

THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN SPANISH AND BRITISH TEXTBOOKS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SKILLS, HISTORIOGRAPHICAL FOCUS AND THE SEQUENCING OF ACTIVITIES*

La Primera Guerra Mundial en los libros de texto de España y el Reino Unido: un estudio comparativo de competencias, enfoques historiográficos y la secuencia de las actividades

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Abstract. This study compares a sample of Spanish and British textbooks to analyse how they present the topic of the First World War, a conflict that has distinct meanings in the national memory of both countries. With this aim, activities from the chosen textbooks are quantitatively assessed with reference to two main variables: historiographical focus and the cognitive level required to complete them. To this we add another objective: to associate these variables with the position of different activities within the didactic sequence embedded in each textbook. The results confirm that both Spanish and British textbooks dedicate a large part of their activities to political-institutional history and military events. However, British books also incorporate a strong element of the history of everyday life, women's history and "history from below". In general, activities in British textbooks require a higher cognitive level than Spanish ones. Finally, introduction, extension and specific skills-based activities are more likely to require a high cognitive level than those found in the main body of a given teaching unit.

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Keywords: Textbooks; First World War; Historiographical focus; Comparative perspective; Teaching History.

Resumen. *El presente análisis compara un muestreo de libros de texto españoles y británicos para comprender de qué manera presentan la Primera Guerra Mundial. Se trata de un tema con significados muy distintos en la memoria nacional de los dos países. Con tal fin, se valoran de modo cuantitativo las actividades propuestas al alumnado en función de dos variables principales: los enfoques historiográficos y el nivel cognitivo que se exige. Además, se plantea el objetivo de relacionar dichas variables con su ubicación dentro de la secuencia didáctica plasmada en cada manual. Los resultados confirman que tanto los manuales españoles como los británicos dedican una buena parte de sus actividades a la historia político-institucional y a los acontecimientos militares. No obstante, los textos británicos también incorporan una fuerte vertiente de la historia de la vida cotidiana, la historia de las mujeres y de la «historia desde abajo». En general, las actividades en los manuales británicos exigen un nivel cognitivo más alto que los manuales españoles. Finalmente, las actividades de apertura, de ampliación o para trabajar competencias específicas tienen más posibilidades de exigir un nivel cognitivo alto que las asociadas al cuerpo principal del texto.*

Palabras clave: *Libros de texto; Primera Guerra Mundial; Enfoques historiográficos; Estudio comparativo; Didáctica de la Historia.*

INTRODUCTION

School textbooks can reveal the hegemonic views of history that are disseminated within each State.¹ Studying these sources in comparative perspective allows for a greater appreciation of the diversity of national reconstructions of the past, as well as of the didactic and historiographical approaches that are predominant in different education systems. Goodman *et al.* (1983) undertook a pioneering project in this field by comparing textbooks from Japan and the USA with the aim of identifying the perceptions that existed in each country with relation to the other's history.² Subsequently, an article by DeRose provided a potential

¹ Matthias Vom Hau, "Unpacking the School: Textbooks, Teachers and the Construction of Nationhood in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru". *Latin American Research Review* 44 (2009): 127.

² Grant K. Goodman, Nagayo Homma, Tetsuo Najita & James M. Becker, "The Japan/United States Textbook Study Project: Perceptions in the Textbooks of Each Country about the History of the Other". *The History Teacher* 16 (1983): 541-567.

classroom application of this type of historical thinking.³ DeRose used Vietnamese textbooks as a means by which to talk about the Vietnam War in American high schools. Along the same lines, Lin *et al.* analysed the narratives about the Korean War that underpin American, South Korean, Japanese and Chinese textbooks.⁴

Since the beginning of the last decade, this field of study has begun to widen. Alayan and Al-Khalidi contrast the presence of gender issues in history textbooks from Jordan and Palestine.⁵ Meyer, Bromley and Ramírez shed light on the rise of discourses based on human rights that, since the 1970s, have consolidated their place in school textbooks at a global level.⁶ The previously cited article by Vom Hau highlights the legacy of nationalist historiography in textbooks intended for use in Argentina, Mexico and Peru. Finally, Tarman and Ayas have researched the political conflicts that shaped textbooks in Turkey and Japan over the course of the past century.⁷

The bibliography available in Spanish on the comparison of history textbooks across different countries and languages is still quite scarce. However, recent contributions by Cosme Jesús Gómez Carrasco, professor at the University of Murcia, represent a notable step forward. This author, in collaboration with others, has analysed Spanish texts in relation to their English or French equivalents from various perspectives: the historiographical focus of activities—in this case in *Historia y Memoria de la Educación*—;⁸ the types of historical thought implicit in

³ Joseph J. DeRose, “Comparing International Textbooks to Develop Historical Thinking”. *Social Education* 71 (2007): 36-39.

⁴ Lin Lin, Yali Zhao, Masato Ogawa, John Hoge & Bok Young Kim, “Whose History? An Analysis of the Korean War in History Textbooks from the United States, South Korea, Japan and China”. *The Social Studies* 100 (2009): 222-232.

⁵ Samira Alayan & Naseema Al-Khalidi, “Gender and Agency in History, Civics and National Education Textbooks of Jordan and Palestine”. *Journal of Educational Media, Memory & Society* 2 (2010): 78-96.

⁶ John W. Meyer, Patricia Bromley & Francisco O. Ramirez, “Human Rights in Social Science Textbooks: Cross-national Analyses, 1970-2008”. *Sociology of Education* 83 (2012): 111-134.

⁷ Bulent Tarman & Cemalettin Ayas, “Comparing Issues Surrounding and Turkish and Japanese History Textbooks”. *History Education Research Journal* 10 (2011): 67-76.

⁸ Cosme J. Gómez Carrasco & Arthur Chapman, “Enfoques historiográficos y representaciones sociales en los libros de texto. Un estudio comparativo, España-Francia-Inglaterra”. *Historia y Memoria de la Educación* 6 (2017): 319-361.

contents about Early Modern History;⁹ or the cognitive level required to complete textbook activities, which vary depending on the publisher and the country in question.¹⁰

The present study compares a sample of Spanish and British textbooks to analyse how they present the topic of the First World War.¹¹ Activities from the chosen textbooks are quantitatively assessed with reference to two main variables: historiographical focus and the cognitive level required to complete them. The curricular topic has not been picked in a random fashion, but rather stands out as a historical question with differing meanings for both societies. Despite its neutrality, the Great War had significant effects on Spain by causing an economic restructuring that accelerated the Restoration crisis,¹² but nowadays the weight of the conflict in public discourse is negligible. By contrast, Great Britain is a country that was directly involved in the war, and in its collective consciousness there survive “memories” —and myths— which almost all citizens are likely to be familiar with.¹³

The following objectives were set to guide the research process:

- A. To identify the historiographical focus used by textbooks to present the topic of the First World War.
- B. To identify the cognitive level required to complete the activities proposed in these textbooks.
- C. To associate the historiographical focus and the cognitive level of the activities with their position in the didactic sequence.

⁹ Cosme J. Gómez Carrasco & Sebastián Molina Puche, “Narrativas nacionales y pensamiento histórico en los libros de texto de Educación Secundaria de España y Francia. Análisis a partir del tratamiento de los contenidos de la Edad Moderna”. *Vínculos de Historia* 6 (2017): 206-229.

¹⁰ Cosme J. Gómez Carrasco & María Martínez Hita, “Nivel cognitivo y competencias de pensamiento histórico en los libros de texto de Historia de España e Inglaterra. Un estudio comparativo”. *Revista de Educación* 379 (2018): 145-169.

¹¹ Note: the British textbooks selected for this article were designed only for classrooms in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, due to the fact that Scotland has its own education system.

¹² Miguel Martorell Linares, “‘No fue aquello solamente una guerra, fue una revolución’: España y la Primera Guerra Mundial” *Historia y Política* 26 (2011): 17-45.

¹³ McCartney, Helen B, “The First World War Soldier and his Contemporary Image in Britain”. *International Affairs* 90 (2014): 299.

Based on these objectives, the following hypotheses were made:

- A.1. Both Spanish and British textbooks dedicate a large part of their activities to political-institutional history and military events.
- A.2. However, British texts also incorporate a strong strand of the history of everyday life, women's history, and "history from below".
- B. In general, the activities proposed in the British textbooks require a higher cognitive level than in Spanish ones.
 - C.1. Introduction, extension, or specific skills-based activities have a greater probability of incorporating historiographical approaches related to culture, art, the history of everyday life, women's history, or history from below. Summing-up exercises and those associated with the main body of the text tend to resort to political-institutional history and military events.
 - C.2. Opening activities, extension activities or specific skills-based activities are more likely to require a high cognitive level. Summing-up exercises and those associated with the main body of the text tend to require a lower cognitive level.

The hypotheses linked to objectives A and B are based on conclusions obtained by Gómez Carrasco and other authors in the abovementioned bibliographical references. Hypotheses C.1 and C.2 work on the assumption that summing-up exercises and activities associated with the main body of the text embody the minimum contents of the official curriculum — what students will recognise as "final exam fodder".¹⁴ In correspondence with the cited author's conclusions, introduction, extension, or skills-based activities, as they are not so restricted by the need to prepare students for passing exams, might grant more freedom to include less traditional historiographical approaches and more cognitively demanding activities such as roleplays or debates.

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

Six textbooks have been selected for this study — three Spanish and three British. Two of the Spanish books (Anaya, 2008; Vicens Vives, 2015)

¹⁴ Jorge Sáiz Serrano, "Actividades de libros de texto de Historia, competencias básicas y destrezas cognitivas, una difícil relación: análisis de manuales de 1º y 2º de ESO". *Didáctica de las Ciencias Experimentales y Sociales* 25 (2011): 51.

correspond to the subject of Modern World History (first-year Baccalaureate),¹⁵ while one of the British books, edited by Cambridge (2013),¹⁶ is intended for students at the equivalent AS-level (16-17 years old). The remaining two British books (Hodder, 2001; 2016)¹⁷ are for GCSE preparation (14-16 years) and roughly coincide with the other Spanish textbook published by Vicens Vives (2016),¹⁸ which is designed for the subject of Geography and History (fourth-year Compulsory Secondary Education). All the British textbooks pertain to the subject of History.

The topic of the First World War does not occupy the same number of pages or sections in each of the six sources. In Anaya (2008) the conflict is studied in a block of its own that stretches across 28 pages. Vicens Vives (2015), meanwhile, dedicates twenty pages to it. On the other hand, in Cambridge (2013) the Great War is not a topic in its own right but is part of a block titled “International relations in an era of imperialism, 1871-1918”, which covers 33 pages. At the lower stage, Hodder (2001) is the textbook that reserves the most space for the First World War: 98 pages. Hodder (2016) is different. Here the war and its medium-term antecedents are brought together in a block titled “Conflict and tension, 1894-1918”, which numbers 38 pages. This block does not include the post-war peace treaties (they are left for the next block), and is preceded by two blocks that focus on Russia and Germany in the same timeframe. Finally, Vicens Vives (2016) only dedicates six pages to the First World War; it appears in the “The age of imperialism” subsection, within a section called “The age of great international tensions”. Already these divergences suggest that publishers may work with quite different curricular or historiographical criteria.

¹⁵ Leandro Álvarez Rey, Margarita García Sebastián, Cristina Gatell Arimont, José Carlos Gibaja Velázquez, Jorge Palafox Gamir & Manel Risques Corbella, *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*. (A Coruña: Vicens Vives, 2015); Joaquim Prats, José Emilio Castelló, Carlos Forcadell, María Camino García, Ignacio Izuzquiza & María A. Loste, *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*. (Madrid: Anaya, 2008).

¹⁶ Phil Wadsworth, *Cambridge International AS Level. International History, 1871-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁷ David Ferriby, Dave Martin & Ben Walsh, *AQA GCSE History. Understanding the Modern World*. (London: Hodder, 2016); Ben Walsh, *GCSE Modern World History*. (London: Hodder, 2001).

¹⁸ Margarita García Sebastián, Cristina Gatell Arimont, Monserrat Llorens Serrano, Rosa Ortega Canadell & Juan Roig Obiol. *Ecumene. Ciencias Sociais, Historia (cuarto curso)*. (A Coruña: Vicens Vives, 2016).

This is a case of convenience sampling that results from the difficulties in obtaining British textbooks in Spain, and also because Spanish libraries do not usually hold extensive collections of this type of resource. However, although convenience sampling is not ideal because it limits the potential to generalise conclusions, it does not invalidate the results of a piece of research. The selected publishers are among the largest in their respective countries, and for this reason it can be assumed that these textbooks are or were widely used.¹⁹ Furthermore, most of the sampling is relatively up to date because two of the Spanish textbooks are adapted to the requirements of the LOMCE education law (2013), which was in force until the subsequent LOMLOE law (2021) came into effect, while two of the British texts were published during or after the most recent reforms to the National Curriculum (2012-2014). The inclusion of two theoretically obsolete books can serve to provide some notions, albeit restricted, of the pedagogical changes that have occurred in the last twenty years.

The proposed methodology is as follows. Firstly, it is necessary to categorise the activities in these textbooks according to their position within the didactic sequence. In this case, “activity” refers to any explicit question or task that entails work on the part of the pupil. Reading strategies and the questions or debates that arise organically in the classroom could also be considered activities, but they would require methods (interviews, observation sessions) that are beyond the scope of this project. A scheme to define the location of activities within the didactic sequence is provided by Sáiz Serrano:²⁰

- **Introductory activities:** For initial motivation or to activate previous knowledge.
- **Activities in the main body of a teaching unit:** Questions linked to the text, maps, tables or images that together make up the teaching unit.
- **Summing-up exercises:** Activities of synthesis to review and summarise a unit’s contents.

¹⁹ The Spanish textbooks are written in Galician, but their contents are the same as the versions that are used in other Autonomous Communities.

²⁰ Sáiz Serrano, “Actividades de libros de texto”.

- Extension or skills-based activities: To build complementary knowledge that goes beyond the curricular “core”, or to develop transversal and historical skills (for example, working with primary sources).

The next step is to group the activities according to their historiographical focus and, furthermore, the cognitive level they require. Therefore, this piece of research is quantitative in nature. The data is collected and organised through a Microsoft Access database. Regarding the different historiographical approaches, Gómez Carrasco and Chapman’s classification is adapted for use here:²¹

- Focus 1: Important figures.
- Focus 2: Political-institutional history or military events.
- Focus 3: Culture and thought.
- Focus 4: Art and visual propaganda.
- Focus 5: Economic, social or structural history.
- Focus 6: Everyday life, gender or women’s history, history from below.

With reference to cognitive level, the aforementioned work by Sáiz Serrano again offers a model that is easily applicable to multiple activity types:

- Low level: Finding and reproducing information present in a text or other resource.
- Medium level: Activities that demand a certain level of real comprehension in order to summarise, outline, paraphrase, identify a key argument, etc.
- High level: Analysing, evaluating and applying information extracted from various sources to create new information, making inferences from incomplete information, etc.

²¹ Gómez Carrasco & Chapman, “Enfoques historiográficos y representaciones sociales”.

In general terms, activities of a high cognitive level demand a greater mental effort to complete them, although there are exceptions. For example, answering the question “If you were attacking the enemy trenches, how would you cross the barbed wire in the photo?”,²² which is a high-cognitive-level activity, probably requires less work than a medium-level task such as “Make a conceptual map of the phases of the war, participating countries, and the evolution of the fronts and battles”.²³ In other words, cognitive level alludes to the complexity of mental processes, but not automatically to difficulty. In addition, each level tends to imply a natural progression from the previous one, so it is expected that the textbooks will exhibit some diversity in this sense.

RESULTS

459 activities were analysed in total. The Spanish textbooks contain 172 activities on the topic of the First World War (37.47% of the total), of which 23 (5.01%) are from the fourth-year Compulsory Secondary Education textbook (Vicens Vives, 2016); 68 (14.81%) are from Anaya (2008); and 88 (19.17%) are from Vicens Vives (2015). 287 activities are to be found in the British books (62.53% of the total), although there is a highly uneven distribution between them. The oldest Hodder textbook (2001) contributes 202 activities (44%), while the Hodder textbook that was published in 2016 has 65 (14.16%). Only twenty (4.36%) of the activities come from the AS-level text (Cambridge, 2013).

Historiographical focus

The results of the analysis by historiographical focus are presented in Table 1. The activities included here constitute the majority of the total that were analysed, but not all of them. This is due to the fact that there are 35 tasks (7.63% of the total) that lack a specific historiographical focus, such as the classification of sources or those that merely consist in copying a table or graph.

²² Walsh, *GCSE Modern World History*, 23.

²³ Álvarez Rey *et al.*, *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*, 139.

Table 1. Historiographical focus in Spanish textbooks

Vicens Vives, 2016 (fourth-year Compulsory Secondary Education)							
Position	Focus 1	Focus 2	Focus 3	Focus 4	Focus 5	Focus 6	Total
Introduction							
Main body		10		1	2		13
Summing-up		9					9
Extension and skills							
Total		19		1	2		22
Anaya, 2008 (first-year Baccalaureate)							
Position	Focus 1	Focus 2	Focus 3	Focus 4	Focus 5	Focus 6	Total
Introduction		1				1	2
Main body		15	1	1	1		18
Summing-up			1		1	3	5
Extension and skills		18		6	1	2	27
Total		34	2	7	3	6	52
Vicens Vives, 2015 (first-year Baccalaureate)							
Position	Focus 1	Focus 2	Focus 3	Focus 4	Focus 5	Focus 6	Total
Introduction		1					1
Main body		6			1	3	10
Summing-up		18		1		2	21
Extension and skills		23		7	12	4	46
Total		48		8	13	9	78
Focus 1: Important figures Focus 2: Political-institutional history or military events Focus 3: Culture and thought Focus 4: Art and visual propaganda Focus 5: Economic, social or structural history Focus 6: Everyday life, gender or women's history, history from below							

Introductory activities are observed to be rare. In Vicens Vives (2016) there are none at all because the First World War forms part of a broader topic, while in the other books it is a separate block. Also note the total absence of activities that revolve around important historical figures; students are not made to study the “great man” view of history, although there are people with a prominent role that are covered via other approaches (Wilhelm II, Woodrow Wilson, etc.).

Political-institutional and military history are the dominant approaches, particularly in activities associated with the main body of a teaching unit. In Anaya (2008) and Vicens Vives (2015), summing-up exercises and, above all, extension and specific skills-based activities do permit a certain degree of diversification through contents related to art and visual propaganda. An interesting example in Anaya involves drawing associations between Edvard Munch’s painting *The Scream* and a passage from Erich Maria Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*.²⁴ Finally, sections on the mobilisation of women during the Great War introduce an element of Focus 6 — again, these hold more weight in summing-up and extension activities.

Few introductory activities are printed in British textbooks either. Like Vicens Vives (2016), in the case of Cambridge (2013) this absence is explained by the fact that the First World War is not a single topic but is part of a larger block. In fact, the war’s consequences are left for the following unit.

Here too, activities focused on political-institutional and military history are the order of the day. The exception is Hodder (2001), the only book where this approach represents less than half of the activities. In said textbook, the theme of the Great War occupies more pages than in the others, thus creating space to address multifarious aspects of the war experience. It includes a detailed study of daily life in the trenches, the effects of the war on the British civilian population, as well as the immediate antecedents to the war in the United Kingdom, such as the socio-economic reforms of the Liberal Party or the fight for women’s suffrage.

²⁴ Prats et al., *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*, 176.

Table 2. Historiographical focus in British textbooks

Hodder, 2001 (GCSE)							
Position	Focus 1	Focus 2	Focus 3	Focus 4	Focus 5	Focus 6	Total
Introduction	1	3			1	2	7
Main body	11	57	6	23	8	28	133
Summing-up		13		2	4	12	31
Extension and skills	2	5	1		1	1	10
Total	14	78	7	25	14	43	181
Hodder, 2016 (GCSE)							
Position	Focus 1	Focus 2	Focus 3	Focus 4	Focus 5	Focus 6	Total
Introduction							
Main body	1	32	3			5	41
Summing-up		9	1			2	12
Extension and skills	1	7				1	9
Total	2	48	4			8	62
Cambridge, 2013 (AS-level)							
Position	Focus 1	Focus 2	Focus 3	Focus 4	Focus 5	Focus 6	Total
Introduction							
Main body	1	7		3	2		13
Summing-up		7					7
Extension and skills							
Total	1	14		3	2		20
Focus 1: Important figures							
Focus 2: Political-institutional history or military events							
Focus 3: Culture and thought							
Focus 4: Art and visual propaganda							
Focus 5: Economic, social or structural history							
Focus 6: Everyday life, gender or women's history, history from below							

One difference with respect to Spanish textbooks is the presence in all three British sources of activities focussed on significant historical figures. These primarily examine how the divergent personalities and priorities of the Allied leaders influenced the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The use of visual propaganda and political cartoons is noteworthy when contrasted with Spanish textbooks, in which such images do appear, but usually without any associated task.

Cognitive level

Table 3 displays the results of the analysis of activities by cognitive level. All the activities are present here because their completion always hinges on a cognitive process regardless of whether or not there is a specific historiographical focus in play. Despite there not being a great number of introductory activities, that type of exercise is more likely to demand a high cognitive level. For example, Anaya (2008) asks students to examine a photograph of soldiers in a trench and to reflect on what similarities and differences could exist between their experiences and those of a modern soldier.²⁵

Table 3. Cognitive level in Spanish textbooks

Vicens Vives, 2016 (fourth-year Compulsory Secondary Education)				
Position	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Introduction				
Main body	8	5		13
Summing-up	8	2		10
Extension and skills				
Total	16	7		23
Anaya, 2008 (first-year Baccalaureate)				
Position	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Introduction	1		1	2
Main body	10	3	5	18
Summing-up	14	15	1	30
Extension and skills	10	9	9	28
Total	35	27	16	78

²⁵ Prats et al., *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*, 172-173.

Vicens Vives, 2015 (first-year Baccalaureate)				
Position	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Introduction	1	1	1	3
Main body	6	6		12
Summing-up	6	10	2	18
Extension and skills	19	24	14	57
Total	32	41	17	90

In tasks built into the main body of a teaching unit, activities of a low cognitive level are the most frequent, except in Vicens Vives (2015) where there are six low-level activities and six medium-level ones. To mention an illustrative example, one activity consists of a table to be filled in by adding which countries were at war during each year between 1914 and 1920, as well as the names of the main battles.²⁶ This is a low-level activity (albeit perhaps a laborious one) because one only needs to look up the relevant information in the text. The following task is to write definitions for terms such as “trench warfare”, “reparations” or “armistice”. This requires a medium cognitive level because the pupil must explain concepts in their own words, thus demonstrating that they have understood the information and are capable of reorganising it.

In summing-up activities, exercises of a medium cognitive level become more prominent, except in the case of Vicens Vives (2016). The other textbooks also offer extension tasks or activities for practising historiographical and transversal skills. The majority of high-level activities are observed in the latter category. In Vicens Vives (2015), under the heading “Describe, analyse and associate”, there are a series of medium-cognitive-level tasks in which the student works with primary sources that talk about how different countries might be considered responsible for the outbreak of the Great War. At the end, in a section titled “Build your opinion”, the following question is asked: “Do you think Germany was the sole culprit for the war? Justify your answer with arguments from sources”.²⁷ In this way, students follow a logical sequence in which processes of a low cognitive level (identification and comprehension of

²⁶ Álvarez Rey et al., *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*, 48.

²⁷ Álvarez Rey et al., *Historia do Mundo Contemporáneo*, 137.

facts and ideas) are the foundation for higher-level ones (such as making one's own judgements).

British textbooks turn this distribution on its head, as can be seen in Table 4. Low-cognitive-level activities are in the minority. Questions like "Which countries were part of the Triple Alliance?" or "What economic value did the Ruhr region have?", solutions to which are found by re-viewing the text, seldom appear in these books because it is understood that, if a learner knows how to solve the more complex activities, they presumably must have already internalised that kind of declarative knowledge.

Table 4. Cognitive level in British textbooks

Hodder, 2001 (GCSE)				
Position	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Introduction		3	5	8
Main body	35	66	33	134
Summing-up	1	11	19	31
Extension and skills	2	8	9	19
Total	38	88	66	192
Hodder, 2016 (GCSE)				
Position	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Introduction				
Main body	5	9	23	37
Summing-up	3	3	11	17
Extension and skills			11	11
Total	8	12	45	65
Cambridge, 2013 (AS-level)				
Position	Low level	Medium level	High level	Total
Introduction				
Main body	3	3	7	13
Summing-up	1	4	2	7
Extension and skills				
Total	4	7	9	20

On the contrary, the proliferation of tasks demanding a high cognitive level is remarkable. There is no fixed pattern concerning the position of these tasks in the didactic sequence; their relative protagonism in the main body of a unit, in summing-up or extension activities appears to depend on the publisher. In the AS-level textbook (Cambridge, 2013), these activities usually start with a “How far...” or “To what extent...” and ask the student to consider all available information in order to make and defend their own case for or against a historical argument. In the Hodder textbooks, a range of “historical empathy” exercises are also included. Students imagine that they are soldiers on the frontline or militant suffragettes, for example, and in this role they compose letters to their families, write speeches, take part in debates and dialogues, etc.

DISCUSSION

In the light of the quantitative analysis of the data, hypothesis A.1 can be confirmed as true. Both Spanish and British textbooks dedicate a large part of their activities to political-institutional history and military events. But this conclusion can be lent nuance by certain qualitative considerations. Gómez Carrasco and Chapman assert that history books in Spain and France usually frame the national past in its European context. Juxtaposed with this Eurocentrism, British books are Anglocentric—national processes are studied with less attention paid to the rest of the continent—, but when they do deal with non-national issues, they tend to delve more deeply into the history of countries outside Europe than their Spanish and French equivalents.²⁸ The results of the present investigation corroborate this viewpoint. That national issues should be absent from Spanish textbooks comes as no surprise given that Spain remained neutral during the conflict, but their vision of the Great War is basically limited to the Western Front. On the other hand, Hodder (2001) devotes several pages to the Battle of Gallipoli and campaigns in the Middle East. Meanwhile, in its section on the antecedents to the war, Cambridge (2013) offers a summary of the modernisation and industrialisation of Japan during the late nineteenth century that is every bit as thorough as its sections on Germany and France.

²⁸ Gómez Carrasco & Chapman, “Enfoques historiográficos y representaciones sociales”, 349.

Hypothesis A.2 can be partially confirmed. Beyond the traditional positivist style of history, British texts incorporate a strong element of the history of everyday life, women's history, and of history from below, or at least this is true for the two Hodder textbooks, published fifteen years apart. This likely reflects the historiographical pedigree of British and North American academia, since the authors responsible for many of the breakthroughs in those fields during the 1960s and 1970s were Marxist historians trained at anglophone institutions (Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, Natalie Zemon Davis, etc.).²⁹ In the case of the First World War, the inclusion of activities designed to foster empathy is undoubtedly related to the privileged status that the conflict holds in British national memory. According to Pennell, both the official curriculum and interviews with teachers coincide in prescribing historical empathy as an essential tool to guarantee the transmission of the memory of the Great War from one generation to the next.³⁰ Pennell and other authors argue that historical empathy is useful in the classroom because it motivates students and makes it easier for them to feel a personal connection with history. However, they also warn that its use carries risks because empathic reactions can undermine pupils' ability to think critically or cause them to transpose their own values and beliefs onto people from the past.³¹ The absence of this type of activity in Cambridge (2013) could be an attempt to evade such hazards.

Hypothesis B proved to be true: in general, activities in British textbooks require a higher cognitive level than in Spanish ones. This also corroborates the findings of previous research. Gómez Carrasco and Martínez Hita affirm that "books in Spain usually portray the historical account as an absolute truth, an objective and closed area of knowledge. This causes students to conceive of history as a neutral and decontextualised reality".³² The positivist influence leads to serious disadvantages

²⁹ Justo Serna & Analet Pons, *La historia cultural: autores, obras y lugares*. (Madrid: Akal Ediciones, 2005), 34-39.

³⁰ Catriona Pennell, "Learning Lessons from War? Inclusions and Exclusions in Teaching First World War History in English Secondary Schools". *History and Memory* 28 (2016): 39.

³¹ Scott Alan Metzger, "The Borders of Historical Empathy: Students Encounter the Holocaust through Film". *The Journal of Social Studies* 3 (2012): 387-410; McCartney, "The First World War Soldier".

³² Gómez Carrasco & Martínez Hita, "Nivel cognitivo y competencias", 164.

at a didactic level: “The insistence on short-answer exercises, on concrete facts or concepts, not only generates uncritical historical notions in students, but also a sense of atemporality due to the scarcity of activities that work on different categories of historical time”.³³ Despite this, the *Vicens Vives* textbook (2015) is a good example of the improvements that can be made in this regard. It contains history workshops for using primary sources, high-cognitive-level exercises such as writing a dialogue between two imaginary characters, and a “web section” —designed to develop the Digital Competence foreseen by the LOMCE education law— that hones in on the historical memory of the First World War in different countries.

It is not possible to confirm hypothesis C.1. It was suggested that introduction, extension or specific skills-based activities have a greater chance of incorporating historiographical focusses related to culture, art, the history of everyday life, women’s history or history from below. To begin with, there are not enough introductory activities to make a collective characterisation, which suggests that the authors of these textbooks did not reflect sufficiently on how to mobilise students’ prior knowledge, nor possible activities for initial motivation. In the Spanish textbooks, extension activities do cover the aforementioned approaches more frequently than activities in the main body of teaching units, as predicted by the hypothesis, but so do summing-up exercises, which contradicts it. In British books, historiographical focusses on culture, art, the history of everyday life, women’s history or history from below are actually more frequent in main-body activities than in summing-up exercises. As stated in the introduction, hypothesis C.1 was made under the assumption that activities in the main body of a teaching unit are more closely tied to exams or other forms of assessment. From this perspective, it seems that Spanish publishers are updating their historiographical horizons with less traditional approaches, but that this update is concentrated on synthesis or skills-based activities, where final grades are not at stake and there is more leeway for “experimentation”.

Lastly, the results confirm hypothesis C.2. Introductory activities, extension or specific skills-based activities are more likely to require a high cognitive level. Summing-up exercises and those associated with the

³³ Gómez Carrasco & Molina Puche, “Narrativas nacionales y pensamiento histórico”, 216.

main body of the text tend to require a lower cognitive level. The trend is less obvious in British books, but can still be perceived. This conclusion harks back to the previous comment on the levels of “experimentation” that can be permitted in extension activities. In the Spanish case, it suggests that there is a correlation between high-cognitive-level activities and a historiographical focus on culture, art, the history of everyday life, women’s history or history from below.

CONCLUSIONS

This work of quantitative analysis has shown that textbooks in Spain and Great Britain differ in their treatment of the First World War. Although political-institutional history and military events predominate in both countries —the military focus is logical, given the subject— the authors of British texts have made use of the advances in historiography from the last half-century to offer a more layered view of the conflict, while in Spain the old positivist schools still cast a shadow over the historical record. At a didactic level, activities proposed in British books usually require a higher cognitive level.

In Spain there are discordant voices that question these limitations. For example, Miralles, Molina and Ortuño point to knowledge of various historiographical approaches as a positive factor in teaching. In the last section of the work cited, these authors elaborate a proposal for a second-year Baccalaureate teaching unit through which students would learn to apply family, oral, women’s and local history techniques to their own immediate context.³⁴ Out of the selection of Spanish texts analysed here, the more recent Vicens Vives book for first-year Baccalaureate (2015) represents a clear improvement in this sense, both in the diversity of its focus and in the number of activities entailing a high cognitive level. These novelties are especially noticeable in extension and specific skills-based activities, where the pressure of exams and final grades is less pronounced. Nevertheless, the almost contemporaneous Vicens Vives book for fourth-year Compulsory Secondary Education (2016) does not share the same features. Would the correlation between the position of activities in the didactic sequence, historiographical focus and cognitive

³⁴ Pedro Miralles Martínez, Sebastián Molina Puche & Jorge Ortuño Molina, *La importancia de la historiografía en la enseñanza de la historia*. (Granada: Grupo Editorial Universitario, 2011).

level be reiterated in a study of books from other publishers? For future inquiries and with more resources to hand, it would be advisable to collate a larger sample.

Another missing piece of the puzzle is Spanish teachers' real-life praxis when dealing with the Great War. This could be elucidated through interviews and observation phases in the same manner as Pennell's research in England.³⁵ There exists a difficult-to-quantify sector of the teaching community (but plausibly a majority) that uses textbooks almost exclusively, with only marginal recourse to other materials, because it "appreciates the easy availability of knowledge that is conclusive, synthesised and ready to be transmitted".³⁶ For this reason, the absence of introductory activities is a problem observed in both countries. If the didactic sequence in history classrooms is often set by textbooks, authors need to think harder about the importance of students' prior knowledge and what activities could aid their initial motivation.

Note on the author

PHILIP D. WEBB (Milton Keynes, 1992). Member of the Spanish Americanists Association (*Asociación Española de Americanistas*) and the "Hístamérica" American history research group at the University of Santiago de Compostela. The author graduated with a first-class BA History and Hispanic Studies from the University of Birmingham (UK) in 2014. He completed a Master's in Modern History at the University of Santiago de Compostela (2015-2016), where he also wrote his doctoral thesis in Modern History on the topic of migration between Spain and Paraguay from 1850 to 1960. The present article does not form part of that pre-doctoral research process, but derives from an interest in the past and present of education that the author has developed over several years working as a teacher in a private academy. Furthermore, a branch of his academic output analyses the links between the interpretation of history, nationalism and collective memory in certain contexts; see "El pensamiento de Rafael Barrett y Silvano Mosqueira: dos visiones de la realidad paraguaya a principios del siglo XX" in *Memoria del 56º Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*,

³⁵ Pennell, "Learning Lessons from War?".

³⁶ Sáiz Serrano, "Actividades de libros de texto", 51.

eds., Manuel Alcántara, Mercedes García Montero & Francisco Sánchez López (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca, 2018); and “O legado cultural de Victorino Abente y Lago (1846-1935) no Paraguai: ‘o primeiro intérprete do sentimento nacional’”. *Madrygal. Revista de estudos gallegos* 23 (2021): 349-369.

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