**UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA**

**Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación**

# Comparative study between United Kingdom education system and Spain education system

**Fátima Flores Pérez**

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# COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN UNITED KINGDOM EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SPAIN EDUCATION SYSTEM

**Resumen:** En este trabajo, se hace un estudio comparativo entre los sistemas educativos de Reino Unido y España, en lo que respecta a la Educación Infantil. Además, se hace una investigación sobre las diferentes corrientes educativas que surgieron conforme la educación para los más pequeños, tales como el Funcionalismo o el Progresismo entre otros. Por otra parte, he realizado una búsqueda sobre las primeras corrientes pedagógicas que surgieron con relación a la educación infantil y como cada una de ellas proponía el trabajo con los niños. Para comprender lo mejor posible las educaciones de estos países europeos, se encuentran redactados los momentos más importantes de la educación infantil a lo largo de la historia inglesa y española. Con lo que respecta al estudio de ambos sistemas educativos, se ha dividido en dos apartados para su mejor comprensión: en primer lugar, he comparado la organización de las etapas de la educación infantil entre ambos países y en segundo lugar he redactado los curriculum con los que estos países trabajan la educación infantil.

**Palabras clave:** Sistemas educativos, Infancia, Reino Unido, España, Estudio Comparativo.

**Abstract**: In this paper, I have made a comparative study of educational systems in the UK and Spain, with regard to Early Childhood Education. In addition, there is research on the different educational theories that emerged about education for younger, as functionalism or Progressivism among others. Moreover, I have done a search about the first pedagogical currents that emerged in relation to children's education and how each of them proposed work with children. To better understand the education system of these European countries, I have drawn the most important moments of early childhood education throughout the English-and Spanish history. With regard to the study of both educational systems, it has been divided into two sections for better understanding: first, I compared the organization of the stages of early childhood education between the two countries and secondly I have written the curriculum with these countries work early childhood education.

**Key words**: Educational systems, Childhood, United Kingdom, Spain, Comparative study.

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## 1. Introduction and Justification

Among all the important factors that determine the personality of each person, the way you are going to develop your personality, the way you are going to be, act and think for the rest of your life, and, in summary, who you are going to be, one of the most important things is the education you have had as a child. It will determine the way we grow, we mature, and finally the person we have become.

Education has always been influenced by current politic and economic reality existing at that time. As an example, we can see how nowadays, as a result of the economic crisis, the education in Spain is changing considerably

> Environmental education must constitute an integral process, which plays its role throughout the whole teaching and learning intertwinement. For this reason it is necessary to establish an educational process that examines the relation of any topic or human being activity, within an analysis of the importance or incidence on social life, as it is the pedagogical part and its political essence (Martinez Castillo, 2010, p.97).

We could consider that, over the time, education dedicated to the youngest children has changed a lot, since the social reality is much different from the one that was centuries, or even decades ago. Nevertheless, today, in the twenty-first century, we still find some countries where education remains stuck as a long time ago, and we can find this even in countries in which the progress and developments are guaranteed in other fields such as technology, politics or science. As I said before, in the particular case of Spain education has improved, but perhaps not as much as it should. According to Bolentín Oficial Educainee, in 2012 Pisa reports, Spain is still below average in Mathematics, Reading and Science, in positions 27th, 25th, and 23rd respectively. United Kingdom is located just below the average in the subject of Mathematics at number 20. United Kingdom has a better place than Spain in Reading and Science with positions 16th and 14th. In Reading and Science, Korea is at the top. In Maths the first place is to Japan (National Institute of Educational Assessment, 2013). Although infant education stage is not assessed in Pisa reports, early childhood education has been gaining more and more influence over time. We have begun to understand that smaller schools are not places where children are left for the day to entertain them but holding a learning process where they are the protagonists and discoverers of new knowledge.

## 2. Objectives

In this section I describe the objectives I want to achieve with this dissertation:

Main Objective:

- To compare Spanish and British Education systems, with special focus on Infant Education.

Specific Objectives:

- To develop and research about theories of education.
- To explore the similarities and differences between Spanish and British education system.
- To know and investigate the main early childhood pedagogical currents: Kindergarten, Casa dei Bambini and Brandford system.

## 3. Education theories

In world history of education, the various theories that have emerged have always played a key role in the development of education. Several authors such as Plato, Dewey, Rousseau and Marx, have made their contributions and criticisms regarding what already existed. Thus, different theories of education appeared, such as functionalism, Marxism or progressivism, which exposed their view of education and the best way to carry it out.

### 3.1. Functionalism

Emile Durkheim's work about how stable the society is in regard to social order can be considered the beginning of functionalism. Functionalism maintains that society is more than the sum of all parts. Each part has a function to develop and preserve stability in society. Social order is one of the necessities of society and this social order, according to the functionalists, can only be achieved by shared standards and values (Ewan, 2012). Functionalism gives the responsibility of a proper socialization process to schools, since they consider that education in schools is a crucial part in this process. At school, students are learning skills and developing a set of attitudes besides learning the rules and values needed. Functionalists such as Emile Durkheim or Talcott Parsons argue that the school helps maintaining social order within society. Young people are socialized in schools by learning values, acquiring skills and being presented with equal opportunities. Furthermore, the school promotes the proper development of society by preparing young people to develop properly in their future work roles (Bryant, 2013). It is clear that functionalism is designed to serve society and that the important thing in this system of education is the transmission of values and standards to youth through

school. The main goal of functionalists is the accomplishment of a society in which people are prepared to develop adult roles and develop their skills (Owens, 2008). However, for various reasons there are criticisms against this system. The main reason is because functionalism is very optimistic about the functioning of the education system. According to Bryant (2013) functionalists reward the best students, while ignoring social inequalities that may restrict someone's achievement. On the other hand, functionalists claim that the standards and values are essential to social stability, but in societies as diverse as United Kingdom, there is hardly ever a consensus on such decisions. Moreover, functionalists avoid conflicts between, for example, different social classes, genders or ethnic origin and their conservative attitude prevent them from accepting the obvious social changes (Hamlin, 2012).

## 3.2. Progressivism

Based on the criticism of functionalism, a new educational system emerged: progressivism. Progressivism developed in the twentieth century as another example of rebellion against tradition and against formalism in schools. John Dewey, remembered as the "father of progressive education", was one of the most influential people in this system. Progressivism appeared as a new way of thinking about teaching methods, pupils and school goals (Resee, 2001). Progressivism is characterized by setting aside traditional approaches and focusing on the needs of the individual student. Both teacher and student fix the content and the learning method, without considering the school a controlling institution. One of the key aspects of progressivism is the consideration of the student as a self-discoverer. The teacher helps students to achieve new knowledge through related content and real life experience. This system of education is designed to serve the student, and for this reason the student is the starting point. The contents to be developed in classes are based on experiences, abilities and interests of the student. Students often work in groups putting into practice one or more areas of study at the same time. In the progressive classroom creativity plays an essential role, teaching students the contents through different resources (Hill, 2012). There are some advantages in progressivism, such as teachers encourage students to be interested in their studies, leaving aside memorization and textbooks. On the other hand, conceptual understanding and reading is accomplished by studying a topic in depth, so new forms of teaching are not always effective (Evers, 1998). The system has received much criticism especially by traditionalists, who do not accept this new method of teaching.

### 3.3. Rosseau

As said before, Dewey is considered the father of progressivism, but according to many authors, Rosseau was the inspiring force of such a system. Rosseau, in spite of the received criticisms of having thoughts which differ from the traditional ones, defended that education ought to be "child-centered". The education had to develop in harmony with the capabilities of the students, letting them learn for autonomous discovery. Through his educational novel entitled *Émile*, Rousseau presented his thoughts about freedom, hypocrisy in religion and sexual debauchery. There are many who defend progressivism as the correct educational system. According to Mayer "the child has his own interests and lives in his own world, and the values of children are completely different from those of adults" (as cited in Novello, 1999). However, the philosopher never thought that his education plan would finally emerge not only in France but also in all the other European states. The purpose of education according to Rousseau was to develop people in a natural way by removing anything that impedes the development of natural gifts. These obstacles may be cultural or religious and moral teachings. According to his view, the purpose of education is to promote the natural man without forgetting the need of educating people to become members of society, too (Bertram, 2012).

### 3.4. Plato

On the opposite side we find the philosophy of Plato. Plato is considered one of the most important philosophers of history. The Athenian presented his philosophy of education in the Republic with Socrates as his main contact. The aim of his philosophy of education was to prepare students for the future. Theorists whose views are clearly contrary to Plato's traditional system include the afore-mentioned philosophers Rousseau and Dewey (Kraut, 2004). The main issue in the republic was justice. Socrates defined justice as the relationship between society and the individual. According to Socrates, those individuals must be of one of three classes: rulers or guardians, warriors and artisans or workers. Plato claimed that the only way to ensure that society had those three types of individuals was through school. Thus, Plato saw education as a uniform school with defined objectives such as maintaining justice and peace in society. The philosopher suggested that the person should be educated so as to become an artist, philosopher and lover of wisdom. These goals, according to Plato, are

only achieved by learning the metaphysical truth, therefore metaphysics is the purpose of education and learning (Rawat, 2011).

### 3.5. Marxism

Finally, there is an author who created his own ideological current. Karl Marx was a socialist thinker of German origin. Doctor of Philosophy, Marx created the theory of conflict, more commonly known as Marxism. The main idea of Marxism is that society is in a continuous class struggle between those which have power and those who do not. Marx states that the society belongs to those with money and power, having inequalities between the citizens and for those possessing less lost power. Comparing Marx's theory to the functionalist theory by Plato, it can be noticed that they are both macro perspective. This means that both functionalism and Marxism are theories that focus on society instead of concentrating on the individual. Furthermore, both theories explore how structures such as education and family affect individuals, unlike the progressive theory, which examine how the individual can influence these structures (Louise, 2013). However, there are also differences between the Marxist and functionalist theories. In contrast to the functionalists, Marxists do not see the socializing process in a positive light. According to Marxists, education socializes children to become obedient workers and school only teaches the standards and values of the ruling class. Marxists assume that there is a hidden curriculum. This includes things that children learn only by attending school and that are not previously set objectives. The purpose of education according to Marx is to benefit the high class of society. Schools spread the ideology of the ruling class and prepare people for future work, having to accept their position in capitalist society (No data, 2013).

### 4. Pedagogical currents

According to Alegre (2011), the term currents means "trends and events which are supported by theories and explanatory, psychological or psycho-educational models, and which have led into general practice formulation or educational, methodological and organizational ideas for Early Childhood Education". Based on educational practices with handicapped children, these pedagogical currents which appeared over time became specific theories for Child Education. Thereby, they moved from the area of special education to the area of child education: experiences, methods and materials. The pedagogical currents over which I have investigated are: Federico Froebel's

kindergarten, the Casa dei Bambini created by Maria Montessori and Brandford system of British sisters Margaret and Rachel McMillan.

**4.1. Kindergarten**

The German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) never imagined his creation Kindergarten was going to have, 150 years later, the importance and content that nowadays has. For the realization of his great work, Froebel investigates about existing theories to have the greatest success possible. Regarding to the foundations of his work, we can find relation with the natural pedagogy of Pestalozzi and Rousseau. Moreover, Federico relies on the idealism of Schelling.  Froebel method principles are:

- Paidocentrism: This was a big change for existing systems because it stops seeing childhood as a bridge to adult development but rather considers a stage with its own characteristics. The child is the center of education so they changed the methodology and activities to appropriate them to the nature of the student.

- Naturalism: As the name suggests, the word 'garden' gives the importance of nature related to education. The child, as a natural being, must grow in spontaneity.

- Education values : Froebel believed that at these ages, the teacher was still able to form positive attitudes of the child. Therefore, through play, he gave importance to moral development and not just intellectual.

- Activism: Spontaneous activity is one of the necessary principles for child development, so the game is used as a way to follow and guide the activity.

The materials used in Froebels methodology were balls, cylinders or cubes, among others. Furthermore, he proposed different manipulative activities to develop students' ability as modeling or trimmed. His method was propagated in France thanks to the educational Administration, which transformed the 'asylum rooms' in nursery schools (Alegre, 2011).

**4.2. Casa dei Bambini**

The Casa dei Bambini was founded by Maria Montessori in 1907 in the neighborhood of San Lorenzo in Rome. Maria Montessori (1870-1952) was a well-known Italian doctor and psychologist. Author of nearly two dozen books, Maria studied the character of the child and the role that the teacher must have in education (Vallet, 2014). Like Froebel, her first contacts with education were with deficient

children. In 1898, at the Congress of Turin, Montessori defended the importance of pedagogy versus medicine in the treatment of children with disability.

In the houses of the children, Casa dei Bambini in Italian, there were children from 3 to 6 years old. Montessori was looking that, mainly through sensorimotor activities, children achieved a personal independence, developed manipulative skills and promoted their capabilities, since in these schools the children were the center around which the educational action revolved. The principles on which the pedagogy of Maria Montessori is based are:

- Paidocentrism: The child is totally different from the adult. They have their own laws governing intellectual and emotional development.

- Self-education: Montessori considers that it is very important to create an ideal environment, with appropriate materials and unobstructed, to allow the spontaneous development of the children. The teacher acts as a helper and aims to stimulate children's activity.

- Respect to child development: Education means allowing the development and individual growth of students, and about them the teacher has to know the important biological and psychological key in child development. We must not forget that the protagonist is the child and the educator is the one who helps fueling growth and social relations, while respecting the freedom of the child to be, feel and think.

- Principle of freedom: It is very important to let the child have the freedom to choose the activity without coercion. For that reason, it is very important to teach the child to have autonomy in order to have freedom. This independence is carried out in a specific order: first of all, the child has to have the physical independence; then the emotional independence; thirdly, the child must acquire independence of will; finally the child acquires independence of thought.

- Principle of activity: The child is innately active so it is essential to develop activities for them to relate and interact with the outside world, as they gradually develop their intelligence.

Montessori´s pedagogy was soon propagated to other countries such as Holland, Sweden, Denmark and the United States. In Spain, it came thanks to Catalonian teachers who attended in 1914 at an international Montessori course in Rome (Alegre, 2011).

## 4.3. Brandford system

The Brandford system was carried out by the British sisters Margaret and Rachel McMillan, heiresses of Federico Froebel pedagogical principles. Also known as nursery school, it has been one of the most important pedagogical currents in child education. The nursery schools have open classrooms with easy access to outer spaces. In addition, they attach importance to outdoor activities (Lujoqui, 2006). The aim of the Brandford system is to serve as a bridge between home life and school.

Their pedagogical principles are:

- Attention to physical development: Providing child outdoor activities and a balanced diet, the child will have a proper physical development in early childhood.

- Principle of activity: Opposite to the traditional school, the sisters McMillan apply active methods besides of teaching hygiene habits and physical health.

- Maternal environment: To make children feel safe, they are provided with a climate of maternal environment. Through the game the students develop motor skills (Alegre, 2011).

## 5. History of education

Taking a look to the history, we can realize how the education has changed throughout the years, no matter the country we are looking at. The political situation, the importance of the religion on a particular moment, the advances on technology… there are continuous changes on the reality of a country which determine the way the education is taking into account.

## 5.1. History of Education in the United Kingdom

It was during the Industrial Revolution when schools appeared, with the aim of socially moralizing and keeping children away from crime. In the early nineteenth century the first schools came up in England, known as "infant schools". In 1816 the first infant school, run by Robert Owen (1771-1858), arose in New Lanark, Scotland. This school emerged for the children of people working in their factories, with the teacher James Buchanan (1784-1857). This kind of school did not take long to spread through other countries such as France, where those schools came up in 1826, or to Spain in 1838. In these other countries where this kind of school was extended, the English model was taken, in regard to the fact that students were children of the

working class. At the beginning, those schools were helped by philanthropic and private associations, and later on, by the Public Authorities.

In 1820, after meeting the teacher Buchanan, Samuel Wilderspin (1791-1866) decided to take over an infant school in London and devoted the rest of his life to the dissemination of this type of school, as agent of the Infant School Society founded in 1824. With the publication of several books, Wilderspin made sure that the dissemination of these schools was adequate and therefore he added in his textbooks models and prints (Universidad de Murcia, 2014).

Around 1930, the schools in the United Kingdom were created by religious foundations and local government, and there were fees to be paid in order to study. For this reason, not everyone had access to school. In 1938 only 13% of students from working class up to 13 years old were still in school, and secondary education was mainly for the middle class only, which could afford the payment of the established fees.

In 1870, schools were mostly grammar schools. These schools provided an education for children aged between 12 and 19 years old. Previously, for those students who did not have a high economic status, the only option they had after finishing their studies at age 13 was to become a worker, since they had to face the work world. All this changed with the possibility of an examination in order to continue studying. This test was performed at the age of 11, which was coming down to test the ability of students in the subjects of English and Arithmetic. Those students who did not pass the test, could only access to a Secondary Modern School and later, perhaps, to a Technical School. The selection process, carried out through this examination, meant that only the most academically gifted students were the ones who could continue their studies (RJW, 2013).

The 1899 Board of Education Act established a Board of Education, charged with the superintendence of matters relating to education in England and Wales. This Board of Education produced many reports during its lifetime. Six of them were produced under the direction of Sir Henry Hadow, an educationist, music critic and prodigious writer. He chaired the Consultative Committee for these six reports between 1923 and 1933. The 1926 report, *The education of the Adolescent,* was particularly significant as it recommended the establishment of primary and secondary schools with the break at age 11. Before that, there was no separation between the primary and

secondary school. This report, as well as the other five, was replaced in 1944 by the "Butler Act" (Gillard, 2006).

Like other European countries in the 20th century, education became an economic, political and social problem. As a key part of the history of education in the United Kingdom, we find the abovementioned Butler Act or Education Act of 1944, which reads as follows: "it shall be the duty of the local education authority for every area, so far as their powers extend, to continue towards the spiritual, mental and physical developments of the community" (1944 Education Act Part II, 7).

The comprehensive school has been the cause why the tripartite system consisting of grammar schools, secondary modern schools and secondary technical schools, has gradually disappeared. Besides, there are also voluntary religious schools. Comprehensive schools, as its name suggests, integrates all kinds of students regardless of their qualities, except for children with special needs, who are mostly attended by special schools. Moreover, there is no entry examination and the goal is to achieve the maximum degree of uniformity in the classroom, so the 86.8% of British children attend comprehensive schools. The percentages of pupils attending other English schools are: 5.2% attend Middle or Middle-deemed Secondary Schools;  2.6% attend Secondary Modern Schools; 4.2% Secondary Grammar Schools, and 0.1% attend Technical Schools (RJW, 2013).

## 5.2. History of Education in Spain

In 1838 the society responsible for propagating and improving the education of people was founded. The company had the Duke of Gor as president and Montesino (1781-1849) as a vocal. It was in Madrid where, thanks to the donations of the diplomatic Juan Bautista Virio, they created the first school of *parvulos.* This set the model for teachers who wanted to establish a nursery school in the future. Despite their efforts, the company could only create four more schools and in 1850, the year in which the company disappeared, there were in Spain just about 95 parvulos schools, of which 41 were public and 54 private. Despite the fact that the company was not as successful as expected, Montesino became a key figure to early childhood education in Spain. With his exile in England from 1823 to 1834, Montesino met Wilderspin and became acquainted with his method to work in infant schools. Besides, he came to know the system of mutual instruction from Pestallozzi too. Thanks to the Manual for teachers in kindergartens, written by Montesino in 1840, the organization, media, teachers and

curriculum used by such schools were exposed. In this manual, it became visible the influence Wilderspin had in Montesino during his years of exile, with his prints seen in the rotatory swing or *gonígrafo* which also appear in the work of Wilderspin (University of Murcia, 2014).

In the early nineteenth century, Spain began to consolidate the idea of an education and the Constitution of 1812 is the first document that dictates the organization, financing and control of that education, stating that education must be the duty of the state. However, until September 9th 1857, with the Public Instruction Act, the liberal education system was not definitively established. This law, also known as the Moyano Act, because the Minister promoting at the time was Claudio Moyano, consisted on four parts. The first one, called "studies", defined the Spanish education levels: first education, compulsory and free for those who could not afford it; second education consisting on six years of study; and a higher level with studies in colleges or professional studies. In the second part of the law, called 'educational establishments', the law regulated free education centers, as well as private ones. 'About the public teachers' was the third part of the law, and it established the minimum required formation for teachers, and the ways to access to the post. Finally, the last part of the law, called 'government and administration of public instruction', established three levels of administration: central, provincial and local.

With the arrival of the Republic and with it the new Spanish Constitution of December 9, 1931, important changes in education were carried out. Religious education was no longer compulsory and allowed bilingualism in schools that wanted to teach a first language other than Castilian. Besides, the training for teachers was modified and given more importance to primary and secondary inspections (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, 2004). The principles of the school in this first part of the Republic were a secular school; free unified school; free, compulsory and egalitarian teaching for children, i.e. coeducation. Moreover, not only was a secular education imposed, but it was banned for religious congregations to become teachers. This led to the confrontation of the church and Catholics against secularists. In addition, Royal Decree, 222 and order ECI/3960/2007 were passed. The latter stated that the secular education was for everyone, except for those families who wished their children to have religious studies. In Article 2 teaching is divided into 3 stages: Kindergarten, elementary and higher; being the last two free and compulsory.

In 1933, the Spanish education suffered a fall due to the triumph of the Catholic (CEDA) and Lerrouz radicals, which abolished important school factors such as coeducation and bilingualism. After the civil war and the Franco regime, the Spanish teaching suffered important changes again, especially affecting children education. The General Education Act 1970 says that preschool education would be free only in state-run schools, differentiating between kindergarten (aged 2-3) and *parvulos* starting at 4 years old (Adrianna, 2014).

Proceeding with the matter of education laws, we can mention that there have been many important laws through the Spanish educational history. The organic law regulating the Right to Education 1985, also known as L.O.D.E., regulated participation in the teaching of the educational community and the right to education among others. On October 3, 1990, the general organic law of the education system (LOGSE) was passed, which substituted the general law. The government of José María Aznar tried to remove the law by creating a new one called Organic Educational Quality Act (LOCE), but it never came into effect. In 2006 the current Organic Education Act (LOE) appeared, whose main objective was to adapt the Spanish education to the situation of the country, imposing religion as a mandatory form for schools but optional for the students, or the appearance of new subjects such as Education for Citizenship and Human Rights. This Act has been modified in some respects in 2013, now being called Organic Act for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE) to come into force during 2014/2015 and which has brought many controversies in the Spanish society. (Royal Decree, 2013).

## 6. Differences between the education systems of the United Kingdom and Spain

Although Early Childhood Education it is a voluntary educational stage for students, according to studies by the Appraisal Institute, we are facing a fundamental step for children. In early childhood education the aim is to develop the child in various aspects such as emotional, physical, social and intellectual. It also intends to address the potential difficulties of children who come from the poorest backgrounds. We must also take into account the environment in which the child takes this educational stage.

If we compare a child developing his early years in the UK with another one doing the same in Spain, according to the two different education systems, we will find some differences, which I will try to explain on the following points:

### 6.1. Structure and organisation of the education system

According to the images found on the web Grammazzle, educational levels between the two countries are very similar, but not identical. The major difference we find, and very important from my point of view, is that children in United Kingdom are divided into classes based on their age by August 31, the day before the beginning of the academic year, while in Spain the dividing age-line is December 31. In my opinion, this is a disadvantage for the Spanish students, since many children begin a new course without having reached the required age for it.

Both countries give the option of voluntary early childhood education, although United Kingdom compulsory education begins at the age 5 and in Spain at the age 6. After the Nursery, which as said before is voluntary on both countries, we find the Primary Education, which in the United Kingdom is compulsory until the age 11, and it is divided into two key stages (Key Stage 1, for ages 5-7, taught in years 1 and 2, and Key Stage 2, for years 7-11, taught in years 3, 4, 5 and 6). In Spain, that Primary Education is compulsory up to 12 years, and it is divided into three cycles. After the Primary Education, both countries have the Secondary Education, compulsory, up to 16. The slight difference on both countries regarding the Secondary Education is that in UK it is divided in two key stages (Key Stage 3, for ages 11-7, taught in years 7, 8 and 9, and Key Stage 4, for years 14-16, taught in years 10 and 11) and in Spain it is only one full stage, including the four grades, 1 – 4). After the compulsory education, and before starting College, many British and Spanish students have the possibility to perform two years, called fifth stage in the UK and *Bachillerato* in Spain which prepare the students who whish to enter the University (Vélez Silva, 2013).

With regard to children's education in the United Kingdom, the most common schools are the aforementioned nursery schools. In addition, we also find the nursery classes attached to primary schools, although they have the same curriculum as any other nursery. The nursery school is characterized by being completely separated from

**Reino Unido**

| Edad hasta el 31 de Agosto | Curso | Curriculum |
|---|---|---|
| 3 años | Nursery | Foundation Stage |
| 4 años | Reception |  |
| 5 años | 1º | Key Stage one |
| 6 años | 2º |  |
| 7 años | 3º | Key stage two |
| 8 años | 4º |  |
| 9 años | 5º |  |
| 10 años | 6º |  |
| 11 años | 7º | Key stage three |
| 12 años | 8º |  |
| 13 años | 9º |  |
| 14 años | 10º | Key stage four |
| 15 años | 11º |  |
| 16 años | 12º | Key stage five |
| 17 años | 13º |  |

**España**

| Edad hasta el 31 de Diciembre | Curso | Curriculum |
|---|---|---|
| 3 años | 1º | Infantil |
| 4 años | 2º |  |
| 5 años | 3º |  |
| 6 años | 1º | Primaria |
| 7 años | 2º |  |
| 8 años | 3º |  |
| 9 años | 4º |  |
| 10 años | 5º |  |
| 11 años | 6º |  |
| 12 años | 1º | Secundaria |
| 13 años | 2º |  |
| 14 años | 3º |  |
| 15 años | 4º |  |
| 16 años | 1º | Bachillerato |
| 17 años | 2º |  |

any other school, while infant classes are in the same building as the primary and often accommodate children with ages close to 5 years. In Spain, child education is divided into two cycles: a first cycle with children aged between 0 and 3, and the second cycle with children aged 3 to 6. In the United Kingdom there are two stages called foundation stage, divided into 3-4 years and 4-5 years. In both countries students move from one course to the next one based on the age, unless you have any particular learner who requires specialized attention or that the child has not acquired the knowledge and maturity needed. Economically speaking, kindergartens are divided into public or private ones. In the case of Spain, education is free from age 3, but there are limited vacancies, which are only given to children who live on the nearby areas, and given first to parents with lower incomes. That means that you can only accede to a vacancy on the public kindergarten that corresponds to the place you live, and in case there are no more free vacancies because your incomes are higher than the rest, you will have to take your child to a private kindergarten.  In the UK, according to the statistics of 2004, 60% of students go to public schools and 40% to private ones. (Mañana, 2014).

## 6.2. Curriculum

The curriculum for Infant Education in Spain is set by the government. In BOE (Official State Bulletin) we find the contents and objectives to be taught in the different areas of knowledge. Furthermore, as I said before, in this act it is said that for children aged 3, education is compulsory and free.

> According to Articles 14.7 and 6.4 of the Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, Education, this corresponds to determining the educational content of the junior stage of child education and establishes the curriculum of the second cycle […] (Royal Decree, 2007, p.474)

As disclosed in BOE, the Spanish Curriculum seeks the integral development of children from different angles: physical, emotional, affective, social and cognitive. These contents are organized into 3 areas: self-knowledge and personal autonomy; knowledge of the environment; language: communication and representation.

Some of the general objectives set by the government for infant education are:
- To know their own bodies and that of others, their chances of action and learn to respect differences.
- To acquire gradually autonomy in their usual activities.
- To develop emotional skills.

In this official document we find the three areas of knowledge for the second cycle of Infant Education. These will give children an opportunity to discover different

contexts, in addition to supporting their inclusion in them. Moreover, these areas only have sense if worked together with other areas, since the environment cannot be understood without the use of certain vocabulary. The situations that the teacher provides to the students have to be as privileged as possible in order to expand their knowledge and learn things they did not know previously. For each area, the bulletin portrays objectives, a series of contents divided into blocks, and the evaluation criteria. A more detailed description is provided in the subsequent lines.

*Self-knowledge and personal autonomy*

This area refers to the construction of the very identity of children and the development and understanding of their emotions. In addition it helps them to maintain good relationships with other children, and this is the reason why the contact between them is so important. The adult has to take into account that the way children think of themselves is linked to what is around them. So we have to show that we trust them and listen to their different proposals. As already mentioned, this area needs to be worked with the other two areas: "knowledge of the environment" and "language: communication and representation". According to Royal Decree 1630/2006, of 29 December, some of the objectives of this area are:

- To create an accurate and positive image of himself.
- To understand and represent his body.
- To identify feelings and emotions

The contents of this area are divided into four blocks: the body and self-image; play and movement; activity and daily life; and personal care and health. Regarding the evaluation in this area, it is checked whether the child has progressed in its body schema, if s/he actively participates in class activities showing motor skills or performing usual things, like washing his/her hands or using the toilet in an autonomous way (Royal Decree, 2007).

*Knowledge of the environment*

The second area aims to arise children's awareness towards their environment, making it interesting and motivating for them. Favoring the processes of discovery and experience, children maintain a constant interest to the world and to their surroundings. Some of the objectives of this area are:

- To observe and explore their environment.
- To know the basic components of the natural environment.
- To interact with others successfully.

In this case, the area has three blocks: physical environment, objects, relationships and measurement; closeness to nature; culture and social life. The aspects to be evaluated are discriminating objects and surrounding elements, and show interest in the environment among others.

### *Language: communication and representation.*

Language serves as a bridge between the outer and inner world, because it facilitates the expression of thoughts or ideas. The child is in the most important step to develop language as it is when they start talking. In addition, it is very important the action of the teacher to make sure that the child does not have any kind of linguistic problem. Otherwise not only is verbal language worked but also the artistic language, body language and audiovisual language too. Some of the objectives of this area are:

- To use language as a means of communication.

- To express emotions, ideas and feelings.

- To understand and reproduce some literary texts.

The four blocks of content in this area are: verbal language; audiovisual language; artistic language; body language. The evaluation takes into account aspects such as the use of oral language appropriately or students' interest in the written texts.

In the case of the United Kingdom, the curriculum is established by the British government, as well as in Spain, where also the government establishes it. Although, we find a big difference between British and Spanish curriculum, since instead of the only 3 areas of work of the Spanish curriculum, on the British curriculum there are 6 areas of work:

❖ Arts

❖ Language development

❖ Early mathematical experiences

❖ Personal, social and emotional development

❖ Physical development and movement

❖ The world around us

According to the Department of Education (2014) "it is only when the curriculum evolves from the needs of the children that it can be viewed as being effective in promoting learning" (p.19).

### *Arts*

In the UK great importance is given to the development of creativeness and learning from pupils' spontaneity. In this section there are 3 blocks: "art and design",

"music", and "drama". Activities in "art and design" can be painting or drawing by observation, using different types of materials such as paper, cardboard or wood or working with malleable materials. Music activities could consist in singing simple songs, listening to variety of music or different sounds of daily life as the song of a bird. Finally, drama activities can be dressing up with costumes, or doing role plays in which the child plays different roles in daily situations, like shopping, going to the doctor, or many other seen on their daily routines.

### Language development

Language plays a key role in the curricula of both Spain and the United Kingdom. Children are in a crucial phase to develop the language so the teacher has to provide and motivate them to have an appropriate development.

### Early mathematical experiences

This is one of the biggest differences between the Spanish and British curriculum. Our system does not consider Maths as an area of knowledge by itself whereas in the UK children are exposed to mathematical contents such as size and quantity, numbers, shapes, patterns or sequencing.

### Personal, social and emotional development

For the British, this is the most important area. The school is the child's second home, and that is where s/he will learn most of the knowledge s/he gains throughout his/her life. The way in which the child learns to see him or herself and understand others, determines the future of hi/hers inner life as it fosters self-esteem and a good understanding of his/her emotions.

### Physical development and movement

Children really enjoy the outdoor activities as well as indoor activities in the school. Through this area, the English curriculum ensures the schoolchildren learn about the environment which is around them, developing motor skills to be self sufficient and knowing his closer environment.

### The world around us

Since the moment children are born, one of the most important things is to make sense of the world. Children are innately curious if they are in a place or with strangers. Through their senses, children explore their immediate environment, and learn to enjoy every moment. In the British curriculum, children are provided with a variety of activities for exploration and experimentation, thus satisfying their greatest need: learning (Department of Education, 2014).

**7. Conclusions**

With the completion of this work I have greatly expanded my knowledge of education in Spain and the United Kingdom. Although both countries belong to the European Union, they have many differences with regard to the education of children in Infant Education. For example, one of these differences is the fact that in the United Kingdom they give great importance to areas of knowledge which do not exist in the Spanish educational curriculum, such as Arts or Mathematics. Another difference we can find between both countries is that in Spain objectives and evaluation criteria are more detailed than in the UK.

In addition, I have met the first infant pedagogical currents that emerged in different places of the world like Italy or United Kingdom. In my opinion, thanks to educators such as Montessori, Froebel or the McMillan sisters, today child education has its place in the education system, improving year after year. Moreover, with this comparative work I have understood the different phases that both countries have undergone in terms of education, taking into consideration that they are highly determined by the government which is ruling on each moment. I do not consider that any country is managing education better than the other, because both have advantages and disadvantages in their education systems. However, I think that we could learn more from neighbouring countries like Britain to gradually improve our education, and not focus on our political and economic situation of a particular moment of the country, since in essence, the most important thing on education are the children, aren't they?

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