

The Leadership of Schools in Spain. Analysis of Regulations and Evidence¹

La dirección de los centros educativos en España. Análisis normativos y evidencias

<https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2025-410-710>

Francisco López Rupérez

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2613-9652>

Director of the Extraordinary Chair of Educational Policies of the UCJC

Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to analyse the evolution of the Spanish regulatory framework between 1970 and 2020, about the professionalisation of managerial roles, and to draw some conclusions concerning policies focused on school leadership. The introduction outlines the special consideration given internationally to school leadership and its role in student outcomes and school improvement. The importance of the professionalisation of managerial roles is then considered to establish the conceptual framework. This is followed by a comparative analysis of the various education laws enacted in Spain during this period. To ensure a consistent comparison, a uniform analytical framework has been employed, inspired by international practices and comprising three criteria and eight sub-criteria related to professionalisation. Empirical evidence is then examined in relation to the case of the Autonomous Community of Navarre and its anomaly concerning the professionalisation of school leadership. The discussion of both types of results highlights the weaknesses of the Spanish model. The most innovative approaches to the professionalisation of school leadership are found in the LOPEGCE and the LOCE. The study concludes with several recommendations for the future of school leadership in Spain, including the pursuit of a clear and balanced school leadership model, inspired by the modern concept of a profession and aligned with international consensus on the complexity and challenges of school leadership and its implications; the incorporation of available empirical evidence; and the recognition of progress made in other developed countries towards the increasing professionalisation of managerial roles.

¹ This study is, in part, indebted to López Rupérez (2024).

Key words: Leadership. Educational establishments. Educational legislation. Educational policy. Educational management.

Resumen

El presente trabajo tiene como finalidad principal analizar la evolución del marco normativo español entre 1970 y 2020, en lo concerniente a la profesionalización de la función directiva, y extraer algunas de sus consecuencias en materia de políticas centradas en la dirección escolar. En la introducción se describe la consideración especial que se atribuye internacionalmente a la dirección de los centros educativos y a su papel en los resultados de los alumnos y en la mejora escolar. La importancia de la profesionalización de la función directiva es considerada, a continuación, a fin de focalizar el marco conceptual. Seguidamente, se efectúa un análisis comparado sobre las diferentes leyes educativas aprobadas en España en dicho periodo. Al objeto de asegurar una comparación homogénea, se ha empleado un mismo patrón de análisis, inspirado en las prácticas internacionales y compuesto por tres criterios y ocho subcriterios relativos a la profesionalización. Se consideran después las evidencias empíricas aplicadas al caso de la Comunidad foral de Navarra y a su anomalía en materia de profesionalización de la dirección escolar. La discusión de ambos tipos de resultados subraya las debilidades del modelo español. Las visiones más innovadoras en materia de profesionalización de la dirección escolar corresponden a la LOPEGCE y a la LOCE. Se concluye con algunas recomendaciones que miran al futuro de la dirección escolar en España, tales como la búsqueda de un modelo de dirección escolar explícito, equilibrado e inspirado en la idea moderna de profesión que se alinee con el consenso internacional sobre la complejidad y la dificultad de la dirección escolar y sus consecuencias; que incorpore la evidencia empírica disponible; y que valore los avances producidos en otros países desarrollados, en el sentido de una profesionalización creciente de la función directiva.

Palabras clave: Liderazgo. Establecimientos de enseñanza. Legislación educativa. Política educativa. Gestión educativa.

Introduction

The acknowledged importance of the impact of school leadership quality on the quality of schools has progressively been consolidated over decades on an empirical basis. Its direct and indirect effects are regarded as significant in both academic and institutional circles. For instance, the OECD (2017)

has highlighted a series of channels through which leadership influences the reality of schools in the following terms:

“School headteachers play a key role in managing schools. They can shape teachers’ professional development, define the school’s educational goals, ensure that teaching practice is directed toward achieving goals, suggest modifications to improve teaching practice, and help resolve problems that may arise in the classroom or among teachers” (p. 120).

This influence, which spreads in a “cascading” manner and ultimately reaches all students in educational institutions, explains the international importance currently attributed to policies focused on school leadership.

There are two types of evidence that, due to their convergence, underpin this broad consensus and merit emphasis: qualitative or observational evidence, primarily linked to the effective schools movement (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Lezotte, 1991); and evidence derived from quantitative estimates of the association between leadership quality and school performance (Leithwood *et al.*, 2019).

Regarding the first, it is worth recalling Hechinger’s (1981) description, in which he states:

“I have never seen a good school with a bad headteacher, nor a bad school with a good headteacher. I have seen poor schools transform into good ones and, regrettably, outstanding schools rapidly decline. In every case, the rise or fall could be easily traced to the quality of the headteacher” (p.33).

That qualitative perception aligns with the impressions of inspectors and senior officials in the Spanish educational administration, who, with responsibilities in the management of educational institutions, have had the opportunity to closely observe schools and their development.

However, the effective school’s movement, employing naturalistic methodologies, has identified through numerous empirical studies (Klitgaard and Hall, 1973; Purkey, 1983; Lezotte, 1991) the common characteristics of schools that succeed in achieving good results in socially disadvantaged environments. These attributes are known as “correlates” and are distinguished

by their consistency and universality; that is, they are repeatedly observed in both primary and secondary schools, on both sides of the Atlantic, and across both the first and second generations of research (Lezotte, 1991). The quality of leadership, specifically in the form of pedagogical or instructional leadership, remains a constant piece of this puzzle.

The second type of evidence comes from purely quantitative analyses, most often linked to studies examining the association between leadership quality—or specific aspects or dimensions of it—and school success, measured by student performance in standardised tests. Reviews and meta-analyses on this issue are available in the literature (Uysal and Sarier, 2018; Robinson *et al.*, 2009; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004), yielding varying results regarding the strength of the relationship between these two variables. Estimates generally fall within an approximate range of 10 to 20%, depending on factors such as the type of school, the dimension of leadership under examination, and the country. In the case of Spain, the strength of this association has been estimated at 18.8% for secondary schools when academic outcomes are measured using the PISA 2015 assessments (López Rupérez *et al.* 2020).

There are examples of studies that straddle both types of evidence. Such is the case of the research conducted by Bryk *et al.* (2010), who took advantage of a naturally occurring situation—one not specifically designed for that purpose—created by a reform affecting public schools in Chicago, which granted schools greater autonomy in appointing their headteachers. As the authors conclude (Bender *et al.*, 2006):

“Only 11% of schools with weak leadership achieve substantial improvement in reading. (...) The probability of achieving significant improvements in mathematics is seven times higher in schools with strong leadership than in those with weak leadership” (p. 24).

A significant observation comes from the empirical analysis conducted by E. A. Hanushek and colleagues (Hanushek *et al.*, 2016) on the school system of the State of Texas. The authors conclude that improving the quality of headteachers yields benefits even greater than those obtained by improving the quality of teachers, in the sense that it comparatively affects a much larger number of students.

The central objective of this study is to analyse the evolution of the Spanish regulatory framework between 1970 and 2020 from the perspective of the professionalisation of school leadership and to draw the appropriate lessons for policies focused on school leadership. For this reason, we will highlight the importance of the professionalisation of leadership, stemming from the special consideration given internationally to the management of educational institutions and its role in student outcomes and school improvement.

Next, we will conduct a comparative analysis of the various Spanish education laws enacted during this period. To ensure a consistent comparison, we will employ a uniform analytical framework comprising three main criteria and eight plausible sub-criteria related to professionalisation. Subsequently, we will examine the evidence applied to the case of the Autonomous Community of Navarre and its anomaly concerning the professionalisation of school leadership, and we will discuss the findings obtained from both approaches. Finally, we will conclude with some reflections on the future of school leadership in Spain.

The importance of professionalising the management role

The demand for greater professionalisation of school leadership is one of the key elements of a broad international consensus, firmly established for several decades in multilateral organisations with responsibilities in education (Delors *et al.*, 1996; Pont *et al.*, 2008a and 2008b).

The recognition of the complexity of leadership roles, based on task analysis (Leithwood *et al.* 2019; Fullan, 2014), together with extensive empirical evidence of its impact on student achievement and school quality (Sammons, 1995; Leithwood *et al.*, 2004; Leithwood *et al.*, 2019; López Rupérez *et al.*), explains why most developed countries have upheld a vision of school leadership through the lens of professionalisation. UNESCO itself

has recently reaffirmed this perspective (UNESCO, 2024) due to its connection with the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015).

National and international studies agree in recognising that the responsibilities of school leadership constitute a distinct activity from teaching. Leadership roles require a set of conceptual, methodological, and technical skills that are specific to the position and not necessarily required for teaching. While school leadership must certainly be built upon a solid foundation of teaching experience, it also demands its own professional competencies.

Professionalising school leadership, therefore, means incorporating that set of knowledge, skills, and experiences—specific to leadership roles—within the framework of a mature profession. This requires defining an explicit and well-structured model that enables an adaptive evolution in response to contextual changes, guided by a constructive regulatory approach.

The Australian Council of Professions (2004) articulated a robust and contemporary vision of the concept of a profession in the following terms:

“A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards, present themselves as such to society, and are accepted by it as possessing specific knowledge and skills, organised within a widely recognised learning framework and derived from research, training, and high-level education; and who are prepared to apply that knowledge and exercise those skills in the interest of others.”

In this definition, the characteristic features of well-established professions are easily recognisable, and it highlights the importance attributed to three key components: expert knowledge—organised and transferable—specific to the profession; the professional or practice-based community; and ethical obligations.

The professionalisation of an activity leads not only to improved performance and its consequent impact but also, as a result, to its social recognition. As we have noted elsewhere (López Rupérez, 2014):

“The social acceptance of a profession, its recognition, and prestige are linked, in one way or another, to the ability of its members to effectively

apply an organised body of knowledge and skills in the practice of their profession and in solving the characteristic problems it entails. The essence of a successful professional practice lies in the effective utilisation of this expert knowledge base” (p.76).

These two aspects of professionalisation—prestige and organised knowledge—reinforce each other, creating a virtuous cycle that, considering the available evidence, is one of the key tools for advancing the education system as a whole. Given this, it is unsurprising that, despite the distinct cultural traditions of the United States and France, both have chosen to assign school leadership a specific professional status, separate from teaching and, therefore, not temporary. In other words, according to both models, a school leader, even if they originate from the classroom, will never return to it (López Rupérez, 2024).

Ultimately, the professionalisation of school leadership ensures, with a high degree of certainty, the quality of school management—understood in a broad sense—and its impact on the overall quality of the education system.

The evolution of regulatory frameworks regarding the professionalisation of school management in Spain: 1970-2020

An analysis of the historical background of legislation on school leadership in Spain, prior to the period between 1970 and 2020—which will be examined later—reveals a distinct regulatory approach across different educational stages. For instance, the Law of 26 February 1953 on the Organisation of Secondary Education (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 1953)—also known as the *Ruiz Giménez Act*, after the Minister of Education who promoted it—established in Article 27 a direct appointment process for the leadership of secondary education institutes, determined by ministerial designation.

However, the development of the consolidated text of the Primary Education Act (1945), through Decree 985/1967 of 20 April, established

the Regulations for the School Headteachers' Corps for this educational stage (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 1967). This decree created the School Headteachers' Corps and defined rigorous, objective, and professionalised procedures for accessing leadership roles, based on a two-step sequence: first, a selection process through competitive examination (*oposición*), followed by initial training for the selected candidates.

This differentiated approach was later rectified through two legislative measures: the first, introduced by the General Education Act (LGE, 1970), which abolished the School Headteachers' Corps; and the second, contained in the Organic Law on the Right to Education (LODE, 1985), which unified the procedures for accessing leadership positions and, as a general rule, eliminated the direct appointment process.

A pattern for comparative analysis

With the aim of facilitating a consistent comparative analysis of the successive regulatory frameworks in Spain from the perspective of the professionalisation of school leadership, we will rely on a plausible analytical framework, inspired by international practices and structured in the form of criteria and sub-criteria, as defined in **Table I**.

TABLE I. An Analytical Framework for the Comparative Study of the Professionalisation of School Leadership in Spanish Legislation

Criteria	Sub-criteria
Access to school leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Appointment to the position ○ Initial training. ○ Accreditation for the exercise of leadership functions.
Professional practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Authority. ○ Responsibility.
Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continuous training. ○ Performance evaluation. ○ Career progression.

Source: López Rupérez (2024).

The General Education and Educational Reform Financing Act (LGE, 1970)

In the implementation of the LGE, two decrees were issued concerning school leadership: the first, Decree 2957/1972 of 3 October, which abolished the School Headteachers' Corps and regulated its integration into the Corps of General Basic Education Teachers, or alternatively, allowed members to remain in the abolished corps; the second, Decree 2655/1974 of 30 August, which regulated the exercise of leadership functions in National Colleges of General Basic Education. The procedure of direct appointment remained in place for access to leadership roles in National Institutes of Secondary Education.

Taking Decree 2655/1974 as a reference, the analysis of the corresponding regulatory text allows for the following characterisation, in accordance with the framework described in Table I.

Access to school leadership

In accordance with Article Three, Section One, *appointment to the position* is made by the Director General of Personnel, upon the recommendation of the Provincial Delegates of the Department, following a report from the respective Technical Education Inspectorates and after consulting the Teaching Staff Assembly and the Advisory Council of the School.

To be appointed as the Headteacher of a National College of General Basic Education, candidates must belong to the Corps of General Basic Education Teachers, be assigned to the school, and have completed a minimum of three years of service in state schools at this level (Article Three, Section Two).

Furthermore, regarding the *initial training* sub-criterion, Article 110.3 of the LGE stipulates that candidates must undergo “*special educational training and periodic retraining, which will qualify them to permanently exercise leadership functions.*”

With regard to the *accreditation for the exercise of leadership functions* sub-criterion, no such requirement was established, despite the fact that the

previous model entailed a stronger professionalising requirement—namely, membership in a specific management corp.

Professional practice

The conditions of professional practice, as described in Article Two, focus more on *responsibility* than on the exercise of *authority*. This section of the decree states that “the headteacher shall be responsible for guiding and organising the activities of the school, as well as for coordinating its teaching staff. Additionally, the headteacher shall serve as the President of the Teaching Staff Assembly and the Advisory Council.”

Professional development

Of the three sub-criteria assigned in Table I to this comparative criterion, only continuous *training* is mentioned, referred to as “periodic retraining,” as established both in the law and in the decree. There is no reference to *performance evaluation*, nor is *career progression* considered. A limit of five years is set for the exercise of leadership functions, after which the headteacher fully returns to teaching duties.

In summary, the LGE represents a setback in the professionalisation of school leadership compared to the previous regulatory framework. This is not only due to the abolition of the School Headteachers’ Corps and the consequent reduction in access requirements but also because the mandatory combination of leadership and teaching, as established by the law, diminishes the time dedicated to effective school management. Some authors (Mayorga, 2007) have referred to this regression, citing the conclusion reached in the Final Report of the Evaluation Commission on the General Education and Educational Reform Financing Act (*Boletín Oficial del Estado*, 1976), which identified the “lack of professionalised leadership” as a factor with negative effects on schools (Evaluation Commission on the General Education and Educational Reform Financing Act, 1976).

The Organic Law on the Right to Education (LODE, 1985)

The LODE is the first law to develop the provisions set out in Article 27 of the Spanish Constitution of 1978. Within this broad regulatory framework, it establishes the rules governing school leadership in public schools and publicly funded institutions.

Access to school leadership

Article 37 sets out all matters related to *appointment to the position*, which can be summarised as:

- The headteacher of the school shall be elected by the School Council and appointed by the competent Educational Administration.
- Candidates must be teachers at the school with at least one year of service at the institution and three years of teaching experience.
- The election shall be decided by an absolute majority of the members of the School Council.
- In the absence of candidates, if no candidate secures an absolute majority, or in the case of newly established schools, the relevant Educational Administration shall appoint a provisional headteacher for a period of one year.

Regarding the sub-criterion of *initial training*, and unlike the previous law, the LODE does not include any explicit reference to it, nor to any form of *accreditation* as a requirement for exercising leadership functions.

Professional practice

The responsibilities of the headteacher are outlined in Article 38. These encompass both individual *authority* and *responsibility*, as follows:

- Officially represent the school.
- Enforce compliance with laws and current regulations.

- Direct and coordinate all school activities in accordance with prevailing regulations, without prejudice to the competencies of the School Council².
- Lead all staff assigned to the school.
- Convene and preside over academic events and meetings of all the school's governing bodies.
- Authorise expenditures in line with the school's budget and manage payments.
- Endorse official certifications and documents of the school.
- Propose appointments for leadership positions.
- Implement the decisions of the governing bodies within their scope of authority.
- Any other responsibilities assigned by the relevant organisational regulations.

Regarding the tenure of these specific functions, it is established that:

- The headteacher's term of office is three years.
- The headteacher may be dismissed or suspended before the end of this term if they seriously fail to fulfil their duties, following a reasoned report from the School Council and after hearing from the individual concerned.

Professional development

The law does not address professional development, neither in its limited form as *continuous training* nor in its broader sense, which would include training, *performance evaluation*, incentives, and *career progression*. Like the previous LGE, leadership is considered a temporary function, and vertical mobility is not envisaged in this law, nor is continuous training. In this context, it is not surprising that, as an unintended consequence of the law, more than half of headteacher appointments at that time were extraordinary

2 The school board selects the principal and designates the management team, resolves conflicts, imposes sanctions, approves the budget, evaluates the annual general programme, approves the internal regulations, and supervises the general activity of the school in both administrative and educational aspects.

(López Rupérez, 1994).

Organic Law on Participation, Evaluation and Governance of the Schools (LOPEGCE, 1995)

This new law—like the previous one, introduced by a socialist government—is considered an extension, in terms of schools, of its predecessor, the LOGSE (1990). It represented a step forward in the professionalisation of the leadership role, which, given the context and its regulatory background, can be considered significant³.

Access to school leadership

In terms of the *headteacher's appointment*, this law (arts. 17 and 20), while maintaining the elective procedure assigned to the School Council, first established in the LODE, introduces as a novelty the requirement to present their merits, a “leadership programme,” and the composition of the governance team that would form their candidacy. Additionally, the duration of the term was extended from three to four years.

Regarding the sub-criterion of *initial training*, it introduced the requirement of prior *accreditation* before exercising the leadership role (art. 19). This was a comprehensive process that, in addition to completing a training programme organised by the educational administrations, required a positive assessment both in other leadership or coordination positions and in the classroom.

Professional practice

The LOPEGCE adds, from the very law, competences for the headteacher that were not present in the previous law (art. 21), among which it is worth highlighting, in the realm of *authority*, the ability to appoint the rest of the leadership team; and, in terms of *responsibility*, to carry out, by delegation,

³ For a description of the objectives of the Law, see *The Impact of Laws in 50 Years of Education* (Marchesi, A.) in this special issue.

the hiring of works, services, and supplies.

Although the School Council retains much of its competences, it no longer appoints the leadership team. And while it sets guidelines, it no longer supervises the general activity of the centre in administrative and teaching aspects.

Professional development

In terms of professional development, undeniable progress is made in the sense of increasing professionalisation. Thus, programmes for *continuous training* to improve the qualifications of the leadership teams are contemplated (art. 25), and for the first time in Spanish legislation, the *evaluation of performance* in the leadership function is introduced (art. 34). Regarding the sub-criterion of *professional career*, although no articulated career is foreseen for headteachers – only a vague reference is made to “economic and professional compensation” (art. 25.4) – and leadership remains a temporary function, a robust incentive is introduced in the form of the partial consolidation of the salary supplement linked to the leadership function, following a positive performance evaluation (art. 25.5).

Organic Law on the Quality of Education (LOCE, 2002)

This was the first educational law from a government led by the Partido Popular. The alternation in the national government, which occurred after the law had come into effect, allowed for its application to be delayed by using a Royal Decree that regulated the implementation schedule. Through this legislative mechanism, it was replaced by another law without being fully implemented. Nonetheless, due to its design, it formally served as a reference for greater professionalisation of school leadership, and in some specific respects, it provided an additional push in that direction.

Access to school leadership

Regarding the sub-criterion *Appointment for the position* the elective approach previously implemented by the School Council is replaced by a selective one, through a merit-based competition among career civil servant teachers from the educational bodies and regulations corresponding to the institution (art. 87).

This selective process is managed by a Commission – introduced in Spanish educational legislation – made up of representatives from the educational administrations and, at least 30%, representatives from the respective school (art. 88).

The prior requirement for *accreditation* and its various components, present in the previous law, is eliminated. However, it is replaced by a subsequent requirement, consisting of the successful completion of an *initial training* programme for the selected candidates. This programme is organised by the educational administrations and includes a theoretical training course related to the tasks assigned to the managerial role, along with a practical period (art. 88).

Furthermore, the requirement of having a permanent assignment at the centre is removed to link the exercise of the managerial function to the candidate's demonstrated professional competence and to make mobility possible, facilitating other policies, such as compensatory ones.

Although the duration of mandates is reduced to three years, the possibility of extending them through the renewal mechanism is introduced, even at different institutions.

Professional practice

The headteacher's competencies are expanded, compared to the provisions of the LOPEGCE (art. 79), in terms of both *authority* and *responsibility*. Regarding the first of these sub-criteria, it is envisaged that headteachers will be granted the necessary autonomy for management (art. 92.1), within a new framework in which the School Council retains much of its competencies, but with a focus not as a governing body, but as a consultative participation body.

As for the second, the focus is on encouraging collaboration with families, institutions, and organisations, fostering an orderly school climate, promoting improvement plans, and initiating internal evaluation processes within the institution, among other things.

Professional development

In terms of professional development, continuous training is provided through mandatory management training courses, so that headteachers can update their technical and professional knowledge (art. 92).

As for *performance evaluation*, its link to incentives is maintained (art. 94.3), as was established in the previous law, and it is also associated with the acquisition of the “headteacher category”, after a positive evaluation at the end of their mandate (art. 89).

Finally, in relation to the sub-criterion of *professional career*, alongside the possibility of accessing the permanent “headteacher category”, there is an option to exempt, either partially or completely, the management team—especially the headteacher—from direct teaching, depending on the characteristics of the school (art. 92.4); it also provides for the continuation of the managerial role after the mandate, by participating in a new selection process; and it foresees a degree of vertical mobility, for the “provision of positions in the public teaching service, as well as for other professional purposes within the educational sphere as established by the educational authorities” (art. 94.2).

Organic Law of Education (LOE, 2006)

This new educational law, passed by a socialist government, introduced several changes compared to the provisions of the LOCE (Law on Education Quality). These changes represented, to some extent, a return to the model established in previous socialist laws, although some of the elements introduced in the two preceding laws were preserved.

Access to school leadership

Regarding the sub-criterion of *appointment to the position*, the selection committee model introduced by the LOCE is maintained, but the proportion of representatives from the centre is increased—at least sixty-six percent (art. 135) compared to thirty percent of the previous law—to such an extent that, in practice, it returns to the philosophy of an elective model inspired by the LODE.

The law reintroduces the requirement of having at least one full school year of seniority at the centre, as well as the submission of a leadership project that includes, among other elements, objectives, action lines, and their evaluation (Article 134). The duration of the term is also reinstated at four years. Candidates from within the same centre are given preference (Article 134.1.c). Beyond the knowledge of the center itself that this measure may favor, it is made difficult by it. to transfer proven leadership knowledge and experience to centres that need it most.

Regarding *initial training*, the mandatory completion of the training programme by selected candidates is maintained, but candidates with two years of experience in a leadership role are exempt from the entire initial training, not just the *practicum* as was the case under the LOCE (Article 136), neglecting the importance of systematic knowledge of the conceptual basis and best practices.

Similar to what was established in the LOCE, the *prior* requirement for *accreditation to exercise the leadership function*—present in the LOPEGCE and somewhat inspired by Anglo-Saxon models—is eliminated in favour of the French model, albeit without the competitive examination (López Rupérez, 2024).

Professional practice

In relation to the LOCE, regarding the competencies of the headteacher (Article 79), the task of pedagogical leadership is added, and the reference to greater management autonomy for headteachers to drive and develop improvement projects is removed. The School Council regains its role as a governing body, as established in the original LODE law, along with most of the competencies laid out in that law, except for the election of the headteacher

or the appointment of the leadership team, for example. However, the Council now has the possibility of drafting proposals and reports on the functioning of the school and the improvement of management quality (Article 127). In conclusion, *authority* is reduced while *responsibility* is increased.

Professional development

The issue of *continuous training* is not addressed in the law. However, *performance evaluation* is considered in similar terms to those established in the two previous laws. As for the *professional career*, the category of headteacher is eliminated (Article 139); the possibility of exempting the headteacher, either partially or fully, from direct teaching is closed; and the possibility of continuing with the exercise of the leadership function through participation in new competitions is also closed. The possibility of a certain degree of promotion is partially maintained (Article 139.2), although it is neither structured nor sufficiently specified.

Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE, 2013)

Contrary to what might have been expected, in this second law of a government from the Popular Party, there is no clear recovery of the advancements described in the LOCE, in terms of greater professionalisation. Instead, a middle-ground and somewhat conceptually confused formula is adopted.

Access to school leadership

Regarding the *appointment for the position* (art. 88), the model of the Selection Committee is maintained, but the participation of the Administration in the composition of the Committee is increased (between 50 and 70 percent) compared to the previous law, in a direction like that established in the LOCE.

The preferential consideration of candidates from the centre, which was present in its predecessor, the LOE, is removed.

Concerning the sub-criterion of *initial training*, the exemption from training for two years of experience in the managerial role is eliminated, and the prior requirement of having completed an official training course on the development of the managerial role is reinstated (art.134), which is closer to the *accreditation for the exercise of leadership functions* introduced in the LOPEGCE, but less robust.

Professional practice

Regarding the LOE, additional competencies are attributed to the headteacher (art.132) that were previously assigned to the School Council in its predecessor, and it is specified that, in carrying out “quality actions,” the school headteacher will have extensive autonomy (art.122bis). The responsibility of exercising pedagogical leadership and promoting innovation and the development of plans to achieve the objectives of the educational project is removed. The School Council reduces its competencies compared to the LOE, although it is still considered a governing body (art.127). It can be said that, in comparison to its predecessor, the *authority* and corresponding *responsibility* of the headteacher are increased.

Professional development

Essentially, the status quo of the previous law is maintained in this regard.

Organic Law Amending the LOE (LOMLOE, 2020)

This a law occurred because of political alternation and that its responsible parties are the same as those behind the LOE suggests that this new law would reflect a certain preservation of that model.

Access to school leadership

Regarding the sub-criterion for the *appointment to the position*, the requirements for access to school management (Article 134) established in the LOE are maintained, and the proportions in the composition of the selection committee are restored, reducing the administration's participation to less than a third of its members (Article 135). However, a serving school headteacher is introduced into the selection committee. Candidacies from faculty members within the school are once again particularly valued.

Concerning the *accreditation* for the management function, no strict procedure is established in this regard, although a mandatory *initial training* programme is reinstated after the selection process. However, exceptions to this training requirement are considered in some cases (Article 136.6), while the responsibility for determining the training requirement is delegated to the educational administrations (Article 134.1.c).

Professional practice

Regarding the headteacher's competencies (Article 132), most of those outlined in the LOE are reinstated, although some additional responsibilities are added, such as promoting experiments, pedagogical innovations, and educational programmes; fostering the qualification and training of the teaching staff; and designing the planning and organisation of the school's teaching activities, among others. Therefore, the *responsibilities* of the headteacher are increased, but compared to the LOMCE, the headteacher's *authority* is reduced.

Professional development

Regarding the sub-criterion of *continuous training*, the law includes the completion of update modules for the performance of the headteacher's duties. Otherwise, the provisions established in the LOE (Article 139) are maintained verbatim.

Empirical evidence applied to the case of the Autonomous Community of Navarre

The Autonomous Community of Navarre constitutes a unique case in Spain regarding the professionalisation of the leadership role, which, in this analytical context, deserves special consideration.

In 2020, we published a quantitative study on leadership in Spain in the British journal *Leadership and Policy in Schools* (López Rupérez *et al.* 2020). The study was based on the development of four partial indicators, corresponding to different dimensions of leadership in schools. The calculation of these indicators relied on responses to the 2015 PISA questionnaire directed at school headteachers, and the results from the meta-analysis by Robinson and colleagues (Robinson *et al.*, 2009). These partial indicators were integrated into a weighted composite indicator regarding the quality of school leadership (LI). The study also examined, among other aspects, the distribution of this integrated indicator across different autonomous communities. Figure I show the territorialised results.

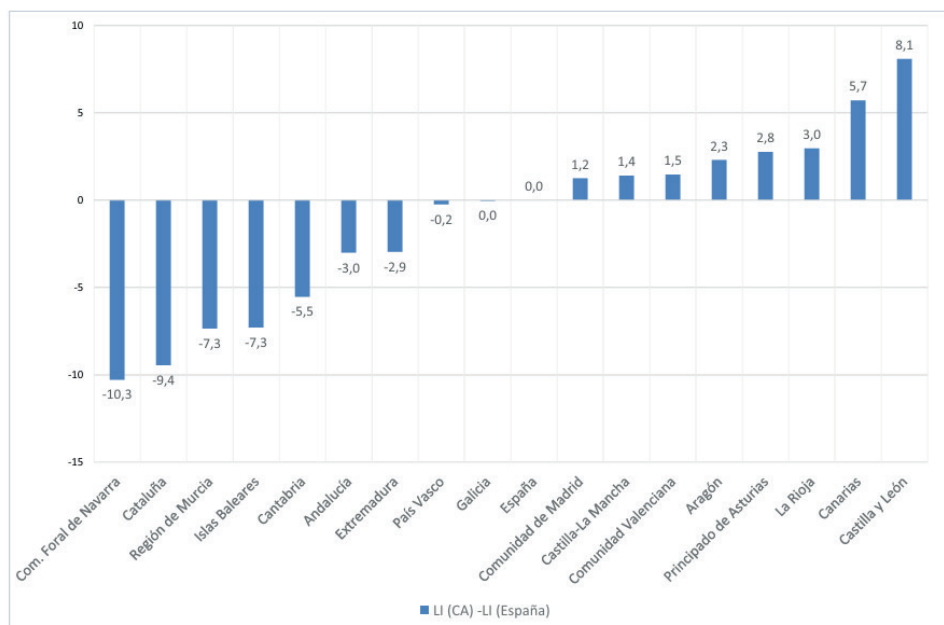
Although the results on the quality of leadership in public secondary education schools across Spain were not good the Autonomous Community of Navarre ranked very poorly on the LI indicator, coming in last place, 9.8 percentage points below the national average.

This study did not aim to provide an explanation for these results. For example, in the extreme case of the Autonomous Community of Navarre, further research, likely qualitative in nature, would have been necessary to gain a deeper understanding of this situation.

Sometime later, the study came to the attention of the Association of High School Headteachers of Navarra (ADIZE), which invited me to present it at their 2023 Meeting in Pamplona. The previous conversations with the attendees and organizers, as well as the subsequent public discussion with high-ranking officials of the Navarra educational administration, provided me with relevant information, at least to formulate a notably plausible explanatory hypothesis. It turns out that the corresponding educational administration had dispensed with the consolidation of the salary complement, associated with the continued and successful exercise of the management function. To have

suspended this incentive in the territory was very likely the reason why a very large majority of the principal appointments were being made through the extraordinary procedure.

FIGURE I. Deviations of the values of the integrated leadership indicator LI, compared to the sample value for Spain for public secondary education centres, by autonomous communities



Source: López Rupérez *et al.*, (2020)

This led to a designation which, in addition to the potential dissatisfaction it could cause in many cases, prevented thinking ahead about a leadership project, its development, and implementation supported by a suitable leadership team chosen for that purpose. Furthermore, the performance evaluation that should have been positive for the consolidation of the salary supplement was left in suspense. Thus, the following factors were aligning, with a more than likely negative result on the quality of leadership: the non-voluntary nature of the appointment; the improvised planning and

consequently improvised leadership action; the elimination of accountability linked to performance evaluation; and the various interactions between these factors.

One of the positive effects of the ADIZE Meeting has been that the Autonomous Community of Navarra, after decades of neglecting this element of professionalisation of the leadership function, has rectified, and in the sixth final provision of its budget law (B.O.E of 26 March 2024), it amends the Foral Legislative Decree of 30 August 1993, which approves the consolidated text of the Statute of Personnel at the service of the Public Administrations of Navarra, introducing the mentioned incentive and its conditions.

Discussion and conclusions

Table II synthesises the regulatory evolution analysed above, with 0 representing the baseline or reference level; + indicates progress in professionalisation compared to the previous law; = signifies the absence of substantial changes compared to the previous law; and - represents a regression in professionalisation relative to the previous law. It clearly shows, for example, the lack of stability in the model, except for performance evaluation, linked to incentives and introduced in the LOPEGCE. The progressive nature of responsibilities does not always align with the necessary increase in authority to carry them out. The most innovative views in the search for a new balance that strengthens the professionalisation of school leadership undoubtedly belong to the LOPEGCE and the LOCE. It is to their contributions that this weak constructive dynamic observed in the overall analyses can be attributed.

TABLE II. Evolution of Spanish legislation on the professionalisation of school leadership from 1970 to 2020.

Criteria	Sub-criteria	LGE	LODE	LOPEGCE	LOCE	LOE	LOMCE	LOMLOE
Access to school leadership	-Appointment to the position	0	-	=	+	-	+	-
	-Initial training	0	-	+	+	-	+	=
	-Accreditation for the exercise of leadership functions	0	=	+	-	=	=	=
Professional practice	-Authority	0	-	+	+	-	+	-
	-Responsability	0	+	+	+	+	+	+
Professional development	-Continuous training	0	-	+	=	-	=	+
	-Performance evaluation	0	=	+	=	=	=	=
	-Career progression	0	=	=	+	-	=	=

Note: 0 represents the reference level; + denotes progress in professionalisation compared to the previous law; = indicates no substantial changes compared to the previous law; - signifies a regression in professionalisation compared to the preceding law.

From the evolution of Spanish basic legislation on school leadership in public schools between 1970 and 2020, it can be inferred that there has been a lack of an explicit and well-articulated model, whose pillars—often unclear and lacking a well-founded justification—must be identified by the researcher through an interpretation of the laws. This poor practice, which at times borders on arbitrariness or a tacit ideological influence and moves away from a rational approach to educational policies, has hindered the development of a calm and well-founded debate as a precursor to political agreement.

For instance, from the perspective of the regulatory frameworks, there has been a seesawing between models of initial training depending on whether it occurs before or after the selection process, with no effort made to rationally justify the preference for one over the other. The same can be said regarding selection versus election as the process for appointing a headteacher, where in the latter case, an underlying ideological conception can be sensed, albeit hidden under a formal convergence around the novelty of the Commission introduced by the LOCE.

In the modifications made concerning the powers or competencies of the headteacher, the series of shifts characteristic of a conflict between a more

professionalising vision of the headteacher role and one more focused on preserving the School Council's original character as a governing body has predominated in all laws since democracy was reestablished. This is especially reflected in the School Council model and the fluctuating proportions in the composition of the selection committee, as well as in the shifts in the relative importance between the Administration and the School Council/Staff, depending on the political stance of the law.

In such a key area as the management of leadership talent through professional development, it can be observed that, while the evaluation of the headteacher's performance has become consolidated over time, no professional career model has been established. Vertical mobility, or promotion, is only addressed in some laws and is presented as a vague ideal whose development, after so many decades, is still to be formulated and implemented. Horizontal mobility is only hinted at in the LOCE.

Continuous professional development is referenced in various regulations, though its prescriptive nature has not been clearly established in all legislative processes. Only the consolidation of the recognition of the salary supplement linked to the headteacher role is firmly established, serving as a valuable extrinsic incentive for headteachers, with a notable repercussion on the quality of leadership in public schools, as evidenced by the analysis of the Navarra case on an empirical basis, to the point of prompting a regulatory correction in the right direction.

Beyond the validation of the diagnostic tool used in the referenced case—due to its capacity to detect the undesired effects of this procedural anomaly—the analyses have highlighted that neglecting certain elements of professionalisation is associated with a decline in the quality of headteacher functions, likely having a negative impact on the results that these same students in Navarra could have achieved under more favourable leadership conditions in their schools.

The comparative analysis also draws attention to the fact that, more than half a century ago, and in a pre-democratic social and political context, the General Education Law benefited from both a White Paper and an evaluation of its effects (Comisión de Evaluación de la Ley General de Educación y Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa, 1976). The absence of these best practices in the vast majority of laws passed during democracy aligns with the opinion of a prestigious and diverse panel of experts, who have considered the failure to base policies “on knowledge, empirical evidence, and research”

as one of the main weaknesses of governance within the Spanish education system (López Rupérez, 2021).

It is worth adding to the above a notable territorial dispersion in the criteria for the regulatory development, by the Autonomous Communities, of the basic State legislation as the Federation of Associations of High School Headteachers has highlighted (FEDADI, 2022).

In view of all the above, it can be concluded that Spain faces the important task of finding a balanced school leadership model inspired by the modern idea of a profession; one that takes into account the international consensus on the complexity and difficulty of school leadership and its consequences; incorporates available empirical evidence; values the progress made in other developed countries towards the growing professionalisation of the headteacher role; and, finally, does not hinder the use of proven effective school leadership—but rather promotes it—as a fundamental tool for educational compensation. This is one of those evidence-based policies, accepted internationally, that would contribute to increasing the real equality of opportunities within the Spanish education system.

The political agreement, essential for promoting substantial and sustainable advances, must be based on an explicit model that serves as the foundation for a calm analysis and public deliberation—as befits a pluralistic society—in which serving headteachers are involved.

References

Australian Council of Professions (2004). *About Professions Australia: Definition of a Profession*.

<http://www.professions.com.au/defineprofession.html>

Comisión de Evaluación de la Ley General de Educación y Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa (1976). *Informe que eleva al gobierno la Comisión Evaluadora de la Ley General de Educación y Financiamiento de la reforma educativa*. Documento multicopiado.

- Bender, P., Allensworth, E., Bryk A. S., Easton J. Q. y Luppescu S. (2006). *The Essential Supports for School Improvement*. CCSR. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/EssentialSupports.pdf>
- B.O.del E. (1953). Ley sobre Ordenación de la Enseñanza Media. 26 de febrero de 1953. B.O. de E. No. 58. <https://www.boe.es/datos/pdfs/BOE//1953/058/A01119-01130.pdf>
- B.O. del E. (1967). Decreto 985 de 1967, por el que se aprueba el Reglamento del Cuerpo de Directores Escolares. 20 de abril de 1967. B.O. del E. No.117. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1967/05/17/pdfs/A06578-06580.pdf>
- B.O.del E. (1976). Decreto 186 de1976, por el que se crea la Comisión de Evaluación de la Ley General de Educación y Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa. 6 de febrero de 1976. B.O. del E. No.37. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1976/02/12/pdfs/BOE-S-1976-37.pdf>
- Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S. y Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing Schools for Improvement. Lessons from Chicago*. University of Chicago Press. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/O/bo8212979.html>
- Delors, J. et al. (1996) *La Educación encierra un tesoro*. Madrid: Santillana & Ediciones UNESCO. http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/DE-LORS_S.PDF
- Hanushek, E. A.; Rivkin, S. G.; Schiman, J. C. (2016). Dynamic effects of teacher turnover on the quality of instruction. *Economics of Education Review*, 55, pp 132-148.
- Hechinger, F. M. (1981). Citado en *Escuelas eficaces y profesores eficientes*. La Muralla.
- Fullan, M. (2014). *The Principal: Three keys for maximizing impact*. Jossey-Bass.
- Klitgaard, R.E. y Hall, G.R. (1973). Are there Usually Effective Schools? *Journal of Human Resources*, vol. X, nº1, pp 15-27
- Lezotte, L.W. (1991). *Correlates of Effective Schools. The First and de Second Generation*. Effective Schools Products Ltd.
- Leithwood, K., Seashore, K., Anderson, y Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How lead-*

- ership influences student learning. Review of research.* University of Minnesota; University of Toronto; The Wallace Foundation.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., y Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management*, 28(1), 7–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800060>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., y Hopkins, D. (2019). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *Leadership & Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1619607>
- LGE (1970). Ley 14 de 1970, General de Educación y Financiamiento de la Reforma Educativa. 4 de agosto de 1970. B.O. del E. No.187. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1970/08/06/pdfs/A12525-12546.pdf>
- LODE (1985). Ley Orgánica 8 de 1985, reguladora del Derecho a la Educación. 3 de julio de 1985. B.O.E. No. 159. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1985/07/04/pdfs/A21015-21022.pdf>
- LOCE (2002). Ley Orgánica 10 de 2002, de la Calidad de la Educación. 23 de diciembre de 2002. B.O.E. No.307. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2002/12/24/pdfs/A45188-45220.pdf>
- LOE (2006). Ley Orgánica 2 de 2006, de Educación. 3 de mayo de 2006. B.O.E. No.106 <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2006/05/04/pdfs/BOE-S-2006-106.pdf>
- LOMCE (2013). Ley Orgánica 8 de 2013, para la mejora de la calidad educativa. 9 de diciembre de 2013. B.O.E. No.295. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/12/10/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-12886.pdf>
- LOMLOE (2020). Ley Orgánica 3 de 2020, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación. 29 de diciembre de 2020. B.O.E. No. 340. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2020/12/30/pdfs/BOE-A-2020-17264.pdf>
- LOPEGCE (1995). Ley Orgánica 9 de 1995, de la participación, la evaluación y el gobierno de los centros docentes. 20 de noviembre de 1995. B.O.E. No.278. <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/1995/11/21/pdfs/A33651-33665.pdf>
- López Rupérez, F. (1994). *La gestión de calidad en educación*. La Muralla.
- López Rupérez, F. (2014). *Fortalecer la profesión docente. Un desafío crucial*. Narcea Ediciones.

- López Rupérez, F. (2021). *La gobernanza de los sistemas educativos. Fundamentos y orientaciones*. Narcea Ediciones-UCJC Stamp.
- López Rupérez, F. (2024). La función directiva en el contexto nacional e internacional. En Gairín, J. et al. *Dirección y liderazgo de los centros educativos. Naturaleza, desarrollo y práctica profesional*. Narcea Ediciones-UCJC Stamp.
- López Rupérez, F., García García, I. y Expósito-Casas, E. (2020). School Leadership in Spain. Evidence from PISA 2015 assessment and Recommendations. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2020.1770806>
- Mayorga, A. (2007). La dirección educativa y su problemática. *Participación educativa*, 5, pp. 93-98
- Naciones Unidas (2015). *Transformar nuestro mundo: la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible*. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ares70d1_es.pdf
- OECD. (2017). *PISA 2015. Assessment and analytical framework. Science, reading, mathematic, financial literacy and collaborative problem solving. Revised edition*. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-2015-assessment-and-analytical-framework_9789264281820-en
- Pont, B., Nusche, D., y Moorman, H. (2008 a). *Improving School Leadership. Volume 1: Policy and Practice*. OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership>
- Pont, B., Nusche, D., y Moorman, H. (2008 b). *Improving School Leadership. Volume 2: Case Studies on System leadership*. OECD Publishing. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership>
- Purkey, S. C. y Smith, M. S. (1983) Effective Schools: A Review. *Elementary School Journal*, 83, (4), pp. 427-452.
- Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., y Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why*. (BES). Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/60180/BESLeadership-Web-updated-foreword-2015.pdf
- Sammons, P. (1995). *Key characteristics of effective schools: A review of*

- school effectiveness research*. B & MBC Distribution Services.
- UNESCO (2024). Global Education Monitoring Report 2024/5: Leadership in education – Lead for learning. UNESCO. <https://doi.org/10.54676/EFLH5184>.
- Uysal, S. y Sarier, Y. (2018). Meta-analysis of school leadership effects on student achievement in USA and Turkey. *Cypriot Journal of Educational Science*. 13(4), 590–603. <https://doi.org/10.18844/cjes>

Address information: Francisco López Rupérez. Universidad Camilo José Cela. E-mail: flopezr@ucjc.edu