

# Curriculum reform to respond to the challenges of the future. Spain in international perspective

## *La reforma del currículo para responder a los retos del futuro. España en perspectiva internacional*

Inmaculada EGIDO GÁLVEZ, PhD. Professor. Universidad Complutense de Madrid ([miegido@ucm.es](mailto:miegido@ucm.es)).

### Abstract:

In recent years, many countries and international organizations have devoted significant efforts to designing a school curriculum that responds to the educational needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Spain, the LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which amends Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education) has also proposed the renewal of the curriculum as a key element for the modernization of the education system. The aim of this paper is to analyze the Spanish curriculum reform from a comparative perspective, in order to assess whether it is in line with the current trends of change on the international scene and to detect the conditions that must be met to successfully achieve its purpose, in the light of what has been learned in other countries. To this end, a comparative analysis framework has been developed based

on UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and EU (European Union) publications on this subject and on various comparative studies on recent curriculum reforms around the world. The results show that, in terms of the approach and architecture of the curricular model of the compulsory education, the Spanish reform follows the recommendations of international organizations and shares to a large extent the characteristics of the reforms undertaken in many countries around us. However, it is also possible to detect some relevant differences in terms of the strategy adopted for the change and the agents involved in it, which should be considered, as they could become obstacles to the achievement of the pursued objectives.

---

Revision accepted: 2021-09-16.

This is the English version of an article originally printed in Spanish in issue 281 of the **revista española de pedagogía**. For this reason, the abbreviation EV has been added to the page numbers. Please, cite this article as follows: Egido Gálvez, I. (2022). La reforma del currículo para responder a los retos del futuro. España en perspectiva internacional | Curriculum reform to respond to the challenges of the future. Spain in international perspective. *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 80 (281), 175-191. <https://doi.org/10.22550/REP80-1-2022-10>  
<https://revistadepedagogia.org/>

ISSN: 0034-9461 (Impreso), 2174-0909 (Online)

year 80, n. 281, January-April 2022, 175-191  
revista española de pedagogía



**Keywords:** curriculum, educational reform, educational policy, comparative and international education, Spain.

## Resumen:

En los últimos años, muchos países y organismos internacionales han dedicado importantes esfuerzos a diseñar un currículo escolar que responda a las necesidades formativas propias del siglo XXI. En España, la LOMLOE (Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre de 2020, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación) ha planteado también la renovación del currículo como un elemento clave para la modernización del sistema educativo. Este trabajo pretende analizar en perspectiva comparada la reforma curricular española, con el fin de valorar si se encuentra alineada con las tendencias de cambio vigentes en el panorama internacional y, a la luz de lo aprendido en otros países, detectar las condiciones que debe cumplir para alcanzar con éxito su propósito. Para ello, se ha elaborado un marco de análisis comparativo basado

en las publicaciones de la UNESCO (Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura), la OCDE (Organización para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo Económicos) y la UE (Unión Europea) sobre este tema y en diversos estudios comparados sobre reformas curriculares recientes en todo el mundo. Los resultados muestran que, en lo que se refiere al enfoque y la arquitectura del modelo curricular de la educación obligatoria, la reforma española sigue las recomendaciones de los organismos internacionales y comparte en gran medida las características de las reformas emprendidas en muchos países de nuestro entorno. Sin embargo, es posible detectar también algunas diferencias relevantes en cuanto a la estrategia adoptada para el cambio y a los agentes implicados en él, que deberían ser consideradas, pues podrían llegar a traducirse en obstáculos para el logro de los objetivos previstos.

**Descriptor:** currículo, reforma educativa, política de la educación, educación comparada e internacional, España.

## 1. Curriculum reforms as a response to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

The school curriculum covers what and how new generations are taught, questions that are as old as educational institutions themselves, but which are especially complex nowadays. At present, all educational systems face the challenge of meeting demands for training needed for a future that is hard to predict, without forgetting the im-

portance of preserving the knowledge and values that make up the cultural repertory of society and must be transmitted in schools.

In recent decades, there have been efforts to react to these new demands on the educational system by adding new subjects and cross-curricular contents to the curriculum, in addition to the topics that progress in knowledge has made it necessary to add to more traditional dis-

ciplines. Nonetheless, it is clearly not possible to continue adding new content to the curriculum indefinitely as this would result in students having a broad spectrum of superficial learning during their education as teachers would otherwise not be able to cover everything in the available time (OECD, 2020a). For this reason, the need for an in-depth reconfiguration of the curriculum is currently under consideration, abandoning the model of accumulation of content on which previous reforms were based and prioritising the acquisition of competences by students as the cornerstone of the new educational model (Egido, 2011).

In fact, many countries around the world have undertaken curriculum reforms for the compulsory education stage in which “basic” or “key” competences play a core role, a concept that involves the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and consequently involves the search for more ambitious learning goals than those in the past (Reimers, 2021a). For their part, various agencies and international bodies have also undertaken important work in this regard and have defined various “competence frameworks for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” to guide the renovation of the curriculum. The OECD’s contribution has perhaps had the biggest impact, but UNESCO’s contribution, developed fundamentally through the International Bureau of Education, is also important as is that of the European Union, which has established the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (López-Rupérez, 2020).

In Spain, Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May on Education (LOMLOE) proposes curriculum reform as a key element in the modernisation of the educational system. The documents published by the Ministry of Education relating to the new curriculum explicitly set out the importance of considering the vision of international bodies and of countries in Spain’s surroundings. So, the Ministry states that “a detailed review of international trends and of models for drawing up curriculums in other countries can provide points of reference for our curriculum development, once adapted and contextualised for our situation” (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional [Ministry of Education and Vocational Training], 2020a, p. 11). The work done by the three international bodies mentioned above is referred to, and the cases of Portugal, Wales, Ontario, and Estonia are identified as successful models, as is Scotland less directly.

For this reason, it makes sense to consider in greater depth the proposal for curriculum change that accompanies the LOMLOE by analysing it from an international perspective. Is the Spanish reform in line with the recommendations of international bodies and with the reforms carried out in other countries? What can international experience teach us about curriculum reform? The aim of this article is to contribute to answering these questions by using a comparative perspective which, based on what has been learnt from other systems, indirectly makes it possible to evaluate the

chances for success of the Spanish reform and the predictable challenges it will face.

## 2. The framework for compared analysis of the curriculum reform

With the aim of examining the curriculum reform proposed by the LOMLOE from an international perspective, we have prepared a framework for comparative analysis based on consulting two types of sources. On the one hand, there are reports and publications on the topic by UNESCO, the OECD, and the EU. On the other hand, we review various pieces of research that offer comparative visions of curriculum reforms carried out in educational systems from different parts of the world over the last two decades.

In the specific field of international bodies, the analysis criteria UNESCO uses for comparing curriculum frameworks (Marope et al., 2017; Opertti et al., 2018) is con-

sidered in depth, as are the proposals and recommendations of the European Union regarding key competences (European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2018, 2020). In the case of the OECD, the documents about the curriculum that make up the framework of the Future of Education and Skills 2030 Project (OECD, 2018b, 2019, 2020a) are considered, including the review of the comparative curriculum analysis tools used in it, especially Curriculum Content Mapping (CCM) (OECD, 2020b). With regards to comparative studies of recent curriculum reforms, we examine works that focus on the European sphere as well as others that contemplate systems from other parts of the world (Isaac et al., 2015; López-Rupérez, 2020; Priestley et al., 2021; Reimers, 2021a, 2021b).

Based on the review of these documents, a comparative framework has been created that takes into account criteria relating to the content and process of curriculum change, as both are decisive for the result of

TABLE 1. Elements for comparative analysis of curriculum reform.

a) Content of the reform	Curriculum focus Architecture of the curriculum structure/Map of curriculum components
b) Contextual framework	Frequency of changes in the system Political and economic stability Perceived need and consensus around change
c) Strategy for design and implementation	Consultation, participation, and communication processes Previous experimentation Alignment with other reforms in the system Time planning and sequencing of changes Provision of necessary resources and support
d) Engagement of key agents for change	Political leaders Educational administration Schools and management teams Teachers Students/families

Source: Own elaboration.

the reform (Fullan, 2016). This framework features a group of parameters and indicators which, while they are closely interconnected in practice, can be grouped in four major dimensions (Table 1) for presentation:

The elements considered are used to compare reforms in Spain with the predominant international trends. This makes it possible to detect points of coincidence and divergence with the dynamics of changing and updating curriculums in place in other educational systems.

It is important to note that Spain's curriculum reform is still in the preparatory stage, and so the documents considered in the analysis are those that have appeared up to the time of writing: the LOMLOE itself and the background document for curriculum reform (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020a), as well as the expected student profile at the end of basic education and the curriculum structure proposal for drawing up the *Enseñanzas Mínimas* (core curriculum) (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2021a; 2021b). A more detailed comparison with the international framework will be possible when the Royal Decrees on the curriculum have been published and the legal implementation of the reform has been completed.

### 3. The LOMLOE curriculum reform in an international perspective

The main results of the comparison are set out in the following sections, organised around the four major dimensions considered.

#### 3.1. Content of the reform: focus and architecture of the curriculum model

The reform proposed by the LOMLOE opts for a competence-based focus in the curriculum, following the recommendations of international bodies and current trends in reforms carried out in educational systems internationally (Marope et al., 2017). In fact, this focus is not a novelty in Spain, as competence-based learning has been part of the educational system since the approval of the Organic Education Law (LOE) in 2006, at least at the legislative level.

The competence framework on which the new curriculum is based is specifically the one laid down in the Council Recommendation of the European Union in 2018, organised around eight key competences for lifelong learning (European Union, 2018). Other European countries have also adopted this framework, with different degrees of flexibility, while a smaller number, such as Finland, have opted to develop a national framework of transversal competences inspired by the contributions of the OECD (Lavonen, 2021). In the Spanish curriculum, small changes have been made to the naming of some competences, but their conceptualisation is essentially the same as that done by the European Commission, and so it enjoys the backing of the work done in this area in the European institutions (Valle, 2020).

With regards to the "architecture" of the model, the components of the curriculum structure after the reform of the LOMLOE include expected student profiles for stages and levels, defining teach-

ing areas or subjects, with their corresponding specific competences, essential learning, and evaluation criteria, as well as the methodological and evaluation guidelines. In general terms, these components are present in many of the countries that have carried out curriculum reforms in recent years.

In the case of Spain, except with regards to expected student profiles in higher-education qualifications, setting expected student profiles for the end of compulsory education is an innovation. However, these expectations already exist in other systems and the OECD does recommend preparing them. As this body states, student profiles lay down the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that must be achieved through learning at school, and so they are of use to help state the targets of the redesign of the curriculum. The expected student profiles respond to the questions of what sort of citizen we want and what results we hope to see at the end of compulsory education. Systems that use expected student profiles to direct the selection of competences include Canada, South Korea, Scotland, Hong Kong (China), and Portugal (OECD, 2020c). As an example, in this last case, the *Perfil dos Alunos à Saída da Escolaridade Obrigatória* (student profile at the end of compulsory education) sets out the principles that should guide educational action and the values and areas of competence that should be developed, including for each area a series of operative descriptors, as is proposed in the Spanish curriculum (OECD, 2018a).

The use of learning areas and specific competences associated with them is also a common way to organise the curriculum in educational systems in other countries, although in this regard differences can be found concerning the scope of this concept. In some countries they are broad areas, with a marked interdisciplinary character, while in other systems they refer to more specific subjects or disciplinary areas or a combination of disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas is used (Isaac et al., 2015). In the case of Spain, the subjects established for compulsory secondary education (ESO) broadly coincide with the disciplinary learning areas that the OECD's Curriculum Content Mapping envisages for the lower secondary education stage (OECD, 2020b).

For each area or subject, the new curriculum sets out the “essential learning”, essential considered fundamental for understanding the world and provides the foundation for constructing new learning (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2021a). This focus matches that of the European Union, which in the 2018 recommendation summarised the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes for each of the eight key competences (European Union, 2018). It is also a strategy used by various countries to reduce curriculum overload. Continuing with the example of Portugal mentioned above, in 2018 the *aprendizagens essenciais* (essential learning) were defined and linked to the student profile for each area of teaching. However, defining essential learning is a difficult process in all educational systems and



elicits concerns about the decline in students' level of education. The challenge in this respect is to prioritise concepts and ideas that are fundamental within a body of disciplinary knowledge and are more transferable across disciplines among the many elements that could potentially be present in the curriculum (OECD, 2020a).

The new curriculum structure will also include the criteria for evaluation by areas of teaching at the end of the second and third stage of primary education and by subjects at the end of the second and fourth years of ESO (compulsory secondary education). In the international sphere, some countries only set evaluation criteria, while others set criteria for learning standards formulated by year, cycle, or stage, in accordance with different levels of attainment (OECD, 2020b). Again, the degree of specificity with which the criteria and learning standards are formulated in each system varies, constraining the autonomy of schools and teachers in the field of evaluation. The EU has designed a series of frameworks for evaluating competences that might be of help to countries, although the map of eight key competences has still not been completed (European Commission, 2018).

The last of the components considered in the curriculum comprises guidelines on learning situations. Most educational systems regard questions relating to teaching-learning methodology as an area for decision by teachers and schools, and so these are not included as

prescriptive elements in official curriculums. Nonetheless, it is common to find suggestions about teaching practices considered appropriate for the competence-based approach, such as service learning, project-based learning, and phenomenon-based learning, this last type being used extensively in Finland (OECD, 2020c).

### 3.2. The contextual framework of the reform

Among the contextual factors that affect the development of a curriculum reform includes the frequency of changes in the system. In the international sphere, some countries review their curriculums regularly at predetermined intervals, some make changes when they deem it to be appropriate, and others combine both types of reform (OECD, 2020c). Spain belongs to the group of countries in which there is no planned time interval for curriculum revision, but rather it is carried out at specific moments, which in recent decades have also corresponded to the beginning of a general reform of the education system. This has been the case since the LOGSE (Organic Law on the General Organisation of the Education System) education law of 1990, which was followed by the unfinished reform to the LOCE (Organic Law on the Quality of Education) law of 2002, the reform of the LOE law of 2006, and the reform established in the LOMCE (Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education) law in 2013. At this moment, the reform to the curriculum comes hand-in-hand with the new educational law, the LOMLOE, approved in 2020. The high frequency of changes in Spain has meant

that in all of the school community and especially among education professionals there is “reform fatigue” (OECD, 2020c). International experience underlines how reiterated curriculum reforms, interrupted by others before they have been fully implemented and their results evaluated, wear down even the most motivated teachers, reducing their commitment to implementing the planned change and their receptiveness to new changes in future (Reimers, 2021b).

Also, in relation to the context in which the reform takes place, it is interesting to ask how much the desirability of undertaking the change to the current curriculum is perceived, given that the prospects of success of any reform are greater when there is shared agreement on its appropriateness and its priority status for the system (Fullan, 2016). In this regard, it is possible to find generalised agreement between academics and teachers in Spain regarding the need to reformulate the school curriculum, which is regarded as being excessively overloaded, rigid, and fragmented into disciplines, among other weaknesses (López-Rupérez, 2020; Moya & Valle, 2020). The survey organised by the Ministry of Education in November 2020, which around 3,000 teachers completed, shows that teachers largely support the idea of an in-depth change to the curriculum, given that they regard its content as inadequate and virtually impossible to cover in full (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020b).

This general consensus on the need to modify the curriculum is, however, not

found with regards to the model that the reform should inspire. On the contrary, among education professionals there are two different concepts of the curriculum: a more academic-disciplinary one that focusses on content, and another more interdisciplinary or transversal one focussing on the development of students’ basic skills and capacities (Colectivo Lorenzo Luzuriaga, 2020a). The survey cited above underlines these dual perspectives. In particular, among secondary teachers, there is no agreement on the appropriateness of a competence-based curriculum. Instead, these teachers support of assessing the students on the subjects taught more than the idea of the assessment on key competences acquisition (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2020b). As research has shown, these diverging and even contradictory views of the curriculum, can be major obstacles to achieving change (Gouédard et al., 2020).

### 3.3. Strategy for designing and implementing the new proposal

The strategy adopted for carrying out curriculum reform includes the actions relating to the design and implementation of the change, as well as the time planning and sequencing of the necessary transformations. These actions and times affect the different stages of the reform, but they are especially important in the early stages, considering that decisions taken in this period shapes its future path (Reimers, 2021a).

The proposed reform must have sufficient justification to be seen as legitimate, and in many countries is it com-



mon to use procedures like prior review of the weaknesses of the curriculum, expert reports, the experiences of other educational systems, the recommendations of international bodies and the dissemination of good national practices to do this. Some systems, such as Finland, stand out in this respect for their effort in turning to research and rigorous analysis of the available evidence about the results obtained with the current curriculum (Reimers, 2021b). Using these procedures does not, however, mean that the change is designed from the top-down, but rather that it is vital to increase participation by all of the sectors affected by the preparation of the reform, with the aim of involving them in it. In line with the recommendations of UNESCO and the OECD, efforts have been made to base reforms on collaborative focusses, and so a large number of systems such as Scotland, Finland, and Ontario have organised long-term consultation and participation processes aimed at teachers, families, and other actors involved in the curriculum reform (Gouëdard et al., 2020; OECD, 2020c).

Some countries, in parallel with the consultation processes, have carried out trials ahead to the proposed change. For example, Portugal opted for a strategy of gradually introducing its new curriculum model, creating a pilot project in 2017 called the “Autonomy and flexibility project”, which 235 centres took part in voluntarily (OCDE, 2018a).

The process followed in Spain to start the curriculum change has some simi-

larities with those used in the systems mentioned above, such as references to international bodies and to other educational systems. However, there are also significant differences. For example, the short amount of time dedicated in Spain to consultation, participation, and communication processes relating to the reform has not really allowed for a calm debate about the new curriculum proposal open to the entire educational community (Luengo et al., 2021). Neither has there been a systematic dissemination of the experiments and trials that have been successfully carried out with the new competence-based curriculum in Spain (Moya & Valle, 2020), but rather, at best, particular aspects of some of them have been shared.

Without minimizing the above, in the reform design strategy an issue that comparative research shows as essential is the need to align the curricular change with the rest of the educational reforms necessary to achieve success. Given that educational policies are interdependent, it is only through a holistic or systemic view of the change that the desired results can be obtained (López-Rupérez, 2020). To do so, it is necessary to ask what other elements of the school system must be reinforced or reformed and establish a coherent sequence for making the required changes (Reimers, 2021a). In the international setting, curriculum reforms usually go hand-in-hand with reforms aimed at improving teacher training, increasing the autonomy of schools, and strengthening the pedagogical leadership of the school management.

The cases of Scotland, Finland, and Portugal mentioned above can illustrate this trend. So, in Finland, where schools already had a high level of autonomy, the most recent curriculum reform was accompanied by a new initial and ongoing training programme for teachers (Lavonen, 2021). In Portugal, the change to the curriculum is part of a broad collection of reforms that include the modification of the system for accessing and initial teacher-training programmes, as well as a notable increase in the autonomy of schools, which can decide 25% of the school timetable (OECD, 2018a). In Scotland, the Curriculum for Excellence, which was finally implemented in 2016, was accompanied by policies to strengthen the teaching profession and the pedagogical leadership in schools that were initiated in 2011 (OECD, 2020a).

In Spain the new law states that in the near future there will be a proposal of reform of the initial training, access to the profession, and professional development of teachers. There is undoubtedly an urgent need for this, given that only 43% of teachers feel prepared to teach interdisciplinary or transversal competences, putting Spain in one of the last places in the OECD (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2019). The competence-based focus must be accompanied by an in-depth reconsideration of teacher training and specialities if it is to be a success (Colectivo Lorenzo Luzuriaga, 2020a), but the sequence of the change planned in Spain, with the reform of teacher training planned to come after the curriculum reform, differs from that used in the successful countries mentioned above.

With regards to the autonomy of schools, the law and the documents about the curriculum published by the ministry emphasise the importance of this factor. The LOMLOE states that schools will be able to adopt various experiments, work plans, timetables, or forms of organisation while exercising their autonomy and that part of the timetable will be available to them to guarantee the integrated development of competences and the incorporation of transversal content. While this idea might involve an increase in school autonomy in Spain, the fact is that responsibility for this question ultimately lies with the autonomous regions. There is, therefore, a risk that differences will develop between different autonomous regions in the regulation of school autonomy and even that it will be understood that the work of schools aimed at developing transversal competences might be limited to a small percentage of the school timetable, with the rest remaining as it currently is.

Closely linked to the above is the critical role that school leaders play when facilitating or inhibiting change in schools (Fullan, 2016). School management can mediate in the incorporation of the new curriculum proposals, encouraging the adoption of innovations in the schools (Gouëdard et al., 2020). The new law, however, has not reformed pedagogical leadership by management teams, which in the case of Spain remains very limited (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, 2019).

Along with the importance of the holistic vision of the reform, international

experience also underlines the importance of appropriate allocation of time. The evidence shows that curriculum-change processes are necessarily long, as the reform must maintain its course until the political intentions settle into educational practices and remain there for enough time to become new shared ideas about how teaching is provided (Reimers, 2021b). It is estimated that a period of around ten years is needed to carry out a curriculum reform, two on average for decision making and eight for implementation, and in decentralised systems, like that of Spain, more time is required (OECD, 2020c). In contrast with this, the plan is for the Spanish reform to be put in place in a much shorter period, especially with regards to the implementation phase, which is expected to be done over two academic years.

### 3.4. Engagement of the key agents for change

In the long run, curriculum reforms affect society as a whole, but their design and implementation especially require the involvement of key agents inside and outside the school, such as political leaders, educational administrations, teachers, and students and their families. For the reform to be a success, it is vital that these actors, with their different roles relating to the curriculum, aim to achieve common objectives. For this reason, many countries include actions intended to achieve the greatest possible consensus among them in their strategies from the beginning (OECD, 2020a).

In Spain, the division of competences in education between the central gov-

ernment and the autonomous regions means that both levels of government share the political decisions relating to the curriculum. The Ministry of Education sets minimum teaching requirements, which establish the curriculum elements that are common to the whole country, while the autonomous regions have the power to develop the remaining curriculum elements that reach the schools. With the LOMLOE, following the amendment approved in the law's progress through parliament, *enseñanzas mínimas* will cover 50% of the timetable in the autonomous regions that have a co-official language and 60% in the others. Nonetheless, beyond this allocation of time that guides the curriculum design process, which is hard to transfer operationally to the reality of schools, the fact is that the role of the autonomous regions will be decisive in the reform of the curriculum. In fact, in Spain, control over the processes of implementation of the curricular change corresponds to a greater extent to those who carry them out, that is, to the autonomous communities, than to the Ministry of Education. This implies the need to start from a shared curricular model and a collaborative work between the ministry and the communities, which may be compromised in the context of political tension referred to earlier.

To facilitate joint work between the Ministry of Education and the autonomous regions, the LOMLOE allows for the creation of a unit aimed at developing the *Enseñanzas Mínimas* and continuously updating the curriculum. Other countries in Spain's surroundings also have similar agencies or institutions, al-

though one element that differentiates the Spanish initiative is that this unit will be created after the preparation of the curriculum proposal. This contrasts with the approach that underlies the law itself and with the functions that a curriculum development unit would be expected to perform, which would include advising on the preparation of the royal decrees on *enseñanzas mínimas* (Colectivo Lorenzo Luzuriaga, 2020b).

Despite the above, as in any country, teachers will undoubtedly be the central figures in the implementation of the new curriculum in Spain. International experience underlines the need to offer teachers simple, clear, and comprehensible curriculum tools, as well as assistance to help them produce pedagogical proposals focussed on developing competences. The reforms done all around the world underline the fact that resistance or fear of change that might affect teachers should not be underestimated, but that on the contrary, it is necessary to identify the barriers that teachers face and help them to overcome these by providing the required support (Gouédard et al., 2020). This is what has been done in countries such as Finland, where in 2017 the National Education Council provided 100 million euros to hire 2,000 tutors to help teachers introduce teaching of transversal competences in the classroom (Lavonen, 2021). Finland, Scotland, and Portugal have all proposed school networks as a way of developing innovative teaching solutions (OECD, 2020c).

In the case of Spain, the importance of supporting teachers and providing the

necessary resources to implement a competence-based curriculum reform is clear following the experience acquired from the earlier LOE and LOMCE laws (Moya & Valle, 2020). Some research indicates that teachers, especially in secondary education, report dissatisfaction with the support and guidance educational authorities provide for implementing the competence-based model, as well as with the material and human resources they provide (García-López et al., 2020).

In addition, it is worth noting that it is not just education professionals who have something to say about curriculum reforms. Students are also important and treating them as active agents in their learning is key in the curriculum redesign process. Therefore, systems such as those of Scotland, Finland, and the Netherlands, to mention just a few, have put in place mechanisms to hear their voices, their needs, and their interests (OECD, 2020c).

## Conclusions

For more than two decades, educational systems all over the world have been making major efforts to redesign their curriculums to enable students to develop the competences needed to face the future with success. In this process, countries and international bodies have had the opportunity to learn from one another, with the result that some shared lines of change have become visible on the international stage, as well as lessons about the experiences of success and the challenges that must be confronted, which might be of use for

countries that seek to implement curriculum reform (OECD, 2020c). Starting from this approach, this work has considered in depth the curriculum reform initiated in Spain following the LOMLOE, analysing it from an international perspective. This analysis has been directed at identifying whether the reform is aligned with the trends of change in other countries and on detecting the requirements to be fulfilled to achieve its goal, considering the experiences of other educational systems.

The result of the study makes it possible to affirm that, with regards to the focus and architecture of the curriculum model, the Spanish reform is in line with the recommendations of international bodies and with the direction of the changes undertaken in other countries. Nonetheless, beyond these common elements, it is also possible to detect some significant differences in the strategy adopted for the change and the agents involved in it, which must be considered when inferring the chances of success of the reform.

Considering the content of the curriculum change, as is explicitly stated in the documents published by the Ministry of Education, Spain's reform clearly shows the influence of international bodies such as the EU, the OECD, and UNESCO, and educational systems regarded as successes, in particular Portugal. In this way, Spain is no exception, given that, in the current context of globalisation, the trends that shape curriculum reforms respond to converging patterns of change with the result that curriculums display a certain isomorphism all over the world (Lingard, 2021; Reimers, 2021a).

Among the lines of convergence, opting for a competence-based curriculum focus stands out, and at present this is the focus used in most of the international panorama. Closely related to this approach, there are also more and more systems that include some of the curricular elements that are new in the Spanish proposal, such as the student's exit profile and essential learning. While it will be necessary for the definitions of the learning objectives to be made public in Spain in order to judge how similar they are to the ones established in other countries, the fact is that the proposed components of the curriculum are in line with ones that are common in many of the curriculum designs found in other parts of the world. In fact, in the Spanish reform, areas and subjects are still a fundamental part of the organisation of the curriculum, and so there is no radical change with regards to the previously established model.

Taking into account the above, it is surprising that in Spain a good part of the debate on the new curriculum has once again focused on the competence approach, when this not only constitutes the general trend on the world scene, but is, since 2006, the determined commitment of the EU towards convergence in education, which no member country can ignore.

Regarding the divergences between the Spanish reform and those carried out successfully elsewhere, the most notable factors, which could become obstacles to achieving the planned objectives, are especially related to the contextual framework in which the reform begins, the timetable



established to carry it out and the planning and sequencing of the necessary changes in the school system.

In relation to context, once again in Spain an educational reform is being undertaken without consensus, in a political atmosphere of confrontation and even tension between seemingly irreconcilable positions. Even though mentioning this question is somewhat repetitive, the fact of the matter is that the lack of a basic agreement on the sense and direction of the reform will endanger its continuity in the event of a political change. In addition, during the debate and processing of the new law, Spain was in a highly uncertain social and economic situation because of the pandemic and so it seems clear that the social and political context in which the curriculum reform was started is far from stable, considered the ideal situation based on international experience (Altricher, 2005).

With regards to time planning, the timetable designed for preparing and implementing the reform is extremely short when compared with international experience. Little time has been spent on processes of consultation and participation with the educational community, and the autonomous regions will also have little time for its legal development and there is little time allocated to implementation in schools, as only two academic years have been provided for carrying this out in all compulsory education. It is probable that the political leaders in Spain, as has also happened in other countries, underestimate the time needed

to achieve curriculum change, as they regard it as a merely technical matter and do not consider the time really needed by those who implement the reform (OECD, 2020c).

In the case of the sequencing of the reforms in the system, Spain has chosen to initiate the curriculum change before undertaking the modification to the initial training of teachers and their further training in practice and also before the Curriculum Development Unit starts work. Other reforms that usually accompany curriculum change in the international setting, such as ones affecting school autonomy or management, have been approached indirectly or have not been considered. When we consider international experience, we find that delaying or disregarding other reforms in the system compromises the success of the curriculum reform (Reimers, 2021a).

From the point of view of involvement of key actors in curriculum reform, the role of schools and teachers is especially important. The experiences of other systems show that the essential unit of change is the school. The fact that in Spain, since the LOGSE was passed, curriculum development has been discussed in terms of levels, as though it were a vertical and even hierarchical process (state, autonomous regions, centres), should not mislead us. In practice, curriculum development is not linear. Instead, it is in schools that the official curriculum is reinterpreted and implemented, not always in predictable ways (Priestley et al., 2021).

In short, the curriculum reform proposed for Spain follows many of the habitual lines of change at this time in other countries regarding its approach and architecture. Nonetheless, it has been undertaken in an unfavourable situation and, if it is to be a success, it must also take note of some principles for the design and implementation of reforms identified by experts and international bodies. Among these, special attention must be paid to building capacity for change in schools and the alignment of the curriculum reform with the other changes required in the system. If these challenges are downplayed, we might find ourselves with a reform that does not achieve its objective of enabling Spain's education system to offer students the education required by 21<sup>st</sup>-century society.

## References

- Altricher, H. (2005). Curriculum implementation. Limiting and facilitating factors. In P. Nentwig & E. Waddington (Eds.), *Context based learning of science* (pp. 35-62). Waxmann.
- Colectivo Lorenzo Luzuriaga (2020a). El currículo de la educación obligatoria [The compulsory education curriculum]. In J. Moya & J.M. Valle (Coords.), *La reforma del currículo escolar: ideas y propuestas* (pp. 71-79). ANELE-REDE.
- Colectivo Lorenzo Luzuriaga (2020b). *Por un Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Curricular [For a National Institute for Curriculum Development]*. <http://www.colectivolorenzolzuriaga.com/PDF/INDC%20.pdf>
- Egido, I. (2011). Las competencias clave como elemento central del currículo de la enseñanza obligatoria: un repaso a las experiencias europeas [Key competences as a central element of the compulsory education curriculum: A review of European experiences]. *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*, 17, 239-262.
- European Commission (2018). *Commission staff working document accompanying the document proposal for a Council recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning*. SWD/2018/14 final. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018SC0014>
- European Commission (2020). *Supporting Key Competence Development: Learning approaches and environments in school education*. <https://bit.ly/3qnwHtx>
- European Union (2018). *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018/C 189/01-13)*. Official Journal of the European Union.
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The new meaning of educational change*. Teachers College.
- García-López, L. M., Gutiérrez, D., García-Fernández, B., Lupiáñez Gómez, J. L., Romo-Pérez, V., Eirín, R., & Mateos, A. (2020). 2007-2017: A decade of key competences in Spain. *Profesorado, Revista de Currículum y Formación del Profesorado*, 24 (3), 381-399.
- Gouëdard, P., Pont, B., Hyttinen, S., & Huang, O. (2020). *Curriculum reform: A literature review to support effective implementation*. OECD Working Paper No. 239. OECD.
- Isaac, T., Creese, B., & González, A. (2015). *Aligned instructional systems: Cross-jurisdiction benchmarking report*. Institute of Education of the University of London.
- Lavonen, J. (2021). *Las reformas de los planes de estudios y la formación del profesorado en Finlandia como apoyo al desarrollo de competencias para el siglo XXI [Curriculum reforms and teacher education in Finland to support the development of competences for the 21<sup>st</sup> century]*. In F. Reimers (Ed.), *Propuestas educativas audaces* (pp. 125-152). Universidad Camilo José Cela.
- Lingard, B. (2021). National curriculum making as more or less expressions of and responses to globalization. In M. Priestley, D. Alvunger, S. Philippou, & T. Soini, (Eds.), *Curriculum making in Europe: Policy and practice within and across diverse contexts* (pp. 29-52). Emerald Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83867-735-020211003>
- López-Rupérez, F. (2020). *El currículo y la educación en el siglo XXI. La preparación del futuro y el enfoque por competencias [Curriculum and education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Preparing the future and the competency-based approach]*. Narcea.

- Luengo, F., Hernández-Ortega, J., Clavijo, M. y Gómez, J. A. (2021). Fortalezas y debilidades de la propuesta curricular LOMLOE. Proyecto Atlántida [Strengths and weaknesses of the LOMLOE curriculum proposal. Atlantida Project]. *Avances en Supervisión Educativa*, 35. <https://doi.org/10.23824/ase.v0i35.723>
- Marope, M., Griffin, P., & Gallagher, C. (2017). *Future Competences and the Future of Curriculum. A Global Reference for Curricula Transformation*. IBE-UNESCO
- Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (2019). TALIS 2018. *Estudio internacional de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje. Informe español [International study of teaching and learning. Spanish report]*. Instituto Nacional de Evaluación Educativa.
- Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (2020a). *La reforma del currículo en el marco de la LOMLOE. Documento base. Claves para el diálogo [Curriculum reform in the framework of the LOMLOE. Base document. Keys for dialogue]*. <https://bit.ly/3Fqb2XN>
- Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (2020b). *El currículo a debate un currículo para una sociedad que avanza. Síntesis del cuestionario final [The curriculum under debate a curriculum for a society that is moving forward. Summary of the final questionnaire]*. <https://bit.ly/3poegFy>
- Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (2021a). *Propuesta de estructura curricular para la elaboración de las enseñanzas mínimas [Proposed curricular structure for the elaboration of the minimum teaching standards]*. <https://bit.ly/3qiwkqJ>
- Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional (2021b). *Perfil de salida del alumnado al término de la educación básica [Student exit profile at the end of basic education]*. <https://bit.ly/3FDdLgV>
- Moya, J., & Valle, J. M. (Coords.) (2020). *La reforma del currículo escolar: ideas y propuestas [The reform of the school curriculum: ideas and proposals]*. ANELE-REDE. [https://anele.org/pdf/libros/Libro-reforma\\_curriculo\\_escolar.pdf](https://anele.org/pdf/libros/Libro-reforma_curriculo_escolar.pdf)
- OECD (2018a). *Curriculum flexibility and autonomy in Portugal – an OECD Review*. <https://bit.ly/3FDe1fT>
- OECD (2018b). *The future of education and skills: the future we want*. <https://bit.ly/3yUhwvu>
- OECD (2019). *OECD Learning Compass 2030. A series of concept notes*. [https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/OECD\\_Learning\\_Compass\\_2030\\_Concept\\_Note\\_Series.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/contact/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_Concept_Note_Series.pdf)
- OECD (2020a). *Curriculum overload: A way forward*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/3081ceca-en>
- OECD (2020b). *Technical report: Curriculum analysis of the OECD future of education and skills 2030*. <https://bit.ly/3pnSTVc>
- OECD (2020c). *What students learn matters: Towards a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/d86d4d9a-en>
- Opertti, R., Kang, H., & Magni, G. (2018). *Comparative analysis of the national curriculum frameworks of five countries: Brazil, Cambodia, Finland, Kenya and Peru*. IBE-UNESCO.
- Organic Law 1/1990, of 3 October, on the General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE). *Spanish Official State Gazette*, 238, of 4 October 1990, pages 28927 to 28942. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/1990/10/03/1>
- Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (LOE). *Spanish Official State Gazette*, 106, 4 May 2006, pages 17158 to 17207. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2006/05/03/2>
- Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December, for the Improvement of the Quality of Education (LOMCE). *Spanish Official State Gazette*, 295, of 10 December 2013, pages 97858 to 97921. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2013/12/09/8>
- Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which amends Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (LOMLOE). *Spanish Official State Gazette*, 340, of 30 December 2020, pages 122868 to 122953. <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/lo/2020/12/29/3>
- Priestley, M., Alvunger, D., Philippou, S., & Soini, T. (Eds.) (2021). *Curriculum making in Europe: Policy and practice within and across diverse contexts*. Emerald.
- Reimers, F. M. (Ed.) (2021a). *Implementing deeper learning and 21st century education reforms: Building an education renaissance after a global pandemic*. Springer Nature.
- Reimers, F. M. (Ed.) (2021b). *Propuestas educativas audaces [Bold educational proposals]*. Universidad Camilo José Cela.

Valle, J. M. (2020). ¿Nuevas competencias para la vida o competencias para una nueva vida? La renovada visión de la Unión Europea en las Competencias Clave 2.0. [New competences for life or competences for a new life? The renewed vision of the European Union in Key Competences 2.0.] In J. Moya & J. M. Valle (Coords), *La reforma del currículo escolar: ideas y propuestas* (pp. 83-110). ANELE-REDE. [https://anele.org/pdf/libros/Libro-reforma\\_curriculo\\_escolar.pdf](https://anele.org/pdf/libros/Libro-reforma_curriculo_escolar.pdf)

## Author biography

**Inmaculada Egido** is a University Professor in the Department of Education-

al Studies of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Spain). Her teaching and research work are dedicated to Comparative and International Education and Educational Policy. She is co-director of the “Historical and comparative keys to education: memory, gender, and identities” research group and a member of the Spanish Comparative Education Society (SEEC), of which she was president between 2014 and 2018.



<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1995-2688>

