



The Representation of Interculturality as a Controversial Topic in Textbooks: A Case Study in the Spanish Educational Context

La Representación de la Interculturalidad como Tema Controvertido en los Libros de Texto: Un Estudio de Caso en el Contexto Educativo Español

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Abstract: This study examines the representation of interculturality as a controversial topic in history textbooks used in Spanish high schools. Using a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, four textbooks from the publishers Anaya and Vicens Vives were evaluated. These textbooks address themes such as colonialism, decolonization, and the contemporary world. The findings reveal that factual content is the most frequent (29.82%), followed by conceptual (26.32%), procedural (23.51%), and attitudinal content (20.35%). Additionally, recent editions show an increase in procedural and attitudinal activities, reflecting a shift toward a more competency-based pedagogical focus. However, textbooks often perpetuate nationalistic and Eurocentric narratives, limiting critical discussions on interculturality and contemporary social issues. Mechanical activities, which dominate the books, prioritize memorization over critical thinking, although participatory and investigative activities have increased in prevalence. This analysis underscores the need for more inclusive and critical teaching practices that address diversity and foster key competencies such as empathy and argumentation.

Keywords: Interculturality- textbooks- critical education- contemporary history- competency-based teaching.

Resumen: Este estudio examina la representación de la interculturalidad como un tema controvertido en los libros de texto de historia utilizados en los institutos de educación secundaria en España. Mediante un enfoque metodológico mixto que combina análisis cualitativo y cuantitativo, se evaluaron cuatro libros de texto de las editoriales Anaya y Vicens Vives. Estos manuales abordan temas como el colonialismo, la descolonización y el mundo contemporáneo. Los resultados revelan que los contenidos factuales son los más frecuentes (29,82%), seguidos por los conceptuales (26,32%), los procedimentales (23,51%) y los actitudinales (20,35%). Además, las ediciones más recientes muestran un aumento en las actividades procedimentales y actitudinales, lo que refleja un cambio hacia un enfoque pedagógico más centrado en las competencias. Sin embargo, los libros de texto suelen perpetuar narrativas nacionalistas y eurocéntricas, lo que limita los debates críticos sobre la interculturalidad y los problemas sociales actuales. Las actividades mecánicas, que dominan en los libros, priorizan la memorización frente al pensamiento crítico, aunque las actividades participativas e investigativas han aumentado en frecuencia. Este análisis subraya la necesidad de prácticas de enseñanza más inclusivas y críticas que aborden la diversidad y fomenten competencias clave como la empatía y la argumentación.

Palabras claves: Interculturalidad- libros de texto- educación crítica- historia contemporánea- enseñanza basada en competencias.

Introduction

In this article, we analyse how interculturality is represented as a controversial topic in school History textbooks used in the Spanish educational system. As Carretero et al. (2012) point out, textbooks tend to reproduce dominant narratives that often avoid social and cultural conflicts, thereby contributing to the construction of selective and partial historical knowledge. This trend reveals that textbooks are not merely neutral pedagogical tools, but rather discursive devices that shape social imaginaries, legitimize certain narratives of the past, and silence others (Achugar et al., 2011), particularly those linked to subaltern epistemologies.

In the current educational context, schools are expected to foster citizens capable of critical reflection, deliberation, and autonomous judgment when facing contemporary ethical and social dilemmas. As Osorio (2017) emphasizes, in order to develop these competencies, students must acquire argumentative skills that allow them to support their ideas and make well-founded decisions. In this sense, it is essential that educational institutions not only transmit content, but also explicitly address the tensions, conflicts, and controversies present in historical and scientific knowledge. Only in this way will it be possible to actively integrate diversity and social conflicts into the curriculum, moving toward a truly inclusive and critical education.

The subject of History, Geography, and Social Sciences constitutes a key curricular space for shaping informed, critical, and socially engaged citizens, capable of actively contributing to the construction of a more just, equitable, and democratic society. To achieve this, students must investigate, analyse, and solve social problems relevant to their current context (Pagès, 2011). In this regard, the issues-centred social studies approach promotes a form of social science teaching that focuses on addressing persistent and controversial social issues, with the aim of fostering deeper understanding and active participation in society (Evans, 2021). Debating controversial topics contributes to the development of critical-reflective thinking and promotes active citizenship engaged with social issues (Ortega-Sánchez & Pagès, 2020).

From this perspective, Santisteban (2019) emphasizes that “controversial topics highlight strategies in which controversy, debate, contrasting opinions, argumentation, and consensus are the foundations of an authentic democratic education.” The teaching of such topics—rooted in a long-standing tradition in Anglo-Saxon education—seeks to foster active citizenship based on democratic

principles, which drives the development of social, critical, and creative thinking (Pagès & Santisteban, 2014). Addressing recent and controversial historical processes in the classroom can also be of great pedagogical interest and value.

This approach, grounded in critical theory and critical social studies, has yet to achieve the expected impact in many contexts. Various authors suggest this is due to what has been referred to as the “war on critical social studies” over the past two decades (Evans, 2011). Other studies indicate that teachers have lost the freedom and autonomy to work with relevant social issues in their classrooms (Ross & Vinson, 2012). For this reason, it is necessary to promote an education oriented toward social justice, one that addresses social problems and challenges power structures by exposing situations of inequality and injustice (McCrary & Ross, 2016).

Teaching Controversial Topics

Santisteban (2022), drawing on Wellington (1986), offers a comprehensive definition of controversial topics, highlighting several key aspects. The author points out that these topics: (a) challenge social values; (b) promote political education; (c) confront emotions with rationality; (d) reveal the complexity of society; and (e) address current issues. Expanding on this perspective, controversial topics can be defined as those on which there is no general consensus (Levinson, 2006; Magendzo, 2021; Aceituno & Collao, 2023). Additionally, different social groups produce diverse arguments regarding these topics, which leads to divisions within society and often results in irreconcilable explanations or solutions. These issues also give rise to belief and value systems that support the various groups in conflict.

Given the relevance of controversial topics in the curriculum and considering that the discipline of History frequently addresses such issues, it is important to consider how these topics also shape the trajectories of teachers (Palma Solís, 2022), especially those who have chosen to study History. The way History teachers take a stance on controversial topics is influenced by their knowledge, ideology, political background, gender, and socioeconomic status. Tribukait (2021) highlights the importance of the affective dimension in teaching controversial or sensitive historical content, particularly in the context of a politically polarized society.

Cassar et al., (2021, 2023) propose that controversial topics often arise spontaneously in the classroom and the way teachers address them is conditioned by factors such as prior experiences, emotions, personal beliefs, and moral convictions, as well as by their professional representations. Building on the ideas of Hess (2009), these researchers suggest that the teaching of controversial issues should be part of a planned didactic activity, in which there is a conscious commitment on the part of the teacher to integrate such topics into the classroom with the goal of developing specific competencies. When teachers actively engage with a topic perceived as controversial that arises spontaneously during class, they take the opportunity to connect their pedagogical decisions with their broader social purpose (Ho et al., 2017). There is consensus that developing dialogic, argumentative, and deliberative skills is an appropriate educational goal when addressing problematic or controversial content—especially in fostering critical thinking within a context where the teacher acts as a facilitator of inquiry and open discussion (Pineda-Alfonso & Navarro-Medina, 2019).

On the other hand, textbooks continue to serve as a primary support tool for many teachers, who often rely on them as the foundation for classroom narratives without frequently questioning their content. Rarely do these books present counter-narratives, which leads students to perceive historical facts as immutable and absolute, thereby distorting objectivity in historical discourse (Durna, 2020). This approach should aim to strike a balance between official history and that reflected in popular culture. The direct relationship between history, historiography, textbooks, and the nation-state (Wendt, 2010)

raises important questions: How can certain narratives be integrated into textbooks? And in this context, why do errors or stereotypes persist?

The Use of Textbooks to Avoid Controversial Topics

One way, teachers avoid addressing problematic topics is by relying exclusively on textbooks, which allows them to distance themselves from the conflicts that may arise when dealing with controversial issues in the classroom. This approach entails the teaching of static and immutable content that neither teachers nor students tend to question (Martínez Bonafé, 2008). Textbooks continue to be used as the main tool for presenting curricular content, largely due to institutional pressure, and students interact with this knowledge because someone in a position of authority imposes it. However, the responsibility for introducing—or avoiding—certain topics in class ultimately lies with the teacher, who decides what is taught and, therefore, what is silenced, made invisible, or denied.

When teachers adopt a “neutral” stance, they often rely on “objectified” clichés, deny the existence of controversy, or even indoctrinate by presenting a single interpretation as if it were the absolute truth. Some acknowledge that the topic is controversial but choose not to teach it (Corngold & Waddington, 2006; Vandenberg, 2009). This may be due to the inherent controversy of the topic itself or a lack of adequate training (López Zurita, 2023). When a teacher indoctrinates by transmitting their moral beliefs as certainties that students must accept—without allowing access to alternative discourses—they are presenting unverified truths. Ibáñez-Martín (2021) defines indoctrination as teaching something as if it were a universal truth, regardless of any opposing evidence.

Some researchers have observed that certain teachers feel insecure or uncomfortable when addressing socially contentious issues in the classroom, as they must confront both the potential disruption these issues may cause and their own uncertainties regarding neutrality, norms, and value systems (Van Alstein, 2019). Addressing controversial topics that generate public debate requires problematizing content, which promotes reflective thinking, the exchange of perspectives, the construction and justification of personal viewpoints, as well as historical thinking. However, studies such as Kello's (2016) show that teachers sometimes adopt strategies to prevent controversy from emerging forcefully in the classroom due to their discomfort or lack of confidence in dealing with such issues.

Additionally, it is common for teachers to avoid teaching recent history, believing that it cannot always be approached “objectively.” This leads them to shy away from controversy and oversimplify the content (Toledo, 2015; Martínez-Rodríguez, 2019). Scientific literature has repeatedly pointed out that the usual practice in history classes remains focused on memorization of declarative knowledge, presented as closed and indisputable facts. Various studies have confirmed that most teachers tend to teach the past from a simplistic perspective, based on a single, supposedly “neutral” narrative, while fewer integrate an interpretative dimension of history more aligned with its disciplinary nature (Yilmaz, 2010; Wansink, Akkerman & Wubbels, 2016).

In this context, as Soler Castillo (2008) notes in his research, it is especially problematic that the highest concentration of information about controversial topics is found at the primary level of education—a stage at which children have not yet fully developed their cognitive abilities or, more importantly, their critical awareness. In contrast, during upper secondary education—when the content focuses more on economics, urban development, and cultures, and when students are better equipped to understand and reflect—the analysed textbooks barely mention Indigenous peoples and reduce the presence of Afro-Colombians to their historical links with slavery and racism.

Textbooks as a Source of Study and Their Nationalist Perspective

This study examines the textbook as a curricular instrument that carries ideological weight regarding concepts and structures such as identity, culture, politics, and gender (Miralles & Gómez, 2017). School textbooks convey a specific vision of these structures, shaped by their authors and aligned with the worldview and societal model they aim to promote. As Atienza (2007) points out, textbooks are not neutral: they transmit representations, perspectives, and interpretations of knowledge that reflect underlying ideologies. Furthermore, school manuals are often based on dominant cultural and ideological values, which legitimize the content being taught (Apple, 2022).

In this regard, the historical knowledge constructed in school textbooks is not a mere reproduction of academic discourse, but the result of a pedagogical recontextualization of that knowledge (Oteiza & Franzani, 2022). Thus, historical testimonies of different modes, genres, and temporalities incorporated into textbooks form part of a didactic discourse that serves as a vehicle for “cultural transmission.” School history, therefore, becomes a privileged space for discursive intervention and construction, where a particular social configuration of the nation is established early in students’ lives. This dimension should help students understand the past and present in a reflective, critical, and well-informed way (Carretero, 2017; Oteiza, 2018).

It is no coincidence that, more often than not, the content of textbooks aligns with the values and interests of powerful groups (Zárate Pérez, 2011). As Van Dijk (2009) notes, they rarely allow for content to be “controversial,” which implies censorship of alternative or critical voices. Critical discourse analysis has shown that Third World countries and minority groups tend to be portrayed in textbooks as underdeveloped compared to Western white culture, which is often depicted as charitable and philanthropic assisting the “poor” through aid, charity, or technological guidance (Van Dijk, 2009).

As Miralles and Gómez (2017) highlight in their study, the textbook likely constitutes the most widely read historical narrative by the general public and may even be the only account of the past they refer to throughout their lives—aside from informal sources such as the media, museums, or other spaces of historical interest. For this reason, it is essential to analyse this narrative, whose construction has generated considerable controversy due to its use (and at times, instrumentalization) in educational contexts.

In many cases, textbooks are the primary source of discourse for teachers in the classroom and are rarely questioned (Durna, 2020). This traditional approach tends to exclude alternative narratives, leading students to perceive historical events as absolute and immutable truths, thus undermining the balance that should exist in historical interpretation. This perpetuates a style of teaching that limits students’ critical historical thinking (Saiz & López-Facal, 2015; Gómez, 2015). In Spain, it has been noted that textbooks often present a dominant historical narrative and activities that do not require high levels of reasoning, but rather simple memorization of data (Gillate et al., 2024).

In this regard, criticism has also been directed at the outdated approach found in many Spanish textbooks, where a dominant historical narrative takes precedence in the form of a list of facts, and the activities demand little cognitive effort from students: recalling, recognizing, and reproducing information from the text, without encouraging them to reason or question the historical events presented. All of this has turned textbooks into a particular object of scholarly interest (Colomer et al., 2018; Gómez Carrasco, 2015).

Far from weakening in times of globalization, the nationalist narrative in textbooks remains predominant (Carrier, 2018; Grever & Van der Vlies, 2017). A relevant example is the way Latin

America is addressed in Spanish textbooks, where it is mainly portrayed in connection with the 15th century and the conquest initiated by Christopher Columbus. This controversial topic has sparked multiple historical interpretations: while the official version maintains that America was “discovered” by Columbus in 1492, Latin American historians have promoted an alternative view that frames the event as an “encounter between two worlds” (Carretero et. all, 2012). Textbooks rarely delve into the implications of colonization for both the native populations and the Spanish colonizers themselves, thereby perpetuating stereotypes and reductive representations of Latin America. Studies (Riekenberg, 1991, 2001; Bernhard, 2013) reveal a persistent gap between scientific historical knowledge and the representations found in textbooks, which consolidate Eurocentric and oversimplified views of Latin America’s past.

Despite previous efforts aimed at promoting history education based on civic principles and democratic participation, research conducted over the past decades—by authors such as Cosme Gómez and Miralles (2015), López Facal (2010), and Saiz & López-Facal (2015), both in Spain and other Western contexts—has revealed a different reality. Studies on how history is taught, what content is most addressed in classrooms, and with what purpose, show that history teaching (at least from the perspective of official curricular guidelines and common classroom practices) continues to be predominantly descriptive, linear, and lacking in critical thinking. Moreover, it is still often used as a tool to reinforce national identity.

Textbooks also tend to portray Latin America as a conquered and homogenized territory, without offering a historical bridge that allows students to understand the complex transitions experienced by pre-Columbian societies. This perspective contributes to the construction of a fragmented history of Latin America, in which its nations appear disconnected from the rest of the world, thus creating a limited and reductionist perception of its history and its role in the global context (Gloël, 2024).

The Image of the "Other" in Relation to the Dominator

Since the arrival of Europeans in the Americas, an Indigenous identity began to be constructed through the lens of modernity, shaping the "Indian" as a homogeneous social category defined by an asymmetrical relationship between the dominator and the dominated. This construction of the "Other" not only legitimized the hegemony of the conquering society but also served as a means for the West to reflect upon and reconstruct its own identity. Postcolonial studies have enabled a critical examination of dominant narratives, opening up space for alternative voices that challenge and subvert the simplistic dichotomies imposed by hegemonic Western thought, while also questioning the supposedly universal and natural character of liberal capitalist society (Lander, 2011).

When speaking of the “Other,” the metaphor of an “encounter” is often used. This implies, first, the recognition of the other’s presence—not only in physical terms but also in historical and testimonial dimensions (Mèlich, 2006); and second, the assumption of responsibility for their well-being, a fundamental principle from the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas, which calls for an education centered on the needs of the Other (Jaramillo, 2015). The school, as a key institution in social formation, should foster encounter and recognition, promoting spaces in which multiple ways of being are valued and respected. It is not enough to merely “accept” the Other; it is necessary to recognize that their otherness is always unsettling and never fully defined, meaning that the inclusion of difference is insufficient unless it acknowledges the radical alterity of the Other. This diversity is what makes genuine dialogue possible and enriches coexistence through the multiplicity of ways of being and understanding the world.

In Latin America, the “Other” has played a crucial role by resisting the mechanisms of domination that oppress them. This resistance is expressed in new forms of collective action which, as Paulo

Freire (1972) noted, not only aim to denounce the power structures that perpetuate exclusion but also propose alternatives that promote interaction based on listening, mutual respect, and coexistence in diversity.

Western Epistemological Colonization and Its Deconstruction

The concept of colonialism has been introduced in textbooks in a superficial and sanitized manner, treated as mere historical knowledge without exploring its profound impact on the formation of identity and culture. To decolonize thinking in the classroom, it is essential to critically examine how history has shaped our perception of cultural identity and how education can foster inclusivity by integrating cultural diversity. Education aimed at decolonized thinking must bridge the gap between colonial and postcolonial worldviews, promoting change, development, and social transformation (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

Teachers, as key agents in this process, must incorporate into academic content a worldview that reflects not only dominant cultural beliefs and values but also those voices and perspectives marginalized by colonialism (Razack, 2009; Thabede, 2008). The curriculum should challenge Eurocentric beliefs that perpetuate issues such as intercultural intolerance and exclusion, creating a space where decolonized knowledge can genuinely be integrated into educational practices (Crampton, 2015).

Frantz Fanon (1963) argued that decolonization can only occur if we critically reflect on how coloniality continues to shape our thoughts and behaviours. Therefore, it is crucial for both teachers and students to engage with the concepts of colonialism and decolonization, turning the classroom into a space for dialogue about the historical and contemporary implications of these ideas.

The process of “delinking” implies a shift in the terms of the conversation, not just in its content; in other words, it requires thinking from the categories, knowledges, and languages that have been silenced by modernity (Garzón, 2013). The coloniality of power permeates all spheres, and when this logic infiltrates and is systematically reproduced, it comes to shape the subjectivity and identity of individuals, perpetuating inequality and exclusion.

Research Objective and Questions

The aim of the research presented in this article is to analyse how interculturality is discursively constructed as a controversial topic in *Contemporary World History* textbooks for upper secondary education (Bachillerato) in Andalusia. The study seeks to identify the discursive strategies, silences, and ideological representations that shape the school narrative on colonialism and decolonization. To this end, we address five research questions:

RQ1 Explore the discursive forms through which textbooks construct the notion of interculturality, with particular attention to the concepts, narratives, and interpretive frameworks that legitimize certain views of the "other" while excluding others.

RQ2 Analyse school activities as discursive practices that position students in relation to specific representations of history and the present, assessing to what extent they promote debate, critical thinking, or the reproduction of dominant discourses.

RQ3 Compare the discursive strategies used by different publishers and editions in their representation of colonialism and decolonization, examining ideological shifts or continuities in the construction of the school historical narrative.

RQ4 Investigate the ways in which subaltern knowledges, actors, and memories are discursively silenced or marginalized in the analysed teaching materials, particularly in relation to otherness and non-Western epistemologies.

RQ5 Assess the discursive and pedagogical implications of using the textbook as a device that produces and legitimizes specific forms of historical knowledge, identity, and citizenship, from a critical and decolonial perspective.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study (Cohen et al., 2018). This methodology combines strategies and tools from two paradigms. On the one hand, it employs the rationalist or quantitative paradigm, which is based on a system of categories and quantitative data analysis. On the other hand, it incorporates strategies from the qualitative or constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which focuses on the interpretation of the collected data. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), combining quantitative and qualitative approaches provides a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem, allowing researchers to overcome the limitations inherent in each approach when used in isolation. The sample for this research consists of four *Contemporary World History* textbooks for the second year of Spanish upper secondary education (Bachillerato), published by two well-established educational publishers in Spain: Anaya and Vicens Vives. These publishers have become key references in the development of learning models and curricular content. The selection of these two publishers is based on their significant share of the Bachillerato textbook market. In the context of this study, in the region of Andalusia, these textbooks are the most widely used by teachers and students. The analysis focused on identifying the content and types of activities that reflect how interculturality is addressed in these textbooks. The study examined sections related to colonialism, decolonization, and the contemporary world. In total, 271 activities were analysed.

Table 1.
Research Sample

Textbook Title	Publisher	Year	Number of Activities	Code
Historia del Mundo Contemporáneo	Vicens Vives	2002	63	MV1
Historia del Mundo Contemporáneo	Vicens Vives	2016	88	MV2
Historia del Mundo Contemporáneo	Anaya	2012	54	MA1
Historia del Mundo Contemporáneo	Anaya	2020	66	MA2

For data analysis, a previously established and validated category system was used, which has proven effective for data collection in previous studies (Travé et al., 2014; Listán-Ferreras et al., 2020). This system was developed after conducting a floating and interactive reading of the collected data, in line with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory and culminated in the creation of our own category system (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Category System

Category System	Descriptors	Indicators	Example
Types of Contents (C)	Factual (F)	To complete the activity, it is necessary to master factual data or information, dates, figures, or names of characters.	"Complete the chart with the main colonial conflicts by analysing the image: Conflict - Chronology - Countries - Causes - Resolution."

Types of Activities (A)	Conceptual (C)	To complete the activity, it is necessary to master specific or general Social Science concepts.	"Define the following concepts: Apartheid, Long March, Commonwealth, Intifada."
	Procedural (P)	To complete the activity, it is necessary to master certain procedural skills, such as searching, processing, and communicating information.	"Search for information and create a map-based project reflecting the evolution of the State of Israel. Indicate the current relationship between Israel and Palestine."
	Attitudinal (A)	To complete the activity, it is necessary to adopt a position or issue an axiological value, linked to principles and norms.	"After reading the speech 'The Reasons for Imperialism' by Jules Ferry to the Chamber of Deputies, Paris 1882 and 1885, critically assess the challenges to the author. Finally, analyse the phrase 'Superior races have a right over inferior race.'"
	Mechanical (M)	Repetitive activities that do not require understanding the content. Generally, the correct answer is found in the accompanying text.	"By analysing the map, indicate what it represents and in which year it is located."
	Comprehensive (C)	Activities requiring a certain degree of elaboration and complexity. These exercises involve cause-and-effect relationships or explaining a process.	"Causes and consequences: What were the reasons for colonial expansion? How did colonization affect the dominated peoples? When did these empires begin to collapse?"
	Quasi-investigative (C-I)	Activities involving school research, even if not following the entire process. Research is conceived as mere information gathering and presentation.	"Search for information about one of these battles: Ayacucho, Carabobo, or Boyacá: the place, chronology, development, and consequences, and present it in an explanatory chart."
	Participative (P)	Exercises that involve not only intellectual skills but also active behaviours and decision-making (role-playing, debates, etc.).	In class, based on the previous analysis, assess if the following statement is accurate: "Liberty leading the people represents the French bourgeoisie in its struggle for freedom and symbolizes bourgeois liberalism." "Summarize the position of the Second International Congress on imperialism and present the arguments used in class."
	Investigative (I)	Activities aimed at developing complex intellectual skills, such as hypothesis formulation, searching for causal relationships, and contrasting	"Currently, several conflicts arise in which individuals feel compelled to work for a culture of peace. Explain: 1. What degree studies could you pursue to become an expert in mediating

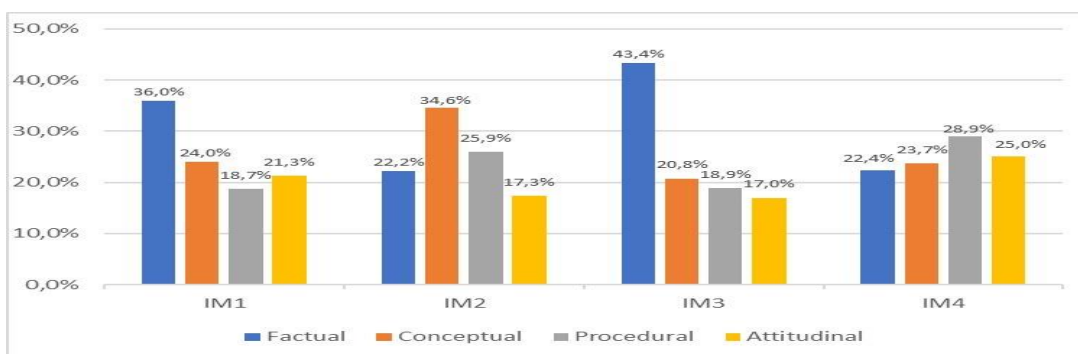
information or building international conflict situations?
conclusions. What challenges and difficulties
would you face if you choose this
profession? Justify your answer."

For data analysis, the qualitative analysis software Nvivo was used, which facilitated the interaction between the analysis categories and the meanings constructed in the discourse. To make the task easier, the hermeneutic units extracted were coded with a system of codes that identify the origin of the data, that is, the publisher (MA- Anaya Manual, MV- Vives Manual), the year of publication (MA1-from 2012; MA2-from 2020; MV1-from 2002; MV2-from 2016), the page, and the type of category to which the information unit belongs (content or activities, along with the corresponding descriptor).

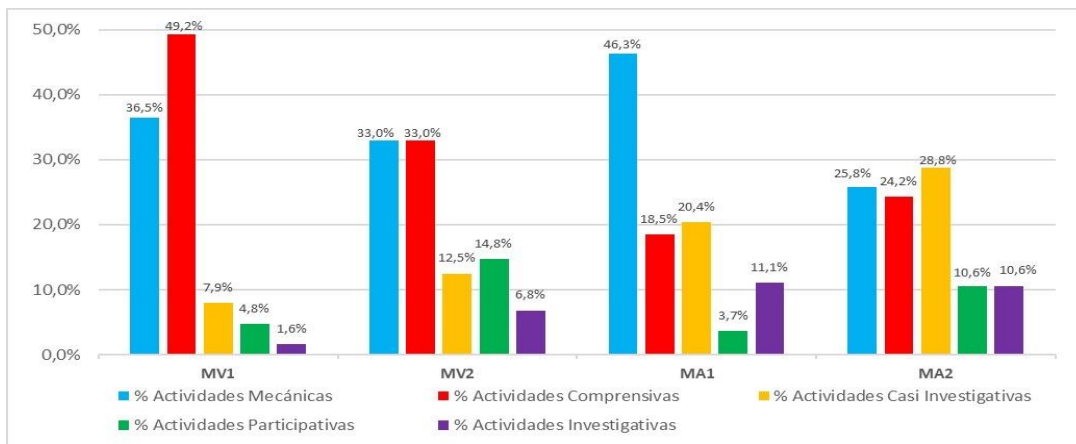
Results

According to the previously defined category system, the results obtained are presented in a series of figures detailing the percentages corresponding to the two analysed categories. Regarding the type of content, the data indicate that factual content is the most frequent, representing 29.82% of the total, followed by conceptual content at 26.32%. Procedural and attitudinal contents show a lower relative presence, accounting for 23.51% and 20.35%, respectively (Fig. 1). This initial analysis reveals a notable trend in the more recent editions of the MV2 (2016) and MA2 (2020) manuals, where exercises including procedural and attitudinal content show a percentage increase compared to older editions. This increase could be related to a greater pedagogical emphasis on the development of practical skills and values in contemporary textbooks, reflecting an evolution in educational priorities toward more comprehensive and competency-based approaches. These findings suggest a shift in the orientation of the analysed manuals, possibly aligned with current curricular recommendations that promote a balance between factual learning and the acquisition of procedural and attitudinal competencies. This more diverse approach could have significant implications for teaching by facilitating a more holistic approach to learning in educational contexts.

Figure 1. Percentage values of the types of analysed content



In relation to the types of activities identified in the analysed textbooks, the corresponding images are presented with the data expressed in percentages (Fig. 2). These visual representations allow a clear interpretation of the distribution of the different activities, facilitating the analysis of the pedagogical trends reflected in the reviewed texts.

Figure 2. Percentage values of the types of activities analysed

Finally, the absolute frequency of the exercises listed in Figure 2 is presented. This analysis includes a detailed examination of how many times each type of activity appears in the reviewed textbooks. To facilitate interpretation and provide a complete overview of the distribution, a table has been created to organize these data in a clear and structured manner (Table 3). This approach allows for the identification of patterns and trends in the selection and use of activities within the analysed texts, highlighting their relevance in the pedagogical configuration of the textbooks.

Table 3.

Absolute frequency of mechanical, comprehensive, semi-investigative, participatory, and investigative activities

	Mechanical Activities	Comprehensive Activities	Quasi-Investigative Activities	Participatory Activities	Investigative Activities
MV1	23	31	5	3	1
MV2	29	29	11	13	6
MA1	25	10	11	2	6
MA2	17	16	19	7	7
Absolute Frequency (Tot.)	94	86	46	25	20

The following presents the results obtained from the analysis of the activities proposed in the textbooks, classified according to the type of task, their absolute frequency, and representative examples:

Table 4.
Classification by Type of Activities

Type of Activities	Absolute Frequency	Main Characteristics	Representative Examples
Mechanical	94	Require low cognitive level. Copying data, enumerations, direct identification of information in the text.	“Indicate in the text the consequences of the Berlin Conference in 1885” (MA1-151). Comparing this chart “World production in 1870” with that of world production in 1913: Which countries had lost weight in the world economy in 1913? Which had gained prominence? (MV2-106).
Comprehensive	86	Require inference, explanation of processes, and cause-effect relationships.	“Cite, examining the map of Africa, the territories corresponding to each European country in 1914” (MV1-105). “Indicate two reasons that explain the influence of the Ottoman Empire in recent history” (MA1-137).
Quasi-investigative	46	Guided research process: document analysis, synthesis, and elaboration of partial conclusions.	“Explain the causes of European migration between 1800 and 1914 based on various documents” (MV2-91). In MA1 (162): “Based on Bismarck’s caricature (1964), in which he remains indifferent while the European powers take over the world with Germany’s passivity, identify the characters representing the different European powers and explain Bismarck’s attitude towards this situation.”

Type of Activities	Absolute Frequency	Main Characteristics	Representative Examples
Participatory	25	Involve taking a stance, debates, making personal judgments, and dialogue among students.	“Do you think colonial expansion represented an early globalization? Justify your answer” (MV2-102). “Point out traits of the culture of other countries that you consider significant, indicating why and your reasons for the choice” (MA1-137).
Investigative	20	Project development, oral presentations, hypothesis formulation, searching for diverse sources.	“Oral presentation on a historical topic about Latin America in the 21st century (MA2-352-353): choose one topic: Venezuela, from Hugo Chávez to Nicolás Maduro; Cuba, Castroism: Fidel and Raúl Castro; Argentina: from Menem to the Kirchners; Brazil: socioeconomic aspects; Mexico, Ecuador, and Chile in the 21st century: a global perspective. Project stages: 1. Preparation phase to organize information chronologically; 2. Documentation phase gathering all textual, graphic, or video materials; 3. Oral presentation phase emphasizing clarity, visual predominance, and simplicity.”

Analysis of the Results by Type of Activities

The analysis of the textbooks confirms a trend already identified by Ferreras-Listán et al. (2020): the majority of the proposed activities are mechanical, with a total of 94 exercises. These tasks are limited to identifying or copying explicit information present in the text itself, generally highlighted in bold or italics, with very direct instructions. They are low cognitive-level exercises, such as completing lists, creating outlines, or placing events on a timeline.

Secondly, there is a considerable number of comprehensive activities (86), which require students to establish causal relationships, explain processes, and handle concepts. Unlike mechanical activities, these require interpreting images or graphs and often pose open-ended questions. Vives textbooks favour this type of activity, with a significant number of comprehensive exercises found both in the 2002 and 2016 editions—around 29 and 28 exercises, respectively, in this category.

Quasi-investigative activities (46) and participatory activities (25) appear less frequently in the analysed manuals, although their presence increases in more recent editions, especially in the books from the Vicens Vives publisher. Quasi-investigative activities involve research as a process that begins with topic selection and continues with gathering, selecting, and analysing information, as well as synthesizing it. In these tasks, students are reconstructing information from various sources, which implies intellectual tasks similar to academic research.

Participatory activities, meanwhile, promote the development of critical thinking through dialogue, debate, and reasoned decision-making. Although limited in number, these tasks allow students to mentally construct their own opinions, adopt a critical stance, and express it with reasoning. Their presence notably increases in the most recent textbook editions (MV2, MA1, MA2), where the authors seem to place greater importance on these active methodologies.

Finally, only 20 investigative activities were identified, which are the most cognitively complex. In these tasks, students must formulate hypotheses, search for information from external sources, organize it coherently, and communicate it through structured presentations. These activities promote higher-order thinking skills, such as seeking causal relationships, contrasting information, and drawing original conclusions. Although still scarce, they stand out for their pedagogical richness. They typically appear as final or complementary tasks and are practically absent in older books like MV1. However, they reappear in more recent editions like MV2 and MA2, with their number doubling in the 2020 Anaya edition compared to previous editions.

Table 5.
Classification of Activities According to Types of Content

Types	Main Characteristics	Representative Examples
Factual	Activities focused on handling objective data such as dates, names, facts, or chronologies. They are usually in the form of closed questions or activities involving temporal or spatial location.	"Place on the timeline (MV1-246): Mark the independence dates from 1945 to 1990 of the following states after their decolonization: Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Algeria, Morocco, Congo, Nigeria, Equatorial Guinea, and South Africa". "The Partition of Africa" (MA1-151): "Create a timeline and place the key events of the colonization process on it."
Conceptual	Focus on the understanding of concepts, causal relationships, analysis of sources or images, formulation of explanations or comparisons. This exercises often use verbs like analyse, explain, compare, define. Many activities start from image or graph analysis but risk superficial treatment.	(In MV1-243): "Based on the image 'The Spanish colonies in Africa', list the territories Spain had in Africa". In MA2 (163): "Briefly define: colony, dominion, protectorate, Taylorism, Panama Canal, Suez Canal, Leopold of Belgium".

Types	Main Characteristics	Representative Examples
Procedural	More complex activities involving taking a stance, synthesizing arguments, debating, personal judgments, and critical reflection. They are more frequent in recent textbooks.	"Criticism of colonization" (MV2-101): "Do you think it is justified to speak of unequal exchange? Argue your answer". "Also summarize the critical positions on colonization. Do you think attitudes like those of Ferry or Chamberlain are defended in our society today? What is your opinion?" "Describe the cartoon titled 'France's Benefits to Its Colonies', explain the vision of colonialism it offers and evaluate its intent". "Highlight the positive and negative aspects of colonization based on texts from the Second International and from Rabindranath Tagore".
Attitudinal	Allow students to express personal opinions, assess past events, and adopt alternative perspectives. They encourage critical thinking and historical empathy.	"Respond in writing with a paragraph, highlighting the positive and negative aspects of colonialism" (MV2-101). "Put yourself in the shoes of a young Palestinian or Israeli and write a short argumentative text defending your views" (MV1-249).

Analysis of the Results According to the Type of Content

When examining the results from the perspective of the type of content addressed in the activities, a clear predominance of factual exercises is evident, followed by conceptual, and to a lesser extent, attitudinal and procedural. This distribution reflects a conception of historical knowledge primarily focused on the memorization of objective data—such as dates, events, or names—rather than a reflective and critical approach to historical processes.

Factual activities are the most common in the textbooks analysed. These types of activities ask students to place events on timelines, identify elements on maps, or respond to closed questions that require little or no elaboration. Such tasks are typically formulated in direct and explicit language, using instructions like "place," "list," or "locate," which reinforces a reproductive approach to historical knowledge.

Second in frequency are conceptual exercises, which involve the use of key concepts in historical analysis, such as colonialism, metropolis, protectorate, or imperialism. These activities, although sometimes structured as closed questions (e.g., brief definitions), tend to broaden the understanding

of historical phenomena, especially when combined with images or source texts. In such cases, students are required to explain relationships, interpret intentions, or construct arguments—tasks that demand a greater intellectual effort.

Though less frequent, attitudinal activities introduce a value-based and interpretive dimension to historical knowledge. These activities encourage students to make judgments, adopt a historical or contemporary perspective, and reflect on the consequences of events. These tasks not only foster critical thinking, but also open opportunities to empathize with historical actors or analyse ideological discourses.

Finally, we identify procedural activities, which invite students to take a position, engage in debate, justify their opinions, and connect the past with the present. Although these are the least represented activities in quantitative terms, their presence is concentrated particularly in the more recent textbooks—such as MV2—possibly indicating a growing editorial interest in promoting more active and democratic forms of teaching. These activities are often structured as small-guided research projects, requiring students to construct their own arguments based on diverse sources. They frequently intersect with attitudinal and conceptual contents. In short, while these contents appear less frequently overall, they have a moderate presence in the most recent editions (MV2, MA1, MA2), where the authors seem to be making a greater effort to emphasize this type of activity within the school textbooks.

In conclusion, the analysis shows that, although more recent textbooks cautiously incorporate conceptual, attitudinal, and procedural contents, the predominance of factual continues to set the tone in history education. This trend perpetuates a limited and cumulative vision of historical knowledge, restricting the development of historical thinking and the formation of critical awareness in students—despite attempts to include activities that promote reflection, critical judgment, and active participation.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study has shown how the pedagogical approach to interculturality is developed in textbooks, with a specific focus on colonialism and decolonization. Through this analysis, the potential of these texts to foster a deep understanding of the issue and encourage students to adopt a critical stance has been highlighted. According to Tocora and García (2018), education plays a key role in the socialization of students within sociocultural parameters. In this sense, if textbooks present history from an official, nationalistic perspective, students will inevitably adopt these views on social issues, culture, and perceptions of migrants and other ethnic groups in society. As Miralles-Martínez and Gómez-Carrasco (2017) point out, the teaching of Social Sciences must problematize what has been done so far in terms of education for citizenship, aiming to promote an education that integrates diversity and recognizes plural identities.

Research on textbooks in recent decades reveals the persistence of national narratives in the teaching of history (Foster, 2012; Grever & Van der Vlies, 2017). The narrative style, along with the clear dominance of national content, remains a constant in many countries, making textbooks one of the main vehicles for transmitting these narratives. However, the aim of this article is not to advocate for a radical change in the structure of textbooks, traditionally seen as unchangeable (Martínez, 2002), but rather to uncover and analyse the discursive strategies that reveal the underlying ideology. This approach is essential for fostering the development of students' critical thinking, especially considering that the audience is young, inexperienced, and tends to view textbooks as an unquestionable source of knowledge (Atienza & Van Dijk, 2010). As we have seen from the analysis of the reviewed textbooks, many of the selected contents for developing historical skills, such as

empathy, source evaluation, or moral judgment, remain focused on the national context. There is still a need to work on the management of teaching-learning processes and, therefore, on how students perceive reality and construct social representations through textbooks.

Demonstrating what is observed in the results, we note that mechanical activities are more frequent in the textbooks analysed in this study, showing how official knowledge, prevailing attitudes, and dominant ideologies appear more often compared to activities that promote critical thinking. We do not question the pedagogical value of repetition, but we note its excess at the expense of more complex mental operations. However, it is important to highlight that recently, things have improved as participatory and investigative exercises have increased compared to the past (as shown in Figure 2). In any case, since the end of the last century, researchers in the field of history education have emphasized teaching students to think historically in the classroom (Lahera & Pérez, 2021), that is, by using explicit teaching methods. For this purpose, a series of cognitive skills have been proposed, which relate not so much to the "what" of history, but to the "how" historical knowledge is constructed.

Regarding the contents involved in the activities, factual content predominates. In these exercises, chronological order of data and description based on presenting information, names of key figures, dates, and historical events are emphasized. Next, with a slightly lower percentage, we find conceptual activities, always in reference to the involved content. It is important to note that in these tasks, there is no distinction made between more structuring concepts and less inclusive concepts, meaning no hierarchy or relationship is established between them.

On the other hand, we have noticed that many activities include concepts (both general and specific to the Social Sciences) whose understanding is assumed, as they are not clearly explained. This leads us to believe that the content of the textbook is aimed at an idealized or typical student who is presumed to already possess the necessary knowledge and skills to complete the activities (Martínez-Bonafé & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2010). Regarding attitudinal content, there are no activities that encourage the formation of value judgments by the student. Instead, students are asked to adopt positions based on information already present in the book. This results in missed opportunities to debate controversial topics and develop essential educational competencies.

Continuing, we briefly explain that, as we have examined earlier, in our research, the reviewed textbooks do not address or highlight issues related to otherness. Even in the activities, it has been observed how they make invisible the discourses that emphasize "us" and diversity (Miralles-Martínez & Gómez-Carrasco, 2017), giving the appearance that we live in a relatively homogeneous society and world in terms of ethnicity and culture, and where conflicts are part of the past, as they are not mentioned in relation to our present. As an example, we cite the exercise (MV1-246), in which students were asked to indicate the independence date of various states following their decolonization, with no reference to what had happened before the conquest of these territories.

According to Apple (2022), textbooks often make a cultural selection, conveying a specific view of reality (to the detriment of others) and presenting it as official knowledge. We add to this statement that textbooks tend to favour a national or European narrative. We confirm this by reporting as evidence that in the book MA1, at the end of the chapters, there are sections titled "Beyond Europe," introducing other cultures in comparison to "us." Each section briefly establishes, to be analysed later, the history of other populations in Latin America and Africa, explaining the reasons for European colonial domination while downplaying the responsibilities of the colonizers.

This nationalist approach has led researchers to find different, if not contradictory, views on the same historical events presented in the textbooks of different nations. The opposition between a

“traditional” nationalist history and a “new history,” which is more focused on how historical knowledge is produced, remains an unresolved tension that continues to have a significant impact on research on history textbooks (Carrier, 2018).

Another key conclusion from studies conducted with students is that they often establish an identification with the past in national terms. That is, it is common for them to use terms like “we” or “our” to refer to events that occurred long before their birth and even before the appearance of their nation (Barton & Levstik, 2004; López & Márquez, 2018). Considering the results of studies conducted in recent decades, which focus on understanding how students construct the history of their nation, it seems clear that there is a predominance of master national narratives (López, 2019).

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