





The Didactics of Children's and Young Adult Literature in Spanish university teaching plans

La Didáctica de la Literatura Infantil y Juvenil en planes docentes universitarios españoles

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Funding: The edition and publication of this work has been possible thanks to the funding granted by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by the Regional Government of Extremadura to the Education, Culture and Territory Research Group (SEJ036) through grant reference GR21011.

Abstract

This study analyses the compulsory subjects in Spanish language related to the Didactics of Children's and Young Adult Literature in the degrees of teachers in Primary Education of Spanish universities based on the analysis of the data reflected in their teaching plans. Information was obtained from 40 Spanish universities. Several aspects are analysed, such as their field of knowledge (specific didactics - social and legal sciences or philology - humanities), its nature within the various curricula, the credits assigned, its name as a subject, the frequency of its main thematic descriptors and course bibliography. Based on this eminently quantitative analysis, the general conclusion is that in almost all these aspects there is great heterogeneity and a lack of common criteria, at least in the presentation of the subjects. This may be due to the relatively recent creation of departments of language and literature didactics in Spanish universities, which has repercussions both on the efforts to stabilise the area and on the progressive epistemological accommodation of children's and young adult literature in the degrees where it is taught.

Keywords: Children's literature; Higher Education; teacher training; Spanish university.



Resumen

En el presente estudio se analizan las asignaturas obligatorias en lengua española relacionadas con la Didáctica de la Literatura Infantil y Juvenil en los grados de maestros en Educación Primaria de las universidades españolas a partir del análisis de los datos reflejados en sus planes docentes. Se obtuvo la información de 40 universidades españolas. Se examinaron diversos aspectos como el campo de conocimiento de origen (Didácticas específicas - Ciencias Sociales y Jurídicas, o Filología - Humanidades), su carácter obligatorio en el plan de estudio, el número de créditos asignados, la denominación como asignatura, así como los autores más citados en sus bibliografías. De este análisis eminentemente cuantitativo y descriptivo se extrajo la conclusión general de que existe una gran heterogeneidad en la presentación de las asignaturas. Todo ello puede deberse a la relativamente reciente creación de los departamentos de Didáctica de la Lengua y la Literatura en la universidad española, que repercute tanto en los esfuerzos por perimetrar el área, como en el progresivo acomodo epistemológico de la Literatura Infantil y Juvenil en los títulos donde se desarrolla.

Palabras clave: Literatura infantil y juvenil; Educación Superior; formación de maestros; universidad española.

INTRODUCTION

Compared to the existence of teaching studies, the incorporation of children's literature and its didactics into the curricula of Spanish universities is a relatively recent development, which led to an epistemological revision of the concept in the 1980s (Cervera, 1989; López & Guerrero, 1993; Núñez, 1998, among others). To a large extent, the "marginal" nature of children's literature in the sphere of literary studies has been one of the reasons for this recent incorporation (Botrel, 1982; López, 1990; Sánchez, 1995; Soriano, 1995; Fernández, 1996; García, 1998), whose aspects were definitively closed by works such as those by Moreno and Sánchez (2000), Cerrillo and Sánchez (2006), Díaz-Plaja (2009) or Colomer (2010), who gave an autonomous and differentiating entity thereto. The university restructuring of teacher training curricula as a result of the adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (Lebrero, 2007) led to the inclusion of children's literature as a didactic discipline at the service of early childhood education, in a competency-based model (Montero, 2010) with new methodological approaches (Cerrillo, 2007), all supported by a large number of children's publications that have appeared in recent years (García-Rodríguez, 2011). Therefore, in the meanwhile, various university teaching manuals have been published aimed at addressing this didactic area in the field of teacher training: García-Rivera (1995), Colomer (1998), Montero (2000), Ruiz (2000), López and Encabo (2004), Perera (2007), Cerrillo (2007), Martín-Vegas (2009), López and Encabo (2013), Gutiérrez (2016), Palou and Fons (2016), Soto et. al. (2017) or the recent joint monograph coordinated by Molina (2020). They are all clear examples of the interest of researchers in the field in delimiting the perimeter of the area for future teachers.

Despite this, there is a lack of studies that analyse how this incorporation of subjects related to the Didactics of Children's and Young Adult Literature has exactly taken place in Spanish universities in order to measure the degree of homogeneity and establishment and, in this way, to see at what stage of the process we are at. Although such analysis can be approached from different angles, there is no doubt that checking curricula against

each other can provide solid information, the data and metadata of which can be statistically cross-checked.

A number of studies have increasingly shifted the field of analysis towards our quantitative and statistical research method, focusing on the evidence from the curricula. [Mendoza \(1998\)](#) addressed this issue by highlighting the training of future teachers in literature and reading, an approach that would later be developed by [Larrañaga, Yubero and Cerrillo \(Larrañaga et al., 2008\)](#). Other research focused on the initial training that future teachers receive in relation to their reading mediation skills ([Aguilar-López, 2013](#) or [Gallego & Rodríguez, 2015](#)) or on their training in the field of children's literature and the need to modify their previous vision ([Taberner, 2013](#)), but has not focused on teaching plans, as proposed herein. Therefore, the precedents of [Cerrillo \(1990\)](#), [García \(1993\)](#), [Tejerina \(1997\)](#), [Silva-Díaz \(2000\)](#) and [Palomares \(2015\)](#) already advanced the problem of training future teachers through the revision of curricula. We then find the work of [Ibarra and Ballester \(2013\)](#), which directly addresses the issue by focusing on Universidad de Valencia. Other studies, such as the recent one by [Larragueta and Ceballos-Viro \(2020\)](#), are completely at the heart of our research. In short, they show the unequal way Spanish universities have incorporated subjects related to the Didactics of Children's and Young Adult Literature in their curricula. Firstly, this analysis shows that the 65 subjects for Early Childhood Education Teachers' studies included in the Register of Universities, Centres and Degrees, RUCT ([Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, 2021](#)), show a high degree of differentiation both in their form of enunciation and in their development. Therefore, only 38 of these degrees offer a subject devoted to literature, not always to children's literature. On the other hand, students' vision of these subjects is very unequal, as [Martín-Macho and Neira-Piñero \(2017\)](#) note for the field of Early Childhood Education.

In this context of research, this article falls within what these lines describe from the more general to the more particular. The following general objective is presented: to identify the characteristics of the teaching plans on Children's and Young Adult Literature taught in Primary Education Degrees in Spanish universities when it is considered as a compulsory subject of Spanish language, since it is only in these cases when it is a question of homogeneous training among all the students who take this degree in Spain. The specific objectives are as follows: (1) to identify the university degrees where it is taught and the field of knowledge (Humanities or Social and Legal Sciences, in this case in Specific Didactics) it belongs to; (2) to analyse the degree of homogeneity in its denomination; (3) to know the credits awarded thereto; (4) to identify the authors and works most cited in the bibliography of the teaching plans with the intention of configuring a canon of bibliographical sources.

METHOD

The starting point being prior similar studies by [Palomares \(2015\)](#) for Primary Education and [Larragueta and Ceballos-Viro \(2020\)](#) in the field of Early Childhood Education, as well as comparative analyses of subject teaching plans such as that conducted by [Sánchez-García \(2013\)](#), following the models of [Wimmer and Dominick \(1996\)](#), we first downloaded the teaching plans of 43 subjects belonging to 40 Spanish universities where Primary Education Degree is taught for the 2020-2021 academic year (10 years after the implementation of the Bologna Plan).

The study sources used correspond to the information that appears on the different official websites of the Spanish universities where Primary Education degrees are taught. The universities under study, in alphabetical order, are the following: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Alicante, Almería, Autònoma de Barcelona, Autònoma de Madrid, Barcelona, Burgos, Cádiz, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Católica de Murcia, CEU, Comillas, Complutense, Córdoba, Extremadura, Granada, Huelva, Illes Balears, Jaén, A Coruña, La Laguna, La Rioja, León, Lleida, Málaga, Murcia, Navarra, Oviedo, País Vasco, Palmas de Gran Canaria, Pontificia de Salamanca, Rey Juan Carlos, Salamanca, Santiago de Compostela, UNIR, Valencia, Valladolid, Vigo and Zaragoza.

The sample obtained is deemed to be sufficiently valid to conduct a descriptive analysis of the presence of the aforementioned subject. [Table 1](#) shows the number of subjects analysed per university in the Degree in Primary Education that refer to Children's and Young Adult Literature.

Table 1. Number of subjects analysed per university in the Degree in Primary Education

Subjects under analysis	Universities
1 subject	37
2 subjects	3

A total of 43 compulsory subjects were analysed. In order to determine the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the criteria used in the different teaching plans on Children's and Young Adult Literature taught in Primary Education Degrees at Spanish universities, we analysed the credits assigned to the subjects, their names, the courses where they are taught and the bibliographical references referred to in the teaching plans, as well as the links to different areas of knowledge (didactics or philology) and departments. The restriction to a specific qualification (Primary Education) and to a specific nature (compulsory) makes the results more accurate, as it is in line with the training that in principle should be compulsory for any university student taking these studies.

Interesting factors referred to in the description of the data sources were analysed by means of a descriptive rather than inferential analysis, as the replicability of the results is highly conditioned by the sample analysed, which practically represents the entire population, although not all universities make this information available on their online portals.

RESULTS

In the light of the analysis of these teaching plans, a number of results emerge, which are presented below.

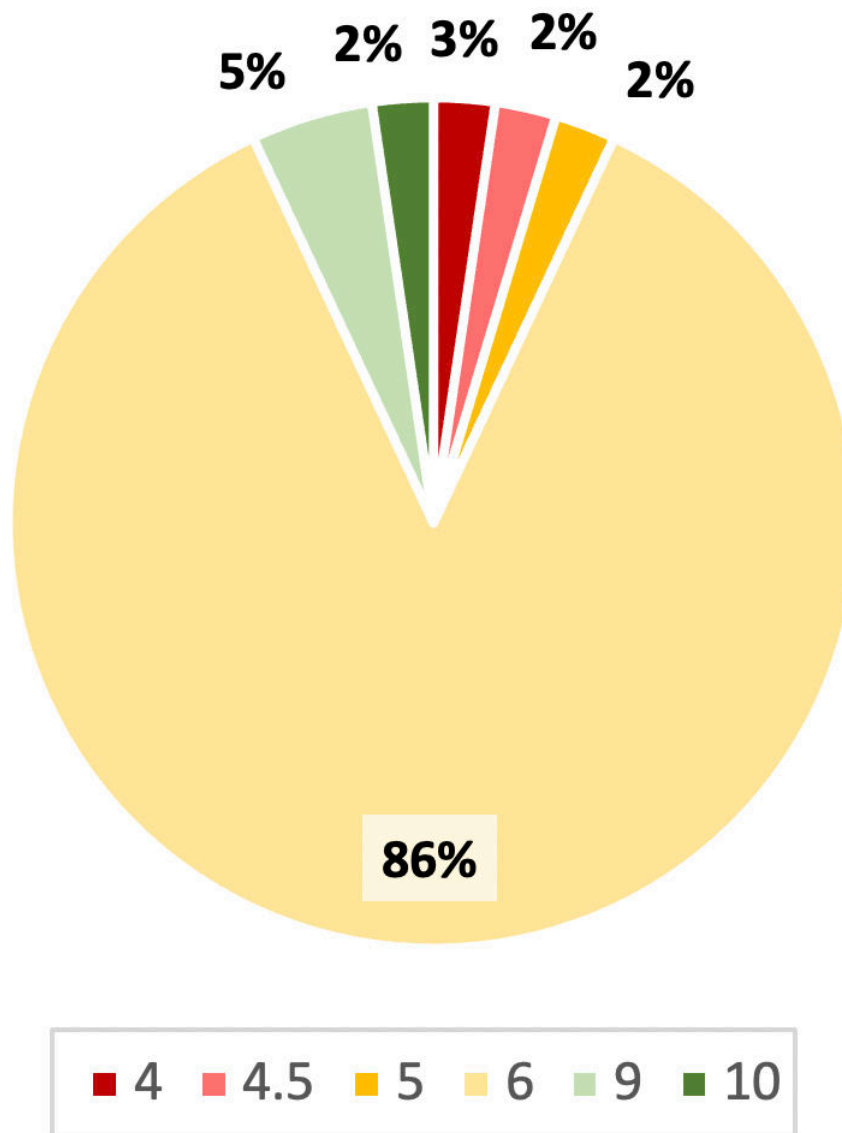
With regard to their names, there is great heterogeneity, as will be shown below. On the other hand, the analysis of the content descriptors in the teaching sheets shows a fairly homogeneous thematic development. Thus, epistemological questions, the history of literature, promotion plans and the dynamisation of school libraries are dealt with.

With regard to the number of subjects in Primary Education, 92% of the universities under analysis have only one compulsory subject in Children's and Young Adult Literature

over the 4 years of the degree. The rest of their literary teacher training, which depends on the elective subjects taken, is completed in the curricula with elective subjects, an aspect that should be addressed in the near future, as the picture here is very uneven.

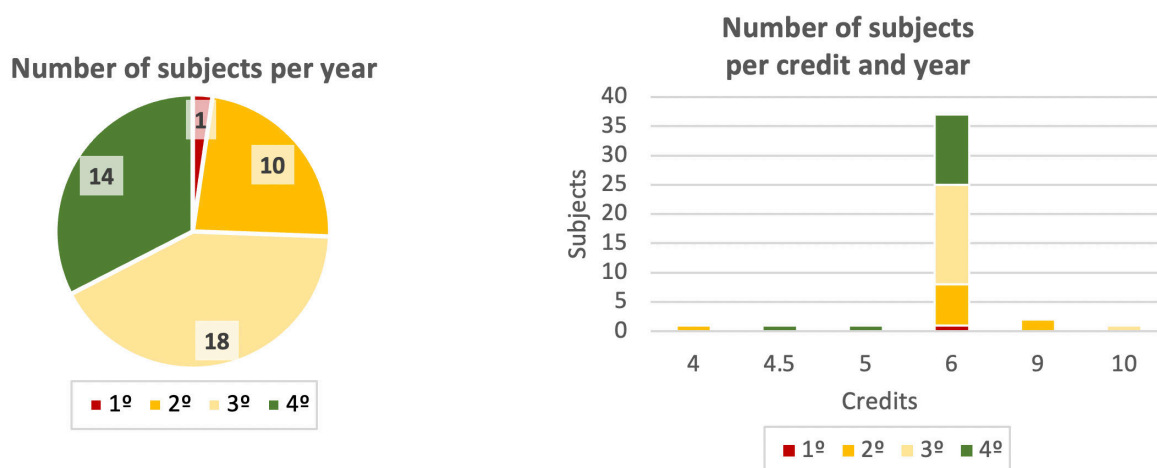
If we examine the compulsory teaching load in the degrees, the contents related to Children's Literature are taught in the degrees of Primary Education teachers unequally, although 86% share the allocation of 6 training credits, as we can see in [figure 1](#):

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of subjects by credits



The most common model, the 6-credit course load in Degree in Primary Education, is reflected with a similar distribution from the second academic year onwards, as it can be seen in [figure 2](#).

Figure 2. Distribution of the subject taking the course within the degree (left) and the distribution of credits in each of them (right) into account



With regard to the responsibility for teaching within the Teaching Organisation Plan of each university, there is an unequal allocation to different types of university departments (table 2). We identify two very marked trends within this heterogeneity: most faculties link it to departments in the branch of knowledge of the Social Sciences (this is also reflected in the teaching accreditations of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation, ANECA, for Senior Lecturer in the ACADEMIA Programme), while vestiges of the previous link to the Human Sciences and Philology or Spanish Literature are preserved. In those cases where the department is not included, it is because the universities themselves do not provide this information, especially in private universities, where teaching is not organised in departments as such.

Table 2. Distribution of the Children’s Literature subject according to the department and year it is taught

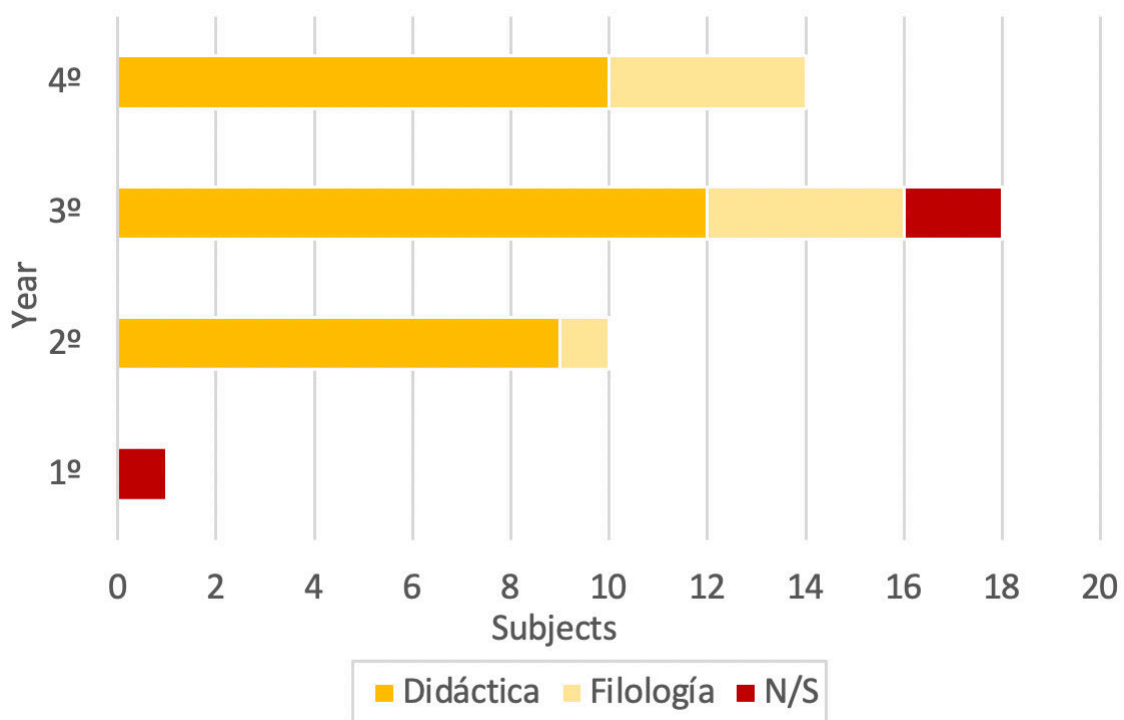
Department/Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Education Science				1
Human and Communication Science			1	
Education, Linguistics and Literature			1	
Languages				1
Language and Literature Didactics		5	7	5
Language, Art and Physical Education Didactics		1		
Social Science, Languages and Literature Didactics			1	
Language, Art and Physical Education Didactics				1
Specific Didactics		2	1	1
Education			1	1
Philology			1	1
Catalan Philology and General Linguistics				1

Department/Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Spanish and Classical Philology			1	
Philology, Communication and Documentation			1	
Hispanic and Classical Philologies		1		1
Spanish Language			1	
Spanish Literature				1
Spanish Literature and Language and Literature Didactics		1		
Not specified (N/S)	1		2	
Total	1	10	18	14

Approximately three quarters of the subjects are thus assigned to general or specific Didactics departments, while only in a quarter of the cases are they assigned to philological departments in which several areas of knowledge are included, including Literature Didactics.

In both contexts (philological or didactic areas), the subject is most commonly found in the third and fourth year, with only one case where it is offered in the first year of the degree (figure 3).

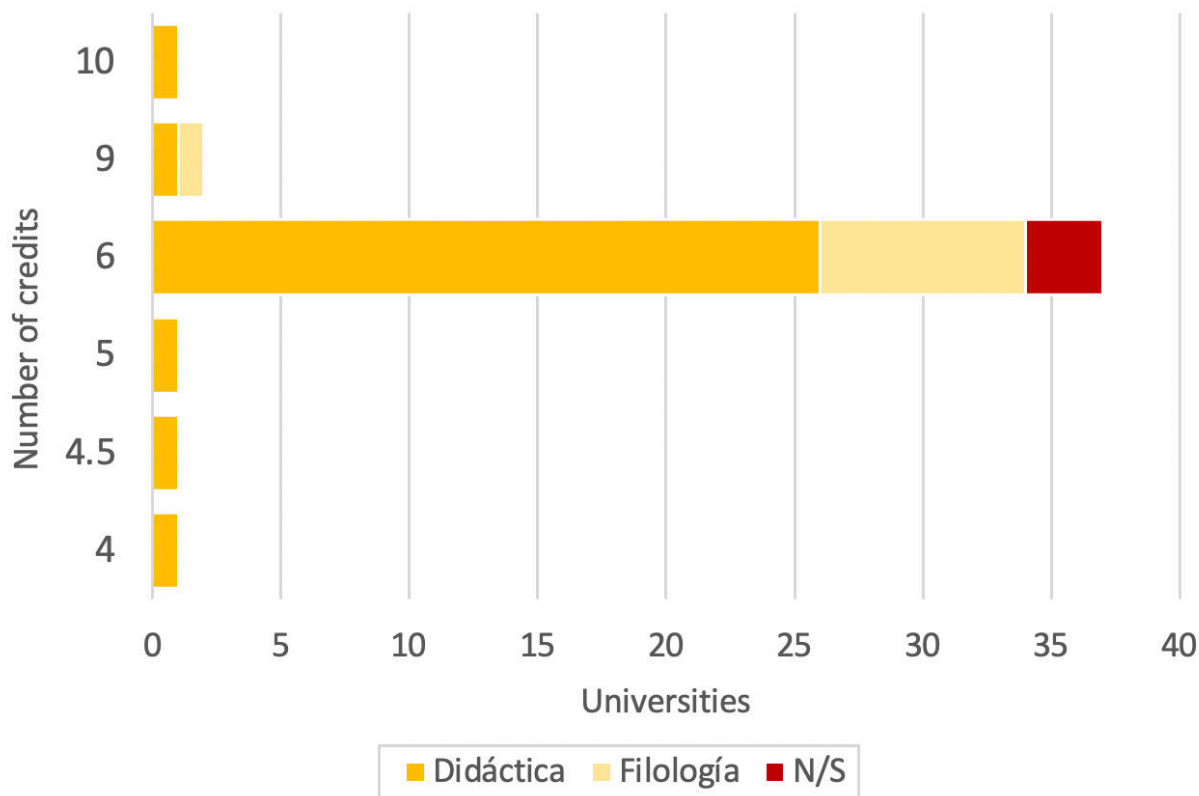
Figure 3. Assignment of the subject by area of knowledge (Didactics and Philology) and year when it is taught



As regards the number of ECTS credits assigned to the subject (figure 4), there is a wide range also arising from the location in the general curriculum of the degree. Range is

between 4 and 10 credits. The most frequent option is a 6-credit subject in both types of departments.

Figure 4. Subjects by area of knowledge (Didactics and Philology) and credits



There is also an unequal link to departments that are mainly didactic or, to a lesser extent, philological (table 3).

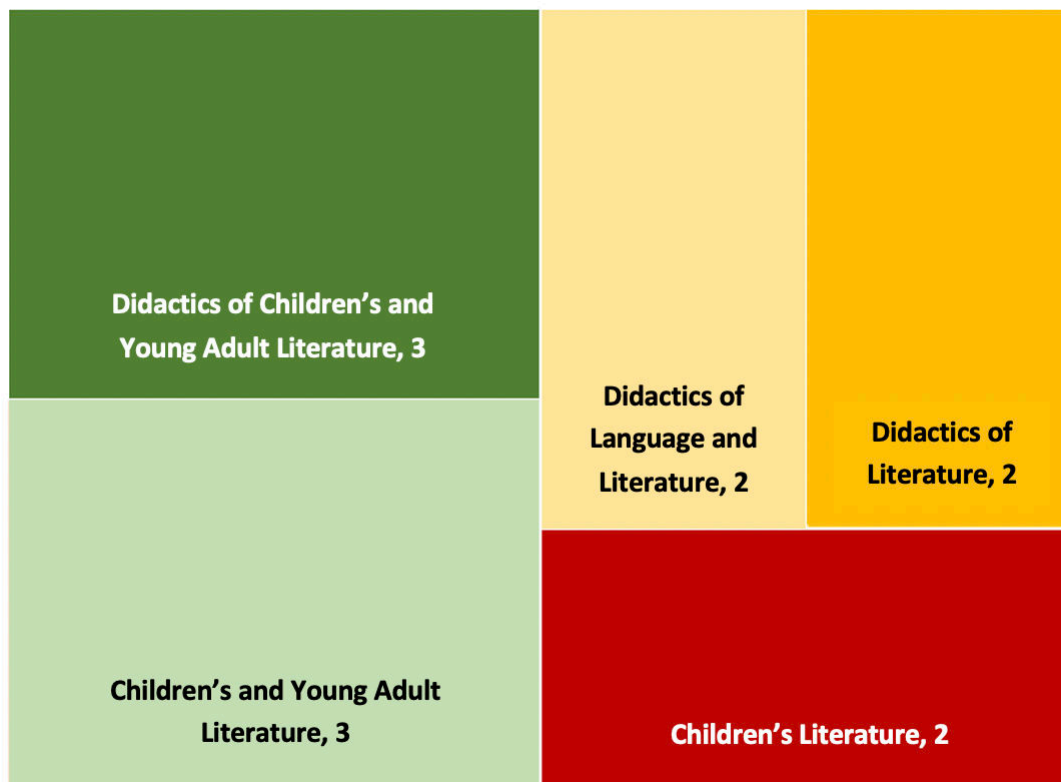
Table 3. Name of the subjects and link with the assigned area of knowledge (Didactics and Philology)

Subject/field of knowledge	Didactics	Philology	N/S
Verbal and Technical Competence in Language and Literature Teaching		1	
Reading and Literature Didactics	1		
Didactics of the Spanish Language and Literature		1	
Language and Literature Didactics	2		
Didactics of Language and Literature in Primary Education			1
Didactics of the Spanish Language and Literature	1		
Didactics of Literature	2		
Didactics of the Spanish Literature		1	
Didactics of Children's Literature and Reading Promotion	1		
Didactics of Children's Literature and Reading and Writing Promotion	1		
Didactics of children's and young adult literature	3		

Subject/field of knowledge	Didactics	Philology	N/S
Literature and Children's Literature Didactics	1		
Literary Education		1	
Literary and Aesthetics Education in Primary Education	1		
Teaching and Learning Spanish Language and Literature	1		
Teaching and Learning Children's Literature			1
Literary Training for Teachers	1		
Literary Education and Children's Literature	1		
Planning of Language and Literature in Primary Education	1		
Reading and Children's Literature	1		
Spanish Language and Literature and its Didactics	1		
Spanish Language and Literature and its Didactics III	1		
Language and Literature: Spanish		1	
Languages and Learning	1		
Catalan and World Literature for Primary School Education		1	
Spanish Literature and its Didactics		1	
Spanish Literature, Children's Literature and Literary Education	1		
Children's Literature	2		
Children's Literature and Reading Promotion	1		
Children's Literature and Literary Education in Primary Education		1	
Children's Literature and Reading Promotion	1		
Children and Youth Literature	3		
Children's Literature and Literature Teaching	1		
Literature and Creativity		1	
Literature and Education	1		
Literature, Children's Literature and Promotion Reading Habits			1
Total	31	9	3

As for these denominations, five main families predominate, which have to do with the enunciations related to the educational components (Didactics of) or that linked to the content of the same (Children's Literature), as can be seen in [figure 5](#).

Figure 5. Names of the most repeated subjects related to Children’s and Young Adult Literature



The academic canon of children’s literature in the teaching guides of Spanish universities

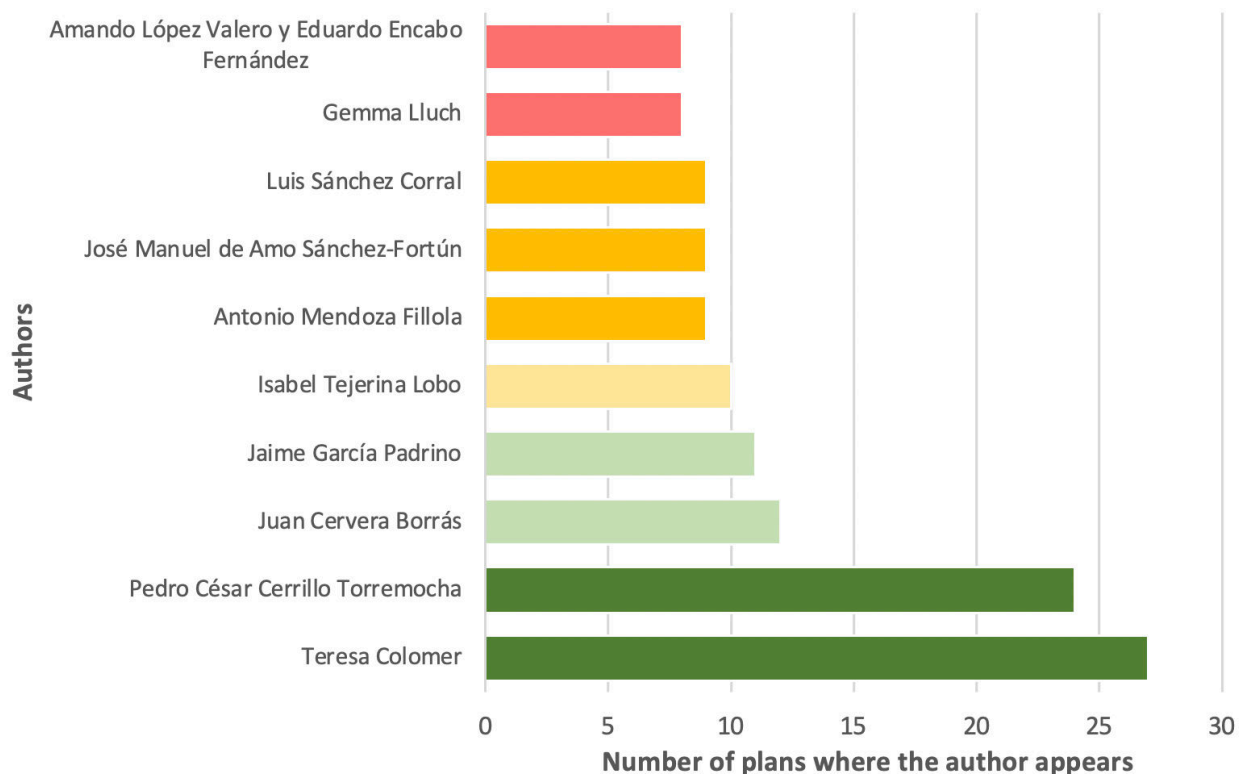
As a conclusion to our analysis, we would like to focus on those works and authors who are used as recommended texts in these plans since, to a large extent, they are the creators of the bibliographical canon in the discipline, that is, their sources of reference. In this sense, it should be clarified that the vast majority of the plans propose a double bibliography: on the one hand, a basic bibliography that deals preferably with the epistemological statutes and the basic contents of the subject, together with a second group of entries under the heading of complementary, which preferably covers specific questions. Exceptionally, in some (such as Universidad de Oviedo), it has been decided to include a specific bibliography for each subject or block individually.

First of all, we would like to point out that the analysis shows that most sources found, more than 95% of them (contrary to what happens in children’s literature publications at international level according to [Selfa in 2015](#)), come from national authors in Spanish, especially monographic works from the end of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century ([figure 6](#)). Among the international ones, of particular importance are Rodari’s *Grammar of Fantasy*, the most frequently mentioned and recommended, more than 14 times; Bruno Bettelheim’s *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*; and Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* Likewise, along with scientific and essayistic studies, repertoires and anthologies of texts are included, with special mention of *Cada cual atiende a su juego* by Ana Pelegrín (with more than 10 hits) or the *Cuentos al amor de la lumbre* by Antonio Rodríguez Almodóvar, although it is only fair to

highlight the prominence of the *Historia y antología de la literatura infantil española y universal* by Carmen Bravo Villasante, which is included in the basic bibliography of more than 10 teaching plans.

In order not to make this a never-ending section, we will focus on the 10 authors who are most present in the plans analysed, although we would not wish to fail to mention others who are also referenced (such as López Tamés, Cassany, Tabernero Salas, Borda Crespo, Cendán Pazos, Ballester i Roca, Yubero Jiménez, Larrañaga Rubio or Sotomayor Sáez) who would follow these more prominent entries.

Figure 6. Histogram of frequency of authors included in the bibliography of the teaching



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the teaching plans for subjects related to children's and young adult literature in the 40 Spanish universities generally shows the lack of common criteria in their implementation at university level, despite the attempt at homogenisation present in the ministerial order regulating the teaching profession in 2007 for Primary Education (Annex I of [Order ECI/3857/2007 of Royal Decree 1393/2007](#), within the competences and descriptors established by the Disciplinary Didactic Module, Language).

The subject does not have the same number of credits in all universities, nor does it have a fixed location in a specific module within the degree programme. Therefore, the figures pointed out by [Moreno and Sánchez \(2000\)](#) showed an average of 4.5 credits for these subjects; on the other hand, the current study plans confirm a trend of 6 credits, since 37 of the 43 teaching plans under analysis (86%) present this value, which represents a 1.5 credits increase compared to previous situations. This fact confirms the

increasing relevance of these subjects within the teaching plans of the degrees intended for teacher training.

As for the assignment of subjects, in the light of the analysis conducted, it is possible to confirm the first approximations of a qualitative aspect that both [Moreno and Sánchez \(2000\)](#) and [Ibarra and Ballester \(2016\)](#) pointed out with regard to children's literature and its inclusion in the new Spanish university curricula after Bologna. It being traditionally linked to the branch of knowledge of Humanities, these researchers demanded the incorporation of this subject into the departments of Language and Literature Didactics in the Schools and Faculties of Education. According to the information analysed, 72% of the subjects are already attached to departments exclusively related to didactics, thus confirming that Moreno and Sánchez's so-called "transition phase" is consolidating.

It is also striking to note the disparity of criteria regarding their denomination, which sometimes makes it difficult to locate them and even to assemble them with related materials. This same aspect has already been highlighted by [Larragueta and Ceballos-Viro \(2020\)](#), who pointed out different ways of naming these subjects and even the absence of the term "children" in a considerable part of them. On the other hand, the same sequence of general contents or descriptors is found in its thematic development, ranging from internal aspects such as the study of its history and literary genres to didactic aspects such as its development in the curriculum, the design of activities or its links with the promotion of reading and the training of readers. However, a detailed analysis of these aspects and their comparison with the Early Childhood Education degree could be the focus of a more detailed study for future research.

Finally, in relation to the main bibliographic sources proposed, we would like to point out that high-impact publishing in the area of Didactics of Literature, understood as that which is included in the JCR and Scopus evaluation agencies, has not had well-positioned journals until recently. We would like to highlight, with a view to the consideration of indexing and quality impact of publications in Language and Literature Teaching from a scientific and contrasted point of view, that the studies in this area have a certain singularity. [Níkleva and Cortina in 2014](#) argue with firm data that only six years ago there was only one journal included in JCR (SSCI), which shows that the population of Spanish-language journals and the Hispanic field was scarce and did not allow for publication in indexed journals. This is also the opinion of [Alario-Trigueros et al. \(1998\)](#), [Battaner \(2002\)](#), [Vez \(2009\)](#), [Níkleva and Cortina \(2011\)](#) or [Guillén \(2012\)](#) in relation to the consolidation of this field. Similar circumstances apply to children's literature, which, in the words of [Selfa \(2015\)](#), began to take off in publishing in 2007. The fact that in Spain there is only one journal in the area in the JCR (within the Core, since July 2021 saw the appearance of the new JCI index of the Journal Citations Report, which exclusively covers the year 2020) oriented towards the teaching of foreign languages and not Spanish as a first language, partly justifies the use of monographic studies that are largely individual and of national origin, as can be seen in the bibliographical references included in the syllabuses. To a large extent, research in this area has been boosted by the consolidation of organisations that promote its study (for example, SEDLLL, CEPLI, RIUL or ANILIJ), the good positioning of journals in the area (see *Porta Linguarum*, *Investigaciones Sobre Lectura*, *Bellaterra*, *Tejuelo and Ocnos*), as well as the creation of research groups in this field.

In summary, analysing the set of questions evaluated in this article, the general conclusion is that there is a high degree of disparity in the implementation of the discipline but, at the same time, there is a tendency towards homogenisation in all the items

examined. The disparity of criteria may be due to the relatively recent introduction of Children's and Young People's Literature subjects in academic curricula, as well as to the creation of Language and Literature Didactics departments in Spanish universities, which has promoted a theoretical discourse to identify the boundaries of the areas of these specific didactics from an epistemological point of view.

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