

SPAIN

The Curricular Integration of Key Competences Project

Introduction

The Curricular Integration of Key Competences Project is an initiative by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport together with the Autonomous Communities. It aims to improve key competences development among Spain's student population according to the current approaches to education and training in the European Union.

1. Aims

- a) To support educational policies of the different Autonomous Communities in order to facilitate decrees regulating compulsory education develop in an adaptive and integrated way. Therefore, as schools would share a common view on key competences and the action process, it would let them improve the real curriculum constantly.
- b) To support and guide teachers so that they can reflect on the possibilities of a new curricular design based on key competences, and how it could affect their daily practise, class work, the levels of curriculum design, syllabus, and educational projects.
- c) To promote educational commitment among schools, families (article 121.5, LOE¹) and other educational agents by means of fostering formal, informal and non-formal education to improve the learning of key competences.
- d) To select and organize a diversified range of tasks and activities that would widen learning opportunities for students while increasing the effective time devoted to the relevant tasks selected.
- e) To encourage the evaluation and recognition of the acquired key competences by methods and criteria that would increase transparency throughout the learning promotion and assessment process.

¹ Organic Law of Education 2/2006, 3rd May (published in the Official State Gazette —BOE— on 4th May).

- f) To promote collaboration among different educational agents, especially between schools and the learning community, in order to achieve an effective transfer of the knowledge acquired on account of the curricular Integration of Key Competences and, furthermore, to incorporate that knowledge into each school's educational projects.
- g) To facilitate information and communication regarding the key competences proposal among the educational agents.
- h) To assess the environment in which the programme was designed and developed along with the processes and results achieved. It would help public administrations to gather different sources of information in order to improve policies attempting to promote educational success.

2. Leadership and Partners

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport leads the Curriculum Integration of Key Competences Project, and it is implemented by The National Centre for Educational Innovation and Research. The curricular Integration of Key Competences is aimed at public schools and state supported schools (*centros concertados*) that offer compulsory education; schools can take part in the project through teachers and the management team; the teaching team is to decide their participation in the project by a majority, in collaboration with other members of the learning community.

Participating schools were selected by the Councils/Departments of Education according to the participation requirements. In the first stage of the Curricular Integration of Key Competences, there were selected one hundred and fifty Primary and Secondary schools, both public and state supported. These schools are located among fifteen Autonomous Communities and the Cities of Ceuta and Melilla. Schools can choose the modality of participation in the project taking into account their level of progress in the development of key competences for learning.

3. Strategies and activities

Modalities of participation

The project approaches the curriculum integration of key competences through different modalities of participation for schools:

- Modality A1: Initiating Schools. It is planned for schools without any previous experience on key competences-based learning.
- Modality A2: "Advanced" Schools. This way of participation aims at schools that have previous experience on key competences-based learning.
- Modality A3: Consolidating Schools. This modality is planned for the 2012-2013 school year and gathers schools that have already gone through modalities A1 or A2.

Sequence of training activities

The following Project strategy is designed for working groups of teachers at school level. Thus, these groups would be able to experience changes together and progressively, to share their fears and opinions. Consequently, a common view on key competences and the best way to integrate them into the curriculum would be reached.

The course of action begins with face-to-face meetings —there were five in 2011— where participants from different Autonomous Communities —school coordinators— are trained by a group of experts appointed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport. During these meetings, the group of experts present and explain those activities that will be carried out by the working groups of teachers in each school.

School coordinators attending these meetings become the project’s leaders in each school. They organize working sessions for the group of teachers who take part in the project, and altogether fulfill the activities proposed in the previous face-to-face meetings. Directly after, there is a second meeting to reach conclusions on the activities that have been carried out. In the meeting, minutes are taken, and resources and conclusions of every activity are enclosed.

Considering the acquired knowledge and as a final activity for each modality, schools accomplish to tasks: an activity portfolio, and a report of all the meetings that took place. Both documents will become the “school biography”. Thanks to this organised compilation of activities and meeting reports it is possible to bring into consideration an outline for the school institutional documents: educational project, levels of curriculum design, and syllabus.

For each modality of participation the sequence of training activities is as follows:

1st Stage (2010-2011):

a) *Modality A1: Initiating Schools.* At this stage, the objective is for the teachers to reflect on their own class practise and to get initiated into a competence-based syllabus.

- Previous Activity. It aims to understand key competences within a social and cultural changing context, as recommended by the European Union and as an integrating part of the Organic Law of Education.
- Activity 1. It pursues to uncover the presence of key competences in the real curricula that takes place in class.
- Activity 2. It is about how to blend key competences with class tasks: exercise, activity and task.
- Activity 3. It approaches the syllabus and how the curriculum elements relate to key competences.
- Activity 4. This activity is called “Methodology and Class: models of thought and teaching, and their relation to key competences. Complex task”.
- Activity 5. Assessing the key competences (initiating level).
- Activity 6. This activity helps to create a “school biography” by gathering information from the activity portfolio and the meeting reports.

b) *Modality A2: “Advanced Schools”*. The goal for this modality of participation is to build a common view that it is shared by each teaching team.

- Activity 1. Teachers would try to build a common view on the role of key competences in the school.
- Activity 2. In this activity teachers create an “integrated didactic unit”.
- Activity 3. At this point, teachers assess the current school project and how the implementation of key competences would affect it.
- Activity 4. Based on the assessment of activity 3, new ground principles are incorporated into the school project.
- Activity 5. Teachers design an improvement plan for the school regarding every aspect of the learning environment: equipment, use of space, resources, methodologies, etc.
- Activity 6. This activity helps to create a “school biography” by gathering information from the activity portfolio and meeting reports.

2nd Stage (2012-2013):

a) *Modality A2: “Advanced” Schools*. Schools that participated through Modality A1 in the first stage of the project become now “Advanced” Schools and carry out the Modality A2 activities explained above.

b) *Modality A3: Consolidating Schools*. Schools that participated through Modality A2 in the first stage of the project become now “Consolidating Schools”. This Modality A3 seeks to make more profound and more sustainable changes involving the school as a whole. To achieve this challenge the project focuses on two aspects: assessment, and teachers’ competence profile.

- Activity 1. It is called “Improvement programmes and their contribution to assess students”.
- Activity 2. It is about the teachers’ competence profile.

Cooperative Environment for Curriculum Development

An important strand of the curricular Integration of Key Competences is the Collaborative Web Platform for Curriculum Development. It is a Moodle Platform coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and it is conceived as a meeting point for the participants to communicate, learn, manage resources, and receive guidance.

4. Context

“To become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” is one of the objectives stated by the European Council of Lisbon in March 2000². From there to the Council

² Lisbon European Council, 23-24 March 2000.

Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (“ET 2020”³), the European Union guidelines insist that all citizens need to be able to acquire key competences as a prerequisite for the European Union to become a competitive knowledge-based economic, and furthermore, for all citizens to realise their potentials.

5. Resources

Within the framework of Thuringian educational policies, funds for the scientific support from the Friedrich-Schiller-University of Jena, overseen by Prof. Gläser-Zikuda, in the amount of 130,000.00 Euros will be made available by the TMBWK for the implementation of the start-up project “Development of Inclusive and Innovative Learning Environments”. Furthermore, schools receive support through the distribution of additional weekly teaching hours and for non-staff costs, for example: material costs, travelling costs and hourly wages for consultants. Finally, the start-up project will be appropriated with 100 weekly teaching hours from the pool of support systems for advisors of school development.

6. Development over Time

On the 28th of September of 2010, following the recommendations of the European Union “ET2020” about the need for all citizens to acquire key competences, the Education Sector Conference between the Minister of Education and the Education Authorities of the different Autonomous Communities approved a territorial cooperation programme: “Consolidation of Key Competences as a Key Element in the Curriculum”. It meant the beginning to the curricular Integration of Key Competences as one of the multiple actions of the programme. In January 2012, once the territorial cooperation programme was completed, the curricular Integration of Key Competences became one of the lines of work for the Innovation Programmes Area of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport; this area, together with the Autonomous Communities and the Cities of Ceuta and Melilla, deals with the continuity of the open research-action process started by the curricular Integration of Key Competences.

In 2011, from January to December, the first stage of the project took place. Via modalities A1 and A2, this first stage focused on guiding and training teachers in their schools. This experience made it possible to develop pedagogical materials for a competence-based syllabus design as key competences are to be integrated in compulsory education since the Organic Law of Education in 2006.

In the first semester of 2012 the “*Shared Didactic Guide*” gathers syllabus design materials that had been created by Modality A2 schools and make them available to the project coordinators and all participating schools; in addition, a digital application was developed to help schools with the project. Furthermore, arrangements for the second stage of the project began: development of new modality A3; continuation of

³ Council Conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) [Official Journal C 119 of 28.5.2009].

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/ef0016_en.htm

modality A2; and guidance and support for those administrations willing to implement modalities A1 and A2 in their jurisdiction.

Communication Plan

- The Communication Plan is another strand of the curricular Integration of Key Competences. It contemplates different actions:
- Presentation and awareness campaign on the curricular Integration of Key Competences: posters, leaflets, logos, etc. It is aimed at the learning community.
- Design and creation of a network of reference schools for curricular integration of key competences.
- Working sessions dedicated to the outcomes of the different strands of the project.
- Web Portal⁴ conceived to bring closer to the learning community all resources regarding curricular integration of key competences that different administrations and groups offer.

7. Evidence of effectiveness and efficiency

Once the first stage of the curricular Integration of Key Competences was completed, an external evaluation was carried out in order to bring a useful feedback for the central administration, the regional administrations, and teachers from the participating schools. Evaluation tools consisted of questionnaires, interviews, etc.

Different aspects brought to light by the evaluation results make clear the efficiency in achieving the project objectives:

Pertinence. The project is pertinent to three perspectives:

- Legal pertinence: the project answers to a curricular requirement specified on the Organic Law of Education.
- Pedagogical pertinence: 68% of teachers consider the project supportive to innovation, both at a personal and school level.
- Organizational pertinence: 70% of school coordinators consider that the project either is a key aspect or supports innovation strategies in their schools.

Coherence:

- Coherence in the connection between Central Administration and the Regional Education Administration of the Autonomous Communities and the Cities of Ceuta and Melilla is accomplished thanks to monthly coordination meetings. This way of cooperation facilitates

⁴ <http://www.educacion.gob.es/cniie/investigacion-innovacion/competencias-basicas.html>

coordination and communication among educational agents from the different Autonomous Communities, the Cities of Ceuta and Melilla, and Central Administration (see objectives a and g).

- Coherence in the connection between Regional Education Administrations and schools: 59% of school coordinators are “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the work carried out by the Pedagogical Base Team in the Autonomous Communities.

Participation:

- 4.257 out of 6.579 teachers working in the participating schools took part in the project; this is 65% of the teaching team.
- 63% teachers participated in the project moved by intrinsic motivation; and 26% participated to receive training on this compulsory curricular matter.

Impact:

- 69% teachers had no previous experience on competences-based teaching and learning; six months after the project started, 68% of those teachers stated that a key competences-based learning is a valuable addition to their practice or an indispensable one. This result shows that the curricular Integration of Key Competences helps teachers in daily practice, and also to reflect on the implications that competences-based learning can have in syllabus planning and class activities (see objective b).
- By means of curriculum design materials developed by Modality A2 —“Advanced” Schools—, the project contributes to select and organise a diversified range of tasks and activities that would widen learning opportunities for students (see objective d).

Viability:

- Teachers’ commitment to develop a competences-based learning approach in their schools became stronger. 99% of school coordinators and 75% of teachers expressed their interest in carrying on with the project (see objective c).
- In some Autonomous Communities, the capability of political decision of the regional coordinators over the school network made possible the implementation of similar projects to the curricular Integration of Key Competences at a regional level (see objective c).

8. Success Factors

The evaluation results point out the following as key factors for the project:

- a. A reflection process experienced and shared by the school as a whole becomes a strategy that promotes bottom-up changes.
- b. A cascade model of training and self-training grants great importance to the development of key competences in class.

- c. As the working guide is conceived as a simple outline of activities, it forces each school to contextualise drafted activities to the reality of their environment in order to carry them out.
- d. The communication and information models count with dynamic exchange platforms that make available at any time: online training, pedagogical materials open to revision and new ideas, discussions, assessments, etc.
- e. As a result of the experience schools acquired throughout the project, the school network provides a reference for future stages of development.
- f. Because of their level of commitment and the amount of extra-work taken, school coordinators become not only leaders but also, the strengthening knots of the school network.

9. Tensions and impediments

The project evaluations detected the following tensions and impediments:

- The different level of implication towards the project. Thus, some Autonomous Communities made a stronger commitment to the project than others.
- The different number of teachers involved in the project from one school to another. While in some schools the number of teachers taking part in the project represented almost the whole teaching team, in other schools only 50% of the teaching team was involved and therefore, this situation had an effect on the evaluation results regarding the impact of the project.
- The different criteria and selection tools employed by Autonomous Communities. On the one hand, schools were selected by means of a public call; on the other, schools were directly selected. Thus, schools had different level of commitment and active participation from the beginning: while, beforehand, some schools were willing to change the learning model and work through key competences-based learning, other schools were urged upon it.
- The possibility for the Autonomous Communities to voluntarily decide whether to take part in the project or, once they are involved, to decide if they are to continue with it, became a threat to the project's sustainability.
- On account of the economic crisis Spain is going through, budget cuts from Central and Regional Administrations increase difficulties significantly.

10. Sources

The Curricular Integration of Key Competences Project:

“Shared Didactic Guide” (pending publication)

Digital Application (pending publication)