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To cite this article: Leire Albás, Naiara Vicent, Iratxe Gillate & Alex Ibañez-Etxeberria (2023) Terrorism and politically motivated violence in the recent history of the Basque Country. Descriptive study of what teachers in training know, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 16:4, 767-787, DOI: [10.1080/17539153.2023.2266162](https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2023.2266162)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2023.2266162>




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Published online: 08 Nov 2023.



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Terrorism and politically motivated violence in the recent history of the Basque Country. Descriptive study of what teachers in training know

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ABSTRACT

Ever since ETA declared that it would no longer carry out acts of violence, the Basque Country has been involved in a peace process. As part of this process, the Basque government has promoted – through its *Adi-adian* Educational Module – the experience of listening to victims’ testimonies in order to inform young persons about an important chapter of our recent history. Reflecting an awareness of the importance of addressing socially relevant topics, the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) began to implement the *Adi-adian* model in a number of its bachelor’s and master’s degrees in teacher training. With a view towards improving the implementation of *Adi-adian*, a statistical-descriptive study was carried out with a quantitative methodological approach. Using a 25-item questionnaire, the purpose was to measure knowledge of recent historical events, determine the sources of information concerning those events, and gauge the satisfaction of participants as regards the information that they have received about the violent episodes of their recent history. The statistical analysis of the data obtained in this study was conducted using the SPSS Statistics 27 software. Generally speaking, the participating students were found to possess an average to low knowledge of the events that took place during the recent history of the Basque Country. As for the sources of information cited, the family, the media and the school are the most frequently mentioned, while respondents express a generalised dissatisfaction with the information received in this regard.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 February 2023
Accepted 20 September 2023

KEYWORDS

Citizenship education; controversial issues; human rights; terrorism; political violence

Introduction

Basque society has lived for a long time in a violent and intensely polarised environment characterised by a large number of human rights violations and countless victims of various actions, many of them of a terrorist and counterterrorist nature¹ Following the announcement by ETA of the definitive cessation of its armed activity in 2011, the Basque citizens found themselves immersed in a new stage in their history, having to face the

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complicated challenge of recovering peaceful coexistence. Against this background, public policies began to be implemented that entailed a series of educational programmes (Urkidi et al. 2022). One such programme is the educational module *Adi-adian*,² which is currently carried out in secondary education schools and universities. The central axis of this proposal is constituted by the educational testimonies of victims: people who intimately experienced the consequences of the conflict and who have undergone a personal process so as to be able to give their testimony in a constructive, reflective and educational way which ultimately nourishes coexistence (Etxeberria 2013).

This work is part of a broader research project called *Memoria y Convivencia* ("Memory and Coexistence") whose aim is to evaluate the impact that participation in the *Adi-adian* educational module has had on those who took part in the programme. More particularly, the present study corresponds to the first phase of that project, where the initial evaluation prior to the implementation of the *Adi-adian* programme is carried out in order to determine the extent of the knowledge that future teachers in the Basque Country have about these events. To this purpose, and before carrying out the analysis proper, we conduct a preliminary inquiry into the educational approach to controversial issues and the armed conflict. And we do so mainly from the perspective of memory and Human Rights, which provides the framework for the educational treatment of terrorism. Next, a review is made of the literature on the younger generation's attitude and degree of knowledge regarding ETA-related events. We expect this framework to help us collect the necessary information that will enable us to better interpret the results of our own research.

Treatment of controversial issues and armed conflicts

Certain episodes from the past have the potential to become a part of a people's collective memory in spite of not having been experienced directly (Cuesta 2011). According to Arnoso and co-authors (2018), there is a consensus when it comes to identifying violence as the central event in these collective memories, and also on the importance of their emotional impact in both the formation and persistence of these memories. Yet this same emotional impact also contributes to the silence of persons who continue to suffer from reliving these memories.

In a context of violence that is suffused with emotions and different interests, memory can become a space for conflicting tensions, without a consensus regarding the memory of past events, and with future aspirations influencing both how present problems are formulated and how we relate to the past (Cuesta 2011). As noted by Arnoso et al. (2018), this can lead to the existence of biased views of reality and the disappearance of certain conflicts in the teaching of history. The purpose of teaching history is to raise awareness of the existence of historical events that have been silenced and/or censored (Carretero 2017), provide training to better understand the various factors involved in conflict situations, defend the inclusion of heretofore silenced testimonies in the classroom, and promote collective positive emotions (Arnoso et al. 2018). As McCully (2012) points out, listening to these stories can motivate young people to care about victims in contexts far removed from their own. The victims' prior experiences can stimulate a process of reconciliation, and give rise to attitudes that are not based on violence (Bilbao and Etxeberria 2005). As Marco Macarro and Sánchez Medina (2008) point out, the

participation of these victims in a particular cultural setting is capable of transforming both individual and collective identities.

Corredor et al. (2018) consider that the inclusion of Historical memory education in school leads to the empowerment of students, who are thus provided with a series of tools that enable them to manage complex political situations, as well as to bring about change. In addition to promoting the recollection of past events in order to prevent their recurrence, addressing memory in the classroom should also allow for the interpretation of those events from an analytical and critical perspective (Cuesta 2011). As a controversial topic of current interest, it offers the possibility of varied responses, and therefore an opportunity to bring the topic into the classroom, where different viewpoints can be compared and contrasted in a critical spirit (Goldberg and Savenije 2018). However, as has been pointed out by López Facal and Santidrián (2011), classroom discussion can and must incorporate any and all opinions – as long as these opinions do not cross the line of respect for human rights.

As regards this issue, Barton (2020) has observed that students are not inclined to be overly concerned with human rights violations that do not directly concern their own personal environments. This is in spite of the fact that students do recognise the role of personal and institutional factors in the violation and protection of human rights. Barton (2020) attributes this phenomenon to limited comprehension on the part of the students of both political and economic mechanisms. This idea is related to the point made by Corredor et al. (2018), as well as to the findings by Jerome and Elwick (2018), who concluded that political literacy among students provides a basis for knowledge and understanding, which enables students to be more critical. Thus, once students are capable of recognising the range of current opinions – including extreme views –, they begin to recognise the biased nature of stories. This realisation in turn leads students to seek out varied sources of information, and to increase the degree of their political literacy. Closing the circle in this regard, Savage (2019) found a positive correlation between the political knowledge of teachers and the students' civic skills. For these reasons, when we work on these kinds of controversial issues, it seems important to acquire a broad-based knowledge of the events in question. Such knowledge will in turn allow one to acquire a political education. In the case of teacher training, the acquisition of such knowledge and education is doubly important, given teachers' responsibility to provide education in civic responsibility and human rights for future citizens.

In order to draw an outline of the current state of affairs in research work that addresses the educational treatment of politically-based armed conflicts, Vicent et al. (2020) carried out a literature review that demonstrates a growth in academic output on the subject. The study points to the usefulness of bringing these topics into the classroom in order to enhance coexistence and promote peace and reconciliation in societies affected by conflicts of this nature.

The case of the Basque Country: youth confronts its conflictive recent history

In the post-violence climate that took shape in the Basque Country after the cessation of ETA's armed activity, a number of proposals have emerged aimed at seeking a framework for coexistence, the *Adi-adian* module being one of the most

outstanding in the field of education with its commitment to bringing into the classroom the testimony of the victims. However, as was the case in Northern Ireland (O'Connor et al. 2020), the lack of clearly defined political positions with regard to the teaching of difficult and controversial stories, as argued by Ibagón (2020) in an international context, has slowed down, also in the Basque Country, the systematic implementation of teaching around terrorism through the educational programme *Herenegun!*. The latter's purpose was to incorporate the period termed Recent Memory (1960–2018) into the History curriculum of secondary education, but following political disagreements,³ it has remained in the pilot phase since 2019.

In relation to this issue, already in 2004, a Basque Government report referred to the students' interest in the subject and the demand by families for this interest to be catered for in such a way as to prevent any manipulation. However, the teachers declared that they did not feel either competent or confident with the subject and the ensuing silence was interpreted as a demand to separate political opinions from educational practice.

Confronted with this situation, and prior to carrying out our work, we wanted to find out how Basque youth situate themselves in relation to the conflictive recent history of the Basque Country. To do this, a review of research carried out on the subject will next be performed so as to enlarge the body of available information and better interpret the results of our study.

A study conducted with politically conscious youth from the Basque Country and Navarre, Iraola et al. (2020) found a relationship between the Basque conflict and fear of both ETA and the Spanish state and also observed according to the age of the participants. While the youngest participants considered the conflict to be something that belonged to the past, participants aged 25 and above considered the conflict to be a part of their political identity – and also indicated a higher degree of fear. This idea is related to a subsequent research (Larrinaga and Amurrio 2022) on young people from the Basque Country regarding the transformations in youth activist practices during the last decade (after the cessation of ETA's armed activity). In this investigation, a weakening of inherited loyalties and a certain breach between generations, whose experiences are different, were identified. Going back to previous research (Iraola Arretxe, Epelde Juaristi, and Odriozola Irizar 2020), these older participants also reported having been subject to a political learning process that was inextricably linked with a polarised social and political scene, in which family and formal education were identified as the primary sources of their political education. Along the same lines, Velte (2020) carried out a study with several young Basques born between 2000 and 2002 where he observed how collective memory is being built and transmitted to the first post-conflict generations, concluding that the Basque conflict is perceived by them through feelings and biases that are shaped around personal and family experience. This idea of the family as a primary source of information for youth regarding the Basque conflict was found in several studies conducted more than 10 years ago (Elzo et al. 2009). Along with the family, the media and – to a lesser degree – social networks and the internet, have also been identified as relevant sources of information (GAD3, 2020; Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017; Rodríguez Fouz 2021). However, in contrast to the findings of Iraola Arretxe et al. (2020), participants in these studies did not identify the school as one of their primary sources of information.

In the particular case of teachers in training, we have access to data obtained in a preliminary study that complements the research reported here and shares part of the sample under examination (Vicent et al. 2021). This study found that family, media, and school (in that order) had constituted the participants' primary sources of information.

This 2021 study (Vicent et al. 2021), as well as other research work (Albas, Echeberria, and Vicent 2022; Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017), clearly reflects a lack of satisfaction on the part of the Basque youth with the information that they have received – a finding that stands in contrast to the level of interest that these same youth reported regarding the subject being discussed, as has been found in several investigations (Albas, Echeberria, and Vicent 2022; Felices and Chaparro 2019; Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017; Rodríguez Fouz 2021; Vicent et al. 2021). This is moreover in accordance with the idea that the topic itself, if only partially, remains in the memory and consciousness of young people, even though they may feel it as something distant and rather related to the concerns of previous generations (Velte 2020).

Since ETA's 2011 declaration that it was laying down its arms, interest in what had happened before – and in finding out what people know about what happened – appears to be growing nothing but stronger. This heightened interest is reflected in a succession of recently published studies. One such recent production is the report produced by GAD3 (2020), a study of the knowledge of the history of ETA in Spain. This study was conducted throughout Spain on a broad sample of subjects, also of young age. This national survey detected a general lack of knowledge regarding ETA that was also reflected among the younger participants. The study found that the younger cohort had limited knowledge regarding either the origins of ETA or the number of civilian and children deaths attributed to the organisation. Furthermore, a small percentage claimed that they believed that ETA was still active at the time of the study. Only two of the ETA actions cited in the study were reported as being known by practically half of participants: the bombings of the Hipercor shopping centre in Barcelona and the Zaragoza barracks. In addition, a number of participants incorrectly associated several Islamist terrorist attacks with ETA. Among the victims of ETA terrorism, only Miguel Ángel Blanco was known by more than half of respondents. Luis Carrero Blanco came close to this threshold, being identified as an ETA target by 49% of participants. To a lesser extent, the names of Irene Villa and José Antonio Ortega Lara were recognised by participants, while Ernest Lluch and Francisco Tomás y Valiente were not identified by more than one-fifth of the younger cohort. An even lesser degree of knowledge was reported for Yoyes, who had first been a member of ETA, and then became one of its victims. It should be noted that one third of the sample of participants did not know what the acronym GAL referred to, and that half of them regarded it as an ETA commando unit). Finally, it should be noted as well that a high percentage of the younger respondents did not know who Lasa and Zabala were (i.e. GAL victims).

Turning now to the school setting, a recent study has shown that in the Spanish History books for secondary education's second grade, the political violence exerted by different actors (ETA, GRAPO, extreme right and police forces) in the years immediately following the Francoist dictatorship is not sufficiently represented, especially in the case of police violence (Magaldi 2022). A preliminary study that analyzes a large sample of textbooks in several knowledge areas of primary education and compulsory secondary education

reaches the same conclusion (Elizalde-Estenaga and Eta Gandara-Sorarrain 2022). Two other studies conducted on secondary school pupils regarding events surrounding the Spanish transition to democracy provide a number of clues. Sánchez-Agustí et al. (2019) asked a series of questions to nearly a thousand students from a variety of Spanish cities. The results indicated that, except for the case of the one Basque city represented in the study, only a minority of the participants associated the transition to democracy with a violent process. The authors attribute this difference to the terrorist actions of ETA linked to the Basque Country. The authors likewise explain the fact that the few mentions of terrorism come from the Basque Country participants in terms of this selfsame factor. Conversely, among those who identify the Transition as a peaceful period, the authors detected an assimilation of the official historiography presented in school textbooks. Also apparently reflecting acceptance of the official historiography are the few mentions of police repression (which participants did not associate with deaths).

In another study, Bueno and Arcocha (2020) reported data from research they conducted in Navarre that evaluated the knowledge of first-year high school students regarding the Spanish transition to democracy. This study found that a large number of the students surveyed identified the period as being violent. Thus, more than half of respondents acknowledged the creation by the Spanish state of illegal armed groups – as opposed to the nearly 25% of respondents who reported such an assertion as false (with students of foreign origin more prominently represented in the latter than in the former group). In addition, more than a half of respondents acknowledged that the illegally armed groups were responsible for the 300 deaths that had occurred during the Transition. On the other hand, respondents indicated that they also were aware of the existence of armed organisations that were opposed to Franco – although the students considered the existence of such organisations to be a secondary factor in bringing Franco's dictatorship to an end (with the dictator's death being the primary factor). In addition, we have the report commissioned by the Government of Navarre (Rodríguez Fouz 2021) and conducted on a large sample of secondary school students from the community. In this report, half of respondents demonstrated little or no knowledge of terrorism. Thus, fewer than half were able to identify any terrorist group that had operated in Navarre in recent decades. The group most commonly cited by respondents was ETA, with a far lesser degree of demonstrated knowledge of terrorism perpetrated by the extreme right, or of the GAL death squads. Finally, when participants in this study were asked if they were aware of institutional initiatives aimed at remediation of the damage caused, organisations involved in such undertakings, or social initiatives that promoted dialogue, more than a half responded "no".

Already at college level, research work carried out by Jiménez (2020) on university students from Navarre around the testimonies of ETA victims showed a considerable need to cultivate recent memory, concluding that exposure to testimonies entails an increase in the negative perception of ETA terrorism. Following this line, a pioneering investigation commissioned by the Basque Government (Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017), analysed the results of almost one thousand questionnaires that had been completed by students in Social Science and Education departments in three different Basque universities. These results revealed that the level of knowledge of past events was limited. However, given that this broad-based study was also concerned with other issues, only four such events in recent Basque history were mentioned. The first of these was the

Hipercor bombing, which received a correct response from nearly 50% of participants. The second had to do with the case of Lasa and Zabala and slightly exceeded one half of correct answers, just like a third event, which involved a question regarding Miguel Ángel Blanco. The fourth item mentioned GAL, and received a correct response from somewhat more than half of participants. Finally, it is noteworthy that there was a high proportion of “Don’t know” and “Not applicable” responses to each of these four questions.

Turning now to the education of teachers, a study was conducted at the University of Malaga as part of its Master’s programme for secondary school teachers (Felices and Chaparro 2019). This research involved a small sample, and was based on the same four questions posed in the previously discussed study by the Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe (2017). The results of this study revealed an ignorance of both the emergence and origins of ETA. In addition, only one-third of respondents could cite three names associated with ETA either directly or indirectly (with the names supplied being mainly victims). Participants also had difficulties identifying specific persons within ETA, and persons associated with the organisation. As regards the Hipercor bombing, only one-third of respondents could clearly identify this event. On the other hand, the assassination of Miguel Ángel Blanco was recognised by nearly all of those surveyed. Yet when it came to the details of this episode, respondents committed numerous errors. As for the question regarding Lasa and Zabala, the majority of those surveyed did not respond at all, with very few providing an accurate description of the case. Given these results, the authors of the paper concluded that, in spite of showing a general knowledge of the subject matter, the student responses contained notable errors, lacunae, and contradictions. These results led the authors to question how events in Spain’s recent history had been addressed in both secondary school classrooms and university degree programmes.

Finally, we will cite previous research conducted by the same research team involved in the study reported in this paper, the participants of which were also teachers in training in the Basque Country (Albas, Echeberria, and Vicent 2022). This previous survey examined a small sample of students in a Primary Education degree programme at the Gipuzkoa campus of the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU). This study used the same four questions that had been posed by the Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe (2017). The results of this prior study revealed a higher degree of knowledge of both GAL and the Lasa and Zabala case. On the other hand, only half of the sample knew of the Hipercor bombing, and an even lower percentage was able to correctly identify Miguel Ángel Blanco.

By way of conclusion, we can say that the prevailing interest in social conflicts requires that we address such issues in the classrooms of the Basque Country. This interest stands in contrast with the disinformation that young people complain about – disinformation corroborated by research findings that there is a considerable ignorance of what happened (both in general terms, and especially as regards violence perpetrated by the Spanish state and officially recognised by the Basque government (Carmena et al. 2013; Etxeberria, Martín Beristain, and Pego 2017; Landa 2008). Sáez de la Fuente et al. (2020) concluded that there was a generalised silence that prevailed in society about the Basque conflict that was also reflected in the region’s schools. Even so, the authors identified the existence among Basque youth of fragments of both individual and collective memory that had been internalised without having been questioned. The authors call for a careful

consideration of this fragmentary memory when it comes to designing teaching and learning processes, with the objective of promoting critical questioning of this fragmentary memory. In this way – the authors contend – the fragments can be transformed into knowledge of substantive quality. In turn, Velte (2020) points out the importance of dealing with these types of issues at school when she identifies a greater assimilation of the contents worked on at school in relation to the student's family environment.

Drawing on the literature review carried out by Ibagón (2020), we put the focus on the way in which some communities that have recently experienced internal armed conflicts deal at school with the challenge of teaching new generations the history of that difficult and traumatic past. To this effect, it is necessary to train future teachers in strategies that will enable them to deal with controversies in the classroom, since the analysis of such controversies allows us to approach the past, develop the students' historical thinking and understand the present around issues that are still open in our society.

That said, addressing difficult stories within the framework of formal educational processes can help us promote informed critical positions among the new generations about the causes and effects of an internal conflict, thus making it possible for them to reflect on why similar phenomena should be avoided in the present and in the future (Ibagón 2020).

Research goals

Taking into account all of the above, this paper pursues as its final objective to better understand the profile of students in initial teacher training at UPV/EHU who will participate in the *Adi-adian* programme. In accordance with the information obtained regarding the previous conceptions of the students, a didactic sequence will be designed that can be implemented as realistically as possible so as to attain better results in the future concerning the knowledge of recent Basque history and the political training of future teachers. To this end, several specific objectives are set:

- To gauge the knowledge of the students in initial teacher training at the UPV/EHU regarding the violations of Human Rights that have occurred in the recent history of the Basque Country.
- To identify the sources of information for students in relation to this knowledge.

Method

As noted above, this paper is part of a larger project that aims to assess the impact of the *Adi-adian* educational module on teacher training. Specifically, the work presented here corresponds to the first phase consisting in an initial evaluation. The results obtained in relation to the extent of knowledge possessed by the students about the violent events that took place will be taken into account when bringing *Adi-adian* into the classroom in order to enhance the proposal's contribution. Likewise, the data obtained in this phase will be compared in the future with the knowledge gathered by the participants in the module so as to assess the latter's impact.

While the methodological framework of the entire research is of a mixed nature, for this particular purpose, we propose a statistical-descriptive study that hinges on a quantitative methodological approach and resorts to an *ad hoc* questionnaire.

Sample

For the purposes of data collection, non-probabilistic data sampling has been utilised on the basis of stable coexistence groups. These groups comprise part of the larger set of students enrolled in one or more of the courses offered in the initial stages of the education programme for teaching social sciences at the UPV/EHU during the academic years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021.

After obtaining written consent from each of the participants, a final sample size of 259 students in the three faculties of education was obtained. Specifically, 45 of the students were enrolled in the Degree in Pre-school Education and 193 in the Degree in Primary Education (undergraduate students); and 21 in the Master's Degree in Secondary Education Teacher Training in Social Sciences (graduate students). The proportion of each of these groups in the sample was determined by the number of students enrolled in each of the three programmes.

Measurement tools

For the purpose of data collection, a self-administered questionnaire comprising 25 items was drawn up in both Spanish and Basque. The objective of the first part of this questionnaire (items 1–23) was to measure the knowledge of the participants by means of their responses to the multiple choices offered for each item (for which three options were provided, plus the option “Don't know/Not applicable”), with only one of the options being a correct response. The second part of the questionnaire sought to determine the sources of respondents' information (item 24) and their satisfaction with those sources (item 25). In item 24, a total of seven options were offered, and respondents were instructed to select one or more of these options. The seventh option allows the subject to write down a source of information that has not been offered in the previous six items. Finally, in item 25, respondents were instructed to select among four options on a Likert scale ranging from “Very Satisfied” to “Very Unsatisfied.”

The items in the first part of the questionnaire include the four questions used in the study conducted by the Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe (2017). The remainder of the questions were drawn up by the authors of the present study. The 23 items referring to knowledge of what had happened (items 1–23) have been organised in two distinct subcategories, following the classification proposed by the Basque Government (Carmena et al. 2013). The first subcategory, named “ETA,” comprises 13 items, and focuses on questions about this armed group. The second subcategory contains items related to acts of violence on the part of the Spanish state, its security forces, and extreme right-wing and parapolice groups, a subset that has been labelled “politically motivated violence”, following the terminology used by Landa (2008), who defines as political actors “The state and the groups that received its support or acquiescence” (our own translation). This subcategory comprises 10 items regarding events or information related to this victimiser.

A preliminary version of this questionnaire was created for the purpose of implementing a pilot study in November 2019. This initial version was also subjected to the validation of expert evaluators. Results of the pilot study and expert evaluation of those results were used to make necessary adjustments, and thus create the final version of the questionnaire used in this paper.

Procedure

After the required permits were obtained from the Ethics Committee for Research Involving Human Beings (CEISH-UPV/EHU: M10/2019/197), a copy of the questionnaire was supplied to each of the participants for self-administration under routine teaching conditions prior to implementation of the *Adi-adian* programme. Copies of the questionnaire were collected in both hard-copy and digital format (the latter using *Google Forms*). Questionnaires were collected through use of pseudonyms, and via the assigning of numeric codes. After the project conducted in the classroom was finalised and graded, informed consent was obtained from each of the participants in the study.

Either Spanish or Basque was employed as the language for data collection (depending on the language used in the course in which the individual subjects recruited for the study were enrolled).

Data analysis

After establishing the absence of both outliers and patterns of missing non-random values, descriptive statistics and frequency tables were created for the items (1–23) related to knowledge of events. The results obtained for each of the items were classified by percentage and number of correct responses. Considering the difficulty of a number of the questions, the following scale of knowledge of events was used: Poor – 20–39% correct; Moderate – 40–69%; and High – 70% or greater. Any score of 20% or less was considered to reflect lack of knowledge or minimal knowledge.

In order to establish statistical significance, given the absence of compliance with normalisation parameters, the Mann-Whitney U and Wilcoxon -tests were used. In addition, contingency tables were obtained using the Chi-square test. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d*, following the proposal of Lenhard and Lenhard (2016) for non-parametric tests.

Statistical processing of data was conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 27 programme.

Results

The correct response rate of 44.09% that was obtained indicates a moderate-to-poor general knowledge of events that occurred during the recent history of the Basque Country. However, a three-point differential was noted between Master's programme students and undergraduate students. Thus, it can be said that the Master's students (55.26%) displayed a moderate knowledge of events, while the results for the undergraduate subgroup (43.09%) could be classified as "poor-to-moderate." These results are displayed in [Table 1](#) below. A Mann-Whitney U test conducted on these data revealed

Table 1. General knowledge.

		Total	Undergrads	Master's
N	Valid	259	238	21
	Missing	0	0	0
M		10.14	9.91	12.71
SD		4.331	4.289	4.051

statistically significant differences between the two subgroups, with a low effect size ($U = 1627.5, p < .01, d = 0.335$).

An analysis of the means by victimiser indicates that, for both subgroups, undergraduate participants obtained lower scores than Master's students, with the Mann-Whitney U test indicating statistically significant results as regards both knowledge of ETA ($U = 1755.5, p < .05, d = 0.285$) and knowledge of politically motivated violence ($U = 1613.5, p < .01, d = 0.32$). Participants in the undergraduate subgroup responded correctly to 49.15% of the items referring to ETA, and to 35.2% of items dealing with politically motivated violence. Conversely, students in the Master's subgroup displayed moderate knowledge both as regards the items concerning ETA (60%) and those concerning politically motivated violence (49%) – although the level of knowledge of the second category was, lower than that of the first. Thus, taking into account the results of all study participants, there were correct responses to 50.08% of questions that referred to ETA, and 36.3% correct responses to questions concerning politically motivated violence, numbers that indicated moderate and poor levels of knowledge respectively (Tables 2 and 3). Statistical differences with respect to the victimiser were demonstrated using the Wilcoxon test, and displayed a very high size effect in all three instances: total sample ($Z = -12.881, p < .001, d = 2.67$), undergraduate students ($Z = -12.316, p < .001, d = 2.651$) and Master's students ($Z = -3.845, p < .001, d = 3.084$).

A breakdown of results for each of the individual items referring to ETA (Table 4) reveals that percentage of correct responses exceeded 70% in only two instances. These two items referred to ETA's laying down its arms (i12) and the assassination of Carrero Blanco (i15). Respondents were less familiar with ETA's origins (i5, i6, i7) and other violent actions that it had carried out (i1, i3, i9, i13). Generally speaking, responses showed little familiarity with specific victims and events, such as the murder of Gregorio Ordoñez (i18) and the kidnapping of Ortega Lara (i20). Finally, other than the total number of murders

Table 2. Knowledge of ETA.

		Total	Undergrads	Master's
N	Valid	259	238	21
	Missing	0	0	0
M		6,51	6,39	7,81
SD		2,612	2,587	2,600

Table 3. Knowledge of politically motivated violence.

		Total	Undergrads	Master's
N	Valid	259	238	21
	Missing	0	0	0
M		3,63	3,52	4,90
SD		2,186	2,181	1,841

Table 4. Knowledge of ETA.

Item No.	Correct		Incorrect		Missing cases
	N	%	N	%	
i15	231	89.5	27	10.5	1
i12	199	76.8	60	23.2	0
i1	172	66.4	87	33.6	0
i5	171	66	88	34	0
i3	154	59.5	105	40.5	0
i6	148	57.1	111	42.9	0
i9	140	54.1	119	45.9	0
i13	128	49.4	131	50.6	0
i7	126	48.6	133	51.4	0
i18	86	33.2	173	66.8	0
i20	83	32	176	68	0
i22	24	9.3	235	90.7	0
i19	23	8.9	236	91.1	0

for which ETA was responsible (i9) (information that was more well known) questions regarding the number of persons victimised by violence reflected very limited knowledge. This was the case as regards the number of threatened persons who required bodyguards (i22) and the number of victims of extortion (i19).

Among all of the questionnaire items related to knowledge of ETA, only the results for the question regarding the origins of the organisation (i6) indicated statistically significant differences ($X^2 = 10.368$, $p = .001$, $gI = 1$, $d = 0.4084$) in responses between undergraduate and Master's students, with an effect size of low-to-moderate. Here once again, results for the Master's students ($N = 19$; 90.5%) were better than those for undergraduate students ($N = 129$; 48.3%).

As regards the subgroup of items that concerned politically motivated violence (Table 5), students displayed a moderate knowledge of a number of questions that are still current issues (i.e. regarding the dispersal of ETA inmates in Spanish prisons (i16, i23)). Respondents also displayed a certain familiarity with the case of Lasa and Zabala (i2) and the GAL organisation (i4). However, fewer students were acquainted with details such as when GAL began its activities (i8), the target victims of its actions – such as Santi Brouard (i17), and also were generally unaware of other parapolice or extreme right-wing groups whose ideology was similar to that of GAL (i11). In addition, individual responses revealed a minimal knowledge of the number of persons victimised by violence (i10, i14) and of the number of extreme right-wing terrorist groups that had existed (i21).

Table 5. Knowledge of politically motivated violence.

Item No.	Correct		Incorrect		Missing cases
	N	%	N	%	
i23	169	65.3	90	34.7	0
i4	167	64.5	92	35.5	0
i2	140	54.1	119	45.9	0
i16	140	54.1	119	45.9	0
i11	87	33.6	172	66.4	0
i8	77	29.7	182	70.3	0
i17	57	22	202	78	0
i14	41	15.8	218	84.2	0
i10	39	15.1	220	84.9	0
i21	23	8.9	236	91.1	0

Table 6. Level of student satisfaction with information received.

	Very satisfied		Quite satisfied		Not very satisfied		Very unsatisfied		Missing cases
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Undergrads	3	1.3	38	16.5	122	53	67	29.1	8
Master's	0	0	1	5	12	60	7	35	1
Total	3	1.2	39	15.6	134	53.6	74	29.6	9

Table 7. Cited sources of information.

	School		Family		Friends		Media		Social Networks/Internet		Books		Missing cases
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Undergrads	90	59.2	100	65.8	46	30.3	87	57.2	64	42.1	14	9.2	86
Master's	4	19	12	57.1	8	38.1	16	76.2	11	52.4	7	33.3	0
Total	94	54.3	112	64.7	54	31.2	103	59.5	75	43.4	21	12.1	86

Statistically significant differences according to level of instruction were found with respect to a number of the above-cited items. In each of these instances, a higher degree of knowledge was displayed by the Master's students, and the size effect was moderate. Thus, for the item dealing with the case of Lasa and Zabala (i2) ($X^2 = 4.509$, $p < .05$, $gI = 1$, $d = 0.2662$), 52.1% of the undergraduate subgroup ($N = 124$) responded correctly, as opposed to 76.1% ($N = 16$) of the Master's subgroup. As regards the question about GAL (i4) ($X^2 = 12.59$, $p < .001$, $gI = 1$, $d = 0.4521$) 100% of the Master's students ($N = 21$) responded correctly, while 61.3% of undergraduate students ($N = 146$) did so. Finally, a difference was observed in knowledge regarding distribution of ETA's prison inmates (i23) ($X^2 = 9.063$, $p < .01$, $gI = 1$, $d = 0.3808$) with 95.2% of Master's students ($N = 20$) responding correctly, compared to 62.6% of undergraduate students ($N = 149$).

Turning to level of satisfaction with information received (Table 6), 82.9% ($N = 210$) of respondents indicated dissatisfaction, a rate that was somewhat higher among Master's students ($N = 19$, 95%) than among undergraduates ($N = 189$, 82%). However, there was no statistically significant difference found between the two groups as regards level of satisfaction with information received.

As for sources of information cited by participants in the study (Table 7), those most frequently alluded to were family, media, and school. However, there was a difference in terms of preferences between the undergraduates and the Master's students. Thus, the primary sources of information cited by the Master's programme students were media, family, and social networks/internet – with school being the least frequently chosen option. Conversely, undergraduate respondents chose family, school, and media in that order. Despite these differences, only the options of school ($X^2 = 11.995$, $p < .001$, $gI = 1$, $d = 0.5459$) and books ($X^2 = 10.067$, $p < .01$, $gI = 1$, $d = 0.4971$) reveal low-to-moderate significant differences.

Discussion

The data obtained reveal a general dissatisfaction on the part of the student respondents about the information they have received regarding the armed conflict

in the Basque Country. This finding is consistent with two previous studies conducted by our research team (Albas, Echeberria, and Vicent 2022; Vicent et al. 2021), and also with the results of a study conducted in the Basque Country (Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017).

Information reported here regarding sources of information is also consistent with the findings of previous studies. Thus, participants in the present study identified family, media, school and – to a lesser extent – social networks/internet as their primary sources of information, with their order of importance varying among the different studies. Specifically, school was listed as one of the most important sources of information only in the study of Iraola and others (2020) and in our own previous paper (Vicent et al. 2021). Conversely, the other studies (GAD3, 2020; Elzo et al. 2009; Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017; Rodríguez Fouz 2021) indicated that their participants reported school as being a source of information of lesser importance. In this regard, the results presented here reveal differences between undergraduate and graduate students when it comes to identifying books and school as relevant sources of information. In the case of books, it does seem logical to expect that graduate students report having had greater recourse to books, given that they are receiving advanced instruction in the social sciences. Accordingly, it can be assumed that the graduate students have more keenly cultivated the habit of reading historical materials than their undergraduate counterparts. As regards school, it is striking that the subgroup of Master's programme students relegates it to last place in importance among sources of information. This stands in contrast to the data for undergraduate students, for whom school is the second most important source. This leads us to consider the possibility that something may be changing, and that the conflict that is the subject of the present study is slowly becoming a part of classroom instruction in schools. However, the results of the present study raise questions as to how the subject is being addressed, given the moderate-to-poor knowledge of events revealed by our results – especially among those in the undergraduate subgroup that identifies school as one of its most important sources of information. This idea would be in line with the still scarce presence of the subject in textbooks (Elizalde-Estenaga & Gandara-Sorarrain, 2022; Magaldi 2022).

Differences between the undergraduate and Master's level participants in this study are clear, and can be understood in terms of the social science education (specifically, and in many cases, in the field of history) of the Master-level students – and can also be explained by the fact that these students are older than the undergraduates. In this regard, Iraola et al. (2020) indicate that, for persons above the age of 25, the Basque conflict constitutes a part of their political awareness, whereas for those 25 and younger, it is something that belongs to the past. Yet despite this difference, knowledge levels are not high in the case of either subgroup – a finding that corroborates the observations in our preliminary study (Albas, Echeberria, and Vicent 2022), as well as the findings of the research conducted at the request of the Basque Government and aimed at discovering where youth stood regarding the terrorism and human rights violations that occurred in the Basque Country (Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017). On the national level, there is more extensive study which confirms the limited knowledge of the subject among young people (GAD3, 2020).

The item in this survey that resulted in the highest rate of correct responses concerned the assassination of Carrero Blanco by ETA. We attribute this finding to the fact that this

historical event is included in the content of the EAU, the university admission examination. Another item that elicited a high percentage of correct responses was the date that ETA announced it was laying down its arms. One might assume that this can be accounted for by the relative recency of this event (as is also the case for the dispersal of ETA prisoners, which respondents also tended to be familiar with). However, respondents were far less familiar with the so-called “backpack children” a phenomenon related to the imprisonment of ETA convicts in facilities distant from their homes. On the other hand, although ETA’s cessation of armed activity is a relatively recent event, it did occur more than 10 years ago. In the case of many of the respondents, this lapse of time represents more than half of their lifetime. For this reason, we can rule out recency as a cause of the high rate of correct responses, which we instead attribute to ETA’s 2011 announcement being a landmark historical event. This explanation also applies to the assassination of Carrero Blanco and other events more frequently recognised by respondents (the kidnapping and murder of Miguel Ángel Blanco by ETA; the murder of Lasa and Zabala by GAL, and the date of ETA’s emergence).

These landmark events were also referenced in other studies, with varying results (GAD, 2020; Albas, Echeberria, and Vicent 2022; Felices and Chaparro 2019; Instituto de Derechos Humanos Pedro Arrupe 2017). We therefore share the view that both the context and the sample under examination may determine whether greater or lesser levels of familiarity with such events are reported. The source of the subjects’ information, and the way in which the events are presented in these sources, may also both be determining factors. As regards this issue, it seems to be the case that knowledge of GAL and its actions appears to be greater in the Basque Country than in the rest of Spain.

It seems to us that, just as there is familiarity with the time that ETA appeared on the political scene, the date of GAL’s establishment should be equally well known – since this too was one of the landmark events that we are referring to. However, the item related to the establishment of GAL’s death squads received a low score from respondents (although respondents did indicate a general awareness of what GAL was in responding to a different item in the survey). These findings lead us to consider two possibilities: first, that information presented in the school may be superficial and confusing, and may leave out important data; and secondly, that material concerning the conflict has been presented in a biased manner. As was the case in the study conducted in Malaga (Felices and Chaparro 2019), confusion on the part of some respondents about who Miguel Ángel Blanco was and the general ignorance about ETA’s origins tend to reinforce the first of these possibilities. And the statistically significant differences between levels of knowledge of ETA, on the one hand, and politically motivated violence, on the other, tend to reinforce the second hypothesis.

The incomplete view of events offered in formal educational settings may also be related to other items that received high numbers of incorrect responses. Some such items had to do with events or particular victims that were less widely known, and that had received less media attention (e.g. the murder of Santi Brouard by GAL, or of Gregorio Ordoñez by ETA – despite the fact that Ordoñez was the first councilman murdered by ETA after the transition to democracy, and thus could also be considered a “landmark event”). Respondents displayed an even lesser degree of familiarity with numerical data. Thus, except for the number of deaths for which ETA was responsible, items having to do with numbers were among those for which the most incorrect responses were received.

The study conducted by GAD3 (2020) reported this same tendency – a tendency which does seem logical, given that highly specific data are involved. However, the fact that participants were able to correctly indicate the number of ETA's murder victims – but not the numbers of victims of extortion or torture, or the number of persons requiring bodyguards – may be related to the fact that data presented in classrooms are limited to fatalities and exclude victims of other kinds of violence.

Statistically significant differences were found between the number of correct responses of participants in the Master's and undergraduate subgroups for four of the questionnaire items, three of which belonged to the set of questions that concern politically motivated violence. Given that the percentage of correct responses to these items was lower among the undergraduate students (i.e. the subgroup of participants that identified school as a primary source of their information), the knowledge gap reflected here is of considerable concern. Particularly salient in this regard is the fact that no more than 25% of the undergraduate students were able to identify GAL. Although the percentage of correct responses to this item was greater than that reported in the study conducted by GAD3 (2020), it still strikes us as reflecting a high degree of ignorance. These findings are consistent with the report of Sánchez-Agusti and her colleagues (2019) regarding secondary students' views of the Spanish transition to democracy. They found that Spanish youth characterised this historical period as peaceful – with data obtained from the one Basque city included in the study most strongly reflecting the view that this was a violent era. The authors attribute this finding to ETA's terrorism, while noting that participants displayed low levels of awareness of police repression, which they did not associate with deaths. Our conclusion in this regard is that, in spite of the fact that ignorance of this part of history is an accepted fact at the institutional level (Carmena et al. 2013; Etxeberria, Martín Beristain, and Pego 2017; Landa 2008), the lack of knowledge thus reflected may be the result of the transmission of an official memory that suppresses a part of history – a suppression of historical memory that, as Arnoso et al. (2018) point out – frequently occurs in conflict situations, as demonstrated by studies based on the analysis of textbooks (Elizalde-Estenaga & Gandara-Sorarrain, 2022; Magaldi 2022).

As pointed out by Sáez de la Fuente et al. (2020), we understand that ignorance of events is directly related to the silence that has prevailed for years in the school environment, where teachers have not felt emotionally prepared to face the issue until at least a few years ago (Basque Government, 2004). Still today, as Ibagón (2020) points out, this phenomenon happens in territories that have experienced a recent armed conflict and where it is difficult to introduce the historical facts in the classroom. This is proven by the difficulties encountered in implementing the *Herenegun!* proposal in a generalised way, to the point that this initiative has eventually become a space for strong political tensions probably stemming from different interests and emotional experiences (Cuesta 2011). Indeed, *Herenegun!* has failed to obtain the necessary consensus for it to be deployed in a durable way.

Conclusions

One of the conclusions emerging from the present study is that youth and emerging adults in the Basque Country are highly unsatisfied with the information that they have received regarding terrorism, violence, and the violation of human rights in this territory. A related finding is that the limited information that this age group do possess has been obtained from their families, the media, school and – to a lesser

extent – social networks and the internet. The differences in the reporting of school as a primary source of information would appear to indicate that these topics are beginning to be addressed in the classroom (i.e. given that it is the subgroup of younger undergraduate students that most frequently reports reliance on information obtained in school). However, the fact that undergraduate students identify school as a primary source of their information leads us to question the way in which the subject matter is being addressed in classrooms.

We have seen that future teachers have a generally low level of knowledgeability regarding the subject, with inadequacies in this respect that are more evident among undergraduate students who are studying to become early childhood or primary school teachers. In turn, future secondary school teachers display a greater awareness of past events, and their education and age seem to be the decisive factors in their higher level of knowledgeability. In general, it is worth noting the superficial knowledge of past events as well as the stark differences in the extent of knowledge possessed about ETA on the one hand, and about events related to state violence, parapolic groups, and extreme right-wing groups on the other – with ignorance regarding the latter appearing to reflect a process whereby certain historical episodes have become invisible (Carretero 2017).

In our view, the presentation of armed conflicts in classrooms should lead students to understand these phenomena in multi-factorial terms, and an analytic and critical perspective should be promoted in teaching about such conflicts (Cuesta 2011; Goldberg and Savenije 2018). Accordingly, an incomplete version of the history should not be provided in educational settings – especially if we have in view objectives of a transformational character (Corredor, Wills-Obregon, and Asensio-Brouard 2018; Sáez de la Fuente Aldama, Bermúdez Vélez, and Prieto Mendaza 2020) that emphasise respect for human rights (López-Facal and Santidrián 2011). For these reasons, no instance of human rights violation – whatever its particular context or relative intensity – should be excluded from the presentation of this subject in classrooms.

For all of these reasons, in post-conflict contexts such as the one that concerns us here, we believe it is important to bring the testimonies of victims of different kinds of violence and victimisers into classrooms. As Arnosó et al. (2018) point out, such experiences might be conducive to the emergence of collective emotions that could even lead to “taking care of the other” (McCully 2012). According to Jerome and Elwick (2018), exposure of students to diverse opinions helps them to appreciate the complex and biased nature of narratives, thus enhancing their political education – a goal that is of particular interest for future teachers, given that higher levels of political education among teachers lead in turn to higher levels of civic competence among the students taught by these teachers (Savage 2019).

In view of this situation, we consider it essential to bring controversial issues such as terrorism or political violence into the classroom in contexts where this phenomenon has been experienced, as is the case with Basque society. It seems especially important to us to work on the training of teachers as future educators and therefore professionals responsible for the future of society. Specifically, we believe that putting the focus on these issues provides the opportunity to understand the complexity of history from a broad, critical and analytical perspective underpinned by the principle of education for citizenship. The incorporation into the classroom of different testimonies from victims of terrorism or counterterrorism can be of great help in order to prevent terrorist actions from happening again.

Notes

1. Some of the reports made about violations of Human Rights may be viewed at the following link from the Basque government: <https://www.euskadi.eus/documentos-paz-convivencia/web01-s1lehbak/es/>
2. Information on the proposal can be accessed at the following link from the Basque Government: <https://www.euskadi.eus/gobierno-vasco/-/modulo-adi-adian/>
3. The controversy raised can be followed at the following link from the Basque Government: <https://www.irekia.euskadi.eus/es/search/1305631?sort=date>; see also some current media coverage (Hernández, J.J., 2023; Noticias Taldea Multimedia, 2023; Segovia, 2023)

Acknowledgements

This project has received financial support from the office of the Vice Rector for Innovation, Social Outreach and Cultural Activities of the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) via the Educational Innovation Project Memory and Coexistence (HBP2019-20/102); from the Vice-Rectorate for Basque Language and Continuing Education of the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) (PIC INVEC3L4-D00024-1); and from the Basque Government, via the Research Group GIPyPAC, UPV/EHU (IT1442-22), the Department of Peace and Coexistence of the Basque Government (OTRI-EHU2023.0268).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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