

Primary education in the uk and spain



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Primary Education is an important topic to be discussed and analysed, since it is the basis of our society's formation, being thus decisive for our children's future. This essay is entitled ' Primary Education in the U. K. and Spain: a comparison' and it focuses on explaining some of the main matters concerning both systems. It is first of all focused on explaining some topics related to primary education in the United Kingdom including two paragraphs. The first one a historical background, proves to be the base of today's structure which may help us clarify today's structure, which the topic of the second paragraph. This is followed by two clone paragraphs applied to Spanish primary education. The last two paragraphs concentrate on the use and importance of ICT in primary education in both systems. The essay is concluded establishing an overall comparison between both systems.

According to Denis Haye in his book Primary Education: the Key Concepts, British primary education and its structure find its roots deep in history, in the middle ages. It has been stated by some historians that English education began in AD 597 with the establishment of the cathedral of Canterbury by St Augustine. In the end of the seventeenth century education belonged to the church which promoted Christian knowledge, by creating its own schools. At the same time there were pioneers such as Robert Raikes, Charles Gordon and the welsh Charles of Bala, who believed in a connection between social action and education. The first ' publicly funded schools' appeared in the mid-nineteenth century and aimed to offer Christian education to poor children. From this time on, the control of education starts switching little by little from the church to the state. Furthermore, between 1846 and 1848 in Wales, the ' Welsh Education Committee and the Cambrian

Society' both evolving into national schools, were formed. In the nineteenth century it is important to highlight the education act of 1872, since it led to many advances in primary education, not only affecting the 'labouring classes' as was happening in other parts of the country. The 1944's education act was decisive because from this time on, education was free of charge and relied on 'voluntary provision'. It is known by the introduction of three kinds of schools: grammar schools, modern schools and Technical schools. The year 1988, saw the introduction of the national curriculum including a selection of subjects such as maths, science English and religious education. From 2010, teaching foreign languages is also a compulsory part of the curriculum.

In order to explain the base of today's primary education in the UK, it is necessary to go back to the twentieth century, when there were many important changes in primary education. Among these, stands out the introduction of the national curriculum in English mainstream schools. In this author's words, during the twentieth century, it was also thought to be decisive an 'agreement about the need for a general education for children up to the age of 11, this being followed by a subject-specific teaching up to the age of 16 and a selection of specialist subjects thereafter'. Due to the national curriculum, from the beginning of the 21st century most primary schools in the UK currently accept children from 5 to 11 years old. As Denis states, there is also a tiny number of schools designated 'deemed middle (ages 8 to 12 or 9 to 13)' and 'first' when they educate children from 5 to 8 or 9.

To explain today's structure it is also important to focus on the types of schools that can currently be found in the UK. As the Department of Education reports, they can be divided into 3 main groups: mainstream state schools, specialist schools, state schools with particular characteristics and independent schools. To the first group belong Community schools, which are often run by a 'local authority' and aim 'to develop strong links with the local community, providing services like childcare and adult learning classes'. Trust schools as well as Voluntary-controlled and voluntary-aided schools are owned by a charitable foundation, which 'employs the staff and sets the admissions criteria'. Academies, faith schools, city technology colleges, community and foundation special schools, grammar schools and maintained boarding schools can be found in the second group. The third group is formed by Independent schools which have their own 'admission policies and curriculum'.

Spanish primary education, as the rest of the developed nations, it finds its roots in the XIX century. Many factors can be identified as those which influenced the rise during this century of specifically educative establishments aiming to reach a growing proportion of the population. The Apparition of the national states is indeed the most notorious factor, since it puts the Old Regime to an end while at the same time instruction is seen as a mean reinforcing its unity. Thus, education is considered to be from this time on, a public affair that has to be organised and controlled by the state which regulates its legal and administrative processes. To understand the current Spanish primary education, it is important to focus on three relevant education laws, well-known for their impact on the system. The commonly

referred as 'the Moyano Law' was decreed in 1857 in a context of socio-economic crisis, This law consisted on a legislative initiative carried out by the politician Carlos Moyano whose main aim was to improve the deplorable condition of education at that time, decreasing thus the analphabetism average in the country. Education was divided in two stages: elementary (6-12 years old) and superior (9-12). Primary education was compulsory until the age of 12 and free of charge for those who could not afford it. According to the web page State Univeristy. com, it also marked the foundation of privet schools in Spain at that time owned by the Catholic Church. Just one year after the 1944's British education act, the 1945's law was decreed in the historical context of post-war and in the ideological context of national Catholicism. Its main objective was to orientate the student in accordance with their aptitudes to the working life. Born in the context of democracy, the 1990's law of education aimed to impart an equal instruction in order to allow pupils to acquire basic cultural elements, to wit: oral expression, reading, writing and arithmetic calculi. It divided education into tree periods: the first stage (from 6 to 8 years old), second (8-10) and third (10-12).

To explain the structure of today's primary education in Spain, it is important to go back to the year 2006, when the fundamental law of education also known as 'LOE' or 'Ley Organica de Educaci3n' was decreed. This law established a compulsory education from 6 to 16 year-old children. While in the UK children start their primary education at the age of 5, Spanish children start going to school at the age of 6. Also it is important to mention that most pupils attend pre-schools from 3 to 5 years of age. Most of these 'nursery schools' in most cases belong to the same centre of education.

According to the famous online encyclopedia known as 'Wikipedia', primary education in Spain can be divided into three cycles: the first cycle includes pupils from 6 to 7 years of age, the second 8-9 and the third 10 to 11.

Focusing on the Spanish national curriculum, compulsory subjects are: Spanish language and Literature, Art, Mathematics, Physical Education, Natural and social sciences both included in a subject called 'Conocimiento Del Medio' and English or French. Many state schools have an agreement with the British Council making the study of English compulsory from the age of 6. Although in the United Kingdom there are several types of schools, in Spain most of them can be grosso modo divided into three groups: public or state schools, private schools or semi-private schools also referred in Spanish as 'concertado' schools. As happens in the UK, state schools are funded by the government and therefore they are free for those living in the country. These cannot be freely selected, as the children are allocated the closest school to their home. According to Maurice Hamlin in his web page practicalspain.com, semi-private or concertado schools are similar to the British's grant maintained schools since they 'receive subsidies by the government' being education thus, provided free of charge. Most of them are run by a religious order e. g. the Salesians of Don Bosco, and pupils usually wear uniforms. Private and International schools in Spain are becoming more popular. According to the Article 'Living and Working in Spain' they provide a more relaxed environment offering a wider range of subjects and an international approach.

Another important aspect to be analysed, is the use of the information and communication technologies in British and Spanish Schools. According to the

British Department of Education, information and communication technologies (ICT) in schools can ‘ improve the quality of teaching, learning and management in schools and so help raise standards’. In order to evaluate the use of ITC in primary schools The Education and Training inspectorate published in 2002 a report in which some of the main strengths of the use of new technologies are highlighted. As this report states, integrating the ICT in the national curriculum supports both teaching and learning. The quality of planning for ICT is proved to be ‘ satisfactory or better in 70 % of the schools inspected’ and in most schools the quality of teaching and pupil’s experiences are proved to be satisfactory, including ‘ a wide range of ICT applications among which stands out the use of word processing. Learning to use Microsoft Word’s spell check, digital cameras, create an maintain a web page, sending a forwarding e-mails, burning a cd, as well as learning how to control ‘ multi-media and database software’ are indeed but a few other applications in schools. As this study proves, ICT has also a very positive reaction on children by increasing their motivation towards learning in general; as the report states ‘ children have high levels of interest and enthusiasm in their work in ICT being motivated by the inclusion of ICT in their lessons’.

It is a fact that there are an increasing number of schools that are incorporating ICT not only as a subject in the national curriculum but as a way to make the other lessons lighter and more amusing to children. According to an article written by Sophie Borland and published in the newspaper ‘ The Daily Mail’ there are even some schools in the UK who have decided to ‘ turn a P. E. lesson into a Wii class’ in order to motivate and ‘

boost their enthusiasm for sport'. To do this, Borland says, the newly approved by Department of Health 'Wifit Plus' is used in the class involving a variety of fitness activities. Even though this article received very positive reviews there are some people like the spokesman of the Department of Children, Schools and Families who states 'there is always a place for innovative exercises if they do not replace traditional ones. Another school in the UK, according to the education editor Graeme Paton, is to include the use of the so-called social network 'Twitter' as part of their curriculum. All children, the author states, will be taught how to use webcams, podcasts as well as blogs. Pupils in this school 'will be expected to develop an understanding of different ways to communicate online. Improving keyboard skills, using websites such as the online dictionary Wikipedia and learning how to employ spell-checkers will also form part of the biggest overhaul of lessons for 20 years'.

As happens in the United Kingdom, Spanish new generation of children are marked by the information and communication technologies which are gaining each year a greater importance in the education policy. The inclusion of the ICT in Spanish education system finds its roots in the European initiative 'e-Europe' which motivated the creation of the 'Special committee of study for the Development of the Information Society in Spain (CDSI)' by the Ministry of Science and Technology. Some of the conclusions of the CDSI can be applied to education. According to this committee 'the use of the new technologies should be present in all subjects as part of the national curriculum and in the relationship between teachers and pupils and all the members of the educative community. The presence of ICT in Spanish

primary schools can be clearly perceived in the autonomous community Extremadura which is considered to be a pioneer in this field. According to the secretary of ICT in the education polity of the autonomous government of Extremadura 'Junta de Extremadura', this region started the project of including the information and communication technologies in education in the year 1999, when the 'Strategic Plan for the development of technology in society' was presented and the educational sector was considered to be the main pillar of that development. This moment marks the appearance of ICT in Extremaduran classrooms. What is probably the most outstanding fact is that, this region decided to develop free software equally configurable and adaptable. A new operative system called 'gnu/LinEx' which would offer an enormous variety of applications in order to fulfill the necessities of all kind of users and a great diversity of tools for its use inside the classroom. Furthermore, in the academic year 2002/2003, an initiative was carried out in all Extremaduran high schools which consisted on transforming regular classrooms into 'technological classrooms' by introducing a computer for each two students. Also, today's schools in the region have at least one electronic blackboard, together with a projector, a computer and an interactive pad. The creation of the specific operative system LinEx must be adapted to a didactic and pedagogical extent. This is why a new variation of this operative system has been installed in all the schools of Extremadura. According to the autonomous community's government 'LinEx Schools' as it is called, 'offers the pupil an friendly and motivating environment adapted to their intellectual development'. Together with LinEx, it is important to highlight the development of the educative platform 'Rayuela'. As if it was a social network, this platform is an advanced system of information that

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allows a real-time communication between teachers and parents by using the Internet. It also has a database with allows all Extremenian students to have a single Digital Academic Record until they finish high school. Thus, teachers are able to access all the information about the educative course of their pupils (calcifications, assistance and observances) in order to offer them an individualized treatment.

To conclude this essay, I must say that as both educational systems belong to a globalised world and concretely to the European Union, they share indeed some similitudes and the two last paragraphs are an example of this statement. Among other minor differences British primary education probably differs from the Spanish one in what in my opinion, is its main strength: the diversity of schools offered which allows parents to have a greater choice.

2. 500 words.