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Teaching History in the Digital Age: An Analysis of Digital Resources in tandem with History Textbooks for High School in Albania

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Abstract: The paper aims to analyze the extent to and the ways in which history textbooks for high school in Albania make use of digital resources. Drawing on a review of the published sources in Europe and beyond and using evidence from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of textbooks, the paper examines the space devoted to links to digital resources compared to the overall number of sources included in textbooks, the types of digital resources, their reliability and accuracy, their accessibility and age appropriateness, the narrative viewpoints they convey and the competences they aim to develop to students. The findings reveal that a limited number of identified digital resources feature in textbooks, Albanian-language digital learning resources are missing, links to digital resources listed in textbooks are generally non age appropriate and no longer available, and digital resources convey either the national or the Eurocentric narrative.

Keywords: reliability; age appropriateness; narrative viewpoints; students' competences; digital resources; history textbooks.

1. Introduction

In the digital world we are living, the education system cannot adhere anymore “to a teaching strategy as if society was still in the Gutenberg era” (Fuga, 2023, pp. 31-32). The digital revolution calls for a radical change in the way of teaching and learning in school (Moreno-Vera et al., 2023, p. 19) aimed at responding to the evolving digital society. For Jemie R. Engbrecht (2018) “the education system will logically follow society’s lead and incorporate more technology and digital content into classrooms” (p. 3). Similarly, E. Babameto and D. Pano (2024) mention that, “the education system would be subject to a digital transformation with the task and challenge to follow the pace of technological progress” (p. 1809), in order to “transform students into responsible digital citizens who contribute positively to the online environment”. Likewise, as T. Mills Kelly (2013) argues, the digital technology is changing the way students learn about the past; therefore, it is necessary to adjust the education system “to the rapidly accelerating, technology-driven cycle of change that is transforming the teaching, learning, research, and production of historical knowledge” (p. 3). More specifically, Juan Ramon Moreno-Vera et al.

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(2023), referring to Wineburg (2018), assert, “teaching history when everything is on the internet should not be done to strengthen memorization, but to raise problems, debates and provide students with a civic and active character” (p. 19).

Scholars share divergent views on the impact of the new technology and digital developments in education. Some of them place emphasis on “the great educational potential of digital technologies. These technologies can renew both the activities carried out with students, the management of their learning paths, working methods, etc.” (Lofreda et al., 2017, p. 143). For Christine Redecker (2017), “the real potential of digital technologies lies in shifting the focus of the teaching process from teacher-led to learner-centred processes” (p. 20). Similarly, Stefan Bornemann (2013) addresses the importance of digital media as particularly useful instruments for competency-oriented teaching and learning scenarios. M. Tribukait et al. (2017, p. 5) point out that the incorporation of digital media in education will bring about radical improvements as regards new ways of creating and communicating knowledge. Likewise, Mario Carretero et al. (2022) argue that “the key promise of digital technologies resides in their ability to communicate historical facts in an engaging manner alongside, in some cases, enabling students to take a virtual role as a protagonist in historical processes” (p. 1). Alexandra Krebs (2024, p. 8) underscores the openness of the digital space to central principles of historical learning, including controversy, multiperspectivity and plurality. While, Terry Haydn (2013) examines how using the new technology “enables the development of a ‘community of practice’ where teacher and pupils can work collaboratively on enquiry questions in history outside the confines of classroom time” (p. 8). Furthermore, Dietrich Karpa et al. (2013, p. 5) regard students not only as consumers of information, but also as contributors to the digital world. Thus, when used effectively technology can lead to successful performance outcomes (Haydn, 2013, p. 3).

Other scholars express their concern about the possibilities that the digital media landscape offers to anyone to spread historical statement (Alvén and Rudnert, 2023, p. 229); so that, internet “has also become a breeding ground for hate speech, intolerance, and dis-, mal-, and misinformation” (Going beyond, 2024). The prominence of social media has exposed “today’s youth to problematic historical content that can challenge the official curriculum or give it potentially dangerous, manipulative spins” (OHTE, 2024, p. 9). Consequently, “the digital age poses threats to education quality, with younger generations often exposed to harmful online content” (Reimagining education, n.d.). Sam Wineburg (2018) underlines the lack of civic online reasoning, arguing that “In an age when no one regulates the information we consume, the task of separating truth from falsehood can no longer be for extra credit. Google can do many things, but it cannot teach discernment. Never has so much information been at our fingertips, but never have we been so ill-equipped to deal with it” (p. 8). Likewise, M. Carretero et al. (2022) highlight the difficulties faced by young people “in discriminating the veracity, accuracy and complexity of information available in digital contexts” (p. 9). In a similar vein, Frederik Alvén and Joel Rudnert (2023) make reference to “warning signals showing that young people have a hard time discerning bias and propaganda in information they get from the Internet and too often also use inaccurate content, misinformation and conspiracy theories in their school work” (p. 230). For that reason, students need to be trained to “assess the credibility of the digital content” (Borghi et al., 2023, p. 196). Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan (2017) mention the importance of “doing fact-checking, as well as source-checking” because, “when assessing the credibility of a piece of information, the source who originally created the content or first shared it, can provide the strongest evidence about whether something is accurate” (p. 18). Likewise, Moreno-Vera et al. (2023, p. 19) argue that in times of post-truth and fake news, it is imperative to prepare students to critically analyze and cross-reference sources, aiming to empower them to navigate the digital age in an ethically acceptable and responsible way. Similarly, as discussed in the book *Quality History Education in the 21st Century: Principles and*

Guidelines (2018), students' ability "to assess and judge motive, utility, reliability, trustworthiness is an important step in building resilience and preventing manipulation when accessing historical sources and interpretations" (p. 20). Hence, by developing students' digital skills, education plays a crucial role in "cultivating responsible and well-informed digital citizens who navigate the virtual realm with a heightened sense of awareness and discernment" (Going beyond, 2024).

The discourse around digital technologies in education has gained increasing attention among scholars over the last two decades. Although the incorporation of digital media in the teaching and learning of history is a timely topic, several studies have been published theretofore. Most of them discuss both opportunities and challenges posed by digital reality in history education, including the accessibility to a wide range of sources, the use of innovative pedagogical approaches, the development of students' digital skills, the shift in the role of teacher in the learning process, student's learning outcomes, etc. They mainly focus on the analysis of the integration of the new technology in the classroom practices, teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of digital media in the education process, but no attention is paid to whether and how textbooks make use of digital resources. More specifically, the General Report of the Council of Europe on "History Education in the Digital Age" deals with opportunities and limits that digital technology presents for school stakeholders and the teaching process in history education, while it fails to mention the inclusion of links to online materials in textbooks (Blagojević, 2024). Similarly, *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook*, published by the Council of Europe in 2022, offers teachers ideas for learning objectives and activities that enable students to explore digital citizenship, without engaging with digital resources referenced in textbooks. Maren Tribukait et al. in the study entitled *Digital Learning in European Education Policies and History Curricula* (2017) examine digital strategies and curricula for history and IT-related subjects' approach to digital media in history lessons across Europe, but no references are made to digital platforms listed in textbooks. Magali Lofreda et al. (2017) in their article "Textbooks and digital resources: current transformations in France" investigate how textbook and resource portal compete and coexist in the teaching and learning process, but no analysis is conducted with regard to links to online materials featured in textbooks. In a similar vein, the article published by Shahid Lakha (n.d.) "The Advantages of Textbooks and Digital Resources" deals with textbooks and digital resources as separate media and no textbook corpus has been examined concerning direct links to digital platforms.

Although the Albanian National Strategy for Education 2021-2026 (2021, p. 46) highlights the priority given to digital literacy, and history programs for upper-secondary school stipulate the development of students' digital competence and the incorporation of information and communication technology (ICT) in the teaching and learning process (History Program, 2019), little research has been conducted on the topic heretofore by the Albanian scholars, too. The only articles published are: "The Future Higher Education in Albania in the Digital Era—Challenges and Opportunities," authored by E. Babameto and D. Pano (2024), who highlight the need to reform the higher education system by leveraging new technologies and digital advancements, and employ a survey questionnaire to evaluate shifts in students' perceptions of the blended mode of teaching and learning processes. Sonila Osmani and Doreta Tartari (2024) in their article: "The impact of digital technology on teaching and learning. A case study of schools in Durrës, Albania" utilize a mixed-method approach to investigate the benefits and challenges of implementing digital technology across 10 educational institutions in Durrës, without examining the use of specific digital tools within any particular subject area. Thus, none of these articles deal with history textbooks and how they take advantage of online materials.

In order to fill the gap in the existing research and provide a comprehensive overview of the extent to and the ways in which history textbooks make use of digital resources, the study aims to answer the

following research questions: What is the space devoted to references made to digital resources in comparison to other resources featured in textbooks? What types of digital resources are listed in textbooks? What narrative viewpoints do they convey? Are links to digital resources offered in the main text or in the question and task section of the teaching unit? Do textbooks make references to online resources retrieved from (non)authoritative websites? Are digital resources open access and age appropriate? What competences do digital resources offered in textbooks aim to foster? By answering these questions, the study not only provides a rich dataset of the digital resources listed in history textbooks, but also offers compelling insights on the space allocated to them, the types of digital resources referenced, the narrative viewpoints they convey, as well as the competences they intend to develop.

2. Methodological Approach

2.1. Conceptual Framework

This study employs two main concepts: first, *textbook*, which “constitutes the privileged medium for educational content, the repository of knowledge, techniques or know-how that a given social group considers necessary to transmit to the younger generations” (Magali et al., 2017, p. 145). Similarly, Annkatrin Bock (n.d.) states that “Textbooks are labelled as the typical or lead medium of instruction in schools, certainly in European classrooms, and provide a ‘map for orientation or navigation.’” For Iva Červenková et al. (2023), novice teachers, in particular, “rely more significantly on the textbook as a source of relevant information and use it as a guide for methodically designing their lessons” (p. 25). Although “the current world has become mainly digital” (Carretero et al., 2022, p. 2), as Bruce Allen Knight (2015) asserts, “textbooks are generally viewed as reliable tools which provide creditable information that supports and enhances students’ understanding of critical concepts, and that they present bite-size chunks of information to cement student learning” (p. 1). Likewise, Sh. Lakha (n.d.) says, “Textbooks typically contain accurate information that has been well researched and reviewed. This is much more reliable than information found online, as it is not subject to changes or updates that can occur with digital resources.” By contrast, Wong Lee King et al. (2019), referring to Harris (2002), argues that “dependence of solely on textbooks negatively impact students’ learning since textbooks may be objective, and it will limit students’ ability to think differently according peoples or nations’ perspectives” (p. 48).

The second concept deals with *digital resources*, which have become an important component in teaching and learning of history. As outlined in the Glossary of the *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators: DigCompEdu*, digital resources comprise “online information, websites, platforms, multimedia content (images, audio, video), learning materials, (online) games, quizzes, (educational) software, apps, programmes, virtual learning environments, social networks” (2017, p. 88). Wong Lee King et al. (2019), further mention digital primary sources used in history education, such as “original manuscripts, government records, letters, photos, audios or film recordings that have been transferred into a digital format and made available via the internet” (p. 48). As Carretero et al. (2022) argue, “When used effectively, such resources invite questions about the authority and reliability of information and significantly increase access to historical information and multiple interpretations of the past” (p. 10). In a similar vein, Shahid Lakha (n.d.) emphasizes that digital resources allow students access to up-to-date information from multiple sources in an interactive way. According to Iva Červenková et al. (2023), digital resources are more diverse than the printed ones in terms of content and didactic aspects, which help “develop students’ thinking, e.g., by searching for information,

comparing, and inferring” (p. 32). They “are often interactive, providing students with opportunities to explore topics in depth and practice skills in a variety of ways” (Lakha, n.d.). Digital resources “also contribute to the development of students’ critical faculties, intellectual autonomy and resistance to manipulation” (Carretero et al., 2022, p. 10).

In order to take advantage of the digital resources, as Christine Redecker (2017) asserts, “One of the key competences any educator needs to develop is to come to terms with this variety, to effectively identify resources that best fit their learning objectives, learner group and teaching style, to structure the wealth of materials, establish connections and to modify, add on to and develop themselves digital resources to support their teaching. At the same time they need to be aware of how to responsibly use and manage digital content” (p. 20). Similarly, Maren Tribukait et al. (2017) state that teachers “must receive adequate training to improve their digital competence and be encouraged to use innovative pedagogical approaches” (p. 21). Their role is essential in educating students “to understand that because something is on the internet, this does not guarantee its reliability” (Haydn, 2013, p. 21), and in teaching them “how to uncover manipulative or just bad uses of history on the Internet” (Alvén & Rudnert, 2023, p. 230). Similarly, as B. A. Knight (2015) asserts, “Students today still need scaffolding, support and guidance as they engage with textbooks and digital learning resources” (p. 2). Since digital technology enables everyone to “do history” (Madsen-Brooks, 2013, p. 49), students critical “understanding of digital media, of how digital media content, images, messages and advertisements are produced, and of the various possible motives, intentions and purposes of those who create or reproduce them” (Reference Framework, 2018, p. 56) seems to be imperative. Thus, by developing student’s digital skills, they will be prepared for life-long learning in a technology-rich environment and for active participation in a constantly changing digital society (Blikstad-Balas, 2023, p. 218).

2.2. Research Methods

Since digital readiness and the equipment of students with digital skills are important aspects of *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2018), *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook* (2022), *European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators: DigCompEdu* (2017), *Digital Learning in European Education Policies and History Curricula* (2017), and they are stipulated in the guidelines for *Quality History Education in the 21st Century* (2018) by the Council of Europe, the study employs both a quantitative and qualitative method to examine the digital resources listed in Albanian history textbooks. The quantitative content analysis provides an overview of the space devoted to references made to links to digital resources in history textbooks in proportion to the overall number of resources incorporated in textbooks. Its results serve as the basis for the qualitative textbook analysis, which includes both main text and question and task section. The criteria for their analysis include: the types of digital resources referred to in textbooks, their reliability and accuracy, the narrative viewpoints they convey, their accessibility and age appropriateness, their integration in the text and/or question and task section of the teaching unit, and the competences students are required to acquire. It uses Bloom’s Taxonomy action verbs (Krathwohl, 2002) as a framework to assess the competences students develop and the learning outcomes achieved.

2.3. Sample

The sample consists of history textbooks issued for the tenth, eleventh and twelfth year of upper-secondary education that are in current use in schools. The criteria for the selection of the textbook corpus are: first, *their approval* by the Albanian Ministry of Education and Sport for use in public and

private schools across the country. Second, *their content* which covers both national and world history from antiquity to the present. Third, *school level*, with the assumption that textbooks used by students (aged 15-18 years) in the upper-secondary education contain more links to digital resources compared to those taught to low-secondary school students between the ages of 10 and 14. Forth, *various publishing houses*, in order to include all approved textbooks from different publishing houses currently in use, despite their market share.

3. Results

3.1. Are Links to Digital Resources Missing in History Textbooks?

Although “integrating technology into education provides students with an engaging learning experience, allowing them to remain more interested in the subject without being distracted” (Haleem et al., 2022, p. 276), it appears that the Albanian education system does not take advantage of it at all. The quantitative analysis reveals that out of 9 examined textbooks, only 4 contain sources within the main text, and just 2 of them reference digital resources. More specifically, merely 10% of the sources cited in the main text of History 12 (Dërguti et al., 2018) and 20% of those listed in History 11 (Nathanaili et al., 2017) are identified as digital resources. Another picture is shown in the section devoted to questions and tasks, as well as practical activities and/or projects. They devote more space to links to digital resources compared to the same type of sources mentioned in the main text. Nevertheless, the list of digital resources remains generally shorter than that of non-digital ones, as illustrated in Figure 1.

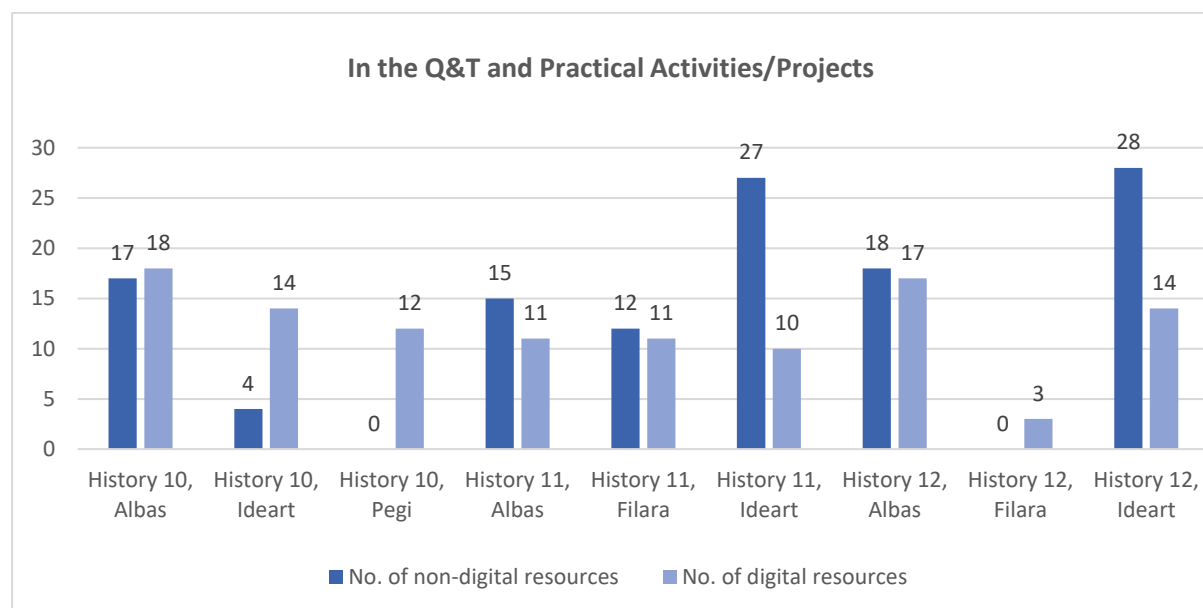


Figure 1. Distribution of (non)digital resources in the section dedicated to questions and tasks, and practical activities/projects

The results seem to indicate these tendencies: first, there are no or very few Albanian-language digital resources suitable for the learners’ age group; second, textbook authors appear to be skeptical about the reliability, authenticity and the accuracy of the digital sources; third, they question teachers’ and students’ digital literacy skills to come to terms with the variety of sources available online, and forth, schools seem inadequately equipped to integrate digital resources into classroom practices. Overall, the limited number of sources included in textbooks indicates that the single historical narrative persists in

history textbooks for upper-secondary education in Albania. This is in line with the findings of other studies (Carrier et al., 2015a, 2015b; Luku, 2020; Vuka, 2015), which emphasize the prevalence of the authorial perspective in the teaching materials.

3.2. Types of Digital Resources

History textbooks make reference to a limited number of digital resources. Even when students are asked to utilize digital sources for their assignments, practical activities or projects, the textbooks provide no guidance regarding which website, online platform, learning materials, multimedia content, educational apps/programmes, they should consult. Specifically, two thirds of the tasks simply require students to “search for information on Google,” “gather data from the internet,” “research online,” or “investigate a particular subject through internet resources.” The majority of the digital resources listed in textbooks are websites, either educational or news one. Among the educational websites mentioned are: Medieval Life and Times (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 49), History Learning Site (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 67), Academia (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 99), Britannica (Dërguti et al., 2016, p. 47, 58, 106), Quizlet (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 78), Jewish Virtual Library (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 150), TimeMaps (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 46), Wikipedia (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 46), MSU Libraries (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 146), and The Avalon Project (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 225), a digital library maintained by Yale Law School’s Lillian Goldman Law Library. References are also made to an official government site, namely Office of the Historian (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 146), and a history magazine website called History Today (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 192). These websites provide students access to various historical sources, including articles, documents, quizzes, atlas, visuals, and more, and they are available in English. History 10, published by Ideart, includes Biografías y Vidas, an online biographical encyclopedia in Spanish (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 62). Albanian language websites are also referenced, offering materials which can be used for educational purposes. Some of them are Albanian History (Nathanaili et al., 2017, p. 98), Muzeu i Memories, Kujto Albania, Observatori i Kujteses (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 296), KIPRED (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 189), and ALTRI (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 295). Albanian news portals, such as 27.al (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 170), Panorama (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 144), Telegrafi (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 129) and Shqipëria.com (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 99) are cited in history textbooks, as well. Another digital resource that history textbooks designed for students in year eleven and twelve take advantage of is Youtube. Students are instructed to watch Youtube videos or documentaries on specific topics, such as Via Egnatia (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 54), the personality of Scanderbeg (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 59), the Ottoman architectural heritage (Filo & Thanati, 2018, p. 135), *Besa* – the Albanian Code of Honor (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 245), though some of the linked videos on textbooks are no longer available. Similarly, History 11 (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 202) includes a link directing students to a documentary on the history of the Albanian currency in the interwar period hosted on TubeId, but the video is no longer accessible.

3.3. Reliability and Accuracy of Sources

History textbooks contain links to both reliable and unreliable digital resources. 22% of the links listed in all the examined textbooks may have questionable credibility. More specifically, textbooks for students in year ten, eleven and twelve of the upper-secondary school authored by Filo and Thanati (2016, 2017, 2018) make several references to Wikipedia, when dealing with topics, such as the accomplishments of Justinian I, the Venetian presence in Shkodra, the Principality of the Kastrioti, and trade relations between Europe and the “New World.” Besides bibliographical sources, History 10 (Filo

& Thanati, 2016, p. 20) features a practical activity titled “The Hellenistic Period,” instructing students to visit the personal blog *Shqipëria Express* to learn about Alexander the Great’s campaign and his role in shaping and spreading Hellenistic culture. The same textbook guides students to consult another personal blog *Dielli* to obtain information about the salvation of Jews in Albania during the Second World War. A similar trend is noted in History 11 published by Filara. When discussing the stance of Albanians in Kosovo and Chameria in the wartime period, it directs students to explore the online forum *Durresi ForumFree* and a community platform *Alba Soul* for further information on the subject (Nathanaili et al., 2017, pp. 143-144). The findings indicate that some textbooks make references to digital resources, whose credibility should be assessed carefully. Wikipedia is not considered a credible source for academic research. As Jan Grabowski and Shira Klein (2023) assert, “Most scholars would say that there’s no expectation Wikipedia should be reliable in the first place; that’s what peer-reviewed scholarship is for” (p. 134). Likewise, online forum, community platform and personal blogs offer informal content that lacks editorial oversight and peer review, which may lead to personal bias and inaccurate information; therefore, their use requires careful evaluation.

3.4. Accessibility and Age Appropriateness

The majority of the identified links incorporated in textbooks are open for unrestricted access, with the exception of History Today which requires readers to subscribe and purchase access to read the article of Robert Bideleux “Kosovo’s conflict” (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 192) and the TimeMaps users who can have access to the atlas and key topics in world history upon payment (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 46). There are also references to digital resources which are no longer available, such as YouTube videos depicting Via Egnatia (Filo & Thanati, 2018, p. 54), Scanderbeg in cinema or literature (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 59), or the webpage of MSU libraries provided to students in year ten to learn more about the Balkans in the interwar period (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 146). Those limited educational resources referenced in textbooks are mostly in English. Although upper-secondary school students learn English in school, the education system should provide them with learning materials in the native language. Most of the digital resources listed in history textbooks are not learning materials designed for upper-secondary school students, which confirms the lack of educational resources in Albanian language as mentioned in the National Strategy for Education 2021-2026 (2021, p. 83). Moreover, textbooks offer links to newspaper articles, research publications produced by NGO, videos available on TV platforms, personal blogs, which are neither suitable for learners age nor provide accurate content.

3.5. Narrative Viewpoints

History textbooks list digital sources that cover both Albanian and world history from antiquity to the present. The distribution of sources across different historical periods is relatively balanced, with the exception of antiquity. Identified digital sources encompass a broad spectrum of topics, from conquests of Alexander the Great and his contribution to the spread of the Hellenistic culture (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 20) to the importance of incorporation of ICT in the education system in Albania (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 295). The digital sources devoted to Albanian history seem to perpetuate the national narrative. They give priority to political, diplomatic and military history rather than the social one, in the same way as the main text (Vuka, 2015, p. 121). The narrative primarily focuses on political figures and national heroes, except in discussions about the rescue of Jews by Albanians or the communist repression, where other social groups and ordinary people are also highlighted. The historical narrative mainly emphasizes the positive achievements and cultural values of Albanians, focusing on cultural

coexistence, Albanian resistance to Ottoman rule, the declaration of independence, the consolidation and democratization of the Albanian state, hospitality and *Besa* (the code of honour) as main civic virtues demonstrated in rescuing the Jews, while acknowledging the crimes committed during the communist period.

More specifically, History 12 authored by Filo and Thanati (2018) provides students with the relevant links to watch on Youtube the documentaries “Via Egnatia” (p. 54) and “Durrës, the city that ‘defied’ the end of the world” (p. 60) which point out, inter alia, to the importance of Via Egnatia as a key route connecting the Byzantine Empire to the West. The same textbook asks students to access the Youtube link to “‘Balkan Tales’ – A photo exhibition on the influence of the Ottoman Empire in architecture” news segment, which emphasizes, among others, the conflict over the cultural dominance in the Balkans and the culture coexistence in Albania (Filo & Thanati, 2018, p. 135). Following that narrative, history textbooks issued for students in year eleven devote a practical activity to the portrayal of Scanderbeg in art and literature and require students to look up information on the Kastrioti principality using Wikipedia (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 53) or watch three Youtube videos which examine Skanderbeg’s depiction in cinema, literature and through the lens of the historians (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 59). The national historical narrative continues by recounting the most important historical events, including the declaration of independence from the Ottoman rule, on November 28, 1912. History 12 authored by Dërguti et al. (2018, p. 190) instructs students to gather information online about the Vlora family, their ties to the Ottoman Porte and their contribution to the history of Albania. Moreover, History 11 published by Filara contains in the main text a document retrieved from Albanian History (Nathanaili et al. 2017, p. 98), which refers to the final decision made by the Conference of Ambassadors on July 29, 1913, concerning the political status and the territorial integrity of Albania. In the interwar period, particular emphasis is placed on the efforts for the consolidation of the Albanian state, by introducing students to the history of Albanian currency and the national symbols featured on it, encouraging them to either watch a video (Filo & Thanati, 2018, p. 202) or explore the Bank of Albania Museum’s website developed within the framework of Education and Museum program (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 243). History textbooks make also references to digital sources addressing the ethnic cleansing of Cham Albanians and the destiny of Kosovo’s Albanian regions during the Second World War (Nathanaili et al. 2017, p. 143). Several digital sources are referenced regarding the Jewish rescue in Albania, asking students to watch the documentary *Besa - The Promise* on Youtube (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 245), consult the Jewish Virtual Library (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 150), visit a personal blog, and read an article published on the Telegrafi news portal titled: “Albania offered the promised land to Jews” (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 129). Furthermore, history textbooks for eleven and twelve year students depict the “dark communist period,” focusing on the repression under the communist rule. Specifically, History 11 authored by Nathanaili et al. (2017, p. 170), under the topic entitled “Features of the communist repression between 1945 and 1990,” contains an in-text citation of a digital source retrieved from 27.al news website, which deals with the internment experience of mother Drane Jakja and her four children. Similarly, History 12 (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 296), under the practical activity “Life in internment and exile camps, and the experiences of the interned during communist Albania,” asks students to collect data from the following websites, Muzeu i Memories, Kujto Albania, Observatori i Kujteses, in order to investigate the segments of the Albanian society that were sent to the internment and exile camps during the communist era, describe living conditions in the camps and critically analyze the violence exerted by the regime. Whereas History 10 (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 192) dedicates a practical activity to Kosovo’s path to independence and instructs students to explore History Today to read an article written in English by Robert Bideleux about Kosovo’s conflict that is only accessible through a paid subscription.

Meanwhile, digital resources covering world history listed in textbooks reflect a European perspective adopted by the authors, “emphasising ideas around European civility and advanced development” (Nagre, 2025, p. 134). They present Greco-Roman antiquity as the cradle of civilization and highlight key developments, such as legal codification, the accomplishments of geographic discoveries, the transformative effect of industrialization and urbanization, and the dissemination of liberal and democratic ideologies. Specifically, History 10 (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 20) directs students to a personal blog that explores Alexander the Great’s role in the development and dissemination of the Hellenistic culture. History 12 (Filo & Thanati, 2018, p. 70) instructs students to use Wikipedia to examine and identify the key achievements of Justinian I. In order to learn about the everyday life in medieval Europe, students in year ten are asked to visit an educational site, which provides learning materials in English (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 49). Within the practical activity on trade relations between Europe and the “New World,” History 10 (Filo & Thanati, 2016, p. 98) invites students to explore Wikipedia and Academia to investigate the influence of geographic discoveries on the economic growth and scientific progress. History 10 (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 78) guides students to Quizlet to assess their knowledge of how the Enlightenment shaped the rule of Maria Theresa and Frederick the Great. In a similar vein, History 10 (Dërguti et al., 2016) instructs students to consult Britannica about the “enlightened monarchs” and interpret the phrase: “They moved society away from the traditional ways of living and introduced a new modern spirit into everyday life” (p. 106). Whereas, History 10 authored by Filo and Thanati (2016, p. 99), within the project on Romanticism, Enlightenment and Liberalism, prompts students to explore Wikipedia, Shqiperia.com, and Academia, to examine the main figures and the characteristics of these ideologies. Aligned with narratives of Eurocentrism supporting principles like self-determination and collective security, History 12 (Dërguti et al., 2018, pp. 225-227) exposes students to the Atlantic Charter (1941) and the Three-Power Pact between Germany, Italy, and Japan (1940), sourced from the Avalon Project, in the context of the outbreak of WWII. Likewise, consistent with Europe’s commitment to security with respect for human rights and the improvement of international relations, History 10 authored by Gurakuqi et al. (2016, p. 185), under the practical activity titled: “Helsinki Conference and Human Rights,” encourages students to research the U.S Department of State Office of the Historian, to evaluate the importance of Helsinki Final Act (1975) in advancing security and human rights, and its contribution to enhancing dialogue among states as a diplomatic instrument for peacefully resolving conflicts. As observed by these examples, the narrative of the digital resources listed in textbooks mostly conform to the Eurocentrism, which, for K. Nagre (2025), is “(i) fundamentally *totalistic*, establishing European models for society and cultural success as a universal benchmark ... (ii) conversely *oppositional*, since the Other is viewed as diametric (and inferior) to the European subject ... and (iii) inherently *teleological*, as Europe is presented as the primary actor throughout time and space” (136). Thus, it is necessary to avoid Eurocentric bias (Pousa & López Facal, 2013, p. 107) in the mainstream educational media, including digital resources and textbooks.

3.6. Students’ Competences

The inclusion of various links in textbooks to help students get access to digital sources seems to support the shift in history teaching from simple knowledge transmission to fostering students’ historical thinking and reasoning. The analysis reveals that digital sources are either used to impart knowledge by asking students to “identify,” “select” and “define” information from online platforms, or require them to “examine,” “evaluate,” “discuss”, and “create.” Some of the references made to digital sources to facilitate knowledge acquisition are, as follows: “Use Google to find information on portraits of both foreign and domestic historians” (Vrekaj & Xhemalaj, 2018, p. 10), “Search online for information

about how Sfetigrad was captured by the Ottomans” (Dërguti et al., 2017, p. 60), “Find data on the internet and define the content of Thatcherism” (Dërguti et al., 2016, p. 165), “Students should search online for information about the Vlora family, including Ismail Qemal Vlora, Syrja and Eqrem Vlora, as well as other members of the family” (Dërguti et al., 2018, p. 190). However, most of the digital resources mentioned in textbooks are listed in the section devoted to questions and tasks and practical activities/projects. Therefore, they ask students to assess or evaluate the statements made in the source materials, and encourage them to create independent work on a specific topic by writing an essay or creating a poster, photo album, power point presentation, website. For example, students are required to “Discuss the influence of the Byzantine culture in the context of world civilizations, drawing on information from online sources” (Gurakuqi et al., 2016, p. 35), “Search for materials online about the Battle of Verdun and write a short essay on the topic: ‘The Slaughter of Verdun’” (Dërguti et al., 2016, p. 109), “Use online sources to write a 10-12 line essay on the topic: ‘Nazi Antisemitism’” (Dërguti et al., 2016, p. 21). In regard to the last task, as outlined in *Dealing with Online Anti-Semitism*, “students may come across anti-Semitic, Holocaust denial or hate propaganda websites during research activities or while surfing the Internet,” therefore, they “should be informed that some websites and social media channels are produced by Holocaust deniers, anti-Semites and racists with the express purpose of spreading misinformation and deceiving. They should be trained to notice and question relationships between the owner of a source and its contributors or respondents” (IHRA, 2019, p. 40). Terry Haydn (2011) goes further arguing that, “in the longer term we do want pupils to be able to use the internet intelligently and autonomously. History departments need to have a long-term plan’ to work towards pupils being able to conduct their own enquiries on the internet” (p. 245). Although no instructions are provided to students how to do research online, History 11 (Filo & Thanati, 2017, p. 13), in the section “Historical Research” asks students to investigate hypotheses about the ethnogenesis and original homeland of the Illyrians using online resources or historical literature, and hold a group debate in class to discuss their findings. While, History 12 (Vrekaj & Xhemalaj, 2018), under the practical activity titled: “Developing the historical narrative of your region using historical sources,” invites students to “Create a report, poster, album, or website to share information with the public and to allow the public to communicate with you” (p. 16). It shows that some textbooks aim to empower students to act as prosumers (Vasilchenko et al., 2020) of knowledge in the online environment.

4. Conclusion

The use of digital sources in history education contributes to fostering students’ historical thinking skills and historical inquiry, providing them with multiple perspectives, helping them to gain a deeper understanding of the past, and arising their interest in learning history (King et al., 2019, p. 47). Even though one of the main objectives of the Albanian National Strategy for Education 2021-2026 is promoting digital literacy at school, and history programs for upper-secondary education prescribe the development of students’ digital competence and the incorporation of ICT in the teaching and learning process, the analysis of whether and how history textbooks make use of digital resources reveals the following areas of concern: first, the limited space devoted to digital sources listed in the main text, as well as in the section dedicated to questions and tasks, and practical activities/projects, indicates the authorial narrative prevailing in history textbooks, which is in line with the findings of other above-mentioned studies. Second, 66% of tasks which require students to utilize online resources, provide no guidance which website, online platform, educational app/programme or online materials, they should consult, which may expose students to historical bias and propaganda. Third, the few educational websites referenced in textbooks generally provide learning materials in English or Spanish. However,

instead of asking students to explore Academia, Britannica, the Avalon Project and more, which are not designed to provide learning materials as such and may be not age appropriate, textbooks may offer links to e.g. Historiana, which is an online platform made by EuroClio, for and with history educators (Tribukait & Stegers, 2022, p. 65), “that offers students multi-perspective, cross-border and comparative historical sources to supplement their national history textbooks” (About Historiana). Forth, links to digital resources in Albanian language cited in textbooks, such as online forums, personal blogs, community platforms, may contain unreliable or inaccurate information and lead to “the formation of incorrect perspectives on historical processes, events, and figures, [and] acceptance of false information without questioning” (Kaya, 2025, p. 13). Furthermore, references to these links show that “digital learning materials are not widely available in the Albanian language, neither are proper educational programmes or learning modules” (Tribukait et al., 2017, pp. 29-30). Fifth, the persistence of Eurocentric narrative in digital resources referenced in textbooks, which covers “the purported superiority of Europe over the rest of the world” (Nakip, 2014, p. 129) calls for “teaching history beyond grand narratives” (Gribetz, 2018). Sixth, although identified digital resources included in textbooks which instruct students to “examine,” “evaluate,” “discuss,” and “create” seem to foster students’ historical thinking skills and inquiry-based learning, references to unreliable and unauthorized websites may contribute to the opposite direction by weakening students’ critical thinking skills regarding sources and by emerging narrow and biased historical narratives (Harisma et al., 2025, p. 1174). Therefore, the revision of history textbooks currently in use in upper-secondary school with regard to links to digital resources and the development of Albanian-language digital learning resources or the translation of available online historical sources in Albanian language are highly recommended aimed at preparing the young generation to combat the manipulative propaganda (Quality History, 2018, p. 20) while surfing the Internet and to “creatively, critically and productively take part in a digital society” (Redecker, 2017, p. 12).

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