

Spain

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Introduction

Overview of Education System

The Spanish Constitution of 1978 created a highly decentralized education system in which the Spanish government oversees legislation, basic structure, and cooperative initiatives among all autonomous communities and with other nations.^{1,2,3} However, the communities are responsible for all other aspects of education within their respective territories (e.g., schools, curriculum development within the framework of basic regulations, financial and personnel management). Education regulations presently in force, including the 2020 Organic Law for the modification of the 2006 Organic Law of Education (LOMLOE), guarantee the uniformity and unity of the education system and allow individual communities to make decisions that meet their needs.^{4,5} This law includes an additional provision for state and regional cooperation to promote an adequate description of the relationships among competencies, content, and assessment criteria of the different stages of education. Thus, the curriculum has a centralized common framework that is developed and implemented by the autonomous communities and schools.^{6,7}

Schools are classified according to whether they are state-run or private. State schools are owned and run by a public authority, while private schools are not. However, the majority of private schools also are publicly funded; the state finances these schools' operational costs under the general system for grant-maintained schools in return for the public service of education they provide to society.

The basic structure of the Spanish education system was validated in 2020 by LOMLOE, which maintained the existing organization that was established in the 2006 Organic Law of Education (LOE). The system is organized into school years (grades), cycles, and levels of education. The levels of education comprise preprimary education (ages 0 to 6), basic education—which comprises primary education (ages 6 to 12) and compulsory secondary education (ages 12 to 16), and secondary education that is not compulsory (ages 16 to 18).

Preprimary education is organized into two cycles—one for ages 0 to 3 and the other for ages 3 to 6—with the second cycle free of charge. There is a commitment to progressively increase the number of public institutions to meet the demand for schooling for children ages 0 to 3. During

the 2020–2021 academic year, 36 percent and 96 percent of the population enrolled their children in the first and second cycles of preprimary education, respectively.

The primary and secondary school curricula are organized into subject areas as regulated by law. Each subject area contains objectives, content, assessment criteria, and a particular contribution to the common basic competencies recommended by the European Union. The subject areas also include standards of learning outcomes, which are not prescriptive under the new organic law.

Primary education (Grades 1 to 6) and compulsory secondary education (Grades 7 to 10) comprise Spain's basic education system: 10 years of schooling (generally for students ages 6 to 16) that is compulsory and free of charge. LOE and LOMLOE established the objectives that describe what competencies students should develop at the primary level. The goal at this level is to facilitate the learning of oral expression, comprehension techniques, reading, writing, numeracy, and cultural skills. Social skills, work and study habits, artistic sense, creativity, and affectivity are also developed at the primary level. These skills are instilled with consideration of students' individual needs for the purpose of developing their personalities and preparing them for secondary education.

Secondary education is divided into two stages: compulsory secondary and post-compulsory secondary education. The four grade levels of compulsory secondary education aim to provide students with the basic elements of culture (e.g., humanistic, artistic, scientific, and technological) that will make them conscientious citizens and allow them to pursue subsequent studies or enter the job market. The main goal of secondary education is to provide students with a common core education with consideration of student diversity. Schools have the flexibility to organize the curriculum with the necessary measures to cater to their students' needs. In doing so, schools must ensure that all students can attain the secondary education objectives without discrimination that might prevent them from attaining their final qualification. Post-compulsory secondary education (Grades 11 and 12) includes the baccalaureate and intermediate vocational education levels. Higher education includes university (UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] Level 6 and above), as well as higher level vocational education, higher level arts and design education, and higher level sports education (ISCED Level 5).⁸

Over the past decade, the Ministry of Education (*Ministerio de Educación*) and the autonomous education authorities have placed great emphasis on competencies, particularly in the area of reading literacy. Since LOE introduced key competencies to the curriculum in 2006 in accordance with recommendations from the European Union, the cross-curricular nature of these competencies and the need for all subjects to contribute to their acquisition have been emphasized. Moreover, LOMLOE in 2020 has reinforced the model based on competencies and made it mandatory to devote time to reading activities daily in primary education. It also recommends that secondary schools continue to emphasize language activities. Reading is included in the language communication competency and is considered transversal, so it should be included in all subjects.

Use and Impact of PIRLS

Spain participated in PIRLS 2006, PIRLS 2011, and PIRLS 2016. Based on PIRLS results and results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and national reading assessments, the government has launched national goals to promote reading across the curriculum and the use of libraries. The National Institute for Educational Assessment published a report of Spain's PIRLS 2016 results. Some of the other actions taken at the national and regional levels using the results from the different assessments include:

- The publication of an official education newsletter⁹ on the National Institute for Educational Assessment's website^a
- The dissemination of released items from PISA, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), and PIRLS^{10,11}
- Seminars in 2013 to disseminate TIMSS and PIRLS results among teachers, principals, and the education community¹²
- The Current National and International Perspectives in Educational Evaluation (*Perspectivas Actuales Nacionales e Internacionales en Evaluación Educativa*) conference in 2016¹³
- IV symposium Assessing and Supporting Literacy and English in 2019¹⁴
- V symposium Assessing and Supporting Literacy and Multilingual Contexts in 2020¹⁵
- Translation and promotion of International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) materials to disseminate in schools, on the Ministry of Education's website, and on social media networks^b
- Promotion through videos, posters, blog articles, etc.^c
- Translation and promotion of compass briefs^d

The Language/Reading Curriculum in Primary Grades

Reading Policy

Preprimary education approaches the written language as a means of communication, information, and enjoyment. In this stage, learning the written code is not an objective, and the individual learning rhythm of each child should be respected. Some children may have acquired certain reading abilities before starting primary education. It is expected that these abilities are strengthened at the end of second grade in primary education. The fact that Castilian Spanish is written as it is pronounced greatly facilitates the learning process of reading and writing.

^a See <http://www.mecd.gob.es/inee/portada.html> for more information on the National Institute for Educational Assessment's website.

^b See https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/descarga.action?f_codigo_agc=20623, https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/descarga.action?f_codigo_agc=21738, <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/inee/evaluaciones-internacionales/pirls/pirls-2021.html>, and <https://mobile.twitter.com/educalNEE> for examples.

^c See <https://youtu.be/TFodVOa2QY4> and https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/descarga.action?f_codigo_agc=20624 for examples.

^d See https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/descarga.action?f_codigo_agc=21641 and https://sede.educacion.gob.es/publiventa/descarga.action?f_codigo_agc=21637 for examples.

Over the course of primary education, students develop a general awareness of the communication practices necessary to live in 21st-century society. The main goal of Castilian language and literature instruction is for students to achieve competency in the linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in an integrated manner. In addition to introducing students to reading and understanding literary texts, the language curriculum includes the study of language itself. The starting point for linguistic education is the level of fluency that students have acquired at the beginning of primary education. The aim is to broaden this competency so students can participate in the various social spheres they will encounter.

Spain is a country historically characterized by a rich cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity is legally acknowledged in the Spanish Constitution of 1978 and in the Statutes of Autonomy of the 17 autonomous communities and the cities of Ceuta and Melilla, across which authority in Spain is distributed and administered territorially.¹⁶ The official language in Spain is Castilian Spanish and there are other official languages used in different autonomous communities. The language of instruction is Castilian except in communities with another official language, where two official languages are used during instruction. This is reflected in the different regional policies related to reading. The organic law establishes that students from autonomous communities with two official languages must achieve a similar level of competency in both of them.

Summary of National Curriculum

The Organic Law of Education, with the latest modifications made by LOMLOE in 2020, defines “curriculum” as a set of objectives, competencies, contents, pedagogical methods, and evaluation criteria of each of the provisions regulated by the law. The Ministry establishes common mandatory curriculum contents for all regions that account for 60 percent of the total instruction time. In the case of the autonomous communities with a co-official language, this percentage is 50 percent. Each autonomous community has the autonomy to develop the remaining curriculum content. The *National Core Curriculum for Pre-primary Education* was published in March 2014 and implemented in the fourth grade during the 2015–2016 academic year.¹⁷ The Castilian language and literature curriculum in primary education focuses on the development of the four basic skills of the language in an integrated approach: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The acquisition of these communicative skills happens through students’ reading and comprehension of different types of texts, as well as their reflection on these texts. The national curriculum content has been organized into blocks in an effort to bring order to the complexity of language learning. These blocks, developed throughout the six years of primary education, include:

- Oral communication—speaking and listening
- Written communication—reading
- Written communication—writing

- Knowledge of the language
- Literary education

The national curriculum outlines the blocks for all six years of primary education. Content related to reading is included in Block 2 and its contents are:

- Graphic resources in written communication
- Consolidation of literacy skills (i.e., reading and writing)
- Understanding of texts read aloud and silently
- Listening to different types of texts
- Understanding texts according to their typology
- Reading different types of texts (e.g., descriptive, persuasive, expository, instructional, and literary)
- Strategies for reading comprehension of texts (e.g., title, illustrations, keywords, chapters, rereading, predictions and verification, synthesis, text structure, text typology, context, dictionaries, global meaning of the text, main and secondary ideas, summary)
- Developing a taste for reading (e.g., reading habits and reading of different types of texts as a source of information, pleasure, and enjoyment)
- Identification and critical assessment of the message and values transmitted by the text
- Using the library to search for information and as a source of learning
- Selecting books according to personal taste
- School reading plan

The autonomous communities and schools develop and, if necessary, supplement the basic national curriculum according to their competencies.

Professional Development Requirements and Programs

Teacher Education Specific to Reading

With the exception of specialist teachers of foreign languages, music, physical education, and special needs education, generalist teachers teach language and literature at the primary school level. Beginning in 2010, the university degree requirement for primary school teachers was extended from three to four school years. The curriculum includes language and literature fundamentals, their pedagogy among the core subjects, other optional courses related to these disciplines, and a compulsory practicum. Qualified teachers obtain teaching positions through open competition at primary and secondary public schools or via a contract at private schools.^{18,19,20,21}

Additionally, as established in the education law in force, the educational authority has to provide resources to improve initial teacher education. Since one of the goals of this education

stage is the implementation of plans to promote reading, specific activities are organized to improve teachers' skills in this area.

Requirements for Ongoing Professional Development in Reading for Teachers

Based on education legislation, teachers have the right and the duty to participate in continuing professional development (CPD).²² In addition to postgraduate courses, education training centers at the national level and at the regional level may offer classroom workshops, online courses, support for teacher-initiated seminars and working groups, or a combination of all these options. In addition, teachers can participate in professional development activities organized by unions, associations, educational institutions, universities, etc., outside the state or regional teacher education network. Teachers in public education are eligible to receive financial incentives for participating in professional development activities every six years.

Monitoring Student Progress in Reading

External large-scale evaluation studies are well established in Spain. This type of assessment has varied over time, and with the previous modification of LOE made in 2013, external evaluations were introduced as a measure to improve the quality of the education system.²³ Originally, four nationwide evaluations in Grades 3, 6, 10, and 12 were planned. Further normative developments and LOMLOE have introduced a number of changes, and presently the situation is as follows:

- Grades 4 and 8: Diagnostic assessments are census-based and organized by the schools.
- Grade 12: Evaluations are only used for the purpose of university admission.
- General assessment of the education system: The National Institute for Educational Assessment (INEE), in collaboration with the autonomous communities, will design the framework and the basic methodological and scientific standards of the general assessment of the education system, and will carry out the evaluations that allow obtaining representative data, both of the students and the centers of the autonomous communities and the whole of the State. These assessments will deal with the competencies established in the curriculum and will be developed in primary and secondary education.

When PIRLS was administered in 2021, the national evaluation was census-based for third grade. The national evaluations had no academic consequences for students,²⁴ and had a formative and a diagnostic purpose. In addition to determining whether students had achieved the expected competencies and learning levels for personal and professional development, the evaluations can be used to help guide students in their school decisions based on their acquired knowledge and competencies. Also, these evaluations regulated the standards required in all of Spain to obtain certificates of completion at every stage. They also provided families, schools, and administrators with valuable information to make education decisions.

Primary school teachers are responsible for evaluating individual student progress. The evaluation of student achievement in reading and in other subjects is ongoing and considers student progress in all aspects of the curriculum. Teachers use the evaluation criteria specified for a content area as the basis for determining students' levels of competency. Primary schools use qualitative grades to inform students and their parents about their learning progress at the end of each term. When students' progress is inadequate, schools must adopt remedial measures as soon as the difficulties are detected. These measures are designed to guarantee the acquisition of essential skills so all students can progress within the education system.

Schools use assessment results in third or fourth grade to plan interventions to guarantee student achievement of key competencies in later grades of primary education. These results allow schools to evaluate instruction and teacher performance and to analyze, evaluate, and redirect the teaching methods used in Grades 1 to 3 or 4.

Special Reading Initiatives

The promotion of reading and the use of libraries through Educational Law 10/2007, of June 22, on Reading, Books, and Libraries²⁵ places special emphasis on carrying out activities related to reading in the classroom, designing school reading plans, developing and using school libraries, and using external resources. As mandated by the Organic Law of Education, education authorities have sponsored numerous promotional activities to encourage reading and to use school libraries as dynamic spaces for teaching and integrating information services.²⁶ The most effective practices for fostering reading and introducing students to books are systematic and ongoing (e.g., reading books; taking part in oral or written reading comprehension activities; exchanging meanings, opinions, and ideas about texts). Occasional activities (e.g., exhibitions, meetings with authors, reading promotion campaigns) reinforce literacy development but do not in themselves guarantee a habit of reading. The education law in force also considers support for students with special education needs. It is the responsibility of the education authorities to ensure necessary resources for students that require educational attention different from the standard. Curricular support or enrichment activities are implemented in schools for this reason. There are also special programs promoted by the government, such as the recent Program for Educational Guidance, Progress and Enrichment (PROA+),²⁷ and/or the autonomous communities.

Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

In Spain, primary schools/centers closed on March 14, 2020. After some isolated experiences were carried out by different education administrations in June 2020, face-to-face education was reinstated in September 2020 with special measures such as bubble groups, two meters of distance between students, reduction of student-teacher ratios by hiring more teachers, etc.

In the case of primary schools, all students attended class during the 2020–2021 academic year. There have been only specific confinements but not complete closures of schools.

Given the sudden lockdown situation that occurred in March 2020, teachers, students, leaders of schools and educational institutions, and parents did everything possible to adapt to the situation with the resources available. This included provision of virtual/online classes, sending printed materials to students' homes with the help of the municipalities, communicating with families by email or telephone, etc. In that difficult situation, the help from and collaboration with families was essential. All available means were used to respond to the situation in the best possible way.

There were a large number of online courses and guidelines to provide teaching staff with the required skills and tools to be able to carry on with their lessons online. Also, a variety of online resources was developed for teachers, families, and students to facilitate access to different resources, tools, and applications for online learning. One such resource was *Aprendo en casa*,^e a web portal with information about different aspects of learning at home, such as general information about COVID-19;^f the well-being of students, teachers, and families;^g learning and assessment;^h and teaching and learning resources.ⁱ

New television programs were specially designed to support children's education during school closure. The most significant one was the result of the collaboration between the Spanish Ministry of Education and Radio Television Española (RTVE). Launched on March 23, it was called *Aprendemos en casa* and consisted of special programming for five hours each day, with educational content to support 6- to 16-year-old students with no connectivity or equipment. There was also a collaboration between the Ministry of Education and the national channel Clan TV to provide content for students ages 4 to 10.

In the case of students with special needs, the help of volunteers and the municipalities and collaboration with families were vital to give those students the best possible support during the lockdown.

^e See <https://aprendoencasa.educacion.es/> for more information about the web portal.

^f See <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/destacados/covid19/indice.html> for more information.

^g See <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/destacados/covid19/cuidado-y-bienestar.html> for more information.

^h See <https://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/destacados/covid19/calendario-ensenanzasyevaluacion.html> for more information.

ⁱ See <http://www.educacionyfp.gob.es/destacados/covid19/recursos.html> and <https://intef.es/Noticias/medidas-covid-19-recursos-para-el-aprendizaje-en-linea/> for more information.

Impact of the Pandemic on Student Learning

There have been different evaluations of the impact of COVID-19 on education and well-being. For example, the Ministry of Education has published a report analyzing the current education situation in Spain as a result of the pandemic, elaborated on by the State School Council.²⁸ Other significant studies on the effects of COVID-19 have been conducted by the National Statistics Institute of Spain,^j UNICEF-Spain,^k the COTEC Foundation,^l the Atlantis Project,^m and the SM Foundation.ⁿ

Policy and Practice Changes

The pandemic has encouraged teacher education in digital skills to make them more prepared for the challenges they have faced and are still facing. It has led to an increased offer of specific training in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and has also underpinned the education reform that was already underway before the pandemic. In the meantime, the new education law entered into force at the end of 2020 (LOMLOE), modifying LOE (still running) and improving not only aspects that previously had been detected but also those that have been further highlighted within the pandemic. The Ministry of Education currently is working on the new curricular design that will be effective from the 2022–2023 academic year onward, in which digital literacy, equity, and diversity will play a key role.

Impact of the Pandemic on PIRLS 2021

Fortunately, the pandemic did not affect Spain’s PIRLS data collection. Some classes were split in two to keep students safely distanced according to COVID protocol. This meant that students had to be gathered from different classes and put together in a bigger space on the day of the administration. Schools that did not have the space had either two administration days or two test administrators sent to the school.

^j The National Statistics Institute of Spain conducted a survey on life conditions (https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176807&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735976608) and a survey on equipment and use of information and communication technologies in households (https://www.ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736176741&menu=resultados&idp=1254735976608#itabs-1254736194579).

^k UNICEF-Spain conducted a survey on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the most vulnerable children: reimagining reconstruction in terms of children’s rights (https://www.unicef.es/sites/unicef.es/files/comunicacion/COVID_infanciavulnerable_unicef.pdf) and a survey to find out teachers’ opinions regarding COVID-19 (<https://www.unicef.es/educa/blog/docentes-frente-al-coronavirus>).

^l The COTEC Foundation is a private nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote innovation as an engine for economic and social development. The foundation conducted a survey called “COVID-19 and education: Problems, responses, and scenarios I and II” (<https://cotec.es/proyecto/educacion-y-covid-19>).

^m The Atlantis Project is composed of a group of professionals from different sectors (education centers, university student departments, groups of advisors and counselors, entities that collaborate with families, Ministries of Education of different autonomous communities, etc.) interested in generating an integrated network of education innovation. The ultimate goal is to support the education community with focused professional development to improve educational success. The group published a COVID-19 investigation report (<http://www.proyectoatlantida.eu/wordpress/resumen-y-recomendaciones-covid19>).

ⁿ The SM Foundation is a nonprofit educational institution focused on the challenge of improving education in the different countries, cultures, and contexts in which it is present. The foundation conducted a study called “We go back to class: The impact of confinement on education” (<https://www.fundacion-sm.org/investigacion/informe-volvemos-a-clase>).

The strong COVID protocols in place meant that schools had to take more time to prepare the sessions but did not present any complications. The response rate did not appear to be affected significantly due to the pandemic; it seemed to be similar with previous PIRLS administrations.

Suggested Readings

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- ³ *Constitución Española* [Spanish Constitution]. (1978). Retrieved from <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1978-31229>
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- ⁶ *Real Decreto 126/2014, de 28 de febrero, por el que se establece el currículo básico de la Educación Primaria* [RD 126/2014 establishing the curriculum for primary education]. (2014). Retrieved from <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2014/03/01/pdfs/BOE-A-2014-2222.pdf>

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