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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Mind the Gap: Differences in Methodology and Contents between Primary and Secondary English Curricula in Aragon.

Author

Lucía Sánchez Estremé

Supervisor

Paula Buil Beltrán

Faculty of Arts
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Abstract

The change from primary to secondary education and the difficulties it implies for students in the short and long term has been a dominant concern in countries as Spain. One of the subjects where this gap has more long term consequences is English, as many students start feeling frustrated with this language in high school and reject continuing its learning process. This dissertation focuses on analysing how the differences in the curricula for each stage can be influencing or causing this gap. For this purpose, first, the curricula for primary and secondary education will be individually analysed. After that, a comparison between both curricula will be established. Finally, the different parts and structures of both curriculums, as well as the differences, will be analysed in terms of how they might be affecting the gap.

Resumen

El cambio de educación primaria a educación secundaria y las dificultades que esto implica para los estudiantes a corto y largo plazo ha sido una preocupación dominante en países como España. Inglés es una de las asignaturas donde esta brecha tiene más consecuencias a largo plazo, puesto que muchos estudiantes empiezan a sentirse frustrados con este idioma en el instituto y al terminar rechazan continuar estudiándolo. Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado se centra en analizar como las diferencias en los currículos para cada etapa pueden estar influenciando o causando esta brecha. Con esta intención, primero, se han analizado los currículos de educación primaria y secundaria por separado. Después, se ha llevado a cabo una comparación entre ambos currículos. Finalmente, se ha analizado como las diferentes partes y la estructura de ambos currículos, así como sus diferencias, pueden estar influenciando esta brecha.

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1. Introduction

In Spanish education one of the subjects that has a higher failure rate is English as a second language (ESL). This is reflected in the level of English knowledge of the Spanish population. Unlike other European countries, in Spain is highly common to find people who despite having been learning English for 12 years (primary and secondary mandatory education) have a low level of English and are unable to communicate.

One of the defining moments for the general lack of knowledge and rejection to keep learning ESL takes place during high school, specifically in the first year of secondary education. This change from primary to secondary education is problematic in all subjects, but it seems to have an especially negative long-term effect on the subject of ESL.

The cause for this is the existing gap between primary and secondary education. Although both are part of the mandatory stage of education in Spain, and thus it should be a progression between them, the reality and results show that it is not the case. This gap has been a major concern for researchers and public administrations for a long time, precisely for its negative effects on students' academic future. For that reason, this dissertation intends to find some of the possible methodological factors influencing this gap, that is the curricular difference between the two stages. For that aim, this dissertation will show an analysis of the previous literature together with an analysis of both curriculums with a comparison between them.

2. Theoretical framework

The gap between primary and secondary education has been studied in Spain for a long time, with some studies dating back to the 70s. These studies have analysed the problems that students, coming from primary education, face when transitioning to the first year of secondary education. Over the years, this change has been associated in several studies with difficulties such as emotional stress, frustration, academic stress, and school dropout.

In 1974 the exiting concern in different countries of the European Union towards the difficulty of the transition between mandatory education to secondary school led to the creation of an international conference about continuity and articulation between mandatory education and middle schools (Iniesta Oneca, 1974).

Although this topic has been studied since the late 20th century, there has been several changes in the legislation, structurization, and organization of the educational system. Thus, this study focuses only on those that belong to the current educational organization, LOE (the organic law for education), and its subsequent modification into the LOMCE (the organic law for education quality improvement).

This section is going to take an overview of the different articles and studies published about this topic. The section will be divided into several parts according to the main focus of the different studies: some share the main focus on consequences for students, other focus on the possible cause for it (methodology, curriculum, etc.), and others from students' perspectives or results.

Several authors focused on the importance of the transition to secondary education and the long-term effects it might have for students' future. Thus, Gimeno (1996, p.12) referred to the transition to secondary education as a stressful and

problematic period for most students. Ames and Rojas (2011, p.8) supported this stating that historically this transition is considered as one of the most difficult ones students confront and often affects their academic future in the long term.

Monarca, Rappoport, and Fernandez Gonzalez (2012) conveyed a survey that concreted this difficult transition into specific negative consequences for students. They concluded that 33% of students transitioning to the secondary stage experienced negative consequences which affect their scholar future. Along with other factors, they argued that even though primary and secondary schools are part in Spain of basic education stage (from 6 to 16 years) they are individual and differentiated entities and it is precisely the differences between them that are creating the trouble.

The gap between the two stages and the consequent differences have been analysed widely with authors centring on diverse causes for this discontinuity. According to Gallardo Fernandez, Saiz Fernández, and San Martín Alonso (2019, p.106), the main factors that intervene in this process are related to the management of the school and those pedagogically related (methodology, assessment, etc.) together with socio-personal factors (personal development, family environment, etc.). They emphasized the importance of the latter in particular due to the biological change taking place during puberty.

Sebastián Fabuel (2015) following Isorna Folgar, Navia Rey, and Felpeto Lamas (2013) also addressed the main consequences suffered by students in the transition from primary education to secondary education. Not only the grades of the students are significantly lower, but also their self-esteem decreases. Moreover, there is a change in the dynamics of the relation between student-teacher and in the methodology. On this topic, Fabuel pointed out the difference between the organization and focus on the curriculum of both stages as one of the possible causes of this gap. The curriculum in

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primary education is not as intellectually challenging and has its focus on the interiorization of procedures and habits, whereas the curriculum in secondary education includes larger and deeper contents.

This emphasis on the importance of the curriculum is supported by Martinez Muñoz and Pinya i Salomó (2015, p.60) who referred to coordination in the curriculum as the key to facilitate this transition. They maintained that curriculum and syllabus must maintain continuity between stages especially in terms of coordination of contents, methodologies, and evaluation. Hence, according to them, school failure is a consequence of an existing gap in terms of methodology, behaviour management, and the new educational context.

There is another line of work where authors examine the matter taking into consideration students perspectives carrying out different kinds of research. Rodriguez Montoya (2016) used a qualitative approach looking at the point of view of students. He analysed students' opinions and feelings regarding the transition from the sixth course of primary education to the first year of secondary school. He concluded that, in terms of their perception and valuation of the change, at the end of the first year of secondary school nine out of ten students feel integrated and satisfied in the school even if they are obtaining bad results. Thus, according to this research, most students by the end of the first year of secondary education are more interested in social interaction and status than in academic results.

Calvo Salvador and Manteca Cayon (2016) similarly carried out qualitative research but focused on those students who already have difficulties in the learning process. They selected students who participate in an extracurricular support program (PROA) and found the barriers and aids encountered in the process of integrating into the secondary stage and achieving success. They indicated the size of the school and the

number of students as one of the influencing factors. Another element they mentioned is the nature of the relations with the school (more structured and organized) and with the teachers (more distanced). In this sense, they also pointed out a change in the methodology used by the teacher as one of the main reasons, with a more test-centred, strict, and autonomous approach with a greater depth in contents together with a higher amount of homework. Moreover, the result led to the conclusion that similarity between stages influences the success or failure of students. They stressed the importance of the tutor's work as a key element to facilitate or difficult the adaptation process.

Finally, Gallardo Fernandez, Saiz Fernández, and San Martín Alonso (2019) worked from a different approach examining some existing transition plans from primary to secondary education. In their paper, their compared and analysed five different plans in terms of the involved agencies, curricular continuity, coordination between stages, common strategies, and attention to the social and personal dimensions of the students. They concluded that many factors are intervening in this transition, thus, one of them is bound to influence students positively or negatively. They emphasized the need of sharing knowledge between professionals to facilitate the coordination and the importance of training teaching in connecting contents with the social, emotional, and personal factors that influence students in this phase.

In conclusion, studying the situation from different approaches, it is possible to see how different scholars agree that there is, indeed, a significant gap in the transition between the stages of primary education and secondary education in the Spanish educational system. As it has been possible to see, this gap has been associated with several reasons, including the bigger size of high school, the change in the student-teacher relationship, the methodology or the evaluation, and how this reflects negatively

in students results (especially in the first year of secondary education, and even in their long-term education).

Furthermore, the data supports the findings of these authors. According to the report carried out by the Centre of assessment, training, and quality of Aragon about the analysis of academic results, there is, indeed, 2.9% of students who do not promote to the next year, whereas in the first year of secondary education there is a 12.7% of students who do not promote to the second year. However, no articles have been found focusing specifically on this transition in the subject of English as a foreign language (EFL). Despite that, according to the data, there is a gap in the results obtained by students in the EFL subject as the end of primary education, only 11,4% of students fail the subject, contrasting with an 18.6% in secondary education. (Centre of Assessment, training, and Quality of Aragon, 2019).

Taking this into account, this undergraduate dissertation is going to investigate why there is a significant gap in the transition of ESL from primary education to secondary education. To do that, the focus is going to be placed on the differences in the contents and methodology existing between these two stages through the analysis of the curriculum and teaching materials used in both stages.

3. The curriculum

According to what has been developed in the previous section, one of the main issues authors point out is the difference in methodology (contents, teaching methodology, assessment, grouping, etc). Hence, an analysis of the curriculum of both the stage of primary and secondary education will be carried out in this section. This analysis will focus on two different parts. First, it will develop the different stages that the curriculum has, and, then, a comparison and contrast between them will be made, exposing the possible differences in methodology that may be partly causing the gap between the two stages.

Before carrying the analysis is worth considering that when talking about education in Spain the different competencies of education are transferred to the autonomous communities. Although there is a common legal framework provided by the Organic Law of Education (LOE) modified by the later Organic Law of Education quality Improvement (LOMCE) and the Royal Decree 126/2014, each community has its own laws and curriculum which concrete this general framework. For that reason, in this dissertation, the focus will be only in the educational law of the community of Aragon.

In Aragon, the Curriculum for primary education is established in the Order of the 16th of June (2014), and the Curriculum for secondary education is established in the Order of the 26th of May (2016). Each of them will be analysed in the following subsections.

3.1. The curriculum for Primary Education.

This document is divided into six parts: an introduction, the contribution to the development of the key competencies, the learning objectives, methodological orientations and contents, evaluation criteria, and learning standards. The introduction

begins by talking about the importance of communication ability in our globalized society and the importance given by the Council of Europe to a plural communicative competence or plurilingual competence.

This part is where the interaction between content, evaluation criteria, and learning standards is established and explained. All of them are divided into four main blocks (one for each skill), each block has a relation of contents, criteria, and their corresponding learning standards. Each learning assessment and criteria refers to a communicative task and must include some of the contents from their block. However, contents of each block are not linked with any criteria or learning assessment and the same content can be linked with more than one criterion. Thus, some contents might be taught many times whereas others are taught only once, it is the teacher's role to ensure there is a balanced among the learning process. Finally, in this part, there is a remark about the importance of taking into consideration that this stage has a basic competence level, and therefore, it is essential to work with familiar contexts, previous knowledge, language in context, group work, and ludic playing.

The next heading refers to the contribution of the subject to the acquisition of the key competencies (abilities that allow students to become active, independent, and responsible citizens and should be acquired by the end of compulsory education). There are nine of them: linguistic, learning to learn, social and civic, initiative and entrepreneurship, digital, mathematical, and basic competencies in science and technology, and cultural expression and awareness. For each of them, there is an explanation about how the ESL contributes throughout the stage of primary education to the development of these competences. This will not be analysed further since the key competencies are developed jointly in both stages and should not be influencing the gap.

After that, the explanation of the main objectives of the subject for the primary stage can be found. There are 18 main objectives for this stage which are classified in listening, reading, speaking, writing, syntactical structures, and sociocultural aspects. Among them a variety of activities or tasks such as reading text, writing letters, or understanding vocabulary. All these objectives include clarifications about the simplicity of materials, the use of close situations, the importance of using language in context, the selection of simple and short texts, and the importance of providing support, etc. Thus, there is an emphasis on adequate tasks and activities to the level of the students by making sure there is support, materials, productions are short and simple, and using language always within student's immediate and known context.

In the methodological guidelines, the importance of developing students' communicative competence is emphasized. At the beginning of the stage students should develop the oral skill and then, gradually, introduce the written one. Hence the teaching method must be the communicative one and it should include contextualized and globalized tasks. Moreover, lessons must be developed using only English with a focus on direct exposition to real language. The communicative language approach refers to a stream which, as explained by Dörnyei (2009: p.34), is a stream that includes several variants of teaching methods that share the focus on the importance of developing student's communicative competence by placing the student at the centre of the learning process and providing meaningful communicative interaction avoiding structured language tasks.

In addition to the methodological guidelines, there are five methodological principles specific for this stage which are: appreciation of other as well as English culture and language, attention to the different learning rhythms and needs implementing support techniques (direct help, extra time, visual support, etc.), the

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inclusion and effective use of the information and communication technologies (ICT), respect student's creativity and emotion, and continuous assessment with the student as the centre.

Finally, the contents, criteria, and learning standards, as has been explained above, are divided into four blocks which correspond to the four basic skills. Most of the types of contents are shared by the different blocks. Between blocks one and three and blocks two and four the interrelation is the type of communication method since they are either about comprehension or production. The same happens between blocks one and two or three and four as they share either oral or written language. The comprehension of oral and written (blocks one and three) texts include the following types of contents: comprehension strategies, communicative function, sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects, syntactic-discursive structures, high-frequency lexicon, and sonorous, accent, rhythmical, and intonation patterns.

As for the production of oral and written text (blocks two and four), the types of contents included are production strategies (planning, execution, linguistic, and paralinguistic and paratextual), socio-cultural and sociolinguistic aspects, communicative functions, syntactic-discursive structures, high-frequency lexicon, and sonorous, accent, rhythmical, and intonation patterns. As it can be seen, there are also some similar contents between these blocks, as blocks one and three refer to the comprehension of English (oral or written) and blocks two and four refer to the production of English (oral or written).

Each type of content includes a specification of ideas or items that must include. For instance, the syntactic-discursive structures include the expression of logical relations, temporal relations, affirmation, exclamation, negation, interrogation, expression of time, aspect, mode, existence, quantity, space, time, and mode. However,

as it can be seen in that example, these specifications or concretions are still enormously vague. Not only these contents are not restricted to one learning criteria or standard (as explained above the law states the multiplicity of relations, meaning that each of them can be linked to any of the learning criteria or standards), but also the specifications are still open to interpretation and do not include any references or examples as to the level, difficulty or quantity of content. Thus, in the content that has been used as an example the expression of quantity can be referred to a long list of vocabulary and expressions and it is up to each teacher to select what of those contents to choose and to assess depending on if they are more adequate for the level of the students as well as the amount of vocabulary and structures to select. Finally, as it is common to have more than one teacher during the stage of primary education it is possible that two of the adverbs (a lot, a little) of frequency are chosen by all teachers and some other expressions (such as any, none, much or many) are never selected by any of the teachers and therefore never taught. Therefore, students can be learning the same vocabulary in different years instead of progressive learning of this content.

Similarly, assessment criteria, although more concretely defined, are unprecise allowing personal interpretation of the idea. For instance, in block two the criteria 2.3. states that students should "Know basic, concrete and significative sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects, and apply that acquired knowledge to a contextually adequate oral production respecting the most elemental communicative convections" (Ley Orgánica 8/2013, del 9 de Diciembre 2013). While it is clear the main idea of this criteria, many different productions, activities, and tasks can be created to assess it but not all of them imply the same level of learning.

It is worth mentioning that the assessment criteria have learning standards that concrete them, but it is not mandatory to use them. In Aragon since the introduction of

the LOMCE the assessment criteria concretion can be elaborated by teachers depending on their students' needs and characteristics. This allows for teaching flexibility; nevertheless, it creates a lack of concretion that easily can lead to the same issue that the contents: some concepts (structures, tenses, vocabulary, etc.) are repeatedly taught while others are forgotten.

From this overview of the curriculum for the sixth grade of Primary School, it can be established that its main characteristic is flexibility to adapt to the needs and levels of students. This can be seen in its methodological guidelines, in how the main objectives are described, or the wideness in the contents. To be able to compare it in the next section an analysis of the Secondary School curriculum will be carried out.

3.2. The curriculum for Secondary Education.

The curriculum for Secondary School is established in Order of the 26th of May (2016). This document is divided into five parts: an introduction, the contribution to the development of the key competencies, the learning objectives, methodological orientations, and finally the correlation of contents, evaluation criteria, and learning standards. In the introduction, there is a general reflection of the importance of a second language in a globalized world. There is also a reference of how this law follows the guidelines established by the Council of Europe in the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages (MCER) which implies the development of the key communicative competence of students.

As it happened in the Primary Education curriculum, there is an explanation of the different parts that the curriculum has and how they must be applied in class. Not all the years of secondary education include the same evaluation contents. For the first and second years of secondary education, there is a relation of contents and assessment criterion, however, these criteria do not have the concretion of the learning standards,

those are only specified for the third and fourth years. Finally, for each criterion, as it happened in the primary stage, there is no association of specific content. Instead, a content (or several of them) from the corresponding block in which the criteria is found must be selected.

The subsection of the contribution of this subject to the development of the key competencies includes the seven key competencies established by the LOMCE and how the activities and tasks developed from ESL are going to help to keep developing those competencies. The activities and tasks are similar to those found in the primary stage but with an increased level of difficulty and variety due to their increased capacities and knowledge in secondary education. Thus, this point will not be further developed as is similar and complemental to the one of primary education.

In the next part, the list of the eight general learning objectives can be found. This list contains activities or abilities students should learn about the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and positive and respectful attitudes towards English and other languages and cultures. The activities and tasks have a higher level of difficulty as they include: comprehension of the full content, understanding of general and specific information, adequate oral communication to the context, adequate writing following conventions, etc.

In the methodological guidelines' subheading, a long explanation about students' needs can be found. The guidelines are divided into the following aspects: context, methodological principles, development of oral and written strategies and abilities, treatment of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, resources and ICT, orientations for assessment, and attention to diversity. The diversity of the context (in terms of groups and levels) in secondary education is explained as the reason why it is

important to carry out an initial analysis of the context and to implement adequate teacher coordination, especially in terms of methodological and didactic strategies.

As for the methodological orientations, five are included, which are: significative learning that begins with previous knowledge, key competencies learning, autonomous and cooperative learning which forces the teacher to respect different learning styles and rhythms, multiple intelligence learning, and the development of students motivation and creativity.

The development of oral and written strategies and abilities is one of the longest points in the methodological subsection. This heading includes an explanation of the importance of working all four interrelated skills in a balanced way together with a concretion of how to develop a task for each of these skills including pre-activities, while and after to facilitate comprehension and learning. Moreover, tasks are divided into communicative and pedagogical. To practice, the formal contents (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), pedagogical tasks must be included to ensure they have the linguistic tools to carry out the communicative task. The communicative ones are when students use the language in context to communicate in real-life situations.

While dealing with pronunciation its importance is highlighted as, according to the Council of Europe, is necessary to be able to establish fluent, precise, and complex communication. Specific pronunciation learning activities (difficult phonemes, minimal pairs...) and extension activities (role-playing, song listening, dialogues…) are suggested to develop it. Regarding the correction of pronunciation mistakes, a distinction is made between controlled and free practice. When in controlled practice systematic correction is recommended, however in communicative activities to develop fluency only significant mistakes should be corrected and this should be done at the end of the activity.

The treatment of vocabulary and grammar in ESL is the next point included in the methodological orientations. In secondary education, grammar can be presented inductively (extracting the rules from practice and examples) or explicitly (teaching first the grammar rule and illustrating it with examples). In both cases, grammar must be learned within a certain communicative context. Regarding vocabulary, its importance to enable communication is underlined. Students must learn new vocabulary and expressions and practice it in context to link in students' minds these words with a specific situation to aid memorization and recalling. Finally, students must also learn organization and memorization strategies such as the use of a dictionary, word formation process, etc.

Resources and ICT are an essential part of methodology according to the secondary stage curriculum. Teachers must create or select materials to adapt their lessons to a variety of levels, learning, and rhythm styles. These materials may be authentic or adapted depending on students' needs. In addition, ICT materials must be included from a critical perspective towards the safe use of technologies.

The methodological guidelines refer to both students assessment, student self-evaluation, and teacher's self-assessment. Students' assessment must be global (including values, competencies, etc.), continuous (assessment is carried out throughout the whole teaching process), objective, flexible (adapted to the results and particular needs of students), and different assessment instruments. Assessment in the first year (and second) of high school must follow the assessment criteria and must include observable, measurable, and assessable specifications (since for these years there are no learning standards in the curriculum). To assess the criterion the recommended tool is a rubric for each of the blocks of contents and a simplified example of the key aspects it should include is provided. The example is for the block of oral expression and includes

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the following aspect to be assessed: grammar and vocabulary (knowing the simple and complex grammatical forms and variety of adequate vocabulary), speech and communication (extension, relevance, fluency, cohesion, and coherence), pronunciation (sounds, accent, rhythm, and intonation) and, interaction (starting, maintaining, developing and ending the conversation).

To conclude the methodology there is a reference to attention to diversity. The syllabus must be flexible to students with lower and higher learning levels. The strategies and possible adaptations are decided by the teacher. Scaffolding, extra materials, support, or extension are some of the suggested strategies. At the end of the law the relation of contents, criteria, and learning standards for the secondary stage with the same structure found in the primary education criteria: divided into four blocks of contents for each skill with the relation of criteria and learning standards. However, as has been explained above for the year this dissertation is focused on (first year of secondary education) there are no learning standards. Thus, each block of contents refers to one skill and includes the corresponding assessment criteria. As it happened in the primary stage, contents and criteria from the same block must be linked by the teacher as the relation between them is open and flexible.

The contents in each block are interrelated similarly as it happened in the primary stage curriculum. Block one (oral comprehension) consists of comprehension abilities and strategies, sociocultural and sociolinguistic aspects, communicative functions, syntactic-discursive structures, and daily oral lexicon. Except for the former, the rest are part of the contents included in all blocks, as are involved in the development of all skills.

The comprehension abilities and strategies are comprised of five main abilities as comprehension of basic instructions, comprehension of general and specific

information, autonomous reading, message interpretation, and use of comprehension strategies, with a list of examples) are included in this part with a concrete explanation delimitating what level of abilities students must learn during the first year. The socio-cultural and sociolinguistic aspects to be worked in class include a wide range of elements that are necessary to be aware of when talking to a person from a different culture including courtesy rules, traditions, habits, register, non-verbal language, or values and beliefs. Regarding the communicative functions, the curriculum establishes eleven main ones that students should be able to perform by the end of the first year. The list is explicit and concrete and includes a wide range of communication situations from greeting and farewells to narrating events or expressing intention or interest.

The first block also includes an extensive and accurate list of syntactic-discursive structures including the verb and the verb phrase, substantive and substantive phrase, adjective and adjective phrase, preposition and prepositional phrase, simple, complex, and composed sentences, and other linkers. Each of these items has an explanation of what aspects should be learned. For instance, for the content of the verb and the verbal phrase, there are specifications referring to which verbs, tenses, modalities, and aspects. For this first year to be and have got should together with the most common irregular forms should be learned. Referring to tenses present simple, continuous, and past simple as well as what future forms (be going to, present continuous) must be taught. Referring to aspect of the verb students must know the distinction between habitual and progressive. Finally, the modality of the verb should be taught including ability, permission, possibility (can, can't) obligation (must) prohibition (mustn't, can't).

This block also includes a list of highly used oral lexicon with an enumeration of the topics' students should know, such as specific vocabulary (about the house, village,

family, and friends, etc.), frequent formulas and expressions, word formation (concreted in most common suffixes and prefixes and lexical groups) and collocations (including a list of examples such as do, make, go or play). Hence, the concretion and specification of contents on this block are adequate to facilitate teachers' function and to ensure that a specific level is learned, and all basic knowledge and contents students should know by the end of the first year of secondary education are, indeed, taught and studied. As for blocks two (speaking), three (reading), and four (writing), include all the contents from block one, as vocabulary and structures are needed for the practice of all skills. In addition, blocks two and four share the content of production strategies and abilities as both skills require them. They include the production of short oral text, participating in conversations, and using communication strategies (including a specific list of planning and execution strategies).

In addition, blocks three and four share the content of graphical patterns and orthographical conventions. This includes four types (recognition of punctuation marks, identification of common abbreviations, comprehension of basic digital language, and comprehension of special sings) and all of them are exemplified to know with ones should be taught in this level. In block two there is also content about patrons but for oral production, it includes the pronunciation of the alphabet, the practice of difficult phonemes and identification of phonetic symbols, ending pronunciation (such as plurals, pasts, and the gerund), contracted and weak forms (with a list stating which ones) and recognition and use of basic patterns of intonation, rhythm, and accent.

In addition to that, each block includes next to the contents three assessment criteria with relation to the corresponding key competencies that are worked with it. Each of them refers to a task o activity that students must be able to carry out. However, most of them are written inaccurately, meaning that, it could be difficult to ensure what

kind of activity must be done to ensure these criteria are achieved, or sometimes many different tasks can refer to just one of the criteria.

In conclusion, the secondary school curriculum for the first year is quite extensive and concrete in terms of contents. Yet, there is a lack of concretion when it comes to the organization of these contents in the syllabus since there is no connection of contents to specific criteria (they are just divided into blocks) and there are no learning standards to concrete the criteria. Thus, this curriculum gives the teacher the role of selecting which contents of each block link with which criteria and concreting the criteria themselves. In the next section, the primary school and secondary school curriculums will be compared to establish differences in structure, contents, or methodology that could take part in the existing gap between these two stages.

3.3. Differences and similarities between Primary and Secondary education curriculums.

Both curriculums are developed by the same entity which is the Aragonese government, and both are part of the mandatory education for students established by the Education and Culture Ministry of Spain (from six to sixteen years old). Although they share a common aim and a similar structure, as it has been shown in the previous analyses of both, there are some differences and changes between them. Intending to find the possible methodological causes of this gap, both curriculums are going to be compared establishing their main differences. Both curriculums begin with an introduction that explains the use and importance of ESL in our current globalized society. Moreover, they equally give importance to the key competencies and key communicative competence as the main aim that should be achieved by the end of compulsory education. As for the methodological teaching approach, both underline the importance

of flexibility and adaptation (as both have an open relation between contents and assessment criteria in each block).

Nevertheless, in the primary education curriculum, there is a paragraph stressing the importance of taking into consideration the basic competence level of students. Moreover, there is a recommendation of using methodologies and tasks that facilitate the learning process and materials or adaptations that simplify this process (group work, adaptations, visual support, teachers' help, contextualized learning, etc.). Even though the possibility of introducing more theoretical explanations is included, it is just a possibility, not something mandatory. Thus, in primary education teachers use a more delicate teaching approach to adapt to the students need and learning level but, when they move to secondary education there is no continuity in this treatment (although in secondary education there is also flexibility and adaptation the teaching method is content-based instead of student-focused).

The subheading of the contribution of the subject to the development of the key competencies, as has been said before, is quite similar in both curriculums only changing the kind of activities or tasks exemplified for the development of each of the competencies. Thus, this part does not influence the development of the gap precisely because it has continuity since these key competencies, as established in the law, should be developed throughout the whole mandatory education. In the subsection of the general objectives of the subject, the difference between these two curriculums starts to widen. In the secondary education curriculum, there are eight general objectives included, whereas in the primary education curriculum the list of general objectives includes eighteen.

The first striking difference, apart from the amount, is that in primary education the objectives are divided whereas in secondary education there is no division. Despite

the lack of division in secondary education, four of them are related to the skills and the other four are related to learning abilities and attitudes towards the English language. The four objectives related to the skills are basically the skills themselves. Meaning that in secondary education there is no need to include several objectives about speaking because the first objective already fully covers what students must be able to do when referring to the speaking skill. For instance, the first objective (related to speaking) is "Understand general and specific information of oral texts, about daily, general or interest-related topics, in face to face or online communications" (Order ECD/489/2016, from the 26th of May, p. 3).

On the other hand, in the primary education curriculum objectives are divided into five subheadings: listening, reading, speaking, writing, syntactic structures, and sociocultural aspects. Thus, each skill is subdivided into mini sub-skills or abilities since students are not able to master all the abilities that a skill implies. Moreover, most of the objectives include a restriction (scope, content, type of text, etc) to make the skill simpler or within reach for students of this age. By a way of illustration, the reading skill consists of three objectives (from objectives two to four) that include three basic and simple reading tasks (reading short and simple texts, obtaining foreseeable information, and understanding short, simple, and personal letters).

The difference in the general objectives between the two curriculums could be classified as evidence of the gap instead of a factor. Although is true that these objectives are for the whole stage and therefore in the secondary education curriculum students do not necessarily need to achieve these objectives by the end of the first year, still there is too much of a leap between them. Students are not required to be able to master any of the skills by the end of primary education but will be required to use them

in secondary education for the first time. This lack of progression could be a cause of difficulties, insecurities, and failure.

The methodological orientations are highly different in each curriculum. The secondary education curriculum contains a significantly longer methodological subheading divided into seven parts, while the methodological guidelines in primary education are explained in one shorter part. The primary education curriculum includes repetitive information already explained in the introduction such as the reference to the Council of Europe, MCER, communicative competence, and the importance of a second language in a globalized society. In addition, as it happened with the main objectives the importance of adapting to students' needs, using the language communicatively and with a globalize and contextualized approach is emphasised. In that sense, there is also a reference to the importance of using direct exposition to the language using as many authentic materials as possible and using only English throughout the whole lesson. Finally, the primary education guidelines also include five methodological principles explained previously about using ICT, continuous assessment, etc.

As for the secondary education curriculum, the methodology includes the same general information and methodological principles as the primary education one, but with more significant and useful guidelines to guide the teacher's practice and ensure learning. Even the methodological principles are written developed in a way that is more useful to the teachers' practice. For instance, the one about multiple intelligence, unlike the primary education one, explains what it is referred by that, which ones are and how to contribute from the subject to their development. In the subheading of development of oral and written skills not only the types of tasks and importance of balance are explained, but also several examples and ideas are provided for each skill. Next, there is a subheading about pronunciation where its importance, examples, and

techniques to properly teach pronunciation are included. This is especially important since it is easier to learn the proper pronunciation from the beginning, otherwise, students often learn wrong pronunciations and it requires more time and effort to correct those habits. Similarly, in the subheading about grammar and vocabulary treatment both explanations, methodologies, and examples are provided.

Before moving on, it is important to talk about another significant difference in the methodological guidelines which is the guidelines for assessment included in the secondary education curriculum. Assessment is one of the most important parts of the teaching process, not only is the origin of the planning of the syllabus but also has a preventive approach being able to see what students know and do not know and how to help them. In addition, knowing students' level is basic to make any adaptations and flexibilization or to find any special needs. In the secondary education curriculum information about the preventive approach of evaluation as well as the importance of assessing teacher's practice and syllabus is found together with clear information about how to properly carry out the assessment process. There is an explanation about how to evaluate the contents, recommendations, and even an example of a rubric for one of the contents is provided. Only the information about the importance of objective (using different techniques and instruments) and continuous assessment is shared by both curriculums. Thus, the information in the primary education curriculum about assessment is scarce, which means that it could not be properly carried out as it is left to the teacher's expertise without support or clear explanations.

The biggest difference is found in the part of the contents. Although both curriculums have a share structure (division in four blocks) the way and especially the clarity and quantity of the contents included are entirely separated. As it has been widely described in the subheading of the primary education curriculum, the contents

included in all blocks are extremely openly written. For instance, referring to syntactic-discursive structures in the primary education curriculum there is an enumeration that includes "affirmation, negation, expression of temporal and logical relations" among others. These contents can refer to many communicative contents, situations, contents, verbs, or tenses. Thus, it is nearly impossible to fully cover this content. On the other hand, the secondary education curriculum is divided into "verb and verb phrase, noun and noun phrase, etc" and in each of these items, there is a list of what contents should be included such as which tenses, which verbs, examples, etc.

As learning standards are not available for the first year of secondary education and are not mandatory in the primary education school, they are not going to be compared. Referring to the assessment criteria, the structure and quantity of them are shared in both curriculums. Both have around 3 criteria for each block of contents with relation to the key competencies that are included in each of them. Nevertheless, there is a big difference between them in terms of level. In secondary education, criteria are more concrete and include specifications of in which aspects that criteria must be done (proper pronunciation, adequate fluency, comprehensible production, etc). Then again, in the primary education curriculum, the criteria for the sixth grade are quite simplified. Often there is information about participating in a simple and brief conversation, using simple structures or with support, and including mistakes. The distance between the criteria for the first year of secondary education and the last year of primary education is too wide to be developed within a year without forcing exposing students to stress and frustration.

4. Conclusion

This dissertation has tried to explore the difficulties students face in the ESL subject when changing from primary to secondary school. Although primary and secondary education belong to the mandatory education period (from six to sixteen years) there is a gap between the level of exigency and difficulty that has been reflecting on students' performance.

In this regard, the literacy has analysed the effect and consequences of this gap proving its negative impact on students. This includes emotional consequences as well as academic ones, as can be seen in the 2019 report from the Centre of Assessment, training, and Quality of Aragon referred in section 2 of this essay. Some point to methodology (contents, teaching approach, assessment, etc), or more specifically a change in methodology between primary and secondary education, as one of the possible causes for this gap. Nevertheless, no papers have been found covering a study of the curriculum (which is the document that establishes all methodological items for primary and secondary education) to establish its possible influence in the gap.

As it has been proved in this study, there is a relation between the characteristics of the curriculums and the gap. In fact, not only the differences between them are a key factor, but they also shared common characteristics. As it has been pointed out in sections 3.1 and 3.2 the lack of direct correlation between criteria (intrinsic characteristic of both curriculums to ensure flexibility) creates the possibility of some contents not being taught whereas others are repeated. Moreover, the openness of the concretion of the assessment criteria can also be influencing the gap. The assessment is carried out with the concretion of the assessment criteria, the fact that teachers can choose between two option or their specification (or even necessarily create their

concision in secondary education) creates a lack of concretion and progression in the assessment.

Regarding the differences between these two curricula and their influence in the gap, three main differences have been found: extension and level of concretion and exemplification of the contents, gradation or flexibility towards students' level, and the methodological guidelines provided. As shown in the comparison, the secondary school curriculum includes contents more extended and more defined, clear, and exemplified. In addition, there is a big difference between the number of contents students should know by the end of primary education and by the end of the first year. Thus, this is a clear representation and part of the reasons for the existing gap. In concordance with this, there is a significant difference in terms of the importance given to gradation of difficulty and adaptation to students' needs. While it is also mentioned in the secondary school curriculum it is highly significant in every aspect of the primary education curriculum including the methodological guidelines, objectives, contents, assessment criteria, and learning standards. Finally, the methodological guidelines provided in the primary education curriculum are vague and not as useful for efficient teaching as the ones found in the secondary education curriculum.

Regarding further research, it would be interesting to consider investigating other methodological differences such as a comparison between the books for the sixth grade of primary education and the first year of secondary education. Although textbooks are not mandatory in schools, the reality is that most lessons (especially if not bilingual) are text-based. Thus, quite often the level and contents are those of the books as well as the text included in them. Finally, to consider other aspects (social, emotional, teachers mindset, etc) it would be interesting to carry out a teacher's survey about the factors they consider influence in this gap.

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