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## Chapter

# What Predictors Explain Holocaust and Human Rights Education in Spain? A Study with in-Service Secondary School Teachers

*Delfín Ortega-Sánchez and César Barba-Alonso*

## Abstract

From the perspective of the pedagogy of teaching collective trauma, and the educational dialogue between historical memory and contemporary social responsibility, this research seeks to determine the socio-demographic, formative and didactic factors that explain the teaching of the Holocaust and Human Rights education in a sample of Spanish secondary school teachers ( $n = 1125$ ). Through a non-experimental, cross-sectional, explanatory and predictive design, and the application of the instrument *Teaching the Holocaust and Human Rights Education* (THRE), the results obtained show that the initial and on-going training of teachers is one of the explanatory axes of the curricular inclusion of the Holocaust and Human Rights as specific contents of education for democratic citizenship. Age, gender and level of teacher education, on the other hand, are not proposed as explanatory factors for the inclusion of Holocaust and human rights as specific content in education for democratic citizenship.

**Keywords:** holocaust teaching, human rights education, secondary education, in-service teachers, secondary school teachers

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Why teach the holocaust?

The importance of establishing a set of formative foundations to guide the selection of strategies and content on the Holocaust has been one of the most evident findings of educational research. The answers to the question *why teach the Holocaust* have been manifold. According to Totten et al. [1], some of them could be specified as why, how, what, when and where the Holocaust took place; examining the nature, purpose and structure of governments; studying human behaviour; and developing awareness of the value of pluralism and diversity in pluralistic societies. The extreme human rights violations of the Jewish Holocaust constitute a central focus for the defence and treatment of democratic principles, and the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict. The rationality of these justifications or aims lies, in part, in the

simplicity of the processes, the geographical reductionism and mono-cultural perspectives perceived by students about the Holocaust [2], or in the general weakness of their knowledge [3].

This multiplicity of responses and the objectives of their teaching have presented divergences between the educational appropriateness of their historical disciplinary purposes, and the emphasis on their readings in the field of citizenship and moral education. Both didactic positions result, consequently, in the division between those who defend the historical disciplinary approach to Holocaust education and those who advocate, as a priority, its moral, civic-social and emotional educational purposes. From this perspective, there seems to be a concern in certain geographical contexts, such as the UK, that 'the Holocaust is regularly identified for its *cross*-curricular potential and/or commonly approached by teachers with reference to *trans*-disciplinary teaching aims' ([4], p. 266) with 'present-oriented' or 'instrumentalising the past' educational consequences.

## 1.2 Teachers' conceptions of the holocaust and holocaust education

Secondary school teachers' conceptions of the Holocaust and its teaching have recently been analysed in politically conflictual contexts such as Greek Cypriot [5]. Their results report the presence of both moral and historical orientations in teachers' discourses on Holocaust education. However, 'it is shown that teachers often oscillate between these two orientations rather than 'choosing' one or the other. In other words, one orientation may be foregrounded, while the other is backgrounded and vice versa' (p. 20).

In this vein, Gross's research [6] on the treatment of the traumatic war confrontation in Poland revealed moral, historical and professional motivating factors for teaching and learning about the Holocaust. Similarly, Mann's study [7] addressed French teachers' intergenerational memories of the Holocaust and the Second World War as an influential personal factor in their classroom approach to these contents.

## 1.3 Students' conceptions of the holocaust and learning about it

Students' attitudes and behavioural, cognitive and emotional engagement with Holocaust-related content, particularly refugee students, have been explored by Kempner [8] for the British case. His results show higher levels of understanding among refugee students and the identification of anti-Semitic manifestations in their contemporary form.

Flennegård's [9] research on Swedish field trips to Holocaust memorial sites has reported their usefulness for the acquisition of Holocaust-related learning content and purposes. Measurement of historical knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and, specifically, the significance of Auschwitz and the general camp system among British students ( $n = 8000$ ) also show the existence of misinterpretations and misrepresentations around their narratives [10].

Despite its educational recognition and curricular significance, and the presence of not very encouraging educational indicators in the Anglo-Saxon sphere, studies and research from the Ibero-American sphere are non-existent. From the perspective of the pedagogy of teaching collective traumas, and the educational dialogue between historical memory and contemporary social responsibility [11], this research formulates the following research question: What socio-demographic, formative and didactic causes explain the justification of Holocaust and human rights education as an intrinsic part of the curriculum of education for democratic citizenship in Spain?

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Participants

Based on a non-probabilistic convenience sample, 1125 Spanish secondary school teachers with the following socio-demographic characteristics agreed to participate (Table 1).

### 2.2 Instrument

The research applies the instrument *Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education* (THRE) [12]. This instrument is constructed on the basis of a statement on the relevance of teaching about the Holocaust and human rights education as a specific curricular part of education for democratic citizenship, and is accompanied by four socio-demographic variables (age, educational level [undergraduate-postgraduate], gender [female-male] and existence-inexistence of previous initial and/or on-going training in the field of human rights education). It also includes a variable linked to the teachers' didactic positions on controversial issues in the social sciences classroom as an effective part of their teaching programmes or, failing that, not relevant in these programmes. The six variables assume a dichotomous nominal nature.

### 2.3 Design and procedure

This study is developed in non-experimental designs of a cross-sectional nature and at the explanatory and predictive levels of research, insofar as it seeks to reveal the socio-demographic, formative and didactic causes of the phenomenon or event of interest, and its level of occurrence.

The questionnaire was administered by email and hosted on the free *Google Forms* application. Teachers received the questionnaire in their institutional email, and were informed of the purpose of the research study and the confidentiality with which the answers would be treated. They were also asked for their consent to use their answers in the study. The questionnaire was administered from December 2020 to January 2023.

### 2.4 Data analysis

In order to identify causal relationships between the independent variables (age, educational level, gender, previous training and didactic positioning of teachers in relation to controversial issues), and the relevance of Holocaust and human rights education in education for democratic citizenship, we conducted a binary logistic regression analysis. Once the assumptions of logistic regression (absence of the

	Women	Men	Total
	$f_i (p_i)$	$f_i (p_i)$	$f_i (p_i)$
Under or equal to 45 years of age	314 (27.9)	163 (14.5)	477 (42.4)
46 years of age or older	403 (35.8)	245 (21.8)	648 (57.6)
Total	717 (63.7)	408 (36.3)	1125 (100)

**Table 1.**  
*Socio-demographic characteristics.*

linearity principle, independence of error and non-existence of multicollinearity among the variables) are verified, we seek to reveal the predictive capacity of the socio-demographic variables and of the didactic stances on the relevance of teaching the Holocaust and its specific link to human rights education.

### 3. Results

The omnibus test reports a Chi-square significance of less than .05 ( $\chi^2_{(5, n = 1125)} = 386.845, p = <.001$ ), evidence that the model constructed can explain the relevance of Holocaust and human rights education. Regarding the assessment of the model's usefulness, Cox-Snell's and Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  account for the extent to which socio-demographic variables and didactic positioning predict this knowledge by 0.291 (29.1%) and 0.391 (39.1%), respectively. The coefficients of determination  $R^2$  are close to the one given by Cohen's Kappa index, obtained from the ratio between the real response values (variable to be predicted) and the values corresponding to its prediction = .37 ( $p < .001$ ) (37%). The evaluation of the model's usefulness was completed with its predictive ability, whose values were as follows: accuracy = 71.4%, error = 28.6%. The percentage of the number of cases that the model is able to predict correctly or the overall percentage correctly classified exceeds 50% of the cases (71.4%), a circumstance that proves an optimal explanatory capacity of the model and, therefore, its acceptance.

The relationship between socio-demographic variables and the didactic positioning of teachers in relation to controversial issues as an effective part of their teaching programmes, and the relevance of the specific teaching of the Holocaust and Human Rights education shows that initial and/or on-going training in Human Rights education and didactic positioning are two causal factors in this relationship ( $0 \notin$  Wald statistic,  $p = <.001$ ). Therefore, teacher training and its impact on teachers' didactic stances are proposed as two of the most significant factors in the inclusion of the Holocaust and human rights as specific curricular content in education for democratic citizenship. Age, gender and level of education, on the other hand, are not explanatory factors for this inclusion.

The established relationship is positive (sign + of  $\beta_i$ ); that is, both factors motivate higher probabilities of considering these teachings. Likewise, in these variables, the  $\exp.(\beta_i)$  is far from 1. Consequently, their strength in explaining the event of interest is adequate (Table 2).

### 4. Discussion and conclusions

We agree with Pettigrew [4] that there is no intrinsic reason why civic-social or moral educational approaches to Holocaust education should necessarily result in a distortion of the past, unless a clear positioning is defined in the historical disciplinary approach. Indeed, 'learning the history of the Holocaust and drawing moral [as well as civic, sociological, political and/or philosophical] lessons for today are mutually exclusive. History is the story of human experience and behaviour and, in studying the history in depth, we may yet learn more about ourselves' ([13], p. 268).

Although the Holocaust is often maintained as content associated with the World War II, recent research [14] shows the need and opportunity to define it more explicitly in the context of education for democratic citizenship. Along these lines,



						95% CI for Exp( $\beta_i$ )		
	$\beta_i$	SE	Wald	gl	<i>p</i>	Exp( $\beta_i$ )	Lower	Upper
Age	.149	.145	1.054	1	.305	1.160	.873	1.542
LE	-.146	.163	.803	1	.370	.864	.628	1.189
Gender	.123	.151	.662	1	.416	1.130	.841	1.519
PT	3.074	.254	146.074	1	.000	21.632	13.140	35.613
DP	-2.989	.256	135.945	1	.000	.050	.030	.083
Constant	-.028	.153	.033	1	.856	.973		
Equation of the constructed logistic regression model								
$y = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(.02 + .14Gender + -.14LE + .12Gender + 3.07PT + -2.98DP)}}$ $f(x) = -.02 + .14Age + -.14LE + .12Gender + 3.07pt + -2.98DP$								
SE: Standard error. LE: Level of education. PT: Prior training. DP: Didactic positioning.								

**Table 2.**  
Equation variables, regression coefficients, Wald statistic and OR value = Exp( $\beta_i$ ).

during the *Holocaust Education in Today’s World*, a scientific meeting organised by the Holocaust Centre North and held on 9 March 2023, Andy Pearce, professor of history education at the Centre for Holocaust Education, stated that, despite the representation of this phenomenon in different subjects in the British curricula, it continues to be a priority in the history classroom. The potential of its transversality would therefore lie in the dangers of making this content independent as a ‘unique phenomenon in history’, a circumstance equivalent to its lack of contextual comparability or historical relationship. In addition, the curricula do not seem to stipulate the specific objectives, the time needed for teaching and the assessment of learning about Holocaust education, and this can be extended to other European curricula.

According to the results obtained in this first research, initial and in-service teacher training is one of the explanatory axes of the curricular inclusion of the Holocaust and human rights as specific contents of education for democratic citizenship. Finally, more data collection instruments with sufficient empirical evidence of validity and reliability are needed to ensure the accuracy of the analysis of the development and historical understanding of this phenomenon among students [15].

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## Conflict of interest

The authors have not reported any potential conflicts of interest in relation to this chapter.

## Data availability statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to reasons of personal privacy and to the application of ethical criteria in the processing of the data obtained.

## Statement of ethical approval

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki (Declaration of the World Medical Association), guaranteeing the ethical-philosophical commitment and unwavering respect for human dignity, privacy, physical and moral integrity, as well as the protection of personal data in the processing of the survey and throughout the research.


In the process of collecting the information, the schools confirmed their informed consent to the research, guaranteeing the anonymity and confidentiality of the students' answers, as well as their subsequent treatment. The study was also approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Burgos (IR 15/2018).

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