

**RURAL SCHOOL IN SPAIN:  
BETWEEN COMPENSATORY EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Education legislation in Spain has been a constant shift between the ruling political parties. Seven school laws have been legislated throughout 35 years of democracy, and that is one of the main issues Spanish education has faced in order to achieve adequate quality levels. And rural schools have not remained unaffected to this continuous swinging; basically, rural schools have been legislated from the perspective of compensatory education, whereas the vision of inclusive education within a framework of a diverse context aimed to effectively reduce barriers to learning and participation has been scarcely approached. In order to achieve that goal, political stability is needed, a major State Pact which is not foreseen at the present time.

**KEY WORDS**

Compensatory education; Rural school; Inclusive education; Education policy.



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# Rural School in Spain: Between Compensatory Education and Inclusive Education

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a complex process that plays a vital role in our society. Education is a basic human right, a right of equality without any exceptions which is essential for the exercise of all other human rights. And school has become the institution that serves the educational role with the aim of fostering freedom and personal autonomy. Regardless of the child's context, personal situation, background or personal story, the school is a space where one goes to learn, a meeting space for individual and collective learning.

To ensure the success of this complex process, and along with that guaranteeing equality of opportunities, successive Spanish Governments have been legislating from the 1970s onwards, having designed and enforced different varied policies and programmes based on the concepts of compensatory education and compensatory pedagogy. And it is under that political framework that the Spanish rural school has been planned, although it is true that the educational purpose of compensatory education has not always taken primacy over the concept of a socio-cultural concern aimed to meet alleged shortcomings in relation to education of inhabitants of rural areas. In spite of all that, the foundations of compensatory education in rural areas did not cease to pursue equality of opportunities in relation to education.

This paper consist of two parts; the first one sets the Spanish rural school within the framework of compensatory education as it is referred to in the

different education laws passed in Spain in recent years, while in the second one the current situation of the rural school—between compensatory education and inclusive education—is addressed.

## COMPENSATORY EDUCATION AND THE RURAL SCHOOL IN SPAIN AT THE END OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

The term ‘compensatory education’ first appeared in Spain in the late seventies as a result of the guidelines disseminated by the Council of Europe in 1977. However, it was not until the appearance of the Decree 1174/83 of April 27<sup>th</sup> that compensatory education became officially relevant. It was understood as a kind of preferential attention to some groups of individuals who were in conditions of inequality regarding the priorities the school system offered them. In fact, a system of checks and balances was proposed in order to redress baseline education inequalities by offsetting them through the so-called ‘positive discrimination’.

The Organic Law on the Right to Education (LODE), 8/195 of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, was the first law from the democratic era to recognise all Spanish people’s right to education and the fact that in no case the exercise of that right might be limited by social, moral, racial, financial, or residential reasons. The rural school achieved, therefore, recognition within the legal framework.

The Organic Law of General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE) of October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1990, allowed progress in the fight against inequality and discrimination; thus, the whole Title V is devoted to setting up the basic compensatory principles for those inequalities. Other positive discrimination measures that make the principle of equality of opportunities effective were also provided, taking control of the preferences that have to be attended in Infant Education pupils, such as financial, geographical or any other type of disadvantages. The provision of the additional human and material resources necessary to catering the school centres where the student body in the aforementioned situation concurs is also covered.

The Royal Decree 299/1996, of February 28<sup>th</sup>, on the Reorganisation of the Actions aimed at the Compensation of Inequalities in Education, developing Title V of the LOGSE, establishes the scope, target groups, objectives, principles, and the action and evaluation methods of the Compensatory Education programme; in Chapter III, Section 2, Articles 18, 19 and 20, compensatory



education actions devoted to the hospitalised population are covered. The appropriateness of maintaining compensatory education measures for the student population of rural schools is also included. But, according to Santamaría (2014, p. 7-8), actually the LOGSE «holds a negative image of education in rural areas, which is generally seen as education of a lower quality; and, in order to ensure quality education and equality of opportunities in rural areas, scholarization of basic education pupils in other municipalities was free-of-charge». That resulted in unfavourable consequences regarding the quality of education in rural areas, such as the rapid spread of Group Rural Schools (in Spanish it is called Colegio Rural Agrupado – CRA) in order to ensure, according to Santamaría, that all schools had the qualified specialist teachers the LOGSE refers to (Physical Education, Music, and English Language), which contributed also to a more blurred teacher accountability and to the closing of small schools, since school enrolment decreases due to a lower age-span 9 years, from 3 to 11 less than expected.

As for the Organic Law of Participation, Assessment and Management of Schools (LOPEGCE) 9/1995 of November 20<sup>th</sup>, it also refers to rural schools in terms of compensatory education—lacking its own identity—since the organisational paradigm supported on it was that of the graded school.

The Regulation of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1999, which regulates compensatory education proceedings in school centres supported with public funds (BOE, July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1999), aims to govern in accordance with the first final provision of Royal Decree 299/1996, following a report from the State School Board. Rural schools continue to be contemplated under the framework of compensatory education.

## SPANISH RURAL SCHOOLS UNDER THE PRISM OF COMPENSATORY EDUCATION IN THE EARLY 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Once fully entered in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, different laws keep on referring to the concept of compensatory education, and the perspective of inclusion is never planned.

The Organic Law on the Quality in Education (LOCE), 10/2002, of December 23<sup>rd</sup> deals in its first section with equality of opportunities in order to achieve quality education. In Article 40 we read that, «with the aim of securing the individual right to quality education, public authorities will



develop the necessary measures and provide adequate resources and support so as to balance the effects of situations of social disadvantage that may interfere in the achievement of education and learning objectives planned for each grade of the education system». In this regard, according to Escudero (2003, p. 2), «Compensatory Education has also tried to give an answer to the reality of those students who, either for baseline risk conditions that remained unattended, or perhaps due to other circumstances that may arise afterwards, they end up showing behaviours and achieving results that do not adjust to the common pupil pattern or model demanded, nurtured and valued at school».

However, in Article 41 we find, once again, rural education is referred to as a question of compensatory education: «special procedures shall be established by Education Authorities in those school centres or geographical areas where, due to the pertinent population's socio-economic and socio-cultural characteristics, a differentiated educational intervention—which should pay special attention to equality of opportunities in rural areas—is needed. In such cases, the necessary materials and teaching staff resources will be provided, as well as the technical and human support needed to achieve compensation in education.»

As for the Organic Law of Education (LOE), 2/2006 of May 23<sup>rd</sup>, within its Title II, 'Equity in Education', the whole of its second chapter is dedicated to compensatory measures for inequalities in education. In that chapter, more specifically in Article 80, it is stated that «[...] in order to put into practice the principle of equality in the exercise of education rights, the public Authorities will carry out compensatory measures with disadvantaged people, groups and regions, and provide the necessary economic resources and support». Articles 82 and 83 refer to equality of opportunities of students of the rural world, and the right to subsidies and study grants to ensure the equality of all people in the exercise of their right to education, especially students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

Finally, at the end of the first fifteen years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Spanish education legislation, through Article 6a of the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE) 8/2013 of December 9<sup>th</sup> presents a series of programmes of territorial cooperation among state and autonomous Administrations in which geographical distribution of economic resources follows criteria based on the singularity of these programmes, which is aimed at fostering equality of opportunities. Depopulation is especially valued, as

are «geographic dispersion of population, insularity, and those special needs inherent to schooling in rural areas».

According to Santamaría (2014), educational planning in rural areas (infant education, primary education, high school, adult school centres...) should particularly address the guidelines stated in the Law on the Sustainable Development of the Rural Environment 45/2007 from December 13<sup>rd</sup> (BOE 14-12-07), and those of the Royal Decree 752/2010 from June 4<sup>th</sup>, in which the first Rural Sustainable Development Programme (PDR), for period 2010-2014. (BOE 11-6-10) was passed. Santamaría (2014, p. 16) highlights that:

In relation to LOE, in the LOMCE, specifically in Article 28, most references to Education (school success, attention to diversity, improvement of population's education...) and Vocational Training are no longer included, which proves to be incoherent with Article 28 itself, and it can have horrible consequences in rural development. Since the framework of PDR of each Autonomous Community is this Royal Decree, in which education provided by education centres is practically left out, Autonomous Administrations may retract—or not reinforce—rural education network.

## RURAL SCHOOLS: STILL HALFWAY BETWEEN COMPENSATORY EDUCATION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

If we pick up on the idea of *schools for all* described in the Salamanca Statement (1994) and developed afterwards by several authors such as Stainback and Stainback (1999) or Booth and Ainscow (2002), inclusive education encompasses different concepts, such as school integration, response to special education needs, compensatory education and attention to diversity. According to Araque and Barrio (2010, p. 7), the perspective of inclusion transcends compensatory education because «that one frequently adopts exclusionary practice, for example, taking some students out of the classroom on the basis of their inherent characteristics, and using basic or elementary focused curricula, thus running the risk of reproducing those inequalities it seeks to balance». Contrary to that, in the case of inclusive education the existing differences among pupils—that is, diversity—are the fundamental resource. The core idea is to propose inclusive educational practices within a diverse context in order to reduce barriers to learning and participation.



In the same vein, Bonal, Rambla, Calderón, and Pros (2005) developed a scale of the educational inclusion strategies deployed by the different autonomous Administrations of Spain including four different grades:

The first grade of educational inclusion would consist of tools derived from the compensatory education programme, or from the strategies about attention to diversity, which have already been put into practice in the whole State. The second grade would consist of co-ordinating those tools through more general regional frameworks. The third one is devoted to intensification through participation of both the families and other agents of the education community, (for example: connecting intercultural education with parents' schools, experimenting learning communities, or creating education projects in the cities). It is only in the fourth grade that some quantitative differences appear, due to the fact that in the Vask Country intensive compensation concur with its own programme of additional aid for schooling and also with project of co-ordinating the systems of Vocational, Occupational and Continuous training (p. 16).

Spanish school entails a very diverse reality, and according to the work of Bonal et al. (2005) we are now halfway into the deployment of inclusion, since a biggest financial investment and a more effective co-ordination of resources was required. The rural school has been no exception to this problem, despite being historically linked to a discourse that considers that rural schools are inclusive schools *per se*.

It is true that rural schools are education centres where all the pupils in the town are hosted; there is heterogeneity of age in their classroom, a more close relationship with the community, and due to its handy size more effective decision-making may be ensured. However, all of these characteristics are not a guarantee of inclusion by themselves. The current law on Spanish education (Organic Law 8/2013) does not include practices which are indeed inclusive, in spite of what is stated in Article 1:

b) Equity, which should ensure the equality of opportunities for the full development of human personality through education; educational inclusion; equality of rights and opportunities that help to overcome any type of discrimination, and the universal access to education, and which should act as a key element in levelling personal, cultural, financial and social inequalities, especially those derived from any type of disability.

Spanish rural schools are still between compensatory education and inclusive education; a wider implementation needs to be applied to the latter so that the rural school can be referred to as an inclusive school.

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