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Country Report

Civics and citizenship education in Estonia: policy design, normatives, and practices

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Keywords: curricula, citizenship education, citizenship normatives, teachers autonomy

Highlights:

- Estonian citizenship education has a clear and established curricula
- The bilingual education system is prominent and reproduces socio-economic and democratic citizenship inequality
- Teachers' autonomy is crucial

Purpose: The main aim of this article is to analyze Estonian civics and citizenship education. We focus on multi-level policy design and implementation, teachers' roles, and educational practices in the classroom. In order to achieve the aim, we analyzed the national curricula from the citizenship normative perspective, conducted interviews with teachers and students.

Findings: Our main findings are related to the controversies related to theory and practice - the overload of curricula and emphasis on knowledge means that teachers play a key role in implementing citizenship education in Estonia. We conclude by giving policy suggestions related to the curricula development and separately focusing on minority schools.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary societal diversity, depoliticization, and polarization mean significant challenges to the political community and, related to it, citizen political agency. Governments can balance this with a more elaborate citizenship education policy but this is not a straightforward endeavor. We approach citizenship education from a fairly broad perspective considering that every democratic state needs active citizens. Citizens need to have knowledge, skills, and values, which enable them to act as citizens in a democracy. In addition, citizens need to be political agents, who are able to value their opportunities and therefore reproduce democratic processes as such. We plan to elaborate on this by using Estonia as an example since Estonia is a good case for the study, having relatively developed curricula, a separate civics subject, and a rather well-organized school system.

The article studies Estonian civics and citizenship education with a key interest in which ways the civics curriculum and educational practice support the development of an active and responsible democratic citizen. This is discussed focusing on policy design and implementation, teacher autonomy and agency, and student experience. A previous report on Estonia (Haav, 2018) was based on a detailed analysis of textbooks and curricula, stating that the Estonian civic education system has some controversies: it has democratic ideals, but there isn't a sufficient focus on how to achieve it and the formation of active citizens is in the background. We plan to expand this discussion by bringing additional and alternative dimensions to the analysis.

First, we will describe the Estonian education system and its specific features, including a salient perspective of minorities. The Estonian education system has clear-cut curricula, but there are different languages of instruction (e.g Estonian and Russian). The results from PISA (Põder et al 2017; Täht et al 2018) and ICCS studies (Toots & Idnurm, 2018) show a clear gap between the educational achievements of Estonians and the Russophone community. In addition, we address this inequality from the perspective of citizenship education.

This is followed by outlining the formal institutional context, the national (framework) curriculum, and the overall composition of social science subjects in secondary schools. We give an overview of the content and follow with the analysis of the curricula by applying the normative citizenship approach (e.g liberal, communitarian, civic republican, and neoliberal (Delanty 2000; Lister and Pia 2008)) and contrast the ideals of this normative approach with the perceptions of an active citizen in a modern state.

Then we focus on the issues of the civics course in Estonia, like the curriculum content overload and lack of practical skills. In addition, we analyze the teacher practices by focusing on teachers' autonomy from the perspective of Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy. Teachers as front-line workers are implementing citizenship education with wide discretion in decisions and mediating the formal curricula and classroom practice. We focus on the autonomy of teachers and the positive and negative side effects of this approach.

Based on the above we will discuss the challenges of civics in terms of its content,

context, policy design, and implementation, as well as related to selected societal issues such as minorities and empowerment. We conclude by giving suggestions on how to improve the current civics and citizenship education in Estonia.

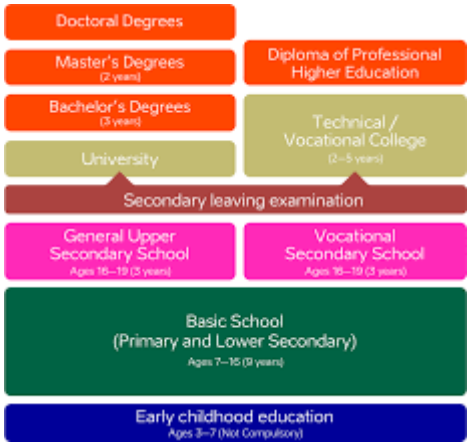
2 ESTONIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Estonian general education has deep Lutheran roots: numerous folk schools operated already in the 17th century. The first academic gymnasia were established in the 1630s and by the end of the 19th century, 96,7% of Estonia's population was literate. Local schoolmasters played a vital role in the national awakening of the 19th century, organizing local cultural associations, libraries and being active correspondents to the newspapers. There was a strong influence of the German Enlightenment and humanist tradition that has partly persisted to date (Ruus et al, 2008, Jakobson et al, 2019).

In 1991 Estonia regained its political independence from the Soviet Union and inherited a dysfunctional and largely separated society. During the 50 years of occupation, large-scale immigration took place, which resulted in one of the biggest demographic changes in the 20th century in the whole world. During this era, the share of minorities rose from 5% in 1939 up to 39% in 1989 (Tammaru & Kulu, 2013), turning Estonia from a mono-ethnic state into a multicultural state. The large-scale migration consisted of people from all over the Soviet Union and what united them was the common language - Russian. In addition, due to the policies in place by the regime, Estonian society was divided by the native language of residents. There were several areas, where the state language - Estonian - was a minority language and Russian language - the minority language - was dominant; in some places, more than 95% of people were not ethnic Estonians (Tammaru and Kulu, 2013). This separation based on language persists even today. This resulted in the main political cleavage in Estonia being based on the so-called "Russian question" - how to interpret the Soviet time legacy? By the end of the Soviet era, Estonian society was divided in socio-economic, cultural, and geographical terms based on the language of residents.

In the education sphere, this resulted in what we now call a "bilingual education system". In Estonia, the school system is state-funded, where the local government has an administrative, not a substantive role. Private schools as such play a marginal role in the formal education system. The general school (from grade 1 to grade 12, starting from 7 years) consists of compulsory basic school (grade 1-9), with the age limit for compulsory attendance being 16 years; and upper secondary school (grade 10 to grade 12). Around 75% of students attend high school, meaning that a quarter of them either continue in vocational education or don't continue their studies at all (Raid & Loite, 2021). The general regulative documents for the content, aims, values, etc. of education in schools are the national curricula, one for the basic schools and another one for the upper secondary schools. The national curricula also state the topics of the classes, compulsory classes, and listed elective courses.

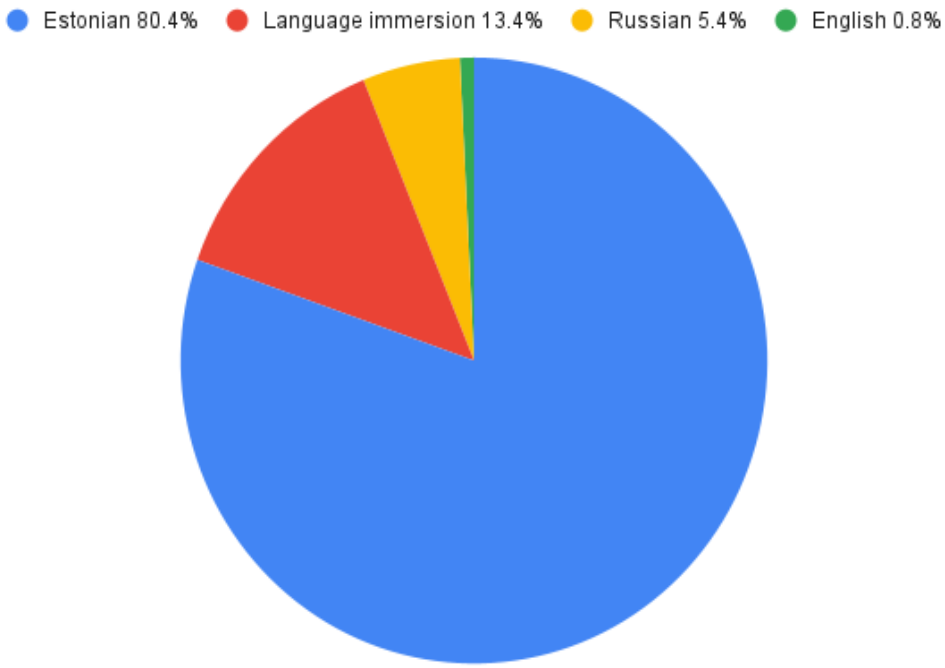
Figure 1. Estonian education system (Education in Estonia)



It is important to note that all schools follow the same national curricula, but the local governments can choose the instruction language of schools. To be clear, preschool and basic schools can be in any language, this can be decided by the local governments, the main choice is between Estonian language school, Russian language school, or Estonian language immersion school ("keelekümblus" in Estonian). The latter means that all subjects are taught in two languages simultaneously.

In upper secondary school, it is possible to study either fully in the Estonian language, or there is a choice to study at least 60% of courses, including civic courses, in Estonian. Around 13% of schools and 25% of pupils study in Russian-language schools - either in the Russian schools or immersive language schools (Kallas, 2018), whilst the Russophone minority is around 33% of the Estonian population.

Figure 2. Source: Haridussilm.ee, compiled by authors.

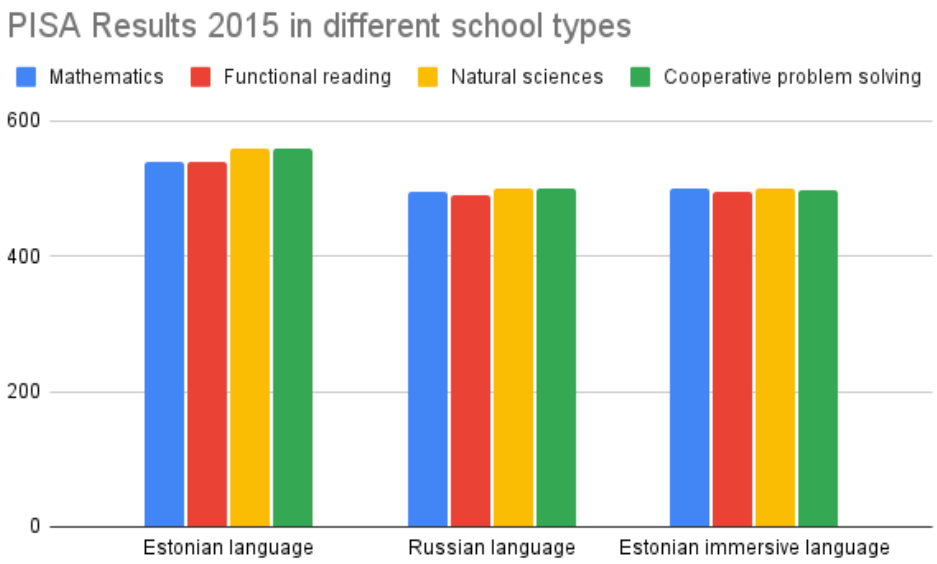


Parents have the choice to choose the school for their children and while it might seem like a minority-friendly option - being able to learn difficult subjects and topics in their native language, it may elicit serious problems relating to the minority groups' future academic and socio-economic well-being. On the most abstract level, this kind of separated school system reproduces already existing inequalities in society (Lindemann, 2013; Vetik et al 2021). There is around 15-20% of socio-economic inequality in Estonia, favoring the titular nation (Mägi et al 2021).

The bilingual education system reduces the chances of minority community children to continue their education in the higher education system since students are not able to learn the state language at a sufficient level (Haridus-ja teadusministeerium (Ministry of Education and Science), 2021) since the higher education system in Estonia is only in Estonian. This directly affects their future prospects in the labor market, since similarly to other developed countries, also in Estonia, there is a direct correlation between education level and income (Leppik 2017; Leppik 2016; Meres 2013). In addition, contacts between different language communities in Estonia are quite weak (Mägi et al, 2021), meaning that in addition to separation in the education sphere, the students don't communicate with other ethnic groups during their leisure time.

The current education system manifests its inequalities also at the academic level. For example, if we look at PISA studies, the difference between Russian and Estonian language schools is about 30 points, at the same time the difference of 39 points is equated to one year difference in schooling (Põder et al 2017). This difference has been throughout all the latest PISA studies (2006, 2009, 2012, 2015) and there are no significant differences between Russian language schools and Estonian immersive schools (Täht et al 2018). At the same time, Estonian results in PISA in general, are one of the highest in the world.

Figure 3. Source: Compiled by authors, source Täht et al 2018.



In addition to differences in academic inequality, ICCS studies (Toots 2011, Toots and Idnurm 2018) show that students from Estonian language schools know more about politics, different societal topics, but also about issues like democracy and civil rights. The same division applies also to the teachers. For example, about half of the teachers in Estonian schools think it is important to develop knowledge about social, political, and public institutions, whilst in Russian language schools, the number of teachers who agree with this statement is just 11% (ibid). This shows that difference is not only in the level of knowledge of students but also in the values of Russian language school teachers, which as we later show, influences directly the values of students. Also, children in Russian language schools know less about societal issues and their civic participation is lower (Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021).

It is important to note that the current bilingual education system has been a subject of debate on a political level since Estonia regained independence. Because of various political reasons, it has not happened before. Current coalition, starting from July 2022, has plans to implement a fully Estonian education system starting from 2024, the results of this reform are currently impossible to analyze and predict. Nevertheless, while Estonia has a very good education system, the current bilingual education system remains one of the weakest aspects of this.

Related to this directly, is the aspect of democratic citizenship in general. Studies (e.g Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021; Kalev & Kunitsõn 2020) show that the common bilingual education system reproduces the inequality in terms of common democratic citizenship, meaning that their participation as active citizens in a democratic state in the future is more challenging, bringing further division between the communities. This is in accordance with what Carretero, Haste & Bermudez (2016) point out: when opportunities for civic engagement are not evenly distributed, some students may decide to civically disengage. Such a bilingual education system may thus contribute to systemic disengagement from active citizenship and place a large part of the population at a disadvantage.

To sum up, the Estonian state has a mandatory basic school system and a voluntary, but highly attended secondary school system. Estonian students' academic knowledge is among the top in the world, but one of the weak points is the differences related to the language of instruction. Based on the language of instruction, students achieve a lower level of knowledge not only in mathematics, natural sciences, reading, or problem-solving skills but also in areas related to civics studies, including values and skills. While this approach, where the local governments can choose the language of instruction in basic schools, might be in the short-term useful for the minority groups, it has some serious disadvantages in the long term in terms of socio-economic inequality and common democratic citizenship.

3 CIVICS AND OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCE COURSES IN ESTONIA

The core document that regulates the studies in basic schools and upper secondary schools is called the national curriculum in Estonia (National Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools and National Curriculum for Basic Schools). The national curricula starts by elaborating what are the core values, learning and educational objectives, general competencies, and so on. In general, both curricula are quite similar, but the upper secondary school curriculum is more nuanced and demanding, as expected. Civics is one of the subjects in the social subjects area, social study also integrates civics topics at the first school level.[1]

The national curriculum for upper secondary starts with some basic values - humanistic and societal, followed by some more general humanistic and moral claims, stressing also active citizenship. Social studies are one of the six subject fields and the general aim of them is to develop students' social competencies: e.g syllabus declares that a citizen is a member of democratic society who interacts with the institutions of society on the basis of his or her interest and opportunities.[2] The courses in civics can be divided into three categories: (1) compulsory courses, (2) framework curriculum listed electives, and (3) other electives. The compulsory courses are civics and history. History is the main social subject in terms of a number of classes. (Estonia, 2011)

The civics course (In Estonian: “ühiskonnaõpetus”, literally translated to society study) has been a mainstay in Estonian general education. There had been a course on civics (“kodanikuõpetus”, citizen study) in independent Estonia between the world wars. In the Soviet era, the functionally comparable course was Fundamentals of Soviet state and law. The decline of Soviet rule brought with it the transformation of the content of social subjects, first as making use of the increasing freedom for the teachers to focus on what they deemed relevant and then as systematizing attempts such as the unofficial first social studies programmes in 1992-93 (Oja 2017). The new national curriculum of 1996 already formally included the civics course.

The early versions of civics courses focused mainly on regulations and institutions (National Curriculum 1996). Subsequently, the course obtained a stronger politics, governance, society and economy emphasis (see Oja 2017 for more detail). The share of law has diminished, but the focus on political institutions and processes has maintained their role. Overall, as could be seen e.g. from the IEA's Citizenship Education Survey (especially 1999, but also 2009, 2016 and 2022), there has been a clear trend of the transformation of teaching from Soviet ideology and regime compliance towards democracy.

The current curriculum was developed in 2008-2010 with minor adjustments in 2014. Civics is a compulsory course both in basic and upper secondary national curricula. In the upper secondary school, there are two mandatory courses: Governance of democratic

[1] We like to thank the review for this addition.

[2] We like to to thank the review for this addition.

society and citizen participation, and Economy and world politics (National Curriculum 2011). The first one introduces different institutions in Estonia and in the world, but it has a rather limited connection between the citizen and the state. Learning outcomes describe an active citizen, but the course outline is more focused on factual knowledge, which does not facilitate the role of an active citizen. The second course introduces the economic aspects in general terms and how the international system functions.

In the civics syllabus, the main emphasis is on the rights and duties of citizens, but they do not treat the citizens as an active subjects in a democratic society. The syllabus covers four different area topics and 14 more concrete topics, but only two of them can be related directly to the perception of citizens as active subjects in society. Most topics deal with a piece of factual knowledge and focus on different issues, like society, politics, economy, and international relations. This kind of approach leaves the active democratic citizenship role rather passive, future grown-up citizens are seen more as passive, rather than active actors in society. (Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021)

The listed electives in the upper secondary school are the following: General history – history of the world: civilizations outside Europe; General history – History of the USA and European countries; Psychology; Family Studies, Human and law; Globalizing world; Introduction to philosophical thought; Contemporary philosophical questions. The emphases can be seen from the course titles, however, not all of the students take these courses, they are not compulsory

But what do civics courses consist of? First of all, civics is heavily overloaded with topics, as will be elaborated on soon, so a more elaborate development of citizen competencies can take place via the other unlisted electives. These are for the school to select and they vary widely depending on the school's capacities. A sufficient range needs to be offered by the school so the student can choose in practice. To bring some examples - some of these electives are school-based, e.g. there is an elective on democracy, politics, and governance in Paide Upper Secondary School. Others are developed with a broader appeal in mind, e.g. the elective on European Union studies that were developed with national/EU support.

Some elective courses are promoted by the government or its branches. For example, one of the courses In social studies is the National Defense Training (“riigikaitseõpetus” in Estonian) and Internal Defense Training (“sisekaitseõpetus” in Estonian), which have been enjoying considerate support from the state in the last decade. Also, the electives on entrepreneurship have received substantial funding. Several municipalities support courses related to local history and knowledge. Thus, in practice, defense and entrepreneurship are nationally promoted while democratic citizenship is dependent on the initiative and resources of the school, competing with other courses based on local history or religious issues, etc.

To an extent, the development of citizen competencies is also supported by the voluntary sector. The Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations (NENO) has developed a program, called community practice, where upper secondary schools students can

participate in local organizations' activities and develop their practical competencies. Since the launch of the program in 2013, around 10% of Estonian public schools and up to 3000 students have participated in the program. There are also diverse community initiatives, international student exchange programs, school student councils, youth councils in local governments supported by diverse NGOs. In addition, the cooperation of the Estonian History and Civic Teachers Association with MONDO, and the importance of the subject is indicated by the existence of subject olympiads, which take place every two years, are organized by Estonian History and Civic Teachers´ Association and funded by the Ministry of Education and Research[3].

These programs mostly promote interpersonal competencies which are one aspect of democratic citizenship.

4 NORMATIVE APPROACHES TO CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

For democratic citizenship, the normative diversity of the concept is of key relevance. There are different views on the so-called good democratic citizen, and this has implications for the design and implementation of the content of civics. Political theorists usually distinguish between three normative approaches to citizenship: liberal, republican, and communitarian (e.g. Delanty 2000; Lister, Pia 2008; Blatter 2011; Kalev, Sinivee 2017; Jakobson et al 2019), to which we add the neo-liberal perspective.

The key aspects of citizen education are knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Heater 2004, p 343). Knowledge is related to facts, interpretation, and personal role. Attitudes are related to self-understanding, respect for others, and values. Skills are related to intellect and judgment, communication, and action. Democratic citizen agency is necessarily based on relevant knowledge. But knowledge is just the first step: in order to have real-life ability and impact, citizens need to have an integral understanding of their role and strategies in reproducing democracy, and the practical skills and experiences in enacting citizenship. Accordingly, citizenship education needs to move beyond knowledge and empower students as citizens also in terms of attitudes and skills.

The liberal understanding of citizenship sets the emphasis on citizens' rights and the ability to use these rights to further one's goals both in the private and, if need be, also in the public sphere (Schuck, 2002). This is well reflected in Marshall's (1992) understanding that modern citizenship entails (at least) three types of rights: civil (e.g. personal freedom, protection of private property), political (e.g. right to vote, organize politically, voice political opinions) and social (e.g. right to education or basic social welfare, creating the basis for effectively using one's political rights). A liberal citizen is envisioned as moderate, pluralist, and emphatic towards others (Heater 1999). People are not obliged to exercise these rights, but moral persons tend to do so (Macedo 1990). The Council of Europe (2010) Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education is closely related to this perspective.

[3] We are grateful for Reviewer 1 for this addition.

The republican understanding, here relevant as civic republicanism (see e.g. Peterson 2011) envisions the role of a citizen as primarily political and depending on practical enactment. A citizen has not only rights but also obligations to politically participate and further the common good in the public domain (Dagger 2002). The position and freedom of a citizen are seen as based on the practical exercise of the status. Hence, a republican citizen ought to be active and know how to use their political rights, and be knowledgeable about politics, constitutional institutions, etc., which would enable them to effectively participate in the political process. This does not necessarily imply the unity of citizens in language and culture but can be based on democratic or constitutional patriotism (e.g. Habermas 1992; Heater 1999).

The communitarian understanding of citizenship also emphasizes the importance of active participation and citizens' duties over rights. Here the key rationale is the boundedness of an individual in his or her community. Thus, communitarians do not necessarily value the role of the state as highly as republicans (although many do), and rather, the key emphasis is on the citizen's shared identity with other community members. Routines, rituals, and traditions are of importance. Often a shared cultural or ethnic identity has an important role as a value basis (Bauböck 1998). National communitarianism is the most relevant practical manifestation of the communitarian perspective.

In recent decades a neoliberal understanding of citizenship has gained prominence. While broadly based on the neoclassical economic doctrine it has developed into a perspective of bureaucratically planning and managing society, including citizen roles (see e.g. Newman, Clarke 2009). Contrary to political participation emphasized by the democratic citizenship normative, neoliberalism views citizens as mostly privately engaged people, entrepreneurs, consumers, or providers of services, who have a narrowly defined residual role in political decision making, complemented by participating in the service development process as feedback givers. Instead of seeing fellow citizens as members of a democratic community of fate, the neoliberal normative defines individuals primarily as market actors making rational deals with one another, however in the framework planned and maintained by the public authorities or arm's length institutions (Davies 2014). Here, one key emphasis is on self-sufficiency, skills, and entrepreneurialism, and another in adopting a functional role for economy and governance as an instrumental system.

Table 1. Source: Jakobson et al 2019

	National communitarian	Civic republican	Liberal democratic	Neoliberal
Knowledge	National cultural and historical knowledge	Basics of the political and institutional system	Legal system with a focus on civil, political and social rights	Legal, social and entrepreneurial capacities
Attitudes	National patriotism, cultural and social harmony	Constitutional patriotism, civic-mindedness, responsibility	Personal development in a civilized manner, human dignity and rights, openness	Self-efficacy, competitiveness, co-operation, flexibility, conforming to prescribed roles
Skills	Not emphasized (language, manners)	Political meaning-making and participation skills	How to use the rights, possibly also critical analysis	Legal tips, market agency, (social) entrepreneurialism

Notwithstanding their differences, all these understandings include a perspective on active citizenship. As already the name indicates some agency or active role is envisaged for citizens but in rather different ways. The conception of civic activism fits well with the republican understanding that emphasizes citizen political agency, and with an Aristotle-inspired communitarian understanding of contributing to the political community. But there is also the liberal understanding of active citizenship in its many forms: the more classical liberal good citizen participating in the social contract, the more left-leaning participatory emancipationist, and the neoliberal emphasis on self-efficacy reducing the burden of government.

A more systematic and broader discussion of active citizenship by Bee (2017) distinguishes between individual and collective layers of civic and political engagement and participation. As an example, an individual civic engagement may start with paying attention to news media and develop into political engagement by paying attention to political issues in news media. Similarly, collective civic engagement may start with belonging to a group with a societal focus and develop into a political focus in case the group has some political agenda. Participation refers to a more active role and may be enacted individually e.g. by donating money, voting in elections, or handing out political leaflets. Collective civic participation may be in contributing to local community activities

and becoming political by being a member of a political organization or participating in a demonstration. We will address the issue of normative perspectives in Estonian citizenship education and the controversy it presents in the next subchapter.

4 MAIN ISSUES IN CIVICS COURSES AND CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

The civics curriculum development has been ongoing since Estonian re-independence. As pointed out above, different content areas have been cumulatively added to their different redactions. As Oja (2017) describes this process from the point of view of curriculum developers, the main goal of lower secondary level civics was to assure basic knowledge of society and basic social skills in the context of one's community, the secondary level civics curriculum aimed to assure knowledge of political institutions and its constitutional order, and on the upper secondary level, it sought to provide an understanding of the world as an intertwined whole, both in terms of economic, social and political processes. Yet in 2011 and 2014, changes to the curriculum were made and several topics were included, with added emphasis on citizen identity, tolerance, societal cohesion, active citizenship, as well as more knowledge of the society (ibid). This resulted in a learning process where, from lower middle school to upper secondary school, students are faced with highly diverse information with different emphases on different school levels.

Our previous study (Kalev & Kunitsõn, 2020) indicated discrepancies between the broad aims and objectives of the national curriculum, and the learning outcomes of the civics subject outline annexed to the curriculum. While the broader aims and objectives emphasized personal development toward democratic citizen agency, the subject outline focused on numerous knowledge-bound outcomes, often at a very abstract level (societal stratification, economic system, etc.). The Estonian civics course syllabi contain elements of democratic citizenship and all the citizenship normatives are somewhat represented but do not present a balanced and systematic strategy remaining eclectic and partly controversial.

In 2021 a thorough mixed-methods analysis of the existing civics curricula was carried out by Ulla (2021), where all educational goals and learning outcomes in the civics curriculum (grades 6 to upper secondary school) were deduced into separate units of meaning, quantified, and coded based on their main normative content, as well as their declarative versus procedural nature, to see what kind of citizenship the state curriculum promotes.

The meaning units across the learning objectives and outcomes of the civics curricula from grade 6 to the gymnasium were derived according to the following principles: firstly, if throughout a single learning outcome semicolons had been used as a syntactic means of designating separate ideas (goals) throughout one objective (or goal); and secondly, if the same sentence unit included conceptually or qualitatively different aims. For example „knows and values human- and citizen rights" would have been separated into four meaning units, as to „know" designates the knowledge aspect of learning outcomes and to „value" designates the attitude aspect of the learning outcomes, which need qualitatively

different approaches both, for achieving, as well as retrieval. Furthermore, human rights are universal, whereas citizen rights context specific and conceptually distinct categories of basic rights. Those kinds of distinctions were necessary for the clarity of the analysis, yet also help illuminate the complex character of apparently unambiguous learning goals and outcomes in the curriculum, indicating how one learning goal can have several conceptual or qualitative subdivisions. After the meaning units had been extracted, a theoretical coding frame was used for theory-driven coding, both, with normative (see table 2) and declarative-procedural categories (see table 3). It must be noted that few meaning units could be coded as both – declarative and procedural for assuming both, knowledge, and skills (e.g., "preserves community traditions" expects the procedural action of preserving traditions, as well as the declarative knowledge of what those traditions are). (Ulla, 2021)

From this analysis, two main types of significant controversies emerged. Firstly – the state curriculum includes a highly diverse array of normative emphases, from liberal, civic republican, communitarian, and neoliberal value systems, yet it very often outlines one type of normative content among the educational goals and a different normative content within the stated learning objectives on that same school level, not aligning the one with another. As an example: over one-third of the gymnasium level educational goals have a liberal focus but only one-fifth of the educational outcomes converge foremost with the liberal norms, whereas only 15 percent of the educational goals relate to the civic republican ideal, yet one-third of the true learning outcomes concentrate on (mostly knowledge related to) civic republican values (see Table 2). Such a mismatch in the aimed content and goals is present on all levels and aspects of the curriculum and leaves an impression that when topics were added to different syllabi, it was done more arbitrarily than systematically.

Table 2. The share of meaning units coded, based on main normative content focus

Level	Educational objective/ learning outcome [Number of meaning units coded]	Liberal share, %	Civic republican share, %	Communitarian share, %	Neoliberal share, %
6th-grade	Educational objectives II school level [47]	36	19	32	13
	Learning outcomes [42]	17	19	41	24

9th grade	Educational objectives (secondary school) [23]	22	22	48	9
	Educational objectives III school level [42]	17	41	21	21
	Learning outcomes [86]	20	36	20	24
Upper secondary school	Educational objectives [33]	36	15	30	18
	Learning outcomes (course general) [40]	20	33	18	30
	Learning outcomes (topic based) [97]	20	30	25	26
Average		22,4	28,5	26,8	22,2

In addition, there are several different levels of learning goals and learning objectives within the curriculum, for example, there are three kinds of educational objectives listed for the secondary level, which should, but do not collide based on their normative focus. The latter would make a teacher wonder, which of those goals to choose to base their teaching on. Even though there are also example working plans provided for teachers on the curriculum website, those are arranged according to the curriculum, and therefore reflect the same internal controversies.

The second significant discrepancy lies in the fact, that the state curriculum declares its goal as shaping active responsible citizens and the educational objectives often describe procedural goals related to that (for example issues related to practical skill development, e.g “can offer help in solving problems” or “can find information for one’s goals and interests”). But on the learning outcome level, there is a very high declarative share to be obtained, with 74% of all lower middle school learning outcomes, 81% of all secondary level learning outcomes, and 70% of all upper secondary school outcomes being declarative in nature (theoretical or attitudinal, e.g., “names most common religions in Estonia” or “knows what are travel documents and personal identification”, see table 3). (Ulla, 2021)

Table 3. The share of meaning units in the civics course curricula, coded as declarative, procedural or both (Ulla, 2021)

Level	Educational objective/ learning outcome [Number of meaning units coded]	Declarative share, %/**n**	Procedural share, %/**n**	Both share, %/**n**
6th grade	Educational objectives II school level [47]	62/**29**	28/**13**	11/**5**
	Learning outcomes (6th grade) [42]	74/**31**	7/**3**	19/**8**
9th grade	Educational objectives (secondary school) [23]	48/**11**	17/**4**	35/**8**
	Educational objectives III school level [42]	64/**27**	17/7	19/**8**
	Learning outcomes [86]	81/**70**	7/**6**	12/**10**
Upper secondary school	Educational objectives [33]	49/**16**	27/**9**	24/**8**
	Learning outcomes (course general) [40]	48/**19**	35/**14**	18/7
	Learning outcomes (topic-based) [97]	70/**68**	22/**21**	8/**8**
Average		66,1/**271**	18,8/77	15,1/**62**

As the learning outcome level of the curriculum is crammed with declarative knowledge, different bits and pieces of information that students should know and acknowledge, it is highly questionable whether there is any real-time left to practice any true citizenship skills.

Furthermore, from lower middle school to upper secondary level, there were 42 to 97 separate learning outcomes coded, to be acquired throughout each course, leaving between 0,72 to 0,83 lessons per one meaning unit to be obtained. Concept development in thinking is a slow and thorough process, requiring deep information processing and practice (Gelman & Lucaricello, 2002), and cannot happen in the amount of time allocated for the meaning units in the curriculum today.

In addition, there is a missing link between the teachers' autonomy and agency. Broadly

speaking, autonomy refers to the individual capacity to be able to make his or her own choices, by the agency we are referring to taking an active role in the teaching practices. In Estonia, the autonomy of teachers is extensive, which is usually considered to be a positive aspect. On the other hand, this requires a lot of effort from teachers - their responsibility in designing the course content is significant and therefore their role is salient (both in practice and according to the national standards for teacher qualification)

Both the Estonian key universities of Tartu and Tallinn have developed special MA level programs for history and civics teachers. As the number of civics classes is limited it has been deemed more functional to integrate the respective teacher training with the broader field of history (that is also defined as a social subject in general education) and possibly some other elective social subjects. These programs have been reformed several times and at least in recent years the courses supporting competences democratic citizenship (e.g. democracy, politics and civic agency) have been missing (see Oja 2017, Jakobson et al 2019). Thus the teachers need to develop such competences themselves based on whatever sources they can find. We will address the respective practical experiences and understandings.

To conclude, teachers are working with on the one hand overwhelmed and on the other hand internally discrepant educational documents, which, to be fair, is quite an impossible task to carry out at the classroom level. Especially due to the incoherence between normative goals and declarative-procedural aims identified in the different parts of the same document. This could suggest that teachers go through the material faster than it would be pedagogically recommended for deep learning to happen or make autonomous choices in the learning process. It could also be expected that teachers would prefer to align their teaching process to the learning outcomes (rather than educational objectives), as those are more (early middle school) or less (upper secondary school) assessed by state officials through high-stakes testing. So what do teachers do in this case? We will explore the perspective of teachers and students in the next part.

5 PRACTICES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

The role of teachers is crucial since they need to translate the top-down set objectives and aims into real-life educational content and design the courses accordingly. We are broadly based on the idea of teachers as front-line bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010). This means that teachers have a clear two-sided agency: they have the autonomy to implement their plans and since the curricula are overloaded, their choice (e.g agency) will significantly impact what students learn, as well as it requires serious effort from teachers to choose what to teach and what to leave out.

In previous studies (Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021; Kalev & Kunitsõn, 2020), we have conducted 10 semi-structured qualitative interviews with selected experienced teachers in Estonia, who teach civics classes in various regions and instruction languages in schools. First, we developed a draft framework for the interview which was piloted and further developed based on this experience. We proceeded with interviews up to the saturation of the

sample, which resulted in 10 interviews. Before interviews, all teachers received outline of high school curricula and civics subject themes. We analyzed the interviews with content analysis. We present some illustrations of teaching practices in this chapter, followed by the learning experience of students. We used participatory action research called Forum Theatre (Boal 1992, 2000) which aims to empower marginalized groups via theatrical activity, which can be later utilized as citizens in contemporary democratic society. In addition, we conducted focus group interviews with the students after the participatory action research, mentioned above.

5.1 Teaching practices

As expected, teachers were broadly familiar with the syllabus and national curriculum. Teachers did not approach the listed values, knowledge, and skills there as strict rules, rather they used them to cherry-pick different parts of it. This can be seen as a manifestation of teachers' autonomy, which on the one hand is a positive development since teachers are free to focus on the issues they seem to regard as the most important ones (e.g based on student feedback, socio-economic context, or any other events happening in society), but at the same time, this means that the quality of teaching might be even more dependent on with the teacher motivation and personal biases.

> “Let’s be honest, the national curriculum is a good document, to be based on, but life, the classroom, people - they are actually making the final result”.

> “Well, the state tries to do something through the syllabi, but I’ll be honest, this curriculum does not do anything without the teacher, the teacher can do what they want with the students and the syllabus can’t stop them”.

One of our findings - that the current curricula are more based on the aspect of knowledge, leaving skills and attitudes in the background, is also reflected by the teachers. When we asked them about the curricula, they mainly focused on different concepts, terms, not on practices, which is crucial for active citizenship.

> “You focus on giving the knowledge to students and when it is done, then you discover that the school year is over and oops! You didn’t actually manage to do something else”

> “Knowledge, well, knowledge is, emh, this is what I need to teach, based on very concrete topics in curricula”

This aspect is related to the above-mentioned issue of the overload of the curricula, but also to various different aspects, like the complexity of this issue and the role of the formal education system as a whole. Teachers emphasize that their role is to prepare students for a life in society, but it was unclear how exactly it would be achieved. Here we see once again the double-edge of Estonian curricula and the autonomy of teachers. What we mean by this is that teachers have wide autonomy in carrying out the curricula, but at the same

time, their personalized role is crucial - what they pick or not, how they approach the classes, etc.

> "Yes, I know that 20 minutes is not enough to discuss, there are different questions and then the question is - do I deal with how Estonian Parliament is structured, or do I just forget about it and address it in the next class? Yeah, that is possible, but if during the next class there is a new current politics theme, for example, closing borders, or how does the European Union function in crisis? And once again, how do I do it all?"

> "I teach in a small rural school, and here it is extremely evident, how easy and simple it is to be a good role model and influence students"

Teachers emphasized that they want to use and do use different interactive methods, like group work, discussions, practical exercises, etc. The main aim was the inclusion of students and making the class more interesting. The key idea that this is how the learning happens - by being an active citizen - was not emphasized to a large extent.

> "Yes, I feel like, I need more time and space, so we could do community practice, this kind of longer project, but then we have the national curriculum, I can't, I don't have like time to do it..."

5.2 Learning practices

After experiencing an interactive method of Forum Theatre, students reflected upon it and it can be concluded that they enjoyed the process of deliberation, discussion, hearing other people's opinions. They mentioned that this kind of approach made some broader topics more concrete and easier to understand.

> "It is, like, usual, that you sit, look at something and go home."

> "Well, it was visual, and if teachers just talk in front of the classroom, well, we are used to seeing that picture, but now it was a real situation that we saw and we'll remember them better"

> "And actually if you make things practical, you will remember them. I mean, you can learn this theory in class, but it does not work like that."

When we asked pupils to reflect on civics class, they said that this class is very abstract and based on knowledge, so a similar approach was mirrored by teachers. They could not state what kind of skills and values they got from the classes, but they were optimistic about citizens having an active role in society.

So how do Estonian civics classes teachers support democratic citizenship? On the one hand, there is a regulation, which leaves quite a lot of room for teachers' autonomy, which can be viewed positively - teachers can take into consideration the current context, but at the same time, it might put too much pressure on individual teachers. On the other hand, the curricula are unclear about how to reach certain aims - especially active democratic

citizenship and the majority of the topics are addressed on a superficial knowledge level. The role of teachers as front-line bureaucrats is crucial. Some authors have pointed out that civics teachers may often even not feel confident in teaching political literacy, political institutions, or economy and often bring their personal conceptions of citizenship and own educational political agendas to their teaching (Keating, 2010; Weinberg and Flinders, 2018).

Students see civics as something abstract, a knowledge-based course that does not actually prepare them for a life of a citizen in a democratic state. This issue is confirmed by ICCS studies and something that is worth looking into more - how could more practical exercises be integrated into the formal education system?

6. CONCLUSION

Citizenship education can be a powerful tool for governments to prepare citizens for political, societal, and economic life (e.g. Crick 1998; Stoker et al 2012; Westheimer 2015; Stoker 2016). Thus, besides other perspectives, citizenship education is an area of public policy that can be systematically developed and implemented, and citizenship education can be analyzed as policy design and implementation (e.g. Jennings 1996; Spillane 2004; Lester et al 2017).

As a policy area, citizenship education is much based on human interaction, so it is not possible to develop it purely technocratically, rigidly, and top-down. The front-line implementers, i.e. schools and especially teachers usually have a key role in citizenship education policy. At the same time, there are goals and objectives that provide the basis for its normative, pedagogic and organizational orientation and the assessment of outcomes is the basis for content development. Thus, there is an interplay of various levels in citizenship education: the national frames for the subject, teachers' interpretations of their agency, and student's perception of their educational experience.

In Estonia, as in other countries, the organization of citizenship education has multiple levels: from broad national guidance and control to school-level additional frames to the crucial teacher agency to the student reflection and feedback. Teachers are in a key position in terms of developing the content and creating the educational practice, integrating the top-down frameworks and pupils' everyday feedback into personalized practical strategies.

In general, the Estonian education system has clear and established curricula, where the content of civics and, more broadly, social subjects are defined. The issue of the bilingual education system is still prominent and reproduces the socio-economic and democratic citizenship inequality. While the frames are rather clear there is a gap in the curriculum between the goals and objectives and the knowledge-oriented course content (Haav, 2018; Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021). As we also saw the curriculum is overloaded thus strengthening the emphasis on knowledge.

Teachers are the people who mediate this in practice, thus having the role of street-level

or front-line bureaucrats who have relatively high degrees of discretion and relative autonomy from organizational authority. The position of street-level bureaucrats regularly permits them to make policy with respect to significant aspects of their interactions with citizens (Lipsky 2010, 13).

This leads to the question of how they are prepared for the role in terms of content development and a proactive teacher as a lead role. A recent study (Jakobson et al 2019) informs that while the Estonian teacher training curricula support educational leadership and didactics preparing for education for democracy and citizenship is largely unaddressed in the curriculum. This is also practically reflected in empirically analyzing the educational practice and the understandings of the teachers and students (Kunitsõn & Kalev, 2021). Not all of the wide discretion seems intended or planned for and teachers would need better preparation to successfully operate in this context.

In sum, the general use of the standard civics and social science education as a policy instrument is rather clearly outlined in the Estonian case. The national curricula and syllabus form a basis for implementation in classes. The more implementation-related aspects are not elaborated on by national authorities and are left to the discretion of the practitioners. One could conceive of a more elaborate system but the basic frame for achieving the objectives of the policy is in place.

However, although the aims are nationally defined and developed stepwise up to the civics subject outline, the logical chain is incomplete. To an extent, the teachers can compensate for the fact that this is not fully backed by teacher training and is largely based on individual considerations and agency. At the same time, reaching policy results needs sufficiently elaborate policies and implementation structures.

Our main policy suggestions are as follows. First, national authorities need to better define the ambition of what to achieve and in which way, and adjust the objectives, course outline, and volume accordingly. This is related to the overload of the course. Secondly, teacher training needs to emphasize practical skills so they can be transferred to the students, in order for them to reach the aims of active citizens in a democratic state. This is closely related to the first aspect and on the heavy emphasis of the knowledge factor. Thirdly, schools with Russian language instruction need a more focused policy approach. The inequalities that are being reproduced there might have serious consequences, not only in terms of socio-economic inequalities but also in terms of democratic citizenship.

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