

THE IMPACT OF THE LOMCE

LA REPERCUSIÓN DE LA LOMCE

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Abstract:

Currently, every day we can see the conflicts caused by the approval of the Organic Law for the Improvement of Education (LOMCE) which contains many advantages and disadvantages. The implementation of this law will affect not only students, but our entire society. This article discusses some of the most contentious issues of the law: the increase in power held by the head teacher in Spanish schools, we will look at the "quality" of education which this law is meant to achieve and gender segregation in education.

Keywords: access to education, educational reform, school system, educational system, public school

Resumen:

En la actualidad, todos los días podemos ver los conflictos causados por la aprobación de la Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Educación (LOMCE), que contiene muchas ventajas y desventajas. La aplicación de esta ley afectará no sólo a estudiantes, sino a toda nuestra sociedad. Este artículo analiza algunos de los temas más polémicos de la ley: el aumento del poder del director en las escuelas españolas, vamos a ver en la "calidad" de la educación que esta ley tiene la intención de lograr y la segregación de género en la educación.

Palabras clave: acceso a la educación, reforma educativa, sistema escolar, escuela pública

Introduction:

This article is centred on the new Spanish educational law, the Law for Improvement of the Quality of Education, abbreviated to LOMCE, and we will analyze more in depth some of the most controversial changes this law intends to achieve.

“School” autonomy

The theoretical basis of this new law is to follow the recommendations made by the OCDE with respect to giving schools more autonomy. The OCDE states “The conclusion which can be extracted from the data collected from PISA (2009) suggests giving schools more autonomy to define and elaborate the curriculum and the evaluation policies positively influences students’ performance” (Foro de Sevilla, 2013). What has been established with the information collected with PISA is the improvement achieved when schools can choose the content they are going to teach and how they teach this content and evaluate it. Nevertheless, our new law does not focus on increasing schools’ autonomy in these matters but on increasing the head teachers’ autonomy with regard to various aspects.

We do not need head teachers who take care of administrative tasks as their priority and teaching tasks as secondary, but completely the opposite. A head teacher should focus on innovation, coordination, motivation of both students and teachers.

“It is not the time for competitive centres or for head teachers with more power, but for schools where participation and democracy are put to the services of thinking about and doing everything possible to make sure students learn as much as possible, for creating strong teaching bodies which are capable, committed towards guaranteeing everyone the quality education they are entitled to. The LOMCE is going in the opposite direction” (Escudero, 2012).

The first area where the head teacher is granted more power is related to student’s admission. With the previous educational law, it was the School Council’s responsibility to decide, according to the pre-established criteria (closeness to the centre, siblings already studying at the centre...), which students were admitted and which were not. The new law hands this power to the head teacher, which means that a head teacher’s subjective opinions could influence the decision about admitting a certain student or not. Also, this new law intends to create school rating lists based on the school’s quality and achievements, evaluated through external examinations. With this in mind, a head master could allow himself or herself to be influenced by students’ academic records because, by accepting the best students, a school increases its possibility of moving up on these quality lists. The position a school holds on these quality lists shall determine the amount of economic resources it receives to fund its running and improvement.

“In general, by giving autonomy to schools the intention is to achieve a strong decentralization of the system. Autonomy, in this case, is neither curricular nor pedagogical but related to resource management, governed by the quality demanded by its clients, in a nearly mercantile manner. This inter-school competitiveness can only favour private schools” (Bolívar and San Fabián, 2013).

The head teacher is also given power to decide about teachers being accepted or not into their school, even when that teacher has passed the public State examinations. If the head teacher believes that a certain teacher who has been assigned to his centre does not fit in, he or she can refuse to accept the teacher in the school. This would not be totally negative if the head teacher were capable of being completely objective, but, the same as any other human being, head teachers are influenced by a certain degree of subjectivity and it is quite possible that some teachers will be excluded from schools because of this subjectivity. Apart from this, the head teacher can also establish specific requirements for the teachers to be accepted into the school. Therefore it would be possible for a teacher to pass the public State examinations and then be

refused a teaching post at a certain school because he or she does not fit the specific requirements set by the head teacher. Here again the head teacher's subjectivity can come into play, as he or she may establish certain specific criteria which fits the description of someone specific who they want to include in their school, leaving out other teachers who may even be better qualified.

Quality in education

Another topic touched by the new law and which seems to be the one which has caused the most commotion is the "quality" of education. This "quality" which the LOMCE is supposed to provide can certainly be criticised. To begin with, to achieve all that is proposed by the new law, a higher investment in education is needed and this is where we find the first contradiction. According to Foro de Sevilla (2013), it is not possible to put into action a new educational law which requires the spending of money when the government which is putting it in place keeps making cut-backs in all areas, education included.

This same author suggests that for there to be a good outcome, both left and right-wing parties should open a national debate so that this lack of dialogue does not keep us from moving forward, trapped in the vicious circle of making reforms and counter reforms with the only objective of changing the previous political party's laws in revenge against the opposition's ideology. The solution would lie in creating an educational system based on a general social consensus, as occurred with the LGE (General Educational Law) in 1970. For this law to be passed, all political wings discussed their ideas and negotiated what would be stated in this law. This way, it was a consensus of all the political parties' ideologies and it remained in place despite changes in political power.

Another important factor to take into account would be that it is not only important to put down on paper a reform, but it is essential to have the necessary economic resources to enforce it, to have well-prepared teachers and smaller classes.

Segregation by sexes

When we go through our teacher training, time and time again, and in almost all subjects, we are told about equality, about equal education for all, about classrooms where diversity is not only accepted also desirable. But then the new law guarantees funding for private schools which segregate by gender. The fact that girls achieve higher academic results is one of the reasons which supports this decision. As Foro de Sevilla (2013) points out, these reasonings do no more than try to hide an ultra conservative ideology supported by the Catholic Church where men and women should be educated separately due to their different destinies.

In spite of all this, it has not been demonstrated that ~~sex~~ gender segregation produces better academic results or that girls learn in a different manner to boys, pillar on which the conservatives lean to justify this segregation. The best idea would be to break educational stereotypes and adapt our education so that it fits the needs of our students, giving them all the skills they need to be active citizens.

Conclusion

With all of the above we would like to say that this new educational law has some adverse effects for the education system and the most important components of it: the students.

By giving schools more independence, they shall have more freedom to choose their students and teachers, which will turn schools into markets, where each school shall try and get the best teachers and students in order to maintain or increase their positions on the quality lists and, associated with this, their funding. It is made very clear that this shall be prejudicial for the public educational system.

In relation with gender segregation, we have to say that it has not been proven that this has positive effects on children's learning. What has been proven is that each child, boy or girl, has a different learning style and this is where our attention should be focused, on diversity, on trying to cover all types of learning styles and individual needs so as to provide our students with the best education possible through meaningful learning.

What seems to be forgotten is that we are talking about quality. For there to be quality in an educational system there has to be an agreement between all parties and not a different educational law each time the political powers shift. Also, a topic which is not addressed in this law despite talking constantly about quality, is the quality of teaching. This begins by providing quality training for teachers, giving them training in not only contents to be taught but also teaching methodology, innovation and creativity. We believe that a teacher's role is so important in the educational process that their training, preparation and qualification should also be regulated by a state law. Other factors and characteristics which are necessary to be good teachers should be taken into account, not only, as occurs in Spain, the ability to study and learn many concepts in order to pass a series of exams. Teachers are fundamental to the educational system, without them, there can be no system.

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