

***Teaching the Notion of ‘Civil Society’ Through Classroom:
How Can Teachers in Tajikistan Use the Ethical Pathways to Human Development
Module to Instil the Notion of ‘Civil Society’ Amongst Secondary Students?***

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Abstract

It has been proved over the past that civically active youth have been a potent force for change. Yet, youth in newly established democratic regimes frequently suffer as a result of their civic participation. In order to help the younger generation, select safe chances for their civic involvement, it is necessary to explain the concept of CS critically. The purpose of the study is to examine how can Secondary Teaching Education Programme (STEP) teachers in GBAO, Tajikistan, implement the concept of Civil Society (CS) in the Ethical Pathway to Human Development (EPHD) module. Accomplished through the document, historical, and textbook analysis, and interpretation of sources on CS, AKDN, and related topics, the study is a desk-based research based on qualitative research examination of the literature. It looks at the historical development of the concept and determines the possibilities and limitations of using “communal” CS paradigm. Focusing on the communal model used by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), and Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) initiatives, the research suggests socio-cultural opportunities to convey the meaning of CS to youth. Considering the AKF's objectives as an NGO can help students grasp a critical understanding of the term and reflect on the paradigms used in students’ context, however, it also informs about the socio-political limitations of teaching about CS in GBAO that often-become barrier to teach about CS. In terms of exposing students to safe civic involvement, the paper underpins the significance of teachers’ subject knowledge, which includes content, pedagogic and curriculum knowledge.

Keywords: Civil Society, Civil Participation/Engagement, Teaching, Aga Khan Foundation, Tajikistan

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Introduction: Rational of the research

Throughout history it has been proven that civil engaged young people have been a powerful force for change (UNICEF, 2020). However, often time youngsters in the just formed democratic states become victims of their civic engagement. Therefore, it is crucial to teach the notion of CS critically so that the younger generation choose safe opportunities for their civic engagement. Understanding the notion of CS is complex but it is crucial for youngsters to understand the concept based on historical, contextual, and political aspects. This research aims to identify the role of STEP teachers in educating the younger generation in Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) Tajikistan about the concept of CS so that they could make secure decisions in getting engaged with society to avoid conflicts.

Background: Civil Society evolvement and the Secondary Curriculum

The term CS has evolved through history and context therefore can be an advantage for younger generation to be taught. Dating back to Greek philosophers the term CS was first mentioned by Aristotle mentioning about 'polis' as a "genuine participative community." Unlike subsequent views of civil society, Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle are more concerned with directing a city to virtue than with having a positive view of political freedom (Simpson, 2014). Most of sources associate the emergence of the notion of CS to 17th and 18th centuries back to enlightenment period. European thinkers, philosophers, and politicians were represented as authors and analysts at all historical periods of CS development. A public organisation, such as a union, is important to organise productive activity to defend personal freedom. The yearning of the individual for legal protection, the development of civic culture, self-governance, etc. can be seen throughout Europe's history (Azerbaiyev & Nurmanbetova, 2016). However, another body of scholars claim that the "societas civilis" of the Aristotelian tradition inspired the Muslim philosophers prior to the enlightenment era which is often underestimated. One of these Muslim scholars and philosopher was Al-Farabi (d. 950). Farabi constructed a cohesive theory of social organisation based on the political and ethical principles of Greek thinkers, particularly Plato and Aristotle, as well as social ideas from the ancient East (Suleimenov and Nurgaliev, 2019). Most of the prominent Muslim scholars, including Al-Farabi, are taught in the SC which makes it relevant to introduce their ideas on CS or social structure to the classroom.

The thinker identified the traits that make a person a good "citizen," known as virtues, and the traits that make a person a bad "citizen," known as vices ("Ignorant cities"). Religion and politics were not separated by Al-Farabi since religion at the time merely taught values (Parens, 2006 cited in Azerbaiyev & Nurmanbetova, 2016). Azerbaiyev and Nurmanbetova is one of the few scholars who in their philosophical interpretation define how the characteristics of the social structure of 'virtuous city' can be a mode of civil society (p.200). In his Virtuous City, Al-Farabi claims that the perfect and virtuous city and its residents of it depend on helping each other for happiness (Turgut, 2022. p.41) which indicates the complete antithesis of the European model of civil society, which is emphasized on individualism.

Interestingly, in the first half of 19th century, CS theorist omits the virtue and moral aspects of ideas of the concept that has been defined by the Greeks and Muslim philosophers. Since 1970s onwards, scholars have continued to focus on the materialistic and individualistic aspects of civic participation which contradicted the earlier philosophers' claims of being civilised. Turgut (2022) mentions that according to the second teacher the ignorant virtues are

as follows: “Even if happiness is told to them, they neither understand nor believe it. The good things they know are physical health, wealth, sensual pleasures, respect, dignity and so on. Similarly, for them, helping each other also becomes obtaining material things such as health and wealth...” The Main Principles of Living Together in al- Farabi's Virtuous...”) Much of Al-Farabi ignorance is associated with today's interaction of people when “people interact with each other only in case of necessity and unite with each other only in case of need” (p. 41).

As discussed previously, the definition of CS changed in the first half of the nineteenth century because of the growing influence of capitalism and early industrialism, as seen in the writings of Hegel, Marx, and others. The term was precepted as referred to as “a system of needs and work, of the market and specific interests” mostly meaning the middle class of society playing a marginal role until 1980s. It became the core representation in anti-dictatorial criticism, and it was used the term to speak out against one-party dictatorships, Soviet hegemony, and totalitarianism. In the winning battle against dictators, who constituted the most severe denial of CS in the twentieth century, “civil society” has become popular (JU, R., 2004).

Civil Society defined in Tajikistan

Many American and European scholars claim that CS is particularly common to Europe and its application to non-European contexts especially Muslim contexts is impossible or problematic (Gellner, 1994). In modern times, the advent of CS is seen as a reaction towards control and neoliberal marketization and CS is considered NGOs and CSOs which assume many roles of governments (Anjum, 2012). Gellner assesses the social order and origin of Ibn Khaldun work and makes an argument that Muslim countries are distinct from those in Europe and America due to the lack of separation of state and religion, resulting in no pluralism in Muslim societies, thus not leaving space for CS. He argues that tribal society is reflected in the Islamic law, which is hostile towards state authority preventing the emergence of stable state, democracies, and civil society (Gellner, 1994, p.195). In Gellner's work it is evident how civic participation and social structure were understood and formed differently. The image of civic society in the book is completely capitalist emphasizing that commerce but not virtue constitute civil society (Kurzman, 1995, p.346).

However, recent scholarship has proven the opposite as more study is done on Islam and modern trends such as CS. Contrary to widespread belief, Kamali (2001, p. 466) asserts that in Muslim cultures, civil society is not anti-pluralistic and a Western monopoly. Diversity was the foundation of Islamic civic society. There was diversity in terms of faith and way of life. Islamic communities were combinations of variety and pluralism made up of many ethnic, religious, and tribal groupings. Islam had been born in the religious pluralism of the Middle East (Armstrong, 2023), Also, concepts such as pluralism, civil society, and democracy has been used in the speeches of Aga Khan IV, the spiritual leader of Shia Ismaili and has references of his speeches in the EPHD module, which can be used in classroom. In this regard the topic of CS and Islam can be appropriate topic for discussion in education of the younger generation.

Civil Society has been defined and amalgamated with different theories which set framework to the civil participation of Muslims societies. In Tajikistan, this concept in its modern understanding, albeit different from the European/Western conceptual framework, is believed to be formed during the Soviet regime where civil society was considered as “civil

socialism.” It was a society in which the acts of every political organisation, social movement, and civic group were directed by a centralized party-state, and even volunteerism was officially recognized. Nonetheless, over the next decades, the SU woven an enormous social fabric that permeated every element of life via a network of state sponsored CSOs linked to the Communist Party (Shahrani, 1993, p.130). State-sponsored Soviet academicians provided terminology guidance, explained the subject matter, assessed how the state and its institutions interacted with it, and decided everyone's place in the socio-legal community (p. 16). Most of the scholarly source’s mention that after the collapse of the SU, Tajikistan’s CS transitioned to be perceived and engaged with through two main paradigms: the neoliberal and communal (or alternative) paradigm.

According to Freizer (2005), CS of Tajikistan is sharply split between communal and neoliberal forms, with the latter being most represented by NGOs and the former by traditional community organisations. Communal CS has a long history in the region, but neoliberal CS (influenced by the Western paradigm of CS) is primarily being formed from new (p.3). However, in recent years there has been also seen the ‘activism version’ of CS referred to as a space outside of political parties where people and organisations worked to democratise the state and reshape power instead of gaining control in the ordinary way (Kaldor, 2003). The conditions in Tajikistan post-independent periods indicates CS in the first form and second form (neo-liberal and communal) in many sources. However, little is mentioned about the third form (activist), due to the presence of totalitarian communist rule and military dictatorships, respectively.

Opportunities of EPHD module

CS is a fluid term and has been defined differently in academia through history shaping the political ideologies. Therefore, giving STEP teachers an opportunity to teach this notion while teaching the EPHD module would be an asset. The module encompasses the works of the AKDN institutions and most importantly the Islamic ethics represented in the work of the AKDN agencies therefore proving the presence of ethics within civic engagement. Also, the textbook includes the guidance and speeches of the Aga Khan IV proving the importance of CS and its presence in the Muslim world.

Even though there is not direct reference to the concept of CS, there are myriads of information related. First, the module takes a step-by-step approach explaining the challenges and responses Muslim face in the modern and contemporary periods. It provides a bigger picture of the issues and the diverse responses to the challenges Muslim face helping students to engage with discussions. As the Teacher’s Guide states: “The topics and issues in the curriculum are often of a complex nature, revealing multiple sets of meanings. They require to be approached from different viewpoints to arriving at the better understanding of them” (IIS, 2010, p. 40). Similarly, the concept of CS which has various meanings and theories can be a relevant discussion of topic to look at its meanings and evolvment when discussing related topics.

Moreover, there are many examples of the civil participation similar to other structures of Muslim life which were present in Muslim communities. However, it has been a matter of debate in modern scholarship whether civil society was present in Islam or not, which indicated shortage of scholarly research in Muslim societies. The engagement of Muslim or Islam with CS would also be a relevant topic for the classroom discussion. The first chapter of the module also has some connection of introducing challenges of the contemporary period

such as “In 1991, the end of Cold War with the fall of the SU, countries in that region became independent. One of these countries was Tajikistan in which a civil war followed” (p.11) and “An important goal for the new, independent nations was to become industrialized as soon as possible. They began to place great emphasis on economic growth. However, it soon became clear that the economy by itself could not solve all the problems of a country. Some of these problems were of a political nature, others dealt with social issues, and yet others were to do with cultural needs” (p.15). These introduction points make it easy for teachers to set the backgrounds for understanding the emergence of the concept of CS (NGOs or CSOs) and its need in the context.

Teachers can refer to them when explaining the notion of civil society. Students can also be inspired if the concept of CS can be linked to the Muslim past, such as the concepts of *assabiyyah* (social solidarity) of Ibn Khaldun or *al-madina al-fadila* (The Virtuous City) of Al-Farabi. These scholars' impressive ideas can inspire students to think more critically about the contemporary paradigms of CS and how those could be mobilised to create better future. Having discussed different historical perspective on the notion of CS can help students analyse their own context. Students, for instance will be able to define what form of CS they had in the past (the soviet *ghrazhdanskoe obshchestvo*) and what is the connection or impact in the present (communal CS). Some of the terms which students heard such as *kolkhoz* and *komsomol* and used in students' daily life such as *mahala* and *avlod* can make it easy to follow the understanding the meaning and the historical evolvement of CS.

In addition, once introducing the idea of Muslims questioning the decline of Muslim civilization in comparison with European advancement in many fields, the module provides how Aga Khan III as a Muslim leader played a significant role in responding to the challenges of “modernity” and contributing to reforms in his community to shape their lives in modern times, while emphasizing to the Ismailis to be guided by the principles and ethics of their faith. For instance, Aga Khan III constantly reminded his followers that “for Muslims the practice of the faith was intricately linked to their activities in the world” (p.19). Also, there is the reference to the speeches of Aga Khan IV who not only play a role for guidance but also set an example for “his humanitarian work, based on the ethics of Islam, provides a valuable example of integrating faith and the world. It shows how Islam as spiritual inspiration and intertwined with the worldly can be used to help people improve their quality of life” (p.19). In his speech Aga Khan IV (2007) says, “By civil society, I mean a realm of activity which is neither governmental nor commercial institutions designed to advance the public”. Through the work of the AKDN the Aga Khan has concluded that the most crucial component of the development equation is CS (IIS, 2010). This indicates that his highness gives emphasis to the social and economic development that can elevate standard of living. Along with this aim for development, the definition of CS is illustrated within the ethics of keeping balance of *din* and *dunya*, inclusiveness, education, compassion, sharing and self-reliance which are the foundations of the AKDN's ethical framework.

Furthermore, the module covers an extensive information about ethics of Islam with further chapters emphasizing on the AKDN institutions and their role in different countries. The AKDN is a network of non-profit, non-religious, private development organisations that serve the most underdeveloped regions of Asia and Africa (Aga Khan, 2004). According to Daryush Muhammad Poor (2012) the AKDN has a unique model of leadership and can be regarded as an NGO which shares many commonalities with other types of organisations or leadership (p. 101). According to Poor (2012) the AKDN stands out from other NGOs due to its dedication to its ethical component which is the outcome of one interpretation of Islam

with Ismaili features, as well as its long-term investments and sustainable growth (cited in Daftary, 2020, p. 190) mentions that the AKDN, although sharing certain traits with both, is neither a faith-based charity nor an international development-focused NGO. Poor (2012) also emphasize that The AKDN NGOs' function as mediators between local autonomy and efficient national and international leadership with a general perspective on organisations (p.103). The above-mentioned claims hint how the AKDN as an NGO is compatible and at the same time uniquely distinct that can become a source of creating a model of Muslims Civil Society.

The module covers the importance of *din* and *dunya*, the ethic of Islam in explanation of the traditions and cultures of different contexts. Despite being a secular organisation the AKDN NGOs follow the ethical framework based of principles of Muslim faith such as self-help, creating various institutions to benefit for all, and speeches/*farmans* of the Imams (IIS, 2010, p. 31). In parallel with this the EPHD module illustrated some traditions from the context of Tajikistan such as “*kryar* in Badakhshan Tajikistan”. This tradition illustrates “volunteering service across traditions” which are tightly linked with defining CS in relation to Muslim traditions. These traditions in turn are linked to the traditions of the Prophet and the Imams which can inspire youngsters. This gives an opportunity for teachers to dive deeper into discussion of ethics, virtue, and morality which have an immense value in both the Greek and Muslim philosophers' work when they talk about social structure or co-existence.

The younger generation who may not have deep awareness of AKDN as a CS entity become confused when it comes to taking decision relying on the moral aspect of their faith. Thus, making the CS notion clear to them through the module, more precisely through the communal paradigm, which the AKDN is promoting in the area, can be valuable awareness and transforming experience in terms of choosing how to act in the authoritarian regime as citizens.

Limitations of the module

There are some limitations within the module and the context of Tajikistan, which make it difficult to approach the concept of CS to be taught. First, the module does not provide a separate chapter or topic on discussing the notion which assigns the job to teachers' self-organisation and interpretation. Some teachers, who do not have grounded knowledge about the term may find it therefore challenging to prepare materials, plans, and activities as there is also not reference to the concept in the Teachers Guide. Therefore, when STEP teachers refer to the notion, they should have a sound knowledge of the concept with a great emphasize on the context where it is taught.

Even though unit 3 touches upon the AKDN agencies and their operation in different contexts with few references to Tajikistan, it is not enough for students to reflect on their own actions and decision as citizens of their country. For instance, teacher can use all the above-mentioned opportunities and approach CS through Islamic principles embedded in the AKDN institutions such as sharing, voluntarism, caring, and brotherhood (IIS, 2010). However, the textbook does not provide alternative theories on CS which need to be elaborated and compared. Moreover, in the case of using AKF work in Tajikistan can be used an example of promoting the communal paradigm of CS in Tajikistan which can help teachers explain only one notion of CS in current times. In addition, as mentioned earlier there are also the two others, the “neo-liberal” and “civil society activism” which exist within the context which are present and may leave students in confusion when not being explained,

therefore, the role of teacher in explaining the notion of CS is crucial. Third, the engagement with the module and connecting it to the lived experiences of students may often be overly sensitive topic. As mentioned in the Teachers' Guide, while the material of the Student's Reader serves as a major resource in the classroom, references are also made to the youth's experiences, interests, and concerns (IIS, 2010, p.20). When interpreting this idea into the context of adolescents in Tajikistan in current time, the module may not represent some of the sensitive concerns for the youth. In the recent months CS projects were effectively eradicated and hence will be safe to discuss in the classroom. CSOs are now pushed as the authorities accept all proposals as a danger to themselves. Thus, it may show the module has some external effect thus pinpointing teacher's vital role what information should be relevant to deliver.

Teachers' role when teaching CS in Tajikistan

Teachers are essential in helping students comprehend the historical context of current concerns and the historical tendencies that correspond to the IIS SC goals. The IIS SC (2010) aims to encourage students to engage in the social and ethical issues that modern Muslim communities, religious traditions, and cultures are experiencing; it also aims to encourage students to discover significance in and inspiration from their faith, as well as to become sensitive to the spiritual aspect of human existence (p.9). Even though the EPHD module does not speak about the bigger trends in the Student Reader such as modernization, industrialization, or globalization, it does not mention a lot about their products such as the emergence of civil society, NGOs, or CSOs. Therefore, teachers would benefit from having a sound knowledge of the developments and key trends in the modern period leading to contemporary contexts. Hattie (2009) meta-analysis suggests that teachers' subject knowledge has a significant impact on student achievement. Shulman (1986) categorized subject knowledge into three types: content knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, and curricular knowledge, which will analyse the role of STEP teachers in accordance to teaching the notion of CS.

Content knowledge

Content knowledge is an important accountability of a teacher according to Pollard (et al., 2004). Teachers' knowledge gained from trainings, college and university courses, or independent study and interest is referred to as content knowledge as per Schwab (1978). Thus, it is crucial for STEP teachers to have a deep understanding of each trend or concepts of the modern period so that students learn better. The EPHD module has notes on the terms of content such as the examples from the work of AKDN or AKF in Tajikistan, which STEP teachers can relate to their contemporary activities in the area and make classes more meaningful for adolescents. Beside the conceptual understanding it is crucial for students to be aware of the cultural or traditional values and social structure of their context. Without the theoretical understanding of various forms of CS and the context where CS is functioning there would not be full understanding of CS.

Knowledge of the social structure of the Western scholars, Muslim philosophers, and experts on CA is a key for STEP teachers illustrating an example of content knowledge in history. Having a clear understand of these theories, the teachers can discuss problems and topics that have an impact on humanity as a whole and the larger society (IIS, 2010, p 9). Moreover, teachers can inspire students to learn more about some of the related areas that have not been much studied. For instance, Islamic philosophers such as Ibn al-Sina (d.1038), Ibn al-Rushd

(d.1198), and Imam Ghazali (d.1111) debated the connection between Islamic government and civil society (Kamali,2001). Much of the work of these thinkers is understudied which can inspire the younger generation for further exploration on the topic. To inspire the young minds, it would therefore be an advantage to pursue further research for STEP teachers in this area too. Unfortunately, STEP practitioner gains the primary knowledge from their master level courses and restrict themselves to further research of the topics of their interests- It would be an advantage for teachers to partake in further professional qualification development, local, or international conferences (Day et al., 2006), which in turn can help teachers encourage students and inspire them how to partake in their civic life.

Pedagogic content knowledge

Shulman (1986) defined pedagogical content knowledge as subject matter knowledge for teaching. The Teachers Guide of the EPHD module proposes project work for teachers to implement in the classroom: “Project work can be presented in a variety of formats. It can be textual, audio-visual, or multimedia based. It can be in the form of an essay or a series of posters. It can incorporate a range of ideas from diverse sources, as well as the pupils’ own original work” (IIS, 2010, p.38). The TG mentions all types of project work except project participation which also can be embedded in the SC as service learning (Rhoads and Howard, 1998) which is characterised as an educational approach that consciously combines academic study with useful community service. Adolescent project participation has been encouraged by many international organizations including the Aga Khan Foundation, which can be an asset for STEP teachers to bring it classroom once learning about CS. Along with-it students can participate in civic activities via other international NGOs. UNICEF also encourages adolescents to actively take part in their families, peer groups, communities, local and national organizations, and policy arenas (both offline and online) to impact choices that affect them. Adolescents can take on duties and build abilities as educators, volunteers, activists, and advocates through civic participation (UNICEF, 2007). Similarly, the AKF is promoting projects such as “Local Impact” promoting new employment opportunities and young organizations by helping high growth sector entrepreneurs with their technical needs (AKF, 2022). Similar projects should be therefore encouraged by teachers as they promote leadership, civic engagement of youth in the context. As per the AKF assessment there is a shortage of leaders within the community to support their initiative projects (Rijabekov et al., 2018). Therefore, getting students to involve in those projects would set a starting point to the civic engagement of CS and fill the gap of encouraging more leaders in their communities. Another exercise that teachers can implement is to study and analyze existing projects AKDN or even non- AKDN CS organizations/groups by creating portfolios/case studies for students. These actions will not only engage students in the projects participation and contributing to their communities as citizens but also teach them and feel proud of their ethical actions made.

Curriculum knowledge

According to Pollard et al (2014), curriculum knowledge refers to the programs of study, syllabi, work plans, resources, technology, and instructional materials used to achieve curricular objectives. Gulayozova (2012) defines the SC as a centralized curriculum with similar learning objectives for students all over the world which has not been narrowed by country. Even though several references are made to the context of Tajikistan, most of them either do not have a direct connection with the topic of CS or not relevant for discussion. Thus, teachers need to apply more contextual approach when making their plannings.

However, this can be at risk if teachers do not have subject matter expertise, therefore a much broader intervention should be proposed to the curriculum authors. Nevertheless, as the curriculum is global curriculum it may become too specific creating more issues, thus altering the main paradigms of CS to the module would be a better choice. One of the aspects of contextualization of the curriculum is the importance of place which includes the local traditions, needs, and conditions as per. Teachers also need to be careful and selective in terms to meet the needs of the political ideology to avoid tension when conveying the curriculum. Thus, contextualizing the curriculum, teachers need to consider all aspects of their planning.

Conclusions

CS has been interpreted through history in diverse ways gradually being distanced from ethics and virtue which considered to be crucial for the Greek philosophers. Like the Greek thinkers, Islamic scholars have emphasized virtue and ethics in social structuring, but unfortunately little attention of scholarship has been in this regard. The work of the Aga Khan agencies can be a proof of the existence of CS in Muslim Words as they are embedded in ethical framework of Islam proving their action as a long tradition. Teaching about the historical account and contextual aspect of CS can indeed benefit students in many ways. Teachers who play a vital role in spreading knowledge of CS certain things need to be followed. First, it is crucial for STEP practitioners to have a sound knowledge of the concept based on their educational experiences. Teachers background knowledge gained from their MA course may not be enough as the module itself does not refer to the term of CS specifically. Thus, teachers cannot restrain themselves to independent research on the topic. Second, due to having broad and complicated historical and contextual scholarship on SC, teachers need to implement best pedagogies of experiencing how CS works. The research proposes CS engagement through the projects of AKF which can be introduced to adolescents so that they be both aware of existing such opportunities and take a chance to participate in them to meet the needs of the community projects. Third, teachers' knowledge of the curriculum demands all sort of consideration to make efficient impact on delivering the notion of CS so that students can be critical as well as safe in interpreting its meaning. Overall, teaching about CS in the context of Tajikistan has multiple means, however, there are factors that teachers need to be aware of, therefore, subject knowledge should be the main weapon for teachers.

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