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Presentation of the Monograph

Teaching Terrorism: Research and Classroom Applications

On September 10, 2025, a summer course entitled *Teaching Terrorism: Research and Classroom Applications*¹ was held at the Miramar Palace in San Sebastián. Organized by the Memorial Center for Victims of Terrorism and the University of the Basque Country, the course brought together a distinguished group of specialists in the field to discuss a topic of contemporary relevance. The successful outcome of this meeting, together with the desire to continue contributing to ensuring that the phenomenon of terrorism occupies its deserved place in classrooms, has motivated the transformation of these presentations into the articles contained in this monograph.

The texts comprising this monographic issue of the *Revista Internacional de Estudios sobre Terrorismo* (RIET) therefore focus on one of the main unresolved issues following the end of ETA: transmitting this past to new generations. At the beginning of the 2000s, this area remained almost entirely unexplored. Today, however, there are already solid theoretical approaches and numerous educational resources that facilitate the teaching and learning of terrorism in secondary education. Nevertheless, a crucial intermediate link remains missing: further educational research.

The articles presented dedicate specific attention to the case of ETA – as could be expected, given that it was the main terrorist organization operating in Spain – but they also address groups of other ideological orientations that have operated in the same context. Collectively, they provide findings from various case studies that allow progress in several directions. These include the comparison of how school textbooks address the victims of the Franco dictatorship versus those of terrorism, the analysis of regional educational legislation with attention both to its advances and its shortcomings, the understanding of teachers' perspectives and their training needs, the study of how a topic that is, a priori, taboo in the school setting – such as death, particularly when linked to premeditation

¹ More information about the course can be found at: <https://www.uik.eus/es/curso/didactica-del-terrorismo-investigacion-aplicaciones-aula>

and political motivation – is approached at the international level, and the presentation of concrete examples of didactic solutions for the classroom.

Regarding the informative content that readers will find in the other sections of this monograph, all of them also revolve around the link between terrorism and education. One of the events discussed is the well-known 2014 kidnapping of 276 girls from the Chibok school in Nigeria by Boko Haram, a terrorist organization that is analyzed in detail in the following section. Likewise, in sections such as Did You Know...? and Chronicles, issues related to the impact of terrorism on educational centers over recent decades – including terrorist acts, indoctrination, and other effects – are brought to attention.

Finally, in the last section dedicated to the memory of victims, Íñigo Pascual provides a personal perspective based on his experience as a victim-educator. Since this initiative is promoted by the Memorial Center for Victims of Terrorism, the focus has consistently been placed on the individuals affected, and, as in this case, their reflections are made directly accessible.

I extend my gratitude to Carlos Igualada and Javier Yagüe, responsible for the publication of each issue of RIET, for their support in making this monograph a reality. I also wish to thank all the authors who agreed to expand and adapt their presentations from the summer course, as well as the director of the Memorial, Florencio Domínguez, for the trust placed in us.

Raúl López Romo

Coordinator of the Monographic Issue

Juan Carlos Colomer Rubio

Victims in History Textbooks in Spain: From Francoism to Terrorism

Abstract

This article analyses the historical representation of the victims of Francoism and terrorism in Secondary Education textbooks in Spain. Drawing on a documentary corpus composed of textbooks from the fourth year of ESO and the senior year of high school, as well as recent studies on democratic memory and history education, the study identifies recurrent patterns in the treatment of repression, political violence and victimisation. The findings reveal persistent narrative superficiality, limited analytical complexity and the absence of a clear conceptual framework regarding victims, terrorism or dictatorial repression. The article also examines the role of teachers in constructing a critical and reparative understanding of the past and proposes lines for improvement to address democratic memory in schools through a plurality of sources, testimonies and experiences.

Keywords: Democratic memory, victims, Francoism, terrorism, textbooks

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1. Introduction¹

The representation of victims in History textbooks in Spain constitutes a subject of growing interest within the field of Social Sciences Didactics and the construction of a plural democratic memory (Fuertes & Ibáñez, 2019). In this regard, research conducted over the past two decades converges in highlighting the centrality of the school textbook as the dominant pedagogical tool in the teaching–learning processes of History and memory, both because of its hegemonic presence in classrooms and its role in legitimizing particular narratives of the recent past. In this way, the textbook not only organizes content and didactic sequences, but also selects, prioritizes, and hierarchizes historical episodes, actors, and processes, thereby shaping social understanding of traumatic past events (Mancha, 2019; Pingel, 2010).

Against this backdrop, current debates regarding the rise of far-right discourses among European youth, new narratives that deny or trivialize Francoism, and the growing loss of historical memory among Spanish adolescents place this object of study within an urgent, civic horizon. Recent studies reveal ideological reconfigurations among European youth, including new sympathies toward authoritarian regimes and anti-liberal discourses, as well as increasing credibility granted to digital content of low epistemic reliability (Mudde, 2019; Stanley, 2025; Traverso, 2022). These trends directly affect schools as spaces of democratic socialization and reinforce the need to critically analyze curricular materials that participate in this construction.

Based on this premise, the present article² aims to analyze the treatment of victims in textbooks used in the 4th year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) and the senior year of high school (Upper Secondary Education), focusing specifically on two areas: Francoist repression and terrorism. Both topics constitute central dimensions for understanding political violence in contemporary Spain and, simultaneously, represent significant didactic challenges for students' historical education (Fuertes & Banderas, 2024; Fuertes & Ibáñez, 2019). The analysis presented relies on a systematic review of textual and iconographic content across various textbooks, drawing on examples of manuals in use in 2016 and 2023 from publishers such as ECIR, Anaya, SM, and Vicens Vives, among others. The corpus allows for the identification of different levels of victim presence in textbooks – absence, superficial mention, moderate development, central development – and contributes to characterizing the depth and rigor with which political violence is addressed in the school curriculum.

Ultimately, this work seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the teaching of recent History, the construction of democratic citizenship, and the role of education as a space for symbolic repair, plural memory, and the recognition of victims.

1 The author wishes to thank Professor Ander Delgado Cendagortagarza for his ideas and suggestions in the preparation of this text.

2 This work is part of the research project “INCLUCOM: Curricular models and historical-geographical competences of teachers for the construction of inclusive identities” (PID2021-122519OB-I00), funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities.

2. The Textbook as a Cultural Object

The school textbook constitutes a complex pedagogical tool that, beyond its apparent instrumental neutrality, articulates a clear discourse about the past. Various authors have pointed out that the textbook is simultaneously a cultural product, an object of epistemic authority, and a methodological guide for teachers. This polyvalent dimension makes it a privileged agent of cultural transmission whose influence extends beyond the strictly educational sphere (Foster, 2011; Valls, 2007).

In the specialized literature, several attributes have been identified that characterize this complex nature of the textbook: its status as a cultural product; its appearance as an omniscient and legitimized source; its routine use in teaching practice; its constructed nature, subject to editorial mediation; and its durability beyond curricular changes. These attributes demonstrate that the textbook is a living device, updated and subjected to editorial selection processes responding to both pedagogical and commercial criteria. Its continuity over time also ensures the persistence of certain historical approaches – such as historicism – even when academic historiography has evolved in different directions (Valls, 2007). In this sense, teaching recent History through textbooks involves mobilizing – consciously or unconsciously – narratives that may consolidate or challenge prevailing social discourses on the dictatorship, violence, or victims.

As highlighted by ANELE (National Association of Publishers of Books and Educational Materials, 2024), current data underscore the economic and social magnitude of the textbook as a cultural industry. Annual sector reports show that in the 2023–2024 school year more than ten thousand new textbook titles were published, nearly three million copies were sold for Compulsory Secondary Education, and the ratio of textbooks per student for this stage stands at approximately five books per learner. This must be added to the gradual expansion of digital textbooks, whose growth has been sustained over the past decade (ANELE, 2024).

This volume of production and circulation implies that the historical narratives present in textbooks have massive penetration among the student population (Fuertes & Ibáñez, 2019). Consequently, any analysis of the teaching of Francoism or terrorism must consider that the textbook continues to be – in practice – the principal channel of access to formal historical knowledge for millions of students.

The textbook itself is also a cultural artifact reflecting political sensitivities, historiographical currents, and institutional pressures. As educational research has shown, textbooks incorporate explicit editorial decisions: content selection, sequencing, types of images used, degree of discursive complexity, and underlying ideological orientation (Bel, 2017; Martínez-Bonafé, 2008).

The final outcome, therefore, is not a neutral representation of History, but a school-mediated translation of the past, susceptible to omissions, silences, and neutralizations. This explains why critical didactics of the textbook emphasize its analysis as a cultural discourse rather than merely as a didactic tool (Van Alphen & Carretero, 2015).

3. Current Democratic and Educational Context

As previously noted, in contemporary European society there is growing concern over the rise of discourses that, from various ideological positions, tend to reinterpret the authoritarian past under lenses of normalization, relativization, or even nostalgia. In different European countries, and particularly visibly in Spain, this phenomenon is linked to the persistence of narratives that minimize the impact of Francoist repression or establish misleading comparisons between the violence exercised by the dictatorship and other historical episodes, thereby obscuring the systematic nature of political punishment (Banderas & Fuertes, 2021).

For example, Fuertes and Ibáñez (2019) note that the ECIR textbook for senior year of high school education LOGSE (García et al., 2003) reproduces a formulation characteristic of this interpretive bias. In it, Francoist repression is largely confined to the early years of the regime and explained as the result of the early prominence of the Falange, linked to the influence of European Nazism and Fascism. In fact, repression is not part of the introductory section dedicated to “The Foundations of the New Regime” but is mentioned very briefly in a short paragraph included in the subheading “The Blue Period (1939–1945)”, itself integrated into the chapter on “Francoism during the Second World War”.

This minimization may relate to recent research that has warned about the increase in uncritical attitudes toward the authoritarian past among European youth, particularly in contexts of political polarization and the spread of anti-democratic discourses (Stanley, 2025). Sociological studies show that an increasing portion of youth grants credibility to content disseminated through digital platforms at the expense of traditional reference media, a phenomenon particularly pronounced among ideologically conservative or far-right-leaning sectors (Keating & Melis, 2019; Mudde, 2019). This shift from verified sources to poorly verified channels generates fertile ground for historical distortion and the advancement of narratives that trivialize twentieth-century authoritarianisms, a trend that textbooks do not neutralize (Traverso, 2022).

These contemporary tendencies have a direct impact on the school space, where the teaching of recent History faces a constant tension between the academic construction of knowledge and the symbolic pressure of the media environment. In this informational climate, teachers are compelled to counter external discourses that often compete with the interpretive frameworks proposed by the media, curricula, and textbooks.

It is therefore unsurprising that the weakness in building democratic memory among young people is a recurring element in socio-educational studies and diagnoses. Various investigations indicate limited knowledge among secondary students regarding key episodes of political violence, both in relation to Francoism and terrorism in contemporary Spain (Banderas & Fuertes, 2021). This deficit is evident in surveys revealing significant ignorance of recent events, such as the murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco, as well as a limited understanding of the historical contexts in which political violence occurred.

This deficiency is not only due to generational distance from the events but also to the insufficient incorporation of democratic memory as an explicit curricular axis in compulsory education. The specialized literature emphasizes that History textbooks offer ambiguous or incomplete definitions of concepts such as victim, political violence, or terrorism, hindering students' construction of a solid interpretive framework (Delgado, in press).

Teaching political violence requires teachers to articulate a dual approach: one historical – rigorous, documented, and contextualized – and one ethical – focused on human rights, the dignity of victims, and symbolic repair. Nonetheless, recent research highlights the difficulties teachers face in addressing the dictatorship with a coherent and well-founded perspective, due to a lack of specific training, the absence of a public culture of democratic memory, and the influence of family backgrounds that shape perceptions of the past (Banderas & Fuertes, 2021).

Teachers therefore occupy an essential role as mediators between historiographical narrative, curricular content, and students' emotional experiences. Their work involves not only constructing knowledge but also guiding critical reflection processes that enable young people to understand the complexity of the traumatic past and its echoes in contemporary society.

4. Analysis of the Treatment of Francoism in School Textbooks

The analysis of school textbooks conducted in recent research allows for the identification of a first category: the absence or trivialization of Francoist repression and its victims. This tendency manifests both in the direct omission of relevant events and in the presentation of violent episodes in a distant, neutralized, or anecdotal manner. The literature has indicated that, in numerous contemporary Spanish textbooks, repression is presented through narrative formulas lacking historical meaning – for example, the use of neutral verbs such as *died* instead of *was murdered* or *was executed* – which dilutes the identification of agents and repressive contexts (Fuertes & Ibáñez, 2019). Similar examples have been detected in textbooks from various publishers, where political repression is reduced to tangential mentions, replaced by diplomatic, economic, or institutional perspectives that relegate structural violence to marginal notes within the historical narrative (Mancha, 2017).

The page dedicated to explaining the consolidation of the Francoist regime in the *Historia de España* textbook by the publisher EDITEX for senior year of high school LOMLOE is particularly significant due to the silences and framing it proposes (Blanco & González, 2023). First, the complete absence of explicit references to repression as a structural element in the regime's consolidation is striking, replaced instead by a narrative focused almost exclusively on diplomatic and foreign policy factors. Within this framework, the inclusion of a photograph of U.S. President Joe Biden linked to the NATO summit introduces a contemporary visual anchor that reinforces a reading of continuity and international normalization of Spain, but without historically contextualizing the significance of Atlantic alliances or their relation to the Francoist dictatorship. The image, presented in a decontextualized manner, functions more as a legitimizing resource than as an object of historical analysis, shifting attention toward external recognition of the regime and diluting the internal – coercive and repressive – mechanisms that made its stability possible. This approach thus contributes to a partial interpretation of the process, in which the consolidation of Francoism appears detached from the political and social violence that underpinned it for decades.

A second category corresponds to textbooks that include references to Francoism and repression, but from a synthetic and low-analytical-density perspective. In these cases, victims are mentioned without historiographical contextualization or precise explanation of repressive mechanisms. The analyzed page of the *Historia de España* textbook by ANAYA for senior year of high school (García de Cortázar et al., 2016), produced under the LOMCE framework, is illustrative of this treatment. It combines brief textual explanations with supporting documents – a photograph of refugees, a quantitative box on executions, and a testimony of a prisoner – which, while diversifying the sources used, are not integrated into a problematized historiographical narrative or a structural interpretation of Francoist violence.

Victims of repression are mentioned generically and, in many cases, reduced to figures or decontextualized individual accounts. No precise explanation is offered regarding repressive mechanisms, their systematic, legal, and institutional character, or their political function in consolidating the dictatorship. Key concepts such as military justice, purges, social control, or the role of regime institutions are only briefly outlined, making it difficult to understand repression as a planned and sustained policy over time. Likewise, the use of personal testimonies serves primarily an illustrative or empathetic function, without orienting students toward guided critical analysis that would allow them to relate sources to the historical context or to current historiographical debates. This type of treatment, frequent in studies of Spanish school textbooks, leads to fragmented and insufficient knowledge of Francoism and the systematic persecution carried out by the dictatorship. As Fuertes and Banderas (2024) note, the absence of historiographical contextualization and didactic problematization limits the development of historical thinking and reduces the formative potential of studying recent history through a democratic lens.

However, some textbooks offer a more complete and complex treatment, incorporating statistics, primary sources, and testimonies that allow victims to be placed at the center of the historical narrative. The inclusion of quantitative data on executions, imprisonments, or exile, combined with photographs or relevant documents, facilitates a deeper understanding of the repressive system and its social impact. These textbooks tend to reflect updated historiographical perspectives and a more critical approach toward the dictatorship.

In this way, research in History didactics highlights the need to incorporate strategies that counteract the marginalization of victims in school narratives. Among these are the use of personal accounts and primary sources, reparative memory activities and diverse approaches, and the linking of recent History with democratic citizenship. These proposals connect with the didactic tradition advocating source-based learning, historical empathy, and the development of civic memory (Barton & Levstik, 2004) and have been implemented in materials such as the publication *Women and Francoist Repression: A Guide for Their Study in Valencia*, published by the Universitat de València in 2017, among other examples.

5. Terrorism Victims in School Textbooks

Terrorism constitutes a historical phenomenon of enormous relevance for understanding the political, social, and cultural evolution of contemporary Spain. However, its presence in school textbooks remains secondary and fragmented. Although the phenomenon appears in the content of 4th-year ESO and senior year of high school, it receives limited treatment, focusing on superficial descriptions of events and organizations, without a conceptual development comparable to that dedicated to other historical processes. Various studies have noted that, in most materials, terrorism is framed as merely one component of the transition from Francoism to democracy, without acquiring analytical or didactic autonomy (García, 2024).

The analysis conducted by Delgado in textbooks used in the Basque Country confirms this trend: terrorism appears as “one more factor to consider in understanding the transition from Francoism to current democracy”, but without a specific or in-depth study (Delgado, in press). This minimal characterization has direct implications for the way students construct their understanding of recent history, particularly in contexts where political violence has had prolonged and far-reaching impact.

A closer look at the content reveals that textbooks frequently reproduce a linear and decontextualized narrative. They tend to list the main organizations (ETA, GRAPO, FRAP, Terra Lliure), provide victim data, and mention the disbandment or disappearance of these groups, without problematizing the internal logic of the violence, its sociopolitical roots, or its traumatic effects. This is the case of the treatment by EDITEX for senior year of high school, where ETA is described in an encyclopedic information box, focusing on its definition, basic chronology, and victim count,

without a specific or contextualized study of its role in the political transition process (Blanco & González, 2023). Terrorism is thus incorporated into the historical narrative as just another element of the political landscape, rather than as a phenomenon requiring its own explanation in historical, social, and political terms.

This minimal characterization of terrorism directly affects students' construction of recent historical understanding. By failing to address political violence as a complex and prolonged phenomenon, and by not analyzing its social, political, and ethical consequences, textbooks encourage a fragmented and superficial view of historical processes. This limitation is particularly significant in contexts where political violence has had profound and sustained effects, as it hinders the development of critical historical understanding and democratic education grounded in recognition of conflict, memory, and victims. In this regard, the treatment of terrorism in the Vicens Vives textbook for 4th-year ESO is characterized by the clearly secondary and subordinated presence of terrorism within the political-institutional narrative of the period. The phenomenon appears integrated into broader sections on the recent political evolution of Spain – such as elections, governmental reforms, or democratic consolidation – without constituting a specific or differentiated object of analysis. This marginal placement reinforces the notion of terrorism as merely a contextual element, rather than a complex historical process with its own dynamics (Gatell et al., 2023).

References to terrorism, particularly ETA, are articulated through brief, informational, and descriptive mentions, focusing on milestones such as the end of violence or its relation to specific political moments. Detailed explanations of causes, internal evolution, social impact, or consequences in terms of rights, memory, and victims are not provided. Consequently, the phenomenon is reduced to a chronological and factual framework, without problematization that would allow students to understand its prolongation over time or its influence on political and social life.

From a didactic perspective, this strategy reinforces a narrative and accumulative approach, in which content is presented as a succession of relevant political events, relegating political violence to a secondary level. The few references to terrorism are rarely accompanied by specific activities, source analyses, or critical reflection exercises, limiting the possibilities for developing a profound historical understanding of recent events. Students thus receive a simplified view, in which the disappearance of violence is almost automatically associated with democratic progress, without exploring tensions, social debates, or contested memories.

This simplification contributes to a perception of terrorism as an inevitable and almost mechanical phenomenon, reinforcing a historical narrative that renders invisible the plurality of social experiences, and especially that of victims, which is barely addressed (García, 2024).

In this vein, Delgado's study indicates that the information provided by textbooks is, for the most part, "excessively synthetic and basic", focusing on the most prominent aspects – the origin of

ETA, the Carrero Blanco assassination, overall figures, the end of the organization – while excluding fundamental dimensions, such as youth radicalization processes, the evolution of social perception of violence, or changes in civic mobilization. Furthermore, the chronology covered is concentrated in the 1970s and 1980s, relegating subsequent transformations as well as the trajectory of public policies, social delegitimization strategies, and the role of victims and civil associations (Delgado, in press).

A particularly problematic aspect is the unequal attention given to different forms of terrorism. Although several groups are mentioned, most space is devoted to ETA, while far-right, international, or state-motivated violence receives only marginal references, without historiographical development or contextualization (García, 2024). This asymmetry limits a comprehensive understanding of terrorism as a complex, multicausal, and plural phenomenon.

Similarly, the presence of victims is reduced to peripheral elements: brief boxes, isolated photographs, or supplementary notes (García, 2024). These marginal notes prevent their integration as a constitutive part of the school historical narrative, hindering students' incorporation of the human and moral dimension of violence. Delgado's research confirms this iconographic and testimonial insufficiency, highlighting the scarce presence of images of victims and their stories, with the consequent loss of pedagogical opportunities for empathy and ethical reflection.

In the didactic domain, these textbooks reproduce a transmissive model based on low-cognitive-demand tasks: data searches, summaries, identification of explicit information, or the creation of timelines. Only exceptionally are primary source analyses, historical problem formulation, or activities requiring interpretation and critical judgment incorporated (García, 2024).

Delgado thus notes that most activities related to political violence merely require reproducing information from the text, without encouraging the formulation of arguments or problematization of the phenomena studied. This lack of cognitive complexity contrasts with the deeply ethical, emotional, and political nature of terrorism, which would require activities integrating reflection, reasoned debate, and contextual analysis.

In some cases, textbooks pose open-ended questions on the legitimacy of violence or evaluation of the conflict, but without providing ethical criteria or conceptual frameworks to guide students. This may generate responses based on intuitive opinions, family positions, or contextual influences rather than on democratic principles or respect for human rights.

A relevant exception is the *Eki* educational project, published by Elkar and the Federación de Ikastolas, which proposes a more comprehensive approach, with activities analyzing testimonies, studying human rights violations, and structured debates that allow for a deeper and more nuanced approach. Other noteworthy examples are those developed by the Centro Memorial de Víctimas, which proposed various units aimed at 1st- and 4th-year ESO students, as well as 1st- and senior

year of high school. These units adopt an approach similar to the conventional textbook format, combining conceptual exposition on terrorism with activities focused on reading victims' testimonies and complementary research tasks using digital resources.

Finally, another notable example is that proposed by SM for 4th-year ESO (De la Mata & Mesegar, 2023), developed in accordance with the LOMLOE curricular framework. It constitutes a particularly significant case of didactic renewal in the treatment of historical change and continuity. Under the heading "Work as a Historian", the proposal shifts the focus from mere content transmission toward the explicit development of historical thinking procedures, particularly visual source analysis and interpretation of change in historical processes.

The activity is structured around two compared images of the same urban space following an ETA terrorist attack, inviting students to analyze the difficulties of historical change based on concrete evidence. This approach represents a significant advance over the more descriptive approaches common in earlier textbooks, as it requires contextualization, comparison, hypothesis formulation, and reflection on the persistence of certain social structures in the face of political disruption. Historical change is presented not as a linear or automatic process, but as a complex phenomenon conditioned by multiple factors.

From a didactic perspective, the proposal directly aligns with the principles of LOMLOE, prioritizing competency-based work, historical literacy, and the use of primary sources that require in-depth engagement with the terrorist phenomenon as a basis for knowledge construction. Unlike other textbooks where images serve merely illustrative purposes, in this case, photographs become the central axis of the activity, acquiring interpretive and problematizing value. Students are engaged as active participants in learning, in line with the construction of complex historical knowledge.

However, although the activity is methodologically innovative, its explanatory potential largely depends on teacher mediation. As García (2024) notes, the implementation of this material relies on the decisions of teachers and school management teams, who must decide whether to incorporate it or continue with the content provided by textbooks. This circumstance generates a complex and difficult-to-resolve scenario until substantial changes are made in the History curriculum that grant greater emphasis to the study of victims within the Transition and the process of democratic consolidation.

The limited treatment of terrorism in school textbooks not only restricts historical learning but also conditions students' democratic education. The lack of contextualization, the scarce presence of victims, and the absence of ethical reflection contribute to a superficial understanding of recent history. This situation is particularly concerning in communities such as the Basque Country, where studies have shown "moderate or poor" knowledge among youth regarding the most significant terrorist events, their perpetrators, victims, and social and institutional responses (Delgado, in press).

6. Conclusions

The joint analysis of the treatment of victims of Francoism and terrorism in textbooks allows the identification of common patterns that respond to an educational logic that could be termed continuist across different educational laws. Textbooks operate through an implicit balance between the need to address traumatic pasts and the concern to avoid latent conflicts with resonance in the public sphere.

In the most superficial cases, political violence appears as a secondary element, diluted within political or economic perspectives, reinforcing the idea that victims occupy a marginal place in the historical narrative. The representation of Francoist repression, for example, often appears devoid of context or softened through formulations that minimize the structural violence of the regime, still reflecting certain social resistances surrounding historical memory. A similar pattern occurs with terrorism, which is addressed in an extremely synthetic and descriptive manner, frequently reduced to figures or lists of acronyms, sidelining victims' experiences and the socio-political complexity of the phenomenon.

These limitations are compounded by the fact that many classroom activities related to both topics remain anchored in a memoristic approach, focused on content reproduction, with minimal use of primary sources or personal and civic reflection by students. In this scenario, the role of the teacher becomes decisive: it is through their didactic mediation that a more critical perspective can be offered, social empathy promoted, and victims placed at the center of historical learning.

In light of these shortcomings, it is necessary to advance toward the teaching of terrorism that transcends the descriptive logic and contributes to the construction of democratic memory grounded in human rights. This involves integrating personal testimonies, analyzing rights violations, fostering historical thinking, and promoting critical reflection on the causes, effects, and responsibilities associated with the use of violence.

A comprehensive educational approach must incorporate the complexity of the phenomenon, the voices of victims, the diversity of actors involved, and societal evolution in response to violence. Only in this way can students be equipped with the necessary tools to understand their recent past and actively participate in building a civic culture based on coexistence, plurality, and the rejection of all forms of political violence.

All of this points to the need to advance toward a genuine didactics of democratic memory in the ongoing professional development of teachers, granting victims a central place in the school narrative, constructed from plurality, critical analysis, and a clear commitment to repair and human rights.

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Julia Gracia Ordóñez

Comparative Study of the Approach to Terrorism in the Current Regional Curricula

Abstract

This article analyses the approach to terrorism in current regional legislation for compulsory and post-secondary education, in the context of a decentralised Spanish educational system, and its potential contribution to the history and prevention of terrorism. Results identify a limited approach focused on historical aspects, which are mainly reduced to a single subject in compulsory education. Terrorism also has a limited presence of ethical argumentation and an absence of the victims of terrorism as a central element that stands out. This is caused by an unequal interpretation of the minimum and common learning requirements set out by the government. It is concluded that students may receive insufficient training on terrorism, depending on teachers and territory, variables that, far from contributing to maintaining a collective memory, only favours ignorance and manipulation. In view of this, recommendations are included for consideration in future curriculum developments.

Keywords: terrorism, radicalisation, curriculum, prevention, history

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1. Introduction

Education is key to preventing violent extremism, radicalisation, and thus terrorism, with the curriculum being one of the most effective tools for promoting democratic values and active citizenship that contribute to resilience against violent narratives (Harris et al., 2013; Norbruch, 2016). In Spain, the curricular approach to terrorism primarily adopts a historical perspective, based on the understanding that knowing the history of terrorism prevents its repetition (Santayana, 1905). The curriculum includes a selection of historical facts related to terrorism in Spain and internationally that, due to their impact and significance, all students must know. In this regard, references to terrorism victims are essential, as they help keep memory alive and highlight its consequences (Jiménez, 2018; Milošević, 2024). However, there are other approaches more focused on identifying psychosocial risk factors and addressing them comprehensively and progressively to protect students from violent extremism. Some of these risks are currently found in digital environments where terrorist organisations operate to recruit and disseminate their narratives through manipulation and disinformation, making the development of digital citizenship essential (Council of the European Union, 2023).

Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education, defines the curriculum as the set of objectives, contents, methodologies, and evaluation criteria for regulated teachings. Its Article 6.3 establishes that the Government, after consultation with the autonomous communities, shall set the minimum teachings to ensure common education. These minimum teachings will require 50% of school timetables in autonomous communities with a co-official language and 60% in those without. These teachings, in turn, draw on international guidelines and determine the competences students must acquire at the end of different stages, among which civic competence stands out. Thus, Royal Decrees, and in their development regional regulations, establish the curriculum by articulating content, format, and timing to ensure students understand the most relevant historical processes, can reflect and dialogue on current ethical issues with an argumentative attitude, and show empathy. A study analysing the presence of terrorism in Spanish educational laws concluded that it is limited, as evidenced by the lack of explicit reference in the law itself and the scarce use of related terms (Gracia, in press).

2. Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework starts from considering terrorism as a global, complex, multifactorial, and constantly evolving phenomenon that requires a transversal curricular approach, starting from early stages and with terrorism victims as the central element. This framework is structured around seven interrelated areas, as shown in Figure 1 and described below.



Figure 1. Theoretical framework. **Source:** author's own elaboration.

First, the centrality of victims responds to Article 2 of Law 29/2011, of 22 September, on Recognition and Comprehensive Protection of Terrorism Victims, which includes among its aims the promotion of their dignity and memory. Their recognition delegitimises terrorism socially and politically, their testimony links memory and history, and they serve as an ethical reference for the democratic system (Jiménez et al., 2024).

Second, students must become familiar with the definition and radicalisation process, following the 3N model, which focuses on variables of needs, narrative, and networks, with primary prevention as a priority intervention (Kruglansky et al., 2019).

Third, although Royal Decrees partially include the history of terrorism among basic knowledge to be acquired, they should establish the context of the terrorist phenomenon to help students improve their understanding, including its definition, causes, and impact. Likewise, it is necessary to learn about terrorist organisations that have operated in Spain. Finally, students should be encouraged to develop their own arguments, which would reduce potential bias (Krause et al., 2022). Applied to our context, the history of terrorism should include an introduction addressing different types of terrorism, an analysis of the three historical phases in which it occurs: dictatorship, transition, and democracy; the centrality of victims through their accounts to delegitimise violence; and the impact of police work and social mobilisation (López Romo, 2020).

Fourth, ethical argumentation against terrorism must be reinforced, starting from inquiry into the phenomenon, considering the plurality of students' opinions, learning to disagree reasonably, and

being able to work together overcoming differences (Clifton, 2017). From a curricular perspective, this approach expands the study of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from an ethical viewpoint, reasons why terrorism is necessarily evil and unjust, and analyses the importance of the rule of law in countering terrorism (Roca Jusmet, 2021).

Fifth, terrorist organisations are evading content moderation and removal by using encrypted platforms and social networks, extremist websites, encrypted messaging, coded material, and constant migration for recruitment, propaganda, and financial transactions. There is a knowledge gap across all sectors of the educational community about how terrorists exploit digital platforms, necessitating greater awareness and training to identify these risks and know protection strategies through digital mentoring, as well as implementing age restrictions and verification to hinder access (OECD, 2024).

Sixth, the need to adopt a gender perspective and highlight leaders from victims' associations when analysing the history of terrorism must be made visible, especially from women's accounts, as failing to do so would overlook this important group. Although most fatal victims of terrorism in Spain have been men, women have been "collateral victims" (Jiménez y Martínez, 2023): mothers, widows, daughters, sisters, or granddaughters, experiencing double victimisation and, sometimes, abandonment. Women have been represented as victims and fighters but also as terrorists or recruiters (Plaza et al., 2017). Regarding women, the global incel (involuntary celibate) movement is also concerning, promoting hatred and dehumanisation of women, whom they blame for their distress, validating violence against them (Aiolfi et al., 2024).

Seventh and finally, we highlight the growing relevance of a culture of prevention and preparedness, as evidenced by the implementation of mandatory Civil Protection emergency training plans in non-university educational centres, delivered by experts to prepare students to prevent and respond to emergencies mainly caused by natural factors. Although self-protection recommendations in case of terrorist attacks published by the Intelligence Centre for Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime (CITCO) exist, there are no specific protocols for educational centres promoted by educational administrations that include procedures for terrorism- and radicalisation-related situations in schools, favouring early and multidisciplinary detection. The existence of grief protocols and terrorist attack drills is positively valued, as far from creating alarm, they contribute to developing resilience in students.

Of the seven areas comprising the theoretical framework, most are not present in the current Royal Decrees or regional regulations developing them, as terrorism is only addressed in Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) and upper secondary education stages, not transversally and competence-based, but in specific subjects analysed below.

Among the limited scientific literature on curriculum and terrorism, a study analysing the presence of death in the curriculum stands out (Herrán et al., 2019), and another studying radicalisation

prevention in formal education (Doñate, 2025). The gap in scientific literature on terrorism's presence in formal curricula motivated this research.

3. Methodology

This study aims to analyse the approach to terrorism in the curriculum within ESO and upper secondary education stages to identify similarities or differences that may guide future developments, using a comparative methodology (Raventós, 1983).

The sixteen units of analysis are framed within Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (LOMLOE), and in its development, Royal Decree 217/2022, of 29 March, establishing the organisation and minimum teachings of Compulsory Secondary Education, and Royal Decree 243/2022, of 5 April, establishing the organisation and minimum teachings of upper secondary education. The LOMLOE, influenced by the 2030 Agenda, recognises the importance of education for peace and human rights, including it in education for sustainable development and global citizenship, present in plans and programmes across all compulsory education. It also includes the development of civic competence oriented towards civic literacy and the adoption of democratic values by students, showing empathy and an argumentative attitude.

The following table briefly shows the units of analysis or regional regulations studied.

Educational Administration	Secondary Education Curriculum	Upper secondary education Curriculum
Andalucía	Decree 102/2023, of 9 May	Decree 103/2023, of 9 May
Aragón	Order ECD/1172/2022, of 2 August, and Order ECD/867/2024, of 25 July	Order ECD/1173/2022, of 3 August
Principado de Asturias	Decree 59/2022, of 30 August	Decree 60/2022, of 30 August
Illes Balears	Decree 32/2022, of 1 August	Decree 33/2022, of 1 August
Canarias	Decree 30/2023, of 16 March	Decree 30/2023, of 16 March
Cantabria	Decree 73/2022, of 27 July	Decree 73/2022, of 27 July
Castilla y León	Decree 39/2022, of 29 September	Decree 40/2022, of 29 September
Castilla-La Mancha	Decree 82/2022, of 12 July	Decree 83/2022, of 12 July
Cataluña	Decret 175/2022, of 27 September	Decret 171/2022, of 20 September
Comunitat Valenciana	Decree 107/2022, of 5 August	Decree 108/2022, of 5 August
Extremadura	Decree 110/2022, of 22 August	Decree 109/2022, of 22 August
Galicia	Decree 156/2022, of 15 September	Decree 157/2022, of 15 September, and Decree 118/2023, of 27 July
Comunidad de Madrid	Decree 65/2022, of 20 July	Decree 64/2022, of 20 July
Región de Murcia	Decree no. 235/2022, of 7 December, and Decree no. 158/2024, of 1 August	Decree no. 251/2022, of 22 December
Comunidad Foral de Navarra	Decree Foral 71/2022, of 29 June	Decree Foral 72/2022, of 29 June
País Vasco	Decree 77/2023, of 30 May, and Correction of errors of Decree 77/2023, of 30 May	Decree 76/2023, of 30 May
La Rioja	Decree 42/2022, of 13 July, and Decree 30/2025, of 1 July, amending Decree 42/2022, of 13 July	Decree 43/2022, of 21 July
MEFPD	Order EFP/754/2022, of 28 July	Order EFP/755/2022, of 31 July

Figure 2. Current regional regulations governing the Secondary Education and upper secondary education curriculum. **Source:** Author's own elaboration based on data published on portals of different educational administrations.

4. Results

Another analysis confirms the absence of terrorism in Infant and Primary Education curricula (Gracia, in press). Regarding Vocational Training, despite being a teaching modality that helps reduce vulnerability to social exclusion and school dropout, with enrolment exceeding one million

students (Gamboa et al., 2023), only one explicit reference to terrorism was found in the Technician in Emergencies and Civil Protection qualification, related to collecting incident information as part of an operational intervention.

Once ESO and upper secondary education stages are identified for analysis, we proceed to examine terrorism's presence in regional regulations developing the minimum teachings established in corresponding Royal Decrees.

4.1. Secondary Education

In ESO, after analysing Royal Decree 217/2022, of 29 March, terrorism is addressed in two subjects: Civic and Ethical Values Education, and Geography and History, with two aspects to highlight. On one hand, Civic and Ethical Values Education may be taught in any ESO year, and in Geography and History only in 3rd and 4th years, so some students may leave or change their educational path without receiving terrorism education. On the other, as shown in Table 2, Civic and Ethical Values Education has an average weekly load of one to two hours, and Geography and History three to four hours, which, considering all basic knowledge to include, could relegate terrorism study. Nevertheless, Geography and History is the main subject for students' first approach to the terrorist phenomenon.

Subject	Geography and History				Civic and Ethical Values Education or for Citizenship and Human Rights (some year or established)			
Year Autonomous Communities	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
AND	3	3	3	3	0	1	0	0
ARA	3	3	3	3	0	0	1	1
AST	3	3	3	3	0	0	2	0
BAL	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1
CAN	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1
CANT	3	3	3	3	0	0	1	0
CYL	3	3	3	3	0	0	1	0
CLM	4	3	3	3	0	2	0	0
CAT	4	4	4	3	1	1	1	1
CVAL	3	3	3	3	0	0	0	2
EXT	3	3	3	3	0	2	0	0
GAL	3	3	3	3	0	0	1	0
MAD	3	3	3	3	0	1	0	2
MUR	3	3	3	3	0	1	0	0
NAV	3	3	3	3	1	1	0	0
PVAS	3	3	3	3	1	1	1	1
RIO	4	4	4	4	0	2	0	0

Figure 3. Weekly hours for Geography and History and Civic and Ethical Values Education subjects in Secondary Education and upper secondary education. **Source:** Author's own elaboration based on data published on portals of different educational administrations.

In the Civic and Ethical Values Education subject, minimum teachings related to terrorism establish:

Basic Knowledge. B. Society, justice, and democracy. Politics [...] The rule of law and constitutional values. Democracy [...]. Democratic memory. War, terrorism, and other forms of political violence.

These basic knowledge items maintain the full or partial wording of the Royal Decree in eleven autonomous communities (65%), except six (35%): Canarias, Cantabria, Cataluña, Comunitat Valenciana, País Vasco, and La Rioja, which eliminate explicit reference to terrorism. To illustrate this omission, the example from Decree 30/2023, of 16 March, of Canarias is shown:

Basic Knowledge. II. Society, democracy, and justice. 2.1. Recognition of democracy and its principles, procedures, and institutions, valuing democratic memory. 2.2. Valuation of citizenship and democratic participation.

In Civic and Ethical Values Education, there is a majority but lower percentage of uniformity in terrorism's presence in the curriculum, as shown in the following map:



Map 2. Presence of terrorism in regional curricula. Civic and Ethical Values Education subject for one ESO year. **Source:** Author's own elaboration based on analysis of regional decrees.

In the Geography and History subject, the Royal Decree establishes the following minimum teachings related to terrorism:

Specific Competence 7. Identify the foundations sustaining various identities [...] the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [...] and the need to recognise the suffering of victims of violence and terrorism.

Basic Knowledge. A. Challenges of the contemporary world. [...] Wars, terrorism, and other forms of political violence. Alliances and international institutions, mediation, and peace missions [...] C. Local and global civic commitment. [...] support for victims of violence and terrorism.

Most autonomous communities (15, or 88%) maintain this wording fully or partially, except Cataluña and Comunitat Valenciana (12%), which eliminate specific mention of terrorism, as shown in this excerpt from Decree 107/2022 of Comunitat Valenciana:

The world after the Second World War: The “Cold War” and decolonisation of Asia and Africa. The historical process of European Union construction. The Spanish Civil War and Francoist dictatorship. The Transition. Democratic Spain. Democratic memory.

A double nuance should be introduced. On one hand, the Basque curriculum for 4th ESO includes a reference to terrorism but only in the international sphere, hindering addressing domestic terrorism precisely where it would be most necessary. On the other, although Comunitat Valenciana omits that mention, it is one of the autonomies that has most promoted educator-victim programmes and use of teaching units from the “Memory and Prevention of Terrorism” programme. In any case, tools exist to address this topic in the classroom beyond its curricular presence, whose inclusion remains the most solid and stable path.

In addition to comparison between regional regulations and the Royal Decree, absences in basic knowledge are notable when contrasting with the teaching unit for 4th ESO Geography and History (Ministerio del Interior et al., 2019), as the following are not established as minimum teachings: a definition of terrorism, affected areas, classification and names of main terrorist organisations, social movements against terrorism, and references to terrorism victims, attacks, or kidnappings, given these variables are used as indicators of students’ knowledge about terrorism (Rodríguez Fouz et al., 2021).

4.2. upper secondary education

After analysing Royal Decree 243/2022, of 5 April, establishing the organisation and minimum teachings of upper secondary education, in this post-compulsory stage, terrorism is addressed in three subjects: Philosophy (1st upper secondary), Contemporary World History (1st upper secondary), and History of Spain (2nd upper secondary).

In the Philosophy subject, minimum teachings establish:

Basic Knowledge. C1. Human action: Ethical and political philosophy. Major ethical issues of our time: inequality and poverty; effective equality of rights between men and women; war, terrorism, and other forms of violence [...].

This wording is maintained in 12 autonomous communities (71%), except five (29%) that eliminate specific mention of terrorism (Canarias, Cataluña, Extremadura, País Vasco, and La Rioja). As an example of this omission, Decree 171/2022 of Cataluña establishes:

Basic Knowledge. What must I do? Evaluation of situations posing ethical problems through analysis of the duality between being and having to be, moral deliberation, ethical dialogue, and characterisation of moral judgements.

Philosophy is one of the subjects with least uniformity, as illustrated in the following map:



Map 2. Presence of terrorism in regional curricula. Philosophy subject for 1st upper secondary. **Source:** Author's own elaboration based on analysis of regional decrees.

On the other hand, in Contemporary World History, Royal Decree 243/2022 establishes:

Specific Competence 2. The Holocaust experience [...] and the threat of terrorism linked to political movements of various kinds must generate an attitude of rejection towards all types of violence and a firm conviction regarding recognition of victims and the right to truth, justice, reparation, and guarantees of non-repetition.

[...] The Holocaust experience [...] and the threat of terrorism linked to political movements of various kinds [...].

Basic Knowledge. B. Challenges of the contemporary world. Regional and planetary threats: terrorism, organised crime, radicalisms, cyberthreats, and weapons of mass destruction.

In this subject, 15 autonomous communities maintain this wording partially or fully (89%). However, Comunitat Valenciana and País Vasco (11%) eliminate specific mention of terrorism. This omission is shown in this excerpt from Decree 76/2023 of País Vasco:

Know and analyse the causes and consequences of major conflicts in the Contemporary Age and their high degree of violence and destruction [...]

[...] fundamental conditions were designed for genocides and extermination with their concentration camp system.

Basic Knowledge. B. Challenges of the contemporary world. Regional and planetary threats.

Some absences in minimum teachings should also be highlighted in this subject, such as specific mentions of significant attacks like 9/11 (New York), 11-M (Madrid), 7/7 (London), or waves of international terrorism – aspects included in the specific teaching unit for this subject (Prieto, 2020).

Finally, in History of Spain for 2nd upper secondary, minimum teachings establish:

Basic Knowledge. B. Challenges of the contemporary world. [...] Recognition, reparation, and dignification of victims of violence and terrorism in Spain. Memory policies in Spain. Places of memory [...] The Transition and the 1978 Constitution. [...] Democratic normalisation and the threat of terrorism.

These basic knowledge items are maintained in 14 autonomous communities (82%) fully or partially. However, three (18%) – Cataluña, Comunidad Valenciana, and País Vasco – eliminate this specific mention. Thus, Decree 76/2023 of País Vasco establishes:

Recognition of actions and movements in favour of freedom in contemporary Spanish history, awareness of traumatic past events and non-repetition of violent and painful situations.

Reparation of violence victims. The Transition: from the Political Reform Law to the 1978 Constitution. The State of Autonomies, universal democratic suffrage, violent opposition, and political-social consensus. The Moncloa Pacts.

Another important aspect regarding History of Spain is that it may have the highest number of basic knowledge items related to terrorism. However, it also has the greatest number of basic knowledge items overall and shorter duration due to University Entrance Examinations, in which questions related to terrorism are rarely included, marginalising the topic in favour of others.

5. Conclusions

This study reveals how the curricular approach to terrorism remains insufficient and uneven in implementation (Doñate, 2025). On one hand, terrorism is not addressed transversally or competence-based and is limited to the five subjects mentioned: Geography and History and Civic and Ethical Values Education in ESO; and Philosophy, Contemporary World History, and History of Spain in upper secondary education (Harris et al., 2013). This limitation overshadows other subjects with great potential, such as Spanish Language and Literature, Foreign Languages, Digitalisation (Pérez-García y Barragán, 2025), or even Plastic, Visual, and Audiovisual Education, which could explore cultural and artistic aspects.

On the other, in terms of timetable load and considering the breadth of basic knowledge in subjects like Geography and History, restricting terrorism treatment to them does not seem effective, especially in 2nd upper secondary, where University Entrance Examinations prioritise other topics with higher likelihood of appearing (Serrano y García, 2014). This is another indirect element to address.

Beyond these aspects, results analysis shows that while most autonomous communities guarantee basic knowledge established by Royal Decrees for addressing terrorism, some, in a legitimate but questionable interpretation, avoid including the term in their curricula. This strategy only contributes to terrorism remaining taboo and deepens students' ignorance (Mota Zurdo, 2022). Indirectly, it may also stem from teachers' rejection due to insecurity from fear of unexpected effects, partly from lack of training to manage controversial topics in the classroom (De Miguel Yubero, 2023). This difficulty worsens in regions where a "battle over the narrative" persists, preventing students from developing capacity to know unbiased history and form their own ethical argumentation (Pinilla Gómez, 2023). This conflict again highlights the importance of access to firsthand terrorism victim testimonies, recognising their value and contribution (Jiménez, 2018). The fact that names of victims, attacks, kidnappings, and social movements against terrorism are not included as minimum teachings only contributes to erasing them from collective memory we must preserve to prevent repetition.

Although progress has been made in access to specific curricular materials on terrorism, a retrospective view concludes no advance in its curricular approach, requiring consensus to avoid political dependence, firmly convinced that terrorism demands far more technical, broad, and integral treatment – not limited to Secondary Education and upper secondary education curricula but open to other teachings and stages, especially initial teacher training, where practitioners must implement it.

This study can serve as a starting point for future research lines analysing other international curricular proposals, realistic studies evaluating what works, in which contexts, and under what conditions (Gielen, 2019), and more qualitative studies to understand perceptions of all educational community sectors. Therefore, these suggestions should be considered by future technical teams involved in drafting and improving future curricular specifications on terrorism.

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Raúl López Romo

A Key Pending Issue. Teachers' Opinions on Terrorism and Education

Abstract

This article presents the results of a survey on terrorism and education given to Spanish secondary school teachers. The analysis concludes that, although most teachers recognise the importance of addressing terrorism in the classroom, its treatment remains insufficient and uneven. Among the reasons are curricular deficiencies, gaps in textbooks, lack of knowledge of specific teaching resources, and structural obstacles such as content overload and lack of time, especially in upper secondary school. Teaching experience shows that the topic is usually addressed indirectly and occasionally, but it also highlights its great potential for developing skills such as fostering critical citizenship.

Keywords: terrorism, secondary education, teachers, Spain

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1. Introduction

Terrorism is a controversial topic. It is so, first, because it has caused enormous suffering: nearly 1.500 people have been killed in Spain between 1960 and the present, and more than 5.000 were injured (Fernández Soldevilla, 2021). Second, because it generates strong polarization among democrats regarding how to address it, especially in relation to the management of its remembrance and its transformation into public memory. This disparity of narratives, produced by institutions such as the Memorial Center for the Victims of Terrorism, linked to the central administration, or Gogora, the Memory Institute dependent on the Basque Government, has repercussions in schools (Mota Zurdo, 2022). Finally, although it is a historical process that is practically closed, it remains recent in time and maintains pending issues, among which justice stands out, with numerous unsolved murder cases (Domínguez & Jiménez, 2023), and education.

Naturally, there are other controversial topics, such as the Civil War or Francoism, which must also be addressed in the educational sphere. We have resources that allow us to tackle them with guarantees (Ministry of Education, 2020), and the difficulties they pose should not dissuade us, but rather become an incentive. Education for peace does not teach to hide conflicts, but rather, precisely, to manage them democratically.

Like the episodes mentioned above, terrorism has been an element of utmost importance in our recent past. Its teaching does not imply only the learning of historical contents, but also the promotion of civic values and the delegitimization of the use of violence as a political instrument. Finally, there is a duty of memory toward the victims that education cannot ignore.

To date, the treatment of terrorism in classrooms is insufficient (López Romo & Rodríguez Fouz, 2026). First, it is absent or scarcely developed in educational curricula, both at the national and regional levels, unlike other periods and historical topics that do receive broader treatment. Second, textbooks address it superficially. In addition, the use of testimony as a pedagogical tool is not widespread, with reticences persisting (Gutiérrez-Pinell & Delgado-Algarra, 2025: 21). There is a lack of greater promotion of field trips, such as visits to places of memory or the carrying out of educational projects around them. Nevertheless, if this topic has not yet been implemented with the depth it deserves, it will be; it is a matter of time.

Throughout the following pages, we will address these issues in greater detail based on teachers' perceptions. Before delving into the matter, it is worth emphasizing the human dimension. The victims and survivors are still among us with their demands for memory, truth, dignity, and justice. Reading their accounts is healing (Jiménez, 2023): it allows empathizing with their suffering, contributing to non-repetition, forming critical citizens, and becoming aware that we have not always known how to defend those whose rights have been violated, not even from the educational sphere.

In a testimony given before students in February 2025, Alberto Muñagorri, who was mutilated by the explosion of an ETA backpack bomb in Rentería when he was 10 years old, stated:

In the school where I was, there was no difference in treatment [after the attack]. To give you an idea, it was an academy that was on the upper floor. I went with crutches. I had to climb the stairs. There was little sensitivity in general, but there was little sensitivity toward a victim of terrorism and toward a person with a disability as well. When I moved to 6th, 7th, and 8th of EGB, since I was a bit of a rascal, I didn't like studying much, they put me at the back. There was no teacher who said to me "Alberto, sit in front" [besides a leg, he had lost the vision in one eye]. Or in physical education class they told me, "well, if you can't, don't do it, stay in class". I said, "no, I want to do what my other classmates do". No teacher ever said to me, "hey Alberto, how are you? do you feel okay? do you have memories of what happened to you?" Never, never. In high school it was a bit more problematic because it was a high school controlled by the abertzale left where I had to see banners and such continuously (...). I think that in education, as in society, there were many shortcomings. I think that in that regard it has improved. Teachers are better prepared (...). In those times I don't know if it was that they didn't know how to handle it or we were insensitive or we didn't want to get involved, but I didn't feel that embrace from the educational world¹.

In March 2025, Naiara Zamarreño, daughter of the PP councilor in Rentería Manuel Zamarreño, assassinated by ETA in 1998, shared her testimony with a group of schoolchildren from Álava. This is how she remembered the period after the attack:

Only silence reigned in our house. There were no laughs, no arguments. That's how we spent the months, even the years, I would say. In silence. I went to high school and still had to endure classmates shouting "gora ETA" at me every time they passed by my side when going up and down the stairs, or putting pamphlets from Ynestrillas, who was a leader of the extreme right (...). And I always in silence. My response was always silence, because I had already suffered enough to get into controversies (...). I have felt rejected in my town for many years (...). I have been working in that high school for two years. And I remember that the first time I entered not through where the kids enter, but through the teachers' door, an immense flashback came to me of those years when every Friday there were demonstrations. I voted in favor [of the abertzale left strikes] because I was afraid to disassociate myself. Images came to me of when they shouted at me in the hallways².

1 Testimony of Alberto Muñagorri, 02/21/2025. Archive of the Memorial Center for the Victims of Terrorism.

2 Testimony of Naiara Zamarreño at the Memorial Center for the Victims of Terrorism, 03/27/2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfdTr8cMevc&t=4228s> (accessed: 12/26/2025).

The harassment did not end with the assassination. Often, families who remained in Euskadi had to face double victimization, derived from the contempt and hostility of their surroundings. Deep down, they were perceived as exogenous elements, to be excised from the community. The testimony of Adei Carrasco, son of Isaías Carrasco – former socialist councilor in Mondragón assassinated by ETA in 2008 – about the atmosphere in his school, is particularly illustrative in this regard: “They bullied me every day for being Isaías’s son (...). I really ended up very alone”. Besides making comments justifying the attack against his father, they made up a song about him. “It was something related to my mother. They messed with her and sang it quite often. Even in class... And the teacher said nothing”. His mother adds: “I saw that Adei was also not well because of an *andereño* [teacher]. One day, after a meeting with her, I told my son why he did those things that the *andereño* said. And he answered me: ‘Ama, you don’t realize that she hates me. That she hates me...’” (González, 2023).

We conclude this selection of quotes with the words of Vanessa Vélez de Pablos, PP councilor in Andoain, a town near San Sebastián, in the early 2000s: “I had to stop going to class at the university. I studied on my own with the notes I could get. I remember that the Econometrics professor, who was ‘from the movement,’ came out during the exam to ask my bodyguard who he was with” (cit. in López Romo, 2019: 165).

What we have just read prompts several reflections:

- 1) The four testimonies come from victims of ETA and their surroundings in Gipuzkoa, the province with the greatest weight of radical abertzalismo. They coincide in denouncing the social abandonment they have suffered, which adds to the pain directly derived from the attacks. There, part of the teaching staff, according to the reiteration of critical voices, has shown indifference and even greater closeness toward the perpetrators than toward the victims.
- 2) These problems have extended practically until the present, as illustrated by Adei Carrasco’s harsh account. Therefore, there remains a pending task of delegitimizing terrorism that affects society in general and teachers in particular.
- 3) The victims, far from falling into revenge, have given a display of dignity and civism. Some have managed to reconvert their trauma into experiences from which others can learn. Naiara Zamarreño and Alberto Muñagorri are part of the hundred victim educators that exist in Spain (López Romo & Ibarra Aguirregabiria, 2024: 33).
- 4) Terrorism took root especially in Euskadi and Navarra, where ETA had support that was as minority as it was persistent. But it affected all of Spain, leaving a trail of victims in all the autonomies. Besides ETA, which has been the bloodiest organization, GRAPO and ultraright and parapolice terrorisms also form part of that dark past, while the jihadist threat remains present.

- 5) Although the experiences recounted may seem distant in other latitudes, we can all fall into insensitivity toward vulnerable groups. Therefore, these voices offer warnings of universal value.
- 6) Below, the results of a survey conducted with Spanish secondary school teachers are presented, but it was worth underscoring that it is not just about figures: behind the data there are people who have suffered a lot.

2. The Survey

Between 2021 and 2025, the Memorial Center for the Victims of Terrorism has trained more than 1.300 secondary (ESO) and Baccalaureate teachers from across Spain on how to address terrorism in the classroom. These are courses, some in-person and others online, conducted in collaboration with the education departments of the autonomous communities or with the Ministry of Education.

The training, lasting approximately eight hours, includes a summary of the history of terrorism in Spain, an explanation of the objectives and benefits of this activity, the presentation of materials available to the educational community (teaching units, learning situations, audiovisuals, comics, etc.), and finally, a testimony from a victim educator to demonstrate the pedagogical potential of such an initiative.

Among the experts who participate recurrently are Florencio Domínguez, director of the Memorial; Belén Sanz, deputy director for Support to Victims of Terrorism at the Ministry of the Interior and coordinator of the victim testimony program in classrooms; Raúl López, head of Education at the Memorial; Ricardo Arana, former head of Education at CCOO Euskadi and co-author of teaching units on this topic; and Cristina Cuesta, victim educator. Daughter of Enrique Cuesta, assassinated by the *Comandos Autónomos Anticapitalistas* in San Sebastián in 1982, Cristina was a pioneering voice in working with secondary school students.

The accumulated experience from several years of courses led us to consider it interesting to develop a questionnaire to contrast what the enrolled teachers know and think: their prior background, their needs or shortcomings regarding what institutions or textbook publishers offer, the attitudes they perceive among other teachers, parents, and students, etc.

The form, which is reproduced in full in the final annex of this article, was created using Google Forms and sent to the teachers enrolled in the Memorial's courses during 2025. They had to complete it anonymously and online before receiving the training.

The initial hypothesis was that, although teachers are generally aware of the topic's relevance, they currently lack certain tools that would facilitate its effective handling in the classroom.

The 168 responses received from an equal number of teachers constitute a non-probabilistic sample. Obviously, they do not represent the entire Spanish educational system, but they provide a valid basis for identifying certain trends and allow us to propose a series of final suggestions. The ultimate goal is to contribute to ensuring that the phenomenon of terrorism, omnipresent in our recent history, receives the weight it deserves in educational curricula and in schools.

Title	Organizing Entity	Format	Dates
Pedagogy and Memory in the Face of Terrorism	Junta de Andalucía	Online	18/02/2025 - 20/02/2025
Democratic Memory in the History Classroom	Government of Cantabria	In-person (Santander)	03/03/2025 - 26/03/2025
Analysis and Prevention of Terrorism from the Educational Sphere	Community of Madrid	Online	09/02/2025 - 25/02/2025
Pedagogy and Memory in the Face of Terrorism in the Valencian Community	Generalitat Valenciana, Ministry of Interior, Memorial and FVT	Online	21/10/2025 - 30/10/2025
Memory and Prevention of Terrorism	Memorial and INTEF, Ministry of Educación	In-person (Vitoria)	06/11/2025 - 07/11/2025

Table 1. Teacher training courses in which the survey was distributed to enrollees. **Source:** Own elaboration.

Regarding the profile of the participating teachers, the vast majority work in secondary education, with two primary teachers, two preschool teachers, and one vocational training teacher added. They come from all over Spain, although the geographical representation is not balanced: Valencians (61), Andalusians (52), Madrileños (26), and Cantabrians (12) stand out. Table 1 allows situating the territorial origin of the surveyed individuals. All courses were aimed at teachers from a specific region, with the exception of “Memory and Prevention of Terrorism”. In this last case, the organizers – the Memorial and INTEF (Ministry of Education) – invited three teachers from each autonomous community.

It has not always been possible to determine their specialty, but among those who indicated it, Geography and History teachers predominate (63). There are also teachers of Spanish Language and Literature (13), from the educational guidance department (11), of Religion (8), of Philosophy (5), from teacher training services (5), of Computer Science (4), of Economics (4), and of other languages: English (4), Valencian (3), French (3), and Latin and Greek (3).

The main age cohort corresponds to those born in the 1970s, totaling 64 of the 168 participants. At the time of completing the survey, they were between 46 and 55 years old. This is a group that retains direct memory of terrorism, although more from its final stage than from its beginnings. In 2010, the date of ETA's last assassination, they were between 31 and 40 years old.

3. Teacher's Perceptions

Moving now to the analysis of the responses received, the first question focused on the degree of concern that terrorism generates among teachers.

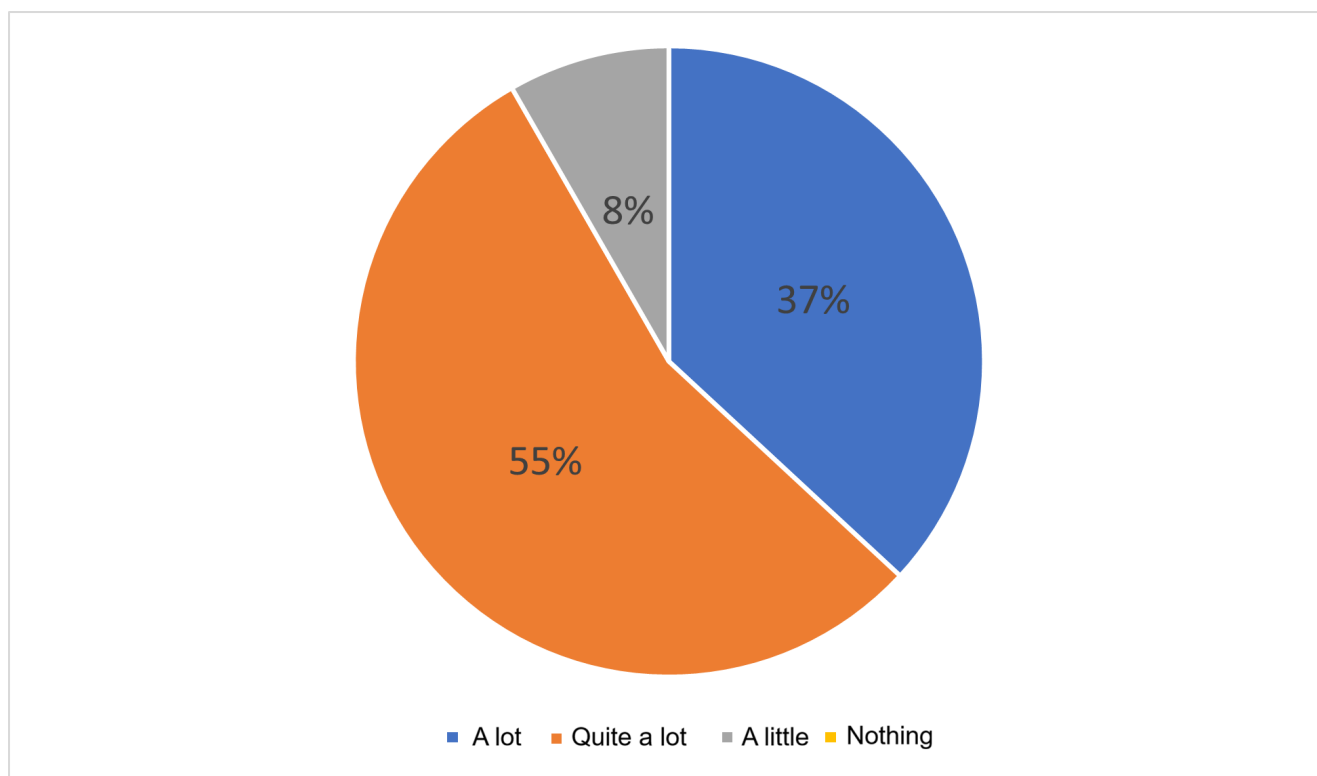


Figure 1. Would you say that terrorism concerns you... **Source:** Own elaboration.

Only 14 of the 168 teachers (8.3%) show little concern, and none claim that terrorism does not concern them at all. The majority demonstrates high sensitivity to the topic, consistent with their voluntary participation in these trainings. In fact, this is a higher level of awareness than average. For comparison, a 2021 survey conducted by the Government of Navarra among ESO students asked: “Would you say that terrorism is a current problem?” 75% responded affirmatively, a notable figure but lower than the 92% of teachers in our survey who are very or quite concerned about this issue (Government of Navarra, 2021: 15).

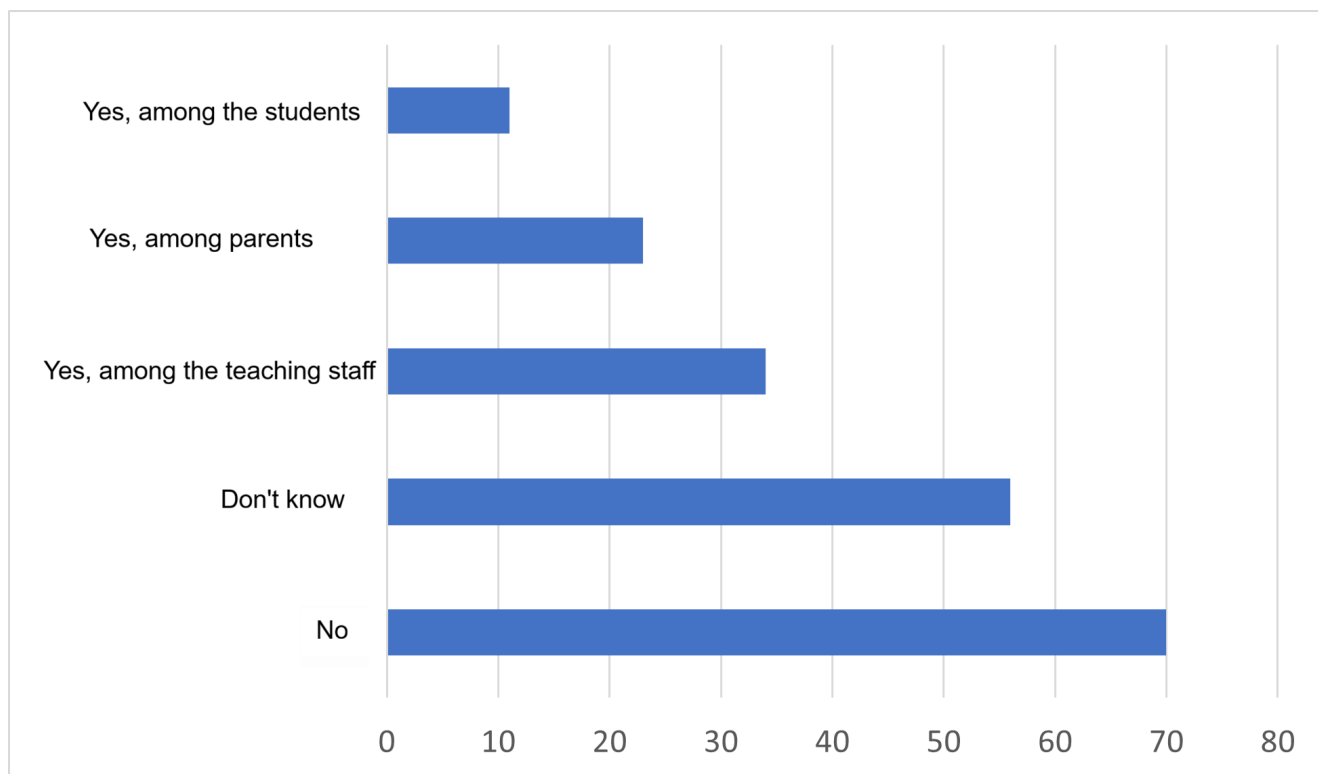


Figure 2. Is there discomfort in addressing the topic of terrorism in classrooms? **Source:** Own elaboration.

This question addresses one of the most relevant problems. Most teachers who perceive discomfort point to prejudices, doubts, or opposition from their colleagues in the staff room, while very few identify this feeling among their students (barely 11 out of 168, 6.5%). More discomfort is also perceived among parents than among students. On the other hand, 41.6% of participants detect no discomfort at all. The results would have been different had this same question been directed exclusively to Basque or Navarrese teachers.

When asked to elaborate on their responses, we gathered diverse opinions. The following comment highlights two key aspects: fear and instrumentalization: “Unfortunately, it created terror among the population and has been highly politicized, which sometimes leads to arguments”. Others emphasize the danger of confusing the part with the whole, as well as the need to act delicately to avoid stigmatization: “There is a risk that students, influenced by prejudices or stereotypes, may associate terrorism with certain ethnic, religious, or national groups, achieving the opposite effect”. The difficulty of maintaining the necessary distance is also noted: “It is a very recent lived topic and remains very current today”. However, in the words of another teacher: “All controversial topics can generate discomfort, but they are the most necessary”.

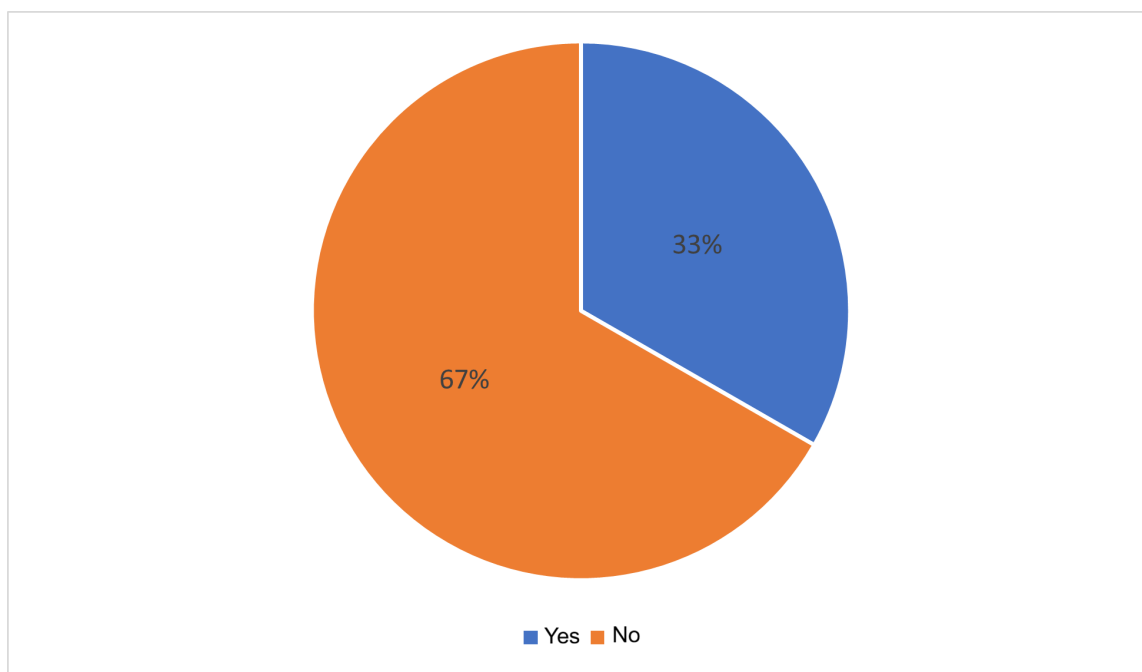


Figure 3. Have you received specific training in education for peace? (in your degree, master's, continuing education courses, etc.). **Source:** Own elaboration.

Education for peace provides a good foundation for addressing topics such as terrorism, as well as related issues like coexistence, tolerance, or bullying prevention. But in general, there is a deficit among teachers in this regard. It is not essential to have such a background, but it would be of great help. Among those who do have it, continuing education courses are mainly mentioned, more than knowledge acquired during the degree or bachelor's, and in some cases, also the master's.

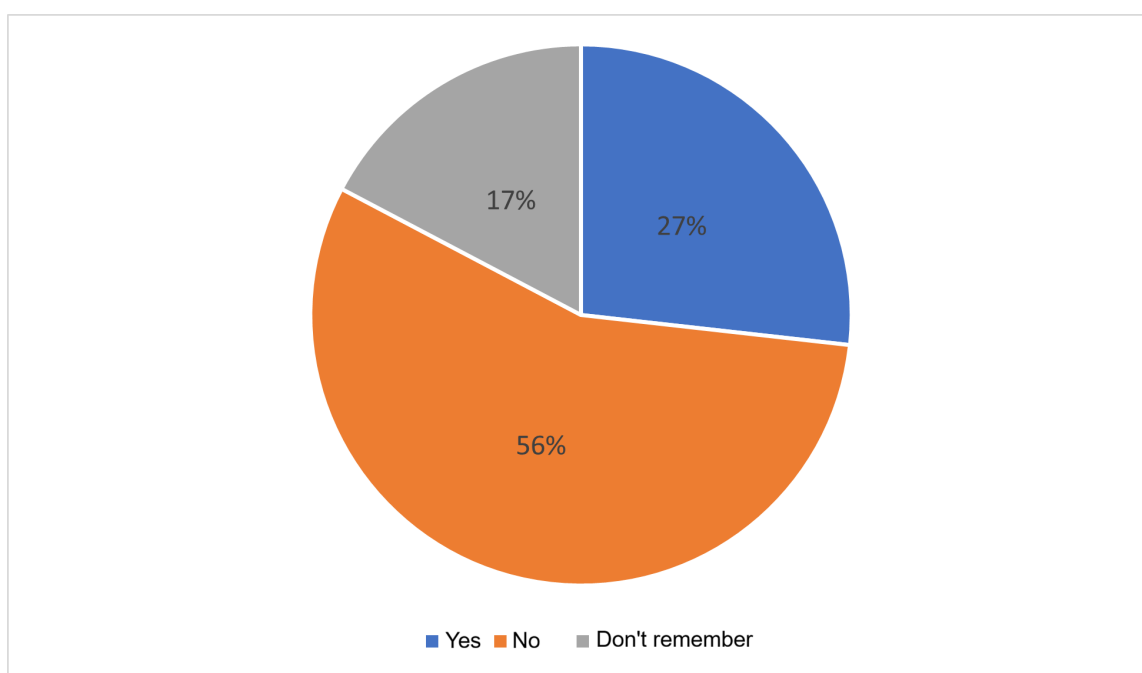


Figure 4. As a student, did you address the topic of terrorism in class? **Source:** Own elaboration.

One in four remembers having addressed the topic in class when they were a student. This is a minority percentage, although it was a violence of great magnitude, active at the time, occupying daily headlines, and therefore difficult to ignore. The incorporation of the topic into formal education is proceeding slowly and gradually, although it can be assumed that it will increase as historical perspective grows, it is considered closed as a cycle, and becomes a subject of study.

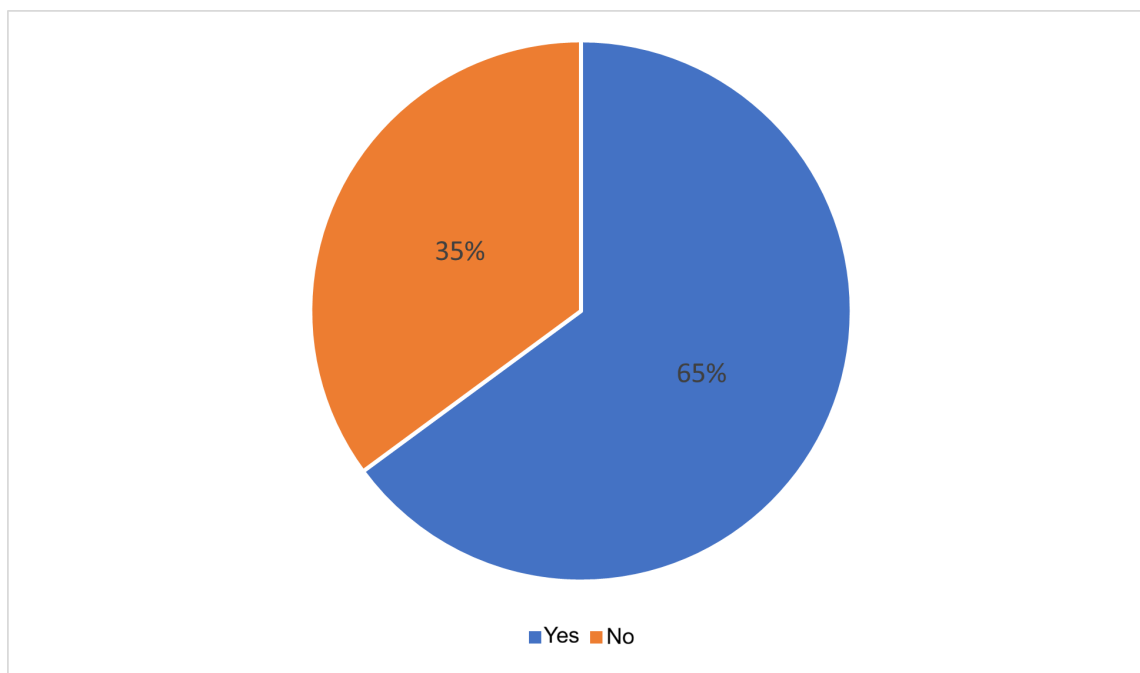


Figure 5. Now as a teacher, do you address the topic of terrorism in class? **Source:** Own elaboration.

35% of the teachers who enroll in courses on education and terrorism still do not apply it in the classroom. It can be assumed that the training will serve as an impetus for them to decide to implement it. The 65% who already do so are well above average. Although data from other regions are lacking, in Euskadi – where it is most needed – barely a quarter of educational centers address human rights issues through the example of the closest politically motivated violence (Eskubidez, 2023: 8-9).

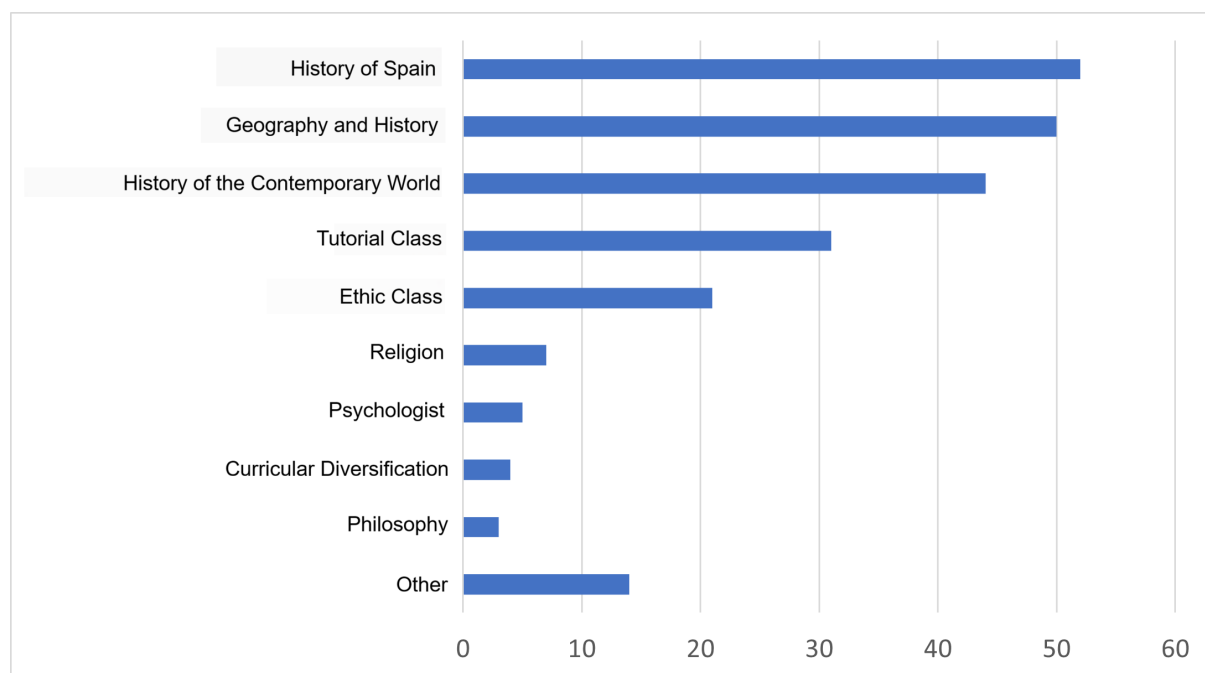


Figure 6. If your answer is yes, in which subject? **Source:** Own elaboration.

In which subjects is it addressed? History subjects predominate: Geography and History in 4th ESO, History of Spain in 2nd Baccalaureate, and Contemporary World History in 1st Baccalaureate, in that order. The notable presence of the topic in tutoring sessions is striking, even above subjects like Ethical Values or Philosophy. This has an explanation: in that space, teachers can carry out activities for group cohesion, address coexistence, prevent violent radicalization, etc. It is an area that offers some margin and freedom, and allows working on an issue that, if better integrated into curricula, would be addressed more frequently in conventional subjects.

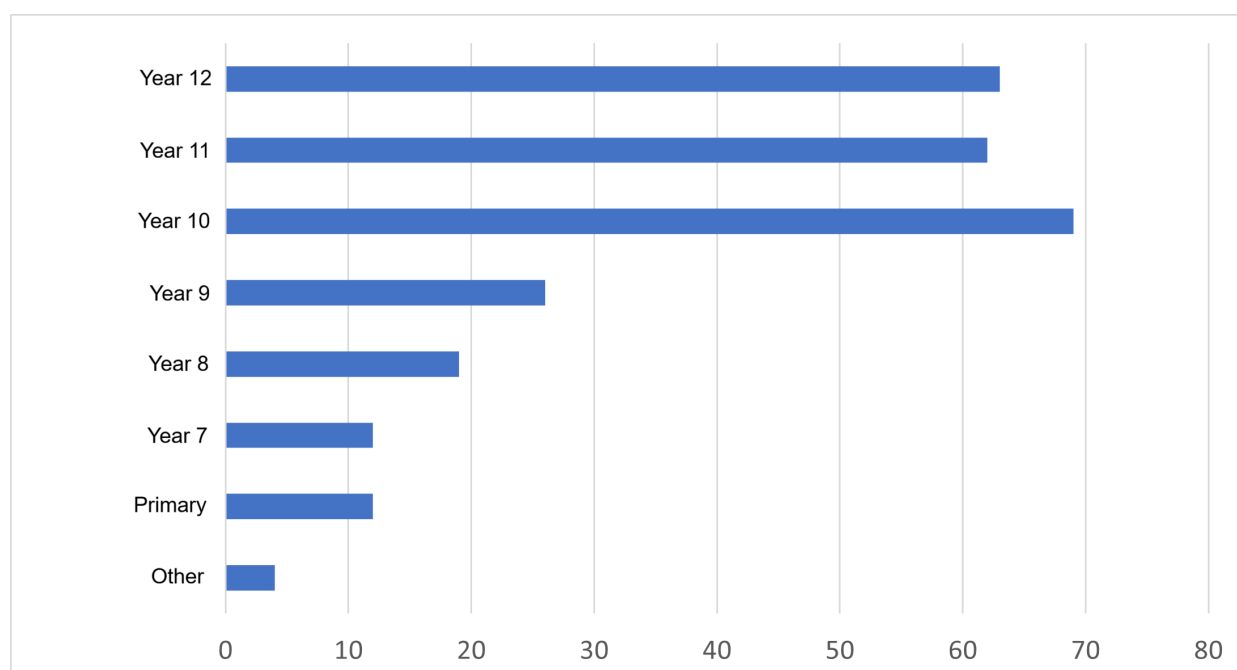


Figure 7. If your answer is yes, in which grade? **Source:** Own elaboration.

The most suitable grade for addressing the topic is 4th ESO. It is the last compulsory level, and most students are already between 15 and 16 years old. Not all students reach senior high school, and moreover, difficulties arise due to the need to prepare numerous contents for the university entrance exam (PAU). Some teachers begin addressing terrorism already from primary or 1st ESO. However, when asked their opinion, the majority considers that the most appropriate is to work on the topic in 4th ESO, chosen by 141 of the 168 participants (83.9%), followed by 1st and 2nd Baccalaureate, with 77.4% and 72.6%, respectively.

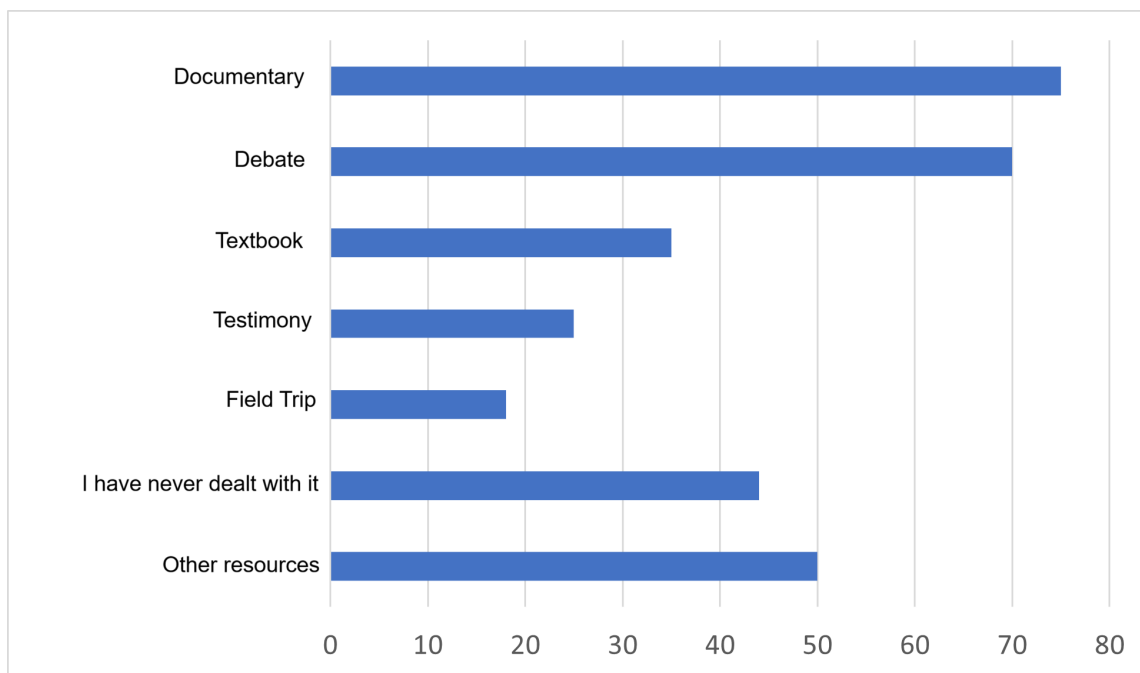


Figure 8. If yes, in what ways have you worked on the topic of terrorism with students? **Source:** Own elaboration.

This question allows us to verify quite concretely what is being done in classrooms and what could be done. Curiously, the majority of teachers (44.6%) resort to movies, documentaries, and series. It is not known for certain if these are the most used resources in class, but the most known and cited works are *Patria* (50), *La infiltrada* (38), and *Maixabel* (18). The preference for audiovisual treatment indicates that terrorism is still not considered an ordinary content within the curriculum.

The second most used method is debate (41.7%), which implies that students should document themselves beforehand, for example, through internet research. Only in third place, and at a considerable distance from the previous two options, appears the textbook (20.8%), a basic resource for teachers, which evidences certain shortcomings in this area. The following question allows us to delve deeper into this last issue.

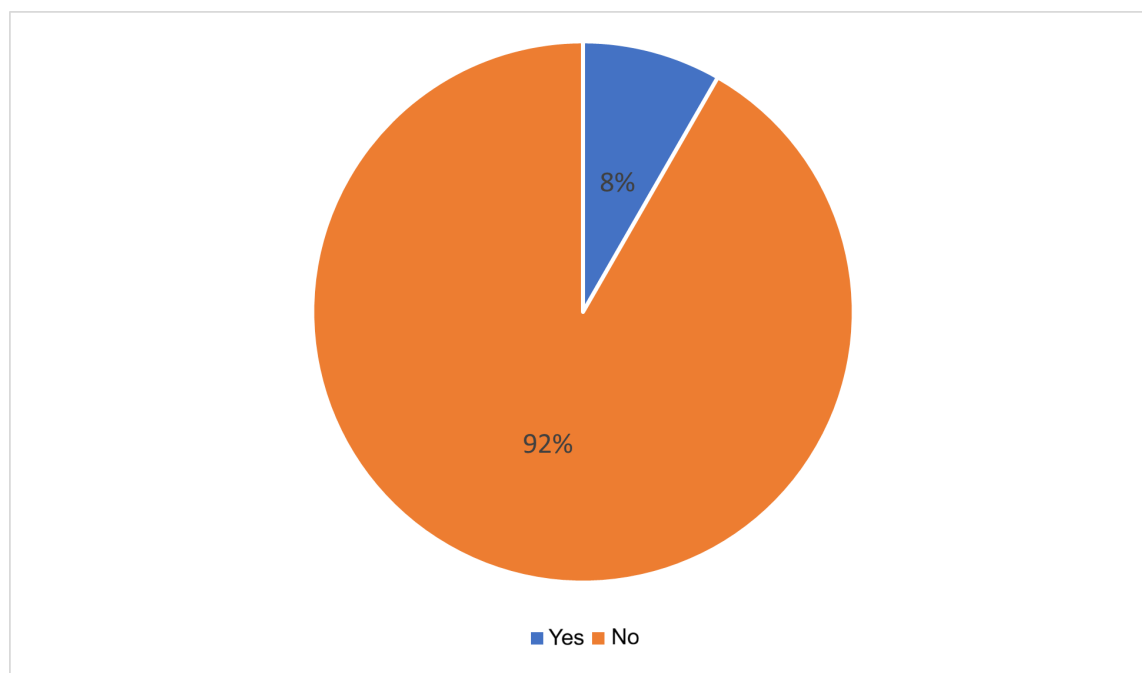


Figure 9. Do you consider that the textbooks you use include sufficient content (information, graphs, photos, activity proposals, testimonies...) on terrorism? **Source:** Own elaboration.

The opinions collected on this are consistent with the fact that an overwhelming percentage of teachers (92%) consider the content on terrorism in textbooks insufficient. Below are some examples that reflect the dominant tone: “It is barely given importance”; “the concept is not addressed”; “it should be addressed with more activities”; “in general the information is superficial”; “because it happens like with all of Spain’s History of the last 60 years. It is always left for the end and many times publishers treat it superficially”.

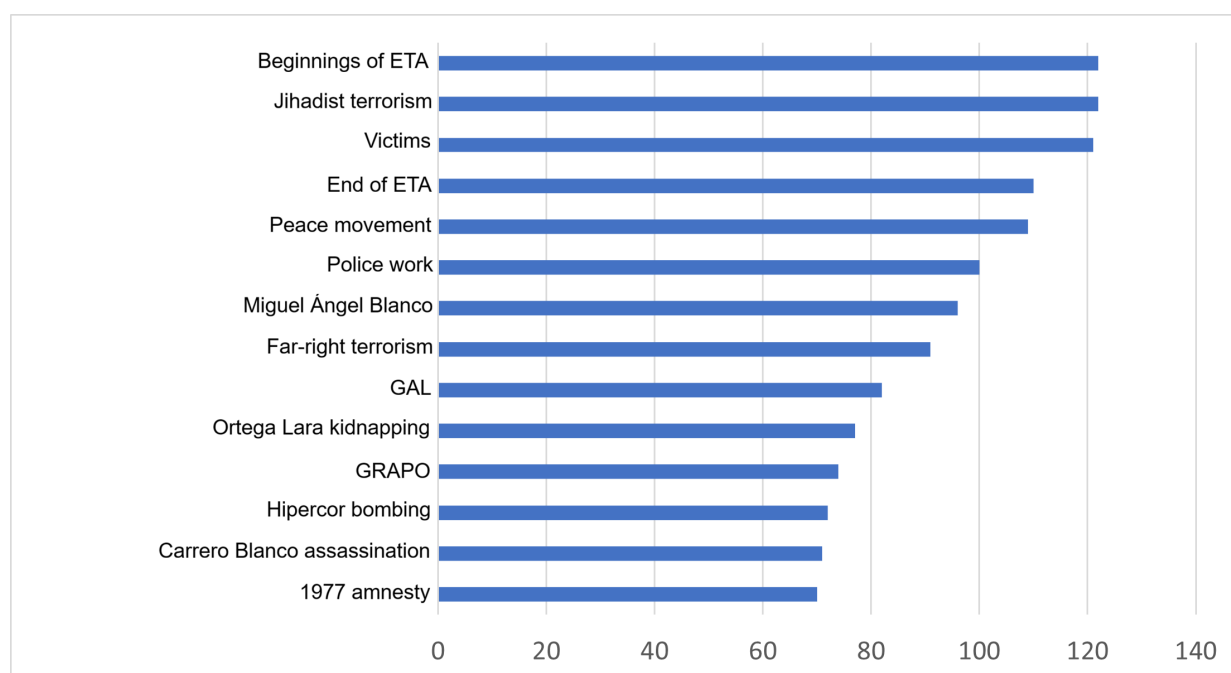


Figure 10. What specific aspects do you think should be addressed in the classroom with students? **Source:** Own elaboration.

What specific aspects do teachers consider should be addressed in the classroom? The majority mention the victims, jihadism, and the origins of ETA. At a second level of relevance appear the end of ETA, the civic and pacifist movement, police work, and the kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco. Approximately half of the respondents also point to the GAL and far-right terrorism, while somewhat fewer mention the activity of GRAPO or the assassination of Carrero Blanco. This last datum is striking, as it is one of the few terrorism-related contents that usually appears in textbooks.

It is also noteworthy that Miguel Ángel Blanco, considered one of the most emblematic victims of ETA and whose kidnapping and murder provoked enormous social upheaval – constituting a historical milestone – is not cited by a higher percentage of teachers (57% do so). Instead, there is a predominant preference for a generic approach to the reality of the victims (72%), over the individualization of specific cases, despite the fact that the latter is often an effective way to deepen any historical or ethical content. Finally, it should be noted that, had this question been posed exclusively to Basque teachers, the presence of the GAL would likely have been greater, being an aspect that, in any case, should also form part of students' knowledge.

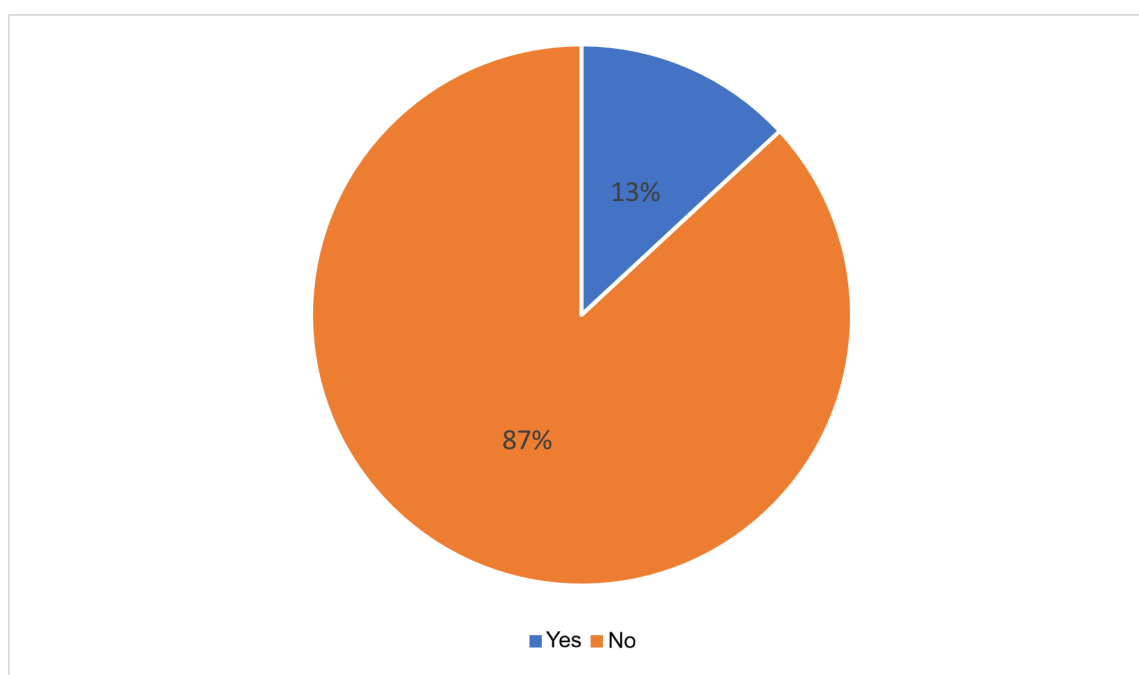


Figure 11. Do you consider that the educational curriculum includes sufficient content on terrorism?

Source: Own elaboration.

One of the main reasons why textbooks address the phenomenon of terrorism insufficiently is that the same occurs in the official curricula on which they are based. This is perceived by a large majority of the surveyed teachers (87%). Among their opinions, messages such as the following are repeated: “lacks depth”; “not addressed enough”; “not included”; “some brushstrokes”; “very much in passing”; “overloaded curriculum”; “it is at the end of the curriculum, which is difficult to reach”.

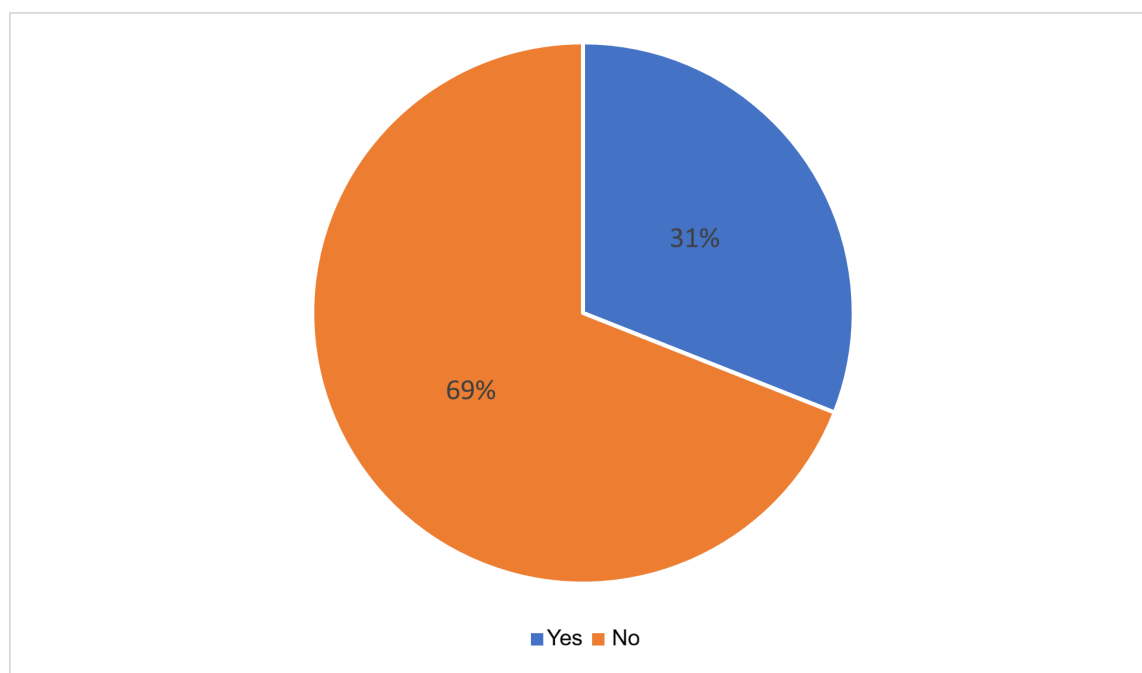


Figure 12. Is there sufficient time throughout the course to address the issue of terrorism in the classroom as it should be? **Source:** Own elaboration.

Beyond aspects that could be resolved, or at least partially corrected, through political initiative or professional involvement, there are also imponderables. The lack of time stands out especially, perceived by 69% of the teaching staff. This issue appears habitually in teachers' comments: "There is not enough time to address all the topics"; "the syllabus is what it is and the time is what it is"; "time is especially lacking"; "especially in senior high school courses, time is insufficient due to the syllabus"; "I think there is time if we work in relation to other things, elaborating our own curriculum and breaking the chronological line a bit". The last comment suggests possible solutions: resorting to transversality and specific treatment. Instead of devoting the same scarce time to each period, a specific aspect could be highlighted for in-depth exploration.

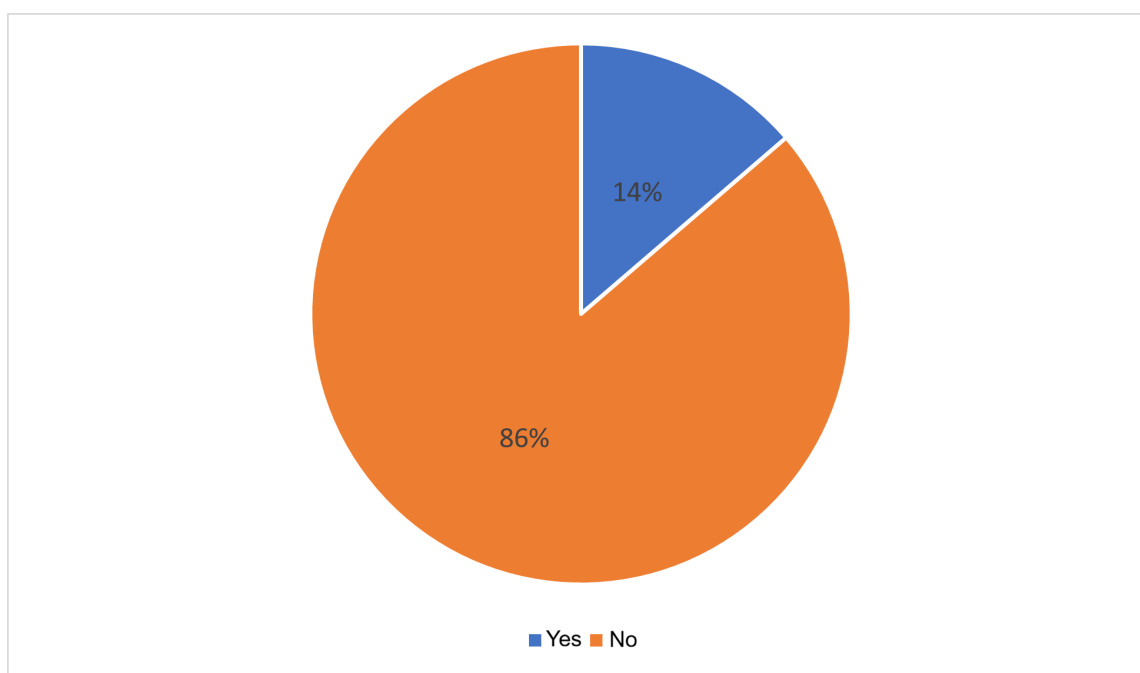


Figure 13. Would you say that you know sufficient resources or teaching materials on terrorism? **Source:** Own elaboration.

It is concerning that only 14% of the teaching staff know sufficient didactic resources. Among the materials cited by this minority are the teaching units of the Memorial, the websites of victims' associations, the RTVE archive, various documentaries, or works by Bakeaz (a Basque NGO focused on peace education). When asked what materials would be necessary or what resources they miss, numerous teachers mention the need for more interactive and audiovisual material.

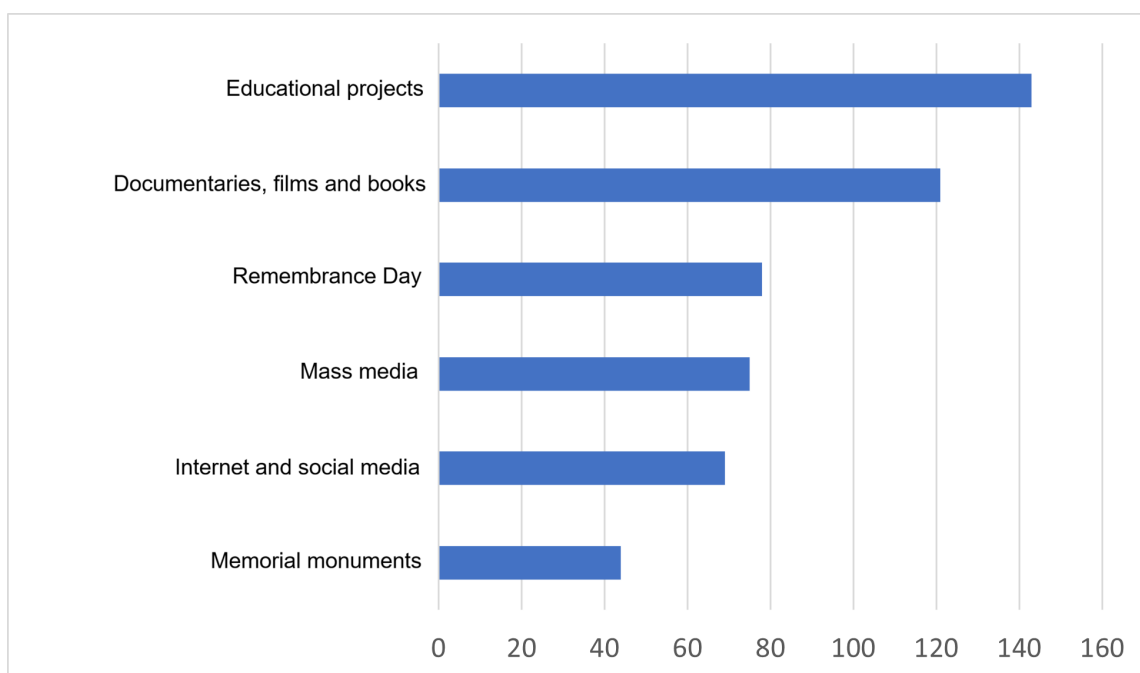


Figure 14. In what ways to “work on the memory of the victims” or “learn from what happened”? **Source:** Own elaboration.

This question leads us beyond the strictly educational sphere, toward teachers' preferences on how to approach this topic in general terms. Nevertheless, the majority option remains the implementation of educational projects (89.4%), ahead of another prominent alternative: the promotion of documentaries, films, and books (75.6%). In contrast, less than half emphasize the need for measures such as monuments, the celebration of a day of memory, or the use of Internet resources – initiatives that, it should be recalled, already exist.

It is logical to think that the preference for educational projects stems from the fact that the responses come from teachers, but this is not an exceptional stance. Other surveys conducted among the general population point in the same direction, reinforcing the idea of education's central role in the social transmission of memory about terrorism. This is confirmed by the Euskobarómetro of July 2017, according to which 62% of Basques consider educational plans the preferred option (Euskobarómetro, 2017: 22).

4. Conclusions: What to Do

The analysis shows that the treatment of terrorism in the educational sphere remains insufficient, despite its relevance in Spain's recent history. Although a majority of the surveyed teachers are aware of the topic's importance and express high concern, there are significant shortcomings in official curricula, textbooks, and knowledge of specific didactic resources. Added to this are structural obstacles, such as lack of time and content overload, especially in senior high school, which hinder its systematic incorporation into the classroom.

The experience gathered in teacher training courses and in the survey of Spanish teachers presented here highlights that terrorism is addressed unevenly and, in many cases, indirectly, resorting more to audiovisual resources, debates, or tutoring sessions than to traditional curricular materials. Also notable is the perception of discomfort in part of the staff and the adult environment, in contrast to lesser resistance from students.

However, terrorism can be addressed as a whole-school project, as it lends itself to a transversal and interdisciplinary treatment. In Geography and History, it allows understanding the temporal evolution of the phenomenon; in Ethical Values, working on human rights; in Philosophy, analyzing the challenges that totalitarianism poses to humanism; in Language and Literature, reading and commenting on victims' testimonies; and likewise, in tutoring sessions and group dynamics, it is possible to contribute to the prevention of violent radicalization when behaviors suggest it. This interdisciplinary approach broadens the formative scope of addressing the topic.

Terrorism can also be tackled through active methodologies, such as cooperative learning, by organizing students into work groups. Likewise, it is possible to resort to innovative methodologies

such as service-learning: for example, inviting students to write open letters or literary compositions addressed to victims, with the aim of making them feel accompanied. In this way, students contribute to the community and perceive the social and civic meaning of the learning acquired in the classroom.

The treatment of terrorism is directly linked to a key competence: civic competence, oriented toward the exercise of responsible citizenship, the assumption of values proper to a democratic culture founded on respect for human rights, and critical reflection on the great ethical problems of our time. Complementarily, this type of activity also contributes to the development of other competences, such as digital competence and linguistic communication competence.

Finally, from a pragmatic perspective, if one had to guide a teacher who must face a broad curriculum in limited time, the recommendation would be clear: invest that time in working with the testimony of a victim of terrorism, duly contextualized beforehand. It is a resource with high pedagogical value, capable of integrating historical, ethical, and civic contents, and of generating reflection among students, in line with the well-known maxim of the 16th-century French humanist Sebastian Castellio: "To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine; it is to kill a man" (Zweig, 2002).

It is worth highlighting that testimonies are especially effective: listening to them contributes to delegitimizing the use of violence in politics, broadening young people's knowledge of the terrorist phenomenon, and generating a change in their perception, bringing them closer to the victims' experience (Jiménez et al., 2024: 28).

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6. Annex. Questionnaire on Terrorism (Teachers)

This questionnaire for secondary school teachers is anonymous, and the information collected will be used exclusively for academic purposes related to the educational work of the Memorial Center for the Victims of Terrorism. We appreciate your collaboration.

Note: Several questions allow the selection of more than one option (multiple response).

*** Indicates that the question is mandatory**

Year of birth*

Educational center*

Subject area or department*

Would you say that terrorism concerns you*

A lot

Quite a bit

A little

Not at all

Have you received specific training on human rights? (in your degree, master's, continuing education courses, etc.)

*

Yes

No

If your answer is yes, where and in what way?

Have you received specific training in education for peace? (in your degree, master's, continuing education courses, etc.)

*

Yes

No

If your answer is yes, where and in what way?

As a student, did you address the topic of terrorism in class?

*

Yes

No

I do not remember

Now as a teacher, do you address the topic of terrorism in class?

*

Yes

No

If your answer is yes, in which subject?

Geography and History

History of Spain

Contemporary World History

Ethical Values

Religion

Philosophy

Psychology

Diversification

Tutoring

Other:

If your answer is yes, in which grade(s)?

Primary

1st ESO

2nd ESO

3rd ESO

4th ESO

1st Baccalaureate

2nd Baccalaureate

Other:

In what ways have you worked on the topic of terrorism with students? *

I have never addressed it

Textbook

Testimony from a victim educator

Field visit (to a monument, museum, or memorial)

Debate

Screening of a documentary or film

Other teaching resources (video game, comic, etc.)

Other:

In which grade(s) do you think it would be appropriate to address the topic of terrorism in the classroom? *

Primary

1st ESO

2nd ESO

3rd ESO

4th ESO

1st Baccalaureate

2nd Baccalaureate

Other:

What specific aspects do you think should be addressed in the classroom with students? *

The origins of ETA

The assassination of Carrero Blanco (ETA)

The GRAPO

Far-right terrorism

The 1977 amnesty

The GAL

The pacifist movement and the social response to terrorism

The Hipercor bombing in Barcelona (ETA)

The kidnapping of José Antonio Ortega Lara (ETA)

The kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco (ETA)

Jihadist terrorism

The 11-M attacks of 2004

Police work against terrorism

The end of ETA

The victims: how many there are, in which period, by which perpetrators...

Other:

Is there discomfort in addressing the topic of terrorism in classrooms? *

No

Yes, among the teaching staff

Yes, among the students

Yes, among parents

I do not know

Other:

Why?

Do you consider that the educational curriculum includes sufficient content on terrorism? *

Yes

No

Why?

Do you consider that the textbooks you use include sufficient content (information, graphs, photos, activity proposals, testimonies...) on terrorism? *

Yes

No

Why?

What do you think we should do in the future regarding our past of political violence? *

Permanently work on the memory of the victims

Learn from what happened and then turn the page

Better not to stir up the past and forget

Other:

If your answer is “work on the memory of the victims” or “learn from what happened”, in what ways?

Educational projects

Monuments

Documentaries, films, and books

Day of Memory

Presence in the media

Internet and social networks

Other:

Have you read books or watched films, series, or documentaries on this topic in recent years? *

Yes

No

Which ones?

Would you say that you know sufficient resources or teaching materials on terrorism?

*

Yes

No

Can you give some examples of materials you know?

What teaching materials would be necessary in this regard? What is lacking or what do you miss?

Is there sufficient time throughout the course to address the issue of terrorism in the classroom as it should be?

*

Yes

No

Any other observations or comments you wish to add.

Victoria De Miguel Yubero

Pedagogy of Death and Terrorism: An International Comparison

Abstract

Death education and terrorism pedagogy are two emerging fields that, although unequally developed, share a common concern: understanding how finitude, political violence and loss are integrated into educational processes and contribute to the formation of democratic citizenship. This article presents an international comparative analysis – focused on 13 European countries – of the presence of death, bereavement and terrorism in educational curricula and policy frameworks. Bibliometric analysis, documentary review and a theoretical framework based on the four approaches of death education are used. Results show two dominant models for the inclusion of death (historical-memorial and psychosocial-preventive) and three main approaches in terrorism pedagogy (commemorative, preventive and citizenship-based). Finally, an integrated model is proposed to articulate terrorism pedagogy through curricular, supportive, phenomenological-evolutionary and meditative-void perspectives. The study concludes that victim centrality, community resilience and conscious education constitute essential pillars to prevent violence, dignify democratic memory and reinforce critical citizenship.

Keywords: death education, terrorism, comparative education, bereavement, democratic memory

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1. Introduction

Death, loss, terrorism, and radicalization are structural phenomena of contemporary societies, especially in Europe, where multiple countries have experienced situations of terrorism, genocide, civil wars, separatist terrorism, and political extremisms throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Although these phenomena have generated profound social, psychological, and political consequences, their presence in the educational sphere continues to be limited, fragmentary, and uneven (de Miguel-Yubero, 2023; Davies, 2009; Papadatou, 2009). The school, as a basic socializing agent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), is not alien to these experiences: it has been a setting, victim, and agent of processes of violence, and at the same time can constitute a privileged space for prevention, democratic memory, and the ethical formation of citizenship.

The pedagogy of death has developed in recent decades a conceptual framework aimed at understanding the educational role of finitude and grief. Its objective is not to address post-traumatic situations or clinical interventions, but to integrate the awareness of finitude, the understanding of death, and the work of grief as transversal formative elements, capable of promoting resilience, human development, and the ethics of compassion (De la Herrán, 2017; Corr, 2019). In parallel, the didactics of terrorism constitutes an emerging field, although still not well consolidated, that seeks to offer educational tools to understand terrorism, its causes, consequences, and effects on victims and communities (Davies, 2018). The relationship between both fields is direct: terrorism is an extreme form of lethal violence, and death – individual and collective – is its most evident consequence, so any pedagogical approach to this phenomenon requires explicitly considering the dimension of finitude.

This article proposes an international comparative analysis that links both fields. To this end, results derived from the documentary review developed within the framework of an academic presentation on pedagogy of death and terrorism are presented, expanded and formalized. Specifically, the presence of death, grief, and terrorism in the legislative frameworks of 13 European countries is studied, as well as the existence of models and approaches that allow articulating a comprehensive educational proposal. The final objective is to offer a solid academic framework, adjusted to the demands of the field of comparative education and critical pedagogy, that allows advancing in the construction of educational policies sensitive to human suffering, memory, and the prevention of violence.

2. Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative design of a documentary and comparative nature, suitable for the analysis of educational policies in international contexts. This approach is grounded in the methodological tradition of comparative education studies, which emphasizes the rigorous

interpretation of official documents and the reconstruction of common and divergent patterns among educational systems (Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). Its purpose is not statistical generalization, but a deep understanding of the normative frameworks that regulate the presence of death, grief, and terrorism in diverse educational spheres.

To this end, a documentary corpus has been constructed composed of the main educational laws, national curricula, and official documents from thirteen European countries: Germany, Portugal, France, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Italy, United Kingdom, Poland, Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark. The selection obeys criteria of geopolitical diversity, normative availability, and historical relevance in relation to political violence or the educational management of collective losses. The breadth of the corpus allows identifying comparative patterns and conceptual models that surpass national specificities.

The analysis procedure consists of a systematic review of the documents through the application of two differentiated semantic families. For the study of the pedagogy of death, a set of eleven terms is used: death, grief, loss, suicide, resilience, finitude, farewell, holocaust, genocide, war, and partial loss. For the didactics of terrorism, a family of fourteen terms is employed: terrorism, victim, radicalization, jihadism, Islamism, extremism, human rights, war, genocide, holocaust, conflict, barbarism, death, and conscience. Both families are applied to the texts through an analysis of presence, frequency, and conceptual orientation, which allows identifying not only explicit mentions, but also relevant implicit approaches.

The analysis is complemented with semantic intensity matrices, constructed from the appearance of terms at different normative levels (organic laws, curricular decrees, pedagogical guidelines), as well as with a qualitative interpretation of their educational function. This method allows distinguishing between punctual mentions, structural references, and integrated approaches, which is key for the identification of pedagogical models in the analyzed countries.

The solidity of the procedure lies in its capacity to combine quantitative approaches (presence and frequency of terms) with qualitative analyses based on the content and pedagogical function of each reference. This hybrid approach allows capturing both the normative structure and the pedagogical and axiological background of each educational system, especially in relation to the transmission of memory, the treatment of loss, and the prevention of extremist violence. Overall, the methodology used provides a solid framework for understanding the position occupied by death – in its individual and collective dimensions – and terrorism within contemporary European educational policies.

3. Theoretical Framework and Analysis of International Legislation

3.1. *The Pedagogy of Death: Conceptual Approach and Frameworks*

The pedagogy of death constitutes an emerging educational field that has been consolidating during the last two decades as a relevant line of research for understanding the presence of finitude, grief, and losses in educational processes (De la Herrán, 2017; Papadatou, 2009). From philosophical anthropology to developmental psychology, death has been considered a constitutive element of human existence (Kübler-Ross, 2005). However, Western education has historically tended to invisibilize it, relegating it to exceptional episodes and clinical interventions, which has hindered the incorporation of a formative, ethical, and humanizing understanding of finitude in school.

In this context, the pedagogy of death is articulated as an approach that transcends emotional support interventions following a death and proposes integrating the awareness of death – individual, collective, and symbolic – in the formative experience. Its purpose is not to pathologize grief nor to psychologize education, but to promote a deep understanding of life, foster resilience, favor moral development, and strengthen students' capacity to face inevitable losses (Corr, 2019). The pedagogy of death also contributes to the creation of a more conscious, critical, and compassionate citizenship, reinforcing the ethical bases of coexistence and social justice.

The conceptual analysis of the pedagogy of death can be structured based on the four frameworks proposed by De la Herrán (2017). These frameworks allow articulating both educational interventions in situations of real loss and curricular, ethical, and formative proposals in contexts of educational normality:

- *Curricular-normalizing*: integrates death as transversal formative content, from history, philosophy, ethics, or social sciences.
- *Educational accompaniment*: oriented to real losses within the school community, facilitating emotional expression and vital reorganization.
- *Phenomenological-evolutionary*: understands death as part of the vital and sociocultural cycle, enabling the transformation of negative meaning toward learning.
- *Meditative-void*: linked to practices of full awareness, attention, compassion, and emotional regulation.

3.2. *Bibliometric and Documentary Analysis of the Pedagogy of Death in International Legislations*

The presence of death, grief, and finitude in European educational normative frameworks constitutes a relevant indicator for evaluating the degree to which educational systems recognize the existential, ethical, and socioemotional dimensions of formation. The comparative documentary

analysis reveals that such presence is highly uneven in Europe and that the incorporation of finitude is articulated through differentiated conceptual models (historical-memorialist and psychosocial-preventive). These models not only respond to pedagogical and historical traditions specific to each country, but also to their sociopolitical trajectories and the traumatic events that have shaped their collective memory.

3.2.1. International Bibliometric Analysis

Bibliometric analysis allows for contextualizing the position occupied by “death education” in the international academic landscape. Although scientific production on death and education has grown significantly since the 2010s, especially in psychology and social sciences journals, the presence of this field in strictly educational journals remains limited (Corr, 2019). This pattern evidences a persistent imbalance: grief and finitude are primarily investigated from clinical or care perspectives, while their pedagogical dimension continues to be underrepresented. The scarcity of educational studies has direct implications for educational policy, as it reduces the likelihood that death will be integrated as formative content in curricula.

The trends collected by De Miguel-Yubero (2023) show a sustained increase in international production, especially around concepts such as *bereavement*, *loss*, *resilience*, and *school bereavement*. However, the volume of comparative or normative production is still marginal. This bibliometric gap explains, in part, why the curricular integration of death in European countries presents considerable conceptual fragmentation. Where research is scarce, so too is educational normativization.

3.2.2. International Documentary Analysis

The documentary analysis of the thirteen European countries studied reveals a normative cartography characterized by structural differences in the way finitude is addressed. The presence of keywords associated with death – grief, loss, resilience, Holocaust, genocide, sudden death, suicide – allows for identifying not only explicit mentions but also curricular orientations, educational values, and political priorities.

Historical-memorialist model. It is present mainly in Germany, Poland, Italy, and Spain. It is characterized by integrating death through the memory of collective traumatic events – Holocaust, world wars, dictatorships, genocides, or terrorism –. In these countries, education on death is closely linked to training in human rights, the analysis of historical violence, and the construction of democratic memory (Assmann, 2011).

Germany is the paradigmatic case. Teaching about the Holocaust is mandatory throughout the territory, and numerous *Länder* have specific materials under the title *Tod und Trauer in der Schule*, aimed at working on loss and grief in educational centers. Poland shows a similar pattern, incorporating contents on memory and education for safety in the subject *Edukacja dla bezpieczeństwa*, where concepts such as genocide, terrorism, civil preparation, and collective resilience are addressed.

In Spain, the LOMLOE incorporates explicit references to democratic memory and requires studying the Holocaust in 4th year of ESO, although the presence of grief or death in a broad sense is less systematic. Integration is carried out mainly through contents in History, Philosophy, and Education in Civic and Ethical Values.

This model has two important pedagogical implications:

(a) death is addressed collectively, through the memory of historical events;

(b) the emotional dimension is approached indirectly, focusing more on ethical and social reflection than on personal accompaniment.

Psychosocial-preventive model: Portugal, France, Ireland, and Norway constitute representative examples of the psychosocial-preventive model. In these countries, death and grief are fundamentally integrated through school policies on emotional well-being, intervention protocols in the face of losses, and programs for suicide prevention or resilience promotion.

Portugal stands out for the normative clarity with which it incorporates terms such as resilience, suicide, finitude, and loss in official documents. France, for its part, articulates a school grief policy recognized internationally, with guides from the Ministry of Education that regulate teacher action in the face of losses and that make explicit reference to terms such as *deuil*, *résilience*, and *accompagnement*. Norway, following the attacks of July 22, 2011, strengthened the preventive and emotional dimension of its curriculum, integrating loss and change as central elements of the *Health and Wellbeing* area. The pedagogical orientation of this model is eminently socioemotional: death is conceived as a phenomenon that requires affective attention, community support, and development of socioemotional skills, rather than as historical or moral content.

Hybrid cases: Spain and Sweden represent hybrid models, in which memorialist elements (Holocaust, democratic memory) coexist with psychosocial proposals (self-esteem, resilience, student well-being). This coexistence reflects both their own cultural influences and the reception of international frameworks (for example, UNESCO recommendations on education for peace and global citizenship). The transversal reading of the results shows some common trends:

- Death rarely appears as explicit curricular content; its presence is usually tangential or indirect.
- Most countries lack a specific policy on school grief.

- The Holocaust is the event with the greatest normative presence in Europe, acting as a gateway for reflection on collective death.
- Resilience appears as an emerging term in countries of northern and western Europe.
- The integration of suicide in curricula, although growing, remains exceptional due to cultural or institutional restrictions.

The comparative analysis allows for identifying two structural patterns:

1. The pedagogy of death in Europe is articulated in a fragmented manner, depending on each country's traumatic history, its sensitivity toward mental health, or its pedagogical tradition.
2. The absence of specific curricular frameworks limits the transformative potential of education for finitude, preventing death from becoming a stable and transversal pedagogical category.

Despite this heterogeneity, the study reveals a key datum: both the historical-memorialist model and the psychosocial-preventive model can function as bases for integrating phenomena of political violence, terrorism, and radicalization in education. Finitude and lethal violence share ethical, emotional, and civic dimensions that require deep, reflective, and sustainable educational frameworks. Thus, the pedagogy of death becomes a valuable conceptual resource for addressing political violence from education, by offering tools to work not only on the collective dimension of loss (memory, history, justice), but also on its personal dimension (grief, resilience, interiority).

3.3. The Didactics of Terrorism: Conceptual Approach

The didactics of terrorism is an emerging field within the education sciences that deals with analyzing how to address terrorism – in its historical, political, ethical, and human dimensions – in formal educational contexts. Unlike approaches focused exclusively on security or police prevention, the didactics of terrorism adopts a pedagogical perspective that understands terrorism as a complex social phenomenon that impacts the life of communities, collective memory, and the experiences of direct and indirect victims (Davies, 2009). Its main purpose is to offer students conceptual and ethical tools to understand terrorism, analyze its causes and consequences, recognize the suffering of victims, and strengthen democratic values against extremist narratives.

From a theoretical point of view, the didactics of terrorism is based on four articulating axes: (1) the multidimensional understanding of terrorism, which includes historical, sociopolitical, ideological, and psychological factors; (2) the centrality of victims, whose voice is considered fundamental to humanize violence and avoid processes of normalization of harm (Centro Memorial de Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2022); (3) the educational prevention of radicalization, understood as the development of

critical thinking, moral competence, and coexistence skills (Davies, 2018); and (4) the promotion of democratic citizenship, based on respect for human rights and the construction of democratic memory.

The field also recognizes the need for a prudent approach, which avoids sensationalism, polarization, and political simplification, situating the treatment of terrorism within safe and respectful pedagogical frameworks. This type of teaching requires institutional planning, specific teacher training, and solid ethical criteria, especially when working with victim testimonies or contents susceptible to generating emotional impact.

3.4. Bibliometric and Documentary Analyses of the Didactics of Terrorism in International Legislations

3.4.1. Bibliometric Analysis

The bibliometric analysis conducted for this study shows that research on the didactics of terrorism remains incipient and scarcely developed compared to other educational fields related to violence or citizenship. Searches in international databases indicate that most works linked to the term *terrorism education* come from fields such as political science, security studies, or the sociology of extremism, while specifically pedagogical production is limited (Davies, 2009, 2018). In this regard, there exists a significant gap between research on radicalization and research on education: whereas the former has grown considerably since 2001, the latter has barely consolidated its own theoretical body.

The data presented in De Miguel-Yubero (2023) confirm this imbalance: the volume of educational publications on terrorism is reduced, fragmented, and generally oriented toward preventive rather than formative frameworks. This bibliometric scarcity conditions the normative presence of terrorism in European curricula, given that curricular innovation usually depends on the available academic production.

3.4.2. Documentary Analysis

Regarding the documentary analysis of educational legislations, a semantic family composed of fourteen terms linked to terrorism was applied (terrorism, victim, radicalization, jihadism, Islamism, extremism, human rights, genocide, war, Holocaust, conflict, barbarism, death, conscience). The results show that the normative presence of terrorism is also highly unequal among countries, although three predominant approaches can be identified.

The first, the commemorative approach, is observed in countries with strong historical experiences of terrorism or political violence, such as Spain, Germany, or Poland. In these cases,

terrorism appears linked to collective memory, and victims occupy a central place in educational policies. Spain represents the most prominent case: the frequency of terms related to terrorism is the highest in the analyzed corpus, partly due to the weight of ETA in recent history and the normative impetus of democratic memory. Germany incorporates terrorism into civic education and historical memory materials, while Poland relates it to citizen security and civil preparedness.

The second approach, the preventive one, characterizes countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Its most distinctive feature is the linkage between education and the prevention of violent radicalization. The United Kingdom constitutes the paradigmatic case with the *Prevent Duty*, which establishes the legal obligation for educational institutions to identify and act upon signs of extremism. France integrates contents on radicalization and citizenship into its curricula following the 2015 attacks, while Belgium and the Netherlands develop institutional programs that combine teacher training, preventive surveillance, and educational resources on extremism.

Finally, the citizenship approach appears in educational systems that integrate terrorism within broad frameworks of human rights, coexistence, and democratic citizenship, such as Ireland, Sweden, Portugal, or Italy. In these countries, terrorism is not addressed primarily from prevention or memory, but as part of the ethical and civic formation of students. The semantic presence of the term is lower, but its orientation is more transversal, linked to competencies in dialogue, cultural diversity, critical thinking, and conflict resolution.

The transversal analysis reveals two relevant trends: (1) terrorism appears less frequently than other traumatic phenomena such as the Holocaust or war; and (2) normative presence is concentrated in countries with their own experiences of terrorism or with national policies for preventing extremism.

Thus, the bibliometric and documentary results indicate that the didactics of terrorism is an underdeveloped field, with unequal curricular presence and normative approaches that depend closely on each country's political history. This scenario underscores the need for specific pedagogical frameworks that allow terrorism to be addressed from education, beyond exclusively securitarian or memorial perspectives.

3.5. Theoretical Articulation: The Didactics of Terrorism from the Pedagogy of Death

The linkage between the pedagogy of death and the didactics of terrorism finds its strongest foundation in the conceptual framework developed in “La educación ante la muerte en contextos escolares afectados por terrorismo” (De Miguel-Yubero, 2023). In that doctoral research, it is demonstrated that experiences of political violence and terrorism generate processes of real, symbolic, and community loss that directly affect school life and require an educational response that transcends mere emotional management. The thesis argues that death – in its individual and collective dimensions

– constitutes a structural pedagogical category and that, in situations of terrorism, education needs to integrate processes of ethical understanding, recognition of victims, construction of democratic memory, and strengthening of community resilience.

From this foundation, the pedagogy of death offers a conceptual scaffolding that allows for pedagogically grounding the didactics of terrorism. The four approaches identified by De la Herrán (2017) and expanded in De Miguel-Yubero's (2023) doctoral thesis – curricular-normalizing, educational accompaniment, phenomenological-evolutionary, and meditative-empty – function as interpretive frameworks that articulate educational responses to lethal violence and its social consequences. This model enables an understanding of the relationship between finitude, trauma, memory, and democratic citizenship, providing a solid structure for addressing terrorism from school with a humanistic, ethical, and critical approach.

3.5.1. Curricular-Normalizing Approach: Integrating Terrorism as Formative Content

In her doctoral thesis, De Miguel-Yubero (2023) argues that death and terrorism can be incorporated transversally into the curriculum through subjects such as History, Philosophy, Civic and Ethical Values, or Education for Citizenship. This approach rejects exceptionality and proposes a pedagogical normalization based on critical reflection on: (a) political violence as a historical and social phenomenon; (b) the processes of dehumanization that enable terrorism; (c) the construction of democratic memory; (d) the recognition of victims' dignity; and (e) contemporary threats derived from hate speech and extremism.

Curricular integration allows terrorism to be situated not only as a political fact, but as a human experience whose understanding requires addressing the finitude, vulnerability, and suffering it generates. Thus, the curricular-normalizing approach connects education on terrorism with the vital learnings derived from the pedagogy of death (De Miguel-Yubero, 2023).

3.5.2. Educational Accompaniment Approach: The School in the Face of the Impact of Terrorism

Educational institutions affected by terrorism require specific accompaniment processes that integrate the emotional, community, and symbolic dimensions of losses (De Miguel-Yubero, 2023). Death associated with attacks not only produces individual grief but also forms of collective and community grief that demand stable pedagogical responses.

This approach entails: (a) educational – not clinical – attention to affected students; (b) sensitive and non-sensationalist communication strategies; (c) care for teaching staff as a key figure

in accompaniment; (d) pedagogical rituals of memory and recognition; and (e) educational continuity as a factor of resilience.

From this perspective, the didactics of terrorism is not limited to explaining the phenomenon but to supporting the educational community in processing the human consequences of violence, articulating what the thesis terms processes of school resymbolization following harm.

3.5.3. Phenomenological-Evolutionary Approach: Democratic Memory and Resignification of Harm

De Miguel-Yubero (2023) identifies that attacks generate biographical, institutional, and social ruptures that can be pedagogically transformed through experiences of memory and ethical recognition. This approach aligns with the phenomenological-evolutionary perspective of the pedagogy of death, according to which negative events can acquire formative meaning when critically elaborated.

Applied to terrorism, this approach involves: (a) fostering an ethical understanding of suffering and violence; (b) creating pedagogical spaces for collective memory; (c) incorporating victim testimonies with an educational – not political – purpose; and (d) promoting empathy, moral reflection, and civic commitment.

It is thus demonstrated that the presence of victims in classrooms – through institutional programs, encounters, or pedagogical narratives – has a profound impact on moral education and on the prevention of indifference and equidistance toward violence (De Miguel-Yubero, 2023; Centro Memorial de Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2022).

3.5.4 Meditative-Empty Approach: Awareness, Self-Care, and Prevention of Polarization

Finally, this author integrates the meditative-empty perspective as a tool to strengthen interiority, emotional regulation, and compassion in contexts marked by hate speech and polarization. This approach, linked to practices of mindfulness, educational silence, and expanded awareness, enables working on essential ethical and human dimensions in the prevention of violent extremism.

Applied to the didactics of terrorism, this approach contributes to: (a) regulating the emotional impact of sensitive contents; (b) reducing reactivity and prejudices; (c) fostering deep listening and critical thinking; (d) cultivating attitudes of respect, care, and compassion; and (e) counteracting dynamics of social polarization.

Interiority is a fundamental element for the construction of critical citizenship in times of symbolic violence and radicalization.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The results obtained from the bibliometric, documentary, and theoretical analyses allow for drawing significant conclusions regarding the presence of death, grief, and terrorism in European educational policies, as well as the potential of the pedagogy of death as an articulating framework for the didactics of terrorism. First, it is confirmed that the educational integration of finitude remains fragmentary, limited, and strongly conditioned by historical, political, and cultural factors rather than by well-founded pedagogical decisions (Corr, 2019). The comparative review shows that death rarely appears as explicit curricular content and that, when it does, it is usually associated either with collective traumatic events or with emotional well-being policies, but not with an integral formative vision.

In relation to the pedagogy of death, the analysis evidences the existence of two major normative models: the historical-memorialist and the psychosocial-preventive. The former, observable in countries such as Germany, Poland, Italy, or Spain, articulates death through the historical memory of traumatic events such as the Holocaust, wars, or terrorism, understanding education on finitude as part of education for democratic citizenship and human rights (Assmann, 2011). Although this approach strengthens collective memory, it tends to relegate the emotional, relational, and vital dimension of grief. The second model, predominant in Portugal, France, Ireland, or Norway, focuses on attention to student well-being, resilience, accompaniment, and grief protocols, recognizing the importance of educational support in the face of real losses (Papadatou, 2009). However, this model shows less development in the area of historical memory, which limits its capacity to address death in its collective dimension.

The coexistence of both models, in some cases in a hybrid manner, suggests that no European educational system has fully integrated death as a transversal pedagogical category, as proposed by the humanistic approach of the pedagogy of death (De la Herrán, 2017). This conceptual deficiency becomes even more evident when analyzing the educational presence of terrorism.

The bibliometric analysis of the didactics of terrorism confirms that this field remains incipient. Scientific production is concentrated predominantly in political sciences and security studies, while pedagogical contributions are scarce and fragmentary (Davies, 2009, 2018). The scarcity of theoretical foundations in education explains the unequal normative presence of terrorism in European educational systems. The documentary analysis developed in this study allows for identifying three predominant approaches: the commemorative, centered on victim memory; the preventive, oriented toward the detection of radicalization; and the citizenship-oriented, which incorporates terrorism within broad frameworks of democratic education and coexistence. However, none of these approaches structurally integrates the emotional, ethical, and existential dimension of the harm produced by terrorism.

In this context, one of the most relevant contributions of this research is to demonstrate that the

pedagogy of death constitutes an appropriate theoretical framework to ground and expand the didactics of terrorism. As argued by De Miguel-Yubero (2023) in her doctoral thesis, educational institutions affected by terrorism require not only institutional protocols but also pedagogical tools capable of addressing processes of individual and collective grief, the reconstruction of meanings after harm, and the ethical resignification of lived experience. The pedagogy of death enables the articulation of these needs through its four fundamental approaches: the curricular-normalizing, the accompaniment, the phenomenological-evolutionary, and the meditative-empty (De la Herrán, 2017).

From the curricular-normalizing approach, terrorism can be addressed transversally in a rigorous, critical, and humanistic manner, avoiding its reduction to sensationalist or exclusively political episodes. From the educational accompaniment approach, the school can provide non-clinical support in the face of the emotional consequences of attacks, promoting community cohesion and mutual care (Papadatou, 2009). The phenomenological-evolutionary approach facilitates an ethical understanding of suffering and enables the transformation of violence into democratic learning, especially through work with victim testimonies, whose pedagogical voice has proven to have a significant impact on moral formation (De Miguel-Yubero, 2023). Finally, the meditative-empty approach contributes to regulating the emotional impact of sensitive contents, reducing polarization, and strengthening compassion – essential competencies for countering hate speech and extremism.

Taken together, these elements allow us to affirm that the articulation between the pedagogy of death and the didactics of terrorism opens an innovative path for designing more coherent, humanistic, and democratic educational policies. The conclusions of this research highlight the need to overcome fragmented approaches, advance toward integrated pedagogical frameworks, and recognize death – both individual and collective – as an essential dimension of education. Only in this way is it possible to build in schools an ethical culture that understands human suffering, dignifies the memory of victims, and strengthens coexistence in politically complex societies.

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Ianire Lanchas Sánchez

“Let Me Tell You...”. Terrorism and Political Violence in the Classroom: A Didactic Application

Abstract

This article presents a project implemented for several years with 10th-grade history students. Interviewing family members and gathering their testimonies offers a valuable educational tool that, while inherently subjective, allows students to critically reflect on conflictive and everyday events in Spain's recent past. This activity aims to encourage students to develop their intrinsic motivation through experiential learning, employing research methods, digital tools, and collaborative work, among other strategies. It helps them explore historical memory, with a particular focus on the political violence experienced in Spain over decades.

Keywords: oral history, memory, Social Sciences, secondary education, terrorism

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1. Introduction

This article explains how, through a classroom research project using an active methodology such as the interview, 4th-year ESO students can come to understand the most recent past of their country.

The interview that students conduct with their grandparents allows them to develop various skills, but above all, it brings them closer to the political violence experienced in their country's recent history, which seems alien to them because their current reality is very different. Many of them live unaware that there was a dictatorship or that there were assassinations, yet they are aware of events occurring in other countries, as if those held greater appeal for them.

What causes our young people to be unaware of what happened here? There are various reasons. One could point out that if what they learn comes from what they read in textbooks, the lack of information would be understandable, since constant changes in legislation have altered educational curricula to the point that in 4th-year ESO students must study nearly four centuries of world history – a task that is impossible to do in depth. Adding to this the fact that content on Spanish history has been substantially reduced compared to that devoted to other countries, it is not easy for them to finish the academic year with a high level of knowledge about what happened here. In other words, there is a palpable lack of information. And if we focus on what can be found about terrorism – specifically ETA – it is practically nonexistent. What little there is, remains superficial, as concepts are mentioned but not developed. Given all this, the students' lack of interest is understandable. It does not appear; it is not mentioned; it does not matter.

First, I will explain the theoretical framework on which the project is based, before describing what led to its implementation. Once the background has been outlined, we will focus on the project itself, detailing the work carried out in each phase and session, the methodology employed, and the evaluation system applied.

The project includes group work, but it would not be complete without using other activities and materials available to us, which will also be discussed here.

2. Theoretical Framework

The general objective is for students to learn about the reality of Spain – and the Basque Country in particular – through microhistory, going beyond textbooks and learning a different research method. As Thompson (1988) put it, they can learn that “oral history returns history to people in their own words” and that “by offering a past, it also helps them find a future of their own making”. The proposal is for students to create a historical framework in which to situate the lives of their family

members, giving voice to them despite being “ordinary people”, as authors such as Studs Terkel (1974) would describe them.

To justify the relevance of this methodology for the proposed project and give it shape, I have drawn on specialists in oral history such as Alessandro Portelli, Paul Thompson, and Allan Nevins, who have been key figures in developing this research method and consolidating archives of testimonies. The project builds on them and on more recent authors to create the necessary theoretical framework for introducing students to what oral history entails. Among these are historians Irene Díaz Martínez, Miren Llona, and Juana María Sancho Gil, who are relevant both for their work on life stories and biographical-narrative research and for creating specialised archives.

Liliana Barela has helped to crystallise a series of ideas for guiding students. In her work (Barela, 2009), she discusses *traumatic memory* and *how to ask questions*. Her contribution has been particularly useful because it is expressed clearly and is easily readable for students, to whom her work is recommended. The aim is not merely to explain the importance of the interview and its methodology or potential complications, but for students themselves to consult written sources and read directly – without intermediaries – the recommendations or guidelines provided by experts. One such guide is that proposed by Beorlegui through the project *Cómo hacer entrevistas* (INTEF, 2024), an initiative that seeks to connect classrooms with the world beyond school walls while explaining, like other texts mentioned, the methodology to follow.

As we can see, there is growing involvement from the Government and various institutions promoting initiatives that help work on memory. However, there is no doubt that to guide students properly, we as teachers must first receive adequate training. It is crucial to raise awareness in teacher education about the need to use these primary sources, as we are gradually losing them and will soon be left working only with written texts selected by others...

Thus, we also draw on the recent work of Ortega (2024), who argues for the relevance of oral sources in the didactics of History. His contribution confirms that such practices are being implemented in both school and university classrooms. Lara (2014), in an earlier study, joins this reflection and highlights the value for researchers of approaching the object of study through interviews.

By learning to recover memory and valuing it through a practice that involves the researcher (in this case, the student), we can address diverse topics, including State terrorism – a controversial subject in the classroom. This practice helps tackle it because the emotional involvement between interviewer and interviewee makes all narrated events feel closer.

This project responds to several commitments sought in this educational stage and subject, as indicated in the LOMLOE and the Democratic Memory Law¹, regarding the “knowledge of Spanish history and democratic memory” (Art. 4, point 1).

1 Law 20/2022, of October 19, on Democratic Memory.

3. Background

The presented project arose from observing that 4th-year ESO students generally lack knowledge of the country's recent history, for various reasons.

First, students have access through their elders to a valuable primary source for understanding the Spanish Civil War, the postwar period, the dictatorship, the transition, democracy, ETA, etc. Grandparents – and in some cases great-grandparents or other relatives – have personally experienced highly significant events over the last 70–90 years. These grandparents come from different regions of the country; some are even foreigners or were exiled for various periods and reasons. Yet young people do not turn to them to learn about these fragments of the past, leaving this source untapped.

Second, there was a lack of suitable materials for learning about the country's history. Textbooks (Asociación Víctimas del Terrorismo, 2022) barely included information on the Civil War or Francoism and even less on ETA or terrorism. These topics were excluded from ESO teaching because they were scheduled for 2nd-year Bachillerato History classes, as per the curriculum. The problem is that not all students continue to Bachillerato, meaning a significant number never address these topics in compulsory education.

These two factors led to the design of a project that would solve the initial problem: students' ignorance of the country's most recent history and events. On one hand, we would use primary sources by retrieving information from elders through interviews; on the other, we would compensate for the lack of textbook content.

Thus, thanks to the interviews conducted in the proposed project, we can better understand those periods from different perspectives, making use of an otherwise wasted source.

Fortunately, over the years new materials have been created that we have incorporated to support teachers in addressing the issue. Among them is the work of authors such as López Romo (2023), education officer at the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism, who has explored how to teach the history of terrorism in schools so that young people understand it and avoid radicalisation. This has resulted in teaching units such as *El terrorismo en España* for 4th-year ESO within the "Memory and Prevention of Terrorism" project².

The project is currently implemented using supporting materials such as the one mentioned, as we will see below.

2 The teaching units are accessible via: http://www.memorialvt.com/wp_content/uploads/2019/06/terrorismo_en_españa_PROFESORADO_WEB.pdf

4. The Project

The project, which has been carried out with 4th-year ESO students since 2015, is titled "Let Me Tell You...". It initially aimed to help students learn about 20th-century Spanish history through their grandparents. Thanks to the project, students felt closer to events such as the Civil War, the dictatorship, or the transition than if they had studied them solely from textbooks. The challenge arose when, in the last four years, grandparents were no longer old enough (most had not lived through the Civil War), prompting a shift along the timeline to emphasise more recent history, addressing topics such as terrorism in general and ETA in particular.

To carry out this project, students use the interview as a historical research method – an approach different from what they are accustomed to in this course. This tool allows for "two different methodological approaches", as González (2015:14) notes: passive oral history and active oral history.

According to this author, the active form is more beneficial for students, as they become investigative agents, interpreting collected material and producing significant cognitive and affective outcomes. The passive form is also necessary, for example, when students refer to pre-recorded interviews as models to guide their own.

My students work in the active mode, in line with González. However, to help them prepare interviews – giving them an idea of how and where to conduct them and what is appropriate – I occasionally use pre-recorded interviews (passive mode).

Throughout the process, adolescents develop the competence of learning to learn, as they must organise their time, locate information in physical or digital repositories and encyclopaedias, and overcome obstacles encountered over the weeks allotted for the task. They also test their *digital* competences³ as well as social and civic competences, learning to listen and engage with local historical heritage.

Finally, but no less importantly, we highlight linguistic communication competence, which includes oral and written comprehension and expression in different contexts.

4.1. Project Objectives

Like any project, this one has specific objectives defined in a document that students read at the start and have available in the shared repository⁴. The objectives are:

3 Regardless of the chosen method, students must record, transcribe, edit, and add music to a video, which is the final product submitted.

4 The school uses Google tools. Information is usually shared via Google Classroom, where documents, videos, and rubrics are posted for students to access as needed.

- To learn to work with primary sources in historical research.
- To learn to design and conduct an interview as an oral history research method.
- To learn about Spanish history in the last century.
- To create intergenerational social relationships.
- To promote the use of ICTs.
- To understand and express ideas orally and in writing.

4.2. Development

The project is designed to be carried out over six weeks (alongside regular classes covering related topics) and includes the following phases:

4.2.1. Initial Phase

This first phase takes place over two classes. In the first, students receive an explanation from me about the project and the methodology to be used. All information is detailed in a document that students work on using shared reading technique⁵. To capture their attention and help them better understand what such a project entails – rescuing elders’ testimonies – I project a video from the TED-Ed platform in class⁶.

Given that they need specific vocabulary (both for searching information and creating content), I explain key terms. We watch video-scribing animations together on concepts such as “terrorism” or “delegitimisation of terrorism”⁷. We collaboratively create a timeline to check their grasp of the most relevant historical moments in recent decades of Spanish history. This timeline guides students when designing the questionnaire, ensuring chronological order.

For homework, students check whether they can find an elder willing to be interviewed. With this preliminary survey, they come to the next class.

5 Technique used in cooperative work.

6 Smith, P. (n.d.). Let’s make history... by recording it. TED-Ed. Retrieved November 24, 2025, from <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/let-s-make-history-by-recording-it-storycorps-ted-prize>. TED-Ed is a platform providing interactive animated educational audiovisual resources on a wide range of topics to support teachers.

7 Animated videos featuring a hand drawing/writing on a whiteboard. I use those created by the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism and the Fernando Buesa Foundation to explain what terrorism is, its history in Spain, and how to delegitimise it: <https://fundacionfernandobuesa.com/web/video-scribing/>

In the second session, students form groups of their choice⁸ (not exceeding four members – five if class size requires it), where they propose their candidate (if they have one). The group decides whether to interview one person or several⁹.

Once organised, students begin planning and designing the research project. They draft initial interview content and define the format of the final product.

4.2.2. Development Phase: The Interview

"It is obligatory to research the topics to be addressed with the interviewee, preparing a script with a list of ideas to cover during the meeting" (Mariezkurrena 2008:231). They should start by establishing the interviewee's date and place of birth to delimit the chronological and spatial framework.

Searching for this information and visual support to construct the historical context surrounding the interviewee is not always appealing to students. This is the more traditional research part. Despite their enthusiasm for creating their own product and unleashing creativity, this aspect has been the most challenging over the years. Students struggle to start searching and reading; they are impatient and prefer immediate answers. At least, that has been my experience.

Simultaneously, while some group members research historical facts, others design the interview, creating the set of questions. The project's objective must not be forgotten: to learn recent national history through grandparents' experiences. Therefore, they should prepare questions about everyday life in the interviewee's hometown, schooling, games, food, meeting and marrying partners – anything to get to know their elders – but questions about Franco, the transition, democracy, terrorism, or ETA must also be included, seeking elders' opinions on these issues. Vocabulary must be carefully chosen for appropriate communication.

Students have two class sessions for research and question design, though more time will be needed outside class. These sessions are used to resolve doubts, make corrections¹⁰, guide searches, and address emerging problems. Supervision during these sessions is essential.

Most interviewees are "ordinary" people without public lives. Yet they are important because through them students learn about everyday life when their grandparents were children or teenagers.

8 Occasionally, some students struggle to find a group, requiring teacher intervention to suggest suitable partners; such "forced" alliances often benefit everyone. Exceptionally, at a student's request, individual work has been allowed. The most recent example (2024-25) involved a student handling "sensitive information" who preferred to work alone, including private viewing of the final product (e.g., political issues or experiences the interviewee wished to keep private).

9 If no second-degree relatives are available, students may interview another close relative, neighbour, or acquaintance willing to participate.

10 We apply the "flipped classroom" methodology: students work at home, and in class I guide, correct, and support them.

As the interview progresses chronologically, students discover interesting details about first jobs, city life, married life, etc.

4.2.3. Implementation Phase

Once I approve a well-formulated, organised questionnaire with a solid historical framework, it is time for action.

The interview must always prioritise the interviewee's well-being. First, confirm whether the person wishes to appear on camera; if not, only audio is recorded¹¹, to document the work and allow reference for refining the final product.

Beyond image concerns, the ideal location – agreed with the interviewee (living room, kitchen, terrace) – must be comfortable, especially for the person being interviewed, who needs to feel at ease recalling memories that may discomfort, move, or please them; various emotions may surface. This relates to the traumatic memory mentioned earlier.

Questions must be direct yet respectful. Students must be aware they are engaging with someone whose feelings and memories will be temporarily stirred. We dedicate part of a class to explaining – via presentation and audiovisual examples – how to behave during the interview. They are reminded to practise active listening, allowing free expression without judgement, reading body language to detect discomfort and subtly move on, or noticing fatigue and offering a break... Many details must be considered (Thompson, 1988:221-242), but only basic guidance is provided, remembering these are 4th-year ESO students likely undertaking such work for the first time.

1.1.4. Editing the Interview

Once the interview is completed and all necessary accompanying material gathered¹², students select the programme best suited to their needs for editing¹³. They create a montage using family photos and/or online archives, music, and voice-over commentary to provide narrative continuity. The aim is to tell the story with the interviewee as protagonist of the past six or seven decades.

11 A dedicated recorder may be less intrusive. Students must know how to use it and test it beforehand. If using a mobile phone, ensure sufficient storage for a nearly two-hour interview.

12 It is advisable to ask interviewees if they have photos or documents (letters, press clippings) they are willing to share.

13 As teacher, I provide programme options and discuss limitations (e.g., editing time restrictions or watermarks requiring payment). New platforms emerge yearly, and students are adept at finding tools that suit their needs.

The submitted video must highlight key interview moments: anecdotes of daily life, feelings, evaluations of specific historical events (political regimes, coups, the March 3, 1976 events in Vitoria¹⁴, terrorist acts, voting in democracy, etc.). As noted, music must accompany the narration, evoking¹⁵ memories for the interviewee without interfering with the interview audio.

Students intersperse off-screen commentary as images of the interviewee or located photos appear. At the end, they must include reflections on what they learned, difficulties overcome, and lessons gained.

4.2.5. Presentation Phase

After weeks of work, videos are presented to the class, though unfortunately only partially due to length and time constraints; we use two extra sessions for viewing. As teacher, I review them fully to appreciate effort and originality, learn from proposals, and evaluate using rubrics provided from the start.

Interviewees are invited to the school. If they accept, they attend the classroom, allowing further questions or additional details.

4.2.6. Evaluation

Students are assessed based on several elements in the evaluation rubrics provided from the outset. All sections and tasks must be completed for the final product to be submitted on the deadline.

One rubric evaluates daily group work, another attitude towards the task (including self-reflection), and a third the final product, as shown in Figure 1.

14 The Armed Police killed five striking workers – an event that marked the city's recent history.

15 I refer to music played in village squares on Sunday dances, or heard on the radio – music that transports listeners to the past when viewing the work.

Civil War Project (ESO4)	EXPERT	ADVANCED	INTERMEDIATE	BEGINNER	
	4	3	2	1	WEIGHT
Accuracy of Content	All facts in the video are accurate.	99-90% of the facts in the video are accurate.	89-80% of the facts in the video are accurate.	Fewer than 80% of the facts in the video are accurate.	30%
Task accomplishment (length, context, images, etc.)	Students complete all the tasks (90-100%)	Students complete the 80-90% of the tasks	Students complete 60-70% of the tasks	Students complete less than the 60% of the tasks	30%
Creativity	The video shows considerable originality and inventiveness. The content and ideas are presented in a unique and interesting way.	The video shows some originality and inventiveness. The content and ideas are presented in an interesting way.	The video shows an attempt at originality and inventiveness on 1-2 parts.	The video is a rehash of other people's ideas and/or graphics and shows very little attempt at original thought.	10%
Attractiveness	The video has exceptionally attractive formatting (IMAGES) and well-organized information.	The video has attractive formatting (IMAGES) and well-organized information.	The video has well-organized information or attractive formatting (not both things) .	The video formatting and organization of material are confusing to the viewer.	10%
Audio/ Music	The audio in the video is clear. Music is appropriate.	The audio is pretty clear. The music used in the video is good, but doesn't match very well with the product	The music doesn't match at all with the product. There are some noises in the background.	The video doesn't have music at all/ the music/ sound is not well recorded/ the music/ noises doesn't allow the message to be heard	10%
Delivery time	Students finish the exercise before the deadline	Students finish the exercise just in the deadline	The students finish the exercise the following day(s) of the deadline	The students don't finish the exercise. They leave it incomplete.	10%

Figure 1. Evaluation rubric for the project's final product. **Source:** author's own elaboration

5. Supporting Activities and Materials

While the project aims for students to learn national history from the Civil War onward, in the last three years we have placed special emphasis on understanding terrorism, as explained throughout this document. Interviews provide irreplaceable data and foster intergenerational connection with grandparents.

Two activities complement the study of Spanish history, both focused on terrorism and ETA. The first is a guided visit to the Memorial Centre for the Victims of Terrorism. The second is a talk at the school by an educator who is a victim of terrorism¹⁶.

Since starting the project, we have enjoyed two such experiences: visits by Antonio Miguel Utrera, victim of jihadist terrorism (11-M 2004 attacks), and Koldo San Martín, son of Civil Guard José San Martín Bretón, assassinated by ETA in Getxo in 1992.

In addition to activities, we use specific supporting materials, especially for addressing terrorism in Spain: learning situations from the “Memory and Prevention of Terrorism” programme and the video-scribing mentioned in the initial phase (INTEF, 2025). Music by national and international artists addressing terrorism or specific events, literature (poems, novels), and cinema (increasingly prominent in recent years) are also sources for contextualising, reflecting, or illustrating. These are teacher-proposed resources, though students' suggestions are welcome.

¹⁶ For over 10 years the school has participated in Adi-adian (Listen attentively), the Basque Government programme featuring in-person testimonies from victims of terrorism and political violence, but only with Bachillerato students. The Memorial proposed extending in to 4th-year ESO organising events either at the school of the centre itself.

6. Conclusions

Undoubtedly, a project requires time for planning, implementation, and evaluation. But it is worthwhile. Stepping outside conventional lessons allows growth for both students and teachers. No two classes are alike, even when teaching the same content, and daily challenges vary greatly.

Over the years, this project has led students to explore family pasts, uncover secrets, and awaken the desire to create songs and poems while reconnecting with elders in ways they had not done – or not for a long time.

Discussing politics, dictatorship, and terrorism has helped them mature and think, learning about elders' daily lives – how hard rural life was, regrets about not studying or travelling more, fears of rapid changes in technology...

It prompts them to question their reality: whether a new dictatorship or terrorist acts are possible today. It makes them view the world – and their own world – differently. Ultimately, it remains a classroom task requiring collective contribution and team decision-making.

I admit initial doubts about how 4th-year ESO students would behave when meeting educator-victims and their maturity for the project. However, the experience has been immensely rewarding for all.

Regarding victim-educator visits, students listened respectfully, asked pertinent and interesting questions, which speakers answered generously and naturally. Adolescents felt grateful for these life examples in their school; several personally greeted speakers afterward.

To break the barrier of perceiving the issue as distant and alien, the visit to the Memorial Centre allowed students to leave the classroom and engage with the topic in a specialised centre through diverse audiovisual formats. They were deeply affected by police recordings, the recreation of Ortega Lara's hideout, imagining the anguish in such a small space for so long, viewing seized weapons, forged documents... They read extensively, examined posters and photos, asked questions... The visit was attentive, reflective, and silent, fully engaging with what the space offered.

Like any project, improvements are needed; as a teacher, I learn daily and adjust details. I conclude by recalling López Romo (2023) on the importance of educating about terrorism: "Educating about terrorism is highly relevant: both for the historical weight the phenomenon has had in Spain and for the opportunities it offers to foster values of respect, pluralism, and empathy with those who have suffered unjustly" (López Romo, 2023).

Efforts must continue to ensure textbooks include these aspects as guides and support for teachers. Creating projects and learning situations is part of teachers' work in adapting materials, but constant creation is unsustainable; institutional and publisher support is needed for high-quality, ready-to-use resources.

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BOKO HARAM



ORGANIZATION TYPE:

Non-state, insurgent, terrorist

IDEOLOGY:

Salafi-jihadist, sunni

FOUNDERS:

Mohammed Yusuf

MAIN LEADERS:

Mohammed Yusuf, Abubakar Shekau, Bakura Doro

PLACES OF ACTUATION:

Nigeria, Tchad, Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso

YEARS OF ACTIVITY:

2009 to present

ALLIANCES AND SYMPATHIZERS:

AQIM (formerly), DAESH (formerly in one of the factions)

ESTIMATED MEMBERS:

1000-7000

Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l Jihad al-Islam, also known as JAS, is the original faction of Boko Haram, a terrorist group that split in 2016 into two main factions: the aforementioned JAS, and ISWAP (a faction loyal to Daesh). Boko Haram was founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf as a peaceful religious sect in Maiduguri (Borno Province, Nigeria), albeit with extremist ideologies. Yusuf's death in 2009 marked a shift towards the use of violent and terrorist actions after the rise to power of its most charismatic leader, Abubakar Shekau.

Throughout its existence, and due to internal divisions within the group, Boko Haram has formed alliances with various terrorist groups. Between 2007 and 2015, for example, it cooperated with AQIM, Ansaru, Ansar Dine, and other Sahel groups for training and weapons. In 2015, it pledged allegiance to Daesh, temporarily renaming itself its West African province, until the split that occurred in 2016. Since then, Boko Haram (JAS) has been an enemy of ISWAP (which continues to pledge allegiance to Daesh and is considered its West African affiliate and wilayah). Both factions frequently engage in violent clashes, to the point that Abubakar Shekau was killed in one of these confrontations by ISWAP members.

Throughout its existence, Boko Haram has been characterized as one of the most violent and ruthless terrorist organizations internationally, especially in its area of operation, carrying out suicide attacks, kidnappings, clashes with the government, and raids on civilian populations. Although it is not possible to know the total number of victims caused by the group, the most optimistic estimates range between 40,000 and 50,000 people, and the most pessimistic between 52,000 and 62,000.

The kidnapping at Chibok school, 14-15th April 2014

Introduction

The mass abduction of 276 female students from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, carried out by the insurgent group Boko Haram on the night of April 14–15, 2014, stands as one of the most emblematic and tragic episodes of jihadist terrorism in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa, and globally in terms of educational environments being targeted by terrorist groups. This incident not only exposed deep structural vulnerabilities in educational security, girls' human rights, and governance in the context of prolonged armed conflict, but also sparked an unprecedented international mobilization, symbolized by the global #BringBackOurGirls campaign, which involved political leaders, celebrities, and civil society organizations in a collective demand for rescue and justice.

As of December 15, 2025, approximately 90-91 of the abducted young women remain in captivity or missing, according to reports from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and organizations such as Enough is Enough (EiE) Nigeria, published in 2025. This article provides a chronological and analytical overview of the event's development, framed within the historical context of the Boko Haram insurgency, the operational dynamics of the attack, national and international responses, the liberation processes, and the long-term repercussions in terms of security, gender, and education.

The Chibok abduction was not an isolated event, but rather the culmination of a systematic strategy of selective violence against female education, aligned with Boko Haram's fundamentalist ideology, which rejects secular Western education as a form of moral corruption and cultural imposition. This pattern has continued, with more than 1,500 documented school abductions since 2014, highlighting persistent systemic failures in preventing such acts and protecting children in conflict zones.



Figure 1. Screenshot extracted from a video issued by Boko Haram that shows some of the kidnapped girls

Historical and contextual background

To fully understand the Chibok kidnapping, it is essential to analyse the emergence and evolution of *Jama'at Ahl al-Sunna li Da'wa wa-l Jihad*, commonly known as Boko Haram. Founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, the group initially operated as a Salafist sectarian movement that promoted a rigorous interpretation of Sunni Islam. It attracted marginalized youth from northern Nigeria through its relentless criticism of state corruption, economic inequality, and Western cultural influence. Yusuf preached that secular education (*boko*) was *haram* (forbidden), arguing that it promoted values contrary to Sharia and fostered dependence on non-Islamic systems.

The group's radicalization accelerated after Yusuf's extrajudicial execution in July 2009 during an armed uprising that resulted in nearly 800 deaths. Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram adopted more aggressive terrorist tactics, including female suicide bombings, public executions, and operational alliances with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and later with the Islamic State. Between 2010 and 2014, Boko Haram escalated its operations, shifting from localized attacks to significant territorial control in northeastern Nigeria, where it proclaimed a "caliphate" in captured areas. This period was marked by a series of massacres targeting educational institutions, setting a clear precedent for selective violence. Examples include the attack on Mamudo Secondary

School in July 2013, where 42 students and one teacher were killed, and the Federal College of Gujba in September 2013, with 44 student victims. These incidents reflected the group's view of schools as symbols of forbidden "Western education" and vehicles for female emancipation, contrary to its extremist ideology.



Figure 2. Then Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, in the attack's responsibility claiming video

Nigeria's socioeconomic and political context contributed to the group's vulnerability. The predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani north has historically suffered economic marginalization compared to the oil-rich, Christian south, leading to high poverty rates, youth unemployment, and regional resentments. These perceived grievances were exploited by Boko Haram for recruitment. Additionally, endemic corruption in the Nigerian armed forces – including systematic diversion of funds for equipment and salaries – severely weakened the state's response capacity, allowing the group to consolidate strongholds in remote areas like the Sambisa Forest, a 60.000 km² nature reserve turned operational centre.

In May 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, deploying additional troops and restricting communications. However, these measures were often characterized by abuses against civilians, failing to contain the insurgency and, in some cases, alienating local communities and even driving some toward the terrorist group. By 2014, Boko Haram had developed a multifaceted strategy of mass kidnappings, used for forced recruitment,

imposed marriages, prisoner negotiations, and ideological propaganda, exploiting ethnic-religious divisions in a nation with over 250 ethnic groups and historical tensions between the Muslim north and Christian south.

Development of the attack

The attack on the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok was a meticulously planned operation amid growing insecurity. The school had been closed for the four weeks prior due to insurgent threats but was exceptionally reopened to allow students from multiple localities to take their final physics exams for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Although around 530 girls were registered, only 276 were in the boarding house that fateful night, aged between 16 and 18, mostly from Christian communities, though with a Muslim minority.

Several critical prior warnings were systematically ignored. Local residents received calls from neighbouring villages alerting them to an approaching armed convoy, and it was later documented that Nigerian armed forces had received a warning at least four hours in advance but did not send reinforcements, citing resource shortages due to commitments elsewhere. The school lacked direct military protection; only two civilian guards were present, who fled upon detecting the threat. Simultaneously, an insurgent detachment distracted security forces in central Chibok by opening fire on 17 personnel, forcing their temporary retreat.

The assault began around 11:30 p.m. on April 14. A large contingent of Boko Haram militants, disguised in Nigerian military uniforms to create confusion, stormed the school complex using trucks, motorcycles, and heavy weaponry. Initially, the apparent objective was to loot agricultural machinery and food supplies from the school warehouse – a common pattern in insurgent operations for logistical sustenance. However, upon discovering the students, the attackers decided to kidnap them, aligning with their ideological strategy against female education. The raid lasted approximately five hours, during which militants deliberately set fire to school buildings, dormitories, and adjacent homes, creating widespread panic and covering their retreat. In sporadic clashes, one soldier and one police officer were killed, while the local guard – consisting of about 15 poorly equipped personnel – was quickly outnumbered and outgunned.

The insurgents employed psychological deception tactics: they presented themselves as government forces arriving to “evacuate” the girls for safety reasons, separating them from any male personnel and ordering them to gather in the courtyard. Some students were loaded directly into three initial trucks, while others were forced to walk several kilometres along rural paths until additional

vehicles arrived. During the transfer to hideouts in the Sambisa Forest, Lake Chad, or the Gwoza Mountains – areas under effective Boko Haram control – 57 girls managed to escape by jumping from moving vehicles, hiding in dense vegetation, or returning to their communities on foot after days of exhausting walking.

Testimonies from the escapees reveal disturbing details: one militant interrogated the captives about their involvement in Western education, declaring that Boko Haram would “re-educate” them according to strict Islamic precepts. The attack coincided with a bomb attack at a bus terminal in Abuja that killed at least 88 people, illustrating the group’s simultaneous operational capacity and exposing serious deficiencies in national intelligence and security coordination.

In the immediate hours and days following, distressed parents and local vigilantes organized improvised searches in the Sambisa Forest but were unsuccessful due to the terrain’s dangers under insurgent control. The Nigerian army initially spread false information, claiming most of the girls had been freed through military operations – a statement retracted after strong protests from families and activists. On May 5, 2014, Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility in a video, justifying the act with selective interpretations of the Quran and declaring that the girls would be “sold in the market” as slaves, emphasizing that their place was marriage, not education. A subsequent video released on May 12 showed about 130 girls covered in hijabs and chadors, reciting Quranic verses under evident coercion, with Shekau conditioning any release on exchanges for imprisoned commanders.

In the following months, Boko Haram intensified kidnappings as a consolidated tactic: incidents in May and June 2014 involved dozens more, serving psychological warfare, recruitment, and funding through ransoms.

National and international responses to the attack

The initial government response under President Goodluck Jonathan was widely criticized for its slowness, minimization, and suspicions of political manipulation, with accusations that the incident was fabricated to destabilize the government ahead of elections. Local protests organized by parents and communities prompted a belated official acknowledgment. In May 2014, a presidential investigative committee was established, though its results were seen as ineffective and opaque.

Internationally, condemnation was immediate and unanimous. The UN Security Council issued resolutions threatening sanctions against Boko Haram, while countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, France, China, and Israel offered technical assistance, including satellites, drones, and intelligence equipment. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign, originating from a local tweet on April 23, 2014, went viral globally, amassing millions of interactions and mobilizing figures like Michelle Obama and Pope Francis.

The campaign emerged from educated middle-class Nigerian activists, combining digital efforts with daily physical protests in Abuja despite occasional repression. Its transnational expansion raised awareness about the attack, indirectly contributing to Jonathan's electoral defeat in 2015 and pressuring for security reforms.

Processes of release, rehabilitation, and persistent challenges

Releases began with the 57 immediate escapes. Subsequent negotiations mediated by the International Red Cross and governments such as Switzerland resulted in controversial exchanges: 21 girls in October 2016 and 82 in May 2017, in return for detained insurgents and reported payments. Individual rescues continued sporadically, with notable cases including Lydia Simon in April 2024 and Ehi Abdul in June 2024.

In September 2025, the federal government announced an allocation of nearly 1.85 billion naira (approximately over one million euros) for education and rehabilitation of the rescued girls. However, many survivors face severe community stigmatization, profound psychological trauma, social reintegration difficulties, and, in some cases, persistent forced marriages or children born in captivity. As of December 2025, 91 schoolgirls remain missing, with rescue efforts limited by operational risks and internal divisions among insurgent factions.

The kidnapping has perpetuated a chronic educational crisis, with mass school closures, female dropout rates, and over 1.700 subsequent kidnappings. Initiatives like the Safe Schools Declaration have suffered from corruption and ineffective implementation. Socially, it has intensified stigma against survivors of sexual violence and mass displacements. Politically, it exposed institutional weaknesses, influencing government transitions and counterterrorism strategies. Globally, it has contributed to the development of international policies on child protection in conflicts, although school kidnappings persist in 2025.

The abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls exemplifies the deep intersections of religious extremism, gender inequality, and state fragility in postcolonial contexts. More than eleven years after the event, the existence of nearly 100 captives underscores the urgency of renewed national and international commitments for effective rescue, comprehensive rehabilitation, and structural prevention, demanding holistic approaches that address not only security symptoms but also the socioeconomic roots of the conflict.



Figure 3. One of the numerous acts carried out demanding the release of the kidnapped girls under the slogan “#BringBackOurGirls”

EPHEMERIS



16TH DECEMBER 2014

Militants from the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) attack the Army Public School in Peshawar (Pakistan), killing 149 people, of whom 132 are children. The attack is claimed as revenge against the Pakistani army and its operations in tribal areas.

1



14TH APRIL 2014

Boko Haram kidnaps 276 students (mostly Christian girls) from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria. The group justifies the attack due to its radical opposition to "Western education". Many of the girls remain missing or in captivity more than a decade later.

2



2ND APRIL 2015

Members of Al Shabaab storm Garissa University in Kenya, taking the lives of 148 people (mainly Christian students) and holding hostages for hours. The group selects its victims according to their religion before executing them.

3



22ND OCTOBER 2015

A young Swedish white supremacist and neo-Nazi enters Kronan school in Trollhättan (Sweden) armed with a sword, killing three people and injuring two. The attacker selected victims based on their non-European appearance (immigrants) and committed suicide after being shot by police.

4



7TH DECEMBER 2017

A 21-year-old with online ties to white supremacy, neo-Nazism, and incel ideology carries out a shooting at Aztec High School (New Mexico, USA), killing two students and injuring several others before committing suicide. Several organizations attribute the attack to far-right motivations due to his neo-Nazi publications and body symbols.

5



19TH FEBRUARY 2018

Boko Haram kidnaps more than 110 girls from the Government Girls Technical School in Dapchi, Yobe State, Nigeria. Five die during the kidnapping, while the majority are released days later under government pressure.

6



8TH MAY 2021

Several explosive attacks (including a car bomb) near Sayed ul-Shuhada school in Kabul, Afghanistan, kill more than 85 people (mostly female students) and injure hundreds. The attack is attributed to the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province (ISIS-K or ISKP).

7



23RD MARCH 2022

The Taliban regime in Afghanistan issues a decree closing secondary schools for girls across the country, breaking the promise of reopening announced days earlier. This measure institutionalizes the ban on secondary and higher education for women, depriving more than one million of access to it.

8



26 NOVEMBER 2023

JNIM militants attack the town of Djibo in Burkina Faso, killing at least 40 civilians. The ambush affects educational infrastructure and contributes to the mass closure of schools in the northern zone due to jihadist terrorist terror, in a campaign that has destroyed hundreds of rural centers.

9



30TH SEPTEMBER 2023

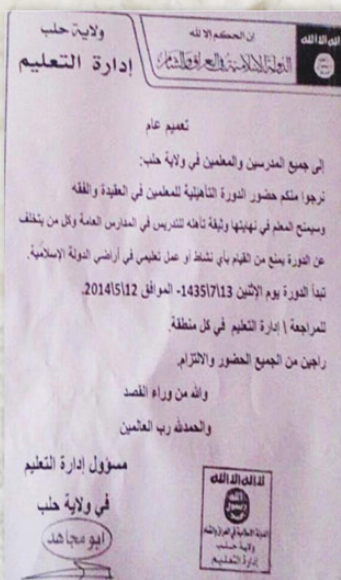
A suicide bombing at the Kaaj educational center (Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood, Kabul, Afghanistan) kills more than 50 people (mostly female and girl students from the Hazara ethnic group) and injures more than 100. The Islamic State-Khorasan group (ISKP) claims the attack against the Hazara minority.

10

DID YOU KNOW THAT...?

In September 2025, the al-Qaeda-affiliated jihadist group *Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)* imposed a **blockade on fuel imports** in Mali, attacking tanker convoys, kidnapping drivers, and burning vehicles. This blockade, which lasted for months, led to a severe fuel shortage in the capital, Bamako, and other regions, paralyzing public and private transportation.

As a result, the military government **suspended classes in all schools** and universities across the country starting in late October 2025, initially for two weeks (until November 9), due to the inability of teachers and students to travel. The measure affected millions of students and teachers, exacerbating a pre-existing education crisis: by June 2025, **more than 2,000 schools were already closed** due to insecurity, **impacting some 600,000 children**.

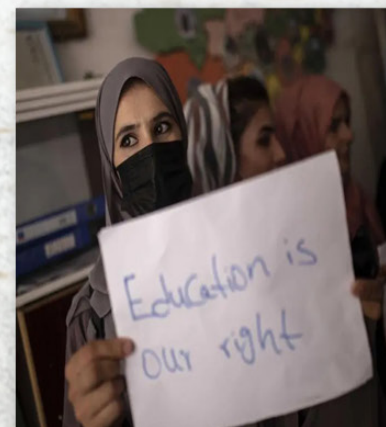


Daesh limited education to nine years: five years of primary school and four years of secondary school, with subsequent selection for colleges or institutes. It banned subjects such as drawing, music, nationalism, French, history, philosophy, and social studies, which it considered corrupting. It introduced subjects such as the **Quran, hadiths, fiqh, Shari'ah, Sira, and aqidah, all under Salafist-jihadist interpretation**. It replaced physical education with "jihadist training", fostering military skills from an early age. Geography was reduced to physical aspects and the Caliphate's wilayats, isolating external perspectives. This approach transformed schools into centers of ideology, prioritizing loyalty over general knowledge.

In the case of **teachers**, those without experience were required to attend a ten-month training institute **focused on aqidah and Salafist methodology**. Previous teachers were required to complete a two-month Shari'ah course and sign a statement of "repentance" for non-aligned teachings. Prospective university students faced a 15-day course and exam requiring a minimum score of 70% for admission to the institute. This purged any potential past influences, transforming educators into loyal propagators. The indoctrination was bidirectional, reinforcing doctrinal uniformity in both teachers and students.

Since August 2021, the **Taliban have maintained a ban** on secondary and higher education for girls and women, making Afghanistan the only country with this gender-based restriction. The measure began in secondary schools in September 2021 and was extended to universities in December 2022, **affecting more than 2.2 million girls**. The Taliban justify the ban with the need for a "proper Islamic environment" and strict segregation, promising reopenings that never materialize.

Instead of secular education, they **promote religious madrasas** controlled by them, focused on rigorous Islamic studies and jihadist indoctrination, limiting non-aligned sciences, mathematics, and history. As a form of resistance to these measures, underground classes and online platforms have emerged, but the Taliban plan to restrict internet and digital access by 2025 to prevent "immorality." Cuts at the Ministry of Education mainly affect female teachers.



In collaboration with:



And Why Not Education?

Iñigo Pascual

It was a Wednesday like any other. After the usual early rise and morning routines, my father and I got into the family car to head to our respective obligations. The radio announced 7:45 a.m. He was 44 and I was 17 when, barely 500 metres into the journey, a white Seat 124 blocked our path, forcing us to stop. Two ETA members got out and, together with another positioned between two vehicles, shot my father at less than two metres. The attack lasted about 20 seconds, and my father, riddled with bullet holes throughout his body, died instantly, without my being able to say goodbye to him while he was still alive.

My life, already affected – since the first ETA threats, my father had become a different person – collapsed entirely. The attack was followed by four dark years, a free fall. When you can fall no lower, there came some six or seven years of false recovery and, finally – and this is rhetorical – a hundred years of solitude.

The solitude of victims. Have you seen the short film *27 minutos*? It depicts the attack that ended with the ETA assassination of the couple from Cádiz. When Antonio (an off-duty Civil Guard at the time) and his girlfriend Hortensia were shot by an ETA commando in 1979 in Beasain (Gipuzkoa). The crime is cruel; the solitude of the victims is too. The short reflects the behaviour of a series of citizen stereotypes: priest, widow, housewife, shepherd, self-employed worker, father and son. Society – at least Basque and Navarre society in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s – took, at best, a certain distance from many victims.

Iñigo Pascual, Educator-victim. Son of Ángel Pascual, director of the Lemoniz nuclear power plant project, assassinated by ETA on 5 May 1982.

New attacks, new shattered families, wounded, extorted, kidnapped, and exiled people remind the victim of their condition. It is difficult to escape that cycle; at least it was for me. I believe I have discovered that, for those victims who are ready, recounting what happened to them and, ultimately, being listened to is important. That is how, about a dozen years ago, my involvement as a victim in communication began, and my eventual transformation into an educator-victim.

I have been asked on numerous occasions what an educator-victim is. Though it may seem unbelievable, I am not sure I have a reliable answer. First, the noun phrase used to designate me – educator-victim – seems overstated if it refers to my person. In plain terms, I would say we are victims who approach groups of young people in the final years of ESO and upper secondary education to recount our experiences as victims.

The account seeks to bring the audience closer to what really happened, without exaggeration, without self-aggrandisement, without prior assumptions or influences of any kind – while drawing out those general rules that indicate what to do or not do when facing situations similar to the victim's. Incidentally, the victim is not an active subject but a passive one; they were simply passing by and/or others decided for them. The victim plays a lottery with odds of about 1 in 500.000 of “winning” yet they do – and it is not a prize, a trip, an apartment... it is death, pain, or both. A great deal of both. In that society I referred to earlier, mixing death, pain, and solitude makes survival difficult. That is why the educator-victim always wins, because in the centre they visit they receive much of what they lost as victims: namely, empathy and understanding, respect and active listening, recognition.

Throughout my life as an educator-victim, I can now recount countless experiences. I have spoken to older people and very young ones, to people of all ideologies, to politicians and journalists, to secondary and university students. I have done so in public, subsidised, and private centres. With students more oriented towards humanities and also towards sciences. With those facing eviction and with students considered lost causes. To all of them I have opened a small corner within myself, within that perhaps mistreated victim who understood almost nothing around them, but who has been fortunate enough to move forward and work through their grief sufficiently to be able to tell the story.

Because, ultimately, all victims want to turn the page. To do so, we need – insist, all of us – the same four things: truth, memory, dignity, and justice. Believe me: those values are still far from being fully realised. Most victims have not received justice or have received poor-quality justice. As for truth, the narrative of ETA's accomplices remains that of a supposed struggle for freedom against an oppressive State. But no struggle justifies murder. Most young people do not even know who Miguel Ángel Blanco is, one of ETA's most emblematic victims, so I dare not imagine the ignorance about the rest. And finally, dignity... Tributes to ETA members, graffiti

such as “Gora ETA” or “ETA mátalos”, the desecration of victims’ graves... all that remains an open wound.

In the world I have left to live, I have little faith in justice or in politics to unite wills and resolve some of our problems. With a society so polarised and divided – even among victims themselves – little hope remains for us, which is why I title this article “And Why Not Education?” They, the students, with their clear gaze and future still to build, may perhaps work and fight to prevent all that which should never have existed.

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 - Second level sections must be numbered and in italics (1.1).
 - Third level sections must be numbered and underlined (1.1.).
 - Conclusions
 - Bibliographic references arranged alphabetically.
- The text must follow Arial 12 style with 1.5 line spacing. Double space will not be used except in the heading of each main section. Tabs will be avoided, with exceptions. The paper must present a justified alignment.
- Citations longer than four lines must be tabulated and spaced from the upper and lower paragraphs.
- The citation model will be based on APA format, adding in the text in parentheses the surname(s) of the authors along with the year of publication of the work and the page, if necessary (González, 2015:35). It will be fully cited in the final section of bibliographic references. Footnotes will be reserved for clarifications, comments or punctuations, and used with moderation.
- Numerically ordered tables or graphs may be included. All of them must have a short description beginning with FIGURE X. (FIGURE 4. EVOLUTION TABLE OF ATTACKS). It will be necessary to indicate the origin of the source at the end of the description, whether it is from another author or self-elaborated (SOURCE: own elaboration).

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