

Evolution of textbooks in Spain over the last fifty years

Evolución de los libros de texto en España en los últimos cincuenta años

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Abstract

Since the enactment of the General Education Law of 1970, textbooks in Spain have undergone significant transformations, shaped by a combination of factors including changes in curricular content and teaching models, the diversification of regional curricula, the removal of prior authorization requirements, the consolidation of large publishing groups, and modernization in design. Significant changes have also occurred in the authors and illustrators of school textbooks. They have evolved into teams of teachers, experts in their respective disciplines, as well as teams of professionals specializing in photography, illustration, and design. Editorial renewals are influenced by the restructuring of the main text and the increasing prominence of visual content. The text moves away from its linear form, adopting concise formats; illustrations increase in number, size, and diversity; and the prevalence of paratextual elements for conveying information, such as tables, charts, maps, and diagrams, significantly rises. Their design and structure have gradually evolved to address new pedagogical needs and demands, integrating more visual and interactive approaches that facilitate content comprehension and promote a more dynamic, contextualized learning experience. Despite ongoing political shifts and the succession of various educational laws,

textbooks have demonstrated a remarkable ability to adapt to political, social, economic, and technological contexts. However, the use of school textbooks remains a subject of debate: some educators employ them passively, while others adopt an active and critical approach. The critical approach is essential for effectively selecting, adapting, and applying instructional resources—including textbooks—in the classroom, as well as for teaching students to read, comprehend, and interpret evolving texts.

Key Words: Textbooks, Curriculum, Publishers, Authors, Textuality

Resumen

Desde la promulgación de la Ley General de Educación de 1970, los libros de texto en España han experimentado transformaciones notables, moldeadas por una combinación de factores que incluyen los cambios en los contenidos y modelos curriculares de enseñanza, la diversificación de los currículos autonómicos, la eliminación de la autorización previa, la consolidación de grandes grupos editoriales y la modernización en el diseño editorial. También se han producido importantes cambios en los autores e ilustradores de los textos escolares, que han evolucionado hacia equipos de profesores expertos en sus campos disciplinares, y equipos de profesionales de la fotografía, la ilustración y el diseño. En las renovaciones editoriales influye la reestructuración del texto principal y el creciente protagonismo del contenido visual. El texto se aleja de su forma lineal, adoptando formatos breves; la ilustración incrementa en número, tamaño y naturaleza, y aumenta la presencia de elementos paratextuales de transmisión de la información como tablas, gráficos, mapas, diagramas. Su diseño y estructura han ido evolucionando para responder a las nuevas necesidades y demandas pedagógicas, integrando enfoques más visuales e interactivos que facilitan la comprensión de los contenidos y fomentan un aprendizaje más dinámico y contextualizado. A pesar de los cambios políticos constantes y la sucesión de distintas leyes educativas, los libros de texto han demostrado una extraordinaria capacidad de adaptación a los contextos políticos, sociales, económicos y tecnológicos. No obstante, el uso de los textos escolares se debate entre el uso pasivo de algunos docentes, y el uso activo y crítico de otros. El enfoque crítico es crucial para seleccionar, adaptar y aplicar recursos didácticos—incluidos los libros de texto— en el aula de forma efectiva, pero también para enseñar a leer, comprender e interpretar textos cambiantes.

Palabras Clave: Libros de texto, Curriculum, Editoriales, Autores, Textualidad

Introduction

In this article we will deal with the changes that school textbooks for infant, primary and secondary education in Spain have undergone over the last 50

years,¹ approaching them from four perspectives: on the one hand, we consider how textbooks, as supports for the official curriculum, have been transformed in terms of their contents and didactic proposals throughout this period, becoming more complex with the proliferation of regional curricula. On the other hand, we review the path towards the liberalisation of administrative control over textbooks. This aspect is closely related to the following one: the consideration of the school textbook as a commercial product. The textbook is part of a large market that has developed considerably in the last half century, giving publishers an important influence on textbook policy and on the very definition of the school curriculum. Fourthly, we look at aspects of textbook writing and production, examining the evolution of textbook authorship and editorial design. By analysing these four approaches: curricular content, administrative control, commercial product, and editorial design and production, we cover several of the functions of textbooks that Manuel de Puelles detailed at the beginning of the 21st century: symbolic, by representing official knowledge; pedagogical, by transmitting basic knowledge; political, by including content that is regulated by the public authorities; and commercial, by having an economic entity (Puelles 2000, p. 6).

The beginning of the modernisation of school textbooks in Spain

Although our study aims to describe the changes that have taken place in school textbooks and in the publishing market since the General Education Law of 1970 (LGE), our analysis begins in the mid-1960s, when the first changes that would crystallise in the following decade were announced. Analysing these years of the so-called “late Francoism” is essential for an accurate understanding of the evolution of the school text in Spain up to the

1 In this article we will not deal specifically with school textbooks in digital format. We will limit ourselves to analysing the basic school text used by pupils, which has the same content, images, composition, *activities*, etc. in both paper and digital formats. A different issue is the numerous complementary materials for teachers and pupils that publishers publish only digitally.

present day.

The starting point for the modernisation of textbooks in Spain is to be found in the work of the *Centro de Documentación y Orientación Didáctica de Enseñanza Primaria* (CEDODEP) [Center for Documentation and Didactic Guidance for Primary Education], created in 1958 (Tiana, 1998, pp. 158-166). This Documentation Center initiated research and proposed technical standards for a new approach to textbooks. The initiatives were fundamentally based on a critique of the recurrent use in Spanish schools of the traditional encyclopaedia, which brought together in a single volume all the content to be taught at the different levels, with a memorization-based and limiting perspective for any didactic reform. Encyclopaedias, together with other textual genres such as extensive reading books or primers for teaching reading, which survived, partly due to economic needs, since the 1940s, are representative of what Escolano describes as “post-war educational neo-archaism” (Escolano, 1998a, p. 20).

The instrument that made possible the emergence of a “second generation” of school textbooks were the *Cuestionarios Nacionales* [National syllabus] of 1965, designed by CEDODEP itself to support the Law that in 1964 had imposed compulsory schooling up to the age of 14. These *Cuestionarios* recovered certain progressive traditions (globalisation, activism, realistic teaching) and appropriated new pedagogical proposals such as unit programming, behaviourist technology and image culture (Escolano, 1998a, pp. 29-30). From this new approach, they promoted the development of schoolbooks by subject and by course, didactic units for the application of the method of globalisation of teaching, exercise books or worksheets for individualised work.

The LGE of 1970, which gave continuity to the CEDODEP’s concern to improve teaching and the modernisation of school textbooks at a time when a major expansion of schooling was taking place with General Basic Education (EGB) as a development strategy, offered new possibilities for pedagogical renewal that would lead to a “redefinition of the reader” as a new active subject who had to combine reading with action (Escolano, 1998a, p. 21). Despite the criticisms of some pedagogical renewal movements that emerged in these years of late Francoism and the beginning of the democratic

transition, from then on, the recurrent use of school textbooks in the classroom was consolidated, at the same time as teachers' books or guides became a strategy to compensate for the deficient training of teachers. However, among innovative teachers in some schools, the new textbooks formed part of their resources in a more critical and eclectic way (Tiana, 2021, p. 349). According to Mauricio Santos, a publisher linked to the beginnings of the publishing house Anaya and later president of the *Asociación Nacional de Editores de Libros y Material de Enseñanza* (ANELE) [National Association of Educational Books and Media Publishers], the LGE of 1970 meant "the assumption by publishers of previously unthinkable functions, such as their important contribution to teacher training, in many cases surprised by curricula whose contents and approaches were new to them" (Santos, 2013, p. 16).

The evolution of school textbooks from the 1980s onwards

Despite the changes in the curriculum that began in the 1980s, incorporating, for example, new content on civic education to teach students about democratic values and constitutional principles, there were no major changes in school textbooks throughout the 1980s. The production of textbooks raised significantly due to the increase in school enrolment, and also due to the increase in the number of subjects on the syllabus, not only in EGB, but also in *Bachillerato* [Upper Secondary Education].

In the preparation of the new *Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo* (LOGSE), which was to be implemented in 1990, new curricular materials were proposed which would encourage a type of 'meaningful learning' in pupils. As Elena Rodríguez Navarro stated, in the change of conception of curricular materials proposed by the LOGSE, technical-methodological issues were to replace epistemological contents (Rodríguez Navarro, 1999, p. 102), an aspect to which the new school textbooks had to adapt. At the same time, school publishing became much more complex with the competences assumed by the Autonomous Communities in the development of the curriculum. School texts had to be adapted to the

Autonomous Communities differences. This also meant that books had to be published in the languages of those Autonomous Communities with their own official languages (Beas, 1999). More recently, from 2004 onwards, the proliferation of bilingual teaching (especially in English and French) in public and private schools has led to greater editorial diversity, as some subjects are also offered in other foreign languages.

Although the intention of the legislator and of some renovating tendencies was, besides giving a more active role to the pupil in the learning process, to give more autonomy and protagonism to teachers in the use of diverse didactic materials and in the application of a more constructivist and open curriculum, after the LOGSE the textbook was maintained and consolidated as the main resource used in the classroom, giving rise to a great development of school publishing. The new concept of “curricular materials” (which extended the concept of “textbook”) offered publishers the possibility of diversifying their educational resources, offering teachers “publishing projects” which include textbooks (at present, digital versions of the books are offered as an alternative), supplementary workbooks for recuperation of failed subjects or academic enrichment related to each subject, access to digital resources such as videos, presentations or educational games, reference books, classroom libraries, manipulative material, or specific resources for teachers (teaching proposals, solutions, pedagogical guidelines, proposals for school projects, area and classroom programs, etc.). In this way, publishers have managed to have an important capacity to guide classroom work, and have taken on “an invaluable task of teacher training”, taking on “the demands and needs of teachers, the only decisive and essential actors in the educational task” (Santos, 2013, p. 23).

The process towards the liberalisation of school publishing

Another very important aspect of the evolution of school textbooks over this long period is undoubtedly that of their control and authorisation, which has been liberalised up to the present day. Traditionally, school textbooks

have been a resource “intervened” from the political sphere, since, being impregnated with values, they are an ideological product that has been the preferred object of educational policy in all countries (Puelles, 2007, pp. 1-2). But they have also been subject to control in many other aspects of a denominational, pedagogical, curricular, technical and even economic nature.

In this sense, the process of liberalisation of school textbooks does not mean, in the period we are dealing with, only an elimination of the strict ideological control and prior censorship imposed by Franco’s regime (which was relaxed in the 1960s), since many other controls were maintained during the transition and the democratic period itself, until the complete liberalisation of the publication and distribution of school textbooks in 2006.

The LGE of 1970 maintained the prior ministerial approval of school textbooks, which had to be adjusted ideologically, but also in terms of their adaptation to the official curriculum and their didactic suitability. However, in 1974, some new features were included in the legislation: once the textbooks had been approved, their selection was entrusted to the cloister of the EGB or *Formación Profesional* [Professional Training] centres, or, where appropriate, to the didactic seminars in the *Bachillerato* [Upper Secondary Education] centres, including additionally the approval of this choice by the parents’ association in each school. These regulations were to be applied by the Autonomous Communities that gradually obtained powers in education. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education set the maximum sale prices for school textbooks until 1982. Another factor regulated by legislation has been the vigency and pedagogical validity of school textbooks, which since 1972 has been maintained at four years, except in cases in which it is fully justified, such as a curricular change.

The LOGSE maintained, as a basic regulation, the same regime of supervision of textbooks and teaching materials, which was also obligatory in the Autonomous Communities that acquired powers in education. However, in 1992, a provision was approved that took a first step towards the liberalisation of administrative authorisation, arguing the need to be consistent “with the open character that the new organisation of the education system confers on the curriculum” and to respect “the rights and freedoms of teachers, parents and publishers, and the autonomy of schools”. This new

regulation required that only the editorial project designed by publishers as a guide for the elaboration of curricular materials for the different areas be submitted for examination. According to this provision,

the aim is to guarantee, in this way, respect for the freedom of publishers to creatively develop the contents of the curriculum and, at the same time, to safeguard the unity and coherence of the curricular approaches proposed by the Government for Pre-school Education, Primary Education, Compulsory Secondary Education and Bachillerato.²

The projects to be submitted by publishers had to conform to the basic lines of the corresponding curriculum, indicating the organisation and distribution of the objectives, contents and assessment criteria for each subject, including also the cross-curricular objectives of the respective educational stage, as well as the pedagogical methods envisaged. Moreover, the same decree required that the projects should reflect “in their texts and images the principles of equal rights between the sexes, the rejection of all types of discrimination, respect for all cultures, the promotion of habits of democratic behaviour and attention to the ethical and moral values of pupils”.

It would be the 2006 Organic Law on Education (LOE) which, twenty-eight years after the enactment of the Constitution, would abolish the prior authorisation of school textbooks, stipulating only that they should be adapted to the scientific rigour appropriate to the age of the pupils and to the curriculum approved by each educational administration.³

The abolition of prior authorisation remains in force to this day, although the obligation of publishers to reflect and promote respect for constitutional principles is of course maintained, to which has been added the obligation to incorporate content aimed at protecting against gender violence, promoting the equal value of women and men, as well as avoiding sexist or discriminatory

2 Real Decreto 388/1992 de 15 de abril, por el que se regula la supervisión de libros de texto y otros materiales curriculares para las enseñanzas de régimen general y su uso en los Centros docentes, BOE de 23 de abril de 1992, p. 13726.

3 Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación (LOE), Disposición adicional cuarta, epígrafe 2. In this respect, the LOE basically respected the provisions of the *Ley Orgánica de Calidad de la Educación* (LOCE) of 2002, which was never implemented.

stereotypes.⁴

Although the prior authorisation of school textbooks has been abolished, the adaptation to the curriculum and respect for the aforementioned values has since been subject to possible supervision by the regional education administrations, as well as through the ordinary inspection process exercised by the education administration over all the elements that make up the teaching and learning process.

It should be noted, however, that although prior authorisation of texts and teaching materials has not been re-established, several Autonomous Communities maintain this requirement, to which publishers must submit their products in order to be taken into account in aid and textbook lending programmes.

The evolution of the publishing market

The beginning of the modernisation of school textbooks at the end of the 1960s also meant a total transformation of the Spanish publishing market. As the aforementioned Mauricio Santos states when recalling those years and the implementation of the LGE of 1970, “of the more than seventy specialised publishing houses that existed in 1970, there were barely thirty left when this country entered democracy” (Santos, 2013, p. 18). Miñón, one of the most prominent publishers of the time and responsible for the publication of the famous *Enciclopedia Álvarez*, was one of the first to declare bankruptcy. Other publishers also gradually disappeared or were taken over by other companies. Thus, the school textbooks of the family publishing houses Hijos de Santiago Rodríguez (Burgos) and Dalmau (Girona) disappeared from the market, as well as those of Magisterio Español, all of them publishing houses with a century-long history.

It was just at that time that the large publishing houses that have dominated the market ever since took off, such as Anaya and Santillana

4 LOE 2006, Disposición adicional cuarta; Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación (LOMLOE), Disposición adicional vigésima quinta, epígrafe 5.

(founded in 1959 and 1960, respectively), as well as SM, linked to the Marianist order, which had been created in 1937. Other smaller publishers such as Teide, Vicens Vives and Casals in Barcelona, or Everest in León, also had an important development. All these publishing houses, which gradually monopolised the publishing market throughout the 1970s, were modelled on the texts published by other French and German companies, such as Hachette, Fernand Nathan, Larousse, Klett and Schroedel, which had accompanied the expansion and modernisation of education in those countries. These publishers “published excellent textbooks, scientifically rigorous, didactically and pedagogically very careful and with attractive typographies and designs that, to a large extent, would serve as inspiration for Spanish authors and publishers” (Santos, 2013, p. 16).

Other smaller publishers such as Bruño, Edelvives or Edebé, linked to religious congregations (De La Salle Brothers, Marists and Salesians, respectively), maintained a guaranteed market share at least in their religious centres.

In 1978, the *Asociación Nacional de Editores de Libros y Material de Enseñanza* (ANELE) was created, a corporate group that lobbied the government on issues such as freedom of pricing or the controls required for the publication of school textbooks. Since then, ANELE has continued to represent and defend the interests of its members, and to provide important reports on the evolution of the textbook industry and market in Spain. At present (2025) twenty-two publishers are members of ANELE.

Very early, at the beginning of the 1980s, other regional publishing companies began to consolidate, some of them of a confessional nature, especially in the Autonomous Communities with their own language (Erein, and later Ibaizabal, in the Basque Country; A Nosa Terra in Galicia; La Galera/ Enciclopedia Catalana in Catalonia; Bromera in the Valencian Community). But the large publishing houses also created subsidiaries and distinctive imprints to publish school texts in Catalan, Basque and Galician, such as those of Anaya (Xerais in Galicia; Barcanova in Catalonia), Santillana (Obradoiro in Galicia; Zubia in the Basque Country; Grup Promotor in Catalonia), SM (Cruilla in Catalonia; Xerme Edicions in Galicia), or Edebé (Rodeira in Galicia). The Santillana group also created specific imprints for Andalusia

(Ed. Grazaalema) or Valencia (Ed. Voramar). Similarly, in Andalusia, Anaya created the Algaida publishing house.

For its part, Oxford University Press entered the Spanish market in 1991 with specific content for English language teaching, but since 1998 it has developed publishing projects in other disciplines for all levels of education, and in the last fifteen years it has become one of the very large and large companies in the sector.

Since the late 1980s, a structural characteristic of the Spanish publishing sector has been the concentration of publishing, where a small number of large companies and publishing groups produce a large part of the titles, and a large number of small and medium-sized publishers publish less than a quarter of the books. In addition, large and medium-sized companies have merged into publishing groups or holding companies (Beas and Montes, 1998, p. 84). The expansion of these publishing groups has linked them to other sectors of the world of communication, “which for the first time in the history of schooling has come to link this industry of culture with more general areas of the economy and society” (Escolano, 1998a, p. 33). An example of this was the incorporation of Grupo Anaya into the French group Vivendi in 1998, as well as the integration of Santillana into the Spanish group Prisa in 2000. Since 2004, the Anaya Group has been part of Hachette Livre, also incorporating Grupo Editorial Bruño. Since the end of 2020, Santillana España has been part of the Sanoma Group, a Finnish-based company with educational companies in eleven European countries. Part of Santillana, which retains its name, continues to belong to the Prisa Group and is a leader in Latin America, both in Spanish and Portuguese. We should not forget that the expansion of large Spanish publishers such as Santillana, Anaya or SM in the Latin American market had already begun in the 1960s through exports, and from the 1980s onwards through the creation of subsidiaries in several countries (Puig Raposo, 2022; Cassiano, 2007; Fernández Reiris, 2005, pp. 223-235).

Today, the companies classified as “very large” in the textbook sector are still Santillana, Anaya and SM, together with the Oxford publishing house (of these four large companies, three belong to a foreign parent company). Other “big” companies include Edebé, Grupo Edelvives and Vicens Vives,

among others. The medium-sized and small companies include many of the publishers with regional coverage, as well as others such as Pearson, Casals, Editex, Teide and McGraw Hill.⁵ It is difficult to know the growth figures for the production of school textbooks, as the data from the publishing sector do not always specifically differentiate the figures corresponding to non-university school textbooks, and provide global data for publishers, but not for each publisher, nor the specific figures by subject or educational level (Beas and González, 2019).

Beyond being immersed in a highly competitive market that generates significant economic benefits, the Spanish textbook industry has to face a complex and changing set of factors, some of which have already been mentioned. The numerous educational reforms of recent years and the regulations that have developed them have been the first conditioning factor in the design and content of textbooks. Moreover, the publishing industry has not been oblivious to some of the debates that have arisen in recent decades, such as the one generated by the introduction of the subject of “Education for Citizenship and Human Rights”, a short-lived subject, for which almost all publishers made a major commitment by publishing textbooks on the subject for all levels of education. The same happened with another short-lived subject, “Science for the Contemporary World”, which was introduced, like “Citizenship Education”, by the LOE of 2006. Previously, in 1996, the so-called “Debate of the Humanities” initiated by the then Education Minister Esperanza Aguirre, proposed above all changes in the teaching of history that were to have an impact on school textbooks. And there has been no shortage of complaints and debates on different occasions about the presence of nationalist content in school textbooks, especially in Catalonia. Undoubtedly, school textbooks have been at the centre of important ideological debates, as has been widely reported in the media, and have been the cause of a certain degree of social alarm at times; however, none of the complaints about the alleged indoctrination caused by school textbooks has had any legal consequences to

5 The Federación de Gremios de Editores de España [Federation of Spanish Publishers' Associations] (FGEE) classifies companies by turnover bracket: very large, those with a turnover of more than €60,000,000 per year; large, between €18,000,000 and €60,000,000; medium-sized, between €2,400,000 and €18,000,000; small, up to €2,400,000 (FGEE, 2024, p. 19).

date.⁶

In addition, it is necessary to take into account the editorial diversity brought about by the adaptation to regional curricula and languages from 1990 onwards, as well as the introduction of bilingual education, with subjects mainly in English or French. Beyond this complexity, the introduction of the broad concept of “curricular materials” has meant that publishers have broadened the range of educational resources on offer, complementary to textbooks.

Another decisive aspect for the publishing industry is the mandatory four-year validity of textbooks, which affects production during the intervening years, and the preservation and use of textbooks during that period. This requirement has at times clashed with curricular changes. However, it is one thing for schools to be obliged to keep the same textbooks for four years and for publishers to reprint them, but it is quite another for publishers not to be able to bring out another editorial line.

Finally, the fact that not all Autonomous Communities implement curricular reforms in the same year and that there are delays in the publication of regional curricula (partly to save the cost of updating textbooks), has an important impact on the publishing industry. The broad curricular competence of the Autonomous Regions involves not only what content is included or left out of the curriculum, but also the teaching load, the school year in which certain subjects are taught, or the inclusion of optional subjects of their own, to which publishers must adapt. Added to this is the disparity of models of aid to families for the purchase or loan of school textbooks, with different financial budgets and possible requirements for approval of publishers for their textbooks to be included among those eligible by schools.

At present, some major publishers, such as SM or Vicens Vives, have undertaken staff reductions and financial adjustments which publishers attribute to a number of factors, such as the rising cost of publishing and the

6 There are also numerous studies that analyse not only current school texts, but also texts from the more remote or recent past, such as the treatment of gender or race issues, or the approach to some controversial topics in the teaching of history such as the Reconquest, the civil war, or Franco’s regime, to cite just a few examples. This makes the school text a constantly “watched” object from the academic sphere, especially since the beginning of the 1990s, when research in the field of what Agustín Escolano has called “manualística” (Escolano, 1998, p. 17) began to gain momentum. A wide repertoire of this type of research can be found on the website of the MANES Research Centre, based in the Faculty of Education of the UNED [www.centromanes.org] (Ossenbach, 2021).

complexity of adapting to the changing curricula and requirements of the different Autonomous Communities, to the reduction in sales caused by the systems of free textbooks, lending and reuse of textbooks that have been implemented in some Autonomous Communities, or to the increase in the number of schools that dispense with the use of conventional textbooks as a factor of teaching innovation, partly thanks to the rise of digital platforms and free online content.

The new professional profiles of textbook authors

Throughout this period, textbook authors changed not only because of a generational shift, but also because authorship shifted to other professional profiles. The identity and position of authors in the field of education are elements that help to understand the influences and perspectives that guide and shape their texts. There are two shifts in authorship. One towards multiple authorship in the form of teams, and the other towards the writing of textbooks by university graduates, some of them prestigious academics. Beas and Montes (1998, p. 95) explain that “in the new publishing houses, teams will be strengthened, so that the authors are blurred; this reaffirms the image of the commercial brand as the identifier of the textbook, unless, for marketing reasons, the main author is a person of academic prestige”. Indeed, the second shift was towards authors whose recognition was based on their academic trajectory within their field of study. Their prestige depended not only on the number of published works, but also on their education, depth of knowledge and contributions to the discipline. Over time, the value of their work became linked to the enrichment of textbooks based on their ability to generate critical thinking, innovative contributions and intellectual authority in their area of specialisation.

In the early Franco regime, the authors of primary school textbooks were teachers, but above all primary school inspectors such as Antonio Juan Onieva, Agustín Serrano de Haro, Adolfo Maíllo, Antonio Fernández Rodríguez, Josefina Álvarez de Cánovas and Josefina Bolinaga, to mention some of the most well-known names. On the other hand, “Even in the mid-sixties, the old encyclopaedias, books of object lessons, instructional or

edifying readings and, in general, texts of rudimentary and terminal knowledge were still in circulation at primary level” (Mateos, 2011, pp. 70-71). The *Nueva Enciclopedia escolar* from Hijos de Santiago Rodríguez reached its 45th edition in 1965, combining drawings by the national teacher Julio Algora with black and white photographs (Figure 1). In other words, the transition from one group of authors to another was slow.

FIGURE 1. (1965). *Nueva Enciclopedia Escolar H.S.R. Grado Tercero*. Burgos: Hijos de Santiago Rodríguez, 45th edition, p. 472



The textbooks of the second half of the 1960s already had double or multiple authorship, the editors began to acquire greater prominence and evidenced the beginning of the change in design, as can be seen in this page from the 1968 *Geography of Spain and World History* textbook (Figure 2). Alluding to the *Cuestionarios Nacionales* in its prologue, it is signed by three authors, including a woman, E. Ramos, headmistress and graduate in History, A. Álvarez, national teacher, and C. Herrero, regent of Escuela Aneja. It still includes, however, several illustrators of the time: Aguilar, Santana, Aguirre and Sinovas, and visibly indicates the role of the teacher Antonio Álvarez,

author of the *Enciclopedia Álvarez*, in the direction and editing of the book.

FIGURE II. E. Ramos, A. Álvarez and C. Herrero (1968). *Geografía de España e Historia Universal. Octavo curso*. Valladolid: Miñón, p. 180



The authorship of books for the *Bachillerato* or preparation for entry to the *Bachillerato* was also multiple and involved graduates in different university courses, but even in the early 1970s textbooks by a single author and illustrator survived.⁷

However, from the mid-1970s onwards, publishers incorporated new

⁷ This is the case, for example, of *Planeta Tierra. Geografía*, by Edelvives, published in 1973 with Victoriano Rostán Gómez, Profesor de Escuela Universitaria del Profesorado de EGB, as author, and Francisco Carrillo Mora, as illustrator.

authors, graduates, university professors and secondary school teachers, as well as teachers from other educational levels. In the words of Mateos (2011, p. 89), “there was a slippage of pedagogical knowledge towards the University and the educational administration began to form alliances with new agents of theoretical production”, who entered the field of textbook writing. The new didactic-disciplinary organisation of school knowledge was transferred to textbooks and called for the need for authors by areas and disciplines. Thus, in the 1970s, a new generation of textbooks appeared which bore little resemblance to those of the first generation, in size, design, colours or authorship. The *Senda* reading books by Santillana, directed by Antonio Ramos, meant a relevant change in the type of literary readings that were made known, incorporating readings by Ana María Matute and Gloria Fuertes, and also “extensively examining the literary fact from an exceptional historical perspective” (Mora-Luna, 2019, p. 804).

For the educational level of *Bachillerato Unificado y Polivalente* (BUP), university professors were incorporated into the task of writing textbooks. Gustavo Bueno, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oviedo, together with Carlos Iglesias and Alberto Hidalgo, wrote *Symploké. Filosofía* (3º BUP) in 1987, published by Ediciones Júcar (Bonilla, 2025). Years later, regarding the “Symploké Project”, Bueno (2004) clarified that these were not textbooks but philosophy manuals in Spanish “mainly because [the manual] is not intended for the student, in order to provide him with an instrument to prepare for his exams, nor is it intended for the teacher to offer him, informally, already prepared the topics proposed by the syllabus, essential in all “administered philosophy”, which he is supposed to be able and even supposed to prepare freely”.

The area of language and literature followed a similar itinerary to that of philosophy. Its greatest representative as a textbook author, Fernando Lázaro Carreter, had published in the 1950s, together with Evaristo Correa Calderón, a relevant and long-running textbook: *Cómo se comenta un texto en el Bachillerato* (1958).⁸ The book was modified and published under the title *Cómo se comenta un texto literario*, from 1960 onwards by Editorial Anaya

8 Responding to article 83 of the Law on the Organisation of Secondary Education of 1953, which established that “all pupils will be trained in the reading and commentary of fundamental texts of literature” (BOE of 27 February 1953, p. 1127).

and, later, after the eleventh edition, by Editorial Cátedra. This work was the classic work on the subject throughout the second half of the 20th century. From this period onwards, Lázaro Carreter's works in the Anaya publishing house became an indispensable reference and made a substantial difference in the pedagogical literary canon (Mora-Luna, 2019).

In the teaching of history and geography, authors such as Antonio Domínguez Ortiz (in Anaya) or Javier Tusell (in Santillana) stand out. Independent authors also wrote their own textbooks in the 1990s. One example is *Ciencias Sociales, Geografía e Historia. La Tierra se mueve. 1er ciclo de ESO*, by Julio Mateos Montero and María Luisa Vicente Blanco, published by Hespérides in 1996, a didactic project of the Cronos Group.

In short, individual authorship shifted from individual authority based on their recognition as prestigious teachers, pedagogues and inspectors to individual authority based on their field of competence (Bourdieu, 1985). However, as early as the mid-1970s, textbooks began to be produced by multidisciplinary teams, and authorship was distributed among various experts, allowing for a greater diversity of approaches. For example, in the 1980s, the publishing house Anaya absorbed the names of its authors under the name *Equipo Aula 3*.

The collective of illustrators was also changing towards designers with other styles. The illustrators, the vast majority of whom were men until the end of the 20th century,⁹ constituted an important group of renowned artists, such as the illustrator, painter, draughtsman and muralist Eduardo Santoja, whose production is considered an essential reference in the history of *deco* illustration and drawing in Spain, together with Antonio Cobos, Pedro Mairata Serrano and Sacul (Miguel Lucas San Mateo). Other illustrators were the painter José López Arjona, the illustrators José Aguilar Fernández, Fortunato Julián García Hernando, Jesús Bernal, Julián Nadal del Val, and national teachers such as Julio Algora, Joaquín Fernández Cidre and Pedro Sarragua, to name but a few well-known names. José Ramón Sánchez, winner of the National Illustration Prize 2014, is one of the most famous names of

9 In Spain, women are more active in the school, children's and young people's book sector, "in a clear reflection of the influence of the role of educators traditionally attributed to women", and secondly in advertising and poster illustration. While male illustrators work equally in advertising, school, children's and young people's books (Castro, 2004, p. 91).

the 70s and 80s, for his illustrations in Santillana's *Senda* reading books. Like the authors, the illustrators began to work in teams with professional photographers and drawers from the books of the 1970s onwards.

The graphic design of information: textuality and illustrations

The change in authorship and illustration was accompanied by an increase in the number of paratextual elements¹⁰ and the space they occupied on the pages. Textbooks were growing in all aspects: size, font, images, and other elements complementary to the text, such as activities and exercises, influencing the way in which the content is written and organised: the textual structure, the integration of iconic language and the graphic design as a whole. The changes also responded to the new psychological model of teaching aimed at a new concept of the school child, "a model of the *average* child, in social and psychological terms" and "a *unified childhood*, which will correspond to schooled childhood until the end of compulsory age (*unified school*), participating in a menu of common knowledge (*unified knowledge*)" (Mateos, 2011, p. 73). In the mid-1960s, regulations for the approval of textbooks were published and numerous publications on the subject were produced.¹¹

It is also worth remembering that since the educational reform of 1970, textbooks coexisted and competed with other didactic materials and resources, such as worksheets and the first school audiovisual media. The introduction of these didactic innovations included a new approach to the

10 Gerard Genette (1989, p. 11) explains that within transtextual relations, one of them is the one in which "in the whole formed by a literary work, the text itself maintains with what we can only name as its paratext: title, subtitles, intertitles, prefaces, epilogues, warnings, prologues, etc.,; margin notes, footnotes, endnotes, illustrations, inserts, covers, dust jackets and many other types of accessory autographic or allographic signs that provide a (variable) setting for the text".

11 The Order of 28 October 1965 laying down rules for the approval of books for primary education included requirements for content and material characteristics, BOE no. 275 of 17 November 1965, p. 15551. The head of the Textbook Department of CEDODEP, Álvaro Buj Gimeno, wrote in 1967 about the structure of school textbooks in the magazine *Vida Escolar*, mentioning typographical aspects, sentence length, use of new words, prepositions and the importance of illustrations (Buj Gimeno, 1967).

textbook as a “collaborator of the teacher and as a work guide for the pupil”, books that promoted “the pupil’s personal effort” and created “habits of work, search, comparison, analysis, synthesis”, instead of “making learning easy and comfortable” (Puga, 1972, p. 312). With this argument, textual instructions for different cognitive activities were incorporated: read, learn, remember, etc.

In this evolutionary process, design and editorial aspects have also significantly influenced the visual and textual form of content transmission. From long, dense texts, sometimes with illustrations, and thematic reading books (readings on politics, nature, society), we moved on to textbooks by disciplines or curricular areas, and to textbooks with fragmented writing structured in microtexts, transforming the way of presenting the discourse, interrupted by numerous paratextual elements, such as illustrations, photographs, graphs and tables, and organised in different textual units: summaries, extracts from readings, vocabularies for learning, etc.


The whole amalgam of resources (textual and iconographic) that textbooks present on their pages now and since the 1980s, not only form a hyper-structure, but also a multi- paratextual design, where paratext abounds in its multiple forms. The hierarchy of information units is blurred, as the text no longer appears as the main source of information. Illustrations are the most abundant paratext, but not the only one. Images have become increasingly numerous and larger, occupying a significant portion of the page and relegating the text to the background. Escolano (1998b, p. 142) rightly states that “this iconographic impregnation of contemporary texts has come to induce a systemic change in the design of textbooks, and equally important modifications in the modes of cognitive appropriation of forms and content by the users: children and teachers”.

The large basic textual units of Francoist school textbooks such as the dedications, the table of contents, the presentation or introduction, and the thematic chapters (Mahamud 2014) have multiplied, giving way to independent microtexts that are related to the main text, training the reader in various cognitive actions, such as remembering, summarising or searching for information. Figures 3 and 4 show the evolution of the design modalities of short texts accompanied by paratextual elements (maps, tables, graphs), a

diversity of cognitive activities and different types of illustrations (drawings and photographs).

FIGURE III. Equipo Aula 3 (1985). *Bóveda. Ciencias Sociales 6º EGB*. Madrid: Ediciones Anaya, p. 46

3 ACTIVIDADES COMPLEMENTARIAS



1

- Observa:
¿Cuál es el océano más extenso? ¿Qué forma tiene el Atlántico? ¿En qué hemisferio predominan los continentes?
- Localiza:
Los grandes océanos y escribe sus nombres. Los continentes que rodean al océano Índico. ¿En qué hemisferio se encuentra este mar? ¿Será un mar cálido o un mar frío? Las tierras que rodean al océano Glacial Ártico. ¿Es un mar frío?

2

- Clasifica de más a menos extensos los océanos.
- Indica cuántas partes hay de tierra y cuántas de agua.

Océanos: — Pacífico	180 millones de km ²
— Atlántico	92 millones de km ²
— Índico	75 millones de km ²
— Glacial Ártico	14 millones de km ²
— Total aguas	361 millones de km ²

El Antártico se distribuye entre el Pacífico, Atlántico e Índico.

3

- Observa si la resaca es una corriente que tiene la misma dirección que las olas o es de sentido contrario.
- Si lanzamos un trozo de madera al mar observamos que apenas se desplaza y que se mueve de arriba hacia abajo. ¿Ese movimiento se lo producen las olas? ¿Cuál es la explicación de ese movimiento?

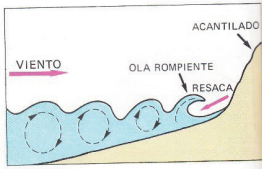
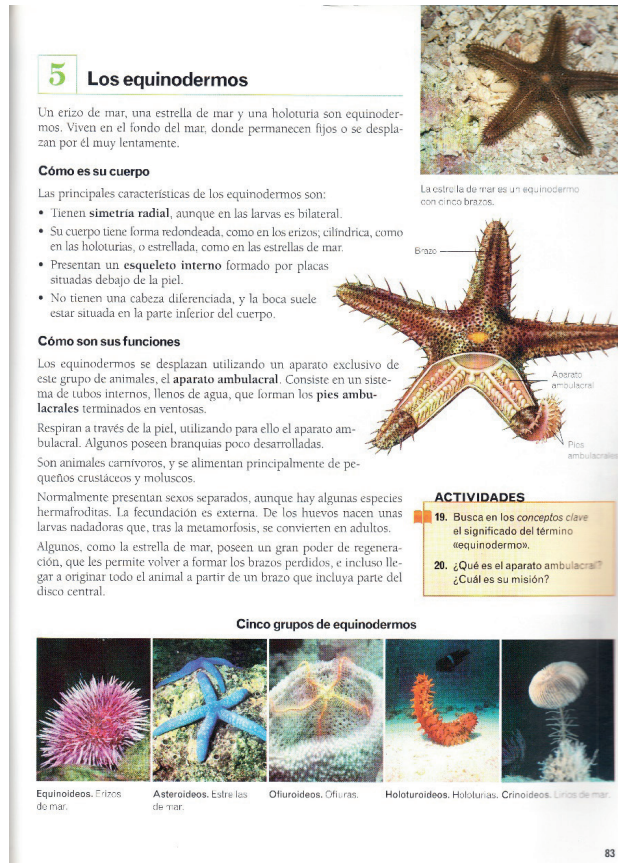


FIGURE IV. Enrique Juan Redal (dir.) (2007). *Ciencias de la Naturaleza 1º ESO*. Madrid: Santillana, Proyecto La Casa del Saber, p. 83



In this evolution, the reduction of the continuous linear main text stands out, which reduces its length and lightens its content, being invaded by the paratextual elements, which create their own discourse in parallel and whose reading is necessary to construct the meaning of the original text. In addition to being reduced, the main text is fragmented into small informative *bits*, short paragraphs, which must be read with the support of the paratexts, by means of jumps, *zapping* and textual and paratextual navigation, making reading, on the one hand, a process that is also fragmented, brief and superficial,

and on the other, dynamic, open, light and free. In this way, printed and digital textbooks have evolved towards more multi-textual formats, visually attractive and seductive in their design. However, this transformation entails greater difficulty in offering in-depth narratives or explanations.

Reading these books requires specific learning, adopting a different way of reading, which depends on the mediation of a teacher for proper comprehension. This is an aspect that has remained constant over time, since both those books with long thematic readings and the multi-textual textbooks of today require teacher mediation. Textbooks are educational documents or resources which, although they must be readable and comprehensible, are not intended for the intimate reading of the reader alone. “Readability is the match between readers and the text” and “suggests that content is clear, well expressed, and suited to the readers”, but it happens that textbook reading is not an individual or intimate reading, it is a mediated reading and part of the readability is obtained from the group and the teacher, in the classroom in the framework of pedagogical interaction” (Chavkin, 1997, p. 151). Rowe (2013) and other authors distinguish between linear reading and tabular reading. While the former “involves the ability to read an extended narrative in continuous, in-depth fashion and reflect upon its meaning”, the latter “focuses on either reading short pieces of text or browsing or skimming texts in search of specific pieces of information” (Durant, 2017, p. 5). The important thing is not to lose sight of deep reading, “the array of sophisticated processes that propel comprehension and that include inferential and deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection, and insight” (Wolf, 2009, p. 33).

From the brief analysis we have made of the evolution of textbooks over more than 50 years, it is clear that school textbooks per se should not be the cause of teacher passivity, although we know that many teachers make a mechanical and uncritical use of them, as an inertia of long-standing practices established in the culture of the school. This reality has profound implications, since the core of a reflective teaching practice should lie in the solidity of teacher training, not in the textbook. The pedagogical value of the textbook ultimately depends on the teacher’s ability to select, adapt and articulate teaching resources in relevant ways, to adapt to the particularities and schedules of each school, and to teach how to read, understand and

interpret changing texts.

These tensions around the various forms of textbook use have given rise to alternative discourses that propose the non-use of textbooks or their substitution or complementation with other resources for teaching and learning. However, former Portuguese education minister Nuno Crato, whose opinion has had an important echo in this debate, in his sharply titled work, *Apologia do Livro de texto*, considers a textbook to be “an essential part of the education system. Ideally, it should be a translator of the curriculum, a guide for teachers and a working tool for students”. Crato advocates the importance of the use of quality textbooks, whose purpose should be above all to build knowledge in a progressive and systematic way, refraining even from substituting knowledge for skills, but rather building skills on knowledge (Crato, 2024, pp. 61 and 16).

Conclusions

The evolution of textbooks over the last 50 years has been determined by various contextual factors, including ideological, political, economic, pedagogical and technical aspects. It also responds to transformations in the conception of the child as a school subject, to new didactic and disciplinary approaches, and to the rise of a new digital and online textuality, which gives rise to forms of communication and reading that are different from the traditional ones. In this process of change, the textbook is adapting to the new realities, albeit slowly, coexisting with previous models in a dynamic equilibrium.

Despite all these changes and transformations, the school textbook retains a series of essential characteristics that continue to define and identify it as such. Its structure, its aesthetics and its pedagogical function of collecting and transmitting selected knowledge maintain a continuity that distinguishes it within the educational ecosystem and the school, under every law and in every era. It is also clear that the recurrent use of school textbooks in the

classroom has been consolidated throughout this period.

For their part, textbook publishers, mostly concentrated in large companies and many of them linked to media groups, have acquired throughout this period, thanks to the persistent use of textbooks in school practice, a great capacity to influence the curriculum and the classroom.

From strict regulation to greater editorial autonomy; from centralisation to territorial diversification by Autonomous Communities; from individual authorship exercised mainly by inspectors, to the collaborative creation of teams of disciplinary experts who construct an edited curriculum; from texts structured with a sober tone and alien to children's reality, to fragmented and brief texts, the textbook continues its process of transformation and persistence in the educational environment.

The challenge lies in adapting to new forms of digital and online reading without sacrificing the ability to read long and deep texts, which require sustained attention and prolonged concentration. It also involves finding a balance between an attractive visual design suitable for different school stages, while maintaining the scientific rigour of the content. All this without falling into overly simplified, superficial and infantilised formats, where the image ends up displacing or eclipsing the value of the text and its informational content.

Since the 1960s, textbooks have undergone a gradual transformation towards multi-textual formats, which invites us to reflect on the evolution of reading practices. In this context, it is essential to adopt an interdisciplinary perspective in order to analyse which reading processes are most effective for both the learning of knowledge and the development of cognitive skills. This reflection should guide the design of current and future textbooks.

By way of conclusion, it seems appropriate to invite reflection on what a textbook is and should be today, at the beginning of the second quarter of the 21st century, and what added value it has or can have in the scenario of artificial intelligence within everyone's reach. Just as there is a debate about what schools can and should do today, what should and can textbooks contain? Is it appropriate to expect textbooks to incorporate values, attitudes, skills, provide emotional well-being, include diversity and transmit knowledge? Or should we focus on textbooks that contain science-based curricular knowledge

and a diversity of approaches to analysis, leaving other educational issues, such as skills and values, to teachers and other educational resources?

Textbooks are products designed and targeted to cater to as many students as possible, which implies that their target audience is, in effect, a prototype of the average student. However, this does not mean that they are not inclusive; on the contrary, they increasingly incorporate diverse social, cultural, sexual, familial and other differences in an effort to reflect the plurality of the student body. It is the teacher's task to complement and deepen those aspects of the textbook that do not fit the specific reality of his or her school and class group. The adaptation of curricular materials - including textbooks - to the characteristics of each school and to the diversity of the students should form part of the professional competence of the teacher.

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