

- Desde el aula, adoptar una metodología que favorezca el aprendizaje de todo el alumnado en su diversidad (actividades abiertas con diferentes tipos y grados de ayuda).
- Partir de una evaluación inicial del alumno en cada núcleo de aprendizaje, que permita valorar sus conocimientos previos para facilitar la significatividad de los nuevos contenidos a aprender.

A lo largo de esta Unidad Didáctica, trabajaremos actividades de refuerzo y de ampliación, para dar respuesta a todas las necesidades. ●

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Educational Systems: the British and Spanish ones

Título: Educational Systems: the British and Spanish ones. **Target:** Maestros Educación Primaria. **Asignatura:** Inglés. **Autor:** Ana Isabel Sánchez Ruiz, Maestra. Especialidad en Lengua Extranjera (Inglés), Maestra de Inglés en Educación Primaria.

As a foreign language teacher, I have always felt a strong interest towards the British Educational System, and after having studied its most relevant aspects at the University, I had the wonderful opportunity of doing my last teaching practice in a public British school in Milton Keynes (Britain) in 2009. I have described in this piece of writing the main features of the British Educational System, something that I considered quite interest for teachers, not only for foreign language ones, because there are some comparisons with our system, as you can see in what follows.

As everybody knows, the Education System in Britain is quite different from the Spanish one, but sometimes, people only think about discipline, that British schools are very strict and children's behaviour is more appropriate than in Spain.

However, we should not forget the differences about kind of schools, how teachers work, subjects, methods of teaching, to name but a few.

Both countries want their students to get high marks and to have Education Systems known because of their good results and their quality, but the resources and the way of understanding the Education are not the same, so there are some differences.

First of all, I would like to talk about when children start compulsory education. In this aspect, we have the first difference. British children start primary school at 5, and finish when they are 11 [loger school (5-9)/ middle school (9-13)]. Before that, they have been prepared for it in nursery schools, the same as in Spain. However, Spanish children start primary school at 6 until they are 12. In Britain, they use this year in Secondary Education (11-16 or 18). This fact is interesting because in secondary they can learn more about subjects which are really interested for them. They spend more time on one or more areas of work, so their specialization is higher.

As far as modern languages are concerned, we also find another difference. In Britain, modern languages are introduced when they are 7-8, whereas in Spain they are introduced when children are 3. On the one hand, I think that the sooner modern languages are introduced, the sooner children can learn them; but on the other hand, it is not sufficient an hour a week. The best situation would be teaching a foreign language increasing the time used for it. The teaching of foreign languages in school should be increased and diversified.

The kind of schools is another difference because in Britain there are two kinds of schools at Secondary Education:

On the one hand, there are Comprehensive schools (95% of children), where they have mixed ability children and a range of practice subjects. On the other hand, we find Grammar schools (5% of children), where they have academic subjects.

It is good that children have got the same opportunities according to their abilities, and this is quite difficult if they are in the same classes, without taking into account that their objectives are different.

This does not mean isolation or inequality of opportunities. On the contrary, this gives each child the opportunity that he/she needs. In Spain there is not this distinction.

Respect to comprehensive schools, children are divided into sets according to their ability, only in course subjects, such as Maths, English, Science and modern languages. This division can promote the following issue: Is it good for children who get lower marks?

This question has not got an easy answer, but I can give my point of view. From my own experience, I think that children have not got problems with this system because they accept that they belong to a group in a subject, and to another one in a different subject; and moreover, this is a challenge for them, because these groups are flexible, and they could be in the following group if they improve. I

checked in my last teaching practice that children assume the division into groups as a natural situation in the classroom. Spanish schools can work with this system if everybody (Government, teachers, parents) makes an effort; in fact, some bilingual schools carry out this method. But I do not only talk about this methodology in the foreign language class but in all the subjects.

I think this method leads to get better results and children will be more trained. Spanish schools should take into account that nobody is good at everything, and children worth an effort to give them the opportunities that they need. Society have to accept that we are not equal when we talk about Education and this doesn't mean discrimination at all. We would be giving children the learning according to their particular features.

Apart from children, teachers are really important because if students are organised in groups according to their ability, they will be able to use the time well in order to gain as much from them as possible because they will have similar conditions, instead of having children with very different abilities.

Moreover, teachers in Britain prepare different activities according to children's abilities. This does not happen in Spain, and I think it would be a good way of adapting the same contents for different children.

Talking about teachers, British teachers have a high sense of responsibility. They are at classrooms half an hour before the class starts, their pupils do not call them by the first name (this improves the feeling of authority because they have to be aware of our roles as teachers, not friends), and they have got an assistant to help them. This is a fantastic advantage for British teachers, because Spanish ones have not got this help.

There are, from my point of view, another extremely important difference between British System and Spanish System: national exams.

- 6/7 KS1 National Tests.
- 10/11 KS2 National Tests.
- 14/15 GCSEs (early).
- 15/16 GCSEs (or other national qualifications).

The results of these exams are public, so everybody can know what school is better, and this helps parents to take decisions. Moreover, in some aspects this fact forces teachers to do their job as good as it is possible because their pupils have to pass these exams and to get good marks.

I did not know that there were national exams in Britain with public results, and I think that there are too many exams (on 14th November 2008 decided to eliminate one of the exams that children did when they were 14), but Education in Spain could improve if the results of exams got by students in each school, such as Selectividad, were public. Teachers would understand how important their jobs are and they would give their students as many opportunities to get the best learning according to their ability as it was possible.

Respect to the classrooms, they are more modern than Spanish ones. In each one there is a whiteboard and a laptop, giving teachers thousands of opportunities to carry out more interesting and attractive activities for their pupils. Furthermore, on the Internet we can find infinity of resources, and visual information is very useful at Primary Education. Motivation is essential because at the age of our students concentration is quite short and children need to feel that what they are doing is interesting for them.

Talking about motivation, British classrooms are full of motivating elements. We can find inside of them a lot of posters, flashcards, pictures, maps, among many others.

In addition to these mentioned aspects, another resource used to motivate pupils in giving them diplomas in order to appreciate their effort in the different subjects. They feel very proud of them and these prizes make students feel the interest and need of going on improving.

Finally, the Inspection is different as well. British inspectors want to find out how good a school is and how it might be better. Teachers and parents tell them their opinion about the school and later, they will receive a report. Inspectors decide if the school is “Beacon school” (an example for the others) or if they give the school another opportunity to do improvements. From my point of view, in Spain the inspections are not serious as in Britain, and I think Inspectors should take more interest because Education is fundamental in the society.

As a conclusion, I think that Spanish Education System could incorporate a lot of aspects of the British one because of their good results, such as national exams, “learning doing”, do not use textbooks (or use them only as a guide), or harder inspections.

In Spain we need children to be motivated, we need improve the commitment of the teachers with the Education, and we have to admit how important the Education is.

The first step is to be aware of what we need to improve. In some years time the Education will improve and it will be better if we make an important effort. Spanish teachers have started this way with the incorporation of the ICT resources in the classrooms, as well as the implementation of bilingual systems. ●