Curriculum, subjects, number of hours

Curriculum refers to the regulation of the elements influencing the teaching and learning processes for each type of provision. It comprises the following elements:

- objectives of each type of provision and educational stage
- skills, or students’ abilities to implement the contents of each type of provision and educational stage in an integrated manner, in order to achieve a correct execution of activities and effective complex problem solving
- contents, that is, the set of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes which contribute to the achievement of the objectives of each type of provision and educational stage as well as to the acquisition of the skills
- teaching methodology, comprising the description of teaching practices as well as the organisation of teachers’ work
- assessable learning standards and outcomes
- criteria to assess the degree of acquisition of the skills and the achievement of the objectives of each type of provision and educational stage.

Both the 2013 Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education and the regulations developing it and establishing the basic curriculum for primary education in 2014 use, for the first time, the term key skills, referring to knowledge put into practice.

In line with the Recommendation 2006/962/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 18 December 2006, the basic curriculum for primary education identifies seven key skills that are of the utmost importance for the well-being of European societies, economic growth and innovation. It also describes the essential knowledge, abilities and attitudes attached to each one of the skills:

- linguistic communication
- mathematical and basic skills in science and technology
- digital skills
- learning to learn
- social and civic skills
- sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
- cultural awareness and expression.

For skills to be efficiently acquired and effectively integrated into the curriculum, integrated learning activities must be designed, which would allow students to move towards the acquisition of more than one skill at a time, since many of them overlap and interlock. There is not a one-to-one relationship between the teaching of certain areas or subjects and the development of some specific skills. Each area or subject contributes to the development of different skills and each skill is in turn acquired
through work in the various areas or subjects.

The following skills must be strengthened in the curriculum of primary education:

- linguistic communication
- mathematical and basic skills in science and technology
- reading comprehension, oral and written expression, audiovisual communication, information and communication technologies (ICT), entrepreneurship and civic and constitutional education, without prejudice to the fact that they could be given specific attention in some of the subjects.

Primary education is organised into three sets of subjects:

- core subjects: they ensure the knowledge and skills allowing the acquisition of a solid education and successfully continue through the following stages in those subjects that must be common for all students
- specific subjects: they allow greater autonomy when establishing the subjects being offered, as well as the number of hours and the contents of the subjects
- subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities: the education authorities and educational institutions offer subjects of their own design or broaden core or specific subjects.

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training sets the basic curriculum with the purpose of assuring a common training for all the pupils. It also determines the minimum number of teaching hours corresponding to the contents of the set of core subjects, which, calculated globally for the whole stage of primary education, shall not be less than 50% of the total number of teaching hours generally established by each education authority for the stage. Possible extensions of school hours which might be established are not taken into account.

The annual average of teaching hours in primary education in 2017 was 792 hours (Education at a Glance 2017: OECD Indicators [1]).

The education authorities of the Autonomous Communities completed the basic curriculum of the new primary education provision in 2014 and are responsible for:

- setting the maximum number of teaching hours, as well as the number of hours corresponding to the contents of specific subjects and the subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities
- completing the contents of core subjects, establishing the contents of specific subjects and the subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities
- recommending teaching methodologies to schools
- complementing the evaluation criteria for core and specific subjects, as well as establishing the evaluation criteria and learning standards for the subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities.

The curriculum of primary education is organised into successive levels of concretion, in which they progressively adapt to the specificities of the school environment and the pupils being attended. For more information, see Administration and governance at local and/or institutional level [2].

Accordingly, schools also play an active role, developing and adapting the curriculum to the pupils' needs and to their environment. To this end, they prepare a series of tools for formulating their pedagogic and curricular organisation:

- school development plan, prepared by the management team and including the curricular
application of the education authority
- yearly general programme, drawn up by the management team
- didactic programmes, designed by teachers
- written paper at the end of the school year, collecting and evaluating the school activities and running.

The educational community takes part in the preparation of these documents through the respective government and teaching coordination bodies of the school. The preparation of the school development plan and of the yearly general programme correspond to the management team, according to the criteria and proposals of the school mixed-membership governing bodies. For more information, see Administration and governance at local and/or institutional level [2].

**Educational provision in primary education**

In primary education, the following subjects are offered during the 6 years into which it is organised:

- **Core subjects (studied every year):**
  - Natural Sciences
  - Social Sciences
  - Spanish Language and Literature
  - Mathematics
  - First Foreign Language.

- **Specific subjects (studied every year):**
  - Physical Education
  - Religion or Social and Civic Values (to be chosen by parents or tutors)
  - One subject from:
    - Arts Education
    - Second Foreign Language
    - Religion
    - Social and Civic Values.

- **Subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities (depending on the regulation established by each education authority):**
  - Co-Official Language and Literature, which has the same status as the area of Spanish Language and Literature
  - areas from the set of specific subjects that have not been taken by the student or areas to be determined.

Thus, students take:

- core and specific subjects established: they are compulsory for students. They must choose at least one of the specific subjects that are optional and that have been established by the relevant education authority and the specific school
- Co-Official Language and Literature: they study it within the set of subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities, although they may be exempt from studying or being evaluated in it provided the conditions specified in the relevant regional regulations are met
- subjects that are freely structured by the Autonomous Communities: they may study one or several subjects from the set, depending on the programme established by each education authority and each educational institution.

Teaching hours per subject in primary education (percentage of the total number of hours of compulsory education). 2017
## Teaching methods and materials

### Teaching methods

The **teaching methodology** is the set of strategies, procedures and actions consciously and thoughtfully organised and planned by teachers with the aim of making student learning and the attainment of the stated objectives possible. It comprises the description of teaching practices as well as the organisation of teachers’ work.

The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training establishes the methodological principles that must guide the teaching practice in primary education:

- attention to pupils' diversity, prevention of learning difficulties and development of appropriate reinforcement mechanisms to tackle with such difficulties
- development of reading comprehension, oral and written expression, audiovisual communication and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and valued-based education
- devotion of daily time to reading in class, as a mean for promoting an adequate reading habit among pupil
- Spanish or the relevant Co-Official Language will only be used as a support in the foreign language learning process. Priority will be given to oral comprehension and expression.

In the case of the teaching and evaluation of the foreign language for students with special needs, particularly those with oral expression difficulties, flexibility measures and alternative methods, which
in no case will be taken into account to lower the grades obtained, must be established.

The **education authorities** are responsible for making methodological recommendations to educational institutions within their remit, expanding and specifying these methodological principles, within the limits set by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training.

Within their pedagogic autonomy, **schools** are in charge of defining the teaching methods in the classroom, according to the said pedagogic principles. They also decide on curricular materials and didactic resources.

**Every teacher** can make their own methodological decisions, which must respect the agreements made at school level and what is established by the relevant education authorities.

**Curricular materials and teaching resources**

The **edition and adoption** of textbooks and other teaching materials:

1. do not require the previous authorisation by the education authority
2. must be adapted to the scientific rigour adequate for the pupils' age group and to the approved curriculum set by the Autonomous Community
3. must reflect and encourage respect for the constitutional principles, values, freedoms, rights and duties, as well as the principles and values compiled by the Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education and the Organic Act on comprehensive protection measures against gender violence (2004).

The textbooks **selection process** follows some guidelines in all the education institutions:

1. Pedagogical Coordination Commission of each school: it prepares a report with the most appropriate textbooks. This report is supervised by the School Board and by the Teachers Assembly
2. teachers are responsible for the final decision on these books choice
3. if the School Board does not agree with the teachers' decision, they can make their own suggestions to the Teachers Assembly, for them to be considered.

The **supervision** of textbooks and other curricular materials is part of the ordinary process of inspection carried out by the Education Authority on all the elements composing the teaching and learning process.

Families **pay for textbooks and school materials**. This funding comes exclusively from private sources, supplementing public expenditure. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, however, through the Sectoral Committee for Education, promotes the **free loan** of textbooks and other curricular materials for basic education in publicly-funded educational institutions. For more information, see [Sectoral Committee for Education](#).

In addition, there is State, regional and municipal **assistance** for acquiring the material aimed at pupils of publicly-funded schools. For more information, see [Early childhood and school education funding](#).

Finally, in Spain, pupils' homework outside school hours is not regulated in any official document; it is up to each teacher to organise it.
Information and Communication Technologies (ICT):

- must play a fundamental role in producing the methodological change required in order to improve educational quality
- the education authorities are in charge of providing public schools with all the necessary IT infrastructure with the goal of assuring its incorporation into the educational processes, emphasising the need to integrate ICT into the classroom through every curricular area (2013 Act on the Improvement of the Quality of Education).

Within the framework of the Plan for Digital Culture in School of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, the Espacio Procomún Educativo [7] is developed, intended for educational and learning purposes, mainly by the teaching community and students, but also by the general public.

‘Procomún’:

- facilitates access to the repository of open educational resources (OER) of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and the Autonomous Communities
- gathers teaching materials classified through metadata (LOM-ES) in order to ensure standardisation, in line with the curriculum for non-university education
- materials are ready to be used directly in the classroom or to be modified and adapted to different contexts or needs
- download formats favour integration into Learning Management System (LMS) platforms.

These OER are under open license (Creative Commons España), which allows free access, as well as their use, modification and redistribution by others without any restriction or with limited restrictions.

The most significant element of ‘Procomún’ is faceted search, which is characterised by the following:

- information retrieval systems that enable searches based on natural or iterated reasoning
- the possibility of searching in context, since, when selecting an educational content, information on related contents coming from other sources to which they are linked is shown.

Regarding digital educational materials, the authoring tool ‘eXelearning’ is available for teachers:

- it facilitates interested teachers the creation of their own materials according to their needs
- it is an easy-to-use and open-source authoring tool that enables to adapt the materials to teachers’ and students’ needs.

DID YOU FIND WHAT YOU WERE LOOKING FOR?

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