Integrating Historical Knowledge with Civic Competences in Pre-University Education in Albania

Ndriçim Mehmeti[1]*, Nevila Mehmeti[2], Ilir Sallata[2]

[1] Faculty of Social Science, "Albanian" University, Tirana, Albania
[2] Faculty of Education, "Aleksandër Moisiu" University Durrës, Albania
* cimmehmeti@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study analyzes the integration of historical knowledge with civic competences in pre-university education in Albania, evaluating the role of teaching in developing students' democratic understanding and active participation. Using a mixed-methods research approach (quantitative and qualitative methods), data were collected through two structured questionnaires administered in March 2025, involving 627 students from lower and upper secondary education, as well as 76 history teachers from both urban and rural areas. The data analysis showed that although students demonstrate good levels of knowledge about democracy and civic values, their practical involvement remains limited, especially in school decision-making and community activities. The study also highlights differences between urban and rural schools in teaching approaches, digital resources, and institutional support. The findings emphasize the need for strengthened teacher professional development, deeper integration of historical content with civic competences, and the creation of a more open classroom dialogue to reinforce young people's democratic participation. The recommendations aim to guide educational policies toward improving teaching methods, empowering teachers, and enhancing the role of the school as a space for civic development.

Keywords: pre-university education, historical knowledge, civic engagement, democratic participation, citizenship education, global citizenship, teacher professional development

1. Introduction

In contemporary times, history education is increasingly viewed in close relation to civic education, emphasizing the role of the school as a space for shaping active and critical citizens. The integration of historical knowledge with civic competences

represents an essential dimension of the modern school, which aims to prepare students capable of understanding the past, analyzing the present, and contributing to the construction of the future. In a democratic and global society, education cannot be limited to the acquisition of historical facts alone; it must also foster critical thinking, civic participation, and social responsibility (Banks, 2008).

Teaching history in the modern school is not simply a process of transmitting events, but a tool for developing civic competences related to the understanding of democracy, respect for human rights, and the ability to participate actively in public life (Barton & Levstik, 2004). For this reason, the connection between history education and civic education appears as a strategy that places the student at the center of the learning process, transforming them into an active agent of society.

Various studies have shown that integrating civic competences into the history curriculum contributes to developing skills for analyzing information from different sources, making judgments about social challenges, and taking responsible decisions (IEA, 2001). In this sense, history is no longer seen simply as a collection of facts but as an educational tool that helps students shape their civic identity and build a shared democratic culture.

In the Albanian context, the integration of these two dimensions takes on particular importance. The country's historical experience, accompanied by political transitions and democratic challenges, places schools before the task of shaping conscious citizens capable of active democratic participation while respecting cultural and social diversity. As Marsh (2022) emphasizes, the curriculum should be seen as a living instrument that adapts to contemporary needs and aims at developing inclusive competences. Curriculum reform has aimed to ensure that history teaching does not remain a memorization-based process, but is oriented toward developing civic competences such as critical analysis of sources, reflection on human rights, and the construction of national identity aligned with European values (ASCAP, 2018). Recent studies have also highlighted the need to reform history textbooks and teaching practices to encourage civic reflection. Duro et al. (2024), in a comparative analysis of history textbooks in Albania and Kosovo, stress that although the presentation of historical facts is extensive, the links to the development of civic skills remain limited. This implies that a deeper integration between the history curriculum and civic education is essential.

The relationship between historical knowledge and civic competences is not only an academic requirement but also a social and political necessity. The modern school has the responsibility to build bridges between the past and the future, shaping aware, active, and responsible citizens. This article aims to analyze the ways in which this process unfolds in the Albanian school context, offering concrete examples and a critical perspective on its role in educating the younger generation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 the Integration of Historical Knowledge with Civic Education in Contemporary Schooling

In contemporary international literature, the integration of historical knowledge with civic education is viewed as one of the fundamental dimensions of developing democratic education. This integration aims to create an educational process that equips students not only with knowledge about the past, but also with competences for active and responsible participation in society. A systematic review of studies on civic education (Jerome, Hyder, Hilal & Kisby, 2024) emphasizes that the integration of knowledge, skills, and values is essential for sustainably influencing civic attitudes and actions. This approach underlines that history teaching should not be reduced to the mechanical repetition of facts, but should serve as a tool for developing critical thinking, historical consciousness, and collective memory.

According to Halverson & Smith (2024), civic education must include three pillars: knowledge (democratic structures, historical processes), democratic skills (debate, argumentation, identifying conflicts), and civic attitudes (tolerance, solidarity, responsibility). This conceptual triad brings together history and civic education in a unified process of developing democratic competences, where the learning experience becomes a tool for shaping active citizenship.

In the context of the digital society, UNESCO (2024) highlights that civic education must include the analysis of digital sources, information verification, and participation in virtual spaces. This is linked to the fact that young citizens increasingly construct their identities and political attitudes online, where information circulates rapidly and without verification. Therefore, modern education requires the development of an integrated historical and civic approach that combines critical thinking with the ethical and responsible use of information.

Owen (2017) stresses the importance of innovative methods in civic education such as simulations, debates, and the use of multimedia resources, which have been shown to increase civic awareness and student engagement. Likewise, the report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025), prepared by Hannah Borhan, *"Civic Education as a Pathway to Inclusive Societies,"* emphasizes that successful civic education programs are characterized by:

- the active involvement of students in the learning process;

- linking curricular content with everyday life and the local community;

- critical reflection on social experiences;

- continuous professional development of teachers;

- consistent assessment of learning outcomes.

According to OECD (2025), these elements create learning environments that support the development of democratic competences, cooperative skills, and a sense of social belonging. The report highlights that civic education should not be treated as an isolated subject, but as an interdisciplinary component of the curriculum, integrating historical, social, and ethical content to build active, critical, and inclusive citizens. OECD (2025) argues that the sustainability of educational policies depends on the ability of school systems to link historical knowledge with concrete civic practices, making education a real instrument for inclusion and social cohesion.

At the political and institutional level, the Council of Europe and the European Union have played a leading role in promoting these approaches. The Council of Europe's *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)* (2025) and the *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook* (Council of Europe, 2022) emphasize the integration of democratic values, critical thinking, and digital competences into both history and civic education curricula. Likewise, the international ICCS (2022) report underlines that school environments that encourage student participation in discussions and civic projects achieve higher outcomes in the development of democratic competences and the building of civic culture.

2.2 History and Citizenship in Albanian Pre-University Education

In the Albanian education system, the integration of historical and civic education remains in a phase of development and consolidation. A comparative study conducted in Albania and Kosovo by Duro et al. (2024) shows that history textbooks at the secondary level often do not meet the Council of Europe's recommendations for teaching that promotes civic reflection and multiperspectivity. The authors emphasize that reflective questions, diverse source materials, and connections to contemporary issues are frequently absent, indicating the need for a reform of the didactic approach in history teaching.

In Albania, an interesting development is the integration of the concept of the right to information and public transparency into civic education. According to Karamuço and Nikaj (2025), this integration into school curricula can help increase civic awareness and support the development of digital competences. They highlight that incorporating principles of the right to information in history teaching supports the development of research, verification, and information-interpretation skills, which are essential for shaping critical citizens in a digital society.

Another dimension that contributes to understanding this process is related to the political participation of young people in Albania. As noted by Gjergji and Gjevori (2023), the political participation of Albanian youth remains low despite their general knowledge of democratic processes. The authors stress that the lack of practical education for active citizenship, combined with the gap between the theoretical content of teaching and real engagement in public life, creates a divide between civic knowledge and civic action. This demonstrates that integrating history teaching with civic education is essential for building a deeper understanding of democratic

processes and encouraging active youth engagement in society. According to the authors, pre-university education should be oriented toward experiential learning by including historical simulations, debates, and community projects that link historical knowledge with civic competences in practice.

Shyti (2020), in his study *"Citizenship Education in Albania. A Country Study on the Secondary School Students' Knowledge and Attitudes,"* analyzes how Albanian high school students develop knowledge and attitudes related to democratic citizenship. The author emphasizes that historical knowledge about political processes, institutional developments, and national figures forms the foundation for developing civic competences. This knowledge helps students understand the evolution of democracy and appreciate the importance of active participation in social life.

At the political and institutional level, national education frameworks also support this approach. The National Education Strategy 2021–2026 (MASR, 2021) and the Guideline for the 2025–2026 school year (MAS, 2025) highlight the development of civic and digital competences as an integral part of pre-university education. These documents are aligned with the European Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) of the Council of Europe and with European Union policies on civic education (Council of the EU, 2025).

2.3 The Role of the Teacher in Integrating Historical and Civic Education

The role of the teacher is essential in the process of integrating historical knowledge with civic education, as the teacher represents the key link between the curriculum and students' experience. According to Jerome et al. (2024), teachers are agents of civic transformation who do not merely transmit factual knowledge but also build democratic attitudes and critical competences through methods that encourage reflection and active participation. This approach requires teachers to act as mediators between historical content and the social context of students, turning the classroom into a space for dialogue, debate, and analysis.

Halverson et al. (2024) emphasize that the teacher is an "architect of democratic experience" in the classroom, as the way instruction is guided determines whether students actually develop civic skills such as tolerance, solidarity, and responsibility. They argue that the development of civic competences cannot be achieved through traditional teaching methods. Instead, it requires strategies that actively engage students in the learning process, including the analysis of historical sources, simulations, and community projects.

In line with this, the OECD (2025) report *Civic Education as a Pathway to Inclusive Societies* highlights that teachers play a key role in creating inclusive and democratic learning environments. The report suggests that continuous professional training for teachers should focus on building competences for integrating civic education into existing subjects such as history, language, or social sciences. This implies that

teachers must possess not only historical knowledge but also pedagogical skills to construct learning situations that connect with students' civic realities.

Mehmeti et al. (2025) argue that history teachers in Albania have significant potential to influence the development of civic competences, but they often face methodological limitations and lack institutional support. They emphasize that some teachers continue to use traditional approaches centered on factual content, while few apply interactive methods related to debates, simulations, and critical source analysis. Improving teacher training and incorporating reflective practices into the teaching process are essential for advancing this integration.

From another perspective, the Council of Europe (2022) highlights the importance of teachers helping students develop skills for understanding and managing information in the digital age. History teachers in particular have the responsibility to educate citizens who can distinguish fact from opinion and verify sources. They must also help students develop empathy toward different viewpoints skills that function simultaneously as historical and civic competences.

In practical terms, Duro et al. (2024), in their comparative study on history textbooks in Albania and Kosovo, emphasize that the teacher's impact is decisive in how students understand and internalize historical content for the purpose of active citizenship. They point out that although textbooks are an important resource, the way teachers interpret and adapt them through reflective questions, projects, or discussions is crucial. These pedagogical choices determine whether the learning process carries civic value or remains purely factual.

In conclusion, the teacher is not only a transmitter of knowledge but also a creator of democratic culture in the classroom. Teachers integrate history with citizenship through practices that connect the past with the present and prepare students for the future as responsible and informed citizens. Strengthening the role of the teacher requires education policies that invest in continuous professional development, pedagogical autonomy, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Such measures help transform schooling into a genuine space for cultivating democratic citizenship.

2.4 Comparative and International Perspectives on Integrating History and Civic Education

Beyond the Albanian context, international and comparative research underscores the central role of history education in developing civic competences, particularly in European and post-conflict societies. Comparative studies show that countries experiencing political transition or social fragmentation increasingly integrate historical knowledge with democratic citizenship education to promote social cohesion and democratic resilience (Messina et al., 2016; Mellado-Moreno & Burgos, 2025).

In Central and Eastern Europe, including Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia, history teaching is recognized as a key space for addressing contested

pasts, collective memory, and democratic values. Pingel (2017) argues that in post-conflict societies, history education supports both critical understanding of the past and the promotion of reconciliation, tolerance, and democratic participation. This perspective is relevant to Albania, where history education is expected to contribute simultaneously to national identity and democratic citizenship.

At the European level, findings from the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) indicate that participatory approaches in history and social studies are associated with higher civic engagement, trust in democratic institutions, and willingness to participate in civic life (Schulz et al., 2018; ICCS, 2022). These effects are particularly evident in systems that emphasize discussion, multiperspectivity, and critical source analysis.

Research from Western Europe further highlights the value of interdisciplinary approaches linking history, citizenship, and human rights education. Osler and Starkey (2017) and Carretero et al. (2017) note that connecting historical narratives to contemporary democratic challenges helps students develop informed civic identities. Overall, these international experiences suggest that Albania's challenges are shared by many systems in democratic transition and that integrated, participatory history education can strengthen students' democratic engagement.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018). Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the research process.

The primary aim of this study is to analyze how historical knowledge is integrated with civic education in the Albanian pre-university education system and to evaluate the impact of this integration on the development of students' critical thinking and democratic competences. In accordance with the Council of Europe's Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC, 2022), education is expected to contribute to the formation of citizens who "think critically, act responsibly, and cooperate for the common good." Similarly, the OECD (2025) emphasizes that civic education is a key instrument for building inclusive and democratic societies, where historical knowledge serves as a foundation for understanding political, social, and ethical processes. Within this framework, the study seeks to assess whether the teaching of history in Albanian schools effectively contributes to the formation of active and reflective citizens who are aware of their societal role.

The study further aims to identify and analyze instructional practices that facilitate the integration of historical content with the development of civic competences in pre-university education. In line with the perspectives of Banks (2015) and Nikolaou (2021), effective civic education requires not only the acquisition of knowledge and

skills but also the cultivation of democratic values and attitudes through experiential learning and critical reflection.

Based on these theoretical and policy foundations, the study pursues the following objectives: (1) to examine the extent to which historical content and civic competences are integrated within the Albanian curriculum; (2) to analyze teachers' perceptions and instructional practices related to this integration; (3) to evaluate the perceived impact of history teaching on students' civic competences; and (4) to propose pedagogical strategies that may inform improvements in national education policies. As UNESCO (2024) highlights, the development of active citizenship requires educational approaches that meaningfully integrate history, ethics, and digital education in order to prepare learners to critically understand the past and actively engage in shaping the future.

To address these objectives, the study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between historical knowledge and civic competences in Albanian pre-university education. This research design enables the triangulation of data and the comparison of findings derived from different perspectives, thereby enhancing the validity and analytical depth of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The mixed-methods approach is operationalized through two structured research instruments—a student questionnaire and a teacher questionnaire—designed to capture experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical practices related to the integration of historical and civic education.

3.1 Data Sources

This study draws on a combination of primary and secondary data sources, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the integration of historical knowledge and civic competences in Albanian pre-university education.

Primary data were collected through two structured questionnaires administered to students and history teachers during March 2025. These instruments generated empirical data on participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices related to history teaching, civic education, classroom interaction, and student participation. The use of questionnaires enabled the systematic collection of comparable data across different educational levels (lower and upper secondary) and school contexts (urban and rural), supporting both descriptive and comparative analyses.

Secondary data consisted of key national and international policy and curriculum documents that provide the formal and institutional framework for history and civic education in Albania. These included:

- History Curriculum for Grade VIII (ASCAP, 2016);
- History Curriculum for Grade IX (ASCAP, 2019);
- History Curriculum for Grade X (ASCAP, 2018);

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- History Curriculum for Grade XI (ASCAP, 2019);

- Subject Curriculum Guide for History (ASCAP, 2019).

These documents define learning outcomes, cross-curricular competencies, and subject-specific objectives related to history and civic education, emphasizing the development of students' capacities for active, responsible, and democratic citizenship.

In addition, the study drew on national policy documents addressing civic education, citizenship education, and democratic participation in the Albanian pre-university system, as well as international reference frameworks, particularly the Council of Europe's Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC, 2022), which provides a comprehensive model of democratic values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge relevant to contemporary civic education.

All policy and curriculum documents were examined through qualitative content analysis, focusing on curricular priorities, intended learning outcomes, and policy expectations related to civic competences. These sources were used to contextualize and interpret the empirical findings and to assess the degree of alignment or discrepancy between curriculum objectives, policy intentions, and classroom practices reported by teachers and students. The triangulation of primary and secondary data enhances the analytical validity and reliability of the study and strengthens its relevance for educational policy and practice.

3.2 Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis followed a systematic mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to ensure analytical rigor and interpretive depth.

For the quantitative data, responses from both student and teacher questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and comparative statistical methods. Likert scale items (ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement) were coded numerically and analyzed to identify frequencies, percentages, and mean values. These measures allowed for the identification of general trends regarding students' civic knowledge, participation, and perceptions of teaching practices, as well as teachers' self-reported instructional approaches and attitudes toward civic education.

Comparative analyses were conducted to examine differences between students and teachers' perceptions, and urban and rural schools.

Particular attention was given to urban/rural comparisons, as previous research highlights structural inequalities related to resources, digital access, and institutional support. Cross tabulations were used to explore variations in teaching methods, availability of digital tools, and opportunities for student participation across different school contexts.

3.3 Population and Sample

The target population included students and teachers in Albania's pre-university education system. The final sample consisted of 627 students and 76 teachers, selected through stratified sampling based on region and school location (urban/rural).

3.3.1 Student Sample

A total of 291 students from lower secondary education participated (137 from Grade 8 and 154 from Grade 9), of whom 104 were male and 187 females. From upper secondary education, 336 students participated (175 from Grade 10 and 161 from Grade 11), including 146 males and 190 females. Geographically, 82 lower-secondary and 111 upper-secondary students came from rural schools, while 209 and 225 respectively came from urban schools. The regional distribution included 11 public schools: 4 in Tirana, 3 in Durrës, 2 in Vlora, and 2 in Shkodër.

3.3.2 Teacher Sample

A total of 76 history teachers from both educational cycles participated in the study. Of these, 12 were male and 64 females. Thirty-five teachers were from lower secondary schools, while forty-one taught in upper secondary schools. In terms of location, 28 teachers were from rural schools and 48 from urban schools. The selection was based on the principle of proportional representation by region and educational cycle to ensure consistent comparability with student data.

3.4 Research Instruments

Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was administered in March 2025 and consisted of four sections:

(1) historical knowledge and understanding of democracy; *(2)* civic competences and social participation; *(3)* teaching methods and the role of the teacher; *(4)* personal attitudes and civic values. The instrument included both closed-ended Likert-scale questions and open-ended reflective items.

Teacher Questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire, administered during the same period, also consisted of four sections:

(1) demographic information; *(2)* teaching approaches and content integration; *(3)* the role of the teacher and institutional support; *(4)* attitudes and personal evaluations.

4. Results

One of the questions common to both questionnaires aimed to assess participants' perceptions of the role of history teaching in developing civic competences and understanding democracy.

Group	Question	Measurement Scale (strongly agree)
Students	History lessons help me better understand civic competences and the principles of democracy.	52.4%
Teachers	Teaching history helps students better understand civic competences and the principles of democracy.	79.1%

Quantitative analysis shows that 52.4% of students strongly agree with this statement, while the percentage of teachers who share the same view is significantly higher, at 79.1%. This indicates a partial alignment in perceptions but also a noticeable difference between the two groups. Students, although they appreciate the role of history in understanding democracy, tend to view it primarily as conceptual knowledge tied to curricular content. In contrast, teachers perceive the teaching of history as a process that develops critical thinking and civic competences, contributing to a deeper understanding of democratic values. These differences reflect, as noted by Jerome et al. (2024), the need to strengthen the reflective dimension of history education by making it more closely connected to students' social and political experiences.

Another shared question in both questionnaires aimed to evaluate the level of open classroom climate, an important indicator of democratic civic education. The item was formulated as follows: Students: "My teacher encourages me to express my opinion on social issues." Teachers: "I encourage my students to express their opinions on social issues." Quantitative findings show that 67.8% of students agree and strongly agree with this statement, while the corresponding percentage for teachers is 82.0%. This suggests that both groups perceive the classroom climate as open to communication, although teachers rate this openness higher than students do, indicating a perception gap between teaching intentions and students' learning experiences.

Teachers report that they encourage the free expression of opinion as part of democratic teaching methods. Students, however, although aware of this encouragement, perceive it as more limited or as something that depends on the subject context and the classroom atmosphere. This result aligns with OECD (2020), which observes that in many countries, there is a discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the openness of the learning environment to debate and critical thinking.

An important aspect of integrating historical and civic education is the use of active methods such as debates, projects, and simulations, which promote participation,

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reflection, and the development of democratic competences (OECD, 2025; Council of Europe, 2022). To assess this dimension, a shared question was included in both questionnaires: Students: "In history lessons, methods such as debates, projects, and simulations are used." Teachers: "I regularly use active teaching methods (debates, projects, simulations)."

The results show that 57.9% of students agree and strongly agree with this statement, while 25.2% do not agree at all. In contrast, 62% of teachers state that they regularly use active methods, whereas 18.6% acknowledge that they do not use them often. These data suggest a moderate alignment between teachers' and students' perceptions, although the difference indicates that the practical implementation of active methods may be more limited than teachers report. While teachers emphasize that they include interactive strategies as part of their teaching practice, students perceive these methods as being used less frequently. This is especially evident in traditional history lessons, where the transmission of factual knowledge tends to dominate.

The table below provides a comparison between student and teacher responses to the questions:

- Students: "History teachers encourage me to …"
- Teachers**:** "I encourage my students to …"

Activities	Agree Strongly / Agree		Neutral / Disagree / Strongly Disagree	
	Pupils %	**Teachers%**	**Pupils %**	**Teachers%**
Participation in activities that promote human rights	**35.3**	**48.8**	**64.7**	*51.2*
Participation in activities that foster cooperation and respect for others	**39.0**	**42.2**	**61.0**	*57.8*
Participation in voluntary and community activities	**42.5**	**55.7**	**57.5**	*44.3*
Participation in school decision making	**28.4**	**33.4**	**71.6**	*66.6*
Participation in activities that encourage critical thinking and reflection on democratic values	**47.0**	**61.8**	**53.0**	*38.2*
Respect for gender equality	**51.6**	**58.2**	**48.4**	*41.8*
Respect for cultural diversity, inclusion, and equality	**58.5**	**79.2**	**41.5**	*20.8*

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Respect for different opinions during a debate	**63.3**	**78.0**	**33.7**	*22.0*
Use of digital resources in a safe and responsible manner	**57.7**	**74.1**	**42.3**	*25.9*

Only 35.3% of students fully agree that their teachers encourage them to participate in activities that promote human rights, compared to 48.8% of teachers who claim they do so. The gap is even more evident in encouraging participation in school decision-making (28.4% of students vs. 33.4% of teachers), indicating that students' involvement in democratic school processes remains limited. This finding aligns with the observations of the Council of Europe (2022)**,** which notes that schools in the Western Balkan region often maintain a traditional model of participation, emphasizing compliance rather than active engagement.

On the other hand, the results related to participation in cooperative and volunteer activities are higher (approximately 40%–55%), suggesting a positive tendency in developing social and collaborative competences, which constitute the foundation of democratic citizenship. However, participation in community-based activities outside the school environment is more limited, indicating the need for stronger connections between schools and local communities.

An encouraging indicator is the responsible use of digital resources (57.7% of students and 74.1% of teachers). This reflects ongoing efforts to integrate digital competences into teaching, in line with UNESCO (2024) and OECD (2025) recommendations on digital citizenship. Nevertheless, the 17% gap shows that students do not yet feel fully engaged in the way digital tools are used in the learning process, possibly due to limited access to technology or insufficient practical training.

To the question regarding the main challenge's teachers face in integrating civic competences into teaching, the participating teachers (48 from urban schools and 28 from rural schools) responded:

Challenges in teaching	Teachers in urban schools: number %		Teachers in rural schools: number %	
Lack of time	*33*	*68.75*	*15 53.57*	
Overloaded curriculum	*36*	*75.0*	*21*	*75.0*
Lack of didactic materials	*25*	*52.8*	*23*	*82.14*
Lack of professional training	*28*	*58.33*	*25*	*89.29*
Lack of support from the school administration / institution	*12*	*25.0*	*17*	*60.71*

Lack of cooperation from parents and the community	15	31.25	20	71.43
Lack of student motivation	11	22.92	15	53.57
Large classes / high number of students	41	85.42	2	7.14
Lack of digital / technological resources	10	20.83	26	92.86
Unclear curriculum or lack of clear guidelines	25	52.08	19	67.86

Teachers in rural schools report greater difficulties across almost all indicators, except for class size. The main challenges in urban areas remain curriculum overload and large classes. In contrast, in rural areas the primary challenges relate to the lack of digital resources, didactic materials, professional training, and institutional support.

5. Discussion

The results of the study conducted with 627 students and 76 history teachers from lower and upper secondary schools in Tirana, Durrës, Vlora, and Shkodër show that the integration of historical knowledge with civic competences is gradually developing within the Albanian education system. However, this process still faces significant challenges at both practical and institutional levels. The data analysis reveals that students and teachers hold different perceptions regarding how civic competences are developed in the classroom, particularly in relation to active participation, critical thinking, and respect for diversity.

The students involved in the study demonstrate a solid level of knowledge of basic concepts such as democracy, human rights, and civic engagement. However, many of them feel less encouraged to participate actively in activities related to school decision-making or community projects. Only 35% of students state that teachers encourage them to engage in activities that promote human rights, while participation in school decision-making remains limited at 28%. On the other hand, 63% of students agree that they are encouraged to respect different opinions in debates, and 58% emphasize respect for cultural diversity and inclusion. The responsible and safe use of digital resources is positively assessed by 57% of students, indicating a growing awareness of digital citizenship. These findings align with international studies such as Schulz et al. (2022) and OECD (2025), which highlight that student engagement in democratic learning environments significantly enhances civic participation skills.

From the teachers' perspective, the results show a more positive self-assessment regarding their role in promoting civic competences. Nearly 79% of teachers state that they encourage respect for cultural diversity and inclusion, while 74% emphasize the responsible use of digital resources for educational purposes. Additionally, 82% of teachers affirm that they encourage students to express their views on social issues,

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yet only 33% report involving students directly in school decision-making. These findings reflect a teaching model that seeks to foster civic competences through discussion and reflection. Yet the use of active and participatory methods remains limited due to time constraints, lack of resources, or insufficient institutional support. As highlighted by Hu and Huang (2019) and the European Parliament (2023), inadequate teacher training in civic education often affects teachers' confidence and their ability to use effective strategies that promote active student engagement.

A comparison of the data between students and teachers indicates a clear perception gap. Teachers perceive the civic climate of the school as more open and inclusive than students do. While teachers report high levels of encouragement for participation and reflection, students indicate that opportunities to freely express their opinions, engage in concrete community projects, or participate in school decision-making are still insufficient. This contrast reflects what the Council of Europe (2022) describes as a "democracy learned but not lived," where civic knowledge is present in the curriculum, but the direct experience of practicing it remains limited. Nevertheless, the presence of values such as gender equality, respect for diversity, and inclusion positively assessed by the majority of participants suggests that there is a solid foundation for the further development of democratic competences.

In this context, one important issue that emerges is the need to improve teaching approaches through the use of active and interdisciplinary methods. History teaching should be developed through real-life experiences, using debates, simulations, community projects, and multi-perspective analysis of historical sources. This would enable students to better understand the connection between historical events and contemporary democratic values. In this regard, the inclusion of local, contemporary, and global topics can serve as a bridge between historical knowledge and civic practices.

Another significant finding relates to the need for continuous professional support for teachers. Professional training focused on the development of civic competences is a key factor in improving the quality of teaching. For this reason, it is recommended that educational institutions and the Ministry of Education develop dedicated training modules on civic education, based on OECD (2025) standards. These programs should include topics such as digital citizenship, managing a democratic classroom climate, integrating history into the development of civic values, and using participatory teaching methods.

Beyond teachers, the role of school institutions is essential in creating an environment that promotes active citizenship. Schools should develop student forums and joint projects with the local community to foster a sense of inclusion and responsibility. Strengthening the link between the school and the community through partnerships with civil society organizations and local or central institutions can help integrate civic education into concrete, real-world experiences. Such collaborations enable

students to become active participants in social change rather than passive learners of civic concepts.

The findings of this study show that pre-university education in Albania is progressing toward a more democratic and inclusive model of civic education, but this process requires reinforcement in several key areas. First, a stronger orientation toward active and reflective learning is needed, one that connects historical content with civic competences. Second, a consistent strategy for teacher professional training and institutional support is necessary for the implementation of contemporary teaching methods. Third, student participation in decision-making and community life must become part of the school culture. Only through the integration of these elements can a school be built that not only teaches citizenship but *lives* it every day. This aligns with the principles of the Council of Europe (2022) and the OECD Teaching Compass (2025), which view civic education as a lifelong process that shapes informed, critical, and active citizens.

The analysis of the findings indicates that one of the main reasons for the gap between civic knowledge and practical engagement is related to the institutional culture of the Albanian school system, which has historically been centralized and hierarchical. Within such a context, students tend to perceive democracy primarily as an object of study rather than as a lived daily practice. As emphasized by the Council of Europe (2022), democracy is not learned solely through the curriculum, but through direct experience in environments that provide students with a real voice and concrete responsibilities.

The study results further reveal that the lack of functional mechanisms for student participation in school decision-making (such as student councils, community projects, and public debates) limits the transformation of historical and civic knowledge into actionable civic skills. This situation reinforces what the ICCS (2022) describes as "democracy learned in theory but not experienced in practice."

The evidence also suggests that another key factor influencing the partial implementation of active teaching methods is related to teachers' professional preparation. Although teachers report positive attitudes toward civic education, these attitudes are not consistently translated into sustainable pedagogical practices. This mismatch is largely due to the focus of initial teacher education and continuous professional development in Albania on subject-specific content. As a result, limited emphasis is placed on interdisciplinary teaching approaches and on fostering students' civic and critical skills.

According to the OECD (2025), teachers require systematic support to develop competences related to democratic classroom management, learning through debate and project-based work, and the assessment of civic learning outcomes. In the absence of stable institutional and professional support, even highly motivated teachers tend to revert to traditional teaching approaches that prioritize the

transmission of factual knowledge, as these methods are perceived as safer and more manageable.

The findings should also be interpreted in light of the political and social legacy of the Albanian education system. As a society that has transitioned from an authoritarian regime to a relatively new democratic system, Albania continues to face challenges in building an active civic culture. Education has often reflected this unfinished transition by incorporating democratic principles into strategic documents without consistently ensuring the institutional conditions necessary for their effective implementation. In this regard, Drita and Kongoli (2022) observe that although democratic citizenship education is formally embedded in curricula and educational policies in Albania, a visible gap persists between declared objectives and classroom practices. This gap is largely attributed to insufficient teacher preparation and limited institutional support.

Educational policies have primarily focused on structural and curricular reforms, while the development of concrete experiences that foster active civic education has received less attention. This has created a mismatch between political discourse and school reality, leaving teachers and students without clear guidance and adequate resources to establish sustainable democratic practices. As argued by the European Parliament (2023), without a coherent approach that connects curriculum design, teacher training, and institutional culture, civic education risks remaining largely declarative.

Overall, the analyzed data suggest that improving the integration of history education with civic competences requires coordinated interventions at multiple levels. At the pedagogical level, a shift toward experiential learning is needed, where history functions as a tool for understanding contemporary civic dilemmas rather than solely as a narrative of the past. At the institutional level, schools must be empowered to create genuine spaces for student participation. At the policy level, civic education should be supported through concrete measures, adequate resources, and monitoring mechanisms.

6. Conclusions

The findings of the study show that the integration of historical knowledge with civic competences remains an evolving process in which students' and teachers' perceptions often do not fully align. While teachers view history education as a powerful tool for developing civic competences and understanding democracy, students perceive this impact as more limited and primarily conceptual. Moreover, the openness of classroom discussion is evaluated more positively by teachers than by students, indicating that pedagogical intentions do not always translate into concrete student experiences. Active teaching methods, although considered important, are not applied consistently in practice. Significant challenges persist, including a lack of resources, curriculum overload, insufficient specialized training, and marked disparities between rural and urban schools. Overall, the results confirm

the need for more coherent approaches and institutional support to strengthen civic education and to more effectively connect historical understanding with active democratic participation.

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