progress in International Reading Literacy

3 TALIS = Teaching and Learning International Survey; PISA = Programme for International Student Assessment.

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are integrated in local schools in Riga (Bērziņa 2018). It was found that the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector was more active in promoting global/development education topics than the policy or the academic sectors.

Issues of citizenship education are also examined in democracy audits and research in the field of politics. Particularly noteworthy are studies (with adult respondents) about integration (Izglītības attīstības centrs 2014; Vērse et al. 2013), national minorities in civic society (Baltic Institute of Social Sciences 2017, 2015; Muižnieks 2010) and identity (Rozenvalds and Zobena 2014).

Since 1991, Latvia has carried out significant school education reforms, which are expected to continue at least until 2021. The aim of the reforms is to “develop, test and successively implement general education curriculum and approaches to the teaching of 1.5⁴ to 18-year-olds that will develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed for the challenges of the 21st century” (Latvijas Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija n.d.). The reforms also seek to introduce competency-based education which includes curriculum on social and civic matters at all levels. There are particular skills in understanding economics, politics, and social problems that students need to be taught at each level. For instance, in grades 1 through 6 students study social processes in their local surroundings and in Latvia; the emphasis is on developing initial skills in studying history. Meanwhile, in grades 7 through 9 students analyze both local and global communities, and seek to identify what factors drive the well-being of individuals and society as a whole (Valsts izglītības un saturs eksaminācijas centrs 2018).

Civic and Citizenship Education in Latvia

Diverse aspects of citizenship education have been developed in Latvia at the school, society, and state levels. Both national and municipal efforts can be observed.

In Latvia the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for citizenship education matters, but also involved are the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Defence; the NGO sector is also active in this area. The Ministry of Culture is in charge of drafting and implementing national identity, civic society, and integration in society policy plans (Latvijas Republikas Kultūras ministrija 2018a). The Ministry of Defence actively promotes patriotic sentiments in society, as well as seeking to raise awareness of national security issues. This includes fostering media literacy to avoid manipulation of public opinion. Meanwhile the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for citizenship education in school curriculum and programs.

As part of the agenda dedicated to the Latvian centenary, a 2017–2021 framework program has been launched at state and municipal level. The program seeks to promote national cultural values, educate society about history, and strengthen the sense of national belonging (Latvijas Republikas Kultūras ministrija 2018b). One of the initiatives, called School Backpack (*Skolas soma*), is aimed at providing opportunities for students to attend cultural events such as theatre, opera, concerts, and exhibitions. School Backpack is supported by Latvia’s government. Meanwhile the project Latvija 2018 seeks to highlight Latvian values and achievements. The conceptual framework of the project is based on four pillars: 1) promoting citizenship, sense of belonging to the state, and national identity, 2) improving quality of education for the 21st century, 3) raising cultural awareness, and 4) decreasing social inequalities. Project Latvija 2018 was to promote civic consciousness, strengthen the sense of national belonging and national identity, improve education, build cultural literacy, and reduce social inequality (Latvijas Republikas Kultūras ministrija 2018c).

4 Formal education in Latvia starts from age 1.5, in preschool.

In 2005 and 2006, the Education Development Centre carried out a project within the framework of the International Civic Education Exchange program (CIVITAS). The aim of the project was to improve the quality of civic and citizenship education, to promote democracy, and to strengthen civil society in Latvia. During the project such programs as Project Citizen, Foundations of Democracy, and The Citizen and Constitution were implemented for different audiences. The Education Development Centre has established a support network which has helped teachers to implement teaching civic-related content. The Education Development Centre's method includes fostering the development of civic, intercultural inclusive education, education about international development and cooperation, encouragement of critical thinking for promoting diversity, participation in state policy development processes, and participation in developing education policy. The target groups are education specialists, employees of state and municipal institutions, specialists from different professional fields, representatives of NGOs, the active population of local communities, school youth, and socially marginalized groups (Izglītības attīstības centrs 2006).

Two NGO sector organizations actively promote civic issues. The Centre for Public Policy, Providus, seeks to "promote evidence-based policy and the development of open society values" (Providus n.d.). Providus focuses on local and international projects related to good governance and participation, corruption, inclusive society, international politics, and elections. Providus researchers very often are opinion leaders who are asked for their opinions about political issues in the mass media. Meanwhile the Education Development Centre (EDC) seeks to stimulate development of democratic society and promote civic engagement and professional competitiveness (Education Development Centre 2017). The mission of the EDC is to promote further development of an educated, democratic society in Latvia by promoting the professional capacity, competitiveness, cooperation, and civic participation skills of each individual.

In the period from 2000 to 2017, citizenship education in Latvia basically was aimed at shaping the civic capacity of students, focusing on preparing students to make socially responsible decisions for individual needs and needs of society. The curricula consisted not only of theoretical, but also practical activities where students had to do projects and research. These activities primarily focused on practical engagement in local communities, like helping seniors, doing spring clean-ups, recycling, doing voluntary work, and participating in elections as observers.

Social science (*sociālās zinības*) is designed as an integrated subject for elementary school and lower-school level (grade 1 to 9) comprising ethical, civic, economic, and health education. Social science comprises topics covering politics and law, sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, and ethics. The subject is taught for 40 minutes (one lesson period) twice a week. At primary education level, the aim of the subject is to develop civic competence, and to study essential personal and social issues on individual, community, and state levels (Izglītības saturs un eksaminācijas centrs 2014). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defence has introduced state defence (*Valsts aizsardzības mācība*) classes in Latvian schools on secondary school level (grade 10 to 12). The aim of the subject has been adjusted and now seeks to promote civic consciousness where one of the objectives is to develop a sense of patriotism. State defence is an elective course which is mostly done by students who plan to pursue a military career. The curriculum includes theoretical and practical activities where students learn about state defence, service in the Latvian National Armed Forces, develop a sense of patriotism, civic consciousness, and work on their physical condition (Aizsardzības ministrija 2013).

In 2016, the Ministry of Education and Science launched a large school education reform which, as mentioned earlier, is expected to be finalized by 2021. The reform seeks to introduce competency-based curricula in schools. The reform also covers social science where the new curriculum would focus more on defining multi-skill competences. As regards citizenship education, one of

the objectives of the new curriculum is to promote national patriotism which, along with other objectives, is done through social and civic domains, cultural awareness, self-expression, natural sciences, math, technology studies, health studies, and physical activities.⁵

Social and civic competences are taught in social science, as well as in separate modules: social science and history, and Latvian and world history. The teacher guidelines recommend devoting to social and civic domains:

- Six hours per week, from age 6 to 9 (grade 1 to 3);
- Six hours per week from age 9 to 12 (grade 4 to 6); and
- Eleven hours per week from age 12 to 15 (grade 7 to 9) (Baunte et al. n.d.).

Guidelines allow teachers to use textbooks and other study materials such as internet resources, documents, and working papers in social science classes. These classes are aimed at advancing students' civic competences thus building their social responsibility at different levels. In this context social responsibility is understood as a willingness and ability to understand the consequences of one's choices and actions, and act in a way that respects other peoples' dignity and freedom (Valsts izglītības un saturs eksaminācijas centrs 2018).

Schools offer civic activities where students can practice different aspects of democracy. Usually schools in Latvia have elected student councils. The councils seek to defend students' interests, organize different activities (spring clean-ups, sport and entertainment activities, charity events, activities during national holidays), consider whether students' rights are being observed, and improve school life by proposing specific initiatives.

Teachers of Civic and Citizenship Education

One of the following requirements needs to be met to qualify for a teaching position in Latvia:

- degree in pedagogy with teacher's qualification in the corresponding study subject;
- degree in the field of science or social science corresponding to the study subject and teacher's qualification;
- master's degree or PhD in education or pedagogy if the written dissertation is related to the corresponding study subject and didactics; and
- degree in the field of science corresponding to the study subject and professional experience in an educational institution, which does not exceed one year, under the supervision of a mentor (Ministru Kabinets 2018).

These requirements also apply to the qualification of social science teachers. A teacher can obtain the qualification of a social science teacher upon completing a 160-hour course in social science at the University of Latvia.

As mentioned above, since 2005, the content of civic and citizenship education has been integrated into social science curriculum. Four higher education institutions in Latvia offer programs that qualify candidates to teach this subject, including a four-year professional bachelor's program or a second-level professional study program following the completion of a Bachelor of Education. It is possible to obtain a qualification as a social science teacher together with a qualification of a teacher of history, history of culture, geography, or another civic-related subject (Augstakā izglītības kvalitātes novērtēšanas centrs 2005).

Standards for social science teachers are closely related to the duties and tasks required. There are also standards concerning the working environment and the requirements, skills, and knowledge that are necessary to undertake their professional work. The standards define that teachers need

⁵ In the new curriculum the desired study results in each of the domains (social and civic domains, cultural awareness, self-expression, natural sciences, mathematics, technology studies, health studies, and physical activities) are split into three school levels starting from the age of 2 (primary school) up to grade 12 (age 18).

substantive knowledge in pedagogy, health education, ethics, civic education, and economics. Social science teachers (*sociālo zinību skolotājs*) should have a desire to participate in society, understand democracy, and demonstrate tolerance in order to succeed at their pedagogical work. The teacher's guidelines include the following specific teacher responsibilities:

- To include up-to-date information about civic society and political processes in the teaching and learning content;
- To integrate the achievement of different fields of social studies;
- To analyze social, economic, and political processes;
- To organize a health-promoting school environment; and
- To integrate the topics of economic, ethics, health, and civic education (Valsts izglītības un saturs eksaminācijas centrs 2018; Augstakāpas izglītības kvalitātes novērtēšanas centrs 2005).

The requirements for obtaining teacher qualifications for social science and for professional development are the same as for teachers of other subjects.

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Studies in Education Discourse, Their Influence

Three study cycles have allowed monitoring the growth dynamics of Latvian students from 1999 to 2016. In this period, there have been multiple changes in the content and methodology of citizenship education studies. Over the last two years, the study results have also been presented to the ministries (Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Science, and Ministry of Culture) dealing with civic matters, citizenship education, national identity, and security issues.

Questions for the ICCS 2016 national survey were drafted together with the Latvian Ministry of Defence. The questions comprised sections on state security, integration and understanding of patriotism. The results of the national survey were considered when preparing the state defense curriculum which was then coordinated with the Latvian Ministry of Education and Science. National and international results of ICCS 2016 were also used by the Division for Social Integration and Development of Civic Society at the Latvian Ministry of Culture in drafting the National Development Plan. The Ministry of Education and Science also used the ICCS study results in preparing the school curricula reform, School 2020. The ICCS results regarding students' achievements and attitudes were taken into consideration when drafting the curriculum for citizenship education, particularly focusing on loyalty towards the state, civic involvement, and views about the political system in Latvia. The results were selected and presented taking into account the interests and specifics of each of the institutions. This included examining the results of students' achievements and attitudes in ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016 compared to the democratic states of the Baltic Sea region.

For instance, the authors of the School 2020 reform (formulated in 2018) sought to include civic competencies, measured in ICCS, in the new curriculum of citizenship education. This was based on the results from the 1999 and 2009 IEA civic education studies (CIVED 1999 and ICCS 2009) which were very consistent in showing the poor performance of Latvian students when compared internationally. Out of 28 countries participating in CIVED, the Latvian students' civic knowledge scores ranked 26th (Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Ten years later the Latvian knowledge scores in ICCS 2009 remained very near the bottom of the ranking (Schultz et al. 2010). Similar findings were observed in these two studies for a number of attitudinal dimensions where Latvian students had scores at or near the bottom of the country ranking in *trust in government and positive attitudes toward the nation*. Going to a context closer to their everyday life, students also reported little sense of the value of participation at school and were unlikely to see their classrooms as places where respectful and open discussion took place. Whether or not these findings became an explicit part of the decision-making process in Latvia, they served

as background motivation. There was some influence of the study on the broader educational discourse and decision making about positive steps that could be taken (such as those detailed below). Additional insight can be obtained from a chapter in a book entitled *Young People and Active Citizenship in Post-Soviet Times* (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz et al. 2018). These authors point to economic challenges in Latvia which many students see as more important to overcome than political challenges.

Comparing to other democratic states of the Baltic Sea region, Latvian students had the lowest results in citizenship education in ICCS 2016 (Schulz et al. 2018). The percentage of A level competence in citizenship education was also low among Latvian students, only 19%. For instance, there were more than twice as many students with A level competence in Estonia (43%), and nearly three times as many in Sweden (58%) and Denmark (53%). Analyzing the ICCS 2016 survey results of social science teachers (Čekse et al. 2018), it can be concluded that students whose teachers failed to interact with other teachers or local communities demonstrated lower results in citizenship education. Also, students demonstrated lower results if their teachers used single-source study means, for instance, only textbooks.

These factors were taken into account when developing the new curricula. Also considered in this process were possible means that would allow improvement of students' results on the knowledge test and their civic competence, as well as students' civic attitudes and national survey results.

Latvia's accession to OECD in 2016 has also had an effect on the curricula. This has allowed improvement of the quality of instruction and the education system in general, as well as to promote more transparent principles of equality.

Since September 2005, civic and citizenship education at the level of basic education has been taught as part of social science classes, and consists of four parts: ethics, introduction to economics, health education, and civic studies. Given that the subject has only recently been introduced, it continues to attract special attention in teachers' professional development courses and in different projects related to education development and improvement. One example of such a project is known as *Let's add value to social science: promoting social integration in the process of acquiring social science*.

Some project results show that teachers do not think that they have opportunities to participate in education policy planning and development in their schools (Politika.lv 2005). Thus researchers, the Ministry of Education and Science, regional school boards, methodological associations, schools, parents, and teachers partnered to address this issue. The aim of the partnership was to improve the quality of teaching of social sciences. Among the group of indicators to assess the effectiveness were the ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016 results. The study results showed that the curricula need to be improved. The curriculum for citizenship education is going to be upgraded within the framework of a new competence-based approach to teaching to be introduced in 2021.

Three approaches are used to teach civic and citizenship education in schools: direct teaching and learning in classes; out-of-class activities like engagement in school council and civic projects; and, through a common civic school culture. There are connections between these three different approaches. Direct teaching might be observed almost in any school subject, including political science, social science, history, literature, biology, and geography; or it may occur during interactions between teachers and students. Aspects of citizenship education are represented in school culture through making decisions and solving problems; through communication among the administration, students, teachers, parents, and the wider community; and as a set of values and priorities pertaining to a school community (Irbīte 2008).

As was noted before, in 2016 the Ministry of Education and Science launched the largest school education reform since the restoration of Latvia's independence, and it is expected to be finalized by 2021 and fully implemented by 2023. The aim of the reform is to introduce competency-based curricula in schools.

The new curricula cover aspects of citizenship education within seven domains: Social and civic domain, cultural awareness, self-expression, natural sciences, math, technology studies, health studies, and physical activities.

As of 2023, state tests are expected to be organized for students of grade 4, 7, 8, and 10. Meanwhile students finishing grade 9 (primary school) will need to take an inter-disciplinary test comprised of elements of social science, citizenship education, natural sciences, and technologies. At the end of secondary school, they will have an opportunity to demonstrate their civic competences in a course called *writing a research or creative paper*, where students are allowed to choose their topics freely.

Minority school⁶ reform, which sought to gradually make the official state language the main language in the study process, has been relatively successful. Comparing ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016 (Schulz et al. 2010; Schulz et al. 2018), students' results categorized by language have equalized. In 2009, the knowledge test result of Latvian-speaking students was higher by nine percent. Nevertheless, Russian-speaking students also demonstrate lower results in democratic attitudes. The national survey conducted within the framework of ICCS 2016 highlighted national issues in terms of citizenship education. The survey results showed that students in Latvia are currently less concerned about migration issues.

After studying the international and national results of ICCS 2009 and ICCS 2016, in 2018 the Ministry of Defence together with the Ministry of Education and Science launched a pilot project introducing state defense classes in 13 schools in Latvia. These classes are an optional career subject, whereas for students of grade 7 to 9 it is one of the topics for research works during special science weeks. The subject is held once per month for several hours. The aim of state defense classes is to prepare students for military careers in the future. Since 1997, state defense has been an optional subject in schools. Since 2011, state defense has been a vocational subject (Aizsardzības ministrija 2013) supplemented with training in the Youth Guard (*Jaunsardze*). In 2017, state defense classes were organized in 17 general schools and one vocational school in Latvia. State defense classes are part of the new competency-based education, seeking to promote civic consciousness and patriotism, as well as offering basic military skills (Mirbahs 2018).

Summary and Conclusions

In IEA's ICCS 2016, grade 8 students from Latvia scored the lowest in the citizenship education test among all democratic countries of the Baltic Sea region that took part in the survey. The results of ICCS 2016 suggested that students' civic competencies can be improved by diversifying the teaching methods, through more opportunities for cooperation between students and local municipalities in contributing to solving local problems, as well as through cooperation among teachers themselves. These ICCS 2016 results have been taken into account when improving the citizenship education curriculum in Latvia (Čekse 2018).

As regards the current situation with citizenship education in Latvia, the chapter mentions several aspects. For instance, project Latvija 100, planned for the period from 2017 to 2021, seeks to develop initiatives aimed at promoting national cultural values, knowledge in history, and sense of belonging among the people in Latvia. The chapter also describes the efforts of the NGO sector and several ministries in terms of citizenship education, as well as looking at national-level studies which are directly or indirectly linked to citizenship education.

⁶ Minority school (*mazākumtautību skolas*) refers to a school with bilingual teaching in both the official state language and a minority language; 25.4% of the total population of Latvia are Russian and 27% of all schools has Russian as a language of instruction.

The teaching of citizenship education in Latvia can be described in three stages. Beginning during the decade starting in 1991, citizenship education was taught in schools as a separate subject. From 2000, citizenship education was taught as part of social science classes. However, as of 2021, when the competence-based approach to teaching is going to be introduced in schools in Latvia, the teaching of citizenship education is expected to be transformed once again. It is planned to be taught not only as a separate subject, but its elements are also expected to be integrated in other subjects as well.

Here it is also important to stress the introduction of state defense classes in general education schools in Latvia in 2018. Their aim is to boost patriotic sentiments towards the state, raise awareness about national security issues, and develop media literacy in terms of collective and individual security. This includes encouraging stronger critical thinking about information from different kinds of media, comparing information from East and West, and avoiding manipulation of public opinion. It is one approach to strengthening democratic values and democracy in society.

Further research in the field of citizenship education in Latvia should focus on several issues that hinder formation of democratic and functional society.

First, greater consideration should be given to studying the sense of security and togetherness in Latvian society. This would promote the ideas of civic responsibility and democracy among students and a wider public in order to form a society capable of critically assessing the political and economic situation in the country, identifying threats, and reacting in line with democratic principles. This issue should be addressed by researchers, as well as policymakers and practitioners (NGOs, school administration, teachers, parents, etc.).

Second, it is crucial to have a sense of regional affiliation and thus take systemic steps so that Latvia becomes internationally competitive and effectively integrated in the family of democratic states in the Baltic Sea region. It is equally vital to have the sense of belonging to the Euro-Atlantic community so that Latvia could successfully fulfil its role in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, and the OECD. Also, in regards to the state defense subject and the content of new curricula, there is an exaggerated emphasis on patriotism which should be reduced. Propaganda that might evolve into radical behavior should be addressed. Instead the effort should be put on building awareness of individual and national values, cultivating the sense of belonging at different levels, as well as promoting the ability to critically assess political and economic developments.

Third, to reach the first two goals, it is important to continue monitoring the curriculum and education system in general, and citizenship education in particular. It is also important to compare development dynamics and identify areas of improvement. Latvian students' low performance on IEA ICCS knowledge tests is still a problem in citizenship education. Results from monitoring the quality of the education system developed by the Ministry of Education and Science and IEA ICCS studies can provide evidence to justify future citizenship education policy.

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