



Article

Secondary School Students' Perception of the Acquisition of Social Science Skill

José María Álvarez-Martínez-Iglesias ¹, Pedro Miralles-Martínez ², Jesús Molina-Saorín ¹
and Francisco Javier Trigueros-Cano ^{2,*}

¹ Department of Didactics and School Organization, University of Murcia, 30100 Murcia, Spain; josemaria.alvarez@um.es (J.M.Á.-M.-I.); jesusmol@um.es (J.M.-S.)

² Department of Didactics of Mathematics and Social Sciences, University of Murcia, 30100 Murcia, Spain; pedromir@um.es

* Correspondence: javierte@um.es

Abstract: The aim of this study is to find out the relevance of the competences worked on in the area of social science, specifically in the subjects of geography and history, through the perceptions of pupils in the 4th year of compulsory secondary education (ESO). In order to carry out the survey, a purposive sampling was carried out in which more than 1400 4th year ESO students (in Spain) participated. In addition, using a Likert-type scale of our own creation called Evaluation of the Perception of Social Science Competences (EPECOCISO) and following a design of quantitative methodology, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out with the analysis software SPSS through the descriptive process, which allowed us to select the three factors that make up the study. Subsequently, correlations were established between factors through Pearson's test, and between the different variables that make up each one of them with the socio-demographic variables (distinguishing between ordinal and nominal variables) through the chi-square test of independence and Cramer's V test (nominal), as well as the linearity test, Goodman's gamma test, and the Kruskal (ordinal) test. Finally, one of the most important conclusions of this study is that the difficulties encountered by students in the acquisition of competences is conditioned by the development of the assessment processes that are carried out.

Keywords: competences; evaluation; social sciences; secondary education; historical thinking



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1. Introduction

Historically, the school has manifested itself—and has also been perceived as such by society as a whole—as one of the fundamental, most characteristic, and most recognisable elements in the lives of young people, as it has been established as a setting where students are able to create their first affective connections separate from their family nucleus (Bruner 1987). If we take into account everything that has happened in recent decades, we can certainly see the effects that the various educational regulations (national and international) have had, and we can see that, in any case, they have been configured according to a reformist perspective, wishing to overcome an educational system that, despite being reviled, has continued to facilitate an encyclopaedic, traditional, and segregationist teaching (Núñez and Palacios 2004; Monarca and González 2020). From this perspective—and being fully aware that in Spain the curricular model has leaned towards lectures, the transmission of legitimised knowledge, and the repetition of everything learnt by students (Álvarez et al. 2021)—the competency-based teaching-learning model was born, which, passing through all levels of education (basic, secondary, and higher), aims to respond to the demands of society (focused on the diversity of the student body and on getting rid of the illogical belief that all students must learn the same thing at the same time and in the same way). These demands have been expressed in recent decades by European governmental bodies through, for example, the renowned Tuning Educational Structure in Europe project

developed by the European Union (González and Wagenaar 2003; Rychen and Salganik 2003; Rauner 1999) and the DeSeCo Project driven by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD 2010, 2018, 2019).

But what is meant by “competences”? Clearly, what is being presented is a new way of understanding the educational curriculum, with the desire that—regardless of the territory in which one resides—all learners should achieve common learning focused on their possibilities and demands (Argudín 2005). In this way, the curricular proposals will deal—in a cross-cutting manner—with generic or key competences (in linguistic communication; mathematics; science and technology; digital, social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; learning to learn; and cultural awareness and expressions). This means, in other words, those competences that are common to all the subjects taught, and which, moreover, should be the central focus of the methodologies proposed by teachers, as well as a set of specific competences that teachers will have to work on more specifically in the subjects they teach, being selected on the basis of these key competences. From this approach, what emerges is the imperative need for education to pursue this comprehensive and permanent (lifelong) approach. In other words, teaching by competences is based on the desire to do away with all disciplinary objectives (based solely on the student’s abilities), as well as to provide a vision in which teachers construct a new professional practice with which to facilitate learning that is close to the realities experienced by students—new methodologies that not only address the learning of these operational objectives (known until now for the faithful repetition of knowledge from the teacher to the student and vice versa), but also approach the contexts of the students (their family relationships, their socio-economic level, etc.), and thus approach the students’ realities and the realities of their lives, getting closer to what should never have been separated and what would, of course, make sense as the basis of all the scientificity that absorbs didactics: the learner.

Likewise, and following the line of this study focused on Spain, Order ECD/65/2015 (which regulates competences in primary, secondary, and baccalaureate education) establishes that competences in secondary education must be governed by the basic principles of lifelong learning, known as learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together (Delors 1996). This is decisive for offering training with which students align the knowledge acquired with their practical skills, emotions, feelings, attitudes or values, among other things. Furthermore, as regulated by (Royal Decree 1105/2014 2014) (which establishes the curriculum for secondary education and baccalaureate), the competences in secondary education “will be worked on with integrated activities that favour the learning of several competences at the same time” (p. 7). Clearly, in order to be able to carry out learning by competences, it is essential that these competences are addressed in all areas and subjects, since only in this way would it be possible to cater for the individuality of students and their all-around education. Therefore, in secondary education, a competency-based pedagogy is one that not only invites students to progress course after course, but also strives to make them increasingly autonomous, both in the acquisition of new learning and in the decisions they make in their lives. In the same way, with regard to the subjects of social sciences, geography, and history (belonging to the block of core subjects), the administration will be in charge of distributing the competences by determining “the common contents, the assessable learning standards and the minimum teaching time” (p. 7), and they must be equally configured according to this conceptual base curriculum. However, by virtue of this competency-based approach, teachers must also ensure that students can give shape and meaning to everything they have learnt.

Undoubtedly, the teaching and learning of social sciences, geography, and history has not differed from other subjects in terms of the way and manner in which they have been taught historically, since if the Spanish educational model (and, more specifically, the procedures used in the teaching of the core subjects) has been criticised for anything, it has always been for using old-fashioned methodologies, close to memorisation and transmission of knowledge from teacher to pupil, without the transversality, dynamism,

and transcendence that is currently included and demanded by educational regulations. In this sense, what is requested by (national and international) regulations is a proposal that teachers redesign (or change) the activities that have been carried out in social sciences, geography, and history, and that through these modifications, and also through interdisciplinary work, the development of various competences (from among all the key competences proposed in the national corpus juris) is provided through these subjects.

Similarly, given that assessment has positioned itself as one of the primordial elements for the collection of information, as well as for the assessment of the learning achieved by students in their different educational stages, it is important to bear in mind the way in which these assessment processes have been carried out up to now, and their apparent transformation—at least from the regulatory point of view—with the emergence of competence-based learning. Broadly speaking, educational assessment systems are known for the value that is still attached to standardised assessment tests, which, generally speaking, are carried out on a specific day for all students (and almost certainly without greater opportunities), following standardised criteria, which, without following any scientific basis, ask all students to know the same thing depending on the educational stage they are studying (Muñoz and Araya 2017). It is precisely Order ECD/65/2015 that states that the assessment criteria will serve as a “reference to assess what the student knows and knows how to do in each area, being broken down into assessable learning standards” (p. 6989). The order states, in turn, that these standards will be assessable and measurable, allowing the academic performance of students to be graded. In this sense, and following what is stated in Article 7 (dedicated to the assessment of key competences), the importance of choosing strategies and instruments that assess students according to their performance is established. This means that while the learning standards must be linked to the competences they will promote, they must also contribute to an assessment as close as possible to the students’ performance levels. In spite of this, the Organic Law on Education 8/2013 (for the improvement of educational quality (OLIQUE)), which also contains some of the fundamental principles for learning by competences (as it could not be otherwise, since it is the educational regulation on which the rest of Spanish educational regulations are based and erected), from the beginning of its preamble, disregards a position in which importance is given only to standardised tests (such as, for example, “This shows that when what matters are the data produced by tests configured in a common way for all students, with criteria established by the administration, as well as their design and implementation, in no case are the individual performances, the learning selected by teachers (which apparently should and could be different depending on the performance of their students), or the rhythms of each student being considered.”) (OLE 2006; OLMIQUE 2013; OLMOLE 2020).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Objects

The general objective of this study is to discover the perception that pupils in the 4th year of compulsory secondary education (ESO) have of the usefulness of the competences according to what they have learnt in their social sciences, geography, and history class; the difficulties they encounter in assimilating them; as well as the instruments used to assess the degree of attainment of these key competences.

In addition, three specific objectives are highlighted that aim to specify this general objective:

1. To differentiate the socio-demographic variables that condition the perception of the usefulness of the key competences according to what has been learnt in the subjects of geography and history.
2. To find out the relationship between the students’ perception of the difficulty in acquiring key competences and their usefulness.
3. To identify significant differences in the degree of difficulty presented by the key competences in geography and history class with the instruments used for their assessment.

2.2. Design

This research has been carried out using an instrument called Evaluation of the Perception of Social Science Competences (EPECOCISO) (Álvarez-Martínez-Iglesias et al. 2020) and following a design of quantitative methodology, specifically through the descriptive process, which is considered the most appropriate for this type of research. As stated by Sabariego and Bisquerra (2014), descriptive methods “seek to specify the properties, characteristics and important profiles of people, groups, communities or any other phenomenon that is subjected to analysis” (p. 114).

Likewise, taking as a starting point the key competences set out in the Royal Decree of the Spanish Government 1105/2014, as well as projects of an international nature (the Tuning project, DeSeCo project, the European 2020 Strategy, etc.), following an exploratory factor analysis—which enables the classification of the variables of a scale into thematic blocks—three of the seven factors that were initially proposed for carrying out this research and that were included in the validation of the EPECISOCO scale have been selected, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Rotated component (factor) matrix.

<p>FACTOR 1 Perception of competences in terms of what has been learnt.</p>	<p>After studying social sciences, I think that the development of competence in linguistic communication is very useful, since with it I will be able, among other things, to use language to express my emotions, experiences and opinions, so that others can understand me (v1). I consider the contents worked on in social sciences for the development of social and civic competence to be very valuable, as they have enabled me to be participative at a social level—taking part in elections, creating associations, etc. (v5). What I learn in Social Studies helps me to understand how fundamental the competence to learn to learn is, as with it I am aware of what I know and what I need to learn in order to construct my own knowledge (v7).</p>
<p>FACTOR 2 Perception of the degree of difficulty in assimilating the competences.</p>	<p>As a result of my work in social sciences at school, when I read a document, it is very difficult for me to know how to differentiate the really important information from that which is only complementary or filler (v12). It is very difficult for me to know how to or with what criteria I have to evaluate a creation to know if it is a work of art or something without value, using what we have studied in social sciences (v14). With what I have learnt in social sciences, I usually find it difficult, and it generates a lot of insecurity, to try to face or assume the problems that happen to me on a daily basis (v16).</p>
<p>FACTOR 3 Perception of the instruments used to assess the degree of attainment of the competences.</p>	<p>I consider taking an exam with short or multiple-choice questions in social sciences to be a good strategy to evaluate my knowledge and critical analysis of societies, their evolution, and the changes that have taken place in them (v21). I think that taking an exam with essay questions in social sciences is a good strategy to evaluate my knowledge and skills (v23).</p>

2.3. Sample

The sample was selected by means of a purposive sampling process with a standard error of 0.7% for the total universe, according to the results of the STATSTM analysis (Hernández Sampieri et al. 2008). Out of a total population of 14,714 students in the 4th year of compulsory secondary education enrolled in both public and private schools in the region of Murcia, a total number of 1714 students was obtained, after eliminating all those instruments containing errors (or missing data). In this sense, following the specialised literature, the sample size requirement was calculated as 996 subjects to be surveyed, a figure that was largely exceeded in the study (Creswell 2014).

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that this is a balanced sample in terms of the sex of the respondents, a practically equal group (51% ♂; 49% ♀) whose ages are between 15 and 18 years old. Similarly, it is a reliable sample (because of the stability and consistency of what has been measured), and a valid one (because it measures what it is intended to measure).

Finally, in order to seek the maximum representativeness of the sample, it should be noted that the members of the final sample come from a total of 18 secondary schools, distributed throughout the region of Murcia, Spain.

2.4. Instrument

The instrument used in this research is composed, on the one hand, of socio-demographic variables (gender, age, parents' level of studies, grade obtained and final grade, etc.) and, on the other, of the study items, all of them structured on a Likert scale on which the students had to choose the response with which they most identified (1 = totally disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = quite agree; 5 = totally agree; and NS = don't know). The results have been achieved following a scrupulous design, based on four main blocks: elaboration and content of the instrument's items, evaluation and analysis by expert judges in the area of knowledge of the research, validation, and application. With regard to the instrument, it can be affirmed that it has good psychometric properties (Maldonado 2015), yielding data that show the different significant relationships between the variables influencing the perception of the level of development of competences according to what has been learned in geography and history. As can be imagined for this type of study, permission was sought from the responsible academic authorities before starting the data collection.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Firstly, in order to select the most significant factors, an exploratory factor analysis was carried out with the analysis software SPSS. To do this, it was necessary to apply the maximum likelihood method to the covariance matrix, as well as Varimax rotation. Once the results of these tests were obtained, the factorial solution was carried out without previously determining an established (maximum) number of factors, highlighting the significance of the three main factors of the study (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the subscales.

Scale	N	Median	D. Tip.
F1: Perception of the application of the acquisition of key competences to life in society	1422	3.3107	0.84607
F2: Perception of competences in terms of what has been learnt	1422	3.5080	0.77057
F3: Perception of the degree of difficulty in assimilating the competences	1422	2.5762	0.78134
F4: Perception of the methodology used for the acquisition of competences	1422	3.6558	1.02768
F5: Perception of the importance of mathematical competence in social sciences	1422	3.0038	0.94818
F6: Perception of the transfer of learning to a real situation	1422	3.6309	0.92828
F7: Perception of the instruments used to assess the degree of achievement of competences	1422	3.5723	0.79740
Valid	1422		

Subsequently, we wanted to know the relationship between the selected factors. Establishing each factor as a single variable, we carried out Pearson's correlation and the cross-table test indicating the frequency of response scores in each of them.

In this sense, each of the variables in the disposition that is collected establishes a general response to the role of secondary schools in the development of competences and, more specifically, in the subjects of social sciences, geography, and history, all based on the experience and perception of secondary school students themselves, since the Varimax (Table 3) test showed the instrument to offer high validity and reliability. In this sense, if the KMO reached values below 0.6, it would be considered inappropriate (and not relevant) to perform a factorial analysis; considering that in the case of this investigation, the KMO

value is 0.926, the instrument and subsequent analysis of the data is fully reliable and consistent.

Table 3. Total variance explained after rotation of the selected factors; rescaled matrix maximum likelihood extraction method.

Factor	Initial Self-Values			Squared Load Extraction Sums		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4229	58,131	58,131	4229	58,131	58,131
2	3049	24,982	83,113	3049	24,982	83,113
3	2764	4916	88,029			
4	2657	3385	91,414			
5	2508	3261	94,675			
6	2419	2981	97,656			
7	2374	2344	100			

In addition, in order to achieve a more detailed and precise analysis, a two-dimensional contingency table test was also carried out, indicating the possible significant relationships between the socio-demographic variables and the variables comprising each of the factors. In this way, in order to ascertain the existing relationships between the variables under study, it was necessary as a preliminary step to differentiate two types of variables according to their nature, highlighting, on the one hand, nominal variables (which do not admit an order criterion) and, on the other, ordinal variables (in which, unlike nominal variables, only their qualification by order makes sense, since they do not present numerical modalities).

In order to detect the degree of dependence between the nominal socio-demographic variables and the items of the instrument, the chi-squared test was carried out (considering dependent those variables that met $p < 0.1$), as well as Cramer's V test, which indicates the strength of the association between the variables, with 0 being independence and 1 being perfect dependence.

Apart from the type of tests performed, the same procedure was applied to the ordinal socio-demographic variables. Thus, the linearity test was applied to each one of them, allowing any indication of dependence between variables to be detected, eliminating—for this purpose—all those variables whose p value exceeded 0.1 ($p > 0.1$), since when this figure was exceeded, any possibility of a relationship between the variables was ruled out. The Goodman and Kruskal gamma test was applied to the remaining variables. This test indicates the strength of the association between the variables, as well as the sign of the association. The coefficient has a range of -1 to 1 , with -1 being a perfect negative association, 0 being independence, and 1 being a perfect positive association (i.e., the closer the value is to -1 or 1 , the stronger the negative or positive association).

3. Results

This section presents the results obtained after carrying out the tests described above, divided by each of the factors of the EPECOCISO scale.

3.1. Factor 1. Perception of Competences in Terms of What Has Been Learnt

In order to respond to objective 1 of this study (to differentiate the socio-demographic variables that condition the perception of the usefulness of skills according to what has been learned in the subject of geography and history), analysis of the questionnaire items belonging to this factor has been carried out.

Specifically, there are eight items that question the contribution of the subject of geography and history to the improvement of the ability to use language to express emotions, experiences, and opinions in a way that is understandable to others (linguistic competence); engagement with the surrounding environment and with society (interaction with the physical environment competence); the skills and abilities to make more and/or better use

of information and communication technologies (ICT competence); full participation in society (social and civic competence); understanding different realities and productions in the world of art and culture (cultural and artistic competence); as well as the awareness that everyone has of what they have learned and what they need to learn in order to continue building their own knowledge (learning to learn competence).

One of the most striking results is that gender conditions the response to all the items in this block, except the one related to ICT competence, with female students (66%) being more appreciative of the value of the competences in terms of what they have learnt in geography and history class than male students (34%). In the case of ICT competence, the percentage difference between pupils and students is not significant: -54% and 46% , respectively (Table 3).

Another of the results that can be drawn from this research is the significant relationship of dependence that exists between the degree of motivation for studying geography and history and the acquisition of competences, since according to the results, it can be affirmed that regardless of the pupil's sex, the greater the motivation for studying the subject, the greater the acquisition of learning and these competences by pupils. Similarly, the same occurs with the time dedicated to study and the final mark obtained after the assessment processes, with both variables showing a high degree of significant relationship with each of the variables in this factor. The main conclusion is that the greater the dedication to study, the higher the final mark obtained, resulting (following the student's perception) in a greater acquisition of all the competences worked on in this subject (Table 4).

On the other hand, being a repeater only yields significant results in the items related to language and ICT skills, as 79% of the repeater students surveyed rate the acquisition of these two skills positively in geography and history class compared to the rest of the skills. Likewise, it is only this competence that has a significant relationship with the parents' level of studies: the higher the parents' level of studies, the higher the student's perception of this subject.

Table 4. Cramer's V test. Perception of competences in terms of what has been learnt.

	v1	v3	v4	v5	v6	v7	v8
Sex	0.083 **	0.073	0.083 **	0.102 ***	0.147 ***	0.108 ***	0.072
Repeater	0.084 **	0.08 *	0.06	0.023	0.056	0.075 *	0.041
Study motivation	0.13 ***	0.099 ***	0.096 ***	0.116 ***	0.107 ***	0.112 ***	0.107 ***

Cramer V test: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

3.2. Factor 2. Perception of the Degree of Difficulty in Assimilating the Competences

In order to respond to objective 2 of this study (to find out the relationship between the students' perception of the difficulty of acquiring competences and their usefulness), the results obtained after analysing the variables belonging to this factor are presented, with the students being questioned about the difficulty they have in situations such as locating existing industries in an area or region, and about having the criteria to value and recognise works of art, differentiating the truly important information after reading a document or expressing their own ideas and listening to the ideas of others, the aim of dialogue, and reaching agreements to resolve conflicts.

In line with what has been described above, one of the results that can be extracted from the analysis of this factor is that, as in factor 1, gender is a conditioning factor in the response to each of the items in this factor, establishing a relationship between gender and the difficulty presented by the competences. Specifically, 85% of the respondents who find the least difficulty in the competences are female students, compared to 15% who are male students (Table 5).

Table 5. Goodman and Kruskal gamma test. Perception of competences in terms of what has been learnt.

	v1	v3	v4	v5	v6	v7	v8
Final Note	0.2 ***	0.145 ***	0.04	0.1 ***	0.151 ***	0.161 ***	0.158 ***
Time	0.104 ***	0.078 ***	0.066	0.1 ***	0.118 ***	0.153 ***	0.126 ***
N. Father	0.009	0.035	−0.08 ***	0.031	0.032	0.061 **	0.016
N. Mother	0.05	0.073 **	−0.066 **	0.039	0.039	0.06 **	0.078 ***

Goodman and Kruskal gamma: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

Another significant result of the analysis of this factor is that it shows the existence of a relationship between the difficulty of the competences for students and the final mark they think they will obtain. However, unlike in previous cases, and as can be seen in table X, this significance is negative (inverse), since the greater the difficulty students perceive the competences to be, the lower the mark they expect to obtain at the end of the course (Table 6).

Table 6. Cramer's V test. Perception of the degree of difficulty in assimilating the competences.

	v11	v12	v13	v14	v16
Sex	0.034	0.109 ***	0.144 ***	0.12 ***	0.155 ***
Repeater	0.043	0.091 **	0.094 **	0.056	0.056
Study motivation	0.067 *	0.073 **	0.089 ***	0.063	0.052

Cramer V test: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

3.3. Factor 3. Perception of the Instruments Used to Assess the Degree of Attainment of the Competences

Finally, the results derived from this factor are presented, the analysis of which attempts to fulfil objective 3 of this research (to identify the existence of significant differences in the degree of difficulty presented by the competences in the geography and history class with the instruments used for their assessment). To this end, two variables related to the assessment instruments used in this subject were analysed, which question students on the suitability of which type of examination (short questions/test-type vs. essay questions) they consider to be the best strategy for assessing the knowledge acquired.

In this factor, unlike the other two, there is no significant relationship between gender and the perception of the assessment instruments used. However, there is a significant relationship with the students' motivation to study, with those students who are more motivated to study the subject preferring short test-type exams.

On the other hand, as in factor 2, there is a significant negative relationship when it comes to the final mark and the instruments used for assessment, indicating that the higher the mark obtained by the student, the worse they rate the assessment instruments used (Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7. Goodman and Kruskal gamma test. Perception of the degree of difficulty in assimilating the competences.

	v11	v12	v13	v14	v16
Final Note	−0.088 ***	−0.165 ***	−0.158 ***	−0.044 *	−0.094 ***
Time	0.008	−0.042 **	−0.022	−0.038	−0.048 *
N. Father	−0.027	−0.125 ***	−0.086 ***	−0.043	−0.048
N. Mother	−0.027	−0.064 **	−0.101 ***	−0.066 ***	−0.062 *

Goodman and Kruskal gamma: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

Table 8. Cramer’s V test. Perception of the instruments used to assess the degree of attainment of the competences.

	v21	v23
Sex	0.062	0.085 **
Repeater	0.045	0.065
Study motivation	0.075 **	0.108 ***

Cramer’s V test: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

It can also be affirmed that there is a relationship between the difficulty students perceive in acquiring competences and the assessment instruments used, since the greater the difficulty students perceive in acquiring these competences, the greater the disagreement they show with the assessment carried out and the instruments used for it.

Finally, it is essential to note the relationship found in Tables 4, 6 and 8. This relationship is significant above all with the gender variable and motivation to study. It is observed that they are closely related, since to the extent that they have an adequate perception of the competences as learned (Table 3), the difficulty they perceive of the competences is lower (Table 4), which translates into a positive perception of the adequacy of the means in the equation (Table 7). The same is true of the final mark variables, which are shown in Tables 5, 7 and 9. The higher the final mark, the better the students’ perception of the competences in terms of what they have learnt, the less difficult it is, and the more relevant the means of assessment used seem to them.

Table 9. Goodman and Kruskal gamma test. Perception of the instruments used to assess the degree of attainment of the competences.

	v21	v23
Final Note	−0.14 ***	0.239 ***
Time	−0.024	0.062 ***
N. Father	−0.039	0.06 **
N. Mother	−0.017	0.052 *

Goodman and Kruskal gamma: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$.

4. Discussion

In light of these results, it seems that the students’ perception is a key factor in carrying out the teaching-learning process through the competence-based approach. In view of Table 1, the selected factors determine the relevance of the competences worked on in the areas of social science, geography, and history through the thoughts of secondary school pupils, and determine their level of acquisition, the usefulness they attach to them in their immediate environment, the importance they attach to them, as well as their value and interest in them. Furthermore, through the second and third factors, an approximation to quality education is made by highlighting the degree of development of key competences in the selected area and their transposition into the lives of young people, as well as the dissatisfaction shown with the development of assessment processes. In this sense, we realise that pupils have many difficulties in identifying the key competences and carrying out learning through this approach.

4.1. The Perception of the Usefulness of the Key Competences According to What Has Been Learnt in the Subject of Geography and History

At present, students themselves, dragged along by a society whose mentality is that of minimum effort, and which promotes mechanical and repetitive processes to the detriment of procedures and attitudes, are reluctant to engage in this type of teaching. They find it more complicated, because they have to break with what they have been doing up to now, since learning by competences requires a change in the way of studying and working on the contents of the subject.

Moreover, on many occasions, this difficulty can be increased because teachers, in their almost unhealthy obsession with delivering what is planned, forget to provide the coherence needed to implement the competency-based approach. This results in a sense of confusion and anxiety on the part of the learner that makes them fail to understand the purpose of learning, and therefore, they end up detesting it (Coopmans et al. 2020; Sáez-López et al. 2021). This feeling is exacerbated when the lack of coherence, in addition to the methodological section, reaches the assessment section, since, as the results show, there is no correspondence between the students' expectations and the reality they actually obtain.

4.2. Differences in the Degree of Difficulty Presented by the Key Competences in Geography and History Class with the Instruments Used for Their Assessment

Among all these questions, the most pressing response is, without a doubt, that all teachers should distance themselves from classificatory assessment tests (Rodríguez 2017), which are incapable of assessing all those aspects that seem to be related to learning by competences (attitudes, values, emotions, individuality, and needs, among others) or, what is the same, the consideration of the principle of attention to diversity (Molina-Saorín 2017). This is because simply maintaining these assessment systems would mean continuing to reward those who memorise (surely for a limited time) without being able to put this learning into practice, as opposed to those who do not memorise but learn slowly and progressively (and who will certainly maintain this learning over time). All of this is done in order to achieve some apparently required minimums, although they are not included in any regulations as compulsory, and they rather seem to be the result of that outdated tradition in which teachers, perhaps due to ignorance of the regulations, maintain decrepit methodological and evaluative patterns, together with shallow behaviour on the part of the administration for the elaboration of educational regulations with common actions and univocal meanings.

4.3. Relationship between the Students' Perception of the Difficulty in Acquiring Key Competences and Their Usefulness

From this perspective, and on the basis of the research carried out, it is easy to understand that full compliance with the implementation of competency-based learning (Serrano González-Tejero and Parra 2011), at least from the perspective proposed, should mean that no student would have to overcome insurmountable barriers, such as being assessed without distinction, displaced (depending on their performance), assessed according to what they know (or do not know) how to do, or assessed with better future projections only if they can overcome each of the steps that the administration has set as essential minimums. In this sense, it is absolutely necessary to highlight that, as in the case of other areas or subjects, the normative analysis of learning by competences is lengthy; with regard to the research presented, the innovative nature of the same is underlined, as it is an enquiry into the perception of students, thus highlighting a twofold projection. On the one hand, a voice is given to secondary school pupils themselves, as they are the ones who will answer the questions that will ultimately be analysed, and, on the other hand, by focusing its scope of study on the competences worked on in social sciences, geography and history, the research approaches a field of study with little specialised, and almost unknown, literature.

5. Conclusions

Consequently, through the approaches indicated by means of theoretical enquiry and in harmony with the analysis resulting from this research, there appears to be an antithesis insofar as the educational regulations analysed raise aspects that contradict each other, specifically in articles that should be entirely concordant, as has been reflected in the aforementioned articles. Similarly, it seems to be the case that it is not known who is responsible for facilitating the development of these competences (Miralles and Gómez 2020; Gómez and Miralles 2016), since, on the one hand, it is made clear that teachers will

be responsible for selecting and accommodating them during the development of their subjects, but, on the other hand, a catalogue of minimum standards is established (by the administration), with barriers for those pupils who are not capable of surpassing them. It is therefore important to highlight who is responsible for developing competences, to what extent students are the real beneficiaries of competence-based learning, and in which cases competences can be assessed through standardised tests, since it is assumed that what they are learning, students will put into practice in their daily lives. (Ortega-Sánchez and Pagès 2020; Ortega-Sánchez and Olmos 2018).

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