Article

Conflicting Knowledge Paradigms: Competence Discourse and Disciplinary Reality in Social Sciences Teaching

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to offer an inside look at the coexistence of different ways of conceiving and organising the knowledge of social sciences in current schools. To this end, the methods of autoethnography and critical discourse analysis were used in a case study focused on the teaching experience of one of the authors. The system of categories constructed allowed us to empirically verify the existence of a conflict between two major epistemological paradigms, competency and disciplinary, in clear correspondence with a gap between innovative educational discourses and traditional school practices. In the case analysed, this conflict led to a curricular over-dimensioning, which aimed to expand the elements to be worked on by teachers and their students qualitatively and quantitatively. The causes of this phenomenon are related to neo-liberal pedagogical parameters and allowed us to conclude that we should not conceive of competency-based learning either as an educational change by itself or as a strategy that guarantees change.

Keywords: social sciences; competency-based learning; knowledge; case study

1. Introduction

A methodological approach based on key competences and learning outcomes entails important changes in the conception of the teaching-learning process, changes in school organisation and culture; it requires close collaboration between teachers in curriculum development and in the transmission of information on student learning, as well as changes in working practices and teaching methods. (Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero 2015, de 21 de enero 2015, p. 6988)

Competency-based learning is an important pedagogical pillar of innovative schools (Guzmán Marín 2017; Hou 2022; Marcotte and Gruppen 2022), a model to which all schools, both private and public, seem to aspire today. This can be seen, for example, in the strong commitment to the preparation or competency training of educational communities, which are understood as the "human capital" of schools (Valencia Álvarez and González 2017, p. 131). The prominence of competences in the desirable school model is also perceived in the argument for a globalising approach to learning content, with the supposed aim of developing an interpretative perspective of reality in pupils that is much more elaborate and complex than the traditional one.

According to Spanish educational laws, the curricular integration of competency-based learning would be perfectly compatible with the classic objectives of areas such as social sciences: using different strategies (observation, data collection, measurement, interpretation, synthesis, drawing conclusions, and so on) to analyse the past in order to understand the present, applying social concepts to resolve significant problems of current reality, developing democratic habits through discussion and teamwork tools, incorporating new values and social attitudes to improve coexistence with others, acquiring intellectual maturity and developing a well-argued critical conscience, and so on.

Basically, competence is know-how or applied knowledge, around which old teaching and learning strategies need to be reconsidered. This approach should start from the elements of the curriculum, establishing meaningful relationships between different knowledge or subjects precisely by working on the so-called "key competences". Currently, the Ministerio de Cultura y Formación Profesional (formerly the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte) of the Spanish Government officially considers the following eight "key competences", which have been integrated in the related curricular developments, from pre-school to baccalaureate: competence in linguistic communication; digital competence; entrepreneurial competence; multilingual competence; personal, social, and learning to learn competence; competence in cultural awareness and expression; competence in mathematics, science, technology, and engineering; and citizenship competence.

The competency-based learning model, very close to vocational training, has actually been trying to penetrate schools for more than a decade through the latest educational laws. According to Cañadell (2018, p. 106), its origins date back to the end of 2007, when the European Union began to address the need for "new skills for new jobs". Some of these "soft" skills were communication, analysis, problem solving, and entrepreneurship skills. In fact, the economicist perspective embedded in the reformist philosophy of laws such as the Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (de España 2013) (Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality in Education) is especially linked to the argument for useful skills to compete in the labour market.

> A more open, global and participatory society demands new, more sophisticated and diversified profiles of citizens and workers, as well as alternative ways of organisation and management that prioritise collaboration and teamwork, and proposals that assume that true strength lies in the mix of different skills and knowledge. (de España 2013, p. 5)

Together with the LOMCE, within the Spanish regulatory framework, we can highlight the importance of texts such as Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero, por la que se describen las relaciones entre las competencias, los contenidos y los criterios de evaluación de la educación primaria, la educación secundaria obligatoria y el bachillerato (Order ECD/65/2015, of 21 January, which describes the relationships among the competences, the contents, and the evaluation criteria of primary education, compulsory secondary education, and baccalaureate). Addressed primarily to teachers, this document attempts to justify, clarify, and specify various aspects, both theoretical and operational, relating to the work and assessment of competences. At first glance, the objectives appear to be quite ambitious, since, among other issues, it states that: "competences should be developed in the fields of formal, non-formal and informal education throughout primary education, compulsory secondary education and baccalaureate, and in lifelong learning throughout life" (Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero 2015, de 21 de enero 2015, p. 6989). A close correspondence has also been established between competences and student motivation: "One of the key elements in teaching by competences is to awaken and maintain motivation for learning in students, which implies a new approach to the role of the student, active and autonomous, aware of being responsible for their learning" (Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero 2015, de 21 de enero 2015, p. 7002).

These kinds of arguments, together with the numerous allusions to the international context with which the Order begins, seem to evoke a new pedagogical meta-narrative that is impossible to avoid. The most remarkable part of the text is undoubtedly its Appendix I, which includes rich descriptions of each of the key competences that are "essential for the well-being of European societies, economic growth and innovation, and describes the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes linked to each of them" (Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero 2015, de 21 de enero 2015, p. 6986). In this sense, authors such as Kozma (2012) have devoted their efforts to identifying the so-called "21st century skills": responding flexibly to complex problems, communicating effectively, managing information, working in teams, using technology, and producing knowledge.

In any case, the sub-discourse of competency-based knowledge does not only affect students and their learning, but also the functions of agents such as school principals or teachers. The former must now possess new competences that go beyond the "insufficient" skills of traditional principals (Jolonch 2019, p. 217). In fact, it is no longer enough to be "a mere manager, and even less so to hold the status of government" (Jiménez Abad 2015, p. 172). On the contrary, the new leaders must "be optimistic, resilient, outward-looking, curious, collaborative and committed to social justice, as well as being pragmatic," while being "efficient and effective in leading the school to create an orderly environment" (Greany 2019, p. 64).

Regarding teachers, today's desirable teacher must have a vast range of new resources and skills, which complement or directly rethink some of the traditional teaching strategies. Their digital competence (Martínez-Abad et al. 2017; Redecker 2020; Rossi Cordero and Barajas Frutos 2018) depends not only on the design of new formats for teaching and learning but also the possibility of instilling in students a set of profoundly valuable knowledge in a highly technologised socio-cultural context. Hence, the need to reduce the digital divide that still exists between a large part of the teaching profession and digital natives is urgent (Liesa et al. 2018; Mohamed et al. 2017; Pérez-Escoda et al. 2016; Rubio and Tejada 2017). Along with the rest of the competences, digital or information literacy undoubtedly requires an in-depth review of traditional assessment formulas (Gulikers et al. 2018; Robinson and Dervin 2019).

However, the argument for competency-based teaching and learning has not been without controversy in recent years (Cachinho and Reis 2007; Espinoza Aros 2014; Solé Blanch 2020; Soto and Pérez-Milans 2018), as the alleged drawbacks have not been few. Some of the voices against the competence approach have been the following.

- Hirtt (2010) criticised the supposed displacement of humanistic learning in favour of the prominence of a set of skills clearly designed to be productive in professional settings.
- From a pessimistic point of view, Barrio (2013) warned that: "If education were reduced to the provision of 'skills', it would be no different from the training of an irrational animal" (p. 111).
- Jiménez Abad (2015) called for what he called "knowing how to be", "that is, values and inclusive personal development" (p. 167). As an example, he referred to the case of digital competence, which "cannot be reduced to knowing how to operate a computer. It includes among other things a critical and reflective attitude to the information available and a responsible use of interactive media. It is not just a question of keys, it is above all a question of ideas, criteria and ethical values" (p. 165).
- Tricot (2019) regretted the fact that "nothing should be taught that cannot be described in the form of competences" (p. 95). The same author argued that "this concept corresponds much more to an awareness than to an innovation" (p. 95), suggesting that competency learning would already have been implicit, in one form or another, in the traditional learning model.

Assuming the existence of these critical perspectives on the chosen topic, the specific objective of this work, within the framework of a much broader doctoral research project, was to develop an internal investigation into the true place of competency-based learning in classroom practice, which is related to the traditional way of conceiving and working with school knowledge.

2. Methodology

2.1. A Case Study

To carry out this project, we opted for a case study focused on all the converging discourses in the Geography and History classes in Spanish secondary education of one of the authors. This case was chosen for several reasons: (1) it was set in a discursive and practical context, a private school in the city of Seville, whose predominant school culture required an in-depth analysis; (2) it was undergoing a major epistemological crisis as a

result of the didactic transformations developed in recent years; and (3) it was a professional environment full of difficulties and contradictions, which had to be understood before it could be exposed to any kind of improvement proposal.

The corpus compiled during the fieldwork combines a total of 12 texts from four different discursive fields: the legislative framework, the school, the Social Sciences Department, and the classroom itself (see Table 1). The research participants, the teacher–researcher and 44 students from the four years of secondary school, belong to the last of these contexts.

Table 1. Composition and organisation of the research corpus.

Sub-Corpora	Text
Spanish and Andalusian education policies	(1) Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre (de España 2013)
	(2) Real Decreto 1105/2014, de 26 de diciembre
	(3) Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero
	(4) Decreto 111/2016, de 14 de junio
School	(5) Orden de 14 de julio de 2016
	(6) School Educational Project
	(7) School Regulation on Organisation and Operation
Department of Social Sciences	(8) Compilation of materials on the school's methodology
	(9) Geography and history subject guide for students
	(10) Annual reports for the academic years 2017–2018 and 2018–2019
Geography and History class	(11) Interviews with 44 students (11–15 years old)
	(12) Teacher–researcher's diary

2.2. Methods, Techniques, and Instruments

In this research, the analysis methods chosen were autoethnography (Adams et al. 2015; Ellis 2016; Mitra 2010; Starr 2010; Wamsted 2012) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2003; Pardo Abril 2013; Pini 2009; Rogers 2011, 2018; Wodak and Meyer 2003). In this way, the descriptive potential of narrative methodologies was combined with a set of varied procedures to compare the underlying intentions of the texts with their actual consequences. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the use of techniques that are applicable to both quantitative and qualitative data and that are both deductive and inductive in nature, always taking the demands of the object of study and its particular discursive–verbal approach into account (see Table 2). This methodological proposal was directly inspired by the assumptions established in the theoretical framework by previous research and teaching experiences as well as by the parameters of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 2008).

Table 2. Relationships among the methods, techniques, and instruments used in the research.

Methods	Data Collection Techniques	Analysis Techniques	Instruments
Autoethnography	Participant observations		Teacher–researcher's diary
	Structured interviews		Interview script
Critical discourse analysis		Pre-analysis	
		Lexicometric analysis	MAXQDA and Sketch Engine
		Content analysis	Mixed category system
		Linguistic analysis	

All the methodological elements of our case study were based on these parameters. In this sense, a constant work of observation, comparison, reflection and reading was developed throughout the research process, assuming the attributes of all qualitative researchers; for example, "the ability to live with ambiguity" or "an acceptance of the self as a research instrument" (Strauss and Corbin 2008, p. 13).

2.3. Strategies of Analysis

The analysis, inspired by the proposals of several authors (Pardo Abril 2013; Wodak and Meyer 2003), although specifically designed for this research, involved four complementary steps. Each of these should be understood as a different, albeit complementary, approach to the research corpus.

1. Pre-analysis, where the texts of the corpus were characterised in order to discover their heuristic potential in relation to the research objectives. In this sense, we observed how the regulatory texts, with the LOMCE as the protagonist, found their raison d'être in a concept of business quality, which is in line with the ideology of the central government at the time. The sub-discourse on competences was perfectly aligned with this. On the other hand, the school's texts responded precisely to the aims of a business project whose product was the educational model defended by its promoters, while the texts of the Department of Social Sciences reflected the existence of a certain discursive gap in terms of the Geography and History subject approach. Finally, we were able to note a strong impact of the previous discourses in the Geography and History class, according to the testimonies of its participants, but also an important margin for questioning. Although intuitive and preliminary, this corpus characterisation was the first step in laying the foundations for the subsequent quantitative and qualitative analyses.

2. Lexicometric analysis using techniques based on textual statistics (word count, identification of key segments, recognition of co-texts, and so on) made it possible to extract previously unnoticed information on frequencies and associations. For example, we were able to confirm the high quantitative presence of students in the four sub-corpora. With regard to the concept of innovation, the central focus of the global research, the identification of its corresponding associations allowed us to characterise this concept in the following way: (a) its meaning was taken for granted and worked as an argument to justify the changes of the LOMCE educational reform; (b) in its main collocations, it coincided with particularly ethereal words; (c) its co-occurrences and concordances only suggested positive connotations; (d) it was closely linked to business, entrepreneurship and economics; and (e) it appeared closely linked to new technologies and little to new methodologies. All these results encouraged us to go beyond the textual materiality to capture the meanings, visible and invisible, deductive and inductive, thematic and non-thematic, with which the discursive units were used in our corpus.

3. Content analysis, which materialised in a system that combined both deductive categories (identified in the theoretical framework) and inductive categories (from the analysed data). Our system of categories fulfilled the objective of deconstructing the corpus from a thematic perspective, allowing us to know what the main themes and topics present in our texts were, thus approaching the way in which such contents are interpreted according to each discursive field. In this sense, we managed to locate the central problem of our study, the impact of educational innovation from the teaching experience, in a broad, complex and contradictory context, where this phenomenon conflicted with different discourses and practices related to the educational model defended both in the laws and in the organisational documents of the school.

4. Linguistic analysis, which focused on identifying the grammatical resources and strategies used. The analysis of the coherence and consistency of the discourses present in the corpus revealed diverse conceptions of educational innovation, highlighting the dissonance represented by the teaching voice regarding the uncritical, distanced and

indifferent perspective of the rest of the discourses. The analysis of naming strategies allowed us to know how the discursive actors are recognised in the texts, according to the perspective of each discursive field. Finally, the analysis of legitimation processes showed us a wide range of persuasive strategies, which contributed to convince of the appropriateness and urgency of the proposals for change coming from the highest spheres. Particularly interesting was the game of recognition between students and their teacher. Each in their own way, with their own processes and linguistic resources, tried to construct their own discourse in response to the domination that was being exercised over them.

Although these four phases were totally conducted, this paper focuses specifically on the third of these phases, an intermediate point between lexicometric exploration and the linguistic deconstruction of the different levels of meaning present in the discourses under analysis. In this phase, we can find the most appropriate response to the challenge of managing and organising a large and diverse corpus, providing a completer and more elaborate vision of the discursive topics than that offered in the pre-analysis phase.

The category of analysis this study focused on directly linked us to the didactic model observed in the Geography and History classes that constitute our case study. More specifically, this category allowed us to understand the typology of the contents that the students and the teacher–researcher involved had to work on (see Table 3). The name of this category, *confronting knowledge paradigms*, refers, primarily, to the fact that the elements that make up this typology, which are all related to school knowledge identified in practical reality, are far from being homogeneous but, as we will see in the following section, are diverse and even contrary to each other.

Table 3. Sections of the general category system on which this work is focused.

Category	Code	Subcategory	Code
Confronting knowledge paradigms	COKPA	Competence discourse	CODI
		Disciplinary reality	DIRE

3. Results

3.1. Competence Discourse

Our first subcategory reflects the prominence of competency-based learning in the educational discourse contained in the normative texts. This element is presented as the central axis of the curriculum of the different educational levels and as a definitive impetus for the educational changes that must take place in the classroom. This is expressed in the following fragment: "This Real Decreto is based on the promotion of learning by competences, integrated into the curricular elements in order to promote a renewal in teaching practice and in the teaching and learning process" (CODI-T2).

First of all, it is worth noting the variety of definitions of the term "competence" in texts which, in theory, should be consonant with each other. On the one hand, competence is defined as "a combination of practical skills, knowledge, motivation, ethical values, attitudes, emotions, and other social and behavioural components that are mobilised together to achieve effective action" (CODI-T2). Moreover, it is stated that competences "are conceptualised as 'know-how' that applies to a variety of academic, social and professional contexts" (CODI-T2). Particular emphasis is also placed on the importance of a proper understanding of the typology of knowledge present in competences.

> Competence knowledge integrates a conceptual knowledge base: concepts, principles, theories, data and facts (declarative knowledge-knowing how to say); knowledge related to skills, referring to both observable physical action and mental action (procedural knowledge-knowing how to do); and a third component that has a strong social and cultural influence, and which involves a set of attitudes and values (knowing how to be). (CODI-T3)

Secondly, several benefits are associated with the interrelationships of the different components that characterise competence learning. One of these is the fact that this type of learning "favours the learning processes themselves and the motivation to learn" (CODI-T3). In this way, a direct and unquestionable correlation is established between work based on competences and the supposed stimulation of students. Another of the great virtues of competency-based learning is expressed in Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero, as "an integral training of people", which enables them to "reorganise their thinking and acquire new knowledge, improve their actions and discover new forms of action and new skills that enable them to perform tasks efficiently, favouring lifelong learning" (CODI-T3). From this perspective, competency-based learning is presented as a definitive and revolutionary approach to renew and improve the quality of any educational process.

As a complement to this apologetic approach, the same text indicates some of the keys to developing an effective process of competency-based learning at school.

> Since competency-based learning is characterised by its transversality, its dynamism and its comprehensive nature, the competency-based teaching-learning process must be approached from all areas of knowledge and by the various entities that make up the educational community, in both formal and non-formal and informal spheres. Its dynamism is reflected in the fact that competences are not acquired at a given moment and remain unalterable, but involve a process of development through which individuals gradually acquire higher levels of performance in the use of these competences. (CODI-T3)

Focusing now on the process of integrating the competency-based learning model into the official Spanish curriculum, we can point out the international references identified in the normative texts. On the one hand, it was stated that UNESCO was the organisation that established the precursor principles for the application of competency-based teaching "by identifying the basic pillars of lifelong learning for the 21st century, consisting of 'learning to know', 'learning to do', 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together'" (CODI-T3). On the other hand, in line with what was noted in the theoretical framework, the direct reference for Spain is the European Union. According to the text, the guidelines of this institution raise the relevance of competences by defending the acquisition of these "as an indispensable condition for individuals to achieve full personal, social and professional development that meets the demands of a globalised world and makes economic development possible, linked to knowledge" (CODI-T3).

In fact, Spanish legislation adopts the concept of *key competences* as defined by the European Union: "those that all people need for their personal fulfilment and development, as well as for active citizenship, social inclusion and employment" (CODI-T2), adding, at another point, that these are "essential for the well-being of European societies, economic growth and innovation" (CODI-T2). The precedent, in the Spanish case, would be the Ley Orgánica de Educación (LOE) (2006), which included the term "basic competences" for the first time. In this sense, the LOMCE and the different regulatory texts that developed it claimed to go "further" in terms of the implementation of the curriculum of competences by including the term "competences" within the definition of the "basic curriculum" (CODI-T3).

Specifically, the two main sources with which the Orden ECD/65/2015 de 21 de enero claimed to align itself are "the results of educational research" and "the European trends set out in Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning" (CODI-T3). On this basis, Article 2 of the Orden established that the key competences in the Spanish education system are the following: (a) linguistic communication, (b) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology, (c) digital competence, (d) learning to learn, (e) social and civic competences, (f) a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, and (g) cultural awareness and expressions (CODI-T3). Article 4 ("Key competences and objectives of the stages") contains certain requirements for the integration of competences in the different educational stages. Among them, due to the originality it represents with respect to the ideas already discussed, the following should be highlighted: "the design of integrated

learning activities that enable progress to be made towards the learning outcomes of more than one competence at the same time" (CODI-T3).

At this point, it is necessary to know more specifically what the guidelines are for the integration of key competences in all curricular areas or subjects, which can be found in Article 5 of the same Orden we have just mentioned. These guidelines, which are summarised in the following table, constitute certain basic requirements to be taken into account by teachers when drawing up or redefining teaching programmes in terms of key competences (see Table 4).

Table 4. Selection of excerpts from the Orden ECD/65/2015, de 21 de enero, on the topic *guidelines for the integration of key competences in the curriculum*.

Excerpt	Code
The learning outcomes to be achieved by pupils should be "defined, made explicit and sufficiently developed in the subject areas".	CODI-T3
"(. . .) Since the evaluable learning standards are linked to competences, this profile will identify those competences that are developed through that area or subject".	CODI-T3
"All areas and subjects must contribute to the development of competences. The set of evaluable learning standards of the different areas or subjects that relate to the same competence gives rise to the profile of that competence (competence profile). The elaboration of this profile will facilitate the competency assessment of students".	CODI-T3
"The assessment of the competency development must be integrated with the assessment of contents, insofar as being competent means mobilising knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to respond to the situations posed, providing learning with functionality and applying what is learnt from an integrated approach".	CODI-T3

Considering all these requirements, this is the right moment to find out how the competency approach is included in the subject of Geography and History, according to the regulatory discourses. In this sense, one of the objectives of the subject contemplated in the Real Decreto 1105/2014, de 26 de diciembre can be used as an introduction to this new topic: "to continue acquiring the competences necessary to understand the reality of the world in which they live, past and present collective experiences, their orientation in the future, as well as the space in which life in society develops" (CODI-T2).

In the Orden de 14 de julio de 2016, which, among other aspects, develops the curriculum of secondary education in the region of Andalusia, we found a characterisation of the subject which specified that our subject will train students in certain "skills" for, on the one hand, "the understanding of the complexity of current societies" and, on the other, "the analysis and implementation of the strategies required to exercise responsible, participatory citizenship, aware of their identity, rights and obligations, in a plural and globalised environment" (CODI-T5). This last idea is mentioned again in the supposed transversal "contributions" of Geography and History to the overall ESO curriculum, referring to "the development of personal competences and social skills for the exercise of participation through the assessment of the various channels of citizen action and empowerment" (CODI-T5). At first glance, in the context of our subject, the concept of competence acquires a new significance that moves away from what has been said about key competences to focus on knowledge that is fundamentally attitudinal and related to the development of civic education.

In order to understand the supposed contribution of the subject of Geography and History to the development of competences, we must move forward in examining the same Orden. Below (see Table 5), we list some excerpts that allowed us to explore this issue in greater depth.

Table 5. Selection of excerpts on the topic *contribution of the subject of Geography and History to the learning of competences, according to the Orden de 14 de julio de 2016.*

Competence	Excerpt	Code
Linguistic communication	"By working on oral and written comprehension and expression through source analysis, preparation of papers and participation in debates".	CODI-T5
Mathematics and basic competences in science and technology	"Through the handling and analysis of numerical information as well as the assessment of scientific and technological advances for social progress".	CODI-T5
Digital competence	"Use of applications and software that allow the collection, organisation, presentation and editing of information and conclusions of content and projects related to this subject".	CODI-T5
Cultural awareness and expressions	"Thanks to the understanding of the cultural fact, its relationship with personal and social identity, its most outstanding manifestations and the importance and benefits of its conservation, dissemination and enhancement".	CODI-T5
Learning to learn	"Through case studies, research papers, projects and the use of cognitive skills involving comparison, organisation and analysis".	CODI-T5
Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship	"Thanks to the knowledge of the world of economics, business and the functioning of society and politics, as well as the development of personal and social skills in group work".	CODI-T5
Social and civic	"With the knowledge and skills that promote personal and collective well-being through the assumption of the codes of conduct, rules of operation and rights and obligations of citizenship that govern social and democratic states".	CODI-T5

All these discursive propositions have an impact on the way in which the "Objectives" (the title of the section) or "competences" (the term by which the list of objectives is finally referred to) are linked to how the subject of Geography and History is formulated. In this respect, it is interesting to note the use of the latter word as a synonym for "specific competences" of the subject, which may cause some confusion for teachers when interpreting the official curriculum. In fact, it would seem that the development of these "competences" would imply the implementation of several competences at the same time. As an example of this last idea, one of the 16 objectives or capacities established in the Andalusian curriculum is reproduced below: "To know and analyse the ways in which human society transforms the environment, and how the territory influences the organisation and identity of this society, reflecting on the dangers that human intervention generates in the environment, with special emphasis on the case of Andalusia" (CODI-T5).

3.2. Disciplinary Reality

In the area of Social Sciences, in particular, the contents are almost strictly conceptual, to the extent that there is a certain obsession with facts, dates, characters, data, features or geographical places on the map. Bearing in mind the importance we give to memorised exams, both in History and Geography, it is clear that these contents are understood as closed, almost timeless and, of course, classified in disciplinary compartments. Proof of this is that, from time to time, the Department asks us to include a series of notes and materials dating back fifty years. (DIRE-T12)

Our second subcategory represents the predominance of disciplinary contents in school practice as opposed to a competency-based approach to teaching and learning. Paradoxically, this situation arises in the very regulatory texts responsible for regulating the official curriculum, through the existence of certain contradictions. On the one hand, it is stated, as we saw a moment ago, that competences must be integrated into all curricular elements; on the other, we find that the way of stating certain elements may be indicative of a purely conceptual dimension rather than a competence dimension. In other words, the suspension of the discourse on competences, in some parts of the normative texts, implies the appearance of a discourse that is not very different from the traditional disciplinary organisation of curricular content.

As an example of this, we can reproduce some of the terms used in the Orden de 1 de julio de 2016 to characterise the most appropriate way of working on the elements considered to be "relevant" in the subject of Geography and History: "range of scientific references", "study", "conceptualising society", "global vision", "knowledge of historical facts", "understanding the position and relevance of Andalusia in the rest of Spain", "knowing and handling the vocabulary, and research and analysis techniques specific to the social sciences", "causes of war and conflict", "relevant characteristics of the natural environment both in Andalusia and the rest of the world", "gathering information", and so on (DIRE-T5).

The indications about the possible competences of the "objectives" of Geography and History are few and diffuse. In fact, among the consequences of working in this subject, the text cited does not highlight the development of any specific key competences but highlights the "appreciation" of the following aspects: "the connections between past and present and human beings and nature; the importance of the notions of change and continuity in social structure and dynamics and the value of comparative methodology together with diachronic and synchronic analysis" (DIRE-T5). The apparent abandonment of the competency discourse can also be verified by looking at the main actions that are mentioned in the objectives of our subject (not including those that make up subordinate clauses), which are grouped in Table 6 below according to their frequency of appearance.

Table 6. Main actions contemplated in the objectives of the subject of Geography and History, according to the Orden de 14 de julio de 2015.

Frequency of Appearance	Actions
More than five times	Analyse (10), know (6), evaluate (6)
Two to five times	Understand (4), value (4)
One time only	Conceptualise, situate, classify, reflect, acquire, manifest, manifest, compare, contextualise, appreciate, explain, expose, master, argue, debate, handle, lend, perform, participate, employ, respect, express

The following excerpt, focused on the task of knowing, is a good example of the type of actions that articulate the objectives, which do not seem to have undergone any kind of transformation under the competence approach that is supposed to be present in all curriculum subjects: "Knowledge of society, its organisation and functioning over time is essential in order to understand today's world. Knowing the space where societies develop, the natural resources and the use that has been made of them, provides us with data about the past (. . .)" (DIRE-T2). Nor in the following words do we discover any clue as to the place that competences should occupy in these changes that the secondary stage represents with respect to primary education: "pupils will delve, in a more systematic, organised and profound way than in Primary Education, into the foundations of the identity and functioning mechanisms of human society, and the forms of relationship between them and with the environment, as well as the spatial dimension in which these arise and develop" (DIRE-T5).

Even when speaking of "transversal elements", no reference to competences is made, as such, but instead to what appear to be themes to be included in the conventional content blocks. Some examples are: "the situation of women throughout history and the struggle for the recognition of their rights . . . ; the identity, projection and space of Andalusian culture in the rest of Spain and the world . . . ; the economic growth and development of Andalusia in history and the present" (DIRE-T5). In general, in the regulatory texts, there is a predominant use of terms such as "disciplines" and a recognition of the usefulness of both Geography and History as well as all those disciplines linked to the area of Social Sciences, "for a better understanding of social reality" (DIRE-T2).

Despite the complexity and interdisciplinarity advocated in the normative texts, the organisation of curricular content is, at least in appearance, rather conventional: "Geography is organised, in the first cycle, in the blocks 'The physical environment' and 'Human space', and in the fourth year it focuses on globalisation. History studies societies over time, following a chronological criterion throughout the two cycles of ESO" (DIRE-T2).

Regarding the discourses produced by the school's Department of Social Sciences, the first thing to note is that the question of competency-based learning appears, as in the normative texts, to be diluted and/or directly displaced. This can be seen in the discourse represented in the Geography and History subject guide for students in their first year of secondary education, where expressions such as "ask ourselves questions and draw conclusions", "write detailed answers and essays", "give a voice to historical figures", "broaden both our knowledge of our environment and our critical thinking", and so on (DIRE-T9) are used. One of the fragments where the survival of a habitual way of approaching teaching and learning processes can be best appreciated is the following one:

> Our History of Art contents will run parallel to the History topics, and will also be worked on in relation to the general characteristics of each artistic style, from some well-known examples, as well as from the specific vocabulary that allows us to formally describe an artistic work. (DIRE-T9)

Leaving aside the didactic criteria of the Department, the particular way of conceiving and working on competences at the School (in this case, in relation to the assessment instruments used) was interpreted from the teaching perspective in a critical way:

> I remember how stunned I was last year when I asked about the assessment of competences in our subjects. One of my senior colleagues said to me—completely convinced—: "Sure, here they are next to each question", pointing out to me the acronyms of the key competences, which he put next to questions that were 100% conceptual, the same ones he had been asking for thirty years. This is practically all the questions in our exams, with the exception of those on historical maps or some Geography graphs. (DIRE-T12)

The following diary note, again a critical one, provides further insight into the Department's priorities in teaching plans:

> When I arrived at the school, I was struck by the fact that in 3rd Secondary level there were also History subjects. My Department argues that it is important that pupils should not spend a year without seeing historical content, so the Middle Ages are left for 2nd and the Modern Age for 3rd. The truth is that I think this is a good approach, although it follows the same chronological criteria as always and the weight of Geography is somewhat reduced in order to go deeper into data and references which, in my opinion, completely escape the purpose of the subject at these levels. (DIRE-T12)

To conclude this inside look at what was happening in our case study, the best way to confirm what type of content was being worked on in the subject of Geography and History is through the pupils' answers to the first question in the interview, specifically the second part: "Do you consider that the content of Social Sciences (History, Geography, Art, Music . . .) requires a lot of effort? What do you find most difficult?". The next graph shows

which aspects are the most difficult for students. The number of times each of these aspects was mentioned was taken into account, as well as the total number of aspects mentioned, in order to calculate the respective percentages. In Figure 1, the aspects are ordered from the highest to the lowest number of mentions received.
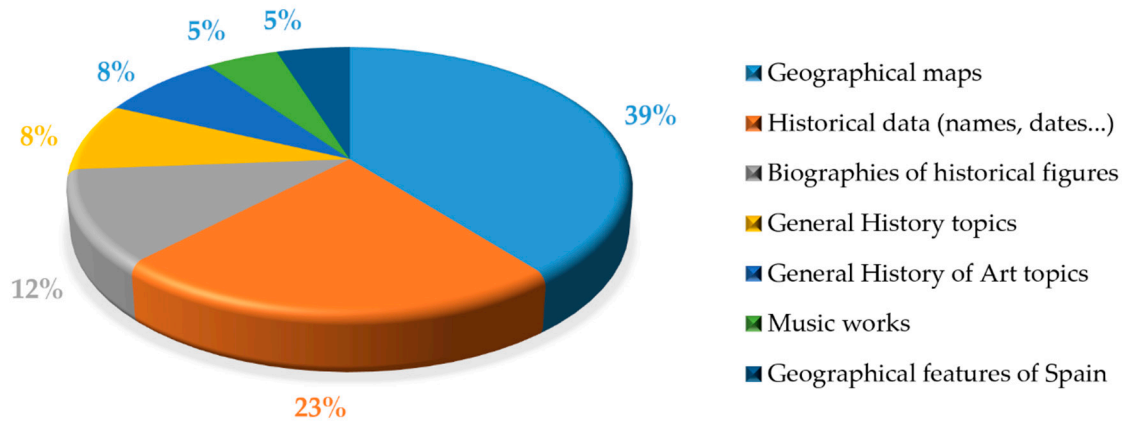

Figure 1. Typology of Social Sciences contents that generate greater difficulty for students.

Table 7 provides a representative selection of the responses from which the data shown in the graph above were obtained.

Table 7. Selection of student responses to the first interview question.

Excerpt	Code
"For my part, I find maps and history subjects (Greece, Rome) the most difficult contents. For me, it does require effort".	DIRE-T11
"In my opinion, it does. I think the things that cost the most are: maps, historical characters and important dates".	DIRE-T11
"What I find most difficult is to learn the theory, but it is not very difficult, as I learn everything like a movie of life. It is true that it is very difficult for me to learn the names and dates of events. I don't like art very much, I find it difficult because I don't like it and I'm not capable of learning it, as it doesn't attract my attention. The same thing happens to me with music".	DIRE-T11
"Well, partly yes and partly no. Yes because there is a lot of theory, especially in History, and because when you have to examine maps you have to dedicate a lot of time to it. And no because if you do the answers and you work a bit on the project you more or less manage it, even if there is a lot of theory, then well . . . Generally yes. What I find most difficult are the maps".	DIRE-T11
"Yes, and I think it's the subject we do more exams in than any other. I find it very difficult to study the physical maps, although I get them right later on, but I find it hard to remember the names".	DIRE-T11
"For me it doesn't require much effort, but it is true that there are some subjects in History, Art and Music that I find more difficult. What I find most difficult is Art and some History subjects. Maps are a problem for me, especially the political maps of the world".	DIRE-T11

As we can see, the tasks that demand the most effort and time on the part of pupils have nothing to do with competences. Almost half of the pupils point to the memorised study of maps as the main challenge they face in the subject of Geography and History. This practice, in our case study, did not involve the use of any kind of digital technology, as the only resource needed to tackle it were paper maps of Spain and the world, both physical and political. As far as the History content is concerned, the development of the

topics, paradoxical as it may seem, did not represent a more important challenge than learning the abundant "names" and "dates" asked about in the written exams.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This work has allowed us to approximate the true place of the competence discourse in many educational schools, revealing that in the reality of the classroom, it can go completely unnoticed beneath the great influence that the disciplinary paradigm still exerts when it comes to organising and working with educational content. Complementing some of the existing discussions in this regard (Guzmán Marín 2017; Liesa et al. 2018), we have been able to confirm the existence of a close link between the sub-discourse in favour of competency-based learning, the educational use of new technologies, and the promotion of emotional competences from what Solé Blanch (2020) characterised as the influence of positive psychology and the "happiness industry".

Despite their prominence in innovative discourses, in which the regulatory texts themselves participate, competences are not properly integrated into the curriculum of subjects such as Geography and History, nor are there significant relationships between different strands of knowledge or subjects, nor is there any specific work on the supposed "key competences". Proof of this is the absence of any mention of pupils' digital competence in the documents of the Department of Social Sciences, or in the testimonies of the research subjects. According with other authors (Pérez-Escoda et al. 2016), working on digital competence is fundamental for promoting the correct use of new technological resources.

Surprisingly, in the analysed regulations, we have found several slightly different definitions of the term "competence". As far as our subject is concerned, this concept has acquired a new meaning in these texts that moves away from the discourse on key competences by international institutions to focus on knowledge, mainly attitudinal knowledge, related to the development of civic education. This relative suspension or abandonment of the discourse on competences, the consequence of which is none other than the maintenance of the traditional disciplinary logic, is also perfectly palpable in the way in which the general objectives of the subject are formulated and how the curricular content is organised. These and other circumstances reflect certain tensions with regard to the supposed requirements of competency-based educational practice which teachers must take into account.

Similarly, competency-based learning did not appear in the guide of the Geography and History subject, either. This fact was confirmed by two other sources. On the one hand, the interviews conducted with the pupils revealed that the six most demanding tasks had nothing to do with working on key competences but with the memorisation of conceptual content (facts, dates, names, places, and so on); on the other hand, numerous observations recorded in the diary pointed to the excessively disciplinary nature of the knowledge worked on in the classroom as the major pedagogical and didactic problem in that school context. Some of the most representative didactic strategies of the traditional didactic model were the "respondones", which is a battery of 50 questions and short answers about each topic to memorise, or the numerous exams on geographical maps.

These dynamics based on the repetition of positive and decontextualised data fit perfectly with the so-called "teaching to the test" culture (Hursh 2013; Robinson and Dervin 2019). This is a pedagogical philosophy that, on the other hand, also responds to the technocratic concept of quality, which is characteristic of neo-liberal education and its interest in the acquisition of specific and perfectly measurable skills (Slater 2015; Sondel 2015). One of the best arguments to justify this neo-disciplinary model is, of course, the curricular overload that forces teachers to give priority to what is easiest to measure. The contradiction that this model presents with respect to many of the slogans of current educational innovation, including those related to competency-based, active, and personalised learning, is quite remarkable. The deviation towards traditional didactic formulas, despite pro-innovative intentions, has been identified by researchers such as Sigurðardóttir and Hjartarson (2015).

There is no doubt that the conscious maintenance of certain traditional educational objectives, content, and processes in the 21st century, despite the supposed discursive embrace of new educational slogans and approaches, has its own ideological connotations. In this respect, authors such as Cachinho and Reis (2007) have openly expressed their misgivings about "the need to change the paradigm of knowledge transmission for the development of competences" (p. 187) in a political context conditioned by "the most rancid conservatism" (p. 201). This is a debate that can only be approached from the premise that, as Soto and Pérez-Milans (2018) stated in their ethnographic work, the commodification of any type of pedagogical element is taking place on a global scale today.

In any case, the incorporation of the competency-based teaching model into the area of Social Sciences should not eclipse or suppress the work of the specific objectives and contents of this field but enrich them by rethinking the logic that organises the way they are worked on. In the words of Palma Valenzuela (2020), the disciplines "must facilitate attitudes, skills and abilities; together with basic conceptual schemes that allow for a deeper understanding of the individual and social reality and to intervene in a transformative way in both" (p. 91).

As our results have shown, we should not conceive of competency-based learning either as an educational change (since, at least in our case study, this approach had not yet been integrated) or as a strategy that guarantees change (since the factors that determine the possibility of undertaking change, e.g., the guidelines of a department, go far beyond the mere reproduction of a novel discourse). This contradicts, for example, the studies by Gulikers et al. (2018) or Poth and Searle (2021), which focused on how to assess competency-based learning, regarding the assumption that, in educational contexts, we can find the necessary conditions to work from this approach.

As the case study presented here shows, the fact of talking about competences does not imply either automatic motivation of the students or, even less, the development of a comprehensive education of the students. As an explanation for the propagandistic use of innovation by schools such as the one in this research, Pascual (2019) alluded to a need not for them to be competent "but only to demonstrate that they are", adding that "unfortunately, this mimicry can even reach the point where teachers cheat—intentionally or not—to ensure their permanence in the system" (p. 185).

In any case, an analysis focused on the new competences that teachers and principals should possess today (Greany 2019; Mohamed et al. 2017) is still pending, which will broaden the view of the professional knowledge currently required to teach. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that this work has not allowed us to observe the supposed drawbacks of the competency approach pointed out by several authors (Barrio 2013; Espinoza Aros 2014; Hirtt 2010; Jiménez Abad 2015; Tricot 2019), since this constitutes a perspective reduced to the purely discursive dimension of our object of study. In this sense, we could ask to what extent the competency-based approach is nothing more than a new criterion for classifying pupils using the new categories of "competent" and "incompetent" instead of "clever" and "clumsy", respectively. In any case, this new vocabulary allows us to keep talking about a desirable student in the context of the neo-liberal school.

All these questions encourage us to continue to broaden the perspective on what we have identified here as a conflict between the particularities of a discourse which attempts to impose itself from the top down, such as that of competency-based learning, and a practice, the classroom practice, which is still completely dominated by the traditional disciplinary culture.

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