

Teachers' reactions to the bans and biblioclasm of Mexico's national free textbooks in 2023: A descriptive qualitative study

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Eric Silberberg*

Armida Liliana Patrón Reyes**

Pedro Chagoyán García***

Eric Manuel Benjamín Sánchez Barragán****

Abstract

The rollout of Mexico's new national free textbooks (LTG) at the outset of the 2023-2024 school year sparked a political crisis. Several states sued to prohibit their distribution and segments of civil society protested that they were designed to "indoctrinate" children in leftist ideology and sexual and gender diversity. This study aimed to investigate the effects of the bans and controversy on the classrooms of elementary, middle, and telesecundaria teachers. An ethnographic methodology was employed with semi-structured interviews and field notes collected at three schools each in Guanajuato and Puebla. Findings reveal that physical resources are incredibly important to teachers, chief among them the LTG, since they promote information literacy and critical thinking. Following the typology of biblioclasm (Eco, 2001), the study maintains that inadequate school libraries might represent a greater threat than book bans. The tension of how the right of students to LTG, of parents to shape their children's education, and the autonomy of indigenous communities as well as the impact on participants (teachers) is also explored.

Key words: teacher attitudes – book bans – book burning – national free textbooks – school libraries.

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* M.A. in Library and Information Science and Special Education. Line of research: Library services for teacher training. Queens College, City University of New York, United States. eric.silberberg@qc.cuny.edu

** Ph.D. in Educator's Training and in Arts. Line of research: Professional identity in teaching studies, Life skills for trainers. Escuela Normal Superior Oficial de Guanajuato. Mexico. armidalilianapatronreyes@ensog.edu.mx

*** Ph.D. in Educator's Training. Line of research: Teacher identity and educational practices. Escuela Normal Superior Oficial de Guanajuato. Mexico. p.chagoyangarcia@ensog.edu.mx

**** B.A. in Modern Language and Literature. Escuela Normal Superior de Tehuacán. Mexico. manusabarra@gmail.com

Introduction

In August 2023, as Mexican families prepared to send their children back to school, the release of the latest edition of the national free textbooks (known as the *Libros de Texto Gratuitos* or LTG) triggered a political crisis across the country. The states of Chihuahua and Coahuila filed a complaint in the Mexican Supreme Court to block the distribution of the LTG in their states. They were soon followed by Aguascalientes, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Querétaro, and Yucatán in prohibiting the distribution of the textbooks (Villa, 2023). Opposition parties took action to impede the distribution of the LTG, with one party leader inviting parents to throw the textbooks in the garbage (Rodríguez, 2023). Various sectors of Mexican civil society, including religious organizations, parents' rights groups, and indigenous communities organized demonstrations and even book burnings (Henríquez, 2023; La Corresponsalía, 2023; "Padres de familia marchan," 2023).

The objections to the LTG were rooted in opposition to the Nueva Escuela Mexicana (NEM), a new educational reform implemented by the administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Criticism directed against the Secretariat of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública, or SEP), the federal ministry responsible for the LTG, alleged legal irregularities in the development of the new curriculum ("Retiran nuevos libros de texto," 2023). However, a comprehensive evaluation of the curriculum had yet to be conducted by educators (Cuevas, 2023; "Falta todavía información," 2023; Poy, 2023a, 2023b).

At the center of the controversy are the perceptions of the teachers, who have a direct responsibility to educate, and who receive and put into practice the reforms made in each administration. For them, the debate over the new LTG signifies more than just a legal and philosophical reform: it is also a practical alteration in how their schools and curricula are managed. (Campos, 2022).

This study examines interviews with teachers and ethnographic field notes gathered at the start of the 2023-2024 school year. Its aim is to explore how teachers in different socio-educational contexts perceive the impact of the national political controversy surrounding the LTG on their classrooms. The paper addresses three questions: What is the importance of the LTG as a pedagogical resource for teachers at the basic education level (elementary, middle and *telesecundaria*)? What are teachers' opinions about the book bans and burnings (biblioclasm) of the LTG? How does media misinformation and subsequent parental attitudes affect teachers' utilization of the LTG in their classrooms?

Our goal is not to probe into the political motivations behind the LTG prohibitions nor propose alterations to the LTG. Instead, our purpose is to construct testimony of the historic political situation and provide an analysis of the views of teachers as that moment in time was unfolding, something that ethnography is especially attuned to uncover (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2007; Pole, Morrison, 2003; Rockwell, 1980).

In the following sections, we delve into three concepts that will help contextualize the analysis of teachers' reactions: teacher perceptions, a typology of biblioclasm, and the tension between the right to read and the rights of parents.

Teacher perceptions

To study teacher perceptions of a nascent education reform, we must examine them as a two-way street. The first is the influence that school culture and the requirements of reform have on teachers and the second is how teachers reinterpret and adapt education reforms to the socio-historical context of their schools (Campos, 2022). Posner et al. (2020) characterize the Mexican public education system as hierarchical and structured around regional politics and patronage, a system perennially skeptical toward reform (Posner *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the NEM and particularly the new LTG were treated with suspicion. Teachers' approval of or resistance to the LTG depend on the attitudes of their supervisors, which include state authorities, district superintendents, school principals, Consejos Técnicos Escolares (school governance committees), and collaborative planning committees among teachers.

It is important to recognize that people's thoughts, feelings, and actions are situated and embody a specific place and time (Dreier, 1999). As Hargreaves (1998: 191) states "the form of the culture of teachers, consisting of relationship models and characteristic forms of association among the participants of these cultures, is evident in the way the relationships between teachers and their colleagues are articulated".

Typology of biblioclasm

In Latin American and Hispanosphere library science discourse, the term *biblioclastia* (biblioclasm) is used to describe various acts of book destruction (Meneses-Tello, 2023). While book burnings are perhaps the most visceral and emblematic examples of biblioclasm (Knuth, 2003), the concept is more nuanced. Bosch and Carsen (2015) and Carsen (2023) define biblioclasm as the set of practices, procedures, devices, and policies that destroy, devalue, or make invisible information resources and their physical spaces.

Eco (2001: 2) provides a typology of biblioclastic behaviors. The first includes those who commit biblioclasm for personal interest. This is usually financial, like a bookseller who divides up an atlas and sells each map for a combined value greater than the original intact volume. The second is biblioclasm due to carelessness "because one way to destroy books is to let them die and make them disappear in remote and inaccessible places". The third is fundamentalist biblioclasm, which Eco describes as individuals who "fear their content and do not want others to read them".

There are various examples of biblioclasm throughout Mexican history. Ruiz (2023) documents cases during the Revolution of 1910-1920 of soldiers raiding libraries to solve immediate

needs: to use the books as fuels for cooking, padding for sleeping, and towels for cleaning. These cases are indicative of Eco's (2001) biblioclasm for personal interest. However, during the Cristero War (1926-1929), Ruiz Corona identifies instances of fundamentalist biblioclasm by both federal troops and conservative religious rebels. Thus, Mexico has a history of fundamentalist biblioclasm as a means of controlling knowledge, which also extends to the realm of education.

Biblioclasm in schools

Now that we have developed a general understanding of biblioclasm, we can inquire into how it appears in the education system.

Díaz and Inclán (2001) argue that while education reform can change textbooks, it will not fundamentally alter the order or organization of schools. Why then fear a change to the LTG? Can we really believe, as the critics maintain, that a change to the LTG will replace literacy and mathematics with ideology?

Some critics of the LTG frame their arguments as a defense of young people against leftist "indoctrination" (Carrasco, 2023; Ramírez, 2023; "Unión de Padres de Familia Gana," 2023; "UNPF exhorta," 2023). Since the introduction of the single and obligatory national textbook program in 1960, groups such as the *Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia* (National Union of Parents of Families or UNPF), religious authorities, the corporate media like *Televisión Azteca*, and conservative political parties like the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN) have expressed their opposition at various times (Grecko, 2023). The launch of the LTG program in 1960 faced protests and book burnings, claiming that it usurped parents' rights and promoted atheism and communism. Similar actions arose during the education reforms of President Luis Echeverría's administration when sex education was introduced (Villa-Lever, 1988). More recently, in 2009, national protests and book burnings broke out in response to content on gender and sexual diversity (Grecko, 2023; Torres, 2018).

Knox (2017: 14) examines the motivations behind parents' groups that pursue book bans in schools, a type of fundamentalist biblioclasm. She characterizes their efforts as the result of a "monosemic interpretation" of books, which is the belief that a text holds a single and explicit meaning to all readers. She argues that these groups regard students as "passive agents" in the classroom who are incapable of evaluating or interpreting texts independently. Thus "if the text states a controversial idea, there is only one outcome that can come from reading it—indoctrination into a particular point of view".

Biblioclasm does not only affect books, but also the educators who defend them. Carsen (2023) and Pérez (2022) describe the psychological distress suffered by educators who live through a biblioclastic event. They have identified the self-censorship that arises under these conditions as a means of self-preservation: its goal is to safeguard both employment and physical well-being.

A final important note is the way in which school budgets provoke a type of biblioclasm. Consistent with Barba's (2020) observation that the lack of funding significantly hinders educational reforms in Mexico, Tudor *et al.* (2023) have found that budget cuts, rather than political movements, are a more substantial factor contributing to biblioclasm.

The right to read and the rights of parents

The LTG controversy also placed teachers between two competing rights: the right to read and the right of parents to shape their children's education.

Legally, the Mexican state assumes the power to produce textbooks. Article 12 of the *Ley General de Educación* establishes that the educational authority is obliged to continually update free textbooks at different educational levels, including preschool, elementary, and middle school. These textbooks are meant to be crucial learning materials for students and invaluable guides for teachers, aiding them in updating their knowledge across scientific disciplines and educational resources. This legal mandate underlines the responsibility of the Mexican state to provide the LTG to students as an integral part of the education system.

Since 1917, the UNPF has exercised a strong legal counterweight to the assertion of the Mexican state. Molina (2022: 165) highlights the central conflict of the UNPF statement on parental rights:

Article 3 of the Mexican Constitution establishes that the education provided by the State will be secular, free, and mandatory. Of these three conditions, only gratuity seems to be accepted among those who are part of the UNPF. The same does not occur with secularism and obligation, which are thought of as an imposition by the State. The argument is that, in the exercise of their freedom of conscience, parents have the right to choose the type of education they want for their daughters and sons, including, of course, religious education in public schools.

The UNPF's concern with mandatory education stems from its disagreement with the contents of the LTG. The state is responsible for creating a literate citizenry with a sense of belonging and the ability to contribute to the collective (Freire, 1988). The inclusion of some topics, particularly on sex education and family diversity, is an important public issue and a matter of public health. However, those who object to the LTG perceive it as an infringement on their parental responsibilities. They argue that parents have both legal and divine rights, based on their religious beliefs, to educate their children.

This tension becomes more complex if we consider the claims of indigenous communities around the LTG and state education. Some of the participants in the present study teach in predominantly indigenous communities. News emerged during the LTG controversy about book burnings in predominantly Tzotzil speaking communities, for example in Yalentay San Joaquín,

Chiapas, where parents expressed concern that the LTG “are not beneficial for indigenous children” (Henríquez, 2023). On the one hand, there is overlap with the UNPF in objecting to content on reproductive health and gender diversity. But on the other hand, the objections of indigenous groups should be seen as a form of protest against an imposition by the Mexican state. González Galván *et al.* (2001: 241) argue that Mexico has historically carried out a program of forced assimilation and ethnocide against indigenous peoples within its borders. Thus, the indigenous demand for autonomy is seen as a movement to resist the finality of this assimilation project, and, at the same time, “the redefinition of the state based on the inclusion of indigenous territories and governments”.

Methods

The present study employed multisite ethnography (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2007; Pole, Morrison, 2003) and utilized techniques of qualitative analysis (Emerson *et al.*, 2011; Saldaña, 2021).

Design

This article arises from a broader ethnographic study of two normal schools: the Escuela Normal Superior de Tehuacán (ENST) and the Escuela Normal Superior Oficial de Guanajuato (ENSOG). Part of this project involved interviewing graduates of these schools who are current classroom teachers. Fieldwork in September 2023 coincided with the launch of the new LTG. We found ourselves immersed in the controversy and participants spoke about its impact on their classrooms without prompting. Educational ethnography requires researchers to actively engage with information provided by participants and adjust research questions to align with the issues relevant to their lived experiences (Brown, Danaher, 2019; Galletta, Cross, 2013; Rockwell, 1980). Thus, finding ourselves in an auspicious position with half of our participants in Guanajuato, where the distribution of the LTG had been prohibited, and the other half in Puebla, where the books had been distributed, we incorporated the teachers’ reactions to the book bans and biblioclasm into the project.

Recruitment

ENSOG and ENST maintain close contact with the schools in which their graduates work as teachers. Through this network, we selected six schools: three in Guanajuato and three in Puebla. We sent written requests to these schools to conduct interviews on their campuses.

Participants

In these six schools, we interviewed twelve teachers who teach different grades and subjects in elementary schools, technical and general middle schools, and telesecundaria schools (see Table 1). In the state of Guanajuato, all participants work in the municipality of Guanajuato. In

Puebla, the participants work in the neighboring municipalities of San José Miahuatlán and Tehuacán.

Table 1. Professional profiles of the participants

Participant	Sex	Years of service	Municipality	State	Highest level of study	Instructional context
A	F	15	Guanajuato	GTO	BA	English teacher, general middle school.
B	M	18	Guanajuato	GTO	BA	Spanish teacher, general middle school.
C	M	18	Guanajuato	GTO	MA	Spanish teacher, technical middle school.
D	F	11	Guanajuato	GTO	MA	English teacher, technical middle school.
E	F	13	Guanajuato	GTO	BA	Telesecundaria teacher.
F	M	14	Guanajuato	GTO	MA	Telesecundaria teacher.
G	F	2	San José Miahuatlán	PUE	BA	2nd grade teacher, elementary school.
H	F	1	San José Miahuatlán	PUE	BA	3rd grade teacher, elementary school.
I	F	1	San José Miahuatlán	PUE	BA	4th grade teacher, elementary school.
J	M	1	San José Miahuatlán	PUE	BA	5th grade teacher, elementary school.
K	F	3	San José Miahuatlán	PUE	BA	Telesecundaria teacher.
L	F	0	Tehuacán	PUE	BA	3rd grade teacher, elementary school.

Note. The states of Guanajuato and Puebla are abbreviated as GTO and PUE, respectively.

For privacy, the participants are identified alphabetically (A-L). We have provided their geographic area, teaching context, and highest level of education to contextualize their testimony.

Municipality of Guanajuato

Found within the state of Guanajuato, the municipality has a population around 194,500 and covers both the urban center of the city of Guanajuato and rural communities. It has important foreign trade and manufacturing. However, there is significant economic and social inequality. 3.42% of the population live in extreme poverty, 30% in moderate poverty, and the illiteracy rate is 3.31%. Demographically, it is homogenous, with only 0.3% of the population speaking an indigenous language (Secretaría de Economía, 2023a). The PAN party, which currently holds power in the state government, was responsible for obstructing the distribution of the new LTG.

In Guanajuato, we spoke with six participants. Two (A and B) in a general middle school in an urban zone of the municipality. This school has a three-year program that includes Spanish, foreign language (English), math, science, geography, civics, technology, art, and physical education.

We interviewed two other teachers (C and D) in the same municipality but in a technical middle school. Compared to general middle schools, technical middle schools have additional programs to prepare students for careers in commercial, industrial, service, and agricultural sectors (Messina, 2013).

The last two participants (E and F) are teachers in a telesecundaria in a rural community within the municipality. The telesecundaria model was created in 1968 as a form of distance middle school education for remote rural communities. While in the general and technical middle schools different teachers teach different subjects, in telesecundarias it is one teacher responsible for all subjects in each grade. Originally, the work of the teacher was supplemented by content transmitted over the then-new technology of television (EDUSAT). Today, the SEP makes multimedia content available through an online portal. Across Mexico, telesecundarias account for approximately 60% of all public middle schools and educate around 20% of all middle school students (Navarrete, López, 2022).

Municipality of San José Miahuatlán

This is a small, rural municipality in the southeastern part of Puebla with a population of just over 14,000 people. Demographically, it is mostly indigenous, with 75.5% of the population speaking Nahuatl. 27.3% of residents live in extreme poverty and 58.1% in moderate poverty. The illiteracy rate is 13.5%, with women experiencing it at a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to men (Secretaría de Economía, 2023b). The state government is controlled by the *Movimiento Regeneración Nacional* (MORENA), the political party in power nationally and led by the current president López Obrador. This is why the LTG had been distributed to schools.

Four participants (G, H, I, and J) are educators in an elementary school in the municipality. In Mexico, elementary education is for six years, and one teacher is responsible for teaching most subjects for one grade (Posner *et al.*, 2020). The participants teach from second through fifth grade. It is important to highlight that in one of the most challenging socioeconomic contexts to teach, we observed teachers with the least experience: between one and two years in the classroom.

Participant K teaches in a telesecundaria in a rural community in the same municipality and teaches a majority population of indigenous children. This can result, as with K, in a socio-cultural distance between urban Mestizo teachers and rural indigenous students. Given that the indigenous population exceeds 30% of the community, the teaching of indigenous language is a mandatory subject (Cano, Bustamante, 2017).

Municipality of Tehuacán

Just north of San José Miahuatlán, Tehuacán is the second largest city in the state of Puebla with an official population of 327,312. It is demographically diverse, including immigrants from Lebanon and China, and is home to a significant indigenous population (7.53%) that speak Nahuatl, Mazatec, Mixtec and Ngigua (Popoloca). 8.31% of the population lives in extreme poverty and 48.8% in moderate poverty (Secretaría de Economía, 2023c). In Tehuacán, we interviewed participant L, who teaches 3rd grade in an elementary school in one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city.

Development of semi-structured interviews

We created an initial interview guide for the broader ethnographic study of the normal schools. However, after initial interviews, we discovered that participants were directly affected by the evolving circumstances surrounding the LTG bans. As a result, we audited the interview guide and made modifications, following the recommendations of Kallio *et al.* (2016). We incorporated questions about the LTG and permitted ourselves a “margin of freedom to follow up on any angle that the interviewee [considered] important” (Brinkman, 2014: 286). Furthermore, each time the participants mentioned the LTG, we asked follow up questions.

Data collection

Interviews were conducted from September 11-22, 2023 in the school of each participant in order to collect physical observations about their schools and to put them in the situational and emotional context of their work (Hammersley, Atkinson, 2007; Pole & Morrison, 2003). This also enabled participants to exhibit teaching materials, discuss specific sites in the school, and show us the LTG.

At each school visit we created ethnographic field notes, which we restricted to detailed descriptions of the school campus, people we worked with, and examples of teaching materials we found or shown to us. We also took contemporaneous notes during the interviews, which included participants' dispositions, the images they showed us on their cell phones, and the physical objects they pointed out (Emerson *et al.*, 2011). After each interview, these notes were transcribed from handwritten notebooks into typed documents. Finally, we drafted an initial memorandum after each interview to record preliminary impressions of what had been seen and heard (Saldaña, 2021).

Data analysis

We carried out qualitative analysis of the interview and field note data following the processes described by Emerson *et al.*, (2011) and Saldaña (2021):

1. The lead researcher read and reread the interviews, field notes, and initial memos. The initial memos played a crucial role in incorporating the emotional nuances expressed by participants during the interviews into our analysis. Text segments that were judged to contain a meaningful idea were segmented as meaning units and used to partition the data.
2. Each meaning unit was further analyzed and assigned a code based on its central idea.
3. When interpreting the data, we attempted to closely align with participants' perspectives when developing codes and categories. Codes were first assigned by the lead researcher and then audited by the team.
4. The codes were then grouped according to thematic similarities to form categories. These categories provided an organizational structure and conceptual framework for the data.
5. Trends within categories were then reviewed and grouped with similar trends to form subcategories. In other words, subcategories are the contours of ideas within broader category.

Positionality

This study strongly emphasizes the positionality and self-reflection of researchers in educational research (Pole, Morrison, 2003; Tuitjer, 2022). Toy-Cronin (2018) argues that insider research provides greater access, trust, and relationships with participants, but what constitutes insider information is fluid and multidimensional. The teacher-participants in the study are graduates of ENSOG and ENST. The Mexican researchers and US researcher (with experience as a teacher in Mexican public education) took advantage of their shared experiences and prior relationships with the participants, a key requirement in ethnographic research (Brown, Danaher, 2019).

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Research Compliance Office of Queens College, City University of New York and the administrations of ENSOG and ENST.

Results

During fieldwork in September 2023, none of the six participants in Guanajuato had received the new LTG. Of these six participants, E and F from the telesecundaria informed us that they were continuing to use select sections of past versions of the LTG. In Puebla, five of the six participants (G, H, I, J, and K) had received the LTG and were utilizing them in their classes. The sixth participant, L, from the urban elementary school in Tehuacán, received her books the day that we sat for an interview. As we spoke, the cardboard boxes containing the LTG were unloaded into the principal's office and school staff began to unpack and distribute the books to the teachers.

The following presents each category that emerged from the qualitative analysis of interviews and field notes (Emerson *et al.*, 2011; Saldaña, 2021):

The continued importance of physical books

Eleven of the twelve total participants informed us that physical books –including dictionaries, encyclopedias, and the LTG– continue to be a vital resource. Physical books are so important to participant C at the Guanajuato technical middle school that, throughout his 18 years of service, he has dedicated himself to building his own classroom library. He reflected on his successes and was sincere about where he could improve. He gathered his collection through a combination of gifts from colleagues and reusing discarded books from friends and family. There was no support from the school for this work. His collection includes books on a variety of topics, genres, etc. C emphasized that in the classroom, “the primary part is the teacher,” a trained and enthusiastic teacher. This teacher harnessed his creative energy and passion to supplement his available resources, especially in situations where they were limited.

Internet access

Unreliable access to internet in school, or, more importantly, in students' homes, was one of the principal reasons that the participants expressed their dependence on physical books. Participants F, G, H, and K from San José Miahuatlán reported that very few students have internet access. Although the telesecundaria model provides internet access to students at school, “sometimes there's internet,” said participant K with a smile. This service deficiency was also shared by participants at the telesecundaria in Guanajuato.

The urban schools were not much better in terms of connectivity. The participants commented that they still prefer physical material. They printed texts that they wrote or found online for students to use in class.

School libraries

Although the school library would be the natural place to expect teachers to select physical books for their classes, the libraries we observed lacked adequate resources and did not meet the needs of their respective schools. In all of them, the *Libros del Rincón* (Corner Books) series constituted the majority of their collections, followed by previous editions of the LTG. *Libros del Rincón* is a SEP program that offers free books to schools. Its objectives are to provide students with reading options beyond their textbooks, to support a pedagogical model that incorporates a variety of titles, genres, and formats, and to address the needs of students at different stages in their literacy development (Secretaría de Educación Pública, n.d.).

In the technical middle school in Guanajuato, the library was a modified classroom attended part-time by a staff member. The collection was very small: a 5-meter wall lined with shelves containing, in total, no more than a couple of hundred books. All this for a student population of 409. The collection was organized by topic and some title sets. The library was closed stacks, with a long blue concrete service desk separating the classroom space from the books. This was

the same school where participant C worked. The school library's limited resources were a contributing factor in his decision to create his own classroom collection.

In the telesecundaria in Guanajuato, the library was also in a repurposed space. Aside from the books, the library served as storage for craft materials, eight computers, and a printer. Bookshelves lined one side of the room and were sparsely stocked with books, most of which had accumulated dust, which indicated infrequent use. The students were busy working in the library when we visited the school during fieldwork. However, they were using craft materials and computers, not the book collection.

In the telesecundaria in San José Miahuatlán, the library was, again, in an adapted former office. The books were housed in a few unkempt metal stacks with missing shelves. Although they were organized by topic, they were stacked on top of each other. These book towers were precarious, and some had already fallen, causing the books to deform. The shelves also served as storage for non-library materials, such as Styrofoam cups and sports equipment.

In the elementary school in the same municipality, the four participants (G, H, I, and J) mentioned that they were awaiting the reopening of their library. This demonstrates the value they place on physical books as fundamental tools for student learning. Participant G previously worked in a different elementary school in an adjoining municipality that had a well-organized and staffed library. She frequently used the collection to complement the topics covered in the LTG.

Mixed impressions about the usefulness of the LTG as a resource

The second category that emerged from our analysis was that participants had mixed impressions about the usefulness of the LTG as a resource.

One of many resources

Participants A and C from the middle schools in Guanajuato succinctly summarized the perceptions of all participants by stating that teachers treat the LTG as "one of many resources." All stated that they select passages from the LTG, whether from past editions still used by those in Guanajuato (whose state blocked the new LTG) or from the current editions used by participants in Puebla. Participant D, from the technical middle school in Guanajuato, stated that she used "sections and [adapted] these sections of the LTG. [She did not] use them cover to cover."

The following are examples of how the participants used the LTG:

Participant A, who teaches English in the general middle school in Guanajuato, selected vocabulary and grammar exercises from the books. She also used them as sample texts; for example, in the current unit on school violence.

Participant C, who teaches Spanish at the technical middle school in Guanajuato, said that he found that the past LTG was limited in terms of the variety of genres for the students. He was the participant who built a classroom library over the past 18 years. Without access to the

new LTG, he was forced to be more resourceful. He went directly to the website of the *Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos* (National Free Textbook Commission), the organization responsible for the LTG, for resources, but said he found "very little." He also joined several large WhatsApp groups with teachers from around the state to share resources. WhatsApp was also a resource sharing platform for participant G at the rural elementary school in San José Miahuatlán.

Participant E, from the telesecundaria in Guanajuato, followed a template for all her units: (1) introduce the topic, (2) activate and evaluate prior knowledge, (3) take advantage of LTG activities, projects, exercises, and samples, and (4) use audiovisual material for review at the end of the unit. She said that without the new LTG she depended more on the digital materials that the SEP provides to telesecundarias (telesecundaria.sep.gob.mx) or content from outside the SEP, such as YouTube.

Participant K, from the telesecundaria in San José Miahuatlán, when teaching a unit on legal documents, consulted the LTG sections and supplemented them with actual government documents. Her objective is to teach students how to follow the directions on government documents. However, she commented that the video links provided in the LTG were "outdated" and "boring."

The new LTG offer a more inclusive representation of Mexican culture

Two participants reported that the new LTG offer a more inclusive representation of the diversity within Mexican culture than previous editions. Participant J, in the San José Miahuatlán elementary school, teaches Nahuatl as one of the topics for his 5th graders, given that 75.5% of the municipality's population are native speakers (Secretaría de Economía, 2023b). J appreciated the texts and exercises to support instruction in what is for many of his students their first language.

Participant K, in a telesecundaria in the same municipality, was happy that the new LTG included more images of Mexican culture in their design: "more than previous versions of the textbooks, they recover Mexican culture." K also teaches many students whose first language is Nahuatl, and she used texts in the language provided by the LTG. She believes that teaching Nahuatl is important because many students show resistance toward studying it in school. Some students, K reports, believe the language is undesirable or a sign of a lack of education.

The books are too advanced due to the educational disruption of COVID

For those participants with the new LTG in Puebla, half commented that the books are too advanced for their students in math, reading, writing, and verbal expression. Participants in the rural elementary and telesecundaria schools in San José Miahuatlán and the urban elementary school in Tehuacán expressed this observation. They also shared the belief that the disruption to education caused by school closures during the COVID pandemic is partially to blame.

LTG prohibitions as political theater

This is the third category to emerge during qualitative analysis. We recorded in our field notes that, in all cases, the posture of the teachers changed when they expressed their frustrations concerning the LTG prohibitions. They sat straighter in their chairs and lowered the volume of their voices. It was uncertain which possible consequences the participants could face in their schools if they publicly expressed their frustrations. In response to the politically sensitive nature of the topic, this study has taken steps to protect the identities of participants.

Our interactions with administrators at each school were relatively limited and a matter of formality: we spoke with them briefly in their offices to thank them for the access to the school campus to conduct our research. The principal in the technical middle school in Guanajuato invited us to have breakfast in the student cafeteria. In that moment she spontaneously expressed similar frustrations to those of the other teachers concerning the blocked distribution of the LTG.

Cynicism about the motivations behind the book prohibitions

None of the participants expressed support for a statewide book ban. They also could not comment on the pedagogical quality of the new textbooks because they had been working in states where they were banned (Guanajuato) or they were only a few weeks into the school year and had just started exploring the new LTG (Puebla). In general, the participants expressed that there was cynicism in the political positions behind the book bans. The teachers expressed their misgivings with varying intensities.

Participant C did not want to talk about the bans. When asked about them, his voice tightened and the corners of his mouth curved downward, expressing resignation toward the decisions made by those in power. With a touch of sadness, he simply stated: "We don't have access to books right now."

On the other side of the city, participant B took a more forceful tone: "I feel that it goes against the right of the students to not have access to the textbooks." B also did not believe that there were legitimate pedagogical reasons that his state prohibited the LTG: "I see it as political problem, an economic problem, between liberals and conservatives".

Despite having received books for her students, participant K, at the telesecundaria in San José Miahuatlán, was angered by the situation. She was more direct than participants C or B. She described the objections and prohibitions as "dramatic" and set the blame in the following manner: "The central topic of the prohibitions to the LTG has been political, and at a national level, an objection of AMLO", referring to President López Obrador. She perceived the LTG bans as a kind of political grandstanding that used the LTG as a political wedge issue.

Trust in teachers to teach critical thinking

Participants reported that bans fundamentally erode confidence in the teachers' ability to teach critical thinking skills to students rather than supposedly protect the well-being of children.

Participant A, an English teacher in Guanajuato, offered: "We should trust teachers. In English, I don't see anything out of the ordinary. We should teach students to evaluate the information they encounter. We want to teach them to be self-learners." Furthermore, she spoke from her perspective as a mother, and she was bothered that her daughter still had not received her books.

In a different context, participant K at the San José Miahuatlán telesecundaria shared a sentiment similar to that of A: "We [teachers] need to teach students to be critical of information. They should be critical with any resource I bring to class. [...] I focus on teaching students to discriminate between true and false information." Participants expressed that teachers should be trusted to develop critical thinking and that this is a key part of their job. This is especially true because elementary and middle school students are at the age when they are starting to interact with online content.

Participant A reported that: "There is more danger on cell phones than in the books." Participant B echoed this sentiment: "In fact, there is more danger online, where students are not under the supervision of their parents, than in any book." While there is some degree of risk, given that middle school students are still honing their critical thinking skills with online content, these problems are not simple. Participant B described that students can independently gather positive social information online: "I've seen growth and progress in schools. There is much more acceptance among the kids in the school and sexuality is not as much a focus of bullying. I think that social media are responsible for the acceptance and understanding of difference."

Addressing parental unease and misinformation

During fieldwork, two political objections to the new LTG were raised in the Mexican press and social media, the first being state prohibitions and the other being popular demonstrations that sometimes included biblioclasm. In general, 8 of the 12 participants reported that they felt that social media had misinformed parents.

In Puebla, the impact of parental unease and misinformation about the LTG was particularly pronounced. This was because schools had started working with books since the start of the school year.

Five of the six participants in Puebla worked in majority indigenous communities and news stories about biblioclasm in indigenous communities caused a measure of apprehension. In the rural elementary school in San José Miahuatlán, parents had not expressed misgivings or protested the LTG. However, the school took precautionary measures. Participant H, a third-grade teacher, reported: "The school told us to be careful with sensitive topics, like anatomy. It was a

precaution because of the information that parents received on social media, the news.” She explained that this was particularly the case with anatomy lessons because the LTG presented illustrated representations of the bodies of boys and girls. To avoid conflict, the school self-censored: teachers skipped pages that could contain sensitive topics and taught the same content a different way. Curiously, students were bringing the LTG home with them to do their homework, meaning that the books were at their parents’ disposal. No one in the school experienced a complaint from the parents and the self-censoring actions were, as H said, a precaution.

In the urban elementary school in Tehuacán, participant L had direct contact with parents who expressed misgivings and frustrations. She discovered that the parents were “apprehensive” about news stories circulating in the press and around social media. Parents expressed to L “fear” that their students were no longer learning to read or do math and, in their place, were being indoctrinated with certain social and political ideologies. In response, L created a presentation to show parents the true significance of the NEM reform and new LTG for students. This was a considerable task as it was L’s first year as a teacher. While still learning about the pedagogical requirements of the NEM, establishing classroom routines, and developing lessons with the LTG herself, she was additionally tasked with educating the community on these topics.

Discussion and Conclusion

In terms of the importance of the LTG as a pedagogical resource, participants emphasized that they rely heavily on physical materials. However, the books are considered “one of many resources.” The participants expressed that banning the LTG resulted in a serious reduction of classroom resources.

The idea that the LTG are “one of many resources” shows that the participants wanted to bring a variety of sources to their students, to encourage them to think critically about what they read, and for students to become independent learners. The decision to prohibit the LTG is fundamentally anti-critical thinking. Such decisions follow the belief that a book can only have one meaning and that students are, in turn, mere receptacles of the information that the books provide (Knox, 2017).

While participants used the term “critical thinking,” the literature refers to this competency as information literacy, which is defined as the ability to “recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (“Presidential committee”, 2006). Machin-Mastromatteo and Lau (2015) have traced the adoption of information literacy in Mexico since its formulation in the United States in the 1970s. They cite that a continuing challenge in Mexican education is the reliance on textbooks over a variety of sources. In light of the fact that much of public education depends on access to the LTG, banning their distribution is a serious blow to teachers. We observed that all 12 teacher-participants wanted a variety of resources for their students.

None of the participants expressed support for the LTG prohibitions, and they expressed varying degrees of contempt toward the political controversy surrounding them. The participants framed the prohibitions as a question of justice: an infringement on the right of students to have books. But this conception of the right to read comes into conflict with other interests and rights.

On the one hand, we have what we may call the right of students to the LTG, as articulated by the *Programa Nacional de Lectura y Escritura* (National Reading and Writing Program) which demands that young people learn informational literacy in order to become "independent readers and writers" (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2006). On the other hand, the UNPF advocates for a distinct and competing right: the right of parents to choose the form of education for their children (Torres, 2018). Participants expressed that they viewed this as a political issue, one that involves partisan loyalties, political theater (as expressed by participant K), and hidden agendas.

We also see how the political movement directly impacted the well-being of teachers, with the examples of self-censorship in San José Miahuatlán and the parent training materials developed by participant L in Tehuacán. These are evidence of the emotional cost paid by those who defend books against bans (Carsen, 2023; Pérez, 2022). The elementary school in San José Miahuatlán opted for self-censorship as a form of self-preservation and to maintain peace with parents and the community. We saw this in Guanajuato as well, but to a lesser extent. We observed changes in the participants' dispositions when they discussed the political situation in their state, which had blocked the distribution of the LTG.

One may be tempted to see the biblioclasm in Chiapas and the self-censorship in the indigenous community in San José Miahuatlán as additional evidence of the dichotomy between liberals and conservatives. We could interpret these pressures as additional forces of parental rights. However, those events exist within a socio-historical context distinct from the claims of the UNPF. Historically, the Mexican state has neglected the education of indigenous communities (Posner *et al.*, 2020) and education has often been a tool of forced assimilation and ethnocide (González Galván *et al.*, 2001). In an evaluation of previous editions of the LTG, Díaz (2023) concludes that while representations of indigenous people on its pages have increased, these representations still predominantly conform to stereotypes, relegated to sections on legends or folklore. Resistance could therefore be a demonstration of autonomy rather than political alignment.

The sample was chosen to include a finite number of teacher cases relevant to the broader ethnographic project. This approach allowed us to tailor our conclusions to the specific municipalities we studied. As Dreier (1999) points out, it is crucial to highlight what people experience. They have emotions and behave in a contextualized and physical way, within specific spaces and moments in time. Future research could leverage our data and results to construct a more comprehensive profile of teacher experiences during the crisis experienced in 2023.

Future studies should explore and validate claims made by participants. The first line of research should explore the claim that the LTG are too advanced for students. These claims invite investigation into exploring the actual scope and potential causes of this mismatch between the LTG and the needs of students. A second possible line of research concerns the teachers' claims that the new LTG offer a more representative and comprehensive representation of Mexican society. The participants appreciated the inclusion of family diversity and indigenous communities, for example with the inclusion of texts in Nahuatl. Research in this area could adopt the methodology proposed by Díaz (2023) and explore how the LTG portrays not only sexual diversity or indigeneity, but whether these representations transcend stereotypes.

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