

What kind of history should we teach to our children? The teaching of the ‘correct version of history’ has gone far from the mere acquirement of academic skills and knowledge and in some cases, the acceptance of government-prescribed historical narratives has become a matter of national security. The question thus in fact lies at the crossroads between relevant national interests, the government’s desire to raise ‘patriotic spirits’ within the younger generation and the preservation of national identity.

This dynamic is specifically evident in the current tensions between Russia and Ukraine, where conflicting narratives about the past are used as a weapon fuelling the ongoing armed conflict. Teaching children the ‘correct’ and ‘polished’ version of state-prescribed ‘historical truth’ is a precondition to instilling patriotic identity, which is supposed to inspire young people to continue the ‘century-long’ struggles of their ancestors in the present armed conflict. In Russia, this struggle is framed within the fight against Nazism starting in the Second World War and allegedly continuing in modern Ukraine. The young Russians are therefore supposed to repeat the ‘great deed’ of their ancestors in liberating the world from alleged ‘Nazism’.

In Ukraine, the current war against Russia is presented as a continuation of a ‘centuries-long struggle’ against Russian colonial usurpation. It dates back to the armed resistance struggle of the XX century, with questionable personas raised to the rank of national heroes whose polished biographies are used to inspire the present-day fighters in the war against Russia. In the end, history teaching which promotes the government-prescribed and one-sided interpretation of events may stop serving purely academic goals and be substituted with what I call mnemonic indoctrination which has nothing in common with the essence of history as an academic discipline.

One fundamental question which is often overlooked in the debate about protecting ‘national security interests’ or ‘instilling the sense of patriotism and national pride’ in the history curriculum is whether such teaching would be in the best interest of children as primary education receivers. It should also be borne in mind that children do not lose their human rights by virtue of passing via school gates, and childhood is no longer considered a ‘rights-free zone’. Therefore, my research will show why replacing history education with state-sponsored indoctrination violates children’s rights and is contrary to the spirit of education rights enshrined within international human rights law.

To achieve this goal, I will conduct a thorough inquiry into how education in Russia and Ukraine is misused and abused for political goals, focusing on whether the history curriculum is subjugated to political goals and whether it promotes a single historical narrative with the aim of raising patriotic spirits. In the second phase, I will create a strong theoretical basis for claiming that substituting education with indoctrination is inconsistent with children’s education rights. My project will result in defining mnemonic indoctrination and summarized with a monograph elaborating on the topic.

This research will therefore fill in the gap in the literature concerning the misuse of history teaching, scrutinising it from the human rights perspective and with a strong focus on the individual education rights of the child. It will especially be relevant in light of the recent inquiries of UN human rights bodies into the processes taking place in Russian education and may open a further debate on how states might engage in misuse and abuse of children’s rights while preaching the carefully crafted version of ‘historical truth’.