Foundations of Good Education in the Spanish Territorial Structure: Policy, Society and Education in a Jointly Development Projectⁱ

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Abstract Spain has a model of territorial decentralization, agreed and legitimized from the 1978 Constitution, implemented in the eighties and part of the nineties of the last century by the Socialist Party. A model combines linguistic and cultural identities with administrative and geographical criteria that are specified in the 17 Autonomous Communities. In educational terms, these "to the charter" organization territories are expressed in the 17 quasi-states of education with different levels and scales of educational quality. Some territories are perfectly comparable to international high-performing countries; these are the cases of Castilla y León, Galicia, Madrid or Navarra. In others, those of the South, the effectiveness and efficiency of the education system is below the national average and also below the average of the OECD member countries. The problem to be investigated focuses on the argumentation and contextualization of education in the most advanced territories; I mean, why the good education? In the methodological order, we have to show that we start from a qualitative approach that aims to analyze, understand and explain. For this, we rely on the CCS (Comparative Case Study) based on the contributions of Vavrus and Bartlett [1]. In the section referring to the findings, we must show that we can present the evidence, based on the perceptions of social and school actors, that

the trilogy formed by politics, society and pedagogy make up a common project of unity in participation, protection and constant improvement of school practices. This triangular connection is the key to success and therefore good manners. The work is divided into sections with the good intention of explaining the limited regional / territorial studies devoted to pedagogical issues; the imaginary of the "horizontal actors" of education (they inform us of social culture, of society / education relations, of the regulation of political action / mentality, and the "school" dimension of decisions).

Keywords Good Education, Education and Territory, Development Common Project, Policy and Education, Society and Education

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to delve into the social and pedagogical imaginaries of a good education. In other words, the perceptions/reasons of the different social and academic actors regarding the education and competence levels were examined by international and national

programs. Our approach is based on semi-structured interviews conducted at the interviewees' workplaces until the pandemic made it unfeasible to continue with this form of collecting information, having to complete the study through interviews sent to the participants via telematic channels. Such actors consisted of centers' management boards, teachers, pre-university students, parents, and other social actors such as unskilled workers, entrepreneurs, writers, trade employees, etc. The purpose was to try to understand and explain the perceived reasons in relation to good education. The datasheet of the queries is presented below. We have chosen a representative sample of primary and secondary education centers of the territory of Castile and León.

2. Materials and Methods

The study has been conducted according to a qualitative method aimed at seeking understanding, unlike quantitative approaches whose purpose is to find representativeness. Such understanding is necessary to provide explanations. Therefore, the nature of this research is exploratory, descriptive, and inductive, using the open interview technique to conduct an objective analysis of subjective meaning. Hence, the how and why stand out as especially relevant questions, since their explanatory answers are the research objective.

The structure of the second part revolves around four thematic axes: social and cultural history; society/education relations; political/administrative regulations; and pedagogy. Such structure is the product of the content analysis of the actors' perceptions.

Datasheet 1 Schools analyzed: (IES Lucía de Medrano-EC1; CEIP F. Villalobos-EC2; IES Zorrilla-EC3; CEIP Simancas-EC4; IES A. Machado-EC5; CEIP MRZ-EC6; IES C. Moyano-EC7; IES V. de Lucerna-EC8). Teachers interviewed: 32 (male, 17; female, 15); teachers status: civil servants, 25; temporary holders, 7; area of expertise: mathematics, 7; biology, 2; social sciences and natural sciences, 10; language and literature, 7; and others, 6. Students interviewed: 11 (pre-university course students). Management board interviewed: 8. Social actors interviewed (parents): 5.

Datasheet 2 Professionals interviewed. Skilled workers (higher education): female, 7; male, 1; average age, 28 (woman) and 23 (men). Unskilled workers: 4; male, 4; average age, 53.

3. Regional Studies on Education in Spain

Historical studies show how the current region of Castile and León has been a pioneer in literacy and schooling since the nineteenth century, when the Spanish education system became structured and legitimized. Both

the number of schools and the school-demography relationship were favorable and above the national average and the data reported by regional frameworks. Unsurprisingly, school attendance was also positive, in comparative terms, despite distances and the nascent but still precarious school network. This cultural and educational trend would remain throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [2] [3]. Such "attachment to education" not only shaped the formal academic network, but reached beyond the pedagogical renewal movements [4] [5] [6] [7] in a social promotion process where leading "pedagogic" figures of the stature of P. Montesino Cáceres [8] [9] C. Moyano [10], S. Alba Bonifaz [11], J. Senador Gómez Maestro [12], [13], Federico Requejo Avedillo or A. Álvarez himself (creator and disseminator of the Encyclopedia Álvarez, in its different types) would play a key role.

In the political/institutional/administrative order, there is a wealth of documents and reports on schooling and education processes at both the national and international levels. Every year, the State School Council (CEE) [14] publishes thorough reports on the state of the education system, disaggregated by autonomous communities. The 2016 report approaches demographic aspects of schooling (from a territorial and European outlook), socio-educational and socioeconomic factors, material and human resources, processes and policies, results and improvement plans, in an exhaustive analysis of non-university enrolment in Spain. Another unquestionable source of information is the Economic and Social Council (CES) [15] of Castile and León, which includes education and schooling processes as an analytical variable in some of its reports. The 2016 Annual Report provides a comprehensive study of enrolment, centers, levels, programs, grants, etc., a complete "state of play" of the resources invested in the educational care of the population of all ages. That of 2017 only includes one page related to universities, the rest of its over 1,200 pages being devoted to the analysis of economic resources, services and institutions. Similar data are provided in the School Council of Castile and León Report (Report on the state of the education system in Castile and León. Academic year 2016-17), which reveals the structure and operation of Grouped Rural Centers, one of the major commitments of the regional government, given the geographical dispersion of the regional population. This is a structured report that revolves around five axes: educational context; material and human resources; policies and processes; system results; and conclusions and proposals. Certain territories even prepare education "white papers" with comparative elements at the interterritorial level, such as that drafted by the PSPV-PSOE for Valencia [16]. This in-depth picture of education in Valencia includes data on school dropout after completing primary education, enrolment rates in subsidized centers (using a comparative approach

involving Castile and León and the Basque Country) or early school dropout rates. This informative landscape is completed by the research on competences that are drawn up by the PISA program upon completion of compulsory education. Since 2003, it has been incorporating the disaggregated data of regional territories in Spain, and Castile and León, Catalonia, and the Basque Country participated in this first informative batch [17].

The evolution of the different PISA reports clearly reveals greater interest in presenting not only national information, but also in offering the data separately using regions as units of analysis. Thus, for example, the latest report includes regional information on Belgium, Canada, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Colombia or even the United Arab Emirates. Nevertheless, the level of regional coverage within the different states is heterogeneous. Proof of this is the case of Portugal, where there is only one disaggregated region, or, to continue with examples of weak data breakdown, the United States, where only the data of three territories are disaggregated (Massachusetts, North Carolina and Puerto Rico). At the other extreme, that is, national units that are thoroughly analyzed from the regional point of view, are Canada and, in particular, Spain, where its 17 Autonomous Communities are analyzed. This scenario of regional data offered by PISA allows us to reflect on the different motivations for regions to participate (or refrain from doing so) in a study on PISA's impact. Accordingly, four axes could in a way justify the presence and interest of Castile and León (and the rest of the regions) in the disaggregated analysis of the well-known report. Comparative politics: to learn the region's position both as compared to its peers (rest of Autonomous Communities) and to other countries (especially emphasizing the greater or smaller distance that separates the highest rated). This line of reasoning/justification would support the theses that advocate the relentless pressure of globalization. At the regional level, this positioning might serve as a clear element of legitimization of the policies developed within the Autonomous Community. Consultancy: to learn the overall performance of the regional education system using the assistance of a specialized consultant that is recognized as a "world expert" (OECD) in education. In this regard, it would be interesting to be aware of two scenarios or possibilities: the Autonomous Community might already have tools to monitor its school system, and by agreeing to participate in the PISA report, its results might serve as a contrast/verification element against the internal information that the Autonomous Community already has. Policy harmonization/emulation: in this case, participating would be the logical result of a process of emulation related to the "pioneering" Autonomous Communities in showing an interest to participate in this international study. It is, therefore, a known domino effect across communities. Domestic competence development:

in this opportunity, the line of argument to participate in the PISA program would be to simply meet the contents of the various Autonomy Statutes of the different Autonomous Communities. Therefore, participation in PISA would be based on the stipulations of the regional self-governance regulations. In this case, the results obtained by PISA could be interpreted/used by Autonomous Communities as elements to pressure the Central Government (low results would serve to draw up a report on an assumed correlation between a lack of general funding of the Autonomous Community and poor school performance).

Alongside the "reasons", it is also necessary to examine the "procedures" or, to put it another way, the mechanics of regional participation. In this regard, it is essential to know whether it is really an "independent/autonomous participation", that is, a setting where those in charge of the regional department of education contact the OCDE authorities for the purpose of including their Autonomous Community in the report or, on the other hand, whether it is a setting of "induced participation" where the Government of Spain itself actively recommends the Autonomous Communities to participate in the PISA report. There is also the possibility of a third scenario which could be defined as "shared participation", where the initiative to take part would be joint (something that could be plausible in the frame of an Education Sector Conference).

Nonetheless, this display of information in the political order does not match the contribution of the learned society; that is, research on the context and conditions of these schooling procedures from a territorial angle. The historical approach has been thoroughly worked on in nearly all the Autonomies (the product and consequence of a large academic deployment of education historians in the Spanish university fabric), but the study of current times is very limited as a result of the hyper-specialization of university subject matters and the scarcity of comparative experts in the university employment area. Nevertheless, there are studies that prove the rule, such as that by [18], a continuation of the one published in 2001. However, this document is a literature review on university research in Galicia in the general area of education sciences which includes specific teaching methods but disregards comparative education. On the other hand, for our study, it is interesting to mention the *PISA for Schools* program that is in its early stages of development at the international and national levels. It aims to analyze competences in a more thorough and comprehensive manner in specific centers that voluntarily request it, although its management is falling into the hands of private organizations selected by the OCDE in a further example of the "privatization of education". Certain documents published on this research program stress a new form of school management, more horizontal and social and less political and national (vertical) [19].

Table 1. Territorial studies of education (2010-2020)

Year	Territories/no. articles	Topics
2010	Catalonia /2	Interculturality. School dropout
	Andalucía/1	Interculturality
	Balearic Islands/1	Interculturality
2011	Catalonia/2	Interculturality. Interculturality
2012	Catalonia/2	Interculturality. Counseling (focused on 9 A.C.)
	Basque Country/1	Social educators
2013	Madrid/1	Training and employment.
	Basque Country/1	Initial Professional Qualification Programs
	Asturias	Basic competences
	Murcia/1	Initial Professional Qualification Programs
	Andalucía/1	School counselors (focused on 9 A.C.)
2014	Andalucía/1	Lifelong learning
	Valencia/1	Franco's purification in Normal Schools
	Madrid/1	Families' expenditure on private education
	Basque Country/1	School autonomy
	General	Autonomy in public centers
2016	Catalonia/1	Education graduates and economic crisis
	Madrid/1	Analysis of essential knowledge and skills (CDI) tests
	General	Teaching and regional education policy
2017	Madrid/1	CDI (essential knowledge and skills) tests
	Catalonia/1	Financial incentives for teachers
	All/1	Teacher competences and performance
2018	Murcia/1	Competences among centers
2019	Valencia/ 1	Achievement in language and mathematics
	Asturias/ 1	
2020	Basque Country/ 1	High capacity students
	Madrid / 1	Chairs in Pedagogy

We are interested insofar as they explain that we are before a revaluation of local/territorial studies on education as well as before new forms of management through new networks among actors and organizations. *PISA for Schools* represents a change towards the local/territorial that becomes the new political schooling policy space, without national contextualization. Hence, it breaks the traditional relationships of power by establishing a new policy of actors such as the OCDE, non-profit foundations or "global experts" [20]. However, certain sectorial contributions of a territorial nature are being published in professional media. We have carried out a bibliometric study on the articles published over the last few years in the *Revista de Educación (Journal of Education)* (RE), a miscellaneous education journal that is well-positioned in the *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR). The results of the analysis confirm and prove the paucity of territorial research studies that put schools' education processes and practices in value and the consequences of this on society's general education. The results of the study, by region, are included in the table above.

Nonetheless, it is true that the titles do not always mention territorial units. Most of them do not refer to the geographical area of reference and it is only by their content that we may identify their geographical context.

4. Actors' Perceptions of Good Education: The Results

When actors (social and educational) are asked about good education indicators (which most of the value as a differential feature in Castile and León in comparative terms), some mention "respect" ("towards others", T2, EC 3), "hard work", "common sense", "critical sense" (T1, EC8); others talk about "discipline, collaboration" (T2, EC8); and others refer to "academic results in internal and external tests" (T2-T3, EC8). There are also those who are far more expressive and accurate, speaking of "high pass rates in pre-university and university tests; high rates in education surveys as compared to other Spanish regions; low school dropout or failure rates; a wide range of options in secondary and university education; enough teaching staff in education centers, qualified, motivated and vocational (if possible); involvement of the entire education community (administration, management teams, teachers, parents, students, etc.) in the improvement of the teaching/learning process; high rates of reading habit among families and students; transmission of values related to basic education and coexistence in society within the home; appreciation of study as something positive and rewarding apart from a career opportunity and door to the labor market for students, etc." (T5, EC4),

and even “students’ future career” (HT1, EC5)¹.

a) Social and cultural history

As regards the bases of “good education”, for some teachers it is about “historical, cultural and social reasons” (T4, EC8), which are related to the social mindset (language, history, etc.), university fabric, political stability, country-to-city migration and pedagogical reasons (higher levels of demand). “Traditional values of attachment to education and culture” (HT1, EC2). “A combination of historical, cultural, political, economic, social and academic bases” (T1, EC3; T2, EC6; T3, EC6). And other participants in the survey mention “academic, economic and historical” reasons (S3, EC3). “It is something cultural” (S1, EC7). “Historical, social and cultural reasons” (T4, EC7).

“I think there are a bit of all those reasons: historical-cultural because, for a long time, the region of Castile and León has been regarded as the country’s “cultural heir”, of the old crown of Castile (we are speaking of Castile the Old); the prestige of universities such as that of Salamanca; it is said to be the Spanish region where the “best” Castilian is spoken (destination of thousands of foreign students), etc. Policies aimed at governmental “stability” due to the same government being in power for a long period of time. Socioeconomic because the need has driven a large part of the rural population to migrate to urban centers for employment or study-related reasons. Academic due to the stringency levels of their education centers (for example, the competitiveness of their universities, etc.)” (T5, EC7). Attention should be drawn to the perceptions of the “pre-university student actor” who insists on economic (primary and tertiary fabric), cultural (values, traditions, hard work, interest, respect, etc.) and academic (higher stringency levels) reasons.

b) Society-education relationship

Nevertheless, several teachers highlight the economy/society relationship. The absence of a productive commercial system to provide employment means that young people have no other option than to study in search of an opening in the external labor market (T2-T3, EC8). “An agrarian and service economy, with no industrial or commercial fabric, forces young people to emigrate and this opportunity is only possible through education” (HT1, EC2; T2, EC5). The reasons are “mainly social (economy, history and culture)” (HT1, EC1; HT1-HT2, EC3; HT1, EC6). Education, therefore, is largely the product of need and becomes almost the only strategy towards the production system (HT2-HT3, EC7). Nevertheless, there is also another impression of these society-education relations; families’ involvement in

education, since “schools and family work together” (HT2, EC2); “family support and involvement” (S7, EC3; HT1, EC5; T1, EC6).

c) Policy regulation (mindset and action)

Policy “favors subsidized private education over public education on the basis of profitability” (HT1, EC2). Others are of the opinion that “the less policy intervenes, the better” (T6, EC2). Views in this area are closely linked to daily work, which is why some argue that “more resources are required to support students with more needs and strengthen equity” (T4, EC2); or “reinforce language learning” (SA 1). There is also evidence of the importance of political decisions to support “work stability and the reduction of the temporary staff workforce”, where the proportion has increased in recent years from rates that were quite low when compared with those reported in the past and present by other territories. There are also proposals to reduce ratios in rural and semiurban areas (T1, EC4) and suggestions for “the Government to facilitate and support teaching practices, although it is always late” (T1, EC4).

A constant issue in territorial policies in this vast “geographical empire” is the provision of support for education in rural settings with means and resources (transportation, dining halls, itinerant teachers, grouped rural schools, schools open with four students, priority education programs, rewards, etc.).

d) Pedagogy

For students, who are aware of Castile and León’s strong educational momentum, it is about “greater stringency levels to be able to prepare the EBAU (assessment of pre-university education for university access)” (S1, EC8); thus, greater standard requirements lead to greater education levels. There has always “been a good level of requirements and very good universities” (S1-S2-S4, EC3); “lots of content is taught” (S5, EC3; S1, EC7). The “positive training of the teaching staff” (S6, EC3), although the “recruitment model should be improved” (T1, EC5). A “cultural and academic thermometer different from that of other territories” (T2, EC4). Teachers also insist on the higher level of requirements: “the level of requirements” (T2, EC7). Another pedagogical aspect is the cooperative effort of teacher teams: “cooperative work in the professional exercise of teaching, dedication, vocation, etc.” (T2, EC4).

5. Discussion of Results

An initial remark is concerned with the interviewees’ conformism: a large number of them decide to choose one of the options provided by the interviewer to answer these questions on the reasons for good education. This being

1 Equivalences. SA= Social Actor. T=Teacher. EC=Schoolar Centre. HT= head teacher. S= Student.

the case, the imaginary conveyed seems more driven and planned, a perception that has become more evident in the interviews which, because of the public healthcare issues, had to be carried out via email by providing the participants with a questionnaire.

A second reading comes from the generalized perception, both at the social and educational levels, of the good education that characterizes Castile and León's social fabric. A view is revealed when the participants are asked to indicate some of the components of such good education. In this regard, the answers as shown in the previous section are diverse, but combine elements of social coexistence with personal and family efforts and with the socio-economic context of reference. A different matter is whether the measurements of national and international competence assessment programs are accepted.

A third element that deserves consideration is the educational specificity of the perceptions. The actors linked to the primary education stage demand more means and resources for the centers to be able to strengthen equal opportunities and equity, they regard education in a more general and social way and, thirdly, they do not believe that Castile and León's society is as well educated as the reports reflect. Likewise, they question research on competences.

As for content analysis in relation to the perceptions expressed by the actors, there are convergence points, such as the economic fabric, the school network, cultural and historical reasons, and a society that is aware of education and makes efforts to ensure their children's education. However, there are also differences in their thinking as can be noted in the fact that students insist that good education is the product of greater curricular and methodological stringency than in other territories; or the fact that social actors underscore issues such as equality, equity, and universal school enrolment. Teachers are more concerned with collective effort in daily routine. Nevertheless, if we delve into curricular areas, the actors linked to the "scientific field" are the ones who most stress the "lack of opportunities" and the need to reinforce the provision of means and resources. Those who belong to the field of social sciences are more "theoretical and political".

When connecting and relating the research findings with the bibliographic and documentary foundation collected in the first section, we perceive two discursive lines. On the one hand, that related to the historical process of educational construction in Castilla y León. This line shows us that the current educational success of the Castilian-Leon school system has been shaped throughout history; especially since the nineteenth century when the current territory already presented computations of literacy and school quantification superior to other national contexts. On the other hand, the territorial pedagogical studies that we have collected in the previous

table indicate that the analysis and understanding of the competence levels is not a preference of the academic and research community. The few regional studies that focus on skills or lifelong learning do so from a national perspective. However, in some of the analysis we find sample studies between several Autonomous Communities, such as the one prepared by the researchers Martínez-Abad, Bielva-Calvo, and Herrera García [23] that address a research process focused on informational competences between Castilla and León and Andalusia; a study that reveals the best competence levels (general and informational) of Castilian-Leon high school students, but that does not delve into the justification or reasoned explanation of these perceived magnitudes.

6. Conclusions

One of the main aspects that have been made evident by our study is the paucity of pedagogical studies at the autonomic level, as the one herein, national or local research being more common. This is especially significant if we bear in mind the strong attraction that our country might draw in terms of territorial education policy. Indeed, among the countries participating in the PISA report, Spain unquestionably has one of the strongest social impacts, basically due to the territorial organization we have addressed [21]. Currently, only Spain and Canada can proudly claim to have incorporated all their regions into the report [22], a fact that inevitably contributes to the launching of autonomic research projects in our country.

Another noteworthy element that we cannot fail to mention is related to the healthcare situation we have faced in the last months, which, in turn, has led to many difficulties at the social level, seriously challenging our research activity. Indeed, certain actions triggered by this pandemic situation, such as home confinement, restrictions on mobility, etc., have conditioned our academic work, hindering the development of this type of research study.

On the other hand, we would like to briefly review the reasons or bases of a good education from the perspective of the social actors we have worked with. In this regard, the school perception that they have concerning education is especially striking, leaving out the fact that the pedagogical component reaches its rationality beyond the education centers themselves, the different sociohistorical, political and cultural factors having a strong impact on any educational element.

School/educational actors are "encased" in their context. Their observations, analyses and interpretations are closely associated with their daily teaching and learning practices and routines; policy is defined and interpreted through the action of education managers as if their own interventions and practices bore no connection to the nature and type of their training or their teaching capacity.

And the most important aspect is always their subject matter and contents. However, as expressed by certain teachers and headteachers, politics should be kept out of schools, as party politics rather than an action of collaboration.

Nonetheless, this also reflects the uniqueness of perceptions, which are of a very personal and empirical nature. Such views fall within the four axes that we have previously explained. However, given the fact that we are dealing with what could be defined as an “ultra-regulated” school system, it is surprising to observe how these actors believe that they enjoy high levels of teaching autonomy. Therefore, we are before a conformist educational approach that is embedded in a high level of professional ethics and academic accountability.

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