

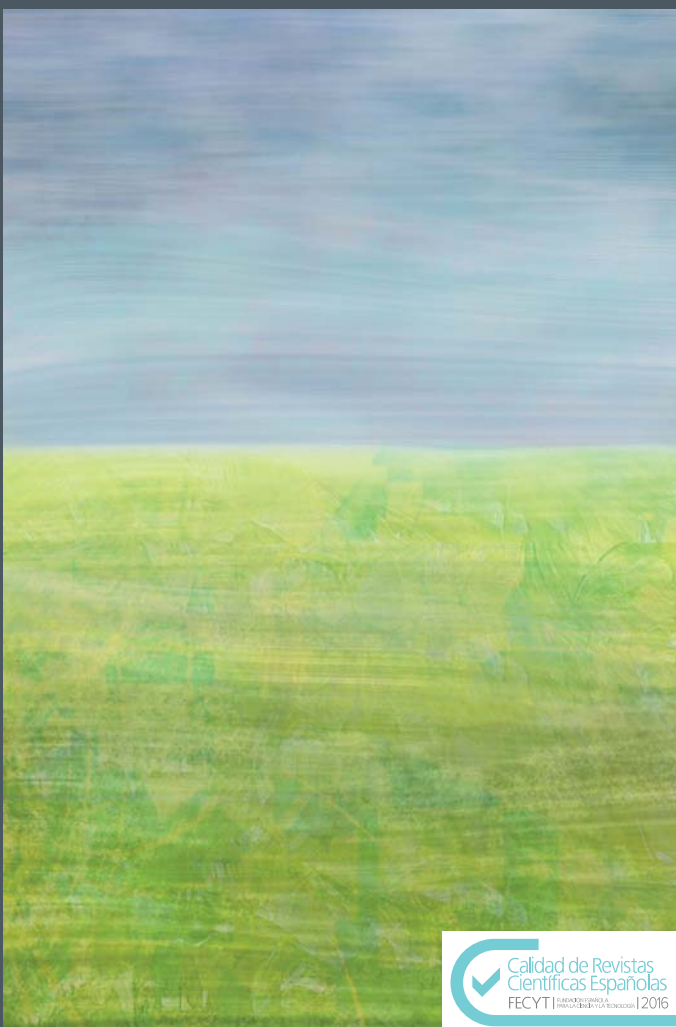
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**Cognitive level and historical thinking competencies in history textbooks from Spain and England.
A comparative study**

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Cognitive level and thinking historically competencies in history textbooks from Spain and England: a comparative study¹

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the activities of History textbooks used in Spain and the United Kingdom to verify the cognitive level and the presence of thinking historically competencies. We have analyzed 4602 textbook activities from both countries to compare the extent to which thinking historically and complex cognitive skills are promoted in each country. We analyzed three variables: activity type, cognitive level of activities and the presence of historical concepts of first and second order. The results show that there are differences between Spain and England in relation to the complexity of the activities and to the development and assessment of thinking historically. This research concludes by highlighting the need to rethink the teaching of history through work with primary sources and other thinking historically skills that allow the development of historical competencies and the resolution of activities with a higher level of complexity.

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Keywords: History education, textbooks, thinking historically, Cognitive skills, Epistemology.

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar las actividades de los textbooks de Historia de Spain e The United Kingdom para comprobar su cognitive level y la presencia de competencias de pensamiento histórico. Se han analizado 4602 actividades de manuales escolares de ambos countries para comparar en qué medida se promueve el pensamiento histórico y habilidades cognitivas complejas en cada country. Para conseguir este objetivo se han analizado tres variables: tipología de actividad, cognitive level de la actividad y la presencia de conceptos históricos de primer y segundo order. Los resultados muestran que existen diferencias entre Spain e The United Kingdom en relación a la complejidad de las actividades y al desarrollo y evaluación del pensamiento histórico a través de las mismas. Este estudio concluye destacando la necesidad de replantear la enseñanza de la historia a través del trabajo con sources primarias y otras destrezas de pensamiento histórico que permitan el desarrollo de competencias históricas y la resolución de actividades con un mayor nivel de complejidad.

Palabras clave: Enseñanza de la historia, libro de texto, pensamiento histórico, habilidades cognitivas, epistemología.

Introduction

The appearance in the 21st century of the pedagogical concept of competencies has led to a new challenge and supposes a boost for the methodological proposals in all subjects and their evaluation processes (Tiana, 2011). Since the turn of the century, following the recommendations of the OECD, explaining education through competencies has spread throughout the European Union, with an emphasis on responsible, active and autonomous citizenship in students' basic education. Both the 2006 LOE and the 2013 LOMCE Spanish education laws included competencies as key elements in the teaching of different subjects.

There is no doubt of the potential that the application of these competencies has for improving the teaching and learning processes of the various curricular subjects. Nevertheless, a process of adaptation of

these competencies to the disciplinary epistemology of each area of knowledge is necessary if these are not to be empty wisdoms. As they are formulated, the basic or key competencies in compulsory education pose a number of problems. Although it is affirmed that they should all be “acquired” from each and every one of the curricular subjects, some (mathematical, linguistic, scientific) are inevitably associated with specific subjects, while others, like social and civic competencies get watered down and are vaguely assimilated in the Social Sciences, Geography and History. According to López Facal (2014), for these competencies to be applied in Social Sciences we need to go beyond any interpretation of them that is related solely to competency. Being competent implies knowing how to interpret the medium in which the learner is interacting, knowing how to propose alternatives, being able to argue and having knowledge of what society is and how it operates, how human relations have been generated and modified over time. Competency is demonstrated in the ability to cope with day-to-day problems. Thus, it is necessary, among other things, to have developed certain information processing skills such as knowing how to look for information, contextualizing data, relating them to earlier, simultaneous, or later events, and appraising how reliable and relevant they are for ourselves and for others from an ethical stance that favors living together. The most competent person is not one who amasses more scholarly knowledge on a historical or other type of subject, but the one who knows how to use knowledge correctly in the appropriate context. These types of skills are part of the methods with which historians work. Incorporating the historical method into education would seem to be a good strategy for forming more competent people (López, Miralles, Prats & Gómez, 2017).

However, not all European curricula include this idea of basic or key transversal competencies in all areas. For example, the British National Curriculum presents an overall aim and several common specific aims for all years in the subject of History. Some of the aims focus on procedural and methodological aspects of history (usually known as second order concepts or concepts of historical thinking) and epistemological elements. Later on, the focus shifts to the contents addressed in each year although these are not compulsory teaching elements (Byrom, 2013).

Given this disparity of curricula, we have conducted a study of the History textbooks used in the United Kingdom and Spain during the transition period from Primary to Secondary Education (11-13 years). The

aim is to analyze how these differences are reflected in the cognitive levels demanded in the textbook activities, their typology and the epistemological interpretation of the subject.

Teaching History and the competencies of historical thinking

The teaching and learning of History in Primary and secondary classrooms is usually perceived as the transmission of series of concepts, information, dates and events in the past which the students then memorize. This leads to students seeing History as a subject that only needs to be memorized and of no application in their lives (Burenheide, 2007; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Furthermore, this approach serves to enhance the existing confusion between the past and history. History is the product of historians' research, i.e., an interpretation of the past (VanSledright, 2004). Thus, for an appropriate learning of history it should not be presented to students as closed knowledge to be committed to memory. We need to move away from the traditional encyclopedic approach so that memory ceases to be the fundamental intellectual skill and accompany it with the capacity to analyze and explain or, as Pierre Vilar puts it "teach how to think historically" (Prats & Santacana, 2011).

The importance of teaching how to think historically in the classroom stems from the fact that historical thinking is not something that develops naturally but needs to be explicitly taught (Wineburg, 2001). A watershed moment for this change in classroom history teaching and learning was in the United Kingdom in 1972 and the curriculum *History Project 13-16*, which was later renamed *School History Project* (SHP). The idea was that students should "do history" rather than just receive and memorize it, i.e., that they developed historical thinking. And so there came into being a new teaching approach as an alternative to the traditional fact and concept learning one. The new approach became, fittingly, known as "New History" (Domínguez, 1987, 2015). It was a constructivist learning model that put the emphasis on methods and history research techniques and on working with resources; but it also sought to change the cognitive skills demanded of the students, to overcome the rote learning of facts and figures. If we consider that the cognitive skills are mental skills and processes necessary to perform a task and that they also facilitate knowledge since they are responsible for its acquisition and retrieval

(Reed, 2007), then learning to think historically means integrating the most complex cognitive skills into the teaching and learning process.

Later, in the 1990s, appeared the *Concepts of History and Teaching Approaches, 7-14* (Proyecto CHATA), directed by Dickinson and Ashby between 1991 and 1996. This project, which like the other two continued into the early 2000s, was based on students' acquisition of second order concepts, in this case students aged 7 to 14 years (Domínguez, 2015). The contributions of various authors since the 1980s are, therefore, of interest (Lee, 2005; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee, Dickinson & Ashby, 2004), who advocated history teaching that included a balance of conceptual and procedural contents, which began to be known as second order concepts.

In North America, in the 1990s, there was a wealth of research into historical understanding, including contributions from important British researchers like Shemilt, Lee and Ashby (Fuentes, 2002). In Canada, in 2006, the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness of the University of British Columbia, directed by Peter Seixas, together with the *Historical Foundation* set up the project called *Benchmarks of Thinking historically Project* (Seixas, 2006), whose aim was to develop and implement a common framework to evaluate history learning in the Canadian classrooms. Since 2012 it has been known as the *Thinking historically Project* and it continues to drive changes in the teaching of history so that students learn to think historically rather than memorize data from the past (Peck & Seixas, 2008).

This project started from the basic ideas being worked on in the UK and focused on defining what thinking historically is. With its aims of specifying what thinking historically is and what criteria to use in evaluating it, the project laid down the six large concepts that make up thinking historically: historical significant, historical sources and evidence, change and continuity, causes and effects, historical perspectives, and the ethical dimension of history (Peck & Seixas, 2008; Seixas, 2006; Seixas & Morton, 2013).

In the United States, Barton & Levstik (2004) or Levstik (2008) have explored new approaches to teaching history, combining a more humanistic focus with another that is more methodological and procedural. However, two names stand out regarding the specific definition and development of historical thinking: Bruce A. VanSledright and Sam Wineburg, with the latter adopting an approach that is very close to cognitive psychology.

Wineburg (2001) explored what it means to read a historical text using the method based on comparing experts and novices – in this case, historians and students. One of the most important reflections this author makes is that historical thinking is not a natural ability that is acquired as one develops psychologically, but that it needs to be learnt. This is the idea behind the title of one of his most important books, *Thinking historically and Other Unnatural Acts* (2001). Elsewhere, VanSledright (2004, 2011) upholds an investigative methodology in which work with primary sources is a central element for the student to develop thinking historically from an early age and with an insistence on the importance of contextualization.

Since the early 2000s, Latin America has also witnessed intense research into the cognitive aspects of the competencies involved in thinking historically. There are important projects like *Jovenes diante da História* (Cerri & Amézola, 2010) and other work in Mexico, Brazil and Chile. Sebastián Plá's book (2005) on Mexico and how to learn to think historically is, in some aspects, one of the best monographs in Spanish on this topic. Other works of note include Díaz Barriga & García Praga (2008) on how students acquire the notion of time, a subject which is also addressed by Mora & Ortiz (2012). In Brazil, we would cite the works of the team led by María Auxiliadora Schmidt (2005) and Tânia García in Curitiba on historical awareness; and in Chile, Henríquez (2011) on interpreting historical sources. In Portugal, we have the work of Barca (2005), while in Spain Carretero & López (2009), Domínguez (2015), Gómez, Ortuño & Molina (2014), Gómez & Miralles (2015) and Sáiz (2013, 2015) show how proposals from the English-speaking world have been incorporated into the research into the teaching of History.

Despite the wealth of studies on the cognitive aspects of History teaching, the Spanish curricular and the textbooks do not reflect the advances made in research (Gómez, 2014; Sáiz, 2013), especially compared to other countries (Gómez & Miralles, 2016). Considering that research shows that the textbooks are still the main resource used by History teachers (Martínez, Valls & Pineda, 2009), it is important to carry out in-depth comparative analyses of the activities in these textbooks in order to discern how appropriate they are cognitively and in terms of competencies in the light of recent research.

Methodology

Aims

The main aim of this study is to analyze the cognitive level and the competencies of thinking historically in the History textbooks in Spain and the United Kingdom. The idea is to see how appropriate the activities are for the international education model proposed. The main aim can be broken down into three specific aims:

- To classify the typology of the activities proposed in the History textbooks used in Spain and in the United Kingdom.
- To compare the cognitive level demanded in the textbook activities in both countries.
- To determine the thinking historically competencies developed in the textbooks in both countries and distinguish the first and second order concepts present in the activities.

Research focus

The research design is descriptive, quantitative and transversal, since the aim is to ascertain the characteristics of the history activities in the textbooks in Spain and the United Kingdom by comparing the two countries (Bisquerra, 2014). The activities will be described according to their typology, the cognitive level they demand of the students and the presence of first and second order historical concepts. Hence a nominal measuring scale is used to classify the activities according to their typology and the thinking historically concepts, and an ordinal scale is used for the cognitive level. We will study the frequency of each category and the relations and correlations between the variables.

Population and sample

The study population comprises history activities in Spanish Social Sciences textbooks used in the 6th year of Primary Education and the 1st and 2nd years of compulsory Secondary Education and those used in the three years

of Key Stage 3 in the United Kingdom, i.e., the equivalent of Spain's 7th, 8th and 9th years. The study focused on the Key Stage 3 years because they belong to transitional stage, like the Spanish years studied. The sample was chosen by interviewing four teachers (two from Spain and two from the United Kingdom) and two experts in Social Sciences teaching from the University of Murcia and the UCL – Institute of Education (London) – about their opinions and perceptions of the most significant and representative publishers. Although the sample is non probabilistic, six publishers were chosen on the basis of the opinions expressed by these experts: Oxford, Santillana and Vicens Vives in Spain, and Heinemann, Hodder Education and Collins in the United Kingdom. The total sample comprised 4602 activities from 18 textbooks (see Table I).

TABLE I. Features of the sample textbooks: number of activities by country and year

COUNTRY	FREQUENCY	YEAR	FREQUENCY
The United Kingdom	2365	7	814
		8	745
		9	806
Spain	2237	6	476
		1	744
		2	1017
Total	4602		4602

Source: Own

The tool used to collect and analyze the data

An Access database tool was designed to collect the information. The qualitative, nominal typevariables were coded with numerical values to facilitate later quantitative analysis with SPSS v.19.0. Three relational tables were created. The third table, linked by "Subject code", includes data on the activities, identifying the countries to which they belong and with the following fields of analysis: type of activity, cognitive level and historical concepts.

The typology of the exercise was defined according to the type of activity using the classification used by Gómez (2014). Table II shows the categorization made.

TABLE II. Type of activities in the textbooks

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	EXAMPLE
Short question	How many dictatorships were there in Spain between 1920 and 1975? What are the features of a dictatorship?
Exercises with figure/illustrations	Work with the illustration. What differences do you observe between the Christian territories at the beginning of the eleventh century and those of the thirteenth century?
Objective evidence	The first Spanish Constitution was passed in: a) 1808; b) 1812; c) 1978 Put the following in chronological order: the Caliphate of Cordoba, the Taifa Kingdoms, the Muslim Invasion and Emirate, the Nazrid Kingdom of Granada.
Critical appreciation of a text	Write an appreciation of the text. What was the working day of a child in the mines like? Could the child go to school? What, do you think, was the significance of the absence of education?
Essay	How would the Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula have felt? Give reasons for your answer.
Capacity building	Imagine you are a suffragette at the beginning of the twentieth century. Prepare a poster demanding women's right to vote. Your poster should include an illustration, a main slogan and three reasons for defending women's vote.
Searching for information	From the eleventh century craftsmen began to form guilds. Research and prepare a list of the main guilds in the Middle Ages.

Source: Own

In order to define the cognitive level demanded by the activities we took as our reference the papers by Sáiz (2013, 2015). This categorization is based on the milestones learning designed by Bloom, in one of its most recent versions and adapted by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). Bloom's taxonomy was also taken into consideration in other classifications of basic and higher cognitive abilities (Ramos, Herrera & Ramírez, 2010), as was the adaptation of History and Social Sciences exercises to skills development (Vidal Abarca, 2010 & Hernández, 2002). This enables us to make a cognitive level hierarchy in which to include the learning resulting from the activities in the textbooks (Table III).

TABLE III. Meaning and examples of the categorization of cognitive levels demanded of students in the textbook activities

COGNITIVE LEVEL	MEANING	EXAMPLE
1	These imply locating and repeating information in academic texts, primary and secondary written sources. These activate <i>verbatim</i> or <i>text-based</i> declarative knowledge. The only skills they require are reading, describing, locating, repeating, reproducing and/or memorizing.	Which foreign countries supported the revolutionaries in the Spanish Civil War?
2	These require understanding information within the resource (an academic text, a source, a map, a timeline, illustration, etc.) summarizing it, paraphrasing it representing it in diagram form; locating the main idea in the resource, summarizing the information provided there and/or schematizing it, defining concepts, relating, establishing similarities and differences between them; searching for and summarizing new information in other sources; and, finally, compile simple resources.	How did 19 th century society differ from structured society?
3	Those that get students to analyze, apply, evaluate information taken from various sources or imply creating new information. They start from the previous level and derive from answering <i>inferential</i> questions and the application of procedural contents as <i>strategies</i> . History empathy exercises, simulations or case studies; simulated biography writing applying learned declarative contents; critical or heuristic appraisal of the information in the sources.	How do you think your life would be different if there were no democracy? Think out your answer and give explanations.

Source: own, based on the categories of cognitive levels established by Sáiz (2013, 2015)

For the analysis of the presence first and second order concepts (the latter in relation to the skills of thinking historically), we took as our basis the proposal by Seixas & Morton (2013), which was adapted to the textbook activities de los textbooks, as shown in Table IV. Two first order concept typologies (chronology: conceptual/factual) were also added to the second order concepts, as has been done in other studies on examinations (Gómez & Miralles, 2015).

TABLE IV. Meaning and example of the categorization of first and second order concepts in the textbook activities.

CONCEPT	MEANING	EXAMPLE
FIRST ORDER		
Chronology	Knowledge of the dates of historical processes or how to situate them correctly.	<i>Put the following historical figures in chronological order: Charles I, James II, William of Orange, Oliver Cromwell.</i>
Conceptual/factual	Knowledge of a concept or a specific event in the past.	<i>Who were the favorites? Give the names of two of them.</i>
SECOND ORDER		
Historical Significant	Explain the historical importance of a particular event or person using appropriate criteria	<i>Why was the printing press so important for culture?</i>
Historical sources and evidence	Understand History as an interpretation based on inferences from primary sources	<i>Interpretations of texts or sources that the textbook presents that go beyond sentence reproduction.</i>
Change and continuity	Understand change in the past as a process of varying rhythms and patterns. Identify the complex patterns of progress and decadence in the different peoples and societies.	<i>Humanism supposed a change of mentality with respect to the previous period. Explain its ideas.</i>
Causes and consequences	Recognize multiple causes and consequences in both the short and long term. See the effects of an event or a specific person on human activities and on today's structures and conditions	<i>Make a list in your exercise book of the main reasons behind the economic crisis of the XVII century.</i>
Historical perspective	Recognize the differences between current beliefs, values and motivations (view of the world) and those of earlier peoples and societies. Explain the perspectives of people on the past within their own historical context.	<i>[on an empathy activity with two invented characters in Ancient Egypt] Imagine you are Merit and that you are writing a letter to your brother. Explain to your brother what the district you live in is like ...</i>
Ethical dimension	Make reasoned ethical judgments about people's actions in the past, taking into account the historical context in which they operated. Evaluate the implications today of the sacrifices and injustices of the past.	<i>William Used Terror To Try To Control The English, But How Sensible Do You Think This Was And Why?</i>

Source: Gómez & Miralles, 2016

The tables collecting information were processed using the Access program and then subjected to quantitative analysis with SPSS v.19.0. This provided the descriptive statistics, and returned the percentage and absolute frequencies of the variables studied. Contingency tables for the variables were also obtained together with the relations and correlations between them.

In order to determine whether the variables were related, we used the Chi-square association to check the hypothesis that two categorical variables are independent. Statistical significance was established at $p \leq .05$. Since Pearson's Chi-squared test does not inform about the strength of association in the variables studied, we used Cramer's Phi and V to study the correlations between variables for nominal measures and Kendall's Tau-b for ordinal data.

Results

With regard to the first aim, Table V shows the types of activities in the school textbooks analyzed in Spain and the United Kingdom. The most common activity typology found in the Spanish textbooks is the short question, which accounted for 50% of the activities registered. It was followed at large distance by figures and illustrations (20%). The remaining categories, (objective evidence, essays, critical appreciations of texts, capacity-building activities, etc.) do not reach 8% each. The British textbooks are more balanced. Almost 32% of the activities are short questions, followed by essays (27%), activities based on figures and illustrations (19,1%), capacity-building activities (10%) and critical appreciation of texts (9%). Other types are below this percentage.

TABLE V. Frequency and percentages of History activities according to their typology in Spanish and British textbooks

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	SPAIN		THE UNITED KINGDOM	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Capacity building	121	5.4	246	10.4
Objective evidence	151	6.8	37	1.6
Critical appreciation of a text	101	4.5	212	9.0
Essay	123	5.5	636	26.9
Information search	139	6.2	32	1.4
Figures/illustrations	463	20.7	451	19.1
Short question	1139	50.9	751	31.8
Total	2237	100.0	2365	100.0

Source: Own

One consequence of these differences in typology is that the results for the cognitive level have also been very unequal (Aim 2). Table VI shows the cognitive level the activities demand of students. Over 60% of the exercises in the Spanish textbooks respond to level 1, 34% to level 2, and just 4% to level 3. In the UK the results are the opposite, with almost 50% of the activities at level 3, 45% at level 2, and a little over 5% at level 1.

TABLE VI. Frequency and percentages of history activities by cognitive level in the Spanish and British textbooks

COGNITIVE LEVEL	SPAIN		THE UNITED KINGDOM	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1	1366	61.0	116	4.9
2	778	34.8	1082	45.8
3	93	4.2	1167	49.3
Total	2237	100.0	2365	100.0

Source: Own

The correlation between variables country and cognitive level is very strong, as is shown in Tables VII and VIII. The Chi-squared test (Table VII) confirms the alternative hypothesis, i.e., there is dependence relation between the variables ($p < .05$). Since the cognitive level is ordinal, Kendall's Tau-b de Kendall statistic in Table VIII indicates the degree of the correlation between the variables, which is moderate to high (.622).

TABLE VII. Chi-squared test to test the relation between the country and the cognitive level variables

	Value	gl	Asymptotic Sig. (bilateral)
Pearson's Chi-squared	2017.462 ^a	2	.000
Likelihood test	2370.135	2	.000
Linear by linear association	1989.073	1	.000
Number of valid cases	4602		

Source: Own.

TABLE VIII. Statistic to test the degree of correlation between the variables country and type of activity

		Value	Asymptotic type error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Sig. approx
Ordinal by ordinal	Kendall's Tau -b	.622	.008	72.727	.000
Number of valid cases		4602			

Source: Own.

In terms of historical competencies (aim 3), Table IX shows the frequency and percentage of each of the first and second order concepts. In the Spanish textbooks there is an overload of concepts, especially of the factual/conceptual type. 75% of the activities require knowledge of this first order concept type. Historically thinking concepts are in the minority and only noticeable in historical sources and evidence (almost

10% of the activities), while the rest scarcely reach 5%. In the United Kingdom there is more balance. 30% of the activities require knowledge of the concept of sources/evidence, 17% are based on factual/conceptual type knowledge, while the concepts of changes/continuities, causes/consequences and historical perspective account for some 15%. Historical significant and ethical dimension are less present.

TABLE IX. Frequency and percentages of historical concepts in the History activities in textbooks in Spain and in the United Kingdom

HISTORICAL CONCEPTS		SPAIN		THE UNITED KINGDOM	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
First order	Chronology	118	5.3	60	2.5
	Conceptual/factual	1620	72.4	409	17.3
Segundo order	Historical Significant	50	2.2	131	5.5
	Sources/Evidence	220	9.8	749	31.7
	Changes/Continuity	29	1.3	345	14.6
	Causes/Consequences	97	4.3	287	12.1
	Historical Perspective	40	1.8	317	13.4
	Ethical dimension	63	2.8	67	2.8
Total		2237	100.0	1561	100.0

Source: Own

Tables X and XI show the correlation between the variables country and typology of historical concepts. The Chi-squared statistic in Table X indicates that these variables are dependent ($p < .05$), and the relation between the two is moderate to high, since in Table XI, Cramer's V has a value of .597.

TABLE X. Chi-squared test to check the relation between the variables country and historical concept

	Value	Gf	Asymptotic Sig. (bilateral)
Pearson's Chi-squared	1640.486 ^a	7	.000
Likelihood ratio	1789.099	7	.000
Linear by linear association	1337.269	1	.000
Number of valid cases	4602		

Source: Own

TABLE XI. Statistic showing the degree of correlation between the variables country and type of activity

		Value	Sig. Approx
Nominal by nominal	Phi	.597	.000
	V de Cramer	.597	.000
Number of valid cases		4602	

Source: Own

Furthermore, the variables presented are closely related, especially the association between the cognitive level and the typology of the historical concepts.

Discussion and conclusions

When comparing the activities in Spanish and British textbooks we find differences in the cognitive level and in the presence of historical thinking competencies. These clear differences between the two countries are not only borne out by the frequencies and percentages indicated, but also by the statistical tests to examine the relation between country and each of the variables studied.

The short questions analyzed in the Spanish textbook make very low cognitive demands in general and the answers are a term, a concept, a

date or a few words. Examples from Anaya, Vicens Vives and Oxford, respectively, are: “What were poleis and what were their characteristics?”; “How did the armed resistance against the Muslim armies begin?”; “Which two Italian cities were most important in the Middle Ages?” The answers to these questions are to be found in the textbooks and very close to the questions.

There are very few examples of more complex and creative activities fostering students’ own thinking through meaningful learning and by building their own knowledge. Creative questions like “Choose an idea from the unit that you found interesting. Find out more information about it and prepare a poster explaining it” (Anaya, 2.º de la ESO) are not only marginally biased, but are also those that receive less class time in general (Sáiz, 2010). Furthermore, the way the question is stated lacks specification in various methodological aspects. The textbook published by Vicens Vives for Secondary Year 1 in 2015 does include some case studies and a history workshop with other types of activities. As an example we have an exercise in empathy on Ancient Egypt: “Imagine that you are Merit and that you are writing a letter to your brother, Habib [...], in your letter you should tell him what the district you live in is like, what craft activities [...]”.

These types of activities are more common in British textbooks, with their greater emphasis on essays, critical appreciation and capacity building questions. The short questions are also posed differently, e.g., “Could you have survived as a medieval peasant?” in the book published by Collins for the first year in Key Stage 3. This question cannot be answered by lifting from the textbook; the student has to reflect and assume a historical perspective. The students are frequently asked to reflect, through questions that require longer answers, like in Hodder Education for the first year of Key Stage 3: “Why would studying the Crusades be dangerous if you: a) Ignored all the Crusades in Europe against other kinds of Christians? b) Ignored the fact that Jerusalem was a holy city for Muslims and Jews as well as for Christians?”

The British textbooks contain a large number of capacity-building exercises that stimulate other types of abilities in students, who often need to use different text and iconographic sources. Some examples are the following activities in Heinemann book for the second year of Key Stage 3: “Write a letter from a Parliamentarian explaining why propaganda was so important to Parliament winning the Civil War”; or “Imagine that

Roger, the slave who died in source o, is your father. Using only the information in sources m-o, write a short speech that you could give at his graveside. How would you change what you said if the slave owner was present?”

Exercises with figures or images, related in principle to second order concepts of historical sources and evidence, do not exploit their teaching potential in the Spanish textbooks. Activities in the Anaya book (2.º de la ESO) like: “Look at the map: Which European territories comprised the Empire of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V? And that of Philip II? What other territories were part of the Austrian Empire?” These questions do not develop any complex cognitive operations, but merely require a non critical repetition of facts, often related to political, institutional or art history.

There is an abundance of activities based on texts and illustrations in the English textbooks. However, the big difference is not in the quantity but in the way in which they are used. For example, following several illustrations of slavery in the Modern Age and two texts from the XVII and XVIII centuries on the subject, the Heinemann book for the second year of Key Stage 3 asks the following question: “Read sources c and d. The Spanish in Florida welcomed the slaves that escaped from British colonies. Why did they do this? What would a slave have to do to remain free in Florida?” As can be seen, the question offers no exhaustive guide for the students to tackle the sources of information, but rather expects them to reflect on the sources and use their knowledge of the subject and other skills to complete the activity. Something similar occurs in the Hodder Education for the second year of Key Stage 3, which offers various sources of information on the attempted invasion by the Spanish Armada, and then asks the students to prepare a detailed report on the cause and consequences of that battle. A further example of significance is in the Collins book for the first year of Key Stage 3. After providing three sources of conflicting information, it asks whether the lives of medieval peasants were hard or not.

If we look at the effect of transversal competencies on the focus of the activities we have the example of the information search exercises. In the Spanish textbooks these activities aim to develop digital competencies, among other skills, and students have to search for and select information. Nevertheless, not all the exercises exploit these skills appropriately. Activities like “Search for information about the characters

indicated”, or “Why was there unease within the Catholic Church? Find out what bulls and indulgences were”, show that the main rewards are for transferring information that is sought with no accompanying reflection or capacity building. These exercises are few and far between in the British textbooks because the British curriculum is not guided by the achievement of transversal competencies but by learning goals that are more related to historical competencies.

The findings show that the British textbooks include the contributions of international research into thinking historically. The exercises include to a large extent first and second order concepts demand that students can understand, analyze and apply contents. Furthermore, the questions in the British textbooks not only work with the skills that are proper to thinking historically; these concepts are also explained as contents in their own right. The textbooks in Spain, however, usually present the historical account as absolute truths, as objective, closed knowledge (Porat, 2001). This leads to students’ conceiving history as a neutral, decontextualized subject (Gómez & Miralles, 2015).

In the light of this situation the challenge is to make our students aware of the methods and techniques used by historians to acquire knowledge, just as they are aware of the discovery and analysis techniques used in Physics, Chemistry and Biology (Prats & Santacana, 2011). Our students need to become familiar with how to work with historical sources, which many authors see as a fundamental part of the teaching and learning of History in order to teach how to think historically (Burenheide, 2007; Prats & Santacana, 2011; Rosenlund, 2015; VanSledright, 2004, 2011; Zhao & Hoge, 2005, Yerxa, 2008). Getting students to work with materials and resources instead of memorizing chunks of the textbooks, getting them to understand and participate in the process of building history will lead to a type of learning in which the students are involved and motivated to research into history (Zhao & Hoge, 2005).

Yet for this change in teaching and learning History to come about, it is not enough to review the materials used, the curriculum itself needs to be reconsidered and the methodology used in the classes needs to be modified (Fuentes, 2002). These three aspects, textbooks, curriculum and methodology, are essential in order to address teaching in the classroom. Indeed, one of the limitations of our research is that it is reduced to the sphere of materials and does not consider the uses the teachers make of

them. So, we have to limit the scope of our findings to a comparative appraisal of the textbooks and not include the classroom dynamics. Hence, a future line of research to overcome this limitation would be to extend the study and incorporate interviews with teachers and classroom observations to add fieldwork findings to the comparative study. The internal reliability could also be enhanced through the participation of a second researcher which would allow data triangulation and therefore remove any possible bias caused by a single researcher.

The educational implications of our findings mainly affect curriculum proposals, publishers and how teachers use the textbooks. A curricular change is needed in which first and second order concepts of history play a stronger role than they do in today's teaching dominated by facts and concepts, and also one in which the competencies that students need to acquire are more related with the epistemological bases of the subjects. Moreover, publishers should compare the exercises in the textbooks of other countries in order to bring in improvements to their own activities. Teachers also need to understand that the linear history, which is usually non critical and descriptive, and which is present in the majority of the Spanish textbooks, is not the only way to teach History. Teaching methodology is all too often conditioned by the epistemological conceptions of the subject. Both questions can be interwoven to enhance the History education of our younger students.

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