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Difficulties in the Classroom

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1. Introduction

In today's world, educators face many challenges in regard to teaching. From dealing with social media to comforting parental worries, teachers have to manage it all. Especially history teachers are challenged. They are not only tasked to convey facts and timelines, but also have to navigate other aspects such as the promotion of critical thinking, dealing with sensitive topics and making sure to provide students with multiple perspectives. In a politicized time like today, political instability and extremism across many parts of the world are increasing. This increases the importance on the role history teachers face in society more than ever before.

This report is based on a qualitative study conducted by students from the Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. The study was executed in 2025, between the months February and June. The study was accompanied and commissioned by EuroClio and was part of the ThinkTank project of Radboud University. Fifteen interviews were conducted with history teachers affiliated with EuroClio or its member organisations. The teachers were selected to reflect a range of educational contexts and national backgrounds. The following countries were selected: Hungary, France, and the United States. We will elaborate on our reasoning for these countries in the methodology. The interviews investigated teachers' day-to-day experiences and their teaching practices and reflected on both challenges and opportunities within history education in a classroom setting. All interviews were transcribed, systematically coded and thematically analysed in order to identify common patterns and insights across different contexts.

The collaboration aimed to provide Euroclio with deeper insights into the needs and everyday experiences of practicing history teachers, in order to better guide future decisions and initiatives. The central research question of the study was: "What do teachers find difficult or easy to teach?"

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Problems Teachers Face

Teachers today face increasingly complex challenges that challenge their ability to teach effectively. Among the most pressing are the rise of conspiracy theories in schools and the structural limitations that restrict teaching practices. Using Sarah Haderbache's (2018) Une politique publique sous tension and Manuela Carvalho's (2017) Strategies for Inclusion – Needs Assessment we can better understand the pressure on educators: content-related difficulties in the classroom and broader institutional obstacles.

Haderbache (2018) researched French classrooms and found conspiracy theories have become more of an issue in the twenty-first century. The 9/11 attacks were shown to be a turning point for the popularity of conspiracy theories. After those attacks, students have increasingly doubted subjects ranging from the holocaust to government programs to immigration policies (Haderbache, 2018, p. 170). Haderbache (2018) found two main risks to conspiracy theories in the classroom: relativisation and stigmatization. With relativisation, students no longer take the teacher seriously, hampering learning and authority. An increase in stigmatization results in students being treated unfairly based on personal backgrounds. She found the reasons for students falling for conspiracy theories are threefold (Haderbache , 2018, p. 172-173): conspiracies are easier to understand than reality; many students lack critical thinking skills; and students may feel left out of society and their groups. In France, the government is trying to combat conspiracy theories by creating more civil education courses and increasing structured resources to help teachers (Haderbache, 2018, p. 175).

While Haderbache (2018) focuses on ideological challenges, Carvalho (2017) focuses on practical matters. Her study in five European countries (2015–2018) shows that teachers often lack training outside their previous studies. On average, teachers reported no training for four years. Though often mandatory, nearly 50% said it took place during work hours, and 22% had to cover costs themselves (Carvalho, 2017, p. 12). Teachers face problems regarding lack of resources, time, and flexibility. The biggest difficulties were limited funds for tools, lack of time to create individualized lessons, and little room in the curriculum for students' specific interests (Carvalho, 2017, p. 13). These reflect larger problems with resource distribution, school organization, and educational policies (Carvalho, 2017, p. 14). Teachers also report challenges teaching nuanced content – multiperspectivity, evidence-based sources, or intercultural topics (Carvalho, 2017, p. 14). These are necessary to help students resist conspiracy theories, yet without support, teachers can't integrate these effectively. For example, it's hard to find evidence-based sources when teachers haven't had training in online research.

In summary, teachers today face a twofold struggle: the ideological and political presence of conspiracy thinking, and systemic obstacles like outdated training, lack of resources, and rigid curricula. As Haderbache (2018) and Carvalho (2017) show, solving these issues requires not just classroom-level strategies, but long-term institutional commitment and reform.

2.2. Pedagogical approaches

While teaching history, teachers may not only experience difficulties with the subject matter but also have struggles from a pedagogical point of view or in dealing with parents. One of the most important things teachers have to ensure is that equity is achieved in classrooms where students have different backgrounds. In Teaching Teachers to Build Equitable Classrooms (2006), Rachel Lotan presents a method to guide teachers into adopting a systemic approach to restructure the classroom and maintain an equitable environment. Classrooms become more heterogeneous, and teachers no longer have the time and ways to differentiate for every student what they might need to stay interested. Lotan explains that teachers should understand unequal participation among students. Elizabeth Cohen (1994) used sociological theories to describe how students expected to be more capable intellectually or socially tend to engage more in class and hold greater influence, reinforcing their standing. In contrast, students perceived as less capable participate less and are doubted for their competence. Cohen (1994) proposed two strategies to weaken this link between participation and status: Multiple-Ability Orientation and Assigning Competence to Low Status Students as mentioned by Lotan (2006, p. 7).

The first strategy, Multiple-Ability Orientation, challenges narrow definitions of intelligence by designing tasks using a broad range of intellectual abilities. Teachers publicly acknowledge various competencies – such as empathizing, interpreting, organizing, and hypothesizing—as essential. This communicates that no student has all abilities, but everyone contributes something valuable. This redefinition of "smartness" is most impactful when introduced through complex learning tasks (Lotan, 2006, p. 7). For the second strategy, Assigning Competence to Low Status Students, the teacher identifies moments when lower status students demonstrate capabilities. The teacher then points out to them and the group what they did well and how it helped the group. This can change the student's self-expectations and those of the group. It encourages students to count on and rely on each other. This doesn't mean low-status students should get simplified tasks, as that would reinforce negative assumptions (Lotan, 2006, p. 10).

In a paper by Florence Lojacono, the role of the teacher is examined in an era of technological development. Traditional methods saw the teacher as a figure of authority over powerless students. Today, there's a shift to a student-centered approach. Lojacono describes the evolution of the teacher's role (Lojacono, 2009, p. 33–34). According to the CEFR (2001) and Lojacono (2009, p), a good teacher is a facilitator, supervisor, coordinator, advisor, and examiner - which might be too much or not enough (Lojacono, 2009, p. 34). The authoritative figure of the teacher is diminished. Authority used to come from being obeyed and linked to discipline, but now the teacher disappears and is reborn with different roles. With the rise of technology, the teacher is no longer the sole provider of knowledge. There is now parity – not of knowledge, but of access to knowledge. This raises the question: what is the teacher's role if not a provider of knowledge? (Lojacono, 2009, p. 37). Lojacono posits that the teacher's role is now to create a favourable climate essential to learning. Learners must want to learn, otherwise, teaching – regardless of expertise – is ineffective. The teacher is now the one who knows how to pass on knowledge, not necessarily the one who has it. New technologies help

provide the "extra" necessary for teaching, as the main task of knowledge delivery is taken away (Lojacono, 2009, p. 38).

2.3. Dealing with parents

Mikhail Mogutov and Bjorn Wansink (2023) wrote a guide for teachers on dealing with parents when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. This guide, written on behalf of Euroclio, defines controversial issues as having multiple viewpoints, creating strong feelings. The guide presents three approaches: the whole-school approach, the teacher-centered approach, and conflict resolution strategies. The first two are preventive, while the third deals with conflict directly (Mogutov & Wansink, 2023, p. 5).

In the whole-school approach, the teacher is part of a support structure where conflict situations are discussed in meetings. Teachers should feel safe, which increases confidence. Schools should ensure teachers know their rights and how to protect themselves. Parental engagement is key. When parents are involved, they become more aware of the curriculum. Regular communication helps. Schools should also clearly share values, goals, and principles to keep parents informed about school operations (Mogutov & Wansink, 2023, p. 6–8).

In the teacher-centered approach, teachers build relationships with parents before controversial issues arise. Familiarity reduces conflict. Teachers should learn about parents' social and cultural backgrounds to improve communication. Informing parents about upcoming controversial content and being transparent about methods and materials can help concerns be addressed early (Mogutov & Wansink, 2023, p. 13–14).

Conflict resolution strategies are a last resort when a parent comes to the school. These tips work to facilitate proper dialogue. Teachers should find common ground, use "I" statements, and show empathy. A mediator can help if tensions are too high (Mogutov & Wansink, 2023, p. 16–18). This is an overview of strategies teachers can use to handle setbacks from parents. There is no one-size-fits-all, and each situation may differ.

2.4. Sources and Teaching Methods for History

History teaching in schools goes beyond the recitation of dates and facts. It is a way to establish a connection between the past and the present, to form critical thinking, and to gain an understanding of the development of the world. In modern history lessons, it is no longer just what students learn that matters, but also how they understand it. Different teaching methods – from reading a textbook to watching films, from analysing primary sources to project work – help students not only memorize information, but also to empathize with historical circumstances, raise questions, and sometimes – even question what is considered true. That effective history-teaching requires a balance between sources and narrative, between theory and practice, and between cognitive skill and internal engagement has long been argued: in his

article The Problems of Sources and Methods in History Teaching, Wesley (1916) noted that textbooks alone offer a limited, often biased view of history. He instead emphasised the value of primary sources—like letters, legal documents, contemporary accounts—to encourage independent thinking (p. 329–341). Yet he also acknowledged that these sources should merely complement, not replace, traditional teaching. Furthermore, Wesley critiqued overreliance on psychological theory in teacher training, ultimately arguing that effective history-teaching requires a balance between the presentation of facts and their interpretation, between the analysis of sources and flexibility in teaching methods (p. 329–341). A similar idea is pursued by Lewy et al. (1974, p. 73-80), who, in their study Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Studying History, noticed that the traditional emphasis on memorising chronology was shifting toward inquiry-based learning. The study revealed strong teacher support for these methods, though students did not always find them engaging. Interestingly, the more advanced students developed a greater appreciation for history.

This transformation is perfectly revealed in the publication Teaching History to Face the World Today, in which Gómez Carrasco et al. (2023) examine contemporary history teaching practices and propose specific methodological solutions. They suggest looking at the history lesson as a small research laboratory in which students act as mini-historians – examining documents, posing hypotheses, analyzing narratives, and even participating in field research. Strategies such as problem-based learning, historical empathy, and experiential learning (e.g., museum visits or service-based learning) help to transcend the classroom and create an emotionally engaging connection with the past. In terms of digital tools, virtual and augmented reality become not only a motivational tool, but also a way to "embody" the context of the past – to see, experience, and empathize. Lewy et al. (1974, p. 73-80) note that emotional engagement does not necessarily arise by itself – it requires carefully selected activities that combine knowledge with experience.

Finally, although transformations in history teaching are often enthusiastically received by teachers, their impact on students can depend on many factors – including academic preparation, personal interest, and emotional safety in the classroom. Therefore, Gómez Carrasco's book (2023) stresses that even the most advanced methodology will not be effective without a conscious relationship with the student, their experiences, and their learning style.

2.5. Multiperspectivity and its influence on history education

Aside from staying objective and addressing sensitive topics, history teachers also face the challenge to avoid biased views on history. History is distinctive and historical traditions, experiences and stories differ per country and culture. The last decade there has been criticism regarding the western view on history. Gruzinski (2025) emphasises that condemnation and ethnocentrism can reveal shortcomings in Western views of history. It can also be a reluctance to revisit and update our understanding of the past. History teachers often face a difficult challenge: while historians construct narratives about the past, it's not always clear how reliable or objective those stories are (Levishon, 2010). It creates a dilemma in which history teachers

not only must decide which historical narrative to present, but also how to address the underlying truth claims and perspectives.

Eurocentrism and western narrative are terms that are often used to describe the western view on history education. For example, in the United States, U.S history is a requirement while world- and ancient history are optional (Kim & Hunter, 2021). Nagre (2022) found that British history school textbooks relied on outdated stereotypes when portraying others in global and historical contexts. Research on Portuguese history textbooks also showed that the narrative centres around power-evasive historical discourse that normalizes key processes such as colonialism, slavery, and racism (Araujo & Maeso, 2012). However, in recent decades, many historians have begun to critically question the deep ties between their discipline and the nation-state (Sachsenmaier, 2006).

Multiperspectivity is a solution to change the eurocentrism and western narrative in history education. The aim of multiperspectivity is to create a more pluralistic, inclusive, and comprehensive approach compared to traditional, often mono-cultural, history education (Stradling, 2003). According to Stradling (2003), history education can have a more multiperspective view when including a broader source range, integrating more diverse context and providing more opportunities to explore contrasting accounts of historical events for students. Research that studied how history education in post-conflict societies can either promote reconciliation or deepen divisions showed that working with experts from different countries created power dynamics, particularly between Western and non-Western contributors (Rowan & Wansink, 2025). Other research, by Kropman et al. (2022), investigated the degree to which students adopt multiple perspectives when reading a history textbook with high versus low levels of multiperspectivity. The research showed that students who read the high-multiperspectivity text demonstrated a greater integration of perspectives in their summaries. Moreover, the students who read the high-multiperspectivity text presented key actors in a more nuanced way.

However, including multiperspectivity in history education also poses some challenges and difficulties for history teachers. Initiatives promoting multiperspectivity can lead to backlash from nationalistic, political and/or public actors. This can lead to controversies and create tension on history teachers (Wolfrum, 2016). Research also showed that integrating multiple perspectives was challenging and that critical evaluation and historical thinking are crucial when applying multiperspectivity (Rowan & Wansink, 2025).

3. Methodology

To find an answer to our main questions "What do teachers find difficult or easy to teach?" and "How do history teachers experience and perceive teaching history in times of extremism?", we conducted online interviews with teachers who teach history to students between twelve and fifteen years old and teachers who have been teaching at a high school or an equivalent. These teachers teach in France, Hungary and the United States of America. These countries were selected because they give a good first impression of how teachers feel about certain subjects. With these countries, there is representation from western Europe (France), eastern Europe (Hungary) and America (the U.S.). The three different countries have also been dealing with different aspects that might have made teaching more difficult in the last couple of years. In France, there has been a lot more radicalization, as is shown by Berretima (2024). In 2020 a history teacher, Samuel Paty, was beheaded because he showed pictures in class of the prophet Mohammed. Hungary is a country that has become very right-wing in the last few years. Following this, teachers have started to feel more restrictions, as was also reported by several teachers during the interviews. In addition, Hungary has seen an influx of Ukrainian refugees following the war between Ukraine and Russia, but has also been notoriously pro-Putin (Dudlák, 2025), which might cause some interesting situations teachers can find themselves in. For the U.S., there was some debate about whether to include them, since it is not a European country and EuroClio is a European organization. However, we believe they are important if we want to give a first broad overview and EuroClio does have an American member association, namely the American Historical Assocation. With the recent political developments in the U.S., we also believe American teachers could offer some valuable insights regarding difficulties teaching in a radicalizing climate.

For the interviews, we compiled a list of seventeen questions. The full list can be found in Annex 1. For the questions, we focused on two main themes. The first theme was difficulties teachers might experience within their engagement with students and focused on potential external pressures they might face. For the second theme, we focused on controversial histories. We asked teachers about their experiences with topics that might be considered controversial, in the present or in the past. These interviews are then transcribed and coded. For the analysis, we decided to focus on the following themes: current controversial issues, the importance of administrative support regarding parental concerns, governmental concerns, objectivity (from the teacher and from students), and social media. These themes emerged from the interview data as being the most relevantand they will be further worked out in the analysis and results.

We ended up interviewing three teachers from France, six teachers from Hungary and six teachers from the U.S. This gives us a total sample size of fifteen teachers. Of those fifteen teachers, seven were female and eight were male. Their ages ranged from early twenties to late fifties. The experience ranged from one year to over thirty years. Eleven of the teachers taught another course next to history. This was most often a language (English, Hungarian) or another subject within the social sciences.

4. Analysis

Across the fifteen interviews we conducted recurring themes were identified, with the following particularly prominent: objectivity in teaching, the influence of social media, parental concerns, controversial issues and governmental concerns. As these themes consistently emerged in our conversations, we chose to explore them in more detail and reflect key tensions teachers face.

4.1. Objectivity

Twelve of the fifteen interviewees commented on the difficulty of remaining objective while teaching history, with six teachers from the United States, three from Hungary, and three from France expressing this concern. In particular, teachers in the United States emphasized the difficulty of remaining objective, as certain history topics are so ethically sensitive that it limits neutrality. The topic of objectivity ranged from how not to (unconsciously) bring personal views to a topic to adopting an objective teaching strategy.

Multiple teachers acknowledged the challenges of maintaining objectivity when teaching sensitive historical topics in such a way that it balances factual information and emotional sensitivity. For example, a Hungarian teacher described the difficulty of remaining factual and objective when discussing the sensitive topic of the Holocaust:

"Sometimes it's difficult. I try to use different sources and we can compare different sources. And sometimes I just don't want to be objective. I mean, if I teach, for example, a difficult period, for example, Holocaust, I just don't want to be objective because I think students can understand more off this period and how people suffer if I'm not objective, if I can't hide my feelings. Sometimes I don't want to hide my opinion on topics."

Another difficulty that emerged from the interviews was the relation between objectivity and teachers' own personal- or political views. Some teachers expressed the difficulty of staying objective while sometimes also wanting to express their own views. Others expressed that opinions and personal views will always be part of teaching. A French teacher stated:

"Honestly, of course your opinions come across, in the discussion, in the selection of materials, in all kinds of things."

Furthermore, several teachers highlighted the importance of using diverse sources and multiple perspectives to approach objectivity. Especially French and American teachers emphasised that objectivity is about presenting more than a single 'truth'. A teacher from the United States emphasized the amount of time spent finding diverse sources to remain as objective as possible. Stating:

"I spend a great deal of time gathering resources for the kids to engage with that ensure that there is some level of objectivity as much as possible."

However, some teachers noted that certain topics are inherently difficult to teach in an objective way. As an American teacher stated:

"You know, you do it in a non-biased way, but there are also some things that (...) there's not a way to stay biased. There's being, equal sided as far as like looking at things. But then there's also certain things that we talk about that are (...) in a, in a democracy, there are certain things that are just, you know, you don't applaud the Nazis."

4.2. Social media

Of the fifteen teachers that were interviewed, fourteen of them reported that social media has a noticeable effect on their teaching and the atmosphere in the classroom at the moment. This ranged from students having a very short attention span due to TikTok and comparable platforms where they can watch short ten second videos to students bringing misinformation into the classroom.

Of those fourteen teachers, eight teachers explicitly stated that students consciously or unconsciously brought in misinformation due to social media. Most of the time, this was because of a low level of media literacy. Only two teachers - both from the U.S. - mentioned that they are working on improving media literacy among students. There was no explicit question about media literacy asked in the interview, so it is not possible to state that other countries and other teachers do not work on media literacy. It is, however, something that is becoming more and more relevant internationally. As an American teacher stated:

"[W]e know that it's not accurate or there's a spin to it. And then [there's the] question, 'Where did you get that information? Did you hear it in the news?' And usually it's from a meme. It's like, really? That's your source?"

Furthermore, students also brought in fake news regarding current controversial events, which might not have come from a meme but from the fact the students are very entrenched in their own online bubble, as a Hungarian teacher stated.

Regarding the reduced attention span, four teachers mentioned it. They are mainly worried because they feel like the students can not concentrate as well as they should. The teachers are noticing that students are not able to keep up with the work they are supposed to do and should be doing. A Hungarian teacher said the following regarding curriculum changes in Hungary and how he thought his students would cope with it:

"[T]here was an aim in 2022 to change the amount of topics. So the number of topics is lower now. [...] but if you compare the number of the pages in the textbook, you can see that the topics are longer. And it's not good for the kids because they are socialized on TikTok and reels and short videos. So they can't focus and read about fifteen pages each in a history textbook."

4.3. Parental concerns

Parental concerns are a common challenge for history teachers, though their nature and intensity can vary. Some teachers report minimal interference, especially when parents are disengaged with education. In these cases, parents generally care little unless exam performance is at stake. When asked whether parents tend to stay uninvolved, one Hungarian teacher said the following:

"Yes, until their students perform well at the Matura exams. That is basically the most important thing: until it benefits your students you can do anything in teaching, but if not, then you might get in trouble from the parents' side".

In some places, parents seem indifferent to what happens in the classroom at all, with one Hungarian teacher stating that:

"Most of the parents, they don't really want anything from education. They just want their kids to be somewhere during the day. And what happens there, they don't really care".

Other teachers, however, face a more active kind of involvement, especially when it comes to controversial topics. An American teacher, for instance, recalled how a parent objected to a particular book being included in a student's reading list, after which the issue escalated to senior school staff. Another described the influence of an activist group, Moms for Liberty, who, while not formally banning books, have a strong presence in local education by encouraging parents to monitor and report teachers for 'controversial' content. Because of this, backing from school administration is necessary, though in the U.S. it is often lacking. Teachers in these situations sometimes feel they have to be careful, worrying that if a student takes a topic home and misrepresents it, it could lead to serious consequences for the school. A Hungarian teacher said:

"It think there is a chance that if I start to talk about such issues and one student takes it home—and they have a different point of view—then the school would be in big trouble.'' These risks of misinformation are heightened by the growing digital availability of materials; though sharing resources online can make lessons more accessible, it also opens teachers up to more criticism due to the lack of classroom context.

There are some teachers who have never faced serious parental backlash, either because of strong support from school leadership, or simply because parents are content as long as students are safe and passing exams. Some teachers even described good relationships with parents who trust their professionalism and understand that difficult topics are part of learning history. Still, some do face concerns of various types, that range from political and cultural pressures to tensions arising from familial expectations. A French teacher, for instance, explained how students questioned lessons based on stories told by their grandparents:

"I hear what they say: 'My grandfather told me it was not that'. I use what they say, and I explain, for example, that your grandfather was here, and your grandfather didn't see other things. […] Students are very interested. They want to understand, and they learn". Thus, rather than seeing this as a problem, the moment was used to spark discussion and debunk the myths.

Furthermore, many emphasised that clear communication with parents can reduce conflict. An American teacher stated:

"I have tried to combat some of that [parental concerns] by being truthful and communicating early on with parents".

When disagreements do arise, teachers generally try to engage in calm discussion rather than confrontation, and, while some parents initially disagree, these conversations usually end in mutual understanding.

4.4. Controversial topics in the classroom

All fifteen teachers interviewed commented in one way or another on the impact of controversial topics on teaching as well as student behavior in the classroom. Their answers suggest that topics such as migration, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Treaty of Trianon or abortion rights – very often cause tension between students or between teachers and students. French teachers stressed that talking about world events is essential for students to understand their environment and develop critical thinking. One teacher, teaching at an international school, shared an incident where a discussion about refugees caused a strong emotional reaction in the classroom:

"I was doing my class about migration and refugees, [...], and I have a student who was like, [...], 'yes, but they choose to leave so they don't have to be here. It was their choice. They are not suffering for it.' And that was really violent. I have UK, Korean, Ukrainian teenagers in my class. So for them it was truly violent."

French teachers also spoke about some students bringing radical or even hateful views from the internet, and sometimes even extremist views:

"One time we had a Neo-Nazi in one of our classes. We did a report and by digging we discovered that he was publishing on his account of, [...], of the school. So yes, it was quite problematic."

Hungarian teachers were more likely to emphasize the historical context and how the Treaty of Trianon remains a highly sensitive topic, as was stated by one of the teachers:

"[T]here is one very kind of delicate topic in Hungary and that is Trianon, of course, say when we lost two-thirds of the territory of the country."

Another teacher echoed that by adding:

"[A]s we talk about the Trianon and the post-First World War era, that is really sensitive and we seem to have some problems with the change of regime now."

However, it is important to emphasize that most Hungarian teachers see these topics as an opportunity to promote critical thinking and develop an understanding of history. Some even claim that when discussing controversial topics, there are no major confrontations in the classroom. This may be because such topics are presented as a natural part of historical inquiry.

Lastly, in the U.S., the focus lies on social context, especially when it comes to ethnic minorities, religion, gender identity, or migration. One teacher from Florida spoke of students from Puerto Rico and Venezuela who feel they constantly have to justify their status or affiliation to a community:

"They often feel threatened and have to protect themselves."

One American teacher emphasized the importance of providing sources from different political positions so that students can critically evaluate information:

"I will ensure that we have something that's from the left leaning. I'll have to try to have something that is from more of a moderate middle, and I'll have something from the right or right leaning or more conservative base. And then I may throw in several other [sources] that way, to ensure that it's not being driven into one perspective."

On the other hand, some teachers admitted that self-censorship does exist, especially when topics become too politicized or may cause negative reactions from parents or the school community:

"I've self-censored, […] [in] the political conversation, I've been very selective on when I try to make comparisons."

In summary, teachers in all three countries acknowledge the importance as well as existence of controversial topics, but the way in which they are presented and dealt with, strongly depends on the cultural context and the educational system.

4.5. Governmental concerns

Governmental concerns strongly shape how teachers approach their teaching. Because the level of governmental influence is strongly linked to each country's political structure and history, a proper discussion requires to distinguish between the individual nations.

As one teacher explained, since the introduction of the Program of National Cooperation in 2010, Hungary has shifted from a diverse selection of textbooks to a national curriculum with a strong focus on national history, identity and the revitalisation of national pride. Most interviewees have expressed dissatisfaction with this system, with one noting that the new textbooks are poorly constructed and have gone uncorrected for over a decade. He adds:

"They said that this is the real end of the post-communist era here in Hungary, with the new constitution and the new political system: they still have this neoliberal economic agenda with nationalist touch."

Many have reported a lack of autonomy, not only in selecting teaching materials, but also in determining how to teach them, as the state chooses the specific facts, timelines, historical figures, and concepts that students must learn. And yet, while the curriculum is strict on paper, the teachers find ways to work around its constraints:

"If you close the classroom door, you can do whatever," one explains, "the state says: you can teach whatever you want, but I won't give you support".

Thus, some resort to other ways of teaching, such as digital resources or parent-funded alternative material. The acceptability of such practices varies: where in some places they go unnoticed or are even reinforced by an open-minded administration, in others they face restrictions, with one teacher noting that a colleague was forced to stop using an unofficial textbook due to administrative pressure. Moreover, teachers are sometimes banned from discussing current political events, as addressing such topics carries the risk of influencing students' political opinions.

In the United States, history education is highly decentralised, with most decisions about curriculum and teaching determined at state and local levels rather than by the federal government. Each state sets its own standards and guidelines, and local school boards have considerable influence over the content and approach to the teaching of history. Generally speaking, as stated by an American teacher, a priority is to "expand patriotic pride and exceptionalism of the American system", especially regarding individual rights and the importance of active, informed citizenship. However, when it comes to controversial topics such as race and sexual orientation, there can be notable limitations. One teacher from Florida, for instance, talked about the existence of laws that restrict teaching subjects like critical race theory, especially when discussions have the potential to cause discomfort among students. To overcome this discomfort, progress has been made in recent decades by diversifying textbooks to include previously marginalised groups and offer different perspectives, yet this progress remains uneven across states. A teacher explained:

"There's definitely a shift from when I started in 1995 to today. Textbooks have improved in terms of being more balanced, and that's good."

Today, there is still an ongoing debate over who should have power over what is taught in history classes, as proved, for example, by federal moves to reduce the Department of Education's influence. One teacher voiced serious concerns about contemporary politics:

"We are also looking at the political spectrum in the United States. There's obviously a problem: you only have two parties."

In France, much like in Hungary, history education is guided by a national program that heavily emphasises French political history, sometimes to the detriment of other, international perspectives. Though teachers do retain some liberties within it, since the revision of the program in 2019 they have become more limited. Furthermore, the sheer volume of prescribed material often leaves teachers with little room for personal input. One teacher mentioned:

"We don't have time because national programs are big enough […] but I try a lot to change my examples and to have a lot of point of views and different places treated".

Because of the both the denseness and centralisation of the French national history curriculum, important subjects such as the Cold War are only briefly covered, while others—particularly more global or politically sensitive issues like genocides—are frequently excluded. Even subjects like French colonialism and decolonisation are underrepresented or even erased. Despite this, teachers try to maintain objectivity and accuracy in their teaching. Some, then, find more freedom in other ways, like extracurricular courses:

"We have a national program, but in the optional teachings, we are more free".

Some teachers claim, however, that this can sometimes lead to disagreement with political authorities when historical facts challenge the imposed national program. It is worth noting that teachers reported receiving limited training and lacked clear guidelines outside of exceptional circumstances, when administrations provided helpful materials and guidance. One teacher explained:

"They actually put out some really good materials straight after it [murder of Samuel Paty] happened. That was sent to schools, including to us, about some ways that we could discuss it with students''.

Thus, these three cases reveal differing models of teacher agency: where Hungarian and French teachers have to work with fixed national curricula with a limited amount of flexibility, their American counterparts possess more structural freedom but face more direct external pressures that threaten their autonomy.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

The results of the study provided relevant insights into the research questions "What do teacher find difficult or easy to teach?" and "How do history teachers experience and perceive teaching history in times of extremism?". The findings revealed that history teachers face multiple challenges in the classroom. The five main themes that emerged after coding the interviews were: the influence of social media, objectivity, controversial issues, parental and governmental concerns. Fourteen of the fifteenth interviewees reported that social media significantly affected classroom dynamics. Primarily the increase of misinformation due to low media literacy and the reduction of students' attention spans influenced the dynamics in the classroom. Maintaining objectivity when teaching history was named as a struggle by twelve of the interviewees. Furthermore, all of the teachers noted that controversial topics had a significant effect on the dynamics in the classroom, with approaches that differ per nation. Parental and governmental concerns also had a significant influence on history education. Seven of the fifteenth interviewees responded on parental concerns, with answers ranging from disengaged to highly involved parents. Additionally, fourteen of the fifteenth interviewees reported on governmental concerns. Governmental involvement differed per country, with responses ranging from complete restrictions to more moderate forms of limitation.

While the study offers relevant insights into challenges French, Hungarian and American history teachers face in the classroom, several limitations must be addressed. Firstly, time limited the study, narrowing the focus of the study solely on three nations and a total of fifteen interviews. Time constraints limited the span of the study making the findings less generalizable. The sample size was unevenly distributed across the three nations. This resulted in an underrepresentation of French teachers compared to those of Hungary and the United States. A more diverse and broader dataset might have revealed more and/or additional regional variations. A second practical challenge faced during the study was securing interview participants. The recruitment of valuable and meaningful history educators affiliated with the EuroClio network or through its member organizations proved time-consuming. A

considerable number of teachers did not respond or declined the interview invites. This lack of response might be due to a general reluctance among teachers to participate in interviews or a discomfort in expressing themselves in English. It might also be due to the fact that teachers are already very busy. This might have influenced the cohort of potential interviewees. Also, the participants recruited were on a voluntary basis. This could have warped the findings of the study towards a more politically- and socially engaged group of history educators resulting in a self-selection bias. Future research could benefit from expanding both the number of participants as well as a more diverse database- across more nations, school systems and educational levels. This to deepen the understanding of how history teachers across the globe experience and navigate challenges in the classroom. The avoidance of discussion can also prove to be meaningful and a good topic for future studies.

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Annex 1

Introductory questions

Can you tell me something about yourself?

How long have you been teaching?

What subjects and grade levels do you currently teach?

How many students are enrolled in your school and is your school diverse? (How diverse)

Difficulties in the classroom and engagement with students

How do you feel about teaching? (What do you get out of your job, specifically history)

Have you ever felt pressure (from school administration, students or parents) regarding how you present certain historical topics? Can you give us an example?

Have you feared repercussions from students and/or their friends or family, and in what way did you fear these repercussions?

Has this pressure and/or fear changed your way of teaching in the past few years? If so, how/why?

Have you encountered students bringing myths, misinformation (on social media), or conspiracy theories into the classroom? If yes, how do you handle this?

Do current political issues have an impact on your way of teaching or the atmosphere in your classroom? If yes, how?

Do you feel that history education in your country adequately prepares your students to understand modern-day issues and conflicts?

Controversial histories – which topics, which ways of teaching

On which historical topics do you focus at the moment in your classes/lessons?

How much input do you have in choosing the topics that will be discussed during the year?

Have there been any changes in your teaching program since you started teaching, could you tell me more about this?

Are there topics you personally find challenging to teach due to their complexity or sensitivity?

Are there certain perspectives on specific historical topics you would like to discuss more in class?

In what way do you teach controversial histories of your country's past?

When teaching historical topics that involve conflicting perspectives or sensitive issues, do you try to remain as objective as possible? If yes, how/examples? If not, why not/examples?

Are there specific themes or events where you find it particularly challenging to remain objective and not pick sides? (Do you ever feel compelled to take a stance on certain topics)

Do you adapt your teaching strategies when dealing with complex or sensitive historical topics? If yes, how? (When it might be hard or sensitive for students (because of their origin, their experiences))

Have you received any training or professional development that has helped you to teach difficult topics more effectively?

Can you share an example of a successful adaptation you've made in your classroom?

Has EuroClio provided resources or training to help you teach controversial or sensitive historical topics? If yes, how?

What kind of support do you wish you had to make teaching certain topics easier?

Could you suggest some improvements to EuroClio?

Do you have any other questions or remarks?