Article

Perceptions of Heritage among Students of Early Childhood and Primary Education

José A. López-Fernández [1], Silvia Medina [2], Miguel J. López [2] and Roberto García-Morís [3,*]

1 Department of Geography, La Merced Campus, University of Murcia, 30001 Murcia, Spain; jantoniolf@um.es
2 Department of Specific Didactics, Faculty of Sciences Education, University of Córdoba, 14004 Córdoba, Spain; smedina@uco.es (S.M.); mjlopez@uco.es (M.J.L.)
3 Department of Specific Didactis and Research Methods, Faculty of Sciences Education, Elviña Campus, University of A Coruña, 15071 A Coruña, Spain
* Correspondence: roberto.garcia.moris@udc.es

Abstract: In recent decades, a growing awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage as a means of promoting sustainable development has been accompanied by a similar re-evaluation of the role of heritage education as a key driver of citizen engagement. The development and implementation of heritage education at all levels, particularly in the context of teacher training, is of vital importance. The aim of this study is to analyse student teachers' understanding of heritage and its potential as an educational tool, in order to identify measures to enhance teacher training and practice with respect to heritage and heritage education. The research design consists of a comparative study of a non-random sample of 149 trainee teachers undertaking Bachelor's degrees in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education at the University of Córdoba (Spain). The results reveal a mainly cultural conception of heritage among both groups, based on local material elements, and little sense of the link between heritage and present-day life. The students studying early childhood education were found to display a more specific knowledge of heritage in their answers, while the primary education students showed a greater awareness of identity and values as features of cultural heritage.

Keywords: heritage education; student teachers; early childhood education; primary education; cultural heritage; teacher attitudes

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognised as one of the key tools for ensuring the protection and sustainability of heritage [1–3]. Teachers ensure the transmission of the cultural legacy of our predecessors by cultivating an awareness of heritage as part of our collective memory and identity [4]. The UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (UNESCO 1972) marked a milestone in the development of heritage education by highlighting the importance of educational programmes (formal, non-formal and informal) as areas of action for safeguarding, promoting and increasing knowledge of cultural heritage [5]. The 1972 Convention defines "heritage" as monuments, groups of buildings and sites which are of "outstanding universal value" from a historical, artistic, scientific, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view; this definition was extended in 2003 by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Cultural heritage is, therefore, both tangible and intangible, comprising not only monuments and collections of objects, owned privately and collectively, but also the customs, traditions, knowledge, learning and ceremonies of our ancestors. In recognition of this vast wealth of cultural inheritance, the European Year of Cultural Heritage was declared by the European Commission in 2018, with numerous projects and programmes in support and celebration of heritage in Europe, including sustainability, tourism, cultural landscapes

and protection [6,7]. One of the key priorities of the year was the promotion of heritage education, including the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in the classroom, workshops, positive engagement, cultural exchange, professional development and teacher training.

Heritage is also included in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development under "Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities", one of the targets of which is to strengthen efforts to protect the world's cultural and natural heritage. The growing importance of heritage education in Spain can be seen in the emergence of the Spanish Heritage Education Observatory since 2010, the approval of a National Education and Heritage Plan in 2015, state grants for research and development projects on the pedagogical applications of heritage and the growing number of PhD theses in this area [8,9].

The concept of heritage in Spain is a symbiosis of its interpretation in French and English, combining the perspectives of the past, present and future. While in French, heritage focuses on inheritance from past generations, the English definition places more emphasis on transmission to future generations [10]. Heritage is thus what we inherit from the past, what we perceive and understand as heritage, and what we consequently choose to identify with, preserve and pass on in turn as our own legacy. Understanding this chain of transmission is what makes heritage education so important.

Heritage is a diverse concept, made up of numerous social and cultural features, and factors that shift and vary over time and according to the lens through which the concept is viewed. It is a complex term, which has evolved from its original focus on conserving the past to the modern symbolic, sentimental and historical–cultural meaning. One of the core characteristics of heritage based on this definition is its role in the formation of memory and identity, both individually and for society as a whole [11].

The growing body of research into the educational potential of heritage [12–15] has not been matched by changes in the classroom, however, where the traditional, monumentalist notion of heritage still prevails [16]. Despite the improved performance of teachers who adopt a counter-hegemonic heritage education methodology [17], studies show that most trainee teachers find it difficult to identify heritage and its importance [15,16], and this can have a detrimental effect on their teaching [18] and decision-making [19] abilities. For this reason, heritage education should be included in teacher training to inform teachers about heritage [20,21] and its educational value [10,11].

Despite considerable work being done in this area, more research is needed into teachers' attitudes to, and understanding of, heritage and heritage education. This study proposes a comparative analysis between students of early childhood education and students of primary education within a specific context, based on an intentional sample of 149 subjects. Data were collected using a previously published mixed questionnaire, to allow us to compare our findings with those obtained in other studies, and analysed using a descriptive–interpretative approach.

2. Literature Review

Recent research into education highlights the potential use of heritage as a tool for teaching critical, responsible citizenship, as well as the need for a holistic understanding of heritage education. Cuenca [22], for example, recommends an interdisciplinary approach to heritage education based on the concept of heritage as a source of symbolic identity. Furthermore, González-Monfort [10] examines the role of heritage as an integrating social construct and a source of information and understanding about the historical and social functioning of communities over time. Heritage education has also been studied by numerous authors from the point of view of education legislation and curricula [4,5,23], materials and resources (e.g., textbooks) [24–30], and projects and programmes in museums, virtual spaces and the classroom [31–37].

In their survey of the primary curriculum in Spain and Portugal, Pinto and Molina [38] note the minimal presence of heritage in social studies. In relation to the situation in Mexico, Luna et al. [39] observe a greater presence of heritage topics in subjects related to language,

interculturality, identity and non-material culture, in contrast to its almost total absence from subjects such as geography and natural science.

In relation to the educational potential of heritage in the teaching of history, Miralles and Rivero [40] propose introducing children to concepts of time and history from an early age through a range of different projects and activities, including an increased exploration and awareness of local heritage. Studies on the development of skills among student teachers at the primary school level also highlight the importance of exploring the local environment as part of their teaching practice in order to promote critical thinking and innovation [17].

Research into the presence of heritage in teacher training programmes is a growing area, though this deals more with students teachers' perceptions and knowledge of heritage rather than their use of heritage education in the classroom. Nevertheless, research on the presence and promotion of heritage and heritage education in teacher training has thus far tended to focus more on primary education trainees than on students of early childhood education [41].

Research into Spanish teachers' attitudes, understanding and use of heritage as a teaching and learning resource has produced a number of interesting studies, including Cuenca [22], Felices, Chaparro and Rodríguez-Pérez [42], Estepa, Ávila and Ferreras [43], Conde and Armas [44], and Castro-Fernández et al. [16]. Molina and Muñoz's [45] (p. 876) case study of heritage education in secondary schools reveals the persistence of a "fragmentary, academic" view of heritage and a tendency among teachers to teach it "descriptively and therefore passively", while Marín-Cepeda and Fontal's [46] analysis of secondary school student attitudes to heritage highlights the students' lack of awareness of intangible heritage. Finally, Castro-Fernández et al.'s [16] survey of teachers in early childhood, primary and secondary education shows a marginal, irregular appearance of heritage within the curriculum. Similar studies involving student teachers and pupils from different levels of education have also been carried out in relation to other countries (such as Germany, Turkey and the United States) by authors such as Yeşilbursa and Barton [20], Dönmez and Yeşilbursa [21], Curtis and Seymour [24], Yeşilbursa and Uslu [47], and Röll and Meyer [48].

In Spain, considerably less attention has been paid to the subject of heritage education from the perspective of teachers in training [41]. Chaparro and Felices's [49] survey of the perceptions of students of primary education shows a very positive attitude towards heritage as a resource for understanding the past, but also a very limited and incomplete understanding of the concept of heritage. Moreno, López-Fernández and Ponsoda-López de Atalaya [50] and Moreno-Vera et al. [51] corroborate this finding, observing that student teachers' perception of heritage focuses less on intangible or natural forms of heritage, and more on its artistic and monumental expressions.

The integrating and socialising value of heritage is frequently highlighted by scholars, as reflected in numerous studies on curricular projects for both teacher training and early childhood and primary education [3,52–55]. Cambil and Fernández [11] (p. 33) observe the need for heritage education to be conducted in context and in dialogue with heritage, and highlight the fundamental role of schools as the starting point for the process of "patrimonialisation": "not just in the sense of analysing and studying heritage elements and resources, but as the relationship of belonging, ownership and identity created between people and certain artefacts and attributes". Other recent scholarship explores how constructivist pedagogical approaches to heritage can help with the development of skills and knowledge related to historical time (such as concepts of change, duration and succession [56]), promote citizenship [2,10,52] and demonstrate the importance of heritage as a primary source of historical knowledge [42,56].

Student teachers need to be given more comprehensive training in the use and adaptation of teaching methodologies in order to provide children with a holistic, interdisciplinary heritage education. This demand for better training is one of the key priorities reported by the National Heritage and Education Plan (2015) [57], together with improved resources and more innovative educational programmes and projects.

3. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive–interpretative analysis based on data obtained from a mixed qualitative–quantitative questionnaire. Inferential techniques were used to test the initial hypothesis, move the analysis forward and identify possible measures to improve teacher training.

3.1. Aims and Hypothesis

The aims of the study were divided into the following general aim (GA) and three specific sub-aims (SAs):

- GA: to compare conceptions of heritage among students of early childhood and primary education.
- SA-1: to analyse their understanding of heritage.
- SA-2: to find out what they class as heritage.
- SA-3: to examine the pedagogical role attributed to heritage by students of early childhood and primary education.

The initial hypothesis of the study was that any differences between the two groups of student teachers would not be significant. Previous studies show that teacher training in this area is based on a largely local, material notion of heritage [16,50]. This study aims to examine the similarities and differences between the two groups in more detail.

3.2. Research Design

The research was carried out during the 2019/2020 academic year and consisted of a comparative study of two groups based on a non-random sample. The first group comprised 50 undergraduate early childhood education students from a fourth-year elective entitled "Heritage Education" ($n = 50$; 33.55% of sample). The second group comprised two sub-groups of undergraduate primary education students from a third-year core subject entitled "Social Science Didactics" ($n = 99$; 66.45% of sample). The group of early childhood education students was predominantly female (90% vs. 10%), while the group of primary education students was more evenly distributed in terms of gender (50% vs. 50%). The average age in both groups was 22.08 years (SD = 4.28).

The survey was conducted as a preliminary activity in the case of both subjects, prior to the commencement of any learning activities. The timing of the study was important to ensure that student responses were based on their pre-existing conceptions of heritage, so that this information may be used to adapt and develop teaching practices and activities in the future.

3.3. Instrument

The data for the study were collected using a previously published mixed qualitative–quantitative questionnaire [58], similar to those used in other studies to survey perceptions about heritage among teachers and secondary school pupils [16,46] (Table 1). The questionnaire was validated by a panel of four heritage education specialists. Its purpose was to obtain comparative data on the participants' knowledge and conception of heritage, and their views regarding the educational potential of heritage. To avoid socially acceptable responses [59], the questionnaire focused on definitions and key concepts. The results were classified according to variables and descriptors, based on a content analysis of the participants' responses (Table 2).

Table 1. Questionnaire structure.

Dimension	Structure	Question
Sociodemographic data		Early childhood education/primary education
		Age
Concept of heritage	Item 1	How would you define heritage?
	Item 2	Which three of the following elements do you associate with heritage?
	Item 3	List five elements, constructions or expressions (local, regional, national or international) that you think of as heritage.
Teaching and learning	Item 4	Describe briefly the possible uses of heritage in the teaching–learning process in early childhood/primary education.

Table 2. Classification of results.

Question Asked	Variables and Descriptors
1. How would you define heritage?	Past (legacy, inherited, ancient, past, olden times, time) Present (today, current, present) Space (city, place, territory, landscape, space, area, country) Identity (meaning, identity, community, belonging, institution, person) Type (cultural asset, architectural, artistic, material, intangible, value, monument, building, natural)
2. Which three of the following elements do you associate with heritage?	Predetermined concepts: legacy, past, inherited, historical, time, current, city, place, identity, meaning, cultural asset, artistic, architectural, material, natural
3. List five elements, constructions or expressions (local/regional, national or international) that you think of as heritage.	Heritage type: material (civil, religious, undefined); intangible (civil, religious, undefined); natural Location: local (in relation to Andalusia: local, provincial, regional); national (rest of Spain); international
4. Describe briefly the possible uses of heritage in the teaching—learning process in early childhood/primary education.	Learn about your local area Construct identity Develop skills and abilities Value heritage

The questionnaire consisted of an initial section to collect the participants' sociodemographic information, followed by three items related to their concept of heritage—one open (1) and two closed (2, 3)—and a fourth item (open) on their attitude to the role of heritage in the teaching–learning process.

The results of the first question were classified according to key concepts and descriptors (e.g., time, historical, past, present, cultural asset, etc.) The open nature of the question allowed for the inclusion of multiple descriptors in each response. For the second question, participants were instructed to select three elements associated with heritage from a predetermined list, which were then grouped into five main categories: past, present, identity, heritage type and natural. For the third, they were asked to name five expressions of what they perceive as heritage. The answers in this case were classified according to type (material, intangible, natural, civil, religious, undefined (for elements not specifically attributed to any of the previous categories, e.g., squares, monuments, etc.)) and geographical location (local/regional, national, international). Question 4 consisted of an open

question, in which the participants were asked to provide a short description of the possible uses of heritage in the teaching–learning process, which were categorised according to four of the five variables defined by Castro-Fernández et al. [16] concerning the aims of heritage education.

Quoted definitions by participants in the sections below have been labelled as "P", with a distinction made between the students of early childhood education (P.Inf.1, 2, 3, etc.) and the students of primary education (P.Pri.1, 2, 3, etc.)

4. Results

The first question asked participants to provide a definition of "heritage" based on their understanding of the concept. Their responses were analysed statistically and the key terms used were grouped according to the codes and categories outlined in the previous section (Table 3 and Figure 1).

Table 3. Categories of key terms used in definitions of heritage.

Category	Early Childhood Education		Primary Education	
	N°	%	N°	%
Past	16	12.90	31	20.13
Present	1	0.81	2	1.30
Space	30	24.19	30	19.48
Identity	15	12.10	36	23.38
Heritage type	62	50.00	55	35.71
Total	124	100	154	100

Past (legacy, inherited, old, past, olden times, time), Present (today, current, present), Space (city, place, territory, landscape, space, area, country), Identity (meaning, identity, community, belonging, institution, person), Heritage type (cultural asset, architectural, artistic, material, intangible, value, monument, building, natural).
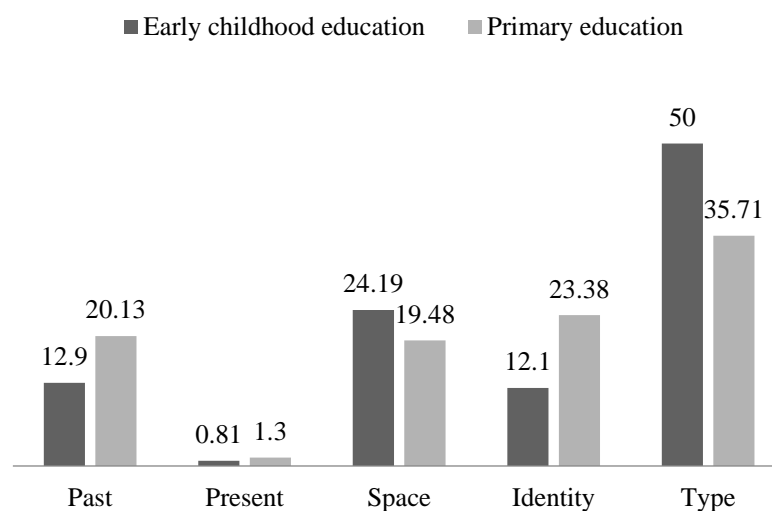

Figure 1. Categories of key terms used by participants.

The main concepts mentioned in the students' definitions corresponded to the category "type". The prevalence of terms related to heritage type was especially pronounced in the case of the students of early childhood education (50% vs. 35.71%), which is significant considering the much higher proportion of students of primary education in the study (33.55% vs. 66.45%). Of these terms, references to cultural assets accounted for 19 definitions in the case of the students of early childhood education and 20 for the students of primary education. The responses of the students of early childhood education were more specific in defining heritage as material (11) or intangible (9) than their counterparts from the primary education degree (5 and 7, respectively). As expected, natural heritage received little attention from either group (3 mentions each).

The second most frequent category of key terms was "Space", as participants commonly associated heritage with a specific place in their definitions (e.g., city, country, locality). The use of terms related to past time was less pronounced, however, particularly in the case of the early childhood education students. The main difference between the two groups was observed in relation to terms associating heritage with identity, the proportion of which was nearly double in the case of participants from the primary education degree (12.1% vs. 23.38%).

The results also showed a tendency among both groups of participants, but especially among primary education students, to offer vague, incomplete definitions which identify heritage as a mainly material concept. This imprecise notion of the term is reflected in descriptions of heritage as a "group of possessions" (P.Inf.7), a "group of inherited possessions" (P.Inf.4), a "group of buildings in an area" or the "historical wealth of where we live" (P.Pri.41), while others include explicit reference to ownership: "group of possessions owned by a person" (P.Inf.25) or "possessions of a person or area" (P.Pri.27).

The second question presented participants with a selection of terms and asked them to choose three that they associate with heritage. The predetermined concepts are displayed in Table 4 in order of preference by each group.

Table 4. Data obtained from Question 2 ("Which three of the following elements do you associate with heritage?").

Early Childhood Education			Primary Education		
Concept	N°	%	Concept	N°	%
Cultural asset	32	22.07	Cultural asset	57	14.88
Historical	28	19.31	Inherited	39	10.18
Legacy	14	9.66	Historical	39	10.18
City	13	8.97	Identity	35	9.14
Artistic	9	6.21	Artistic	34	8.88
Inherited	8	5.52	Legacy	31	8.09
Place	7	4.83	Architectural	30	7.83
Identity	7	4.83	Past	21	5.48
Architectural	7	4.83	City	19	4.96
Natural	5	3.45	Meaning	17	4.44
Past	4	2.76	Natural	16	4.18
Material	4	2.76	Material	15	3.92
Time	3	2.07	Time	14	3.66
Meaning	3	2.07	Place	14	3.66
Current	1	0.69	Current	2	0.52
Total	145	100	Total	383	100

The concepts were grouped into five main categories (past, present, space, identity, heritage type and natural), as illustrated in Figure 2, for the students of early childhood education, and Figure 3, for the students of primary education.

The majority of the terms selected by the students relate to heritage type and past time, with almost identical proportions observed for both groups: 35.87% and 39.32%, respectively, in the case of early childhood education, and 35.51% and 37.59% in the case of primary education. Though a minor presence, it is interesting to note the inclusion of natural heritage in the students' responses on this occasion, in contrast to its absence in the definitions provided in the previous question (early childhood 3.45%, primary 4.18%).

Even more significant is the low occurrence of terms related to the present in this instance (less than 1% in both groups), despite the intrinsic bond between the cultural legacy of the past and the values we hold in society today. This may be due to the participants' predominantly aesthetic–historical perception of heritage and a much less developed sense of the link between heritage and present-day life.
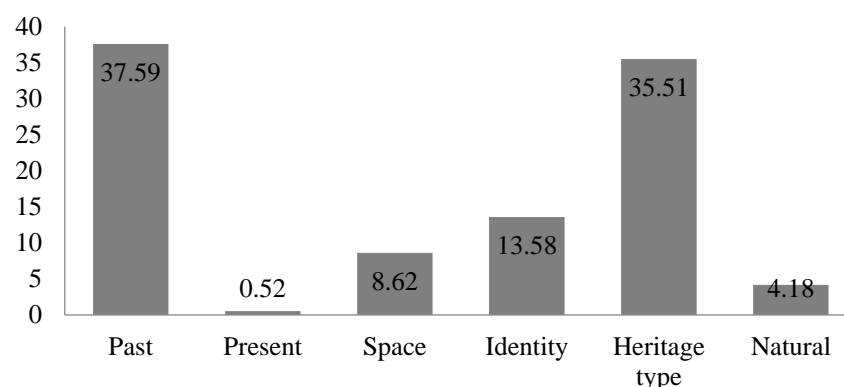
Figure 2. Categories of terms associated with heritage by the students of early childhood education.
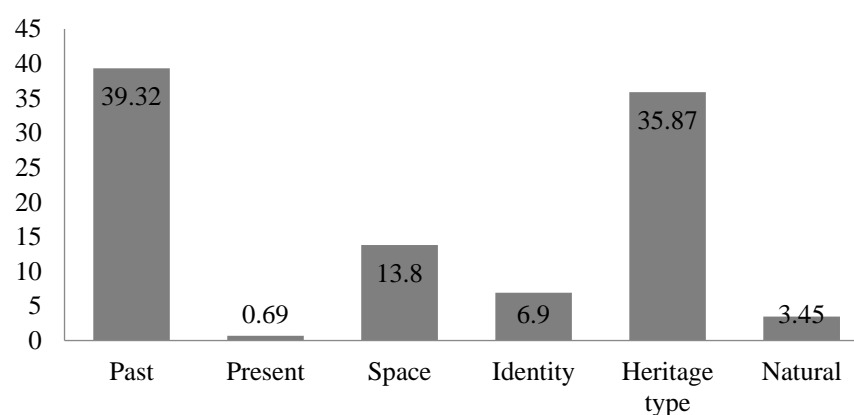

Figure 3. Categories of terms associated with heritage by the students of primary education.

The third question asked participants to name five elements, constructions or expressions that they view as heritage. Responses were grouped into different sets of categories, as illustrated in Table 5 (heritage type), Table 6 (civil or religious) and Table 7 (geographical location). It should be noted, however, that not all participants were capable of naming five examples.

Table 5 highlights the overwhelmingly material notion of heritage among the students surveyed, accounting for over 86% of all responses in both groups (early childhood 86.4%, primary 86.68%). The focus on material heritage over its intangible and natural expressions is observed equally across both groups and coincides with the results observed in relation to Questions 1 and 2. The representation of intangible heritage among the examples given is remarkably low by comparison (early childhood 9.65%, primary 10.51%), yet higher than the even more overlooked category of natural heritage (less than 5% in both cases).

Table 5. Categories of type of cultural heritage.

Type	Early Childhood Education		Primary Education		Total
	N°	%	N°	%	
Material	197	86.4	371	86.68	568
Intangible	22	9.65	45	10.51	67
Natural	9	3.95	12	2.80	21
Total	228	100	428	100	656

Table 6. Sub-categories of cultural heritage: civil, religious and undefined.

Early Childhood Education							
Type	Civil	%	Religious	%	Undefined	%	Subtotal
Material	122	61.93	75	38.07	0	0	197
Intangible	19	86.36	1	4.55	2	9.09	22
Total	141		76		2		219

Primary Education							
Type	Civil	%	Religious	%	Undefined	%	Subtotal
Material	216	58.22	126	33.96	29	7.82	371
Intangible	24	53.33	2	4.44	19	42.23	45
Total	240		128		39		416

Table 7. General location of elements perceived as cultural heritage.

Type	Material		Intangible		Natural		Total
Degree	Early Childhood	Primary	Early Childhood	Primary	Early Childhood	Primary	
Local	176	221	8	21	7	6	439
%	89.34	59.57	36.36	75.56	77.78	50.00	
National	9	42	4	2	0	1	58
%	4.57	11.32	18.18	4.44	0.00	8.33	
International	10	45	4	1	2	4	66
%	5.08	12.13	18.18	2.22	22.22	33.33	
No location	2	63	6	21	0	1	93
%	1.02	16.98	27.27	46.67	0.00	8.33	
Total	197	371	22	45	9	12	656

Table 6 displays the data for the sub-categories of civil and religious cultural heritage, with an additional "undefined" category for elements not attributed to either type (e.g., squares, monuments, bridges, territories, terrain, festivals, etc.)

In relation to material heritage, the examples given show a similar predominance of examples of civil heritage over religious among both groups (early childhood: 61.93% vs. 38.07%; primary: 58.22% vs. 33.96%). The results also show, however, that among the students of primary education, nearly 10% of the participants failed to specify the nature of the example provided ("undefined"). In relation to intangible heritage, the proportion of civil examples is significantly higher in the case of the students of early childhood education, but less so in the case of those of primary education (86.36% vs. 53.33%). What is striking in this instance is the proportion of "undefined" examples in the case of the latter (42.23%), indicating a much lower level of precision in the students' perception of heritage.

Information related to the geographical location of the heritage elements listed by participants is presented in Table 7 below. Figure 4 (below) illustrates the most frequently mentioned elements among each group (three mentions or more).

The material heritage elements listed were predominantly local in nature, though significantly more so in the case of the early childhood education students (89.34% vs. 59.57%). The most frequently referenced local expressions of heritage across both groups were the Mosque-Cathedral and Medina Azahara, followed by other constructions such as the Alcazar, the Roman bridge and the city's courtyards, all located in the ornately monumental Cordoba Old Town. Material heritage elements from other provinces of Andalusia (mainly Seville and Granada) were also mentioned, albeit less frequently. Nationally, participants mentioned the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Burgos Cathedral and the Aqueduct of Segovia, while international elements included the Eiffel Tower in Paris (France), the Great Wall of China and the Tower of Pisa (Italy).
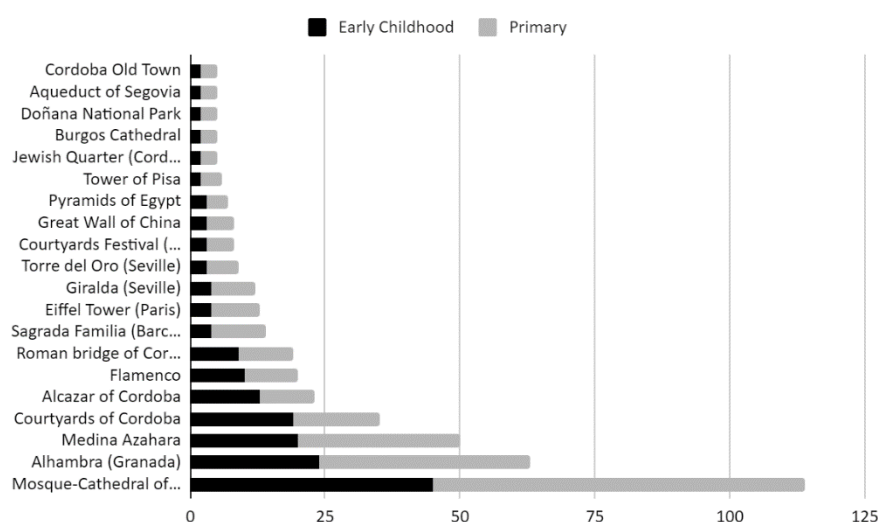
Figure 4. Main heritage elements listed by participants.

As observed in relation to the previous questions, references to intangible heritage were much less frequent, though proportionally less so in the case of the primary education students, whose responses included flamenco and the Courtyards Festival. Clothing and gastronomy were mentioned only twice, while trades and crafts were completely absent. The only natural heritage element represented in Figure 4 is Doñana National Park (three mentions by the primary education students), with other sites, such as Sierra Morena, Cabo de Gata, Sierra de Cazorla and the Sotos de la Albolafia (a nature reserve on the banks of the Guadalquivir river as it passes through Cordoba) occurring no more than once or twice in either group.

Figure 4 shows the geographical distribution of heritage elements at a provincial level within Andalusia. The figures clearly illustrate the influence of proximity on the participants' perception and awareness of heritage. When asked to identify elements or expressions of heritage, participants were found to be more likely to name examples of material heritage close to their living environment, despite findings elsewhere regarding a lack of knowledge about local heritage among student teachers [51]. The results also showed a minimal presence of examples from other parts of Andalusia, such as Granada and Seville.

The results for Question 4 reflected four of the five variables defined by Castro-Fernández et al. [16] concerning the aims of heritage education. The educational potential of heritage as a way of improving historical–artistic knowledge was the most frequent response among both groups, with 64% of the early childhood education students and 50.5% of the primary education students providing answers corresponding to the "Learn about your local area" variable. In line with the results for the rest of the questions in the survey, the participants' answers revealed an understanding of heritage in local, material terms as a resource for teaching young children about history, as illustrated by the following examples (Figure 5): "To learn and explore the history of their city"; "To learn about the culture, landmarks and other typical features of where they live"; and "Heritage helps primary school children to become more aware of the historical events that led to the society we live in today".

In the case of participants from the early childhood education degree, answers corresponding to the other three variables ("Construct identity", "Value heritage" and "Develop skills and abilities") were much less frequent but equally distributed among the remaining students (6 students/12% each).
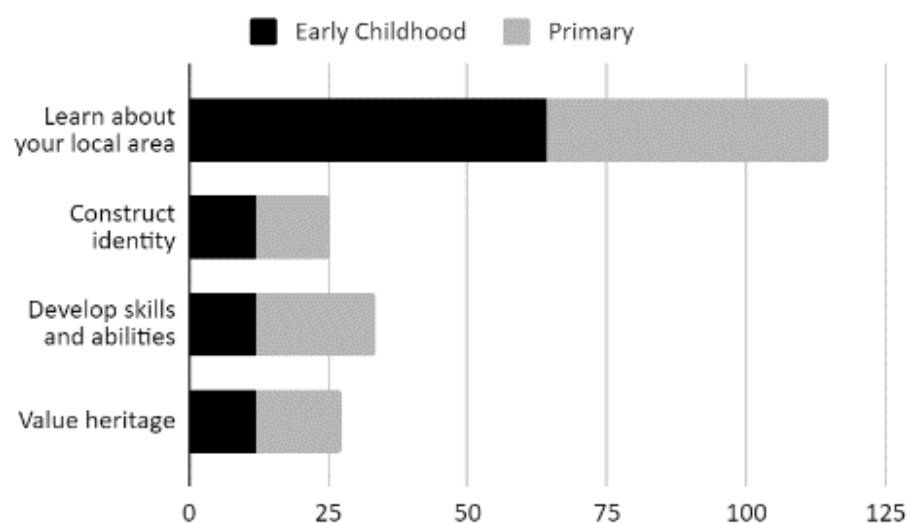
Figure 5. Variables representing the possible uses of heritage in the teaching–learning process according to students of early childhood and primary education.

In contrast, among the primary education students, the second most common group of responses corresponded to the "Develop skills and abilities" variable (21 students/21.2%), revealing a more rounded, present-centred notion of heritage. This less material conception of the educational potential of heritage is reflected in answers such as "To promote critical thinking and respect for the world around them" and "To use heritage as a focus for learning". Answers corresponding to the "Construct identity" and "Value heritage" variables were provided by 13 and 15 students, respectively. The low sense of priority attributed to these functions is significant, particularly in the case of the latter, given the importance of instilling respect for heritage from an early age.

5. Discussion

The results of the study show that students of both early childhood and primary education conceive of heritage in mostly material, historical and local terms, and that their understanding of heritage does not usually include values such as identity, meaning or links to the present. This finding is in keeping with the definitions of heritage reported in Castro Fernández et al.'s [16] survey of 76 teachers in early childhood, primary and secondary education, which found that "in descending order, teachers stated that they work with: (a) artistic-historical heritage, from a traditional, monumental-touristic perspective; (b) intangible, ethnographic heritage, from a symbolic-identity perspective; (c) natural heritage". The predominantly material perception of heritage observed among teachers and trainees alike at all levels of education, both nationally within Spain [16,46,49] and internationally [20,21], illustrates the need for a more diverse understanding of the concept of heritage and a greater focus on the preservation and transmission of heritage in its intangible forms.

The response averages for Questions 1 and 2 (Table 8) confirm the predominantly material, historical notion of heritage among both groups of students [22], and the prevalence of terms and key concepts related to heritage type (early childhood 42.94%, primary 35.61%) and the past (early childhood 26.11%, primary 28.86%).

Table 8. Response averages by category for Questions 1 and 2.

Categories (Concepts)	Early Childhood Education	Primary Education
	Average for Qs 1, 2	Average for Qs 1, 2
Past	26.11	28.86
Present	0.75	0.91
Space	19.00	14.05
Identity	9.50	18.48
Type	42.94	35.61

In relation to the possible mobilisation of heritage for citizenship education [2], virtually none of the definitions proposed related to current social issues (less than 1% in both cases). The contrast between this finding and those from other studies in this area [49] may be due to the absence in our study of any specific question regarding the link between heritage and citizenship. Heritage is not a fixed, received value, however, or a protected artefact of the past to be observed and enjoyed. Instead, it is a dynamic, contemporary social construct of the tangible, intangible and natural elements which each society chooses to identify and harness as the legacy of its past and the basis of its future [10], and heritage education should "[enable] us to question past societies to help us understand the present and think about the future" [2]. In order to protect and preserve it for the future, citizens need to understand its meaning and value in the present. This is one of the core goals of critical, participatory, holistic heritage education [60].

As in Moreno-Vera et al.'s [51] survey of student teachers from three different universities, our study showed proximity to be a key determinant of the conception of heritage among students from both degrees. When asked to provide a short list of heritage examples, participants opted for elements located in their immediate environment in over 86% of cases. References to heritage expressions at a national or international level were less frequent, and may have been influenced by travel experiences, previous studies or the media [46]. This emphasis on local heritage among trainee teachers is also observed internationally [20], and in studies of Spanish school children at both the primary [44] and secondary [46] level. The latter findings support Yeşilbursa and Barton's [20] suggestion that teachers' attitudes to heritage may be formed prior to entering university. Whether they are or not, heritage elements within the local environment are an excellent opportunity to raise awareness and knowledge of heritage among pupils and teachers alike [46], as well as to promote critical thinking [17].

Some differences between the two groups were observed in relation to the concepts associated with identity and space, where the students of early childhood education were found to place less emphasis on the symbolic/identity aspects of heritage than their primary education counterparts (10% vs. 18.48%), and more emphasis on spatial factors (19% vs. 14.05%). The greater awareness of space among the students of early childhood education may be due to the centrality of knowledge and exploration of the surrounding environment in the early childhood curriculum, and the frequent use of local cultural spaces (museums, churches, civic monuments, etc.) for didactic purposes. In contrast to this flexible, open approach, the primary curriculum is more rigidly subject- and memory-based, and heritage is generally used as a complement to other course content [16,44]. In the main, however, a holistic view of heritage was found to be lacking among both groups of students [49].

Overall, the two groups were found to have a very similar understanding of heritage [22]. The main differences between the two consisted of a more specific conceptual knowledge and identification of heritage elements in the case of the early childhood education students (especially in relation to intangible heritage), and a greater sense of the importance of identity and values as features of cultural heritage on the part of the students of primary education.

Finally, while the notion of heritage by both groups included its potential as an educational tool, certain differences were observed in relation to the perceived aims of heritage education. The students of early childhood education prioritised the role of

heritage in helping to promote learning and understanding about one's local area (64%), whereas the primary education students showed a greater awareness of its importance in the development of values, skills and abilities (49.5%). Despite the students' clearly positive attitude towards the educational potential of heritage, both in Spain and elsewhere [20], studies reveal a considerable lack of knowledge and methodological expertise among trainees in relation to how to harness that potential [49].

Recognition of the educational potential of both material and intangible heritage—especially local heritage—has also been noted among current and future teachers in primary and secondary education [42,43] Nevertheless, as noted above, activities and proposals by teachers to realise this potential remain peripheral and unsystematic [16].

While the aims of the study were met in full, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Owing to the non-random nature of the sample, the conclusions obtained regarding student teachers' perceptions of heritage cannot be generalised to other contexts. They may, however, be used for comparative purposes, as part of the ongoing transformation of teacher training in Spain in the context of critical, responsible and holistic education. The growing body of research in this area in recent decades, both nationally [16,17,31,41–44,46] and internationally [20,21,24,39], highlights the need to understand the perceptions of heritage and the heritage education of pupils at all levels of education and of their future teachers, as a way of improving the quality of their education overall.

6. Conclusions

In keeping with the results of previous research, the study showed a mostly material understanding of heritage among both groups of students, and the importance of proximity as a factor in the selection of heritage elements. Worryingly, however, both groups exhibited virtually no sense of the influence of heritage on our current experience, regarding it as something to be admired and enjoyed, rather than as an (inter)active element within society. The central aim of this research was to highlight the connections between the training received by student teachers and their professional practice in the future. This finding therefore offers important insight into the type of measures that are needed to act on the students' existing perceptions and improve the way we train our teachers.

Contrary to the initial hypothesis, which did not predict any significant differences between the two groups, the analysis found that the early childhood education students provided greater precision in their answers than their primary education counterparts. In contrast, while the perception of heritage education among the early childhood education students focused heavily on the acquisition of knowledge, the primary education students displayed a greater awareness of the educational value of heritage for the development of human skills and values. The association between heritage and education for citizenship is important not just professionally, but also in a broader social sense, given the significant task teachers have of educating and enabling new generations of citizens.

Heritage sustainability is one of the core aims and values of the whole education process. Heritage education thus represents the compendium of measures necessary to transmit and acquire an awareness of heritage based on respect for cultural diversity, citizenship and democracy, in keeping with the definition outlined by the Council of Europe in its 1998 recommendation to member states as a "teaching approach based on cultural heritage, incorporating active educational methods, cross-curricular approaches, a partnership between the fields of education and culture, and employing the widest variety of modes of communication and expression".

Our role as educators should be to promote a holistic understanding of heritage as a legacy of the past in our world today, in all of its material and intangible diversity. Central to this notion is the principle of social and economic sustainability and the recognition of heritage as a source of both wealth and preservation costs requiring sustainable management and citizen participation. Such an understanding can only be achieved by the transmission from an early age of the values of conservation, respect and social appropriation.

Our findings support our belief that teacher training for early childhood and primary education should focus on this values-based model of heritage education, and harness the potential of the past to educate children as active, problem-solving, socially and environmentally responsible citizens. At the University of Cordoba, this strategy is already being implemented, both in specific subjects, such as the Heritage Education elective for students of early childhood education, and in more general didactics modules for students in both degrees, such as Social Science Didactics and Environmental Didactics [50,51,58,61,62]. The challenge for teacher educators is to help students to become more aware of the importance and educational value of heritage, and to overcome some of the conceptions (and preconceptions) highlighted in this study.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, J.A.L.-F. and S.M.; methodology, J.A.L.-F., S.M., M.J.L. and R.G.-M.; validation, J.A.L.-F. and M.J.L.; formal analysis, S.M. and R.G.-M.; investigation, J.A.L.-F., S.M., M.J.L. and R.G.-M.; resources, S.M. and M.J.L.; data curation, J.A.L.-F., S.M., M.J.L. and R.G.-M.; writing—original draft preparation, J.A.L.-F., S.M., M.J.L. and R.G.-M.; writing—review and editing, J.A.L.-F., S.M., M.J.L. and R.G.-M.; visualization, J.A.L.-F. and S.M.; supervision, M.J.L. and R.G.-M.; project administration, J.A.L.-F. and S.M.; funding acquisition, J.A.L.-F., S.M., M.J.L. and R.G.-M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to J.A.L.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

References

1. Prats, J. *Valorar el Patrimonio Histórico Desde la Educación: Factores para una Mejor Utilización de los Bienes Patrimoniales*; Instituto de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Zaragoza: Zaragoza, Spain, 2001.
2. Santisteban, A.; González-Monfort, N.; Pagès-Blanch, J. Critical citizenship education and heritage education. In *Handbook of Research on Citizenship and Heritage Education*; IGI Global: Hershey, PA, USA, 2020; pp. 26–42.
3. Fontal, O. El patrimonio cultural del entorno próximo: Un diseño de sensibilización para secundaria. *Enseñ. Cienc. Soc.* **2007**, *6*, 31–47. Available online: https://www.raco.cat/index.php/EnsenanzaCS/article/view/126327 (accessed on 21 March 2021).
4. González-Monfort, N. La presencia del patrimonio cultural en los currícula de educación infantil, primaria y secundaria obligatoria en España. *Patrim. Cult. España* **2011**, *5*, 59–74.
5. Fontal, O.; Ibáñez, A.; Martínez, M.; Rivero, P. El patrimonio como contenido en la etapa de primaria. *Rev. Electr. Interuniv. Form. Profes.* **2017**, *20*, 79–95.
6. European Comission. *2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage. European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage Commission Staff Working Document*; Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2019. [CrossRef]
7. Sciacchitano, E. European Year of Cultural Heritage: A laboratory for heritage-based innovation. *Scires* **2019**, *9*, 1–14.
8. Estepa, J. Aportaciones y retos de la investigación en didáctica de las ciencias sociales. *Invest. Escu.* **2009**, *69*, 19–30. Available online: http://hdl.handle.net/11441/60553 (accessed on 15 April 2021).
9. Miralles, P.; Molina, S.; Ortuño, J. La investigación en didáctica de las ciencias sociales. *Educatio S. XXI* **2011**, *29*, 149–174.
10. González-Monfort, N. La educación patrimonial, una cuestión de futuro. Reflexiones sobre el valor del patrimonio para seguir avanzando hacia una ciudadanía crítica. *Fut. Pas.* **2019**, *10*, 124–144. [CrossRef]
11. Cambil, M.E.; Fernández, A.R. El concepto actual de patrimonio cultural y su valor educativo: Fundamentación teórica y aplicación didáctica. In *Educación y Patrimonio Cultural. Fundamentos, Contextos y Estrategias Didácticas*; Cambil, M.E., Tudela, A., Eds.; Pirámide: Madrid, Spain, 2017; pp. 27–46.
12. Fontal, O.; Gómez-Redondo, C. Heritage education and heritagization processes: SHEO methodology for educational programs evaluation. *Interchange* **2016**, *47*, 65–90. [CrossRef]

13. Fontal, O.; Ibáñez-Etxeberría, A. Research on heritage education: Evolution and current state through analysis of high impact indicators. *Rev. Educ.* **2017**, *375*, 184–214. [CrossRef]
14. Jagielska-Burduk, A.; Stec, P. Council of Europe cultural heritage and education policy: Preserving identity and searching for a common core? *Rev. Electrónica Interuniv. Form. Profr.* **2019**, *22*, 1–12. [CrossRef]
15. Gómez-Carrasco, C.J.; Miralles, P.; Fontal, O.; Ibáñez-Etxeberría, A. Cultural heritage and methodological approaches: An analysis through initial training of history teachers (Spain–England). *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 933. [CrossRef]
16. Castro-Fernández, B.; Castro-Calviño, L.; Conde-Migueles, J.; López-Facal, R. Concepciones del profesorado sobre el uso educativo del patrimonio. *Rev. Interuniv. Form. Profr.* **2020**, *34*, 77–96. [CrossRef]
17. Domínguez, A.; López-Facal, R. Formación de maestros y educación patrimonial. *Estud. Pedagógicos XLIII* **2017**, *4*, 49–68. [CrossRef]
18. Adler, S.A. The education of social studies teachers. In *Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education*; Levstik, L.S., Tyson, C.A., Eds.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2008; pp. 329–351.
19. Yilmaz, K. Social studies teachers' conceptions of history: Calling on historiography. *J. Educ. Res.* **2008**, *101*, 158–176. [CrossRef]
20. Yeşilbursa, C.; Barton, K. Preservice teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of heritage education in elementary social studies. *J. Soc. Stud. Educ. Res.* **2011**, *2*, 1–21. Available online: https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/jsser/issue/19097/202627 (accessed on 20 March 2021).
21. Dönmez, C.; Yeşilbursa, C. The effect of cultural heritage education on students' attitudes toward tangible heritage. *Elem. Educ. Online* **2014**, *13*, 425–442.
22. Cuenca, J.M. Análisis de concepciones sobre la enseñanza del patrimonio en la educación obligatoria. *Enseñ. Cienc. Soc.* **2003**, *2*, 37–45. Available online: https://www.raco.cat/index.php/EnsenanzaCS/article/view/126155 (accessed on 15 April 2021).
23. Van Doorsselaere, J. Connecting sustainable development and heritage education? An analysis of the curriculum reform in Flemish public secondary schools. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 1857. [CrossRef]
24. Curtis, R.; Seymour, C. Louisiana heritage education program and heritage in the classroom: Children's attitudes toward cultural heritage. *J. Soc. Stud. Res.* **2004**, *28*, 20–24.
25. Hernández-Carretero, A.; Guillén, R. La educación patrimonial en los manuales escolares de Educación Primaria: Un recorrido desde LOGSE hasta LOMCE. *Did. Cienc. Exp. Y Soc.* **2017**, *32*, 25–50. [CrossRef]
26. Morón Monge, H.; Morón Monge, M.C.; Wamba Aguado, A.M.; Estepa Giménez, J. Environmental and heritage education as a tool for the sustainable development: An analysis on experimental science and social science textbooks in secondary school. In *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Heritage and Sustainable Development, Porto, Portugal, 19–22 June 2012*; Green Lines Institute: Porto, Portugal. Available online: http://hdl.handle.net/10272/9441 (accessed on 12 April 2021).
27. Cuenca, J.M.; Espeta, J.; Martín, M.J. Patrimonio, educación, identidad y ciudadanía. Profesorado y libros de texto en la enseñanza obligatoria. *Rev. Educ.* **2017**, *375*, 136–159.
28. González-Monfort, N.; Pagès, J. La presencia del patrimonio en los libros de texto de la ESO en Cataluña. *Investig. Esc.* **2005**, *56*, 55–66.
29. Apaydin, V. Development and re-configuration of heritage perception: History textbooks and curriculum. *AP Online J. Public Archaeol.* **2016**, *6*, 27–50. [CrossRef]
30. Barghi, R.; Hamzah, A.; Mostafa Rasoolimanesh, S. To what extent Iranian primary school textbooks mirror the philosophy of heritage education? *J. Cult. Herit. Manag. Sustain. Dev.* **2021**, *11*, 58–77. [CrossRef]
31. Trabajo-Rite, M.; Cuenca-López, J.M. Student concepts after a didactic experiment in heritage education. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 3046. [CrossRef]
32. Aerila, J.A.; Rönkkö, M.L.; Grönman, S. Field trip to a historic house museum with preschoolers: Stories and crafts as tools for cultural heritage education. *Visit. Stud.* **2016**, *19*, 144–155. [CrossRef]
33. Gómez-Hurtado, I.; Cuenca-López, J.M.; Borghi, B. Good educational practices for the development of inclusive heritage education at school through the museum: A multi-case study in Bologna. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 8736. [CrossRef]
34. Ibañez-Etxeberria, A.; Gómez-Carrasco, C.J.; Fontal, O.; García-Ceballos, S. Virtual environments and augmented reality applied to heritage education: An evaluative study. *Appl. Sci.* **2020**, *10*, 2352. [CrossRef]
35. Allard, M.; Boucher, S.; Forest, L. The museum and the school. *McGill J. Educ.* **1994**, *29*, 197–212. Available online: https://mje.mcgill.ca/article/view/8169 (accessed on 12 April 2021).
36. Zhao, P.; Sintonen, S.; Kyanäslahti, H. The pedagogical functions of arts and cultural-heritage education with ICTs in museums: A case study of FINNA and Google Art Project. *Int. J. Instr. Technol. Distance Learn.* **2015**, *12*, 3–15.
37. Monteagudo-Fernández, J.; Gómez-Carrasco, C.J.; Chaparro-Sainz, A. Heritage education and research in museums: Conceptual, intellectual and social structure within a knowledge domain (2000–2019). *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 6667. [CrossRef]
38. Pinto, H.; Molina, S. La educación patrimonial en los currículos de ciencias sociales de España y Portugal. *Educ. Siglo XXI* **2015**, *33*, 103–128. [CrossRef]
39. Luna, U.; Vicent, N.; Reyes Cabrera, W.; Quiñonez Pech, S.H. Patrimonio, currículum y formación del profesorado de educación primaria en México. *Rev. Electrónica Interuniv. Form. Profr.* **2019**, *22*, 83–102. [CrossRef]
40. Miralles, P.; Rivero, P. Propuestas de innovación para la enseñanza de la historia en Educación Infantil. *Rev. Electrónica Interuniv. Form. Profr.* **2012**, *15*, 81–90.

41. Ponce, A.I.; Molina, S.; Ortuño, J. La ausencia de lo patrimonial en la formación de maestros: Un estudio de caso en el grado de educación primaria en la Universidad de Murcia. In *Una Enseñanza de las Ciencias Sociales para el Futuro: Recursos para Trabajar la Invisibilidad de Personas, Lugares y Temáticas*; Carretero, A.M.H., Ruíz, C.R.G., Conchiña, J.L.M., Eds.; Universidad de Extremadura/Asociación Universitaria de Profesorado de Didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales: Badajoz, Spain, 2015; pp. 567–575.

42. Felices, M.M.; Chaparro, A.; Rodríguez-Pérez, R.A. Perceptions on the use of heritage to teach history in secondary education teachers in training. *Humanit. Soc. Sci. Commun.* **2020**, *7*, 123. [CrossRef]

43. Estepa, J.; Ávila, R.; Ferreras, M. Primary and secondary teachers' conceptions about heritage and heritage education: A comparative analysis. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2008**, *24*, 2095–2107. [CrossRef]

44. Conde, J.; Armas, X. Representaciones sociales del alumnado de educación primaria sobre el patrimonio. *Rev. Interuniv. Form. Profr.* **2019**, *94*, 187–201. [CrossRef]

45. Molina, S.; Muñoz, R. La opinión del profesorado de educación secundaria sobre el papel del patrimonio en la enseñanza de las ciencias sociales: Un estudio de caso. *Rev. Complut. Educ.* **2016**, *27*, 863–880. [CrossRef]

46. Marín-Cepeda, S.; Fontal, O. Percepciones de estudiantes de educación secundaria obligatoria en torno al patrimonio. *Arte Individuo Y Soc.* **2020**, *32*, 917–933.

47. Yeşilbursa, C.C.; Uslu, S. The comparison of Turkish and American pre-service social studies teachers' attitudes toward heritage education. *Electron. Turk. Stud.* **2014**, *9*, 879–891.

48. Röll, V.; Meyer, C. Young people's perceptions of world cultural heritage: Suggestions for a critical and reflexive world heritage education. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 8640. [CrossRef]

49. Chaparro, A.; Felices, M.M. Percepciones del profesorado en formación inicial sobre el uso del patrimonio en contextos educativos. *Rev. Interuniverstaria Form. Profr.* **2019**, *94*, 327–346.

50. Moreno-Vera, J.R.; López-Fernández, J.A.; de Atalaya, S.P.-L. La concepción del patrimonio en el profesorado en formación de educación infantil. *Profr. Rev. Currículum Y Form. Profr.* **2022**, in press.

51. Moreno-Vera, J.R.; Ponsoda-López de Atalaya, S.; López-Fernández, J.A.; Blanes-Mora, R. Holistic or traditional conceptions of heritage among early-childhood and primary trainee teachers. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 8921. [CrossRef]

52. Ferreras-Listán, M.; Puig-Gutiérrez, M.; Moreno-Fernández, O.; Rodríguez-Marín, F. The relevance of citizenship, sustainability and heritage education in early childhood and primary education in Spain. *Pedagogika* **2019**, *134*, 61–81. [CrossRef]

53. Medina, S.; López, J.A. El patrimonio en la formación del profesorado de educación infantil: Una propuesta activa a través del casco histórico de Córdoba. In *Buscando Formas de Enseñar: Investigar para Innovar en Didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales*; López, E., García, C.R., Sánchez, M., Eds.; Universidad de Valladolid/Asociación Universitaria de Profesorado de Didáctica de las Ciencias Sociales: Valladolid, Spain, 2018; pp. 263–274.

54. Islamoglu, Ö. The importance of cultural heritage education in early ages. *Int. J. Educ. Sci.* **2018**, *22*, 19–25.

55. Ocampo, M.C.B.; Delgado, P.I. Basic education and cultural heritage: Prospects and challenges. *Int. J. Humanit. Soc. Sci.* **2014**, *4*, 201–209.

56. Pagès, J.; Santisteban, A. La enseñanza y el aprendizaje del tiempo histórico en la educación primaria. *Cad. CEDES* **2010**, *30*, 278–309.

57. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte 2015. Plan Nacional de Educación y Patrimonio. Secretaría General Técnica. Available online: http://www.culturaydeporte.gob.es/planes-nacionales/planes-nacionales/educacion-y-patrimonio.html (accessed on 23 March 2021).

58. López, J.A. Concepciones sobre el patrimonio en la formación del profesorado de educación infantil: Un recurso para conocer el entorno. In *Educación y Divulgación del Patrimonio Arqueológico. La Socialización del Pasado como Reto para el Futuro*; Ruíz, A.B., Medina, S., Pérez, L.M., Eds.; Comares: Granada, Spain, 2020; pp. 1–19.

59. Bromme, R. Conocimientos profesionales de los profesores. *Enseñanza De Las Cienc. Rev. De Investig. Y Exp. Didácticas* **1988**, *6*, 19–29. Available online: https://www.raco.cat/index.php/Ensenanza/article/view/51031 (accessed on 20 March 2021).

60. Cuenca, J.M. El papel del patrimonio en los centros educativos: Hacia la socialización patrimonial. *Tejuelo Didáctica Leng. Y Lit. Educ.* **2014**, *19*, 76–96.

61. Medina, S.; Arrebola, J.C.; Mora, M.; López, J.A. Propuesta de itinerario interdisciplinar en la formación del profesorado de educación primaria en el ámbito de las ciencias sociales y experimentales. *Didáctica Cienc. Exp. Y Soc.* **2016**, *31*, 79–97. [CrossRef]

62. López Serrano, M.J.; Guerrero Elecalde, R. El Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba para trabajar la historia local en Educación Primaria. *Reidics* **2020**, *7*, 153–170. [CrossRef]