

Teaching and Professional Careers Committed to Equity: Contrast with the Perceptions of In-service Teachers

Teaching and Professional Careers Committed to Equity: Contrast with the Perceptions of In-service Teachers

Melani Penna Tosso *, Raúl García Medina and Mercedes Sánchez Sáinz

Complutense University of Madrid, Spain

DESCRIPTORES:

Equidad educativa
Inclusión educativa
Trayectorias docentes
Atención a la diversidad
Historias de vida

RESUMEN:

Se presenta en este artículo un análisis de las opiniones del profesorado sobre el principio de equidad. Partiendo de una revisión de la fundamentación normativa relacionada con el principio de equidad a nivel estatal y europeo, en la investigación se emplearon técnicas mixtas; la entrevista biográfica a agentes claves (n=4) y la administración de una encuesta en cinco comunidades autónomas del estado español (n=992). Para el análisis se empleó la triangulación de los datos de las entrevistas, las encuestas y los dos posicionamientos o formas de concebir la equidad planteados en la LOE/LOMLOE y en la LOCE/LOMCE, y transmitidos por los grupos políticos progresistas y conservadores en sus programas electorales. Los resultados permitieron afirmar que las definiciones sobre la equidad de las y los profesionales de la educación son más concordantes con las posturas políticas progresistas frente a las conservadoras. Igualmente, se encontraron discrepancias significativas en las medidas educativas concretas a implementar o los itinerarios de enseñanza a seguir donde, en general, se constata una actitud positiva y poco crítica del profesorado en activo frente a las posturas críticas del profesorado con veteranía. Se discute sobre el posicionamiento enfrentado de los partidos políticos en torno a la equidad, las opiniones del profesorado con veteranía y la falta de un posicionamiento de los agentes educativos en activo sobre las medidas educativas concretas vinculadas con la equidad.

KEYWORDS:

Educational equity
Educational inclusion
Teaching trajectories
Diversity awareness
Life stories.

ABSTRACT:

This article presents an analysis of teachers' opinions on the principle of equity. Based on a review of the normative foundation related to the principle of equity at state and European level, the research used mixed techniques; the biographical interview with key agents (n=4) and the administration of a survey in five autonomous communities of the Spanish state (n=992). For the analysis, triangulation of the data from the interviews, the surveys and the two positions or ways of conceiving equity raised in the LOE/LOMLOE and in the LOCE/LOMCE, and transmitted by the progressive and conservative political groups in their electoral programs, was used. The results showed that the definitions of equity held by education professionals are more in line with progressive than conservative political positions. Significant discrepancies were also found in the specific educational measures to be implemented or the teaching paths to be followed, where, in general, a positive and uncritical attitude was observed on the part of active teachers compared to the critical positions of senior teachers. The conflicting positioning of political parties regarding equity, the opinions of senior teachers and the lack of a positioning of active educational agents on specific educational measures linked to equity were discussed.

HOW TO CITE:

Penna Tosso, M., García Medina, R. and Sánchez Sáinz, M. (2024). Teaching and professional careers committed to equity: contrast with the perceptions of in-service teachers. *REICE. Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 22(4).
<https://doi.org/10.15366/reice2024.22.4.006>

*Contact: melani.penna@edu.ucm.es

1. Introduction

One of the main criticisms of the Spanish education system is the lack of stability and the constant changes that occur at the legislative level with each new government. In this context of numerous legislative changes (González Medina, 2017), equity in education appeared for the first time in 2002 with Organic Law 10/2002 on the Quality of Education (LOCE). Subsequently, each of the four organic laws published has re-conceptualised equity. An analysis of this general legislation reveals two positions on equity, one that understands it as a political-ethical project and one that understands it as a way of adapting to the neoliberal system (García Calvo et al., 2024).

Given this changing context and these two opposing positions within the same principle, it is legitimate to ask what do teachers understand by equity? Linked to this question, we can also ask: how do teachers manage to implement educational practices committed to equity?

2. Literature review

The European Union understands equity in education as “inclusive and high quality education and training, and the promotion of a European dimension in education, fostering shared values” (European Commission. European Education Area, 2021). Inclusive education is therefore, as reflected above, part of educational equity and must be able to address inequalities from an early age and decouple social, economic and cultural status, as well as ethnic and racial origin, from educational attainment (Essomba Gelabert, 2014).

The EU believes that these conditions are essential for creating and maintaining a cohesive European society that fosters sustainable growth. However, it recognises that people’s educational experiences vary across the continent depending on their social background and focuses on sexism, sexual harassment and the gender gap as some of the main causes of these inequalities. In order to eliminate them, it implements actions such as promoting multilingualism and common values, encouraging young people’s mobility and ensuring quality investment in education and training (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022).

Inclusive and equitable education are also linked in the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030 (UNESCO, 2015), a document that sets out a new vision for education in the coming years, with contributions from organisations such as UNICEF, the World Bank and UNHCR. For them, the purpose of education should be “to provide equal opportunities for all and leave no one behind” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 25). It emphasises the importance of redoubling efforts, especially to reach people in vulnerable situations. Thus, the declaration states that “all people should have access to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 25) and reiterates that it is the most vulnerable who should receive the necessary support to achieve this. In this sense, the UN clarifies that equality and equity are not synonymous, but that “equality means providing the same resources to all and equity means giving more to those most in need” (Schmelkes, 2020).

Finally, the OECD also elaborates on the concept of educational equity, understanding that it occurs when personal or social circumstances, such as gender, ethnicity or family background, do not prevent the realisation of educational potential or the attainment of a minimum level of skills by all individuals (OECD, 2012). From a more economic

perspective than previous bodies, it is concerned about the high level of school failure in member countries, which results in high economic costs and lower contributions to public budgets and returns on public investment. To reduce this, it proposes comprehensive measures such as promoting a school climate conducive to learning in underperforming schools or prioritising links between schools, parents and communities.

In Spanish education legislation, equity is first mentioned in the LOCE, with three explicit allusions: as a principle of quality, in relation to economic development, in relation to scholarships.

Subsequently, Organic Law 2/2003 of 3 May on Education (LOE) contains 26 explicit references to equity, with Title II devoted to equity in education, which is specifically linked to students with specific educational support needs (SSNES) and compensating for social, economic, geographical and cultural inequalities. This law also links the quality of education with equity and as a means to equal opportunities. It is also a principle of the functioning of the education system and one of the keys to the evaluation of both students and the system itself. The principles that govern attention to diversity are those of normalisation and inclusion. One could ask whether normalisation is compatible with equity.

Organic Law 8/2013 of 9 December on the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE) contains eight references to equity, continuing its relationship with quality, but in this case understanding that “there is no greater lack of equity than that of a system that equates in idleness and mediocrity” (LOMCE, 2013, Preamble). It also continues to be associated with excellence, losing its essence as compensation for inequalities and social justice. It also continues to be associated with disability and is maintained as an operating principle of the education system, along with merit.

In Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December, which amends the LOE (LOMLOE), there are 17 explicit references to equity (maintaining those established in the LOE) and associating it with quality as two inseparable principles of the education system, also relating it to educational inclusion. A change can be observed in this law, as it does not mention normalisation as a principle of schooling for pupils with Specific Educational Support Needs (SENSE), but rather mentions inclusion, quality, equity, non-discrimination and equality in access and permanence and universal accessibility, and also associates pupils in situations of socio-educational and cultural vulnerability.

From the legislative analysis, two ways of conceiving and developing equity emerge: on the one hand, the one specified in the LOCE and the LOMCE, where equity is associated with excellence and meritocracy, and on the other hand, the one developed in the LOE and the LOMLOE, where it is associated with educational quality based on social justice and the compensation of inequalities of pupils in a more vulnerable situation. The LOMLOE is the first law to associate equity with equal rights between women and men, overcoming any discrimination and helping to compensate for any personal inequality (with particular emphasis on disability).

It can therefore be seen that the legislation also contains this double concept, already mentioned in the initial definitions, to give what each person deserves can be understood as promoting meritocracy and excellence based on individual effort, or as creating social justice by trying to give each person what he or she needs according to his or her starting situation.

From this legislative analysis, the aim of the research was to contrast and understand the views on educational equity of the two samples of participants, in-service teachers and senior teachers.

3. Method

Methodological approach

A qualitative methodology was chosen in order to facilitate an exploratory approach to the objective of the study, which is essential when dealing with such a complex, dynamic and holistic reality. It was essential to understand and interpret this educational reality from the meanings and intentions of the people involved (Bisquerra, 2009). Therefore, this study presented a non-experimental design that focused on describing and understanding the phenomenon under study through the analysis of relationships between different variables that were not manipulated prior to data collection.

Categories of analysis

In accordance with the methodological approach, it was decided to analyse the opinions of the sample according to the following categories: definition of equity, educational policies and educational measures related to diversity.

Participants

The sample consisted of a small group of experienced professionals (n=4), whose careers are closely linked to innovation and social and educational equity, and that of active educational agents (n=992).

Information gathering and fieldwork tools

Given the limitations of questionnaires, which tend to obscure rather than illuminate the respondents' point of view (Flick, 2007), in-depth interviews were conducted on the one hand with randomly selected professionals with rich innovative careers committed to social and educational justice. Taylor and Bodgan (1992, p. 101) understand in-depth interviews as an encounter between the researcher and the informants aimed at understanding their own lives, experiences and situations, told in their own words. In other words, a conversation between peers that allows us to get to the heart of the subject under study in less time and in greater depth, revealing the motivations and particular perspective of the interviewee (Simons, 2011). As interviews offer greater flexibility, allowing for a more in-depth response or the reopening of a dialogue, and facilitating the active involvement of participants, they proved to be the optimal tool for documenting the views of professionals with such long and rich backgrounds in education. They were conducted according to a script developed from the findings of the research project associated with this study.

A form was also developed, using the free software application LimeSurvey, to be administered to a random sample of teachers from different educational levels, members of management teams and technical or inspection staff. They were distributed in five Spanish autonomous communities: Andalusia, the Canary Islands, Valencia, Madrid and Catalonia. The questionnaire was closed-ended, with nominal and ordinal scales, and consisted of 21 items divided into four categories: relative facts, opinions, attitudes and cognitions (García Calvo et al., 2024). Out of a total of 1205 responses, 992 were accepted as valid (n=992). Of the selected sample, the majority

worked in public schools (89.07 %); in Andalusia (33 %), the Canary Islands (43.4 %), Valencia (13.9 %), Madrid (6.45 %) and Catalonia (0.7 %); working as teachers (75 %), members of the management team (20.8 %), technical staff (2.8 %) or inspectors (0.9 %). The data collected for this study are from teachers in public schools, who make up the majority of the sample.

Data analysis

In order to analyse the data, only the questions that provided the most information on the concept of equity in education were selected from three categories (Table 1), which are the same as those used to collect and contrast the data from the interviews.

Table 1

Categories of analysis and selected questions from the questionnaire

Categories	Selected questions
Definition of equity	Which of the following statements about equity do you think best defines it?
Educational policies	In your opinion, which educational policies are best suited for equity?
Educational measures linked to attention to diversity	In your opinion, which educational measures are most appropriate for equity?

Triangulation was adopted as a convergent strategy for analysing data of different types. In this way, an attempt was made to check “the overlap or convergence of results” in order to obtain a more complete and contrasting knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Bericat, 1998, p. 38).

Since the data from the two previous phases were collected around the three categories of analysis mentioned above, it was easy to introduce a new contrasting factor, the two positions or ways of conceiving equity, as expressed in the LOE/LOMLOE and LOCE/LOMCE, and conveyed by progressive and conservative political groups in their electoral programmes (Central Sindical Independiente de Funcionarios [CSIF], 2019; Parcerisa, 2016). Thus, it was possible to contrast and relate the opinions of the two samples of participants with the positions of these laws, with opposing perspectives on educational equity, one progressive and the other more conservative.

For the latter analysis, the main proposals to promote equity in the above-mentioned laws were identified and classified within the categories of analysis of the study (Table 2).

Table 2

Categories analysed and content of education laws

Categories	LOCE/LOMCE	LOE/LOMLOE
Definition of equity	“Achieving excellence” “A way of distributing resources”.	“Demand from each according to his ability, give to each according to his need”. “Addressing human diversity”. “Addressing Vulnerable Groups”. “A way of redressing inequalities”.
Educational policies	“Comparison between centres (ranking)”. “Institutes of Excellence” “Bilingual Programmes”	“Plural schooling of the student body”. “Complementary activities”

	“School voucher”	
Educational measures linked to attention to diversity	“Gender segregation	“The support to the SSNES within the ordinary classroom”.
	“The attention outside the ordinary classroom of the SSNES”.	“Curricular Diversification Programmes”.
	“Programmes for the Improvement of Learning and Performance (PMAR)”.	“Initial Vocational Qualification Programmes”.
	“Basic Vocational Training”.	“The ordinary measures of attention to diversity”.
	“Language support classrooms for foreign students”.	“The splitting or grouping of the two levels”.

4. Results

Below is a breakdown of the results obtained sorted into the three categories mentioned above: definition of equity, educational policies and educational measures related to attention to diversity.

4.1. Definition of equity

When asked in the questionnaire which statement best defines equity, the most popular option was “demand from each according to his ability, give to each according to his need” (37.85%), followed by “addressing human diversity” (22.12%) and “a way of redressing inequalities” (12.15%). At the other end of the spectrum, equity statements such as “achieving excellence”, “addressing vulnerable groups” or “a way of distributing resources” had the lowest response rates (1.71%).

Although the long professional careers of the four interviewees have enabled them to take on a variety of teaching and management responsibilities, their profiles are different and provide a broader perspective on the object of study, as can be seen below:

- Headmistress in a secondary school (DIES). Still active. Throughout her career she has worked as a secondary school teacher, in the field of Physical Education, in public schools with special difficulties. She has also been a head of studies. She believes that in her career she has always had educational equity as a reference point: “I think it has always been the case, even more so if you work in vulnerable areas like I have, especially in the last twenty years, in Vallecas, in El Pozo...”.

- Guidance counsellor in a secondary school (OIES). Now retired, he combined his years in educational counselling with university teaching. He had previously worked as a primary school teacher in public schools with special needs, and had also been headmaster and head of studies in secondary education. He recalls that in his early years in primary education, there was no talk of equity, although the main concern of many pupils was eating. His perception of equity back then was made meaningful by the teachers working together: “We used to meet teachers from different centres in the form of assemblies and there you felt supported, because there were people who were in favour of this work, helping people to move forward. Basically, you didn’t think about much else other than “they have to pass the Basic General Education level...”.

- Primary school teacher and university lecturer (PEPDU). Now retired, after more than 20 years in university teaching. Previously, he was a primary school teacher in public educational centres under democratic and participative management, linked to the Movimiento Cooperativo de Escuela Popular (MCEP); he was also advisor and

director of a Teacher Training Centre (CEP) and co-founder of the Movimiento de Renovación Pedagógica “Escuela Abierta” (Open School Movement for Pedagogical Renewal). At the beginning of his trajectory, equity meant eradicating poverty and offering tools for a better future, through cooperative organisation, project work and openness to the family and social environment: “We carried out several work projects (...), they were interdisciplinary... We didn't have textbooks (...) and we published short books of poetry, short stories, comics, etc. (...). We always organised demonstrations in the neighbourhood, marches in which the parents participated..., so there was a very close relationship with the parents (...). We also operated under collegial management.

- Primary school teacher specialising in “Therapeutic Pedagogy” and university lecturer (PPTU). Now retired, after more than 25 years as a university lecturer. For 20 years he worked first as a special education teacher and then as a teacher specialising in “Therapeutic Pedagogy”, coinciding with the transition to integrated schools brought about by the LOGSE. He also worked at the National Resource Centre for Special Education and his entire career has been linked to an interest in diversity, especially research on cultural diversity while working at the university. In this last stage, he promoted development cooperation projects with the students who were being trained to become teachers, in line with his idea of a transformative, equitable and humanistic education: “In collaboration with the Assembly for Cooperation for Peace, I proposed a project in the Sahrawi camps with the teachers there (...) It served to confirm my conviction that education is a powerful element of transformation, seeing that they received us with great hope and eagerness to know - beyond the sand, beyond the desert - what was happening in the world (...). This experience was repeated (...) with new projects proposed to the university to go there with the students, and I would dare say that it provided them with a great formative, transformative and affective capital”.

Thus, although they were able to identify equity as a theoretical and ethical concept in their professional experience a little later, they consider that their decisions and actions throughout their careers have been in line with the sense of equity that they defend:

“That everyone has access to education, quality for everyone equally, in the sense of access. But not that everyone has the same needs, each student according to his or her needs. Equality is not the same as equity” (DIES).

“In order to move everyone forward with the necessary resources, with the necessary support, not everyone needs the same attention, but in order to move forward, it seems to me that this is quality and equity at the same time” (OIES).

“To each his or her own; not sharing among equals, but discovering the potential of each child...” (PEPDU).

“No one should have fewer opportunities because of all their personal variables, gender, geographical origin, family activity (...). The equitable response is that everyone should be cared for according to their needs and in order to achieve the maximum development of their potential, whatever it may be, without pretending to achieve for each person something that makes them equal to others who have different characteristics” (PPTU).

4.2. Education policies

In the online questionnaire, the highest rated educational policies with the sum of “adequate” or “very adequate” responses above 80 %, were policies to support public education (92.99 %), scholarship programmes (91.9 %), complementary activities

(88.31 %), pluralistic schooling of pupils (88 %) and after-school programmes (83.96 %). On the other hand, the policies with the lowest ratings, with the sum of “not at all adequate” and “not very adequate” responses, were inter-school comparisons (86.3 %), policies to support subsidised schools (71.96 %), institutes of excellence (65.11 %) and diagnostic tests (53.11 %).

For their part, the four interviewees generally agreed that education policies have been detrimental to public education, reducing resources and diverting them to subsidised private education, or increasing bureaucracy and disproportionate requirements that are not adapted to the reality of schools and teachers.

OIES states that giving up public land to private schools or subsidising elitist schools is absolutely contrary to equity. DIES also points to the lack of investment in public education and criticises the disproportionate demands made by the administration, which stand in contrast to the provision of resources:

“a lot of plans that have to be carried out in the centre with fewer resources and a lot more bureaucracy, which doesn’t even give you time to breathe (...). Right now the management departments are overwhelmed by the number of plans that need to be carried out...”

For its part, PPTU points to the “single-district” schooling policy as inequitable because...

“It implies the displacement of schoolchildren from their closest social and family context (...) and although it is based on the freedom of choice of school, not everyone has the possibility of choosing a school (...) The immediate environment, not only for organisational reasons but also for reasons of the development and training of schoolchildren in the family, neighbourhood or village environment (...), are values that bring quality to an education for all”

Opinions are also unanimous in understanding that there is a better disposition towards the promotion of equity and attention to diversity in the LOE and the LOMLOE. However, as DIES points out, the competences of the Autonomous Communities in the field of education sometimes do not facilitate the development of the policies envisaged in the organic laws. OIES, PEPDU and PPTU also wished to highlight the important contribution of the LOGSE to equity, as a precursor to the LOE and LOMLOE.

In line with the above, they are convinced that policies such as the ranking of schools, the Institutes of Excellence, the Bilingual Programmes and the “school voucher” do not promote equity because, as PPTU argues, “all these measures favour those who already have a favourable starting point”.

Similarly, they consider that the apparent deterioration in teachers’ working conditions does not favour equity, referring to the increase in bureaucracy or ratios, the scarcity of resources or the increase in the number of interim teachers (very negative for the projects). As PPTU states “(...) they subject professionals to administrative stress, bureaucracy and forms (...) You cannot seek equity and equality with saturated centres and without the necessary resources”.

In this sense, it’s a total coincidence to express disillusionment with the educational policies of the Community of Madrid: “I think it’s getting worse in the Community of Madrid, very clearly!” says DIES, while PEPDU criticises the advantages enjoyed by private education in the construction of its centres, as well as...

“The famous cheques that the Community of Madrid is giving to private high school students, not to public high school students (...). And so on and so forth, canteen subsidies... There’s no equity there at all...”

Similarly, the OIES points out.

“Public policies do not take into account equity, and moreover, in the Community of Madrid there is still this stale sense of effort, that those who don’t make it, it’s because they don’t want to, that what they have to do is make an effort and that it has to be made more difficult (...). My experience in the evaluation boards is that there are some very tough people (...), who are demanding a lot. They don’t realise that we are talking about compulsory studies, for the whole population”.

Focusing on the internal management in schools, OIES considers that “changes in schools are much slower than in educational policies” and stresses the importance of teacher training and awareness-raising.

“Teachers need to have a different attitude, an attitude of fairness and of moving people forward. This cannot be asked of everyone, but it can be learned. That is why teacher training is essential...”.

PEPDU also insists that the key lies in the readiness of the teams and the professionalism of the teaching staff..

“The professional attitude, I think it doesn’t matter if there is one law or another - well, it is not exactly the same, when they impose a closed curriculum it is not the same as when it is more open, you have to build it - but this cannot be changed just like that (...) And the things that are done by decree don’t work”.

In this sense, DIES describes how the initiatives of teachers and schools can correct and contextualise educational policies, according to its experience:

“All the headmasters and headmistresses of Vallecas (...), came to an agreement and one of the things that was requested, which was for all or none, was that we should be centres of special difficulty (...), they gave you more resources for the centre, more teachers, more help..., to be able to address all the problems of inequality, vulnerability...”.

However, PEPDU considers that such initiatives are not the general rule, since in its opinion the policies have not improved or facilitated the management and planning of schools, an example being the imposition of management teams by the administration, which limits the participation of the educational community and the decision-making capacity of school councils. “In the area of participation, the LOMCE did away with quite a few things”.

Finally, DIES points out two conditions for the development of an evaluation congruent with equity: an assessment of the needs of the schools in order to offer them the measures and resources they really need; and a realistic and constructive institutional evaluation (not as a control mechanism), which is fundamental for promoting improvement plans in each school.

4.3. Educational measures linked to respect for diversity

Among the educational measures linked to respect for diversity that are perceived as having the greatest impact on equity and that obtained a score of more than 80 % by adding the responses “agree” or “strongly agree”, the following stand out: language support classrooms (89.25 %), inclusive flexible groupings (88.32 %), educational programmes for adults (88.01 %), support for the SSNES in the classroom (84.89 %), ordinary measures of respect for diversity (83.64 %) and splitting or internal level groupings (80.06 %). The measures that were considered little or not at all adequate to achieve equity were gender segregation (93.15 %), the former Social Guarantee Programmes (46.89 %) and out-of-classroom care for SSNES (32.56 %). With regard to the last item, it is striking that attention to pupils in and out of classroom is similarly accepted as an educational response linked to equity. Both measures are evaluated as

equal, although with a higher percentage for the attention to SSNES inside the classroom (84.89%), compared to 67.44% for the attention given to SSNES outside the classroom.

Some of the measures adopted in compulsory secondary education should also be highlighted, since they are directly related to the educational legislation under analysis. Thus, the curricular diversification programmes are the most highly rated (77.72 % of fairly or very positive responses), followed by Basic Vocational Training (76.01 %) and the PMAR (73.06 %). As in the case of support inside or outside the classroom, there is very little difference in the assessment of these three programmes, while the Initial Vocational Qualification Programmes (PCPI) are rated less highly, with only 59.66 % of responses being fairly or very positive.

For their part, the four respondents consider that attention to diversity is a strategic and fundamental measure to achieve equity, but they are critical of the management of this attention in the education system.

DIES considers that the policies “have promoted equity on paper, but not in practice, because of the way they are carried out, because of the ability to implement them”, and criticises the large amount of red tape involved in the administration’s programmes or the slow and impractical functioning of the different management platforms. This reduces opportunities for debate and discussion among teachers.

“And all the plans require coordination, ICT, digital literacy and then what do I do? It’s difficult, you have to convince people, and you have to do good pedagogical leadership, but there is so much to do at the bureaucratic level that pedagogical leadership doesn’t even give you time to do it”.

The OIES is also critical of the management of some of the administration’s programmes, which end up going against the very philosophy of equity:

“In the basic vocational training programmes, you realised that there were students with undiagnosed needs and students with economic difficulties - what a coincidence!, there were immigrants, people with unemployed families, Latin Americans (...).

Diversification became PMAR, the kids could come much younger, already from primary school. In the 6th grade they gave a report saying that a boy was having a lot of difficulties and that he had been ‘on track’ since the first year of ESO (compulsory secondary education). There are students who are on a parallel pathway, who are not working with the others”.

Another example is the great unanimity in considering the importance for equity of providing all educational support in mainstream classrooms. This is illustrated by the experience of PPTU:

“I proposed to the teaching staff and the management, together with my colleagues in the speciality - before the integration plan was applied - as an experiment, since we were a pilot school, to integrate students with special educational needs in ordinary classrooms, with certain conditions, and the specialists working as support through diagnosis, monitoring and intervention. That was an experiment that I used to prove to myself that it works”.

At the same time, however, PPTU acknowledges its doubts about the equity of both models of support, since everything depends on the classroom conditions, the ratio, the type and quality of effective support or the methodological approach. It argues that these factors are crucial for the development of inclusion. The same opinion is expressed by the school with regard to language support classes for foreign pupils, which are not necessary as long as the school has intensive support for learning the

vehicular language, without forgetting that such learning is facilitated by linguistic immersion in the regular classroom.

OIES also highlights the difficulty of interpreting and implementing educational support in secondary education in the ordinary classroom... “People refused to let it into their classroom, people in secondary education are very afraid of it, they feel that they are being controlled (...). They don’t see it as an opportunity to be two professionals in the classroom.

To this must be added the irregular and unfair distribution of resources by the administration, as well as the self-serving use of the discourse of educational inclusion “but without creating the conditions for it” (PPTU). In this way, the contradictions of diversity policies are revealed: “You are in an area like El Pozo and you need three counsellors, they should put them there, maybe somewhere else they only need one, it cannot be that all the centres have the same” (DIES).

In line with this view, the point made by OIES is interesting:

“There are some schools, like the one where I was Head of Studies, that think that the more programmes we have, the more itineraries, the more we can attend to the diversity of students. On the other hand, there are others in the same neighbourhood, who boasted just the opposite, we don’t have anything here because we don’t need it... and they sent referrals to our centre because we had many itineraries and programmes”.

In their analysis of educational measures, all interviewees pointed to three crucial and interrelated factors for improving attention to diversity: teacher training and commitment, teaching methods and the involvement of the entire educational community.

According to DIES, there is a growing awareness among teachers, although much depends on the continuity of the team in each school. Furthermore, it is essential for teachers to cultivate and be aware of the opportunity to be close to students and their problems and concerns, as this is an essential preventive measure to ensure equity.

“As a teacher, you are much closer to the students’ problems (...), when they are absent, when they sleep, when they haven’t had breakfast, what problems they have at home..., sometimes you approach them and sometimes they come to tell you and you are the observer.... It is one of your instruments and you can see very well how the class group works (...), some want to tell you and others don’t, because what has to do with inequality and poverty is sometimes embarrassing (...), they don’t dare tell you that they don’t have money to buy food”.

Another example of the crucial role of conscientious teachers is how difficult it was, according to the OIES, to implement school integration in secondary education and “to bring the Guidance Department into the schools”. One of the main obstacles was the reluctance of teachers: “It is unacceptable to continue living in the centres where taking care of diversity means that you get a ‘cross’...”.

PEPDU also insists on the importance of the professional team and, in general, of the entire educational community... “I laugh a lot about diversity because... we are all diverse! (...). If a school does not have a serious project agreed upon by the whole educational community, it is impossible to deal with diversity”.

With regard to lifelong learning, DIES emphasises the networking of teachers from different centres and the importance of developing joint projects with universities, such as a project in which she participates for the training of student mediators.

OIES considers that “in lifelong learning, the most interesting thing was the good practices (...), what counts is the experience, saying how you do it”. And he criticises

the closure of the former teachers' centres, which worked as a network to host teachers' and schools' initiatives. This is corroborated by PEPDU, who was director of one of them and knows well how they worked, when he states that it is the organised teacher networks (MECEP, MRP, summer schools, parent schools...) that work best, instead of offering mainly online courses that are too focused on subjects that are only of interest to the administration. In his opinion, it is necessary to "promote the staff meetings as spaces for shared reflection" so that "they would be the ones to propose things to the administration and that the administration would facilitate this training".

Secondly, with regard to teaching methods, it is clear that it is impossible to respond to diversity using traditional methods based on verbalism, memorisation and passivity on the part of the students. For this reason, PEPDU proposes a model of "open classrooms" or flexible groupings that break with the inflexible planning style based on chronological criteria and take as a reference the capabilities, skills and developmental rhythms of the students in each area of knowledge. For his part, PPTU insists on a balanced combination of individualised teaching and cooperative learning, the combination of which is essential to meet the needs of all students.

In the same vein, OIES proposes more active, didactic and meaningful teaching practices that go beyond the classic organisation of the centre, such as workshops developed by the students themselves, alternative study trips, visits to the city or the countryside... All this is collected, processed and presented by the students until it culminates in a common end product, a theatre project or a book, "the most interesting thing was to have the book in our hands because we realised the importance of having end products".

Thirdly and finally, on the involvement of the educational community, PEPDU stresses that "the collaboration of families is a fundamental factor for an educational centre to be able to develop educational equity". He adds that centres must be more embedded in the territory, promote the involvement and participation of families, and become spaces open to the neighbourhood and the community if they want to fight poverty and inequality. PPTU shares this argument, adding that "from the point of view of developmental and educational psychology, the process of knowledge begins with proximity, with socialisation in a close environment, as would be convenient and favourable".

5. Discussion and Conclusions:

In order to draw conclusions, it was necessary to triangulate the results obtained from the in-depth interviews and the questionnaire. The results, grouped in the three categories of analysis used, were crossed with the two opposing ways of conceiving educational equity that appear in the LOE/LOMLOE and LOCE/LOMCE, respectively.

In both the sample of veteran teachers and the sample of in-service teachers, the discourses and opinions were found to be more consistent with the conception of equity presented in the LOMLOE and the LOE. In both samples, there is a majority tendency to associate equity with giving to all according to their needs and with accommodating diversity. In the questionnaire, opinions that associate equity with excellence and merit are noticeably less selected and clearly challenged in the interviews.

In terms of education policies, support for public education, scholarship programmes, plural schooling for students and complementary and extracurricular activities were

rated higher than policies that tend to support state-subsidised schools, institutes of excellence, inter-school comparisons and diagnostic testing. This is very much in line with the reflections and assessments of the sample of senior teachers, which strongly reflect that policies that support private education to the detriment of public education, cannot be considered equitable. In this sense, the in-depth interviews provide much more and more detailed information, facilitating the identification of some of the policies derived from the LOCE and the LOMCE, which, according to those interviewed, have not contributed to improving the equity of the educational system. These policies include the single district schooling policy, the bilingual programmes, the school voucher, the increase in the ratio, the disproportionate increase in bureaucracy - in contrast to the scarcity of resources -, the lack of stability of the teams, combined with greater intermittency, the scarce promotion of the participation of the educational community and the evaluation of schools based on comparisons and the establishment of rankings.

With regard to the educational measures related to the attention to diversity, there is a certain tendency in the sample of active teachers to consider positively both the measures enacted in LOE and LOMLOE and those promoted by LOCE and LOMCE. Thus, the most highly rated measures are language support classes for foreign students and inclusive flexible groupings, which correspond to the opposite models of attention to diversity. In addition, support measures within and outside the mainstream classroom are considered equitable measures, the former more so. It is also noteworthy that the Curricular Diversification Programmes, PMAR and Basic Vocational Training were rated fairly or very positively, with no significant differences, while PCPIs, which emerged under the LOE, received a lower percentage rating. However, the sample of veteran teachers was much more critical of the measures promoted by the LOCE and LOMCE, especially PMAR, Basic Vocational Training, and language support classes for foreign students, highlighting the appropriateness of support within the regular classroom.

The opinion of the group of veteran teachers, who have the advantage of having worked in the context of all these laws and of having a broader, even historical, perspective on their rights and wrongs, does not seem to be negligible. Moreover, the simplest analysis will show that these measures are clearly different and, in many respects, contradictory. Consequently, and despite the fact that the sample of active teachers cannot be considered representative, it is worth asking about this apparent contradiction between a clear position on the definition of equity, which focuses on the conditions of people's origin, and the equidistance in terms of the educational measures to be implemented, which seems to indicate that measures that take into account this inequality of origin are as valid as those that do not and segregate students on the basis of their academic results. Perhaps these contradictions can be explained on the basis of the ideas put forward by María José Lemaitre (2005) who, after carrying out research in the field of higher education, concludes that equity is an extremely complex concept, which finds a certain consensus among teachers in its definition, but not in its implementation, an aspect for which the economic situation of the country in which it is implemented is particularly relevant. To explain these contradictions, it is also important to take into account the lack of initial and ongoing teacher training on equity issues (Arnaiz et al., 2021).

This positive and undifferentiated assessment by active teachers, ignoring the sign of the policies that promote each measure, may be related to the nature of educational spaces where, once immersed in daily work, there is no appreciation of the differences between the measures that come from one or the other legislation, or there is no time

to be able to approach in a reflexive and critical manner their starting assumptions and their intentionality in terms of equity. Another possibility is that the evaluation of teachers may be motivated by a situation of lack of resources or precariousness, in the face of which anything goes (Lemaitre, 2005).

All in all, it could be concluded that equity does not seem to be a clearly delimited concept, but subject to interpretation, which varies in its concreteness from social justice to meritocracy and can be taken one way or the other. On the other hand, these results could also be related to the technical training that most teachers seem to receive, which is not designed to train them as competent and transformative intellectuals, capable of critical analysis to discern different positions on equity (Giroux et al., 2022).

We can conclude that equity appears as a political concept and is not linked to politics, understanding this distinction as made by political scientist and philosopher Chantal Mouffe (2021). In other words, in the speeches of politicians, equity is discussed in an abstract way, but there is no real debate on how to translate the different conceptualisations of equity into practice.

While these debates and lack of debates take place, changes in policies and legislation, educational outcomes and dropout rates continue to pose challenges for a more equitable public education (Marrero-Acosta et al., 2022).

Acknowledgements

This paper is part of the research project, “New Education Policies and their Impact on Equity: School Management and Teacher Professional Development” (PGC2018-095238-B-100).

References

- Arnaiz Sánchez, P., Escarbajal Frutos, A., Alcaraz García, S. y Haro Rodríguez, R. d. (2021). Formación del profesorado para la construcción de aulas abiertas a la inclusión. *Revista de Educación*, 393, 37-68. <https://doi.org/10.4438/1988-592X-RE-2021-393-485>
- Central Sindical Independiente y de Funcionarios. (2019, 1 de noviembre). Propuestas para Educación de los distintos partidos políticos para las Elecciones Generales del 10 de noviembre de 2019. *CSIF*. <https://www.csif.es/contenido/nacional/educacion/283859>
- Bericat, E. (1998). *La integración de los métodos cuantitativo y cualitativo en la investigación social*. Ariel.
- Bisquerra, R. (Coord.) (2009). *Metodología de la investigación educativa*. La Muralla
- Essomba Gelabert, M. (2014). Políticas de escolarización del alumnado de origen extranjero en el estado español hoy. Análisis y propuestas. *Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 17(2), 27. <https://doi.org/10.6018/reifop.17.2.198771>
- European Commission. European Education Area (2021). *Mejorar la calidad y la equidad: iniciativas*. European Commission.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. (2022). *Investing in our future. Quality investment in education and training*. Publications Office of the European Union. European Commission. <https://doi.org/10.2766/45896>
- Flick, U. (2007). *Introducción a la investigación cualitativa*. Morata
- García Calvo, G., García Gómez, T. y Vázquez Recio, R. M. (2024). La proletarianización del profesorado como efecto de las políticas neoliberales en educación. *Revista Electrónica*

Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado, 27(1), 15–30.
<https://doi.org/10.6018/reifop.595391>

- Giroux, H., Rivera, P. y Neut, P. (2022). De una pedagogía de la clausura a una pedagogía de las posibilidades. Aprender y enseñar la agencia. En P. Rivera-Vargas, R. Miño-Puigcercós y E. Passeron (Eds.), *Educación con sentido transformador desde la universidad* (pp. 25-34). Octaedro Universidad
- González Medina, A.A. (2017). Cuarenta años de cambios educativos en España. *eXtoikos*, 20(1), 31-33.
- Lemaitre, M. J. (2005). Equidad en la educación superior: un concepto complejo. *REICE. Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 3(2), 70-79.
<https://doi.org/10.15366/reice2005.3.2.005>
- Marrero-Acosta, J., Santos Vega, J. D., Sosa Alonso, J. J. y Vega Navarro, A. (2022). In search of a fair public education: A case study on equity in secondary education in the Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 30(120). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.30.6886>
- Mouffe, C. (2021). *El retorno de lo político. Comunidad, ciudadanía, pluralismo, democracia radical*. Paidós.
- Parcerisa, L. (2016). Modernización conservadora y privatización de la educación el caso de la LOMCE y la Nueva Gestión Pública. *Revista Educación, Política y Sociedad*, 1(2), 11-42.
<https://doi.org/10.15366/reps2016.1.2.001>
- Simons, H. (2011). *El estudio de caso: Teoría y práctica*. Morata.
- Taylor, S. J. y Bogdan, R. (1992). *Introducción a los métodos cualitativos de investigación*. Paidós.
- OCDE. (2012). *Equity and quality in education. Supporting disadvantaged students and schools*. OCDE.
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en>
- UNESCO. (2015). *Educación 2030: Declaración de Incheon y Marco de Acción para la realización del Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 4: Garantizar una educación inclusiva y equitativa de calidad y promover oportunidades de aprendizaje permanente para todos*. UNESCO.

Short CVs of the authors

Melani Penna Tosso

PhD in education and a degree in psychology. She currently works as a full-time research lecturer at the Complutense University of Madrid (UCM). Previously, she was a counsellor in public schools in Madrid and a teacher at the Technical University of Manabí (Ecuador), CES Don Bosco and CSEU La Salle. Her doctoral thesis analysed the training of teachers to deal with affective and sexual education. Subsequently, she has directed the research project “Design and implementation of a Comprehensive Sex Education Programme” funded by the Ministry of Education of Ecuador and has been a member of the research team of different national and international projects. She was director of the degrees Expert in Early Childhood Care (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) and Expert in Feminist and Queer Pedagogies (UCM). She coordinated the Office of Sexual Diversity and Gender Identity at UCM. Email: melani.penna@edu.ucm.es

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8211-8664>

Raúl García Medina

PhD in Education Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid. He has worked as a teacher at all levels of the education system. In 2005 he joined the Faculty of Education (UCM), teaching subjects in the field of Didactics and inclusive and intercultural education. He was coordinator of the Degree in Social Education. He was director of the UCM research group on “Inclusion, Diversities, Educational Cooperation and Sustainability” (INDICES) and is currently a member of the group “Inclusion, Universal Design, Cooperation and Technology” (INDUCT, no. 930448). His research work has focused on inclusion, attention to cultural diversity, prevention of intolerance and coexistence in education. He has also participated as an expert and advisor in projects and publications of the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia (OBERAXE) and the Subdirectorate General for Territorial Cooperation and Educational Innovation (SGCTIE). Email: rgmedina@ucm.es

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4367-3160>

Mercedes Sánchez Sáinz

PhD in Education and Pedagogy. Lecturer at the Faculty of Education-CFP since 1999. Lines of research: attention to diversity, gender and LFBTIQ+phobia in education, didactics and school organisation and queer pedagogies. Four doctoral theses and 30 dissertations. INDEX H14, ih17. Inclusion, Diversity, SAD, Cooperation and Technology Group (INDUCT) 930448. 4 R+D+I/MINECO RESEARCH PROJECTS (6 years), plus 5 in public university calls (5 years), 4 in public institutions (5 ½ years), 2 in private companies (3 ½ years) and 2 COOPERATION PROJECTS public call (1 year and 8 months). PUBLICATIONS: 6 SCOPUS (Q1 and Q2) and JCR articles, plus 11 in indexed journals and 2 in non-indexed journals. 14 books (mostly Q2 SPI), 16 chapters and 2 book reviews. Pioneer in publications on gender diversity in the field of education from Early Childhood Education onwards. Email: mercesan@edu.ucm.es

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7547-4724>