

Presentation: The LOMLOE amidst the challenges of the Spanish education system in the 21st century

The rapid pace of social and economic development has increased countries' expectations of their education and training systems like never before. Governments, multilateral bodies, business organisations, think-tanks, and foundations — from both the educational sector and the wider fabric of society — as well as academics from a range of fields have underlined the critical importance of the challenges associated with improving the quality of education, developing young peoples' personalities in the new circumstances, and joint cooperation in the task of readying individuals and society for a future shaped by globalisation, technological revolutions, and the interactions between them.

There has also been reflection and analysis of the dire consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for societies and economies all over the world, the effects of which will be felt everywhere, with varying levels of intensity, in the short, medium, and long terms.

Now well into the twenty-first century and fully immersed in the context of the pandemic, Spain has set in motion an educational reform, passing Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 de May, regarding Education (LOMLOE).

Obviously, reforms to education laws in a democratic system must focus on changing policies, so that the educational system meets the needs of the times. Therefore, it is to be expected that the legislative power will turn to numerous social partners to make the reforms as advantageous as possible.

For their part, academics and others who dedicate themselves to reflecting on education should have the opportunity to exercise their social responsibility and contribute to this task by analysing the foundations of the educational reforms, studying them in

the light of the purposes of education, the challenges of the future, and the available evidence.

This is the aim of this monographic issue which, in a constructive spirit, is an exercise in the social transfer of academic work relating to the LOMLOE. And, as corresponds to academia, it does so with a vocation of objectivity and analytical rigour based on a substantial critical apparatus, all of which facilitate rational debate and reflection on a key question for the future of individuals and of our society.

This monographic issue comprises two large sections, which group together a total of ten contributions, as well as this Presentation. The Studies and essays section contains six contributions, which consider the educational reform of the LOMLOE from a variety of perspectives and, at a methodological level, share an analytic, interpretative and evaluative approach. The Testing and proposals section contains another four contributions based on empirical evidence — whether created *ex professo* or collected from an international perspective — on other significant aspects of the reform.

The first article is written by Esteban Bara and Gil Cantero, from the Universitat de Barcelona and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, respectively. They consider the issue of the purposes of education, presenting and analysing the questions that have inspired the most debate in society. Along with some of the virtues of the LOMLOE, they conclude that the presence of a wrongly political focus on pedagogy is a dominant feature of this law.

The second article is by José Luís Gaviria and David Reyero, from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. These authors provide a thorough reflection on the place of results in the educational system and they consider its qualifying, socialising, and subjectivising function in the school setting in more depth. In view of these foundations, they criticise the gradual decline of knowledge transfer; a decline that affects these three functions and opens the door to a worrying change in the objectives of the educational system which, in their opinion, is reflected in the new law. The authors support a return to valuing the knowledge accumulated over the centuries as the best way of achieving socialisation, subjectivisation, and qualification at the same time and through schooling.

Francisco López Rupérez, from the Universidad Camilo José Cela de Madrid, centres the third article on the implementation of the LOMLOE in curriculum matters, contrasting it with a true approach to the competence-based curriculum focus, an approach that derives from the international frameworks of reference and from rational justification for this type of curriculum. In it he sets out the humanistic component of this curriculum reform movement, which maintains its link to “liberal education”, even when explicitly broadening its perspective. He also describes elements of the ideological debate surround-

ing this new curriculum focus and its embodiment in the implementation of the new Law, and carries out a critical analysis of the conceptual basis of the new structure. Finally, he reflects on the problems of the evaluation focus, in view of the warnings derived from international analyses.

In the fourth article, José Luis Martínez López-Muñiz, of the Universidad de Valladolid, considers the issue of the low regulatory quality of laws and analyses its causes, then offers a detailed description of the remedies for this. This provides a basis for him to consider the specific question of Spain's educational legislation and to analyse in detail, from his position as a renowned specialist, its many and varied shortcomings. He concludes by calling for brevity, clarity, logical and conceptual rigour, and systematic order as essential elements of educational legislation that is of sufficient legal quality.

The fifth article is by Charles L. Glenn from Boston University (USA). In it he considers the fundamental question of educational pluralism in a free society. He first analyses the reach and limits of governments in the formation of citizens in times of cultural conflict. He then goes on to reflect on the types of schooling that are most appropriate for resolving these cultural conflicts while guaranteeing sufficient attention to the qualities citizens must possess. Finally, he examines in depth the implication of the above when properly attending to the demands of justice and liberty, in particular in the case of the most vulnerable children.

The Studies and essays section ends with the article by José Adolfo de Azcárraga, from the Universidad de Valencia. In the style of physics, of which he is a notable representative, he puts forward a prediction that public education will not improve with the new law, supporting it with rational arguments. To do so, the author writes a multifaceted essay in which he rigorously covers aspects as varied as regulatory hypertrophy, the case of mathematics, equality and effort, knowledge and merit, teacher recruitment, the Spanish Baccalaureate, and secondary education, before finally turning to the fledgling university reform. All of these topics are currently subjects of debate, not just in the world of education, but also in the public or social sphere represented in the media.

The second section — Testing and proposals — starts with an article by María Teresa Ballestar, Jorge Sainz, and Ismael Sanz, from the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos de Madrid. In this research about the economy of education, the authors apply innovative methods to the analysis of educational data that are important for setting policies. They are based on artificial intelligence through machine learning models and artificial neural networks. The results provide a robust foundation that enables the authors to argue for the implementation of educational reinforcement programmes for low-performing and socially disadvantaged students, and to argue for the need to assess the LOMLOE with

this type of method, especially given the major investment that the allocation of the Next Generation funds from the European Union will entail.

The second article in this section is by Francisco López Rupérez, of the Universidad Camilo José Cela de Madrid. The author focusses on the quality of governance in the educational system. He starts with an analytical framework for evaluation, empirically validated through a Delphi process of consultation of experts and a comparative international analysis, and on the basis of this framework, he analyses and evaluates the LOMLOE's reform process in light of the criteria derived from this conceptual model. The main conclusion that emerges from these empirical results is that Spain's educational system has a long way to go to improve the quality of governance.

In her article, Inmaculada Egido Gálvez, from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, analyses Spain's curriculum reform from a comparative perspective. She does this using an analytic framework she developed on the basis of publications relating to this topic by UNESCO, the OECD, and the EU, as well as a variety of comparative studies of recent curriculum reforms from around the world. She identifies similarities in the focus and architecture of the curriculum model, but she also detects significant differences regarding the strategy adopted for the change and the agents involved in it.

This issue ends with an article by Samuel Gento Palacios, Raúl González-Fernández, and Ernesto López-Gómez, from the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia. These authors take a critical approach to three key aspects for the success of the reforms and the good functioning of educational centres: leadership by school management, the autonomy of centres, and accountability. A variety of different observations derive from this analytical framework, which translate into proposals for improving the functioning of educational centres in the context of the educational reform of the LOMLOE.

When reflecting carefully on these ten contributions from eight different universities, we can see an underlying message which, in one way or another, connects all of them: a call for rationality in educational reforms, understanding rationality as "the ability to use knowledge to attain goals"¹.

Two important features characterise successful educational reforms: firstly, successful formulation; and, secondly, stability. And rationality plays an essential role in achieving both of these attributes. For successful formulation, because basing educational reforms on knowledge is an instrument whose efficacy has repeatedly been proven in high-performing educational systems. For stability, because rational foundations for reforms facilitate explaining and justifying them, and their subsequent acceptance by society.

But also because it makes it enables them to be shared by different political positions, thus making it less likely that they will be undone as soon as changes in political fortunes allow or permit it.

As the evidence shows, Spain's education system is in need of both of these elements; and it is in the elucidation and building of these rational foundations that academia can and should be of particular use, contributing to rational debate and restricting the ideological domain to a vision of society, the individual, and his or her mutual relations that is consolidated and so widely shared. In short, this is the last aim of this monographic issue.

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Notes

¹ Pinker, S. (2021). *Rationality. What it is, why it seems scarce, why it matters*. Penguin.

