

# Reasons for an educational pact in Spain within the framework of decentralised government administration

## *Razones para un pacto educativo en España en el marco de una administración descentralizada*

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### Abstract:

Every time a new political party has taken office in Spain in recent decades, it has fully or partially repealed the education law enacted by the previous government and, almost simultaneously, there has been renewed talk of an educational pact. However, unlike legislation, the pact never materialises, leading to disagreements within the political class and great frustration among members of the educational community.

Among the difficulties that prevent a pact from being reached, ideological and political reasons have been cited and the model of educational administration has also been blamed, with claims that it interferes negatively and arguments that its decentralised nature prevents unity in the field of education. This

article highlights some of its strengths and suggests they might be good advocates for reaching an education pact in Spain. In this respect, each autonomous community must meet certain minimum requirements as an intermediate step towards correcting the overall data. The following reasons for an educational pact are priorities: reducing school dropout rates, improving the number of students in vocational training, improving the figures for education spending, and, with regards to teachers, strengthening processes for selecting students to train as teachers as well as the social status of this profession. If territorial differences are reduced by improving educational indicators, it seems more likely that a consensus can be reached as a prelude to an education pact.

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## Resumen:

En las últimas décadas, cada vez que un nuevo partido político llega al gobierno de España, directamente se deroga en todo o en parte la ley educativa promulgada por el gobierno anterior y, casi al mismo tiempo, se vuelve a hablar de un pacto por la educación. No obstante, a diferencia de la ley, el pacto nunca llega a materializarse, lo que provoca desencuentros en la clase política y grandes frustraciones entre los miembros de la comunidad educativa.

Entre las dificultades que impiden alcanzar un pacto se han citado motivos de carácter ideológico y político, pero también se ha culpado al modelo de administración educativa, indicando que interfiere negativamente porque su carácter descentralizado entorpece para

que haya unidad en materia de educación. Este artículo muestra algunas de sus fortalezas y las reivindica como buenas intercesoras para alcanzar un pacto educativo en nuestro país. En torno a él, cada comunidad autónoma debe cumplir unos objetivos mínimos, como paso intermedio para corregir los datos globales. Entre las razones que motivan un pacto educativo priorizamos las siguientes: disminuir las cifras de abandono escolar, mejorar los datos de estudiantes en formación profesional, reforzar las cifras relacionadas con el gasto en educación y, en torno al profesorado, fortalecer los procesos de selección a la carrera, así como la consideración social de esta profesión. Si reducimos las diferencias territoriales mejorando los indicadores educativos, parece más probable que podamos alcanzar un consenso, antesala de un pacto por la educación.

**Descriptores:** abandono escolar, administración descentralizada, gasto educativo, pacto educativo, profesión docente.

## 1. Introduction

*To begin again* [*Volver a empezar*]. These words — the title of the film that gave José Luis Garci the Oscar for the best foreign language film in 1983 — may sound good, but if we use them to talk about an *educational pact* rather than cinema, not only does their intonation change, but so too does our expression, turning into a cry of unease like Munch's famous *Scream*. Sadly, this situation occurs every time the term of office of a new government of a different colour to the previous one begins, as they

seek with some excitement to revive hopes of a pact. When this moment arrives, we all accept with resignation, and perhaps some enthusiasm, this desire to begin again!

What is it that happens in Spain that makes it so difficult or even almost impossible to achieve an educational pact that provides a quality educational system with solidity over time? There is no single answer, nor is there a simple response. It is striking that, as López Serrano notes (2019, p. 559), while “more than 65% of or-

ganic laws have passed with the consensus of the opposition; in the case of education acts: none". If opportunities for consensus are scarce in matters of educational legislation, this leads us to think that an educational pact, which unavoidably requires signatories to be capable of agreeing and collaborating, will struggle to achieve its task under these circumstances.

There have been many pacts over the history of civilisation, some relating to education, but many others being social, economic, political, or religious in character. In all cases, even in those that differ in condition and scope, they have been crafted through understanding, compromise, and respect. In Spain, looking towards the twentieth century, a variety of pacts shaped much of the country's trajectory its achievements. However, none of them related exclusively to education, and so we turn to the *Moncloa Pacts* of 1977 and the *Spanish Constitution* of 1978 itself, given their symbolic value. While the former is a document that very much focussed on economic matters, with the aim of improving the country's beleaguered indicators, it did include a section on education, namely Chapter IV on educational policy. This chapter, which set out various principles and criteria, revolves around democratising the education system, a gradual roll-out of free education, the diversity of languages and cultural content, training of teaching staff, cooperation between the central government and the institutions of the autonomous communities, and policies regarding the acquisition of land, among others (Congress of Deputies, 1977). Therefore, without being a strictly edu-

cational pact, it was of great importance for education as, among other things, it set in motion a Special Plan for Education (Hernández Beltrán, 2002).

The latter, the Spanish constitution of 1978, has been viewed as the foremost pact or the first major pact, as its Article 27 has been described as "a true academic pact" (Puelles Benítez, 1992, pp. 318-319), although, as this author himself suggests, while the constitutional consensus of Article 27 might have been a necessary condition, it was not a sufficient one (Puelles Benítez, 2016). Indeed, various nuances and more than a few limitations have prevented the "dialogue" that this topic requires from being achieved (Puelles & Menor, 2018).

Liberty, equality, rights, and democratic principles of coexistence are the most important values set out in Article 27 and they should form the backbone of any educational pact. Nonetheless, they are also controversial values and both the right to education and equality and the freedom to choose schools (Fernández Soria, 2007) have been interpreted in ways that have caused significant ideological disputes.

After these two documents, between the 1980s and the current decade of the 2020s, the signing of no other educational pact has been achieved, even though there have been various attempts. The closest moment probably came when Ángel Gabilondo was minister for education (2009-2011), but this did not lead to anything definitive. Indeed, the famous phrase of "*agreed, but not signed*"

went down in history, uttered by Adolfo González, the universities spokesperson of the Partido Popular's grouping in Spain's Congress (Bedera Bravo, 2018) at a moment where a State Pact had "almost" been agreed. Along the way, and almost in parallel, there have been academic articles and books, opinion pieces on the subject, and descriptive studies, as well as theoretical, philosophical, pedagogical, and historical essays (Cámara, 2007; Fernández Enguita, 2019; Tedesco, 2004; Viñao, 2020). In addition, various reports have been published by associations and foundations (Colectivo Lorenzo Luzuriaga, 2015; Fundación Encuentro, 1997). And many experts from the university sector and education have contributed rigorous studies (Daros, 2005; Fernández Enguita, 2019; Guaita, 2018; Marina et al., 2016; Merchán Iglesias, 2020; Novella, 2020; Puelles, 2016), all with the intention of considering this topic in greater depth and moving it forwards, in every case recognising the strengths and weaknesses of an educational pact in Spain. As this topic is so sensitive and at the same time so multifaceted, it has been studied from various perspectives and from its different dimensions, and, while we might find a certain unanimity in the need for a pact, there is more disagreement if we pause to consider the why, what for, or how of this process. It seems hard to believe that the different groups share the desire to achieve a pact and, at the same time, a wish to prevent any successful agreement being reached. In general, it is a desire held by most members of the educational community and also by the managers and

political leaders, but they themselves are unable to reach an agreement, and so the differences regarding the content of this pact, its form, and even the meaning it should express, seem to be a chimera.

We might ask whether the lack of a pact is because of political, religious, and ideological differences between governing parties, whether the reasons have more to do with economics, whether it is to do with linguistic diversity, or if it relates to particular curriculum content. In fact, seemingly none of these reasons can be rejected and they are probably all compelling, although other elements relating to the current educational administration model in Spain are of value, with the different ways it is managed in autonomous communities and the disparity of data and positions between them.

Throughout this article we will consider a number of indicators, but we will especially focus on evaluating the strengths of Spain's educational administration model and its effect on the signing of a pact. Diversity should not hinder improvements to the quality of education in the country and it should boost the progress of each autonomous community. This leads us to agree with Jiménez (2004) who notes that the problem is not so much that different regional subsystems exist, but that there is a deep gap between some communities and others. Therefore, respecting differences and for the sake of freedom of management, the educational pact could be presented as a unifying instrument that will guide regional policies, seeking to improve the figures of each of them.

## 2. A decentralised educational administration model does not impede the objectives of a pact for education

Part IV of Spain's constitution mentions the decentralised model of public administration that also applies to educational administration. Nonetheless, given the political and management characteristics, some people prefer to speak of *educational recentralisation* (García Rubio, 2015), in view of the coordinating role that the state plays along with the important competences, some relating to identity, entrusted to the autonomous communities. And we could even speak of a model of *pericentralised educational administration*, when we consider that there is a central ministry and, around it there are the various regions, local administrations, educational centres, educational community, movements, and associations, etc. that manage and implement the various teaching and learning processes.

We might initially think that this model increases the difficulty of unifying standards and achieving a pact, but this is not so. For example, this model is not an obstacle to developing a *common national curriculum* whose construction takes into account the diversity of Spain's territories and their distinctive features, and integrates the most important challenges of each region. Considering the international setting, we find cases like Finland, which, despite its decentralised model, has maintained a common curriculum since the *Basic Education Act* of 1983 that combines autonomy for schools with input from the centre and common objectives.

Or the case of Estonia, also decentralised, which has legislative benchmarks that unify academic decisions in the country. The national standards connect all of the content, competences, and expectations of the country's educational model. Unity is not at odds with valuing plurality.

We might initially think that achieving a pact is easier in countries with a centralised administration, where there is greater concentration of ideas and objectives, where decision making appears to be more harmonious and more uniform than in other decentralised ones, but it is also necessary to know how to take advantage of the benefits and advantages of this option. A common complaint in Spain is that there are seventeen educational systems and that this situation is a hindrance when standardising criteria, but if a pact requires unity, failure to achieve this is not so much a fault of the model but rather of the lack of skill at reaching agreements of those to whom it is entrusted.

Decentralised models generally enjoy good health, but it is necessary to know how to cultivate their values. Some of their benefits relate to acquiring greater autonomy, stimulating demand for higher-quality education, ensuring that local priorities and values are reflected in schools (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2010), arguments about efficiency, greater proximity to educational needs (Esteller & Solé, 2005), contributing to more innovation in the field of education (Bonal et al., 2005), and these benefits also relate to merely competitive motives. Indeed, knowing the differences that characterise Spain, in its administrative and educational situa-



tion, it would make sense to speak of a *territorial pact*, as Tiana (2020) argues.

By its very nature, a pact should involve all parties (the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MEFP), families, teachers, social actors, unions, councils, etc.) as agreements are built between all of them; indeed, as the title of this section notes, a decentralised model of educational administration does not hinder the objectives of a pact for education and nor should it. The comments of Fernández Enguita (2019, p.4) regarding decentralisation of the educational system could reinforce this idea when he advises “not just clear rules, but also commonly accepted boundaries and a certain shared orientation”. Perhaps we should not lose sight of the epic character of the act of educating, where a great diversity of elements, circumstances, and opportunities are in play that can alter this function and, therefore, the desirability of reinforcing through a pact, those things that unite them, that provide greater strength.

Understanding a country’s model of educational administration and who is responsible for each academic and educational decision is no small matter because a pact also involves making decisions and reaching a consensus, even if also it is necessary to train beliefs (Damgaard & Nielsen, 2018). In many cases, both in countries with centralised models and in other decentralised ones, what has actually prevailed has been a model of *deconcentration*. When does this occur? When important decisions are still taken by the central government, but functions of management —

only strictly management — are delegated to other administrations. This model of deconcentration is very characteristic of France, although in this case, in the framework of a centralised government. But in this process, both parties, the government and autonomous communities, must reach a balance knowing that there are educational, social, and economic indicators that differentiate the autonomous communities, create inequalities between them and, in turn, obstruct agreements to achieve a pact for education.

### 3. Improving the educational indicators of each autonomous community: the prelude to an educational pact

If we look at Spain’s autonomous communities, we find wealth, great wealth, but we sometimes also see some disorder in the figures relating to education. This situation leads us to consider the importance of partial educational indicators as a guarantor of a national agreement. Continuing with the line we have been supporting, to make progress in constructing a pact, it is first necessary to improve the figures and educational results of each autonomous community, improving performance indicators and resources among other items and leaving certain ideological questions in the background. Secondly, it is necessary to achieve a fair and balanced coordination between all of the autonomous communities, and finally it is necessary to achieve what in Germany — in another order — is known as *federal loyalty*, which permits a voice that acts and manages from a position of trust, putting forward

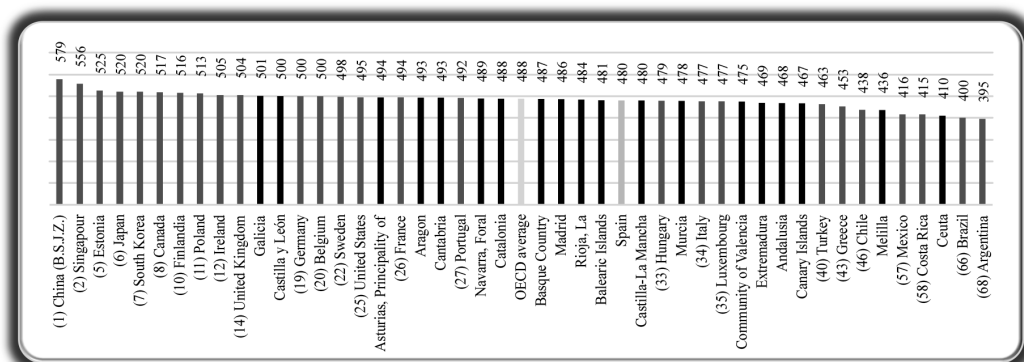
communal efforts and efforts of individual communities in the same direction.

Analysis of the results of the most recent international evaluations reveals the deficiencies of the educational model and, consequently, the need to improve on many of the educational indicators. Nevertheless, we also find interesting data among various autonomous communities, which have impressive results that are similar to those of countries that are in leading positions in the ranking. These differences should be the *leitmotiv* of a pact, acting as a tool for consensus at the same time as for stimulus. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicates that if autonomy is combined with responsibility and this is done in a balanced, objective, and intelligent way, it will lead to better performance by the students (OECD, 2016).

Since the results of the PISA programme started to be published in 2000 and, more specifically, since larger samples of students from each autonomous community started to be used to provide more representative data and allow comparisons between communities, Spain's score has remained below the OECD mean except for PISA 2015, Spain's best result, when it was the same. However, we have also been able to confirm that not all of the autonomous communities would be below the international mean, indeed, the results of some of them are very notable and even very close to those of countries in the top twenty in the ranking. In PISA 2015, the autonomous communities obtained better scores than in this more recent edition. Looking at the figures from PISA 2018 we can see that only three of the best placed, namely Galicia (501), Castilla y León (500), and Asturias (494), are

among the top 25 ranked countries. And in the case of Spain, twelve autonomous communities are above the Spanish mean (480). The worst performing are the autonomous communities of Murcia, the Community of Valencia, Extremadura, Andalusia, the Canary Islands, and the autonomous cities of Melilla and Ceuta, with scores placing them among countries such as Italy, Luxembourg, Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica and Colombia, among others. We should also note the marks obtained by Galicia for scientific competencies (510) and Navarra for mathematical competencies (503), which put both autonomous communities among the top 12 countries in the ranking. With similar scores, we can mention the example, on the sciences scale, of Poland (511), which is in 11th place among the 78 participating countries. And Finland (507) is in 16th place for mathematical competencies. If we review the global ranking, considering the three competences analysed, we can see that the results for Spain's autonomous communities are uneven and approximate to the data from other countries. This can be seen in Graph 1, which shows the leading countries, such as China (Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang), Singapore, Estonia, and Japan, as well as others in lower positions. We have included autonomous communities in this list, which, as we can see, are in very different places among the participating countries. We show a selection of countries that participated in this edition (OECD members and associated countries) and we have added Spain's autonomous communities and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla according to the scores they achieved. Furthermore, as well as the name, we have added their position in the ranking, considering the mean scores obtained.

GRAPH 1. Scores from PISA 2018.



Source: Own elaboration based on PISA 2018 (MEFP, 2019a).

Looking at Graph 1, we could say that Spain, as a whole, needs to improve its performance, and that some autonomous communities that have a greater need to do this, as there are notable differences between them. To improve the educational outcomes of the country as a whole, particular indicators should be focussed on, some national and others relating to individual autonomous communities. The length of this article does not allow us to consider these indicators in depth, but considering the priorities — looking towards both administrations — we are inclined towards the following propositions:

- At the autonomous community level: it would be beneficial to reduce early school leaving figures, improve public spending figures in relation to GDP and to total budgets, and expand the integration of places in dual vocational training.
- At a national level: to improve selection processes for teachers and their initial training.

All of these should guide the construction of an educational pact in Spain.

#### 4. Prioritising indicators that open the door to a pact for education

At the risk of neglecting many indicators, we will focus on four that reflect the quality of education in the country and which each autonomous community should take care of, review, and improve. These are:

##### a) *Early school leaving*

“Reducing early school leaving and improving educational results” (European Commission, 2019) has been a thought-provoking but at the same time resounding recommendation, with the aim of reducing the figures for Spain as well as the disparities between autonomous communities.

The 2020 figures show a small reduction compared to the figures from 2019, falling from 17.3% to 16%. It is admittedly true that in view of these figures Spain has not



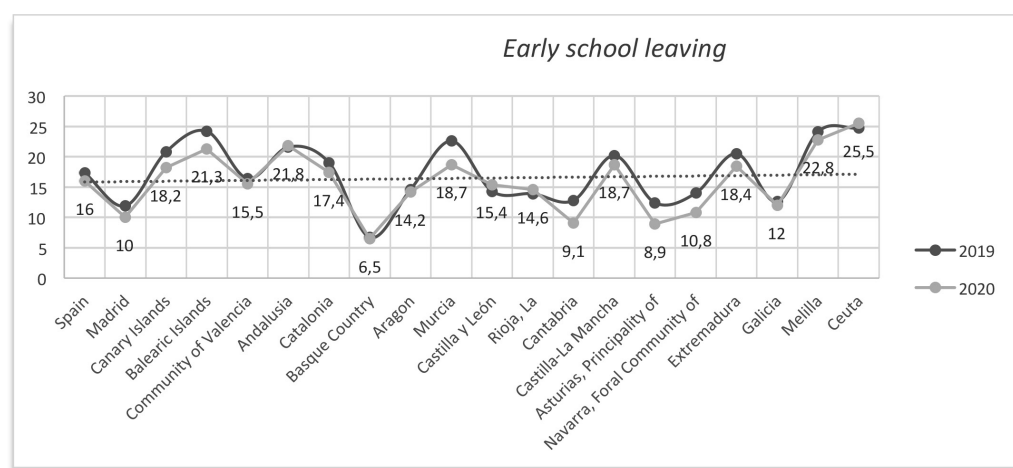
achieved the objective set by the EU of reducing the early school leaving rate to 10% or less in 2020 and it has not even reduced them to 15%, which is what Spain was permitted given its high starting point. Nonetheless, it is fair to recognise that not all communities were above this average; some comply with this recommendation, like the Basque Country, whose early school leaving figure is 6.5%; Asturias, with 8.9%; Cantabria, with 9.1%, and Madrid, with 10%.

In contrast, rates of early school leaving are strikingly high in Ceuta (25.5%), Melilla (22.8%), Andalusia (21.8%), and the Balearic

Islands (21.3%), among others. These are very worrying figures as they are incompatible with the good progress of a country.

These values are not unimportant, as they not only affect education but also have an impact on many other sectors of the country, for example, economic factors, capacity for growth and optimisation, and social factors. High early school leaving rates reduce the economic opportunities of any country and especially weaken the level of qualifications of its young people, but what can an educational pact do face with figures like these?

GRAPH 2. Early school leaving in Spain (2019-2020).



Source: Own elaboration based on MEFP (2020).

To give one example, it could set out strategies to help all autonomous communities prevent high rates of early school leaving and it could also mould other indicators that do not affect or help provoke this early school leaving (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2020). In truth, reducing these figures is more of an achievement than a reason, strictly speaking. Nevertheless, an edu-

cational pact includes content that enables the articulation of alternatives and favours solutions.

#### b) Vocational training

As noted above, early school leaving rates have fallen somewhat, although not to the extent required or wanted.

In any case, part of this fall is due to an increase in enrolment rates recorded in vocational training (Table 1), which is an essential stage that strengthens the work environment and opens up new prospects for young people. Each autonomous community should carry out an exhaustive analysis of students' needs and of the opportunities in their environment.

The current path not only supports traditional vocational training, but it also recognises *professional learning* as one of the principal reference points of education and training systems in Eu-

rope (CEDEFOP, 2021). A good showing in this training will be a good pathway for students' own development and for the better growth of a country and of each of its regions. Similarly, it should contribute to improving rates of employment and early school leaving rates, with this training providing an outlet that is useful, practical, and attractive for all. In this sense the briefing note by CEDEFOP from March 2021 suggests professional learning "as a short-term solution to youth unemployment and a useful response to companies' skill needs in the longer term" (CEDEFOP, 2021, p.1).

TABLE 1. Students enrolled in vocational training.

Region	2017-2018	2018-2019
Spain	22,616	26,340
Andalusia	3,357	3,605
Aragón	136	134
Asturias	120	109
Balearic Islands	245	281
Basque Country	1,673	1,851
Canary Islands	378	730
Cantabria	58	50
Castilla y León	217	353
Castilla-La Mancha	878	1,66
Catalonia	6,253	6,827
Community of Madrid	5,932	5,977
Community of Valencia	1,662	2,245
Extremadura	201	213
Galicia	735	1,037
La Rioja	134	166
Navarra	607	784
Region of Murcia	30	318

Source: Fundación Bankia por la Formación Dual (2021).

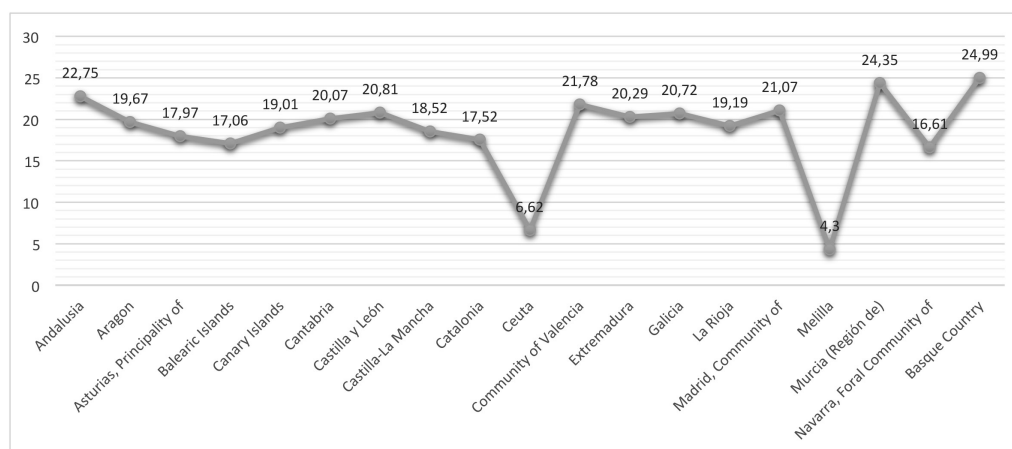
c) *Public spending on education*

We might initially think that when it comes to funding, more is better, but this might not always be the case, or might not always happen with the same intensity or the same results. How this economic provision is managed seems to be as important as its size, and specifying how funds are allocated and shared out might actually shape the spending incurred. To test this efficacy we can examine whether countries that spend more on education also have better results in the PISA report. The reality is that countries like Japan, Ireland and Germany are ahead of Spain in student performance according to PISA 2018 (520, 505, 500 points respectively), but all three spend less than Spain on education: 4% in Japan, 3.4% in Ireland, and 4.2% in Germany. We can also give the opposite example and identify countries whose spending as a percentage of their GDP is somewhat higher but which have poor academic results. This is the case with Chile, which spends 6.3% of its GDP on education and yet its score on PISA is 438.

These are only really a sample, but they show that there is no direct relationship between higher spending and better results.

Spain, which spends a total of 4.3% of its GDP on education (according to figures from 2017 (MEFP, 2020)), should climb in both rankings: economic and performance evaluations. But just as not all autonomous communities have the same budget, their classification in relation to the educational success of their students is not the same. It is worth noting that Spain's decentralised model plays a vital role in the distribution of public funds, as more than four fifths of funds allocated to education, 82%, come from the governments of the autonomous communities, 12% is provided by the Ministry, and the remaining 6% by local governments (MEFP, 2020). It should be noted, for the analysis of the data from Graph 3, that education in Ceuta and Melilla is administered by the Ministry. Consequently, these two autonomous cities only function as municipal administrations.

GRAPH 3. Education spending by total budget.



Source: Own elaboration based on Expansión (2021).

The analysis of these figures, which omits the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla for the reason given above and because they have little economic and demographic weight, reveals a certain correspondence between autonomous communities' spending on education and their place in the evaluations. But we also observe that the communities with the highest budget are not the best placed ones in the PISA 2018 ranking (Galicia, Castilla y León, Asturias, and Aragón) (MEFP, 2019a). In contrast, Murcia and Andalusia stand out for spending but not for academic performance. It is clear that as well as being determined by economic investment, educational performance is also shaped by other factors that are harder to measure.

d) *Teachers: initial training in faculties of education*

In our view, there are a number of indicators associated with the training of teachers in education faculties that should directly or indirectly be part of an educational pact. Among others, it is worth reviewing their skills, the professional development pathway, access to teacher training programmes at university, placement programmes, and the induction programmes that comprise the teaching career. These are all relevant if our objective is to improve education in Spain. Within this variety of areas, we emphasise the following ones:

The first is to improve performance on indicators relating to selection of teaching staff and the capacity to attract good candidates and the best prospective teachers into the profession (Barber & Mourshed, 2008; Manso & Ramírez Carpeño, 2011;

OECD 2005; Vaillant, 2006). A pact for education should envisage a model of access to training that provides for greater rigidity in these processes, creating a *career plan* (López Rupérez, 2021) that takes into account different knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes; all of which are relevant to the profile of a teacher and are necessary for excellence in professional development.

In a decentralised model like Spain's, this measure requires synchronisation of efforts between the ministry and the autonomous communities.

If we look towards the countries that stand out in international evaluations, we find that Singapore, Japan, Estonia, and Finland have very rigorous processes for selecting students for initial training (Malinen et al., 2012; Ro, 2020) and apart from Singapore they all have a decentralised model as in the case of Spain.

Encouraging this rigour is consistent with the importance of the teaching profession, with the value of teaching, and with the training of teachers: three very important elements for the matter that concerns us. Thinking about a decentralised administration like Spain's, the number of new places offered each year should be in line with the number of active professionals, with the rate of replacement, with the need to cover retirements, and with the data provided by relevant prospective studies. This would avoid the major mismatches that exist between the graduate population and number of professional positions.

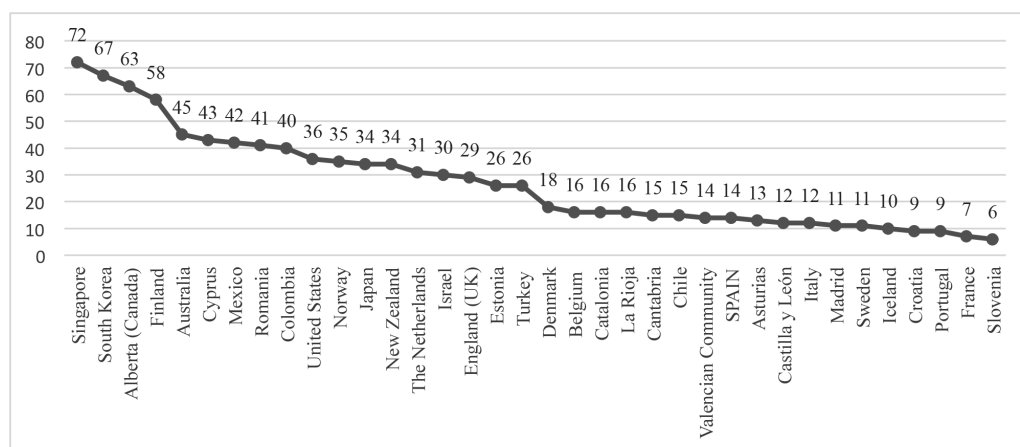
And the second major challenge: to improve the image and social prestige of teachers. A number of studies have recognised the importance of raising the social status of the profession (Egido Gálvez, 2021; Luchenko, 2021), indicating that each region should seek the appropriate strategies to improve it and optimise this.

The teaching profession being well regarded by society means, on the one hand, that many students wish to enter this profession and, on the other, that it is possible to retain the best in teaching. Quality of teaching and social recognition (Sanz Ponce et al., 2020) should create a strong alliance or, as Hoyle (2001) observed, *prestige, status, and esteem* are

three key factors in the model of teacher training. An educational and social pact should contribute to this objective.

Graph 4, which is based on the results from the TALIS 2018 report (MEFP 2019b), shows the differences between countries and between Spain's autonomous communities. It illustrates the greater or lesser degree to which teachers believe that they are valued. Looking at the participating autonomous communities (not all of them are included), the ones where the profession is valued highest are Catalonia (16%), La Rioja (16%), and Cantabria (15%), the three that are above the mean in Spain (14%). Teachers from Madrid, Castilla y León, Asturias, and the Community of Valencia give this lower scores.

GRAPH 4. Teachers' opinion of how society values teaching as a profession.



Source: Own elaboration based on the TALIS 2018 report (MEFP, 2019b).

Spain is a long way off the countries that are in the lead. This process of increasing the status of the profession should be backed by the central administration and so should be part of a pact, but it also requires commitment from each autonomous

community, which should be capable of increasing the prestige of their teachers so that they, in turn, do not yield in the face of the frictions they might encounter in the course of their work. The initiative of Roldán and Cabrales (2020) who proposed



the Plan PROFES+ with measures to promote teaching as a career might continue to open pathways on this line.

## 5. In conclusion

An educational pact should comprise a set of properly sequenced and predicted aims, mainly long-term, that will make it possible to meet and cover the needs of a growing, advancing, and diverse society. But to achieve each of these goals, it is necessary to establish an equitable educational system that can, on the one hand, reduce socio-economic inequalities and on the other, foster equality of opportunities, to “guarantee that [students’] academic performance will be determined by their effort and ability, independently of their social, economic, and family context” (Sicilia & Simancas, 2018, p. 9).

The educational administrations that have good results should be the inspiration and reference point for the others, although their successes are not the consequence of one single indicator but rather of a balance between them and of emphasising structural elements. In reality, a pact does not in itself improve the quality of an educational system, but it does lay the foundations for improving figures, optimising scenarios, and solidifying the objectives.

In general, the best placed autonomous communities have implemented strategies that, for example, reduce levels of truancy as a way to increase performance (López Rupérez et al., 2018), they have launched

compensatory policies that have improved disadvantaged environments, they have tuned the efficiency of spending, and they have consolidated territorial policies that have benefited the resources and the management of the centres. In any case, to understand and explain these data, we must not lose sight of the demographic diversity among Spain’s communities, the funding, the complex educational and school organisation, the different levels of pay for teachers in different communities, or the provision of money to education capital depending on the number of schools and pupils. In a study of regional differences in education, the BBVA Foundation notes and explains many of the reasons behind these differences (Pérez García et al., 2019).

The model of decentralised administration is not an obstacle to achieving a pact in Spain, and indeed it could even facilitate it. There are excellent reasons for moving towards this objective. Given this situation we suggest the following proposals:

Creating a *pact culture* in Spain. And our decentralised model — precisely because of its structure — can provide the best conditions for achieving this goal. That said, there must be the ability to want to make a pact, a firm will to reach agreements, an interest in making pacts, and even a flair for making pacts. All of this probably did occur with the Moncloa Pacts. In the case of Spain, it seems necessary to find a leader or leaders who know how to agree, who know how to hold on to but also let go of certain personal interests, in benefit — always — of education.

By its very nature, a pact must include everyone to find areas of agreement and so everyone should play an active part: the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, representatives of families, of teachers, social stakeholders, and unions, and representatives of state, private, and state-funded independent sectors. All of them should have a place in this process.

*The pact and identity should go hand in hand.* The educational pact should guarantee a balance between everyone that backs and constructs an identity. In this regard, Fernández Cruz (2008) recognised that social and territorial cohesion is a key issue in the construction of a shared identity and in the guarantee of an equitable and supportive offer of basic services for all citizens. Therefore, strengthening identity gives a country solidity and strengthens the foundations of an educational pact.

Putting together a pact whose backbone is a *common national curriculum*. A curriculum which, with this decentralised character, is built taking into account the diversity of the regions and their particular features and integrating the most important challenges of each of them. Sharing a *common national curriculum* is not incompatible with freedom of action for the different agents involved in education.

The *national and international evaluations* make the risks of some data apparent. Among other indicators, autonomous communities need to improve rates of enrolment and early school leaving, spending

on education, and others factors relating to teachers: their selection, governance, and accountability.

Given the difficulties encountered, we should perhaps not insist on making a pact of maximum aspirations — which is plagued with ideological clashes — but instead an agreement of minimum requirements, which is inclusive in character and is constructed from a collection of intentions, with *Will, Imagination, Dialogue and Agreements*, which in Spanish gives the acronym VIDA (*Voluntad, Imaginación, Diálogo and Acuerdos*) or LIFE. Because, ultimately, a pact is creation, it is survival, it is life.

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