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Global governance of education and the challenges of the 21st century: the case of Spanish education law

Adrián Neubauer^a and Iluminada Sánchez-Doménech^b 

^aDepartment of Education and Educational Innovation, European University of Madrid, Spain; ^bDepartment of Education International University of La Rioja, European University of Madrid

ABSTRACT

This paper pursues three objectives: (1) to identify which IO's are the most influential in the current Spanish educational policies; (2) to recognize the challenges identified according to current Spanish legislation (LOMLOE) on education facing Spanish society and its educational system in the 21st century; (3) it also seeks to analyze what model of citizen is aimed to be formed to face the challenges of the 21st. A Documentary Analysis of the Spanish curriculum (0-18 years) has been carried out using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2024. The results show that the '2030 Agenda' and the competency-based approach guide the educational in Spain action to face the future challenges. At the same time, it reinforces the position of implementing the competency-based approach in the Spanish educational system, as suggested by the European Union, in order to face the challenges of the 21st century. Moreover, key challenges identified by LOMLOE are misinformation, digital literacy, climate emergency, socioeconomic problems, and well-being. In conclusion, the close relationship between the economy, education and sustainability is evident. In this way, education is positioned as an essential instrument for achieving the global goals set by these organizations.

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Introduction

Political measures emanating from power require a discourse that legitimizes them (Amossy, 2022). According to Ball (1993), discourses are about what can be said, and thought, who can speak, when, where and with what authority. The legitimacy is the extent to which a community or society accepts who is in authority, what goals are sought, and how policies and programs are implemented. The current official discourse on education can be summarized as follows: the 21st century is characterized by an accelerated and permanent social, political, economic, and technological transformation which poses new challenges to societies and, therefore, to redefine their strategic priorities; these challenges have a direct impact on education systems, which must be prepared not only to offer technical and specialized knowledge but also to train individuals capable of facing the uncertainties and complexities of the 21st century.

At this historical moment, educational systems are attributed to a broader function than that of preparing students for academic exams (Lamb et al., 2017). And the definition of that broader function cannot, because it enters the field of desirable values and of a particular way of conceiving the world, be subtracted from ideology and politics. According to Tan (2024), if we ask what is the purpose of education, many people will answer that it is a form of preparation for future economic participation. Others will consider it is the acquisition of content corresponding to the different subjects the teacher transmits in the classroom. In both educational visions, meritocracy is an alibi to steer students towards

CONTACT Adrián Neubauer  adrian.neubauer@universidadeuropea.es  Department of Education and Educational Innovation, European University of Madrid, Spain

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bifurcations that will determine their life projects and reproduce social inequalities and both positions 'seem somewhat deliberately ignorant of the sociopolitical circumstances in which we find ourselves' (Tan, 2024, p. 129).

As Ball (2001) pointed out, this is a new paradigm of educational governance linked to a more general debate on economic globalization. In this context of interdependence in the solution to global problems, the political sovereignty of the liberal nation-state concept has been reformulated and subordinated to the new structure of global governance made up of IO's (e.g. Organization for Cooperation and Development [OECD], World Bank, United Nations [UN], European Union ...). But this IO's face their own governance and legitimacy problems (Dyer, 2022), among other causes due to their lack of transparency and democracy (Matarranz & Pérez-Roldán, 2016). Despite this lack of sovereignty (Robertson & Beech, 2024), IOs govern through 'promissory legitimacy' (Beckert, 2020), which legitimizes nation-states to elaborate educational reforms (Elfert & Ydesen, 2024).

In this scenario, the '2030 Agenda' (UN, 2015), which was signed by the 193 UN Member States, including Spain, takes on special prominence. It was designed to establish a 'transformative vision for economic, social, and environmental sustainability'. This issue crystallizes in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which cover various areas such as poverty eradication, inclusive and quality education, and gender equality. This social component, as Barron et al. (2023) point out in the document prepared for the World Bank, is not secondary, but forms a triad with environmental and economic sustainability. It is considered indispensable for achieving legitimacy of the political process. In this way, education becomes part of social sustainability being, at the same time, an objective of this agenda and a means to other sustainable development goals, as made explicit in SDG 4.7:

By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The UN does not limit itself to prescribing the objectives of educational policies and the competencies that citizens must have, but also sets the path, through soft policies (Valle López & Sánchez- Urán Díaz, 2023), of the pedagogical practices needed to develop them. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2020), belonging to the UN, states that the new skills required to meet the challenges of the globalized and technological present require the development of competencies, interdisciplinarity, and the use of active teaching and learning methods. In this way, the expected result (competence) is linked to a process (teaching and learning methods) without this relationship having been demonstrated to date (Gimeno, 2008).

This competency model, led by the OECD and the European Union, has been gaining prominence in the curriculum in every Spanish governmental educational regulation since the *Education Organic Law* of 2006 in which the concept of 'competence' appears explicitly (Manso & Neubauer, 2022). Despite opposition from student movements and university unions, the implementation of the Bologna Plan, including the competency model, continued. In Spain, the scant scientific literature that could be found with a critical approach to competencies model denounced their behaviorist nature, their objectives of accountability through standardized external testing and meeting the demands of the global labor market by signaling what their graduates 'know to do', and be an utilitarian and reductionist approach; all of the above is embellished with the complementarity of constructivist methods that 'place students at the center of teaching and learning' (Gimeno, 2008; Sánchez-Doménech & Rubia-Avi, 2016).

The competency-based curriculum model was extended to lower educational levels through successive regulations. In the two subsequent education laws after the Bologna Plan for these lower levels of the Spanish education system, the treatment of 'key' or 'basic' competencies was a cross-cutting element of the core curriculum. However, in the most recent law, the 'Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which modifies the Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education' ([LOMLOE], 2020) which is the subject of analysis in this document, competencies occupy a central role. This new reconfiguration of competencies is like the configuration of competencies at the University, as it includes 'specific competencies' for each subject and 'assessment criteria' (comparable to learning outcomes in the university curriculum). In this way, competencies become 'purposes, content, guidelines for selecting procedures, and proposals

for assessment' (Gimeno, 2008, p. 25). However, its implementation in classrooms has been significantly distanced from the political framework, since, as recognized by the OECD (2019, p. 5):

effectively implementing skills reforms is a complex task, given that skills policy sits halfway between education, the labor market, industry, and other policy areas. This implies the need to coordinate and collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders, including ministries, officials at all levels of government, students, faculty, workers, employers, unions, and many others.

The influence of IO's on national educational policies worldwide has been widely proven (Valle López & Sánchez-Urán, 2023). But, perhaps, the OECD is the organization with the greatest power at present (Molina Pérez, 2017), since through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), it has driven educational reforms in countries such as Germany and Spain (Davoli & Entorf, 2018; Fernández-González, 2015). However, the European Union has also led a legislative renewal in its Member States following the approval of the 'Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning' (European Council, 2018), with which LOMLOE (2020) is strongly aligned.

National educational policies face a complex balance between, on the one hand, fulfilling the commitments made to these supranational organizations and, on the other, seeking solutions to local problems by 'vernacularizing' (Revyakina & Galvin, 2022) the demands within the framework of this new discursive 'recontextualization' (Ball, 2001).

Within the framework of the elaboration of the LOMLOE, the Secretary of State for Education (2020) justifies the need for curriculum renewal given that

'the economic, social, technological, political and cultural processes derived from globalization on a world scale are producing changes at such a speed that it is essential to consider, looking to the future, what, for what and how we teach and evaluate'

(p. 4). However, the interaction between social challenges and educational objectives can generate tensions and disagreements, which requires a profound reflection on the model of citizens to be formed through educational policies. In the Spanish case, the result of this debate - at least in the educative political sphere - has been reflected in the elaboration of an *exit profile* for the learners, which draws an ideal citizen model for the Spanish government capable to respond to the global challenges of the 21st century (Bolívar, 2022; Luengo et al., 2021).

In this scenario of multiple commitments for educational systems, it is crucial (Objective 1) to identify which IO's are the most influential in the current Spanish educational policies. In this document, we seek (Objective 2) to recognize the challenges identified according to current Spanish legislation on education facing Spanish society and its educational system in the 21st century. In doing so, it seeks to understand the direction education is taking and the goals pursued at a global level. For that reason, this paper seeks (Objective 3) to analyze what model of citizen is aimed to be formed to face the challenges of the 21st century through LOMLOE. Accordingly, it would be possible to identify the role assigned to education and, therefore, to citizenship in Spanish educational policy.

We start from the hypothesis that, at the discursive level, the socio-political aim is to train a citizen profile with technical and professional knowledge and to be ready to face future challenges, from sustainability to the integration of digital technologies in everyday life. In other words, the Spanish education system joins completely the objective to train future citizens capable of facing the local and global problems prescribed by IO's.

Materials and methods

This research has been developed following the Documentary Analysis method since it deals with 'searching, selecting, organizing and analyzing a set of written materials to answer one or more questions about a topic' (Hernández-Ayala & Tobón-Tobón-Tobón, p. 401). This process seeks to generate new knowledge, and also to explain how reality is reflected in the documents analyzed (Morrison et al., 2023). These sources of information can be varied, since Documentary Analysis can be applied, among others, to newspapers, websites, and social networks (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Stemler, 2015). However, in this case, we will focus on the analysis of educational policies, which have been developed in recent research (Neubauer, 2023). Thus, the manifest (Kleinheksel et al., 2020) and systematized (Braun & Clarke,

2006) analysis of the challenges identified by Spanish educational laws will be carried out taking into consideration the current historical context, as suggested by Morrison et al. (2023).

Different proposals have been put forward in the academic literature on the steps to be used to perform a Documentary Analysis. In this paper we have established some phases taking as a reference the work of Braun et al. (2016) and Martín-Pastor and Durán Martínez (2019). Specifically, the following steps have been followed:

- Phase 1. Access to information: key documents were identified to respond to the object of study and were downloaded from the Spanish Official State Gazette. These documents are detailed in the phase 6.
- Phase 2. Familiarization with the information: Braun et al. (2016) highlight the importance of researchers exploring the documents to understand their nature. During this process, notes were taken on possible codes, content assumptions, and differences between documents.
- Phase 3. Establishment of the analysis criteria: to ensure the thoroughness of the research, a draft codebook was designed, which was elaborated based on an inductive-deductive process based on notes taken on phase 2.
- Phase 4. Initial coding: this draft codebook was applied to the documents by two researchers. During this process, new codes related to 21st century challenges were identified. Subsequently, each challenge named by these documents was assigned a code. For example, the LOMLOE indicates that one of the challenges of this century is uncertainty and rapid change. These references were attributed to the 'VUCA' code. It also recognizes that this century presents new challenges ethically and for the well-being of humanity. They have given rise to new codes.
- Phase 5. Refinement of the analysis criteria: in order to triangulate the analysis of the information, ChatGPT was used to establish the main categories and group the codes into the corresponding category. This technique has been previously employed by Bryda and Sadowski (2024). In this process, the draft codebook was incorporated into ChatGPT and, through a prompt ('You are an expert researcher in Educational Policy and Qualitative Analysis. You are conducting a research where you employ Documentary Analysis to different educational policies. Group these items (codes) into categories'). Initially, the IA integrated the 'Migrations' code into the 'Human and Social Development' dimension. However, given that migrations are a demographic phenomenon, researchers categorized this code in the 'Global and demographic dynamics' dimension, unifying it to the 'Demographic' code.

As a result, the following codebook was generated (Table 1):

- Phase 6. Final analysis: Once the codebook was designed, it was necessary to clarify which documents were analyzed. To provide a complete overview of the Spanish educational system, the five policies that make up the curriculum up to the age of 18 were analyzed: 'Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, amending Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education' (LOMLOE), Royal Decree 95/2022, of 1 February, which establishes the organization and minimum teachings of Early Childhood Education' (RD 95/2022), 'Royal Decree 157/2022, of 1 March, which establishes the organization and minimum teachings of Primary Education' (RD 157/2022), 'Royal Decree 217/2022, of 29 March, establishing the organization and minimum teachings of Compulsory Secondary Education' (RD 217/2022), and 'Royal Decree 243/2022, of 5 April, which establishes the organization and minimum teaching of the Baccalaureate' (RD 243/2022). This analysis was carried out by two researchers. Initially, one of them elaborated a first analysis (coding) that was complemented and supervised by the second one. In this case, the AI support offered by MAXQDA for document analysis was not used. Finally, a joint coding and analysis was performed by the two researchers.

Results

Common challenges: an intertextual analysis

Spanish educational policy identifies a series of challenges to be faced by society and, therefore, by education in the coming years. Before detailing them in the following section, it is necessary to point out

Table 1. Codebook.

Categories	Codes	
International and supranational organizations	Name	European Union, UNESCO, United Nations, Spanish Government.
	Document	'LOMLOE', '2030 Agenda', 'Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning'
Challenges of the 21st century	Knowledge and Technology	Digital literacy Desinformación Ethic Systematic thinking ICT
	Human and Social Development	Well-being of humanity Emotional management Gender equality Social problems Peaceful conflict resolution
	Global and Demographic Dynamics	Global citizenship International cooperation Demographic issues Glocal approach Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA)
	Economy and Sustainability	Responsible consumption Climate emergency Economic problems Global resources

Note: Own elaboration.

which institutions and which of their documents Spanish legislation relies on to face these challenges. To begin with, it starts from its regulations, specifically from the 'Spanish Constitution of 1978' and the 'Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May 2006, on Education'. Consequently, LOMLOE (2020) considers it fundamental to promote constitutional values and the rule of law as a basis for facing the challenges of the 21st century (RD 157/2022). In turn, it recognizes that 'some of the approaches envisaged in 2006, after the years that have passed, require updating to achieve them' (p. 2). Thus, it argues for the implementation of LOMLOE (2020) in the Spanish educational system to 'review some of its measures and accommodate them to the current challenges of education' (p. 3).

From another point of view, most of the intertextual references refer to IO's such as the UN, the European Union, and UNESCO. The latter has the least presence, although all the documents analyzed stress the idea of aligning Spanish educational policy with the objective 'of adapting the educational system to the challenges of the 21st century, by the objectives set by the European Union and UNESCO for the decade 2020-2030' (RD 157/2022, p. 4). As can be seen, these two bodies go hand in hand on up to five occasions in the documents analyzed. However, the European Union is explicitly mentioned several times (11 Codes). In turn, the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages' (CEFR) (2 Codes) is referenced twice (2 Codes)

design of eclectic methodologies, the competency-based nature of this curriculum invites teachers to create interdisciplinary, contextualized, meaningful, and relevant tasks and to develop learning situations where students are considered as progressively autonomous social agents and gradually responsible for their own learning process (RD 243/2022, p. 233).

Delving into the importance of reinforcing the competency approach in the Spanish education system, the 'Council recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning' (European Council, 2018) is referred to on seven occasions when talking about the challenges of the future, thus positioning itself as a reference document for LOMLOE (2020).

For their part, the '2030 Agenda' (UN 2015) and the SDGs are positioned as the backbone - or compass - that guides Spanish education to face the challenges of the 21st century. As can be seen in the following figure, their representation is intensified in the ESO (RD 157/2022) and Baccalaureate (RD 243/2022) stages, while in the Infant Education stage (RD 95/2022) there is no mention of them when talking about future challenges (Figure 1).

However, allusions to the SDGs are numerous (36 Codes) and varied, since they are found in all the documents analyzed and in different forms. Since this will be detailed in the following section, we will only name those that are mentioned in all the curricular elements (specific competencies, key

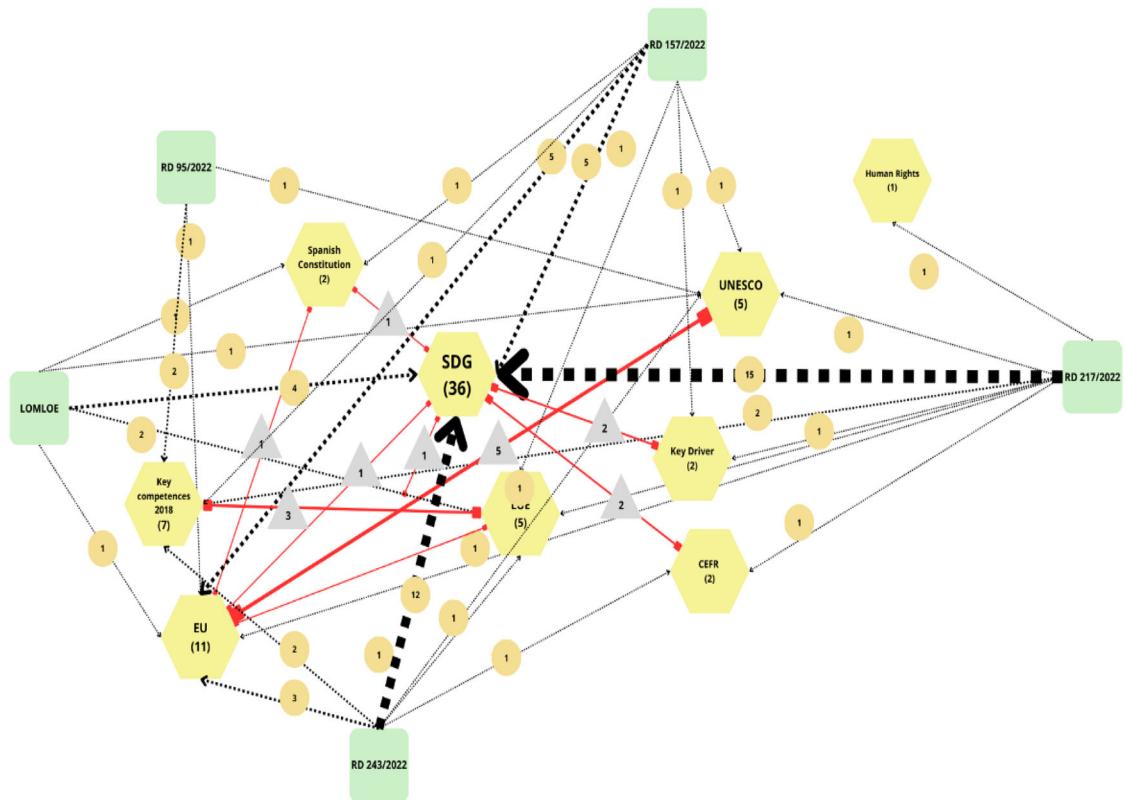


Figure 1. Intertextuality in Spanish educational policies.

Note: The red lines represent the number of times (indicated with triangles) that both institutions and/or documents are simultaneously mentioned (intersect) by the Spanish legislation. Meanwhile, the black lines show the number of references (indicated with circles) to that body and/or document. In turn, the size of the lines and letters indicate the intensity of such intertextuality. Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2. Codes frequency.

Category	Codes	Documents						Total
		LOMLOE	RD 95/2022	RD 157/2022	RD 217/2022	RD 243/2022	Fi	
Knowledge and Technology	Digital literacy	0	0	0	13	9	22	30.14
	Desinformación	0	0	2	6	10	18	24.66
	Ethic	0	0	5	9	12	26	35.62
	Systematic thinking	0	0	0	1	0	1	1.37
	ICT	0	1	1	1	3	6	8.22
	Total	0	1	8	30	34	73	23.25
Human and Social Development	Well-being of humanity	0	1	6	11	9	27	55.10
	Emotional management	0	1	2	2	2	7	14.29
	Gender equality	0	1	0	0	0	1	2.04
	Social problems	0	0	1	2	10	13	26.53
	Peaceful conflict resolution	0	1	0	0	0	1	2.04
	Total	0	4	9	15	21	49	15.61
Global and Demographic Dynamics	Global citizenship	3	0	2	9	6	20	20.20
	International cooperation	0	0	0	7	4	11	11.11
	Demographic issues	0	0	4	6	5	15	15.15
	Glocal approach	1	1	7	17	13	39	39.39
	VUCA	0	0	1	5	8	14	14.14
	Total	4	1	14	44	36	99	31.53
Economy and Sustainability	Responsible consumption	0	1	1	5	3	10	10.75
	Climate emergency	4	1	17	17	11	50	53.76
	Economic problems	0	0	2	1	20	23	24.73
	Global resources	0	0	1	5	4	10	10.75
	Total	4	2	21	28	38	93	29.62

Source: own elaboration.

competencies and the exit profile, basic knowledge, and evaluation criteria) and the preambles of the Royal Decrees of the different stages - except in Early Childhood Education - and of LOMLOE (2020) itself. Finally, the need to assume the principles and values of the 'Universal Declaration of Human

Rights' (1948) in order to face the great challenges facing education and society is also claimed, although its mention is anecdotal (1 Code).

The challenges of the future identified in Spanish education policy

The dizzying changes and new social demands pose a profound challenge for education systems around the world. The Spanish education system is no stranger to this situation and its new law is a good reflection of this. LOMLOE and its minimum education curricula explicitly mention, albeit generically and without naming anyone in particular, on 241 occasions that it must prepare students to face the challenges of this century. Precisely for this reason, LOMLOE (2020) has implemented learning situations, that 'must promote aspects related to the common interest, sustainability or democratic coexistence, essential for students to prepare them to respond effectively to the challenges of the 21st century' (RD 157/2022, p. 108) (Table 2).

To begin with, in the 'Knowledge and technology' dimension, it is recognized that new technologies, in their broadest sense, are a challenge that education must address. Moreover, this is essential given the digital revolution we are experiencing. Therefore, digital literacy (22 Codes), especially in ESO and Baccalaureate, is positioned as a central point to respond to future challenges. However, this is not enough by itself, since 'the training of today's citizens goes beyond digital literacy, as it requires specific attention to the acquisition of the necessary knowledge to use technological media in an ethical, responsible, safe and critical manner' (RD 217/2022, p. 42). This quote shows the most important challenge facing Spanish education, at least in this category: using knowledge and technology ethically (26 Codes). This is seen in the exit profile, where it is explicitly mentioned that this is one of the main challenges that students will face in the future (RD 217/2022, p. 25):

To critically analyze and take advantage of the opportunities of all kinds offered by today's society, particularly those of culture in the digital era, evaluating their benefits and risks and making an ethical and responsible use that contributes to improving the quality of personal and collective life.

Another important challenge in the Spanish educational system is misinformation (18 Codes). This is reflected, for example, in the Primary Education curriculum in the area of 'Spanish Language and Literature', where one of the specific competences to be acquired by students is (RD 157/2022, p. 70):

6. Search, select, and contrast information from two or more sources, in a planned way and with due accompaniment, evaluating its reliability and recognizing some risks of manipulation and misinformation, to transform it into knowledge and to communicate it in a creative way, adopting a personal point of view and respecting intellectual property.

Meanwhile, developing a systemic thinking to understand, analyze, and value all the information of our time is barely considered on one occasion as a challenge to be faced by the Spanish educational system in the coming years.

As for the second category, that of 'Human and social development', LOMLOE (2020) shows a notable concern for social problems (13 Codes), although these are sometimes named but not defined. For example, on only one occasion gender equality is mentioned when addressing the challenges of the 21st century. This occurs in the Early Childhood Education curriculum, where a list of these challenges is drawn up, among which are also peaceful conflict resolution (1 Code) and emotional management (7 Codes):

It is expected that the acquisition of these competencies throughout their schooling will prepare students to successfully face the main challenges of the 21st century: planning healthy living habits, protecting the environment, resolving conflicts peacefully, acting as responsible consumers, using technologies ethically and effectively, promoting gender equality, managing the anxiety generated by uncertainty, identifying situations of inequity and developing feelings of empathy, cooperating and living together in open and changing societies, accepting disability, appreciating the value of diversity, being part of a collective project and acquiring confidence in knowledge as a driver of development (RD 95/2022, p. 10).

However, it seems that the ultimate purpose of meeting these challenges is to improve people's lives. Specifically, LOMLOE (2020) and its curricula allude to this idea on as many as 27 occasions. One of them is the subject of 'History of the Contemporary World', where one of its evaluation criteria is the following:

5.2 Identify the main challenges of the 21st century and their historical origin, through the analysis of the interconnection between diverse political, economic, social, and cultural processes in a global context, arguing the need to adopt eco-socially responsible behaviors oriented to the sustainability of the planet, the defense of democratic institutions, the improvement of collective welfare and solidarity between present and future generations (RD 243/2022, p. 199).

This sentence shows how the well-being of humanity is closely linked to the third dimension, 'Economy and sustainability'. As in the previous one, it warns of the relevance of addressing the economic problems (23 Codes) facing humanity generically. Specifically, it emphasizes on the management of global resources (10 Codes). For example, in the subject of 'Economics and Entrepreneurship', this is mentioned twice. One of its basic knowledge urges to address 'the economic problem: the scarcity of resources and the need to choose' (RD 217/2022, p. 53). For that reason, it encourages responsible consumption (10 Codes) to assess 'its impact on the individual and common good, critically judging needs and excesses and exercising social control in the face of the violation of their rights' (RD 217/2022, p. 25).

That said, the main focus of this dimension is, as LOMLOE (2020) calls it, the 'climate emergency' (50 Codes). There are several allusions to this dimension, and it refers to different phenomena that humanity will have to face in the coming years. Among them, we find the care of the biosphere and ecosystems. Reference is also made to the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energies and the importance of reinforcing recycling. In short, the aim is to reduce the human footprint and combat climate change. Perhaps the most representative quote of this dimension can be found in the basic knowledge of the subject 'Education in Civic and Ethical Values', where it is indicated that we should work on 'the limits of the planet and the depletion of resources. The ecological footprint of human actions. The climate emergency' (RD 217/2022, p. 75).

Concerning the last dimension, where 'Global and demographic dynamics' are addressed, LOMLOE (2020) recognizes that the VUCA (14 Codes) of our time is one of the great challenges of the future. So much so that it invites students to 'accept uncertainty as an opportunity to articulate more creative responses, learning to manage the anxiety that can come with it' (RD 217/2022, p. 25). On the other hand, demographic issues (15 Codes) have a notable presence in the Spanish educational curriculum. In this sense, it warns about the importance of facing both the challenges of the rural world and the management of migratory flows for 'economic, climatic and political' reasons (RD 243/2022, p. 201). For this reason, it emphasizes the importance of strengthening international cooperation (11 Codes). However, one of the central points of this dimension is that global citizenship (20 Codes) is presented as an excellent opportunity to face the challenges of the 21st century and, more specifically, the '2030 Agenda' with guarantees. For that reason, they suggest fostering the glocal approach (39 Codes) among their students, which is based on the premise of acting 'from an individual, local and global perspective' (RD 243/2022, p. 50).

Discussion and conclusions

In this work we set ourselves three objectives. Concerning to the first (Objective 1. Identify which IO are the most influential in current Spanish educational policies), this article shows how the three most influential international and supranational organizations, at least explicitly (Kleinheksel et al., 2020), in Spanish educational policy, are UNESCO, the European Union and, mainly, the UN. In the case of the European Union, which is closely aligned in the same paradigm as the OECD, a competency-based approach is adopted through active methodologies and interdisciplinary pedagogical proposals (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2020).

Precisely, this is the essence of 'learning situations', one of the main novelties of LOMLOE (2020) concerning its predecessor. With this, the Spanish government intends to move from a competency-based discourse at the legislative level to a real competency-based practice in the classroom, contrary to what happened in previous policies (Manso & Neubauer, 2022). But the concretization of the model by law in the curricular elements, especially in the evaluation criteria, is not exempt from criticism despite the model of competencies is considered the most suitable to respond to the challenges of globalization and the digital revolution of the 21st century (López-Rupérez et al., 2022). Assessment criteria are

intended to serve as a guide for teachers on what to assess. They are a combination of 'core knowledge' (formerly 'content'), basic competencies, and specific competencies linked to subject areas. They include UNESCO's humanistic and inclusive approach (Gorostiaga, 2017) with concepts such as 'critical thinking' and 'creativity', which, given the behavioral nature of the competencies, must be observable and measurable. To add further complexity to teaching practice, they must be achieved through active methods such as Project-Based Learning, preferably interdisciplinary and, of course, inclusive, that is, within the framework of Universal Design for Learning. The complexity of this curricular engineering is as evident as it is unrealistic, given the material conditions of teaching in Spain for highly populated areas where class sizes range from 25 to 35 students per class, depending on the stage, for a single teacher.

The UN is positioned as the IO that sets the course for Spanish education through the '2030 Agenda' (UN, 2015) and its SDGs, except for the Early Childhood Education stage. These findings corroborate those obtained by other previous research that point out that the sustainability discourse has deeply permeated national education systems and the Spanish laws (Navarro-González & Gavari-Starkie, 2024). LOMLOE (2020) seeks to strike the difficult balance between the globalized market framework, the model of labor competencies and entrepreneurship with a human-capital driven approach (Fritsch et al., 2024) prescribed by the OECD and the EU and, by the other side, the humanistic and social orientation of UNESCO and UN; In other words, between the OCDE and EU focused on preparing the student for 'jobs that do not yet exist' through the curriculum and how to teach and assets it, and the UN and UNESCO with a more universal aspiration that collides with the economic interests of the developed North (Divrik, 2022).

These data are conducive to reopening - or continuing - the debate on the legitimacy of educational governance copied by these IO's (Dyer, 2022; Matarranz & Pérez-Roldán, 2016; Robertson & Beech, 2024) and controversy as to whether the supranational organizations that are dictating the educational policies of nation-states carry out the main agenda of the member states or have risen to the position of being actors in their own right (Kallo et al. 2022). Beyond future challenges, it seems that these do not have the capacity to face present challenges as populism emerged in politics, the invasion of Ukraine, the invasion of Palestine, or climate change. Therefore, it is worth asking whether these organizations have not only legitimacy but also the authority to set the direction of society in general and education in particular.

In response to the following objective (Objective 2. Recognize the challenges identified according to current Spanish legislation on education facing Spanish society and its educational system in the 21st century), there is a convergence between the challenges identified by these organizations and those included in LOMLOE (2020). Moreover, several times, the Spanish policies call for solving 'the challenges of the future', but do not specify what they are explicitly. The idea underlying this category is that the current historical moment is strongly marked by uncertainty and abrupt changes. For that reason, educating in resilience (Navarro-González & Gavari-Starkie, 2024), and being competent in a liquid society (Bauman, 2000/2025), becomes one of the main keys to facing an unknown tomorrow.

LOMLOE (2020) refers to challenges related to 'Global and demographic dynamics'. In addition, the importance of developing global citizenship and international cooperation strategies is recognized, since current and future challenges - such as migratory flows, increasingly intensified by wars, climate change, etc. - exceed the limits and capacity of nation-states to respond.

Along these lines, 'Economy and sustainability' is the second most represented category, as LOMLOE (2020) encourages responsible consumption, ethical management of resources, and care for the environment. assuming the '2030 Agenda' and with a strong interrelation between economy, education, and sustainability, which can lead to 'contradictions and tensions between groups with different interests and ideological positions' (Urberg, 2025, p. 1). The problem with this approach is that UN not only presents continuous development as the only possible paradigm by adding the adjective 'sustainable' but also avoids addressing the causal origin of the climate emergency, migratory movements or social inequality and does not consider alternative models such as planetary ethics or degrowth (Kopnina, 2020). Consequently, good ethical and social welfare intentions translated into educational goals may not be considered indoctrination, but teaching without critically questioning the reasons that led us here and the other visions would be (Marouli, 2021).

The most repeated challenge in LOMLOE (2020) is to promote welfare. So much so, that we could affirm that the ulterior aim of governments, and in this case of Spanish education, is - or should be - to ensure the welfare and happiness of people, an idea already collected in the 'Declaration of Virginia' of 1776 (Otero León et al., 2016). In consequence, it seeks to reinforce emotional education, gender perspective, and digital literacy. However, Lozano and Hernández Arroyo (2022) consider emotional education in LOMLOE (2020) is more symbolic than real. From another point of view, Spanish educational policy has strongly integrated the perspective of intersectionality in a gender key (Neubauer, 2024). Finally, the low digital literacy of the population increases their vulnerability to being victims of fake news, digital scams, and violations of their rights in the digital world (e.g. cyberbullying, right to be forgotten, grooming ...) (González-Martín et al., 2021). All this not only hurts people's mental health but also has a profound impact on the electoral results of some countries and puts modern democracies at risk.

Regarding the third objective of this study (Objective 3. Analyze what model of citizen is aimed to be formed to face the challenges of the 21st century through LOMLOE), Spanish education pursues to educate a citizen ecosocial committed to the '2030 Agenda' (UN, 2015), who can respond effectively to uncertainty, who is emotionally responsible, who makes a critical-ethical use of technologies and who, finally, thinks globally and acts locally. These ideas, which confirm the starting hypothesis, are reflected in LOMLOE 'exit profile', but this research sheds light on the issues emphasized by this policy.

However, in recent years, led by the new extreme right and its marked neoliberal character, movements opposed to internationalism and globalization that reject supranational policies and advocate the implementation of protectionist national policies have increased considerably (Díez-Gutiérrez & Jarquín-Ramírez, 2024). In education, because of these populisms, according to Rizvi (2022), we can imagine the abandonment of an education committed to multiculturalism, human rights and internationalization to replace it with another that emphasizes the importance of nationalist, religious and patriotic values.

According to Amossy (2022, p. 4) 'legitimacy involves an assessment of the right of the leader to represent the citizens, based on an assessment of his or her ability to understand the problems of the people s/he governs'. This emerging reactionary populism in the West is a symptom that liberal democracies in nation states are failing to achieve the balance we discussed in the introduction to this document, between the demands of economic globalism and the IO's and the problems, needs and culture of their citizens. In Spain, public education teachers feel increasingly overwhelmed by the growing diversity of classrooms, class sizes, and the bureaucratic, inclusivity and training demands of the administrations, while privatization increases. As Ball (1993, p. 3) point out, 'the more ideologically abstract a policy is, the more distant it is from practice in its conception (...), the less likely it is to be directly integrated into the context of practice'.

That said, this research has some limitations that should be pointed out. One is that only the explicit mentions of IO's included in Spanish policies are analyzed. However, their influence may be implicit through the assumption of the educational guidelines set forth by these organizations in their policies. Secondly, the categorization and coding process may be subject to certain subjectivities on the part of the researchers (Renz et al., 2018). Despite having elaborated memos - detailed descriptions of each category and code - and having contrasted these with ChatGPT, this interpretation typical of qualitative research may slightly vary the data. For that reason, the coding process could have been performed by a third external researcher to triangulate the analysis. Finally, the use of artificial intelligence in qualitative research presents some challenges. One of them is the intrinsic bias of the tool (Morgan, 2023). In turn, some authors recognize that there are unknowns about its use that query the transparency and replicability of the research (Hayes, 2025; Morgan, 2023). For this reason, it is necessary to indicate the prompt used in the paper. In future research, and following Revyakina and Galvin (2022), it would be useful to explore how new global prescriptions are adopted and practiced locally and become part of the vernacular teaching imaginary. It also seems convenient to carry out a comparative study with other countries with recent educational reforms (e.g. Portugal, Sweden ...) to know how the '2030 Agenda' (UN, 2015) has permeated and what challenges are identified in their national curricula. For example, curriculum reforms in Albania, driven to achieve the '2030 Agenda', have been strongly influenced by the OECD, UNESCO and the European Union (Rika & Fraint, 2023). Another case of interest is Mexico, where curriculum reforms have been carried out to strengthen educational inclusion in line with SDG4 (de la et al., 2023). In addition, it would be relevant to analyze the role of teachers in this topic. On the

one hand, the initial and permanent training they have received could be analyzed, and on the other, how they develop this discourse at the classroom level. This future line of research is of particular interest because some authors denounce that the gap between political discourse (Gimeno, 2006), educational research (Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2022) and teaching practice is a pending issue.

In conclusion, in this new scenario of global education governance, this is not just an objective to train a specific type of citizen capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century, but this citizen becomes the means to achieve the objectives proposed by the IOs, including their legitimacy to identify them as such and to establish how to achieve them with soft policies that seek to permeate classroom practices. In this area, the commitment of teachers and their identification with this model of citizenship and education will be crucial to achieving them.

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About the authors

Adrián Neubauer: Professor in Education, Cum Laude with International Mention and Extraordinary Doctorate Award. Graduate in Early Childhood Education and Graduate in Primary Education. Master in Quality and Improvement of Education. Research interests: Education policy, right to education, comparative education, and migrations. Member of the Research Group on Supranational Educational Policies (GIPES-UAM).

Iluminada Sánchez-Doménech: PhD in Education. Lecturer on the Master's Degree in Secondary Education in the Department of Teaching and School Organisation. She also teaches on the Degree in Pedagogy.

ORCID

Iluminada Sánchez-Doménech  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4342-2145>

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