The early modern age in secondary education textbooks in Spain: An analysis of activities

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The objective of this study is to analyse how the Early Modern Age is taught in secondary school textbooks in Spain. To do so, the study is focused on the analysis of the historical contents of this period, in relation to the topics proposed by historiographical trends. In addition, the textbook activities has been analised according to their type, cognitive level and the historical skills required of secondary students. The sample consists of a total of 770 activities. A mixed methodology has been used, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. The results obtained indicate that the textbooks have improved in the type of activities and in the cognitive level required, but continue to dominate the contents of concepts, facts and concrete data (related to political and cultural history). On the other hand, the textbooks present a discourse which does not debate or reflect in the development of many of the historiographical stereotypes of the nation, neither does it examine in depth the social problems of the Early Modern Age.

KEYWORDS

history, early modern age, textbooks, teaching, secondary education, Spain, activities

Introduction

The Early Modern Age is a key period for the understanding of the social, economic, political, cultural and philosophical system of the present-day. It can be defined and characterised in Europe and the West by processes such as the expansion of commercial capital and the growing power of the bourgeoisie, European maritime expansion and the great geographical discoveries, the rise of the nation state *via* authoritarian and absolute monarchies, the birth of humanism, scientific advancement and empirical research, the schism within Christianity and changes taking place within an ancient demographic system leading to the foundation of the current demographic regime. The teaching of history must aim higher than the narration of historical feats of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and establish links with the phenomena of the present day in such a way that knowledge relating to this period becomes an essential part of the development of educational competences (García-González et al., 2020).

The adaptation of educational competences to the subject of History implies a historical literacy on the part of the students which extends beyond the mere memorisation of concepts, events and dates and which seeks to interpret the predominant historical narratives found in curriculums and textbooks in an appropriate way. Thus, a different cognitive learning model which students to think historically *via* the method of the historian is required (Gómez et al., 2014a,b; Gómez and Miralles, 2017). The contribution of substantive contents relating to modern history towards students' historical literacy should take into account the concept of historical relevance (Seixas and Morton, 2013). This concept should present the meaning of the past, and knowledge thereof, as a reality which is not static, but rather one which is under construction based on research questions as a response to present-day problems or to questions which are of relevance to students. Indeed, it is of great importance to present historical contents to secondary

school pupils from the point of view of relevant social problems (Sáiz, 2010) as such contents can provide knowledge of historical processes from the Early Modern Age in order to form a critical understanding of society today.

The textbooks used by teachers are a fundamental analytical tool for discovering the historical contents taught in the classroom. Thus, this paper takes into consideration the following questions: Which topics are taught the most? What historiographical approach do they describe? Are these topics updated in the light of new historiographical trends? Furthermore, taking into consideration the activities contained in these textbooks, a reflection is made on their nature regarding the historical period in question: What cognitive skills do the activities aim to develop? Do they train secondary students in the skills of historical thinking and/or social analysis from a critical perspective (Sáiz, 2013; Gómez et al., 2014b; Colomer et al., 2018).

Textbooks are the most commonly used teaching materials in the classroom in Spain (Martínez et al., 2009). They constitute a teaching and learning tool which facilitates the work of the teacher and acts as an intermediary between the student and the subject (Prats, 2012). They are a cultural, academic, commercial and ideological product and, as such, their use and abuse has been analysed in a plethora of studies (Gómez and Miralles, 2017). Articles on the topic of textbooks have constituted an extremely productive line of research over the course of the last two decades (Valls, 2001, 2008; Sáiz, 2011, 2013, 2017; Martínez, 2012; Prats, 2012; DICSO Research Group, Gómez et al., 2014a; Gómez and Molina, 2017; Colomer et al., 2018; Rodríguez and Solé, 2018). As far as research relating to the analysis of textbook contents is concerned, the studies by Valls (2008), López-Facal (2010), Sáiz (2011), Inarejos (2013), and Cuenca and López (2014) are all worthy of note. In terms of research on historical time, the analysis of the activities contained in textbooks and their relationship with competences, the following studies stand out: Blanco (2008), Sáiz (2011, 2013, 2015), Gómez (2014), Colomer et al. (2018), Martínez-Hita and Gómez-Carrasco (2018), and Casanova-García (2020). All of these studies share the point of view that historical knowledge involves thinking, analytical and interpretative skills and that the historical contents selected for school curriculums and textbooks frequently correspond to concepts, events and dates which impoverish the teaching of history. It is proposed, therefore, that methodologies be implemented which develop the strategies and skills of the historian, such as searching for, selecting and handling historical sources, empathy and historical perspective and the creation of historical narratives (Gómez et al., 2019).

The role of textbooks is to transmit knowledge and a sense of the hegemonic reality in accordance with those who hold power (Gómez et al., 2014a). They have commonly been used by states to develop collective identities and to legitimate institutions and international relations (Carretero, 2008; Foster, 2012; Gómez and Chapman, 2017; Sáiz, 2017). The Georg Eckert *Institute for International Textbook Research* in Braunschweig (Germany); the *Emmanuelle* project in France and the MANES (Manuales escolares) research centre in Spain stand out as notable research centres on textbooks. The latter are closely related with the Latin American world and messages of identity linked with school textbooks (Sáiz, 2017; Carretero, 2019; Maraña-Hidalgo, 2019). Studies along the same lines can also be found originating from other countries, as is the case of Hasani-Idrissi (2021) in Morocco and Johnson-Khokar (2021) in Pakistan.

In collaboration with other universities (Murcia, Granada and Sevilla) and with associations such as the Fundación Española de

Historia Moderna (FEHM, Spanish Foundation of Early Modern History) and Herpérides, researchers from the University of Castilla-La Mancha have organised meetings of researchers, teachers and students to discuss the way in which the Early Modern Age is taught in secondary education. To date, four national and international congresses have been held (2014, 2015, 2019 and 2022) with the aim of bringing history research closer to the classroom context. This constitutes an attempt to highlight historical topics which are of relevance to society and to put forward a new model for the teaching of the Early Modern Age placing emphasis on its role in the understanding of present-day society. Many contributions and research proposals have been put forward concerning the teaching of the history of the Early Modern Age in secondary education, ranging from theoretical research proposals to teaching proposals which are of use in the everyday practice of researchers and teachers (García-González et al., 2016a,b, 2020).

As far as studies dedicated to the analysis of general contents in secondary school textbooks on the Early Modern Age are concerned, those by Henarejos-Carrillo (2016), Simón-García (2016) and Maia (2020) are worthy of note, along with the studies by Martínez-Hita (2016) and Irigoyen-Bueno (2020) on the discovery of America and other key topics of this period, such as the Empire and the War of Succession and how they are dealt with in textbooks (Casanova-García, 2020). Other relevant studies include those on social movements in the Philippines (Inarejos, 2013, 2016), the Black Legend in textbooks (Gómez and Rodríguez, 2020) and the place of ethnic and religious minorities, such as the *Moriscos* and *Conversos*, in school textbooks (Moreno-Díaz del Campo, 2020). The issue of gender is gaining presence in this line of research (Rausell-Guillot, 2017; Moreno-Díaz del Campo, 2020), along with other issues such as the analysis of images and illustrations of the Early Modern Age in textbooks (Gallego and Gómez, 2016; Rodríguez, 2020) and the role of peasants as a key group of analysis in the Early Modern Age (Jávega-Bonilla, 2016; Gómez and García, 2019). These are new proposals, topics and contents which seek to improve the teaching and learning process, to increase the motivation of secondary students and to facilitate the application of contents in order to achieve a higher level of significance and relevance of student learning (García-González et al., 2020).

Methodology

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyse how the Early Modern Age is taught in secondary school textbooks. To do so, attention is focused on the analysis of the contents of this period of history in textbooks, how it is approached in the textbooks used by teachers in the classroom and its relationship with the historiographical trends.

The specific objectives to ensure the success of this main objective are as follows:

- To analyse the historical contents of the Early Modern Age in secondary education textbooks in relation to the topics proposed by historiographical trends.
- To analyse the activities contained in the textbooks according to their type, cognitive level and the historical skills required of secondary students.

Sample

For the analysis of the historical contents of the Early Modern Age in school textbooks, three books, published by Anaya, Oxford and Vicens Vives in 2015, corresponding to the LOMCE Spanish educational law, were selected. The selected books were for use in the second year of compulsory secondary education and 770 activities relating to the contents of the Early Modern Age were analysed with the aim of observing the way in which historical skills were applied (Table 1).

In order to carry out a comparative analysis of the historical contents of the textbooks and the topics developed by researchers of the Early Modern Age, the study by Gómez (2014) on publications in journals and scientific meetings in the field of Early Modern History was taken as a point of reference. The aforementioned study analyses 484 book chapters and 291 articles on this specific period of history (Table 2).

With this study as a starting point, the analysis was broadened to include publications by the FEHM up to the present day (García-Fernández, 2016; Fortea et al., 2018; Pérez-Samper and Beltrán Moya, 2018) and certain journals, such as Studia Histórica (monographs 2016–2022) and IH, Investigaciones Históricas (articles ranging from 2016 to 2020).

Methodological design: Instruments and data analysis

The data collection instrument for the activities included in the textbooks was designed in an Excel database and was divided into four categories: historical contents; type of activity/exam question; cognitive level required; presence of first and second-order concepts. Examples of this categorisation can be found in other studies: on textbook activities, see Gómez (2014) and Gómez and Miralles (2016); on examinations, see Gómez and Miralles (2015). The categorisation can be observed in Tables 3–6. On another, more extensive, categorisation of historical contents, see Gómez and Chapman (2017) and Gómez et al. (2019).

In order to define the cognitive level required in the activities contained in the textbooks, the studies by Sáiz (2011, 2013, 2015) have been taken as a point of reference. In this categorisation, Bloom's Taxonomy of objectives-learning stages has been applied in one of its most recent versions adapted by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). This has made it possible to classify the learning outcomes of the activities proposed in the textbooks into cognitive levels. Bloom's Taxonomy demonstrates that it is possible to formulate questions and activities of different levels. However, this categorisation has its limitations due to the fact that human knowledge is not so linear or accumulative (Escamilla, 2011). Therefore, the cognitive

categorisation of questions and the comprehension of texts has been added to this taxonomy (Vidal-Abarca, 2010). On the one hand, there are *literal* questions (of a low cognitive level) which require a simple pattern of information seeking (locating-memorising), while, on the other hand, there are *inferential* questions (of a high cognitive level), the search pattern of which is more complex (reviewing-relating-integrating; inferring-reasoning).

This ranking can also be applied to the very procedures of the teaching and learning of history (Hernández, 2002): working with thematic historical maps; images of the different types outlined above; graphs, tables or charts; and chronological axes. Two levels can be differentiated in these procedures. First of all, there is a low level, represented by procedures which generate a high degree of automatisation, which are merely *techniques* as they require the learning and practice of basic rules of a descriptive or mechanical nature. Secondly, certain procedures demand the activation of wide-ranging cognitive resources as they are not merely rules, but rather *principles* of a more explanatory nature, which imply relating information with other sources, inferring or deducing information contained within a map, graph, chronological axis or image and the elaboration of explanations or hypotheses. Based on these criteria, a conceptual model for the analysis of activities contained in history textbooks has been proposed, consisting of three levels according to their cognitive complexity after Sáiz (2011, 2013, 2015) model, as shown in Table 4.

For the analysis of the presence of first and second-order concepts (the latter relating to historical thinking skills), the proposal set out by Seixas and Morton (2013) has been used as the foundation, whilst also taking into consideration the proposals made by Domínguez (2015). The proposal here has been adapted to the activities of the textbooks, as shown in Table 5. Furthermore, two types of first-order concepts (chronology, conceptual/factual) have also been added, as has been the case in prior studies on examinations (Gómez and Miralles, 2015) and on textbooks (Gómez, 2014).

Results

The historical contents of the early modern age in secondary school textbooks

In relation with the historiographical discourse and from a global perspective, the historical contents of the textbooks are presented from a combination of classical positivism, or the Ranke model (a sequence of data and dates from a chronological point of view), and a structural model inherited from the Annales historiographical school (Gómez and Miralles, 2017). The topics dealt with in the most widely used textbooks in Spain tend to faithfully reproduce the epigraphs of the official education laws (Sáiz, 2010), as can be observed in Table 7.

In the textbooks analysed, the topics relating to the Early Modern Age are presented in chronological order according to the main political stages of this period. The historical contents worked on in the second year of secondary education take in the Early Modern period of the 15th–17th centuries. The 18th century is studied in the third year along with contents relating to the 19th century.

The units dealing with this period correspond to the birth of the Modern State, the Renaissance and Humanism, the geographical discoveries, the authoritarian monarchy of the Catholic Monarchs, the

TABLE 1 Activities analysed according to publisher.

Publisher	Frequency	Percentage
Anaya	185	24.03
Oxford	199	25.84
Vicens Vives	386	50.13
Total	770	100.00

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Habsburg Empire and the 17th century or Baroque Period. It is possible to observe the pre-eminence of political history, inherited from positivism, not only in terms of number of pages but also in how the units are organised. Political circumstances are the vehicle for structuring historical narratives. Based on this way of organising the historical contents, the discourse develops other economic, social, cultural and artistic topics according to the structuralist perspective of the Annales school, towards a vision of total history (Miralles et al., 2011).

The results also show how historical contents relating to cultural history and the history of art have gained ground in secondary education textbooks, followed by those relating to political and institutional history. These two areas comprise 67% if the activities on the Early Modern Age in the textbooks analysed (Table 8). Social and economic history occupy a secondary position, with around 23% of the activities. In comparison with previous studies on textbooks (Gómez

and Miralles, 2017), the activities relating to social and economic topics are somewhat more representative, although they still do not reach the levels achieved by political history and much less cultural history and the history of art.

In order to know the complexity of the activities classified according to the historical contents in Table 8, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out. The results show that there are significant differences ($p = 0.03$) between the activities concerning political and institutional history (with a low cognitive level) and those contents relating to matters of economic, social, cultural and art history (Figure 1).

It is often the case that questions on political history, such as *What were the main kingdoms of the east of Europe?* and *Who were the Catholic Monarchs?* require skills relating to reading, description, locating, repetition, reproduction and/or memorisation, although some, such as the latter, also require understanding and even consultation of other sources. However, activities such as *State the relationship between the English and Flemish textile industries and Castilian transhumant livestock rearing, Why did the Portuguese and the Spanish search for new routes to reach India?* and *Why did the new humanist philosophy bring about the progress of scientific knowledge?* which are connected with economic, social and cultural aspects, require cognitive skills relating to comprehension, relationship, application and critical evaluation. Following a qualitative analysis to observe the most repeated terms and concepts in the activities of the selected 2nd-year textbooks, a word cloud was created (Figure 2). The size of the words represents those which are most repeated in the school textbooks analysed. The most represented concepts are closely related with cultural and artistic aspects (work of art, painting, art, Renaissance, Baroque, humanist, architecture, sculpture, authors, printing press, book, technique, religion, etc.), followed by those relating to political and institutional history (monarchy, reigns, monarchs, Catholic Monarchs, Charles I, Philip II, empire, territories, Europe, Spain, America, countries, institutions,

TABLE 2 Publications on the Early Modern Age analysed in the proceedings of the FEHM and in five prestigious journals.

Source (proceedings of scientific meetings and journals)	Number of publications
Proceedings of the FEHM	484
Studia Historica: Historia Moderna	53
Cuadernos de Historia Moderna	87
Obradoiro de Historia Moderna	56
Revista de Historia Moderna	67
IH. Época Moderna y Contemporánea	28
Total	775

Source: Gómez (2014: 37).

TABLE 3 Categorisation of the type of activities.

Type of activity	Meaning	Example	
Searching for information	Students are asked to search for information on a historical character or event in other sources	Search for more information on the life of Louis XIV and write a summary of his reign	1
Text analysis	Students are asked to respond to a series of questions relating to a historical text of the age or a text written by a historian	(On a text about the Comuneros) Who were the Comuneros? What demands did they make of the King in this text?	2
Creation	Students are asked to create some kind of resource relating to the historical contents of the textbook	Choose one aspect of the unit which has interested you. Search for information about it and make a poster explaining it. Then, present it to the class	3
Essay	Students are asked to write an essay about a historical topic or character	Write an essay about the Thirty Years' War	4
Figures/images	Students are asked to answer a series of questions about figures, graphs or images	Analyse the images above and answer the following questions: To what period does each one belong? What differences can you observe between the two images? What characteristics of Renaissance sculpture do you observe in B?	5
Short question	Students are asked to answer a short question about a text contained in the textbook (not about historical texts of the period)	Why were port cities the focal point of new capitalist activities?	6
Objective test	Students are asked to do an exercise of objective correction (joining phrases, filling in gaps, etc.)	Relate the following information with Charles I or Philip II: (a) He was the son of Joanna "the Mad"; (b) Via him the House of Habsburg became established in Spain; (c) He held the title of Emperor of Germany; (d) He established the court in Madrid. Copy in your notebook and join with arrows	7

Source: Gómez et al. (2019).

power, Church, war, conflict, etc.) and a lower presence of those relating to economic and social issues (population, social groups, society, age, class, cities, land, life). It is also possible to observe the level of complexity required of the secondary students in the handling of historical knowledge (observe, summarise or state) and the approach proposed for the analysis of the historical knowledge (characteristics, causes, consequences, differences, questions, events, historical fact, name, types, outline, summary).

TABLE 4 Meaning and examples of the cognitive level required of students in the activities contained in the textbooks.

Cognitive level	Meaning	Example
1	Involving the location and repetition of information contained in academic texts and written primary and secondary sources. These activities activate declarative knowledge of *literal formulation* or which is *text-based*. They only require skills relating to reading, description, locating, repetition, reproduction and/or memorisation	In which war did the Bourbons and the Habsburgs fight for the Spanish throne?
2	Activities requiring the comprehension of information embedded in the resource (academic text, source, map, chronological axis, image, etc.), summarising, paraphrasing and outlining it; locating the main idea of the resource, summarising the information contained therein and/or producing an outline thereof, defining concepts, relating, establishing similarities or differences between them; searching for and summarising new information in other sources and, finally, creating simple resources	Identify the commercial activities in the figure. What is the reason for them? -Look at the maps and answer the questions: (a) What territories were maintained by the Hispanic monarchy following the Peace of Westphalia? (b) What territories did Spain cede to France in the Treaty of the Pyrenees?
3	Activities which require students to analyse, apply and evaluate information taken from different resources or which imply the creation of new information. They originate from the previous level and derive from the resolution of *inferential* questions and from the application of procedural contents as *strategies*. Exercises in historical empathy, simulations or case studies; the writing of simulated biographies applying learned declarative contents; the critical or heuristic evaluation of information provided by sources	The images below are of a microscope and a telescope. One is attributed to Zacharias Jansen, while the other was perfected by Galileo Galilei. Write a text of ten lines explaining why these inventions seem important to you

Source: Gómez et al. (2019).

TABLE 5 Meaning and examples of the first and second-order concepts present in the activities contained in the textbooks.

Concept	Meaning	Example	
First-order			
Chronology	Requires knowledge of the dates of historical events or of how to place them in the correct chronological order	In a table like that shown as an example, order the warring factions of the Thirty Years' War	*7*
Conceptual/factual	Knowledge is required of a specific concept or event from the past	Who were the Favourites? Name two of them	*8*
Second-order			
Historical relevance	Explaining the historical relevance of a particular event or person using appropriate criteria	Why was the printing press so important in cultural terms?	1
Sources/evidence	Understanding how history is an interpretation based on inferences originating from primary sources	In the painting by Filippo Lippi, find elements which confirm that, in the Renaissance period, religious topics were dealt with in the mood and decoration of the age	2
Change and continuity	Understanding change in the past as a process with different rhythms and patterns. Identifying the complex patterns of progress and decadence in different peoples and societies	Humanism led to a change in mentality with regard to the previous age. Explain your ideas, recalling the characteristics of humanism and of the Renaissance. Which of these characteristics had the greatest influence on the reigns of the Hispanic monarchy?	3
Causes and consequences	Recognising multiple causes and consequences in the short and long term. Seeing the consequences of a specific event or person in human activities and present-day structures and conditions	Write a list of the political, social and economic consequences of the religious unification brought about by the Catholic Monarchs	4
Historical perspective	Recognising the differences between current beliefs, values and motivations (world vision) and those of past peoples and societies. Explaining the perspectives of people in the past in their historical context	Imagine a dialogue between Luther and the Pope. The former wants to convince the latter that each individual Christian should be his own priest, whereas the Pope defends the need for the clergy to promote faith. Write the arguments for each position	5
Ethical dimension	Making reasoned ethical judgements on people's actions in the past, taking into account the historical context in which they moved. Evaluating the implications for today of past sacrifices and injustices	Machiavelli's ideas are often reduced to a single phrase: "the end justifies the means." Do you agree with this statement? Present your arguments	6

Source: Gómez et al. (2019).

As far as how the contents of the textbooks are handled in terms of the proposals of recent historiography is concerned, the results demonstrate a lack of updating of the contents taught in the classroom. The topics contained within the textbooks do not encompass many of the current concerns of Spanish historians. For this reason, the study by Gómez (2014) has been taken as a reference point along with more recent publications (between 2015 and 2022) in the FEHM and in other

journals such as Studia Histórica and IH. A change from history to social concerns has taken place, with an interest arising in the study of social minorities or marginalised groups (healers, washerwomen, servants), identities and stereotypes relating to gender and age, the proliferation of biographies and trajectories of families and individuals as subjects of historical reflection and moving beyond traditional geographical spaces towards others of a peripheral nature (Hernández, 2018). The main issues concerning historiography are: taxation issues (Sánchez-Durán, 2019); oligarchies and local elites (Chacón-Jiménez and Hernández-Franco, 2019); the organisation of territory; vertical and horizontal networks and relations of power between different political, religious and economic institutions (Pullido-Serrano, 2018); families and patrimony (Salas-Almeda, 2016; Carrasco-González, 2018); everyday life (Franco-Rubio, 2018); the image of power, ceremonies and festivities (Moreno-Díaz del Campo, 2020; García-Cárcel and Serrano, 2021); social inequalities, assistance and marginality (Rivasplata-Varillas, 2018; González-López, 2020; García-González, 2021); and social conflict (Torres-Arce, 2018; Mantecón-Movellán et al., 2020). These topics are far-removed from the linear, political and traditional discourse which persists in textbooks (Gómez and Miralles, 2017).

Influenced by different historiographical trends, current research on the Early Modern Age has shown changes in how political topics are approached, focusing on: local elites and the reproduction and consolidation of power (Chacón-Jiménez and Hernández-Franco, 2019); relationships of dependence; war and soldiers with elements relating to everyday life and social advancement (Herrero Fernández-Quesada, 2020); the reassessment of the study of specific kings and queens; and the image of power from a new model of political history influenced by post-modernist trends (Pérez-Samper, 2020). However, in the selected textbooks, the activities approach the contents based on the

TABLE 6 Type of historical contents and examples contained in the activities.

Type of content	Example	
General history	When did the Early Modern Age start and end? Voyages and discoveries with no connection to social, economic or political issues	1
Political and institutional history	What events took place in 1609, 1640, 1652 and 1688? Which monarchs were on the throne at those times?	2
Art and cultural history	Which characteristics of the Baroque can be seen in the Cristo Yacente (Dead Christ) of Gregorio Fernández?	3
Social and economic history	How did the crisis of the 17th century affect the different social groups of the time?	4

Source: Gómez et al. (2019).

TABLE 7 Early Modern Age topics established in textbooks for the second year of secondary education according to the official curriculum (LOMCE).

LOMCE (2014)	Anaya (2015)	Oxford (2015)	Vicens Vives (2015)
The Early Modern Age: The renaissance and humanism; its later scope. Renaissance art	Unit 9: The beginning of the modern age. The 15th and 16th centuries	Unit 1: The modern age. Humanism and renaissance	Unit 9: The Birth of the modern age. Did humanism change people's way of thinking?
The geographical discoveries: Castile and Portugal. The conquest and colonisation of America	Unit 10: The beginning of the modern age in Europe and America		Unit 10. The Renaissance; a new conception of Art: How did the Renaissance bring about a renovation in the conception of Art and in its techniques?
The modern monarchies. The dynastic union of Castile and Aragon			Unit 11. The age of the great geographical discoveries: What new kind of monarchy did Isabella and Ferdinand of Aragon create? How did they expand their realm?
The Habsburgs and their politics: Charles V and Philip II. The "religious wars," the Protestant reformations and the Catholic counter-reformation		Unit 2: The Catholic Monarchs and the great voyages of discovery.	Unit 12. The rise of the Habsburg Empire: How did Charles I and Philip II create the greatest empire of the age?
The 17th century in Europe. The authoritarian, parliamentarian and absolute monarchies. The Thirty Years' War			Unit 13: The decadence of the Habsburg Empire
The Habsburgs and their politics: Philip III, Philip IV and Charles II	Unit 11: The 17th century in Europe and in Spain	Unit 3: The Europe of Charles V and Philip II	Unit 14: 17th century Europe
Baroque art. The principal manifestations of the culture of the 16th and 17th centuries		Unit 4: The 17th century	Unit 15: Art and science in the Baroque
Art and science in Europe in the 17th century		Unit 5: European Baroque culture	

Authors' own elaboration.

TABLE 8 The type of historical contents contained in textbook activities on the Early Modern Age (2nd year of secondary education).

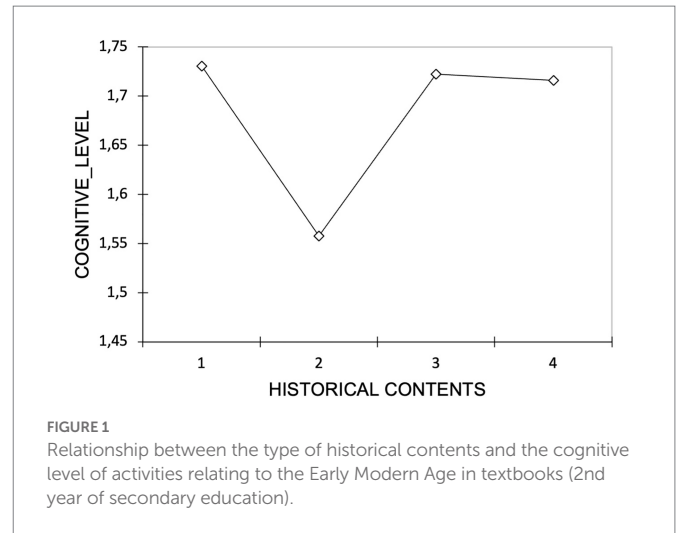| Historical contents	Frequency	Percentage
General history	78	10.13
Political history	217	28.18
Cultural history and history of art	299	38.83
Social and economic history	176	22.85

Authors' own elaboration.

FIGURE 1

Relationship between the type of historical contents and the cognitive level of activities relating to the Early Modern Age in textbooks (2nd year of secondary education).

FIGURE 2

The most representative terms and concepts contained in the activities of the selected textbooks (2nd year of secondary education).

conceptualisation of power and its manifestations, the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, the actions carried out by kings and favourites and the dates of specific battles and peace treaties (*Which foreign conflicts sustained the first Habsburg monarchs? List the different peace treaties which led to the loss of territories*).

Researchers of social and economic history have proposed a change in the historical analysis of social structure focusing more on social relationships. Family and individual strategies and histories have become the object of analysis to provide understanding of the social fabric (García-González, 2021). Social groups such as those in power, traders and the marginalised (prostitutes, *Moriscos*, tramps and *conversos*) have been studied from this new perspective (Montanel-Marcuello, 2018; Rivasplata-Varillas, 2018; Moreno-Díaz del Campo, 2020). In comparison with the contents included in the textbook activities, they are materialised in the description of the general characteristics of the population, social stratification and its evolution, the general characteristics of the economy of Spain and Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries (growth and crisis) and some mentions of marginalised groups such as *Moriscos* and beggars (*What factors led to the expulsion of the Moriscos? What ideological principles was the decision based upon?*).

Issues relating to everyday life and material life (housing, clothing, food, etc.), the re-evaluation of the role of women and gender relationships (Rey-Castelao, 2021) and studies relating to conflict, disorder and justice on a local level (Álvarez Delgado, 2022) are of particular interest to researchers, who have studied them in great detail. However, they are barely present in the secondary education textbooks analysed (*What changes took place in people's everyday diet in the 16th and 17th centuries? Why was this so? What type of furniture and possessions can you find? Which social group do you think lived in each house?*).

As far as the history of culture and art are concerned, a great number of studies focus on image, representation, propaganda, ceremonies, devotions and festivities (León-Vegas, 2015). There are also studies on private libraries, books and the printing industry (Barber Castellà, 2018). However, in the activities analysed in 2nd-year textbooks, these types of historical contents are approached *via* humanism and the Renaissance, the Reformation, the definition of artistic styles and by listing works of art and authors (*What was the Renaissance? By which ancient civilisations was it inspired? What new artistic techniques arose in the Renaissance? In which country did the Renaissance begin? In which two stages can it be divided?*).

Lastly, in relation to the topic of America as one of the key aspects of the Early Modern Age, historians focus their attention on the organisation of American territory (Díaz-Ceballos, 2018), marital strategies, family links and local oligarchies, influenced by microhistory (Levi, 2003). There is a recognition of peripheral spaces in the narrative of imperial history. The case studies, comparative history, biography and prosopography relate themes, ideas, objects and individuals with their social context (Burke, 2018). In school textbooks, the activities on this topic focus on the discovery of America and the organisation of the colonised territories (*List the present-day countries which were under the control of Castile. Which empire did Hernán Cortés fight against? What was its capital?*). No attention is paid to the role of the indigenous allies of Cortés and Pizarro, who are essential in understanding the formation of these complex societies (Díaz-Ceballos, 2018). Furthermore, the negative perspective of Bartolomé de las Casas is neglected and little or nothing is said of miscegenation and its effect on heritage and administration. The shame caused by certain episodes of Spain's imperial past means that key issues for understanding historical developments are ignored. In comparison with the critical model of history (debate, an

initiation in research, etc.) present in textbooks in the United Kingdom, France and Portugal (Gómez and Chapman, 2017; Rodríguez and Solé, 2018), Spanish textbooks tiptoe around controversial and complex issues of the country's Black Legend related with America, the Inquisition and Philip II (Gómez and Rodríguez, 2020).

Historical competences in the activities of secondary education textbooks

According to the data obtained, short questions are the most common type of activities contained in the textbooks analysed, constituting almost 50% of the activities observed (Table 9). A long way behind can be found questions relating to figures and images, which represent a little more than 17% of the activities. The remaining categories (searching for information, text commentary, creation, essay and objective test) represent less than 9% each. There is a lack of questions which lead secondary students to think for themselves regarding social events or to build their historical knowledge in a significant way. Such activities are marginal and are generally those which are worked on least in the classroom (Sáiz, 2010).

A differential analysis was carried out of the variables *types of activity* and *level of cognitive complexity* (Figure 3). As can be seen in the results of the ANOVA test (Table 10) and in the post-hoc Tukey-B test

TABLE 9 Type of activities contained in textbooks (2nd year of secondary education).

Type of activity	Frequency	Percentage
Short questions	368	47.85
Figures/images	134	17.42
Creation	67	8.71
Searching for information	57	7.41
Text commentary	55	7.15
Objective test	53	6.89
Essay	35	4.55

Authors' own elaboration.

(Table 11), the differences are significant, with short questions being those which require the lowest cognitive level. In general, the short questions analysed in the textbooks require an extremely low cognitive level and can be answered with a term, concepts, dates or just a few words.

The educational potential of activities with figures and images, which, in theory, could be related with the second-order concepts of sources and historical evidence, is not adequately exploited in the selected textbooks. Students are asked to observe, summarise, state, identify or briefly explain specific information, concepts or historical events in an extremely guided way, which is, therefore, not well-connected with the historical thinking skills (Seixas and Morton, 2013).

As far as the analysis of first and second-order concepts is concerned, the results (Table 12) show an improvement with regard to prior analyses (Gómez, 2014) as there is a greater presence of second-order concepts.

In spite of this, there is still a great presence of first-order concepts, particularly those of a factual/conceptual nature (more than 50%). Furthermore, these types of activities require a low cognitive level as shown by the results obtained in the ANOVA test (Table 13) and the Tukey test (Table 14) represented in Figure 4.

The conceptual/factual or chronological activities of the textbooks are, on the whole, answered by merely reproducing the historical discourse offered by the book itself (*What route did Columbus take on his first voyage? Where did he leave from? Which Caribbean islands did he visit? In which area of the Americas did he disembark?*). It is striking that the textbooks contain almost no questions relating to chronological skills, handling dates, the use and creation of chronological axes or timelines (just over 3%). The insistence of the use of short question exercises leads students towards an acritical and atemporal conception of history as has been proven in studies on primary teacher training (Sáiz and Gómez, 2016) and of examinations in secondary education (Gómez and Miralles, 2015).

The concepts of historical thinking are less present, with activities relating to sources and evidence (almost 20%) and historical relevance (almost 12%) standing out. The other categories (historical perspective, causes and consequences, change/continuity and ethical dimension) are not well represented in the textbooks analysed. Such activities, relating to second-order concepts, require a higher cognitive level, as shown in

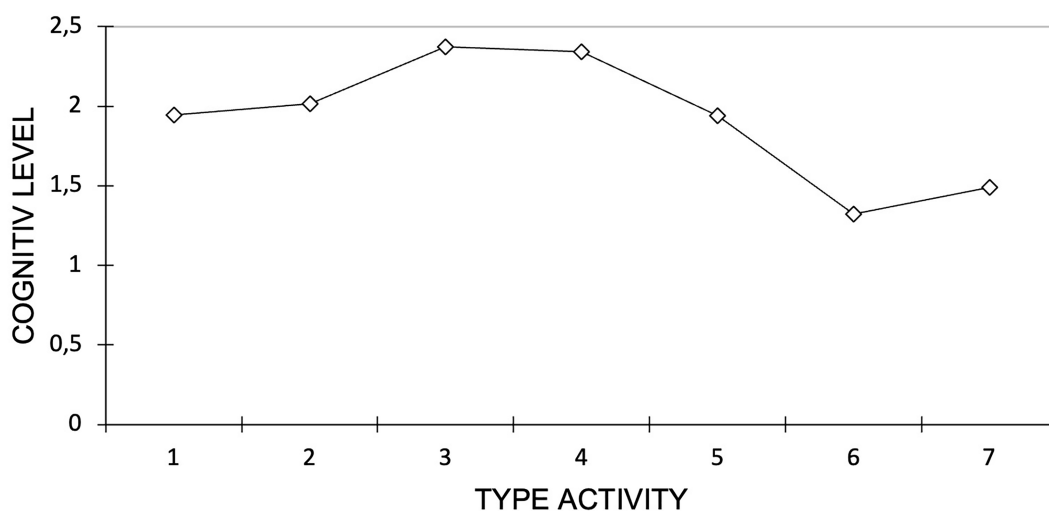FIGURE 3
Relationship between type of activity and the cognitive level required in the textbooks.

TABLE 10 ANOVA cognitive level/type of activity.

Source	FD	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	Pr>F
Model	6	116.059	19.343	63.954	**<0.0001**
Error	763	230.772	0.302		
Corrected total	769	346.831			

Calculated against the model Y = Mean (Y). The bold values: The probability of observing a difference as large or larger than the one observed, if the null hypothesis were true.

TABLE 11 Tukey-B test cognitive level/type of activity.

Type of activity	Means cognitive level	Groups			
Creation	2.373	A			
Essay	2.343	A	B		
Text commentary	2.018		B	C	
Searching for information	1.947			C	
Figures/images	1.940			C	
Objective test	1.491				D
Short questions	1.322				D

Authors' own elaboration.

TABLE 12 First and second-order concepts in the textbook activities.

Historical concepts	Frequency	Percentage
Concepts/factual	381.000	49.481
Sources and evidence	151.000	19.610
Historical relevance	91.000	11.818
Historical perspective	50.000	6.494
Causes/consequences	44.000	5.714
Chronology	26.000	3.377
Change/continuity	19.000	2.468
Ethical dimension	8.000	1.039

Authors' own elaboration.

Figure 4. However, some of the activities connected to second-order concepts such as causes and consequences and change and continuity require a low cognitive level. Activities concerning historical perspective and the ethical dimension are those which require a greater degree of complexity. These types of more complex and creative activities are those which guide students towards forming their own way of thinking and building their own knowledge in a significant way, thus contributing to the historical competences (Gómez and Miralles, 2017).

Conclusions and discussions

Early Modern historical contents in secondary education textbooks continue to be markedly conceptual in nature. The Early Modern Age is presented in secondary textbooks as a period which is deeply rooted in the main lines of the Spanish and European master narrative. The

TABLE 13 ANOVA cognitive level and historical concepts.

Source	FD	Sum of squares	Mean squares	F	Pr>F
Model	7	66.028	9.433	25.597	**<0.0001**
Error	762	280.803	0.369		
Corrected total	769	346.831			

Calculated against the model Y = Mean (Y). The bold values: The probability of observing a difference as large or larger than the one observed, if the null hypothesis were true.

TABLE 14 Tukey-B test cognitive level and historical concepts.

Category	Means cognitive level	Groups		
Historical perspective	2.400	A		
Ethical dimension	2.375	A	B	
Sources/evidence	2.007		B	
Chronology	1.769		B	C
Change and continuity	1.737		B	C
Causes/consequences	1.636			C
Historical relevance	1.527			C
Concepts/factual	1.465			C

Authors' own elaboration.

contents of this model are organised according to political circumstances which act as vehicles for the historical narrative transmitted in the textbooks. Political and institutional history have great weight in this discourse, along with cultural and art history, which has gained relevance in the structure of the historical contents (the great stages of the Early Modern Age: Humanism and Renaissance, the Baroque and the Enlightenment). The main focus of the textbooks (and also of the curriculum) is on the nation as the historical subject and, to a large extent, the Early Modern Age has contributed to this. From the birth of the Early Modern Age and the justification of the unity of Spain with the politics of the Catholic Monarchs and the conquest of Granada (as the origin of the nation); the conquest and colonisation of the Americas, the empire of Charles V and the Hispanic monarchy of Philip II (as the age of international splendour); the decadence and crisis of the last Spanish Habsburgs; and the recovery under the centralising policies of the Bourbons (Gómez et al., 2019).

The introduction of competences into the curriculum has led to the development of a dual model of historical knowledge. Hegemonic contents of a factual/conceptual nature, based around the model of a national and European historical narrative, must be approached in the classroom from a more skills-based perspective (comprehension, reflection, synthesis, explanation, etc.). Such approaches have been reflected in textbooks where it is possible to find an improvement in terms of the complexity and variety of activities in comparison with other previous studies (Gómez, 2014). However, the most frequent types of activities contained in textbooks continue to be those of a conceptual/factual nature related to political and institutional history, which require a lower cognitive level. Such activities do not aim to develop cognitive skills regarding history (second-order concepts), but rather memorisation and the comprehension or application of factual and conceptual knowledge. They do not encourage reflection on the main
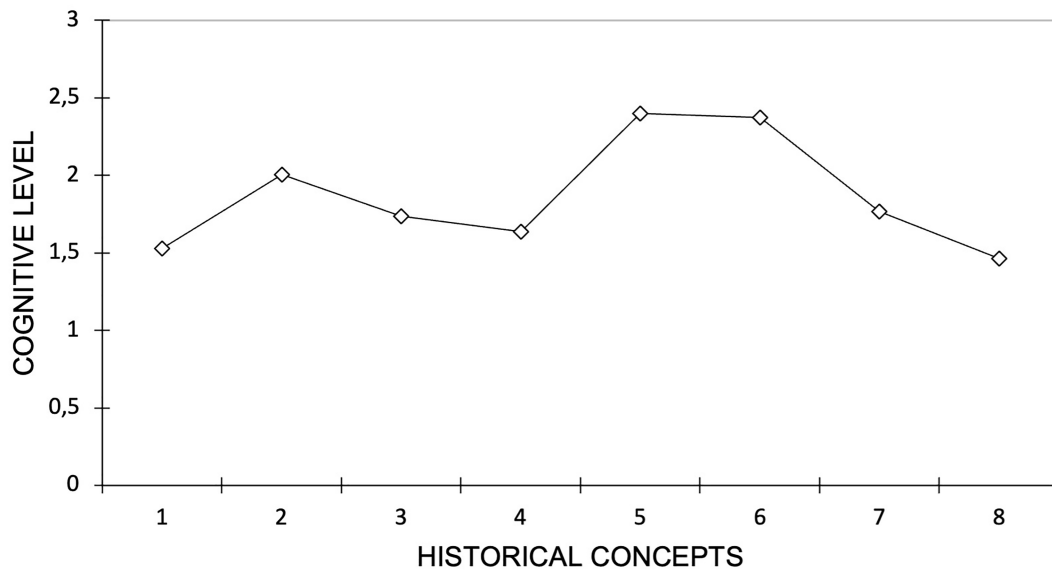
Relationship of first and second-order historical concepts with the cognitive level required in the textbook activities (2nd year secondary education).

landmarks of nation building which make it possible to understand historical science as a subject under construction with its own method of analysis. This leads to the production of textbooks with a great lack of activities based on second-order concepts related to historical thinking (Gómez et al., 2019).

The approach to history employed in textbooks should not be far-removed from the epistemological foundations of history as a science, taken by Carr (1987) to be a continual process of interpretation between the historian and the events, an unending dialogue between the present and the past. However, the model of history put forward by the LOMCE curriculum in Spain and by the textbooks in use presents a discourse which does not debate or reflect on the construction of many of the historiographical stereotypes of the nation or the process of the construction of Europe, neither does it examine in depth the social problems of the Early Modern Age.

An obsession for a succession of "ages" or periods reduces the past to the mummified logic of chronology. It is proposed here that critical thinking be empowered and historical contents be dealt with based on relevant problems which develop a critical perspective of the present and lead to a sense of meaningfulness and motivation among students (Sanchiz and Amores, 2016). Furthermore, there is a need to link the everyday lives of men and women of the past with the great historical processes. Without a doubt, social history has an important role to play when establishing connections between the past, the present and students' interest in historical knowledge (Gómez and Miralles, 2017). The questions asked should respond to problems which are relevant for the students of today (Sáiz, 2010). This makes it possible, therefore, to propose key topics such as social inequalities, differences of gender and age, models of family organisation, relationship networks, social mobility processes, conflict and/or material and immaterial culture, all of which are topics dealt with by the most recent historiographical trends (Pérez-Samper and Beltrán Moya, 2018; Chacón-Jiménez and Hernández-Franco, 2019; Casanova-García, 2020; Mantecón-Movellán et al., 2020; Rey-Castelao, 2021). These proposals have already been put forward from the field of the teaching of early modern history by

researchers and secondary education teachers (García-González et al., 2020). The new LOMLOE curriculum contemplates the historical contents and basic knowledge of secondary education in a transversal way with the aim of analysing processes of change. To a large extent, this approach encompasses the principles of historical thinking. Now, it is up to the education community to put this into practice in the classroom.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

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