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A Study on the Sociology Official Exams for the Lebanese Secondary Certificate from 2001 to 2014

Laurice El Rahi^{a*}, & Marie-Thérèse Saliba^b

* Corresponding author: Laurie El Rahi, lauricerahi@gmail.com

^aLebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon, lauricerahi@gmail.com

^bLebanese University, Beirut, Lebanon, marie-therese.saliba@umontreal.ca

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Abstract

The purpose of public examinations, in most countries, is to assess and evaluate the teacher, learner, and educational material, as well as to receive “certification” through the intervention of the state for the objective of providing an official certificate. This research addresses the following problem: What are the weaknesses in the questions of the Sociology Official Exams for the Lebanese Secondary Certificate? We found that the malfunction lies in the absence of training and supervising coaches and bodies, so they grew imbalance years after another, and did not result in the accumulation of expertise in the literal sense, especially with the existence of several official devices related to the topic. This research presents different suggestions over the short, medium and long run. Not to mention that this research has shown that the official exam, measured in its entirety, applies the lowest cognitive levels (memorizing and understanding), and did not reach the highest levels in the application, analysis and conclusion up until the time of to the evaluation.

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Keywords: Lebanese official exams, sociology, secondary level, problems.



1. Introduction

In general, the purpose of public examinations, in most countries, is to assess and evaluate the teacher, learner, and educational material, as well as to receive “certification” through the intervention of the state for the objective of providing an official certificate.

As 27 sessions of the Sociology Official Exams have passed (no extraordinary session in 2014) since they began in a pilot contest in 2001, we see the need to examine the questions and their evolution. For the first time, all the schools where the students in Sociology and Economic Science (ES) have reached the third secondary (grade 12) participated in this pilot exam. Note that the teaching of sociology at the secondary level aims in its learning objectives (skills - abilities / skills - positions)

Error! Reference source not found. to provide the student with the following knowledge:

- Acquire the basic principles and concepts that are considered necessary to be acquainted with a social situation for primary community entrance.
- Enable the student to recognize the contemporary crisis transformations in Lebanese society, developing countries and in some industrialized nations.
- Define areas of social services and policies intended for social protection in Lebanon.
- Provide information about problems and issues faced by the community in order to involve students in searching for ideas and solutions to deal with them **Error! Reference source not found.**

1.1. Topic statement and significance of the study

Since the official exams tend to “measure” the extent to which they fulfil the above-mentioned goals, at least on the level of knowledge, the purpose of this study is to detect the problems in the official Sociology exams from 2001 to 2014.

1.2. Research question

The main question being asked in this study is: What are the flaws in the Sociology official exams in the Lebanese secondary class?

2. Research methodology

This study is delimited by the examination questions and their correction criteria, official textbook, publications of the Lebanese Educational Centre related to Sociology science, and instructions of the “bank of questions” of the Ministry of Education, in addition to other sources connected to the research topic. The methods conform to the educational collection methods.

The present research will be general and based on 27 sessions, in addition to providing a comparison between the experimental/pilot exam in 2001 and the 2014 official exam. It should be noted that the last mentioned exam was not corrected because of the teachers' strike, therefore the Ministry of Education has delivered success testimonies for all the candidates.

The official examination consists of three groups: the first group is mandatory (on 7 points), while the second and third group are optional (on 12 points); the student should handle the first one, along with one of the two optional groups¹.

Therefore, this research addresses three groups:

- The first group: “The use of the concepts and techniques,” which is mandatory
- The second group: “The analysis of social documents”
- The third group: “The study of a social issue”
- Finally, the comparison between the examination pilot in 2001 and the official examination in 2014 (is presented?).

The study of the four above-mentioned points led to the final answer of our research problem.

3. The first mandatory group: “The use of the concept and techniques”- Grade: 7 points

“This area is designed to provide the learner with the concepts and the social / economic terminologies linked to the concept of material information. The usage of that is not limited, in any way, to remember or retrieve information, however it includes their understanding and applications. We should not limit ourselves to the definition of the concept, but we get to assess the learner's ability to use it”**Error! Reference source not found..**

The skills required in this area are:

- Identification of the social concepts.
- Distinction among several social concepts.
- Application of research methods and techniques in sociology (interview, observation, form ...)
- Establishment of the conditions and factors associated with the social phenomenon...”**Error! Reference source not found..**

Hence, we realize that, this group requirement would be achieved gradually in the fields of cognitive goals, memorization, understanding and remembering, without any analysis, synthesis or evaluation **Error! Reference source not found..** “The evaluation criteria for the Sociology examination in the mandatory group questions (the use of concepts and techniques) are as follows:

- Identification of the social concepts
- Application of research methods and techniques in sociology”**Error! Reference source not found..**

While returning to the official examinations, we find the following correction criteria concerning concepts and terminology. Here are some examples:

3.1. Concepts and terminology that are not found in Sociology Science

- Permanent and temporary displacement (2011 normal exam, question No. 1).
- Book group (2009 normal exam, question No. 1).

¹ The Social exam total score is 20; 1 point is deducted for the student' language, orthography and structure.

3.2. Concepts and terminology that are not found in Sociology Science

- Functional elements of culture (2003 normal exam, question No. 3).
- Solution and connectivity persons (2009 normal exam, Question No. 3-b; and 2006 extraordinary session, question No. 3-A).

3.3. Concepts and terminology that are not found in Sociology Science

- The institution and the center (2009 ordinary session, question No. 2-b).
- No difference between values and system values (2008 ordinary session, question No. 4-b).

3.4. Essential concepts and terminology in the examination found in the book as sentences or small clips

- Citizenship (2010 extraordinary session, question No. 2-a; and 2010 ordinary session, question No. 3; and the 2013 extraordinary session, question No. 4-a).
- Sustainable human development **Error! Reference source not found.** (2012 extraordinary session, question No. 1-b; and 2011 ordinary session, question No. 4).

3.5. Concepts and terminology which are inappropriate or incomprehensible by the examination author, are considered incorrect according to the correction criteria

- Social Reform (2011 extraordinary session, question No. 3; 2012 ordinary session, question No. 4-c; 2012 extraordinary session, question No. 2-a; and 2010 ordinary session, question No. 5).
- Social policy, social welfare, social service (2010 ordinary session, question No. 3-c; 2009 ordinary session, question 3-1; 2011 ordinary session, question No. 3-b; 2005 extraordinary session, question No 1-b).

3.6. Application of research techniques

Concerning the application of research techniques, we find that the three basic techniques (observation, interview, and form) are applied in the official exams, but we also find some errors in asking questions; consequently, it would be impossible to properly answer them (2010 ordinary session, question No. 6).

In addition, some of the questions indicate a lack of author ability to apply a specific application for a specific concept (2003 ordinary session, question No. 4).

Also we read some instructions in the research techniques that do not exist in the exam standards (2004 extraordinary session, question No. 5).

Some rushed questions occurred (2005 ordinary session, question No. 5), or some packing of two or more techniques in the majority of the exams, or the use of non-scientific words (2009 ordinary session, question No. 5) etc.

In addition, other observations include:

- The existence of a social theme in the first group, the mandatory one, that can be placed in the third set, the optional one (2009 ordinary session, question No. 4)
- The presence of “verbs” that are not clear such as “classify/categorize/ organize” without giving a

standard for a classification (2013 ordinary session, question No. 1), or “the relationship” among some primarily fragmentary concepts (2012 ordinary session, question No. 4-a), or “confirm by an idea” where the answer is the same as the question (2012 ordinary session, question No. 3-b), or “extract the intruder where the answer is an enigma (2010 ordinary session, question No. 2-b), or “explain the relationship between social and philosophical concepts” (2010 ordinary session, question No. 5).

- The exam concepts are taken from only one axis (2001 ordinary session).
- Primitive illustrations are used despite the fact that the proposed rule does not include cartoon reading or analysis **Error! Reference source not found.** (2007 extraordinary session, question No. 1-a & b).
- Questions that are mismatched with the correction standards (2005 extraordinary session, question No. 3).
- 100% memorized questions (2008 extraordinary session, question No. 3).

3.7. Malfunction locations

Many of the failures recognized in the first section of the mandatory official exams were mentioned in the earlier paragraphs.

Those mistakes could have been avoided with the presence of a Commission or a Mechanism of action that make the exams administrated in the official certificate or placed in the Questions Bank suitable for debate, because those many current errors are not structural and could be avoided and rectified.

To correct the errors, it would be enough to build on the educational guide **Error! Reference source not found.**, experiences of some of the professors/distinguished professors, and existence of standards for the questions evaluation and ways to correct some “blunders” in order to be suitable at all levels. Note that it was indicated in “the mechanization of public examinations / Questions Bank” that “the examination is considered acceptable only after a final discussion and approval of the committee supervising the final evaluation” **Error! Reference source not found.**

But then, where is this committee, who are its members and what are their experience and their studies in this area?

4. The first optional group: “The analysis of social documents” – Grade:12 points

“This area is designed to verify the ability of the learner to extract information from the knowledge tools (texts, statistical tables, graphs and structure of fees ...), reveal the relationships between the elements and write down analysis, commentary and opinion” **Error! Reference source not found.**

“The skills required in this area are:

- Analyzing the social texts related to the curriculum subjects
- Analyzing the graphics, structural drawings and statistical tables
- Revealing the relationship between the elements of one document or among several documents (...)
- Linking the causes of social phenomena with their results
- Expressing an opinion on the phenomenon related to the themes of the curriculum”. **Error!**

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- “This group contains text and document analysis, provided that it should not exceed the number of four documents. The questions deal with each and all documents”. **Error! Reference source not found.**

The following requirements are mentioned in “The criteria of the detailed weighting of the Social Science exam (analysis of social documents) **Error! Reference source not found.**”:

- Defining documents (type, source, theme)
- Extracting information from documents
- Discussing ideas: (comparison - linking - analysis)
- Writing text synthesis (problematic - main ideas - conclusion - sequencing - clarity - using the concepts properly).

On the official exams, and the correction criteria, we find the following:

4.1. Concerning the sources

- The majority of the sources are incomplete or wrong documents, or even undocumented. Note that the documentation and sources play an important role in the teaching hours of the sociology course from the first year secondary.
- Out of 88 documents, which is the total number of documents, 37 (41%) deal with three topics: Development, Women, and Education.
- Some documents were divided into 3 (2001 extraordinary session and 2003 ordinary session) or 2 documents (2003 extraordinary session).
- Some documents are not suitable as exams in sociology but are convenient for civic education exams, for example (2013 extraordinary session).
- Long documents without any interest within the Sociology field (2002 extraordinary session; 2007 ordinary session).
- Source document “overhead” (2004 ordinary session).
- Document without any source (document No. 3, 2009 extraordinary session).
- Old document (1974), document with Facebook news (2007); (2008 extraordinary session, document No. 1, document No. 4).
- Document incorrectly understood (2003 ordinary session, document No. 2).

4.2. Concerning the questions

Practically, this group is supposed to be divided into two parts: Preparatory questions and text synthesis². Those parts merely reflect the grade allocated to this exam group, which is 12 points. The grade includes:

- 5 points for the preparatory questions (more or less), which makes up around (41%) of the grade;
- 7 points for the text synthesis, which makes up around (59%) of the grade;
- The text’s previous questions must progressively include: A memorized part that demonstrates an

² www.cyberprofs.com

understanding of the intended meaning, application and synthesis, all the way to the upper levels such as creation and evaluation embodied in the text synthesis. This progress is showing, certainly, through the “procedural acts” enclosed in the questions.

- In the official exam questions, “the preparatory questions”, we find the following:
- Inaccurate procedural acts: In almost all the exams.
- Wrongly mixing some concepts: Social variation and transformation, or no Social variation (2008 ordinary session, question No. 1-a, and question No. 2. a; 2012 extraordinary session, question No. 3).
- Heterogeneous correction criteria with questions exam (2007 ordinary session, question No. 3).
- General culture questions (2004 ordinary session, question No. 1- a; 2006 ordinary session, question No. 5 - a).
- Documents with dispersed questions (2006 extraordinary session, questions for the first, second, third document and questions of documents 1, 2, 3).
- Wrong questions in the submission and correction standards (2007 ordinary session, question No. 2; 2009 ordinary session, question No. 6; 2011 extraordinary session, question No. 3-b; and 2003 ordinary session).
- Intuitive questions (2009 ordinary session, question No. 1).
- Questions directed to the professor hence are not accessible to the students (2009 extraordinary session, question No. 7).
- Wrong answers in the correction standards (2011 ordinary session, question No. 2, No. 3; 2013 ordinary session, question No. 2- b).
- Questions related to the first section “Use of the concepts and techniques” (2013 ordinary session, question No. 3).

4.3. Concerning the questions’ scale

The exam must include questions that are simple for the student to read, understand, and recognize the terminology, through questions to application, then conduct the analysis, design, leading to the conclusion and the evaluation. Unfortunately, those norms were not observed in any official exam in our research topic. Here are a few samples:

- In the 2007 extraordinary session: The number of documents was 9: the first 6 questions were dedicated to reading and understanding, the 7th question addresses the conclusion, the 8th question was devoted to reading and understanding, then back to the conclusion in the 9th question via the text synthesis.
- In the 2005 ordinary session: The 1st question requests (the student?) to conclude (understand and apply). The 2nd question requires to show (installation), conclude (understand) and demonstrate (apply). The 3rd question asks to explain (understand) and to select (knowledge and memory). The 4th question requests to deduce (application). The 5th question seeks values (evaluation without any conclusion; it is closer to expressing an opinion). The 6th question requests a text synthesis.
- In the 2006 ordinary session: The first 6 questions required measurement and understanding of the text, with some branching in the 3rd and 5th questions, which referred to assessing the levels (3) and the analysis and evaluation (5), then the text synthesis.

- In the 2001 ordinary session: Questions 1 and 2 (read and understand), questions 3 and 4 (analyze), question 5 (read and understand) and question 6 (text synthesis).
- In the 2007 ordinary session: Questions 1, 2 and 3 (understand and save), question 4 (understand), question 5 (create), question 6 (read and understand) and question 7 (text synthesis).

4.4. Concerning the text synthesis

Concerning the text synthesis, there is a lack of text synthesis in the different exams. We did not have even a hint of its existence at the lowest reference, neither in asking the last question for this group where the question is not well structured, nor in the correction criteria where there is no clear text that reveals the problematic. In addition, a special requirement of the application of “higher-order thinking” is missing from the documents. Therefore, the text synthesis is not accessible to the students. From this point, a perpetual confusion was created between the problem and the problematic **Error! Reference source not found.**, or by the existence of procedural acts dating back to the memorizing phase, or by asking a text synthesis question in the pre-final, knowing that it should be required in the last question “text synthesis” (problematic, main ideas, conclusion, sequencing, clarity, accurate use of the concepts). Hence, we will reveal some exam examples related to our research topic:

- In the 2006 ordinary session, the 6th question was “Based on data in the document and on your pre-requisite information, type a text considering the problem and the social phenomena involved, a summary of its elements, concluding two of their repercussions on Lebanese society, proposing three suitable measures to confront them, noting the desired result, ...” Returning to the correction criteria and the nature of the questions, we find a return to the stage of reading, understanding and memorizing, all of without proposing any problematic that will form the backbone of the text.
- In the 2001 ordinary session, the 6th question was “Type a text in which you suggest a social policy to be adopted in Lebanon to address the problems posed by the documents No. 2 and 3. (18 points)”. Referring back to the correction criteria, we find that the student is requested to return to the understanding and the application stages etc.

4.5. Malfunction locations

There is no concept or a plan for this first optional group “Analysis of social documents”. In fact, the errors were structural and fundamental; hence, they could not be repaired, especially since the students are not well trained to meet that goal by the Educational Centre, Ministry of Education or by the Faculty of Education (curriculum / education matter jurisdiction 2005- 2006 - 2008). Therefore, we must start from the beginning e.g.: Training the trainers, setting up training workshops, dissemination of accurate models, distribution of the efficiencies of this area and how to ask questions according to the objectives set out in the curriculum.

5. The second optional group: “The study of a social issue”- Grade: 12 points

“This area is designed to verify that the student did acquire the ability to formulate the subject in a systematic way (structure and coherence). Here, the subject is not only concentrated on one lesson, but

focuses on several studied lessons. We do not measure the student's capacities on remembering nor retrieving information, rather do we evaluate his/her fundamental capabilities such as demonstrating a design or showing a problem or social therapy. This area of sociology and economic studies is characterized by qualifying the learner to deal with the phenomenon of economic and social problems, write a topic or report containing his/her findings and proposals of concern" **Error! Reference source not found.** Thus, we realize that the competencies foreseen from this area are:

- Analyze a social phenomenon (identifying causes and factors affecting it, the interdependence of its elements...).
- Develop a detailed design for a social theme (problem, hypothesis, structure of the text, structured ideas, and conclusion).
- Address a social issue from specific documents (groups and organizations).
- Write a report about a valuable community social phenomenon.
- Returning to the official exams, we find that:

5.1. Concerning the form:

- The majority of document sources are missing or non-existent.
- The question is an old saying, as if we were in a cultural public exam (2001 ordinary exam 2001, and 2001 extraordinary exam).
- The documents oscillate between one and three documents (2003 ordinary session and 2002 ordinary session, etc.).

5.2. Concerning the topics:

- About 60% of the topics focus on "Culture and Society" / Third year / a branch of Economics Science **Error! Reference source not found.**
- Some topics are not related to the specific sociology knowledge; they are closer to other materials in their curriculum e.g.: 2011 extraordinary exam and 2012 ordinary exam, in which their topics entirely focused on civic education; the 2013 extraordinary exam is closer to the geography (exam?), 2003 and 2005 ordinary exams are closer to Arabic language rather than to Sociology Science study.
- Confusion between the scientific information (objectivity) in sociology and the aspirations (subjectivity) e.g. 2010 ordinary exam, 2006 and 2012 extraordinary exams.

5.3. Concerning the concepts:

- Concepts that do not exist in the book (2008 ordinary exam "social action"; 2003 ordinary exam "gender"). Note that, the last concept is devoted to the students in the university/Faculty of Social Sciences/Social action.
- Misconceptions in correction criteria (2012 ordinary exam: Total ignorance of the relationship between "role, status and social prestige").
- Fragmentary concepts as (2006 extraordinary exam "change" without "social" and 2010 extraordinary exam "reform" without "social").

5.4. Concerning the topic and its questions:

- 80% memorizing e.g.: 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2010 ordinary exams.
- Understanding the documents with some general information: 2002 and 2003 ordinary exams and 2009 extraordinary exam).
- Determining the topic and guidance, and providing design. (Almost in all courses).

5.5. Concerning the topic and the correction criteria:

Among a few of the issued publications by the Centre of Research and Development, there are compulsive techniques for “analysis of a social subject”. While reviewing the criteria for the correction, we did not find any. We mention the problematic in 2002 ordinary session correction criteria: "With the dramatic development of student numbers, with the rights of education and human rights ... We notice that educational opportunities are still uneven among the members of this community. Then, 2 points are given as a full grade to the conclusion that contained ideas from the body and the introduction of the topic. Not to mention that the conclusion would open new horizons.

5.6. Concerning the existence of a social problem:

A social subject does not exist, except in the experimental/pilot session in 2001. All existing correction criteria define the distribution of the labels on specific ideas, with the abolition of many of the techniques and details required from the student to acquire the “adequacy to address a social subject”.

5.7. Malfunction locations:

In this area, there is hardly anything identical to the new methodology, so we could not compare it with the foreign language text books, the French one for example, which endeavors through several technical and different networks, to give the student, in detail, various processing techniques and a methodology of specific methods **Error! Reference source not found.** Thus, the student through the exam will be evaluated accordingly.

6. Conclusion: What are the flaws in the Sociology science official exam of the Lebanese secondary certificate?

The defect areas, as outlined, fluctuate between the first set of mandatory exam questions, and the second and third optional exam questions. According to our study, we recognized the Sociology teachers' requests in high school **Error! Reference source not found.** The teachers announced their requirement for training as follows (Table 1 & fig.1):

Table 1: The sociology teachers in secondary in need of reform

IN NEED OF REFORM	%
Content only	9.52
Teaching methods only	19.5
Evaluation methods only	3.7
Content & Teaching methods	15.3
Content & Evaluation methods	4
Teaching & Evaluation methods	5.82
Content, Teaching & Evaluation methods	11.1
Teaching & Evaluation methods	1
Content, Teaching & Evaluation methods	32.8
No need of reform	15.3
	4



Fig. 1: Statistical diagram of sociology teachers in secondary in need of reform

Observation: The questionnaire of the training requirement was focused on the Sociology topic. The methods conformed to educational collection methods. Concerning the evaluation methods, since varied answers emerged, we were left to pick more than one area. The majority of professors expressed their desire to be trained with new methods in teaching and assessment. The above result shows that: The percentage of professors who requested a reform on the content, methods and evaluation was 32.80% as well as a group of about 48% professors solicited reform on the methods and/or content and/or evaluation methods, with another 15.34% declaring that there is no need for any sort of reform.

We think that the imbalance in the official certificate exams comes from: The lack of training for the trainers and supervisors. Thus an accumulation of incongruences have developed and hence, the certificate exams could not achieve growth in expertise in a literal sense, despite the presence of several concerned official institutions.

The major imbalance exists in the bank of questions and their supervisors: Why and under what criteria professors required to provide exams to the bank for a fee, are particularly selected³, in addition to the absence of standards in spite of its presence in Decree No. 10227/97 published in the Official Gazette number 26, the date of 4 / 6/1997). We even found that some of the exams are focused on general culture, noting that the experimental contest in 2001 was produced with great professionalism.

7. Suggestions

According to our earlier study relating to Sociology course objectives and official exams flaws, we suggest the following:

7.1. In the short term:

- Cancel the elective/optional exam groups (analysis of social documents and the study of a social theme) and discontinue them.
- Retain the mandatory group and work on the formulation and delivery of concepts and technologies to ensure good comprehension by the student⁴.

7.2. In the medium term:

- Create a qualified staff to achieve the expected goals.
- Establish effective training workshops and select trainers and supervisors according to specific criteria at the national level or other.
- Base the teachers' training on their actual needs all the way to attending the evaluation **Error! Reference source not found.**, which is in addition to the cognitive levels.

7.3. In the long term:

- Work on updating the sociology textbook and make it the subject of exams among several publishing houses to improve its quality.
- Re-set the optional exams leaving the door wide to the process of criticism and renewal, leading to finding references and competencies for this developed topic.

Finally, we found in this study as a result of observation and research on Sociology official exams that the mentioned exams only measure the lowest cognitive levels such as memorization and understanding in the majority of their questions. Meanwhile, officials in Arab countries state: "For the specification of the students exam questions in high school, Mohamed Saad, Head of the Secondary Education Central Department and the private schools, affirmed that the exam questions, in all themes, must rely on remembering, understanding, applying, skills going thru upper levels, pointing out that this organization differs regarding the subjects, whether in science or in literary topics"⁵.

³ The fees of an official exam elaboration are 200.000LL

⁴ Identical to the Sociology exams in Egypt, Soudan, etc.

⁵ www.youm7.com/2005

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