

Historical thinking competencies in Swedish' Gymnasieskolan and Spanish' Bachillerato curricula

Competencias de pensamiento histórico en el currículo sueco de Gymnasieskolan y el español de Bachillerato

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Resumen

El objetivo principal de este estudio es el de analizar de forma comparativa la presencia o ausencia de las competencias de pensamiento histórico en el currículo educativo de Historia en los niveles de Gymnasieskolan (Suecia) y Bachillerato (España). Para ello, se diseñó y validó un instrumento mixto, cualitativo y cuantitativo, para analizar los documentos oficiales. Los resultados expresan la gran presencia de variables como "conciencia histórica" en el caso sueco y el mayor peso que tiene el trabajo con fuentes históricas y evidencias en el caso español.

Palabras Clave: Educación, historia, currículum, Ciencias Sociales, pensamiento histórico.

Abstract

The main target of this study is to make a comparative analysis between the presence or absence of historical thinking competencies in the official curricula of Gymnasieskola (Sweden) and Bachillerato (Spain). To reach this goal, a mixed instrument was designed, both qualitative and quantitative, to analyze the official documents. The results show a great presence of "historical consciousness" in the case of Sweden and the use of historical sources and evidences in the case of Spain.

Key words: Education, history, curriculum, Social Sciences, historical thinking.

1. Introduction

Learning history has evolved along the years since it was one of the first school subjects in all the "western" educational systems. Initially, History has the target of constructing the new modern nations and to justify the state-center power that emerged from the liberal revolutions at the beginning of the 19th century. Nowadays, the goal of History must fill a different gap (Moreno-Vera & Alvé, 2020). The students must learn how to explain the contemporary society they are living in, what kind of problems it faces and the relationships between people, nature, economy and sustainable development. As Pierre Vilar or Marc Bloch (2018), killed by the Gestapo in 1944, and the rest of authors of the "École des Annales" (Febvre, 1952, Braudel, 1958) remarked "history has to be useful to interpret a newspaper" (Gómez-Carrasco & Moreno-Vera, 2023).

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In fact, history teaching must face, as a curricular course, different challenges. These problems are mostly related, both to new epistemological approaches in history education, and also to the development of new types of activities, the use of active-learning methodologies, the inclusion of ITC resource, and the development of historical thinking competencies in the classroom (Moreno, Monteagudo & Gómez, 2023)

In his book “L’histoire, pour quoi faire?”, Serge Gruzinski (2015) defended a history useful for society: a historical science, based on evidences and interpretations (Chapman, 2011), that would allow a dialogue between the past and the present.

Beyond positivism and memoristic learning of facts, events, dates or characters (Buchanan, 1998), the development of second order concepts of historical thinking (Seixas & Morton, 2013) will help the students, in the future, to better understand complex processes as the actual rising of populisms, nationalisms, problems of sustainability, gender equality, climate change, refugees, migrations or the understanding of controversial and recurring events as wars or economic crisis and unemployment.

According to McDnough (2002), Guy Debord wrote in his foundational 1957 “report on the construction of situations” that “dadism wished to be the refusal or fall the values of bourgeois society”. In fact, in the late 1970s, the situationist authors highlighted that capitalism was a failed system: bankrupcy, financial crisis, inflation and highgrow up of energy prices.

Something very similar to what we find at the beginning of the 2020s. After a sever financial crisis (2008-2014), where austerity was the wrong answer, new threads appear on the horizon of youth people: post-COVID19 pandemic and health crisis, unemployment, a great increase of the rental prices, the lack of energy because of the war in Ukraine and, lastly, a rising inflation.

Responding to this “new” situation, the Council of Europe (2017) proposed that history education should integrate the knowledge about the past experiences and the challenges of the future. In that sense, history teaching should face: the learning of the complex history of democracy, the activities of ordinary individuals, recognising that people of different cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds have often been long established in societies, valuing multiple identities, providing historical sources and combatting manipulation, fake news and post-truth, addressing issues that might be controversial or balancing the ethical dimension of learning history.

As Prats and Santacana (2001) or Lee (2005) has told, Social Studies and History education teach the students the society they live in and how to behave to become good citizens in the future.

2. Historical thinking competencies and curriculum: an international perspective

In their book, Ercikan and Seixas (2015) commented new different directions to assess and evaluate historical thinking concepts. As they, remarked “mere memorization can no longer be the name of the game” (Ercikan & Seixas, 2015, p. 10). In that sense, the assessment of history learning, which for a century has valued concrete contents and criteria (Wineburg, 2004), changed towards developing more complex levels of historical consciousness and historical thinking competencies.

To reach that new ways of assessment, authors like Carretero, Asensio & Rodríguez-Moneo, (2012) suggested changes in formal curricula, advancing sophistication in historical thinking competencies.

That path has been affected by the consensus of the US National Research Council (2001) that proposed the “assessment triangle” between cognition, observation and interpretation.

Obviously, national curricula are official documents which purpose must be to structure all the teaching processes and help teachers to establish realistic targets. However, as we previously mentioned and according to authors like Crawford (1995) is usually a political weapon to take the control of the agenda to produce a particular kind of society. From 19th century onwards the main political target was to generate recognizable national identities to support the idea and structure of the new states founded after the fall of old regimes (Peterson et al., 2016). In order to reach that goal, most of the 19th and early 20th century curricula used, above all, history education to create this new national identity between citizens (McKiernan, 1993).

The cases of Spain and Sweden fit perfectly in these national purposes like countries like the USA or the United Kingdom (González-Delgado, 2013). In the case of Sweden, for example, Nygren (2011) commented that history education had a great evolution between 1927 and 1961: from a more nationalistic view of history to an international understanding of historical processes based on the recommendations of institutions like UNESCO or the Council of Europe.

It is important to highlight that, for example, in the Swedish context, teaching topics like the Holocaust and other genocides is emphasized when teaching history according to Ammert (2015). In fact, in Sweden we find a national public committee to develop the work about tolerance, democracy and other values and democratic rights (Karlsson, 2000).

Contemporary researchs about historical thinking among Swedish teachers are now center in how to develop basic knowledge through competencies and skills (Nygren, 2012), peace and democratic values (Elmersjö, 2014), invisible and indigenous people (Nygren, 2016) or how to assess competencies through national tests (Alvén, 2011).

A very similar evolution is evident in the Spanish case. Until 1975 the country run under Franco's dictatorship and history education was focused on the "glorious" days of Spanish empire and monarchy. During the decades of 1980s and 1990s, history education started to change towards cooperatively works and the use of historical sources, although according to Sabino-Codina and Albert (2020) topics like genocides, the Holocaust or the crimes in the Spanish Civil War were still invisible on the national curriculum.

In this sense, Gómez-Carrasco et al. (2019) indicate that the presence of historical thinking concepts is a recent debate among researchers. Although history education in Spain is still linked to narratives and positivism, in the last years researchers and teachers are making a great effort to develop new topics as democracy, gender equality or slavery.

The last educational law, LOMLOE (Real Decreto 243/2022), introduces for the first time historical thinking competencies among the evaluation criteria linked to specific competencies in Social Studies. There are 8 specific competencies to develop during the course, each one is related to 2 evaluation criteria.

All the 8 specific competencies are related to democracy or citizenship:

1. Regarding movements in history to develop values like liberty comparing democratic regimes to dictatorships.
2. Related to de different identities in Spain, both cultural, ethnically and nationalistic.
3. The idea of progress, sustainability and social welfare in terms of history, how get that rights.
4. Historical consciousness about social diversity, labor movements, justice, inequalities and ways of life.
5. To analysis the concept of power through primary sources: monarchy, religions, political parties.
6. To make interpretations about the role of Spain in European institutions and the global world. To promote the idea of Europeism, solidarity and international cooperation.
7. To incorporate a gender equality approach in history learning. To value ethically the presence and role of women in history. To understand and fight stereotypes and silences in history. To value feminist movements to get new rights (vote, divorce, equal marriage, LGTBIQ+, etc.)
8. To value cultural heritage as a way to create collective memory and historical consciousness.

At the same time, the contents (in Bachillerato) in Spanish History are divided into 3 different blocks of basic knowledge:

1. Societies in time: Spain's history in contemporary era, from the French Revolution until 21st century.
2. Challenges of the actual world: migrations, climate change, populism, fake news, etc.
3. Civic compromise: democratic consciousness, values, constitution and citizen participation; Multiple identities; Ecosocial behavior: sustainability development goals (UN); Ethical citizenship in the digital world; European values and common programs; Solidarity and cooperation; Security, institutions, rights, liberty and social welfare.; Preservation of cultural heritage and collective memory.

These kind of epistemological debates in history education in all western countries must turn to new learning and teaching topics, the use of practical methodologies, the introduction of evidence-based learning (Seixas & Morton, 2013) and historical thinking competencies to help the students to face new social and global problems (Monroe et al., 2019).

3. Method

3.1 Reserch goals

The main target of this study is to analyze the presence of historical thinking competencies in two national curricula (17/18 years old): Sweden (Gymnasieskola) and Spain (Bachillerato). To reach this goal, the research suggest two specific objectives (S.O.):

S.O.1: To study the presence and cognitive level of historical thinking competencies in Sweden's Gymnasieskola.

S.O. 2: To analyze how many historical thinking concepts appear in Spain's national curriculum for Bachillerato level, studying which cognitive knowledge they represent.

3.2 Context

This study is part of the project "Teaching and learning historical competencies in Baccalaureate: a challenge to reach a democratic and critic citizenship" funded by the Spanish National Research Agency. Because of that, the research follows all the ethic considerations from the University of Murcia ethical committee.

The first objective of the project is to compare the presence of historical thinking concepts in different levels of the curriculum. The first step is to analyze an example of regional curriculum (in Spain), the second step is to study the national curriculum of Spain, and

the last stage is to compare the Spanish curriculum with other international curriculums, in terms of similar economic, social and cultural conditions: Italy (under the average in PISA tests), Sweden (around the average) and Portugal (over the average).

Concretely, the countries selected in this study are Spain and Sweden, two similar countries attending to social stability, solid public education system, economic development and political belonging to the European Union (EU).

The funded research project is focus on Spanish Baccalaurate History Education, which means that is studying history courses for students between 17 and 18 years-old. In that sense, this article is focusing in the Spanish' LOMLOE (Real Decreto 243/2022) for the course "Spain's History" en the second year of Baccalaureate level. And, in the case os Sweden, the study is also focus on Gymnasieskola's History Skolverket (2012) which is the correspondent level for 17 and 18 years-old.

3.3 Design of the instrument, reliability and research procedure.

In regard to the instrument, a mixed table of analysis (both qualitative and quantitative) was created *ad hoc* for the purpose of studying the presence and cognitive levels of historical thinking competencies in different curricula. The instrument was named RECH (Rubric for Evaluation of Historical Competencies) and was divided into two different dimensions. The first one to keep the metadata of the document analyzed: type of source, country, year, section, and complete reference. The second dimension focus on the development of historical thinking competencies.

This second dimension was, initially divided into the big six historical thinking concepts (Seixas & Morton, 2013): Historical perspective, historical significance, cause and consequence, change and continuity, historical evidences and ethical dimension of history.

After the positive validation and reliability process, run under six experts in the fields of history, history education and education research methodologies, two more items were added to the instrument: historical consciousness and civic consciousness, as these two concepts are present in some european curricula as Germany, Sweden, or Norway.

In this sense, each of the 8 items were, at the same time, divided into 3 different categories representing different cognitive levels according to the Bloom's et al. taxonomy (1956) and the clasification done by Sáiz and López-Facal (2015) and Martínez-Hita and Gómez (2018). To consider the level of cognitive difficulty, the authors studied the evaluation criteria of both national curricula (17 evaluation criteria in the case of Spain, and 11 assessment criteria in the case of Sweden), as they are the best representation of the goals that the students must complete. For this purpose, the three levels of cognitive knowledge are low (reproduction of contents), intermediate (reflections about the contents) and high (application of the knowledge and establishing comparisons among concepts).

To establish the 8 items of analysis and the correspondent cognitive levels, the RECH instrument used different sources:

- Historical perspective: based on the criteria from (Van Nieuwenhuysse, 2016).
- Cause and consequence: based on the three levels taken from the British Columbia curriculum (2019) and Domínguez (2015).
- Historical significance: based on British Columbia curriculum (2019).
- Change and continuity: based on the British Columbia curriculum (2019).
- Historical evidences and sources: based on Van Nieuwenhuysse (2016).
- Ethical dimension of history: based on the studies from Seixas and Morton (2013), British Columbia curriculum (2019), Van Nieuwenhuysse (2016) and Sáiz and Domínguez (2017).
- Historical consciousness: based on Coudannes (2014) and Tutiaux-Guillon (2003).
- Civic consciousness: based on Coudannes (2014).

Regarding to the procedure, a qualitative and quantitative research method was employed to analyze both the presence of the historical thinking skills and the levels of cognitive difficulty in the evaluation criteria of the curricula. This type of procedure is normal in recent studies in the field of Social Sciences Education. Gómez et al. (2019, 2020) used a similar quantitative analysis of different dimensions through the statistical package SPSS v 24, and, on the other hand Moreno-Vera et al. (2021, 2022) developed mixed qualitative and quantitative analysis of data using Aquad 7 as application (Hüber, 2013).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Historical thinking competencies analysis in Bachillerato: Spanish LOMLOE

Related to the specific objective 1 (S.O.1), it is interesting to notice that in the case of Spain, the analysis was focus on the 17 evaluation criteria that, at the same time, were linked directly to the eight specific competencies that the students must develop along the course of “Spain’s history” in the 2nd grade of Baccalaureate (17-18 years-old).

Each one of the evaluation criteria could be related at the same time to different historical thinking competencies or historical and civil consciousness. In the Spanish curriculum the narrative of the evaluation criteria is open to include different points of view.

For example, the evaluation criteria 1.2 could be address to the concept of civic consciousness, ethical dimension and historical evidences (Real Decreto 243/2022):

“To identify and value the role of the Transition process to establish the actual democratic system and the Constitution of 1978 as base to guarantee rights and liberties, through elaborating self judgements about the main debates that today affects the constitutional order based on the use of sources and information management.” (p. 182).

The Table 1 shows the statistical analysis of the Spanish curriculum divided into the 8 historical thinking categories and the 3 cognitive levels previously explained.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Total presence</i>	<i>Low cognitive level</i>	<i>Intermediate cognitive level</i>	<i>High cognitive level</i>
<i>Historical perspective</i>	1	5,9%	5,9%	0	0
<i>Cause and consequence</i>	4	23,5%	5,9%	0	17,6%
<i>Historical significance</i>	0	0%	0	0	0
<i>Change and continuity</i>	10	58,7%	17,6%	17,6%	23,5%
<i>Historical evidences</i>	11	64,7%	11,8%	23,5%	29,4%
<i>Ethical dimension</i>	6	35,3%	11,8%	5,9%	17,6%
<i>Historical consciousness</i>	3	17,7%	5,9%	0	11,8%
<i>Civic consciousness</i>	15	88,2%	23,5%	35,3%	29,4%

Table 1. Spain's results.

It is very interesting that, in the Spanish case, all the historical thinking competencies are developed by the curriculum unless “historical significance”. There are no evaluation criteria asking the students to reflect about what contents, events or characters are present or invisible in the historical narratives.

On the other hand, it is also remarkable the positive results of categories like “civic consciousness, present in the 88,2% of the evaluation criteria (15 of 17) with a lot of narratives in the intermediate (argument and analyze) and high level (application and comparisons of concepts) of cognitive levels. As for example:

“2.2. To identify different political, cultural and administrative processes that help the creation of the state and the construction of the Spanish nation, critically analyzing the actions and results and knowing and respecting all the multiple

identities of Spain and the symbols and norms that provide the actual frame of coexistence.” (p. 182).

This is something coherent as in the Spanish curriculum we find a complete content block dedicated to civic values as we mention in the theoretical framework.

We also find very good results on items like the use of historical evidences and sources (64,7%) and Change and Continuity (58,7%). This is something normal in the Spanish education school system, as previous studies like Moreno-Vera & Alvén (2020), determined that the use sources and timelines are usual in the Spanish history classes. But, eventhough, there is a qualitative change in these categories, as Moreno-Vera & Alvén (2020) commented that just 25% of evaluation standards in the previous law were related to the highest cognitive leve (and the curriculum was though for mere reproduction of contents), and in the actual LOMLOE (2022) law that percentage rise until more than 35% of the evaluation criteria.

We also find poor results in othe items like historical consciousness (17,7%), ethical dimension of history (35,3%), cause and consequence (23,5%) and historical perspective (just 5,9%). Although categories as the ethical dimension and cause and consequence get a rising presence if we compare to the previous national curriculum LOMCE (Real Decreto 126/2014), their results must be improved. It is remarkable that there are evaluation criteria regarding the ethical dimension of history, something invisible in the previous national curricula. For example, the evaluation criteria 7.2 dedicated to gender equality in history education being critical to the patriarchy:

“To evidence the secondary role of women in history, analizing artistic and literay sources, valuing the actions in favour of female emancipation and feminist movements, recovering individual or collective figures as silenced and invisible characters in history”. (p. 183).

The low presence of historical consciousness is something coherent with the epistemological development of Spanish history education, closer to the French authors of the Annales journal and the concept of historical thinking (Fontana, 2006).

4.2 Historical thinking competencies analysis in Swedish Gymnasieskola

In the case of the specific objective 2 (S.O. 2), we analized the Swedish Skolverket document for History Education in Gymnasieskola (17 and 18 years-old). In this case, the official curriculum have up to 11 evaluation criteria to study the presence and the cognitive level of historical thinking competencies, as we can observe in the Table 2.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Total presence</i>	<i>Low cognitive level</i>	<i>Intermediate cognitive level</i>	<i>High cognitive level</i>
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<i>Historical perspective</i>	1	9,1%	0	0	9,1%
<i>Cause and consequence</i>	1	9,1%	0	0	9,1%
<i>Historical significance</i>	4	36,4%	0	9,1%	27,3%
<i>Change and continuity</i>	5	45,5%	0	9,1%	36,4%
<i>Historical evidences</i>	3	27,3%	0	0	27,3%
<i>Ethical dimension</i>	1	9,1%	0	0	9,1%
<i>Historical consciousness</i>	3	27,3%	0	0	27,3%
<i>Civic consciousness</i>	1	9,1%	9,1%	0	0

Table 2. Sweden's results.

The results from Sweden are positive and more homogeneous than in Spain. In fact, we detected the presence of all historical thinking competencies in the Swedish curriculum, which is something highly remarkable in terms of learning history.

But, at the same time, almost all the evaluation criteria could fit in the high level of cognitive difficulty as, in the Swedish case, the evaluation criteria are developed in different grades from A to E.

In the Skolverket document it is important to note the good results of categories historical significance (36,4%) that is present in 4 of the 11 evaluation criteria and that was something that did not appear in the Spanish curriculum. This result is coherent with previous studies, as Ammert (2015), who says that concrete topics as the Holocaust or genocides are emphasized in the Swedish case.

“In addition, students can draw some well grounded and balanced conclusions about the significance events in the past, and conditions in the present may have for the future”. (Skolverket, 2012, p. 11).

Other categories had also good results in this analysis, as for example, Change and Continuity (45,5%) or the use of historical evidences and sources (27,3%). It is interesting the way that Swedish curriculum aims that the students use source-critical methods and make self balances and interpretations about historical facts using source materials.

“Students base their evaluation on source-critical methods and make a balanced assessment of different possible interpretations of the source material”. (Skolverket, 2012, p. 11)

The item about historical consciousness gets a good result as well (27,3%) and 3 evaluation criteria from the 11. It is a better result compared to Spain's curriculum, but this is something normal due to the epistemological path that history education follows in Sweden, more related to the German tradition of historical consciousness than can be tracked from Gadamer (1963), Jeismann (1977) or Jörn Rüsen (1987) who propose that, instead of memorizing history as a mere transmission of contents, the subject should be introduced as instruction to think historically for oneself (Körber, 2008; Wallace-Casey, 2017).

In this sense, the evaluation criteria development encourage the students to make their own historical interpretations as we can see in the Skolverket document:

“Students can in detail and in a balanced way give an account of some historical processes and events that have been used in different ways, and in detail and in a balanced way explain why they have been used differently”. (p. 11)

These results show, in the Swedish case, that the students are more oriented to think historically and elaborating their own interpretations using historical sources and reflecting on historical consciousness. Which follows the line of the central european history education (Seixas, 2017).

5. Conclusions

As we mentioned at the beginning of the study, the aim of this research is to analyze the presence and cognitive level of the historical thinking competencies in the national curriculum of Sweden and Spain focusing in History courses implemented in Gymnasieskola and Bachillerato (17 and 18 years-old students).

To reach that goal, the study designed an ad hoc instrument consisting of a evaluation table that develops 8 historical thinking categories (adding to the big six historical thinking concepts, two categories related to historical consciousness and civic education (Seixas & Morton, 2013; Wallace-Casey, 2017). Each category was, at the same time, divided into 3 different cognitive levels of difficulty based on the studies from Bloom et al. (1956) and other clasifications done by Sáiz and Domínguez (2017).

The results, in regard to the S.O.1 about the Spanish curriculum, show that in the Spanish Bachillerato all the historical thinking competencies are present, unless historical significance. The best result is linked to the civic consciousness as there is a complete epigraph of contents related to this topic (Real Decreto 243/2022).

There are also good results in terms of the use of historical evidences and sources, and the elaboration of timelines and reflections about Change and Continuity. This is something coherent with previous studies as Moreno-Vera and Alvé (2020).

In the case of Spain, as conclusion, it is important to remark the big improvement compared to the precedent curriculum LOMCE (Real Decreto 126/2014) in terms of reflecting about the ethical dimension of history, war crimes, the repression of dictatorship, the transition process or the invisibility of gender studies and other different identities (Council of Europe, 2017).

According to the S.O. 2, that analyzes the Skolverket document for History1b curriculum in Swedish' Gymnasieskola, the results are even better, as all the categories are present in the national curriculum.

It is remarkable, in this case, the presence of historical significance, as Ammert (2015) confirmed that Swedish curriculum want to emphasize some events related to the Holocaust or genocides. It is also interesting the high cognitive level that the Swedish' curriculum proposed. A good example is in the case of the use of historical evidences and sources, where the students are encouraged to use source-critical methods and establish their own interpretation based on the analysis of historical sources (Prats & Santacana, 2001).

Lastly, the category of historical consciousness gets also a good result something coherent with the epistemological german tradition of history education in Sweden, following authors as Rüsen (1987) or Kölber (2008). In this case, it is important to highlight that the Swedish curriculum to reflect on their own interpretation of historical events and the different uses of history.

So, this paper aimed to make an analysis of the presence or not of historical thinking competencies in Spain and Sweden, remarking the improvement of the Spanish case compared to previous educational laws (at least in terms of thinking historically and developing competencies), and also highlighting the high cognitive level that the Swedish curriculum shows encouraging the students to make reflections, comparisons and self interpretation of historical events.

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