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### ► To cite this version:

Assaad Yammine, Iman Khalil, Pierre Clement. Sex Education in Lebanon and France. C.Bruguière, A.Tiberghien & P.Clément (eds). ESERA 2011 Conference: Science Learning and Citizenship, Sep 2011, Lyon, France. ESERA, Part 8, pp.157-162, 2012. <hal-01054224>

**HAL Id: hal-01054224**

**<https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01054224>**

Submitted on 5 Aug 2014

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# SEX EDUCATION IN LEBANON AND FRANCE

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*Abstract:* This work is a comparison between France and Lebanon. It analyzes the conceptions of Lebanese and French teachers on issues concerning human sexuality and its education. Our goal is to highlight the different conceptions of teachers in both countries and to identify the parameters to which these differences are correlated. All the multivariate analyses conducted show two very different systems of conceptions, very significantly differentiating Lebanese teachers' conceptions of French teachers ones. French teachers, unlike their Lebanese colleagues, are more conducive to early learning topics related to sexuality to students between 6 and 15 years old depending on the subject. They are more likely to accept abortion and homosexuality, to focus on safer sex as an attitude that can reduce the spread of AIDS, and to consider that the teaching of STIs is not only the issue of biology teachers. The differences between Lebanon and France are not reducible to religion: each country has its own identity rooted in its specific geographical, historical, economic and cultural context.

*Keywords:* Sex education, Multiculturalism, religion, conceptions, teachers

## 1 – Context and theoretical backgrounds

Sex education (SE) presents great interest at the international level. Research in several countries confirms that the promotion of SE does not encourage young people to have early sexual intercourse (Blum & Mmari, 2006, Kirby & Lepore, 2007) but rather put in evidence a positive effect on the maturity in the sexual behavior of students (Singh & al, 2005) and risk taking (Coyle & al, 2004, 2006 ; Kirby & al , 1997, 2005, 2006, 2007).

In 1994, WHO pointed out that sex education (SE) has to provide students, considering their representations and basics, with information and scientific knowledge that allow them to discover and understand the different dimensions of sexuality; WHO added that SE also seeks to stimulate students' thinking based on information provided to help them develop attitudes of individual, familial and social responsibilities.

According to the recommendations of international organisms such as WHO, the educational center of research and development in Lebanon (ECRD) has attempted to introduce SE in the renovated curricula of 1998. This attempt has faced many objections from several socio-political and religious authorities in Lebanon, which resulted in its total suppression from the curriculum of the EB8 class (students aged 12-13) (Circular n°35/M/99, Presidential Decree n°2066) and partial containment of the biology curriculum for the 2nd year of secondary school (15-16 years), Literature and Humanities and the 3rd year of secondary school (16-17 years) (Ministry of Education circular n°95/M/99, decree n°10227/97, Harfouch & Clément, 2001, Yammine & al, 2007, Yammine 2008).

Currently, a new attempt to reintroduce SE in the Lebanese teaching context is part of a project combining the efforts of the ECRD, the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) and the Lebanese Ministry of Education.

French curricula have, in turn, evolved considerably during the past 50 years in human sexuality. ES is currently ruled by laws and is defined as follows:

*"The sex education's primary purpose is to provide students with opportunities to learn and understand the different dimensions of the –and their- sexuality, in accordance with the consciences and the right to privacy. This education, based on humanistic values of tolerance and freedom, self and others respect, should also help students to integrate positive attitudes of individual, familial and social responsibilities."* (B.O N°. 46: Circular N°. 98-234 dated November 19, 1998, Sex Education and AIDS Prevention).

The introduction of SE in France was initially, and is still today, more directed to the biomedical dimension than to the promotion of health (Bernard & Clément 2005, 2007 Berger *et al*, 2007). SE in France has not met such strong resistance as in Lebanon.

Lebanese society is multiconfessional. To manage it, the Lebanese refer to the National Pact (unformulated agreement, not written, signed in 1943) to apportion the responsibilities in the government (Al-Khoury, 1956), "which gave birth a tradition where each community was responsible for providing education to its children as it wanted and where it wanted" (Quobeisy, 1998).

Beyond this diversity, there may be some Lebanese homogeneity in comparison with other countries. This relative homogeneity is in fact emerged in comparing conceptions of the Lebanese teachers to those of teachers from other countries on topics such as evolution (Clément & Quessada, 2008, 2009), or environment education (Khalil & *al*, 2007a and b).

It is for these reasons that we made a comparison of Lebanese and French teachers' conceptions, using samples large enough to identify a possible diversity of opinion within each country, but also to compare the two countries together, in order to identify whether, beyond their differences, the Lebanese teachers share common characteristics that distinguish them from their French colleagues.

Analyzed conceptions will take into account the teachers' knowledge, values and social practices (in relation to abortion, homosexuality...) and their pedagogical projects (what should or should not be taught and at what age).

## **2 - Research Question.**

Do the Lebanese and French teachers conceptions on sexuality and SE mainly differ in terms of the nationality of these teachers (thus according to their national socio-cultural context) or are they rather based on other parameters such as their religion, the degree of belief and the religious practice, or even more on their political opinion?

## **3 – Methodology**

It was developed in the context of the European research project Biohead-Citizen (Biology, Health and Environmental Education for Better Citizenship; 19 countries, including Lebanon and France). Teachers respond in writing, completely anonymously and in the presence of the researcher, to a questionnaire covering six topics, including reproduction and human sexuality and teaching (24 questions) as well as their religious, social and political opinions (17 questions ), and other personal information (Clément & Carvalho 2007). The responses were subject to several types of multivariate analyses (Munoz & Clément, 2007, Munoz & *al*. 2009).

In each country, samples are strictly comparable: 1/6 in-service teachers of primary schools (InP), 1/6 pre-service teachers of primary schools (PreP), 1/6 in-service teachers of biology (InB) in secondary schools (for Students 11 to 18 Years old), 1/6 pre-service teachers of biology (PreB) in secondary schools, 1/6 in-service teachers of language / letters (InL) in secondary schools, 1/6 pre-service teachers of language / letters (PreL) in secondary schools. In total, 722 teachers and future teachers were surveyed in 5 regions of Lebanon (North, South, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa and Beirut) and 732 teachers and future teachers in two regions of France (Rhone-Alpes and Languedoc-Roussillon) (Table 1).

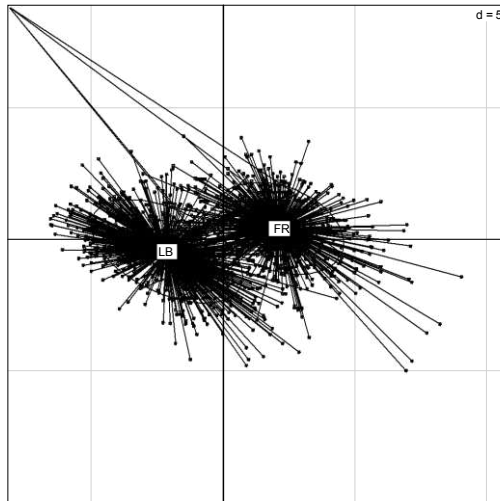
**Table 1.** Submission of samples surveyed in Lebanon and France. For the group of education (InB, InL etc.), cf. the text above. For religion, AGN = Agnostics, CHR = Christians, Muslims = MUS, ELS = most: "I do not want to answer" no answers + some, + a few other religions as AGN, CHR or MUS

		Lebanon	%	France	%
	<b>Total Sample</b>	722	100	732	100
<b>Teaching groups</b>	InB	153	21.2	100	13.7
	InL	111	15.4	110	15.0
	InP	246	34.1	114	15.6
	PreB	59	8.2	149	20.4
	PreL	56	7.8	101	13.8
	PreP	97	13.4	158	21.6
<b>Religion</b>	AGN	3	0.4	370	50.5
	CHR	217	30.1	304	41.5
	ELS	33	4.6	47	6.5
	MUS	469	65.0	11	1.5
<b>Level of belief</b>	1 (+)	700	97	131	17.9
	2	9	1.2	79	10.8
	3	4	0.6	97	13.3
	4	4	0.6	68	9.3
	5 (-)	5	0.7	357	48.8
<b>Level of practice</b>	1 (+)	556	77	44	6.0
	2	76	10.5	30	4.1
	3	38	5.3	9	1.2
	4	7	1.0	67	9.2
	5 (-)	45	6.2	532	72.7

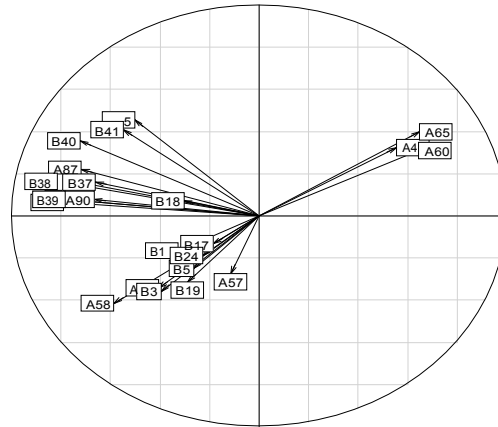
#### 4 - Results and Discussion

We restrict ourselves to the most significant effects, without presenting here the effects less or not significant (age, gender, educational level, etc.).

The PCA (Figure 1) performed using the 24 questions on the SE for 1454 teachers, shows a clear difference between French and Lebanese teachers.



**Figure 1a**



**Figure 1b**

**Figure 1- (a)** Individual points in the space for the first two discriminant axes differentiating the two countries as: FR = France, LB = Lebanon. **(b)** PCA on the SE variables (24 variables), France + Lebanon.

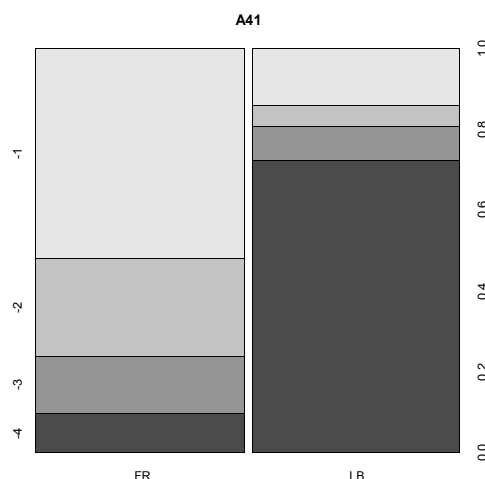
A between analysis, supplemented by a randomization test of Monte Carlo, shows that this difference is highly significant.

In fact, French teachers, unlike Lebanese teachers, are more conducive to early learning topics related to sexuality to students aged 6 and 15 years depending on the subject (A85 à A90 et B37 à B41). They are more likely to accept abortion (A65) and homosexuality (A41), to focus on safer sex as an attitude that can reduce the spread of AIDS (A60), and to consider that the teaching of STIs is not only the issue of biology teachers.

The analysis of the issues that most differentiate the two groups shows KVP interactions: Lebanese and French Teachers opposed or not to abortion, homosexuality, are in the same time more or less favorable to the introduction some scientific content (K) in the SE, based on their religious values (V) and their associated social practices (P).

The histogram in Figure 2a shows that while 52% of French teachers are for equal rights for homosexual and heterosexual couples, 72.3% of Lebanese teachers refuse such equality.

Homosexual couples should have the same rights as heterosexual couples.	I agree	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	I don't agree
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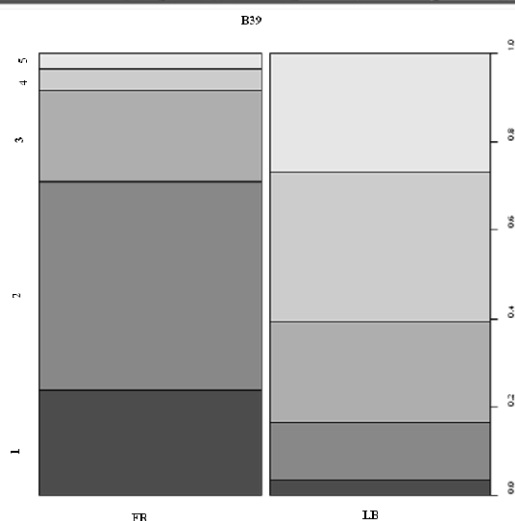


**Figure 2a.** Histogram of individual responses to question A41 (values 1, 2, 3, and 4 correspond to four levels of "Likert scale")

The histogram in Figure 2b shows that 71.2% of French teachers found that incest and sexual abuse are topics to be taught at an early age (the ages of 2 fields are added here), 60.8% of Lebanese teachers that are for late teaching of these topics (> 15 years) or never at school.

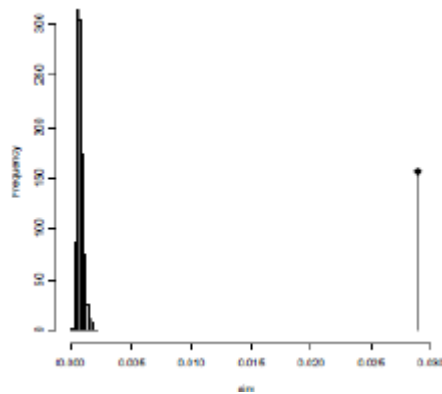
When do you think the following topics should be first introduced at school by teachers and/or external specialists? (Tick only ONE box per line):

Topic	Less than 6 years old	Between 6 and 11 years old	Between 12 and 15 years old	More than 15 years old	Never in school
<b>B39.</b> Incest and sexual abuse	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>



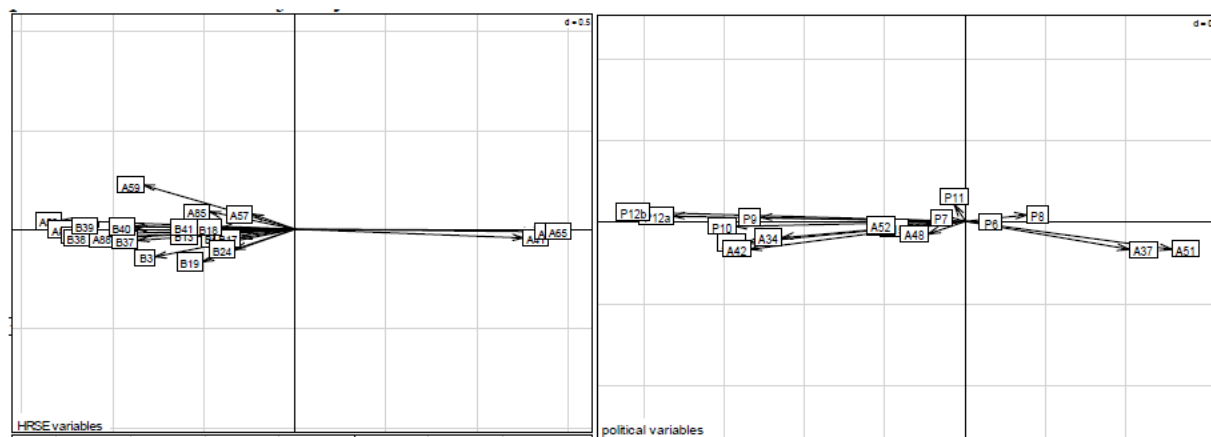
**Figure 2b.** Histogram of individual responses to question B39 (values 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 correspond to five levels of "Likert scale")

The 1 454 teachers' conceptions also vary quite significantly depending on their religion, which is very different in the two countries: half of French teachers are atheists or agnostics, against 0.4% of Lebanese teachers interviewed, 65% of Lebanese teachers are Muslims (Shiites, Sunni or Druze) against 1.5% of French teachers interviewed. It is therefore not surprising that when we remove the country effect, the religion effect disappears. However, when we remove the religion effect, the country effect remains very significant, which means that Christian teachers (41.5% of the French sample, 30.1% of Lebanese teachers interviewed) have different ideas about human sexuality and its teaching (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The test of randomization (Monte Carlo)

Finally, a co-inertia analysis between firstly a PCA on the SE variables (Figure 4a) and on the other hand a PCA on the socio-political and religious variables (Figure 4b) highlights two systems of conceptions: one characteristic of most believers and teachers practitioners, less secular (more against separation between politics and religion, hence between science and religion) are more detrimental to early education of the SE at school, less accepting of homosexuality and abortion, and they prefer stable relationships of couples to "safer sex". Most of the Lebanese teachers are in this pole. The second system of conceptions brings together teachers less religious, more secular, and more favorable to the SE in school; this pole includes the majority of the French teachers.



**Figure 4-** Co-inertia analysis between the PCA on the SE variables (a) and the PCA on the socio-political / religious variables (b).

## 5 – Conclusions

Beyond their religious diversity, the Lebanese teachers share ideas on human sexuality and SE, which distinguish them clearly from the French teachers. Each country has its own identity rooted in its specific geographical, historical, economic and cultural context. The relative homogeneity of the Lebanese teachers who has also emerged in comparing of their conceptions to those of teachers from other countries on topics such as evolution (Clément & Quessada 2008, 2009), or environment education (Khalil & al, 2007 a and b), explains the difficulties of implementing the SE in Lebanon. The perspectives opened by these results will be discussed in more details.

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