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The importance of historical facts and events for the history teacher

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Abstract

The technical system for teaching history has still not been sufficiently developed in our schools today. This involves a review of the content of history and social science education and an elucidation of its strategy. Upon studying the process of history instruction, a series of contradictions emerged, which led us to the choice of topic for our article. The subject of history assumes first and foremost the transfer of facts that have already been historically recorded, so we considered it necessary to focus on this process in particular. In order to reveal the objective significance of an event, it is often necessary to compare it to the times and another event that is relevant in terms of similarities in characteristics. The use of interdisciplinary connections during history lessons connects old and new historical facts and creates the conditions that allow new ones to be better understood, to comprehend the developing situation, encouraging the learners' creativity, critical and logical thinking.

Keywords: History, teaching, Armenia, reforms.

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1. Introduction

The reforms that have occurred in the area of school education in the Republic of Armenia over the last decade have led to the need for a radical review of the aims and objectives of the teaching of history in schools. The foundations of history education consist of national priority objectives that originate in the historical experience of Armenia and the Armenian people as well as the current situation and its perspectives, with a simultaneous consideration of global history and universal human values.

Along with radical changes in the content of history education, a need has arisen to clarify and provide greater variety in history teaching techniques, the organization of the learning process, assessment approaches to learning outcomes, and the formation of a technical teaching system, which we consider:

- A collection of the theoretically established didactic principles, methods and means for the process of teaching history, which allows one to fulfill the set educational objectives.
- A clear and scientific outline of the process of teaching history, with the development of the methods necessary for teaching, the solutions to organizational issues, clear teacher preparation, and the early determination of learner abilities.
- A structure of instruction by the history teacher where all the activities that occur are goal-oriented and sequential, originating with the didactic principles of teaching and leading to the established targets.
- A plan of the rules, aims, objectives, content, principles, methods, means, and forms practically applied during the history lesson, which allow for a high level of effectiveness.
- methods, means and forms that examine and reveal the personality of the learner involved in the process of teaching history, and allow an analysis and diagnosis of the stages in the pedagogical process.

The technical system for teaching history has still not been sufficiently developed in our schools today. This involves a review of the content of history and social science education and an elucidation of its strategy. Such an approach would facilitate comprehending the modern aims and objectives of history teaching and improving the methods used in history instruction. At present, there is a need to clarify the urgent issues faced by history education in schools, its specificities, conceptual approaches to teaching, and also to consider the methods of organization of history instruction, and the requirements that arise during modern lessons and raise its productivity.

These issues have been addressed in the theoretical and methodological works of A. Hovhannisyan (Hovhannisyan, Harutyunyan, & Khrimyan, 2006, p. 41), N. Hovhannisyan (Hovhannisyan & Geghamyan, 2016, p. 18), A. Manukyan (Manukyan, 2016, p. 62), A. Lerner (Lerner, 1982, p. 119), I. Berelkovsky (Berelkovsky & Pavlov, 2001, p. 33), and A., M. Korotkova (Korotkova, 1997, pp. 15-19).

Based on our experience of teaching and the concepts developed by the academics mentioned above, we consider it necessary

- To limit the constant use of only traditional methods in schools while the program is regularly updated.
- To prevent the use of the same methods being applied to teaching topics that differ from each other based on their nature and objectives.
- To harmoniously apply both traditional as well as modern, interactive methods and means which should be directed at satisfying the educational demands of learners.
- To take into account that pupils have different abilities, learning potential and needs, and, as a result, to apply differential teaching and demonstrate person-oriented approaches.

By studying and evaluating modern developments in the history teaching process in the school sector, we state that there is a contradiction

- Between the desire by learners to obtain knowledge of history and the didactic potential of the existing traditional, methodological system.
- Between the need for a new way of delivering the history lesson by the teacher and the potential of the traditional, methodological system in their arsenal.

We should also note that

- No attention is being paid to the teaching functions of interpreting systems in history, the cause and effect relationships between historical phenomena, rules and regulations, and the benchmark provisions that are involved in understanding them.
- There is no practical verification of the relevance or reliability of results when it comes to the benchmark didactic provisions related to the teaching process for some topics in history.
- Interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary connections are not sufficiently provided during the teaching process.
- From the standpoint of the worldview and upbringing of learners, the significance of the didactic principles used in the teaching process for one topic of the other are not justified.
- The main part of the didactic principles used during the process of teaching history is currently insufficient based on the modern requirements faced by didactics.

The existence of these contradictions led us to the choice of topic for our article, as well as the academic background that facilitates its study. And since the subject of history assumes first and foremost the transfer of facts that have already been historically recorded, we considered it necessary to focus on this process in particular.

The recording of facts is simply the tip of the iceberg of history. As V.G. Belinsky mentions, “The identification of facts is valuable only in that this is where ideas are concealed. Indeed, without ideas, it is rubbish for the brain and memory” (Belinski, 1941, p. 291).

Thus, a historian with a sharp mind is necessary to give theoretical and practical value to the facts. Moreover, a specialist with this ability uses universally accepted viewpoints to interpret the facts obtained, complementing them with his or her personal conclusions.

Historical facts can be historical reality (objectively true for everyone involved – both the one creating the information source as well as the researchers availing of it) – facts that have been obtained from the primary historical source. History suffers in the sense that it records only the tangible and visible events that can be registered through locations, years, and names. Any event cannot simply be limited by its chronological endpoints. The historian must address the facts and outline their possible, foreseeable and unforeseeable consequences. One should not simply emphasize the major significance of a historic event and draw a quick conclusion; it is necessary to reveal and analyze in detail the cause and effect relationship that exists between them.

Historical facts cannot be considered academic evidence until they have been subjected to detailed analysis and interpretation. However, even after that is done, they are changeable in nature and subject to further expansion.

Historical facts play a major role in the history process – some historical facts can find big resonance and disseminate broadly, but have no important role for the state and society. For example, on 26 January 1914, the Armenian Reform Package was signed between the Russians and the Turks. The package planned the implementation of a certain set of reforms in Western Armenia. One point of concern was that the document had no concept of an Armenian province or vilayet in the agreement; it was limited only to the name “Western Armenia.” The consolation was that this territory was to be

governed by foreign administrators. The dangerous thing was that the Turkish Government could relieve them of their duties at any time. The text in the agreement also spoke of land grabbed from the Armenians, but this was not in the context of returning them; rather, it was about the administrator's role in solving the disputes that had arisen as a result. And the solution would not be implemented without the agreement of the Turkish Government.

The Russo-Turkish agreement did not satisfy the Armenians' demands and did not meet their expectations but, unfortunately, even that faulty agreement was not implemented and was then condemned to oblivion.

There are historic facts and events that are as "significant" as they are "random." These include for example the organized self-defense battles waged by the Armenians of Western Armenia during the 1915 Armenian Genocide. After being driven out of Europe, the Turks had set themselves the task of creating a new homeland, which also engulfed Armenia. This political approach was also partially implemented during the First World War. And the motivating factors for this were present for Turkey. According to the Turks' perception, the Armenians had wedged themselves in the middle of the Muslim world and were aligned with the Russians, impeding the implementation of their pan-Turkish and pan-Islamic programs. The Turks believed that it was Russian support that had caused the international outcry over the Armenian Question, allowing the superpowers to interfere in Turkish internal affairs to their detriment on every occasion. The Armenians were waging a freedom struggle, which they had no right to do, thus causing the Turks inconvenience. The dark silhouette of the Genocide was rising over the historic destiny of the Armenian people (Karapetyan, 2003, p. 18). In some territories, the Armenian people displayed their centuries-old rebellious spirit against the policy of genocide planned and arranged by the Turkish Government and they attempted self-defense, effectively making a conscious choice favoring death.

Based on this historic fact, let us note that there are currently new technical approaches applied in history teaching, and the requirements towards the education of learners has also changed. From the point of view of ideology and theory, the methodology of history instruction notably possesses a certain variety in its approach to informing about the historic past. The transition is noticeable from the lecture-debate methods of the past to techniques aiming at the development of national and universal values as well as national consciousness. In this sense, "the historian is always in the kind of situation in which a chemist would be if he were to only be informed about his experiments from his own laboratory work. The historian is forced to benefit from considerably baseless testimonials, which would have been insufficient for any other scientist" (Langua & Senyobos, 1899, p. 52). When dealing with facts, the historian must establish their interrelationship. Each fact must be considered relative to its "weight," significance, importance, spatiality and so on. The significance of the facts is often increased or decreased by the historian, with the name of the fact taking front stage but the essence of it being subjected to change each time – in such cases, the historian must avoid making a mistake and must choose a relevant method that is effective at that time. As L. Gyumilyov correctly noted, "it is pointless to study the Himalayas using a microscope" (Gyumilyov, 2016, p. 77).

Experience shows that there are no facts without an underlying cause. Many of the reasons are found on the surface, while others are hidden, but the evidence for many facts does appear even centuries later.

The Armenian Genocide perpetrated by the Turks in 1915 is an example of this. The centuries-old policy of periodically organizing massacres against the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire rose to the level of state involvement in the final decade of the 19th century and the task was set to programmatically annihilate the Armenian people and deprive them of their homeland. A minimum of 300,000 Armenians fell victim to the Hamidian massacres of 1893-1897; 2600 towns and villages were destroyed, around 100,000 Armenians from 559 locations were forcibly converted to Islam, 323 Armenian churches were transformed into mosques, around 500,000 Armenian women and elderly lost their breadwinners. The Armenians nevertheless drew some blood as well, not allowing themselves to be completely annihilated (Devrikyan, 2005, p. 6).

As the basis for the implementation of the policy of genocide, the Young Turk Congress of 1911 made a special decision to clarify the policies that were to be put in place against the various ethnic groups living in the Ottoman Empire. They declared the following points -

- The Ottoman Empire must be Muslim in nature.
- Muslim customs and traditions must be given special provisions.
- Non-muslim nations and people living in the territory of Turkey must be denied the right to form organizations (Devrikyan, 2005, p. 6).

In the first half of February 1915, an extraordinary secret meeting was convened of the Ittihat Central Committee, which saw the participation of all the notorious Young Turk officials – Talaat, Enver, Zia Geokalp, Midhat Shukri, Behaeddin Shakir, Nazim, Husein Javid, Melanzade Rifat, Kara Kemal, Khalil, Hasan Fehmi, and Agha oglu Ahmed. The only absentees were Jemal, who was on the Egyptian battlefield, and the sole Armenian Committee member, Petros Halajyan, who could not be complicit in the decision that was to be taken against his own people (Karapetyan, 2003, p. 59).

The executive secretary of the Ittihat Central Committee, Dr. Nazim, presented the issue of clearing the whole territory of the Empire from non-Turkish elements and, in particular, that of annihilating all the Armenians with the objective of leaving none alive and condemning their memory to oblivion. The war was the best opportunity to do that because the complaints made by other states would not be heard in the political noise and, even if they were to be heard, they would soon be forgotten. Nazim's proposal was seconded through speeches by Shakir, Fehmi, Talaat and the other Young Turk hyenas. The secret meeting of the Young Turks came to a unanimous decision on the annihilation of the Armenians. An executive body consisting of three people was created to deal with the specific activities implemented within this program, and this so-called "committee of three" consisted of Doctor Behaeddin Shakir, Doctor Nazim, and the Minister of Education Midhat Shukri. Following the demand by the Young Turks, Sultan Mehmed Reshad issued an imperial order in March 1915 to dissolve the Ottoman Parliament, where there were several Armenian members who could block this party decision. On Behaeddin Shakri's suggestion, the committee of three created a special organization, headed by Talaat pasha, for the annihilation of the Armenians. The massacre of the Armenians would employ the army and the gendarmerie, as well as gangs consisting of bloodthirsty murderers released from prison specifically to kill the Armenians, Kurdish hordes and fanatic Muslim bandits, which came to a total of 10,000 people. The Kurds were gaining "vital territory" at the expense of the Western Armenians and at the cost of their blood in order to create their "Turkish homeland."

Recording the presented historical fact is an important factor in the formation of the academic worldview of the learner, including his or her academic convictions. The formation of convictions occurs through four stages:

- The hypothetical stage of the conviction's existence.
- The stage of formation of thoughts, opinions and ideas.
- The stage of formation of viewpoints.
- The stage of strengthening of convictions.

The formation of convictions is linked to the ability to defend one's own opinion. Therefore, it is not right to avoid or circumnavigate controversial ideas; within permissible limits, it is necessary to encourage debate and encourage learners to discover the issues under discussion for themselves.

The task of the historian is to discover the motives for facts and events. The most important of motives is the succession of ideological criteria during the course of the state's history. For decades in the Soviet Union, it was prohibited to conduct academic studies into the Armenian Genocide, much less publish them. Any discussion about the course of the Armenian Genocide, its political objectives

and motives, even if this involved evidence, undeniable testimonials, facts established by Turkish and German documents, all of this was considered counter-ideological and nationalistic, in the narrow sense, and was condemned to persecution. It is only in modern times that the attitude towards this issue changed. It is very important that the historian finds the deep causes that lie beneath events. The historian should not neglect any fact or event that is present in the primary source, because no event goes by without a consequence. Studying the historic evidence on its own does not give one any perception of the times when it occurred – the facts must be therefore linked to one another.

In order to reveal the objective significance of an event, it is often necessary to compare it to the times and another event that is relevant in terms of similarities in characteristics. It is well known that the Red Monster Abdul Hamid II ascended to the throne in 1876. His head of government and ally, Kamil Pasha, put forward a program proposal to the Turkish authorities just two years later, which was worded as follows:

- “If we have managed to nurture a snake in our bosom on our European side, in the form of the Balkan people, we must not make the same foolish mistake in Asian Turkey with the Armenians.”
- “If we remove all the elements that can ever become a reason or tool for foreign intervention, and this nation is eliminated, then Christian Europe can look for an ally in Turkish Armenia and not find one, leaving us in peace (Devrikyan, 2005, p. 5).”

The Young Turks adopted Abdul Hamid’s policies. After being driven out of Europe, they had set themselves the task of creating a new Turkish homeland, which also included Armenia. This political agenda solidified further and was implemented during the First World War, due to which Talaat pasha admitted that “from the point of view of solving the Armenian question, I did more in three months that Abdul Hamid had done in thirty years” (Manukyan, 2016, p. 384).

Events do not die in the margins of history. They stay alive and, with the help of researchers, they grow and modernize, returning to us periodically to remind of their significance and importance.

Thus, generalizing the facts and evidence presented, we should note that the advantage of this kind of teaching, first of all, is that the material studied by different classes is brought into a common system. The use of interdisciplinary connections during history lessons connects old and new historical facts and creates the conditions that allow new ones to be better understood, to comprehend the developing situation, encouraging the learners’ creativity, critical and logical thinking . These techniques bring something fresh and interesting to the classroom, relieving the monotony of instruction.

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