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GEOGRAPHY IN THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM – COMENIUS ASSISTANTSHIP EXPERIENCE

INTRODUCTION

Two years ago the author went for a year to Spain to teach in a primary school as a Comenius Assistant. This program enables young people who have no experience in teaching to see how the same subject can be taught in different European countries. They go abroad to observe, practise, learn, and later use this experience in the future in their schools. The system of education in Spain is very different from the Polish one so it was an interesting experience that she would like to share. Teaching in Spain inspired her to share the experience about it in Poland. The author collected a lot of information from the colleagues in Spanish school and she read also official documents prepared by Junta de Andalucia about their educational system. But the best source was her own experience and a chance to see how everything works during that year.

THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN SPAIN – GENERAL STRUCTURE

The Spanish educational system is decentralized. It means that the state only shapes the general aims and the organization system and from time to time it sends inspections to some schools. But every autonomous region in Spain decides itself about the books and contents that are taught. Regions with different official languages: Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia issue regulations about the other language taught at schools in their regions themselves (Fig. 1). Each region has also its own staff list (*bolsa de maestros y profesores*) (*Dispociones generals ...* 2006).

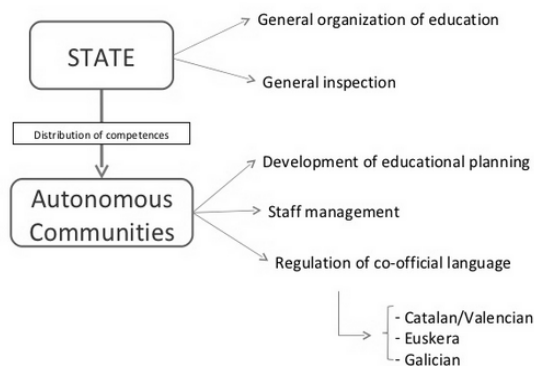


Fig. 1. Educational system in Spain

Ryc. 1. System edukacyjny w Hiszpanii

Source: <http://www.slideshare.net/pacobati/spanish-educational-system>

The process of becoming a teacher in Spain is quite complicated. First of all, after graduating from the university the students who would like to work at school have to pass a special official exam which is very difficult and has a few parts (written, oral, practical). Passing the exam is not a guarantee that they will have a job at school. The note from this exam is put on the list of all the teachers from the region in the central database, from the best to the worst. Then they call the people from the top of the list telling them in which school they are going to teach that year. They cannot refuse. Otherwise, their name goes to the end of the long list. So many teachers in Spain have to drive to work an hour or two every day or they have to rent a flat in a small village for a year. It often happens that they have to leave their families and small children to work far away from home. They switch schools many times before they finally get their final post. And if a teacher gets ill then the headmaster has to call *Junta de Andalucía* (education department) and ask for a substitute. This kind of young teachers, for a few weeks, go from one school to another in order to cover a place of someone who is ill or on a maternity leave, and they treat it as their teaching practice. They get some points which are later added to their note on the list in *bolsa de profesores*.

THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION IN SPAIN – FROM *INFANTIL* TO *UNIVERSIDAD*

The Spanish education system include children at the age of about 1 year. The first cycle is called *infantil* and is an equivalent of a nursery school. The first part of it lasts until they are three (called *guardería*) and the second till

children are six. They are not obligatory. Then, a child starts *colegio primaria* so the primary school that usually lasts six years (between 6–12) and it is divided into three cycles, two years each. Primary school is obligatory and free for everyone. A student can repeat a class only once during this cycle. Then, he has to continue on the next level. The next step is *colegio secundaria* – the secondary school lasts another four years (between 12–16) (Fig. 2).

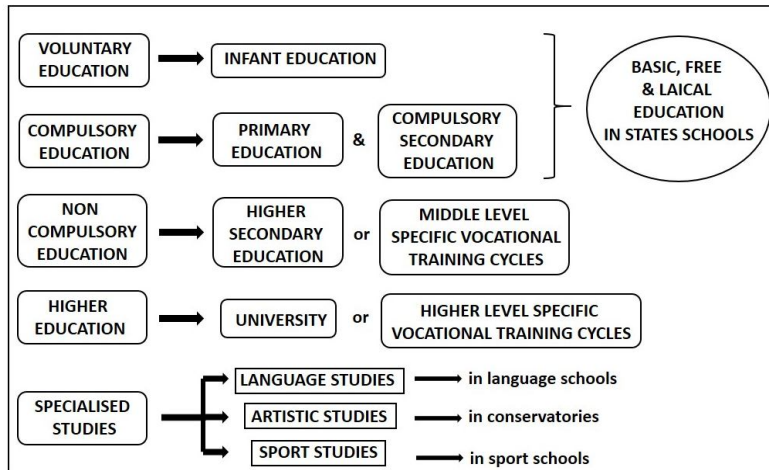


Fig. 2. Structure of Spanish educational system

Ryc. 2. Struktura hiszpańskiego systemu edukacyjnego

Source: <http://www.slideshare.net/pacobati/spanish-educational-system>

First two years are common but in the third one the students already choose the specification between sciences and technologies. This is the last obligatory cycle. You have to take a year again if you fail more than two subjects but if you fail Spanish language and literature and Mathematics you cannot pass to the next academic year. After that school, the children can go to work or choose between preparatory course for studies called *bachillerato* or preparation for a specific job called *formación profesional*. *Bachillerato* lasts two more years (from 16 until 18) and it finishes with the final exams (*Prueba General de Bachillerato*). The students, according to their interests, can choose among four groups of subjects: arts, natural sciences and health, human studies and social sciences and technologies. The final exams consist of: a common exam, an exam in the subject from the chosen profile and a foreign language exam: written and oral part. Positive marks are obligatory to apply to the university. Starting from the secondary school the students collect the points. Usually each subject is worth 3 points. Then they can go to the university or continue learning for a specific

job. Along with this system children can study also arts (music, dance, painting, acting and design) in a special school and foreign languages in *escuela de idiomas* since primary school (Fig. 2) (Salguero, Gómez Vallecillos 2012).

Also the grades in Spanish schools differ from other countries. Students can get marks from 0 to 10. Marks from 0 to 5 fail. These marks are an equivalent of the per cents, so 1 means 10%, 5 means 50% etc.

PLACE OF THE NATURAL SCIENCES IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

In the primary school (6–12) children learn *Conocimiento de medio*. We can translate it as the Knowledge about the Environment. When I was on my Comenius I used to teach this subject. It differs a lot from our Natural Science in the Polish primary school. These six years are divided into three cycles, two years each (Fig. 3).

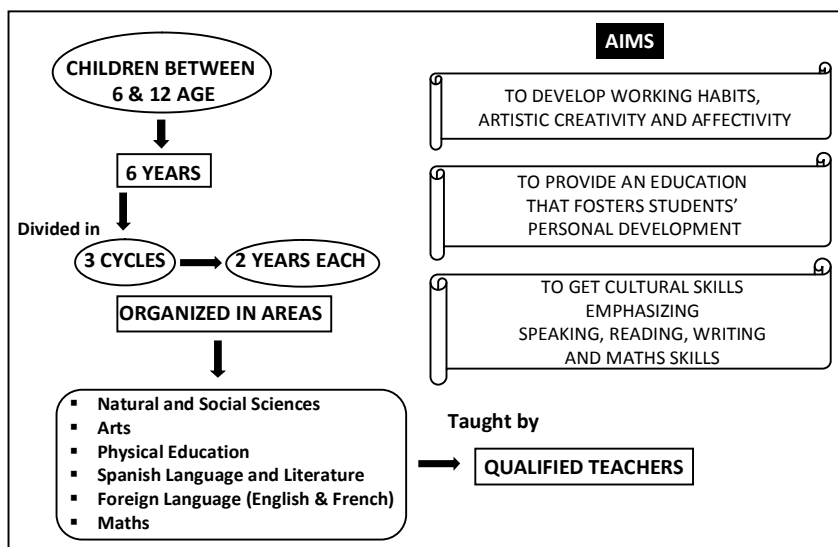


Fig. 3. Obligatory primary education

Ryc. 3. Obowiązkowa edukacja na poziomie podstawowym

Source: <http://www.slideshare.net/pacobati/spanish-educational-system>

The general topics are the same in every cycle, but in each cycle children are supposed to deepen the knowledge in each field. So in each cycle children learn about seven blocks of topics:

- 1) the environment and its conservation,
- 2) differences between the living organisms,

- 3) human health and personal development,
- 4) people, cultures and social life,
- 5) historical changes,
- 6) the matter and energy,
- 7) appliances, machines and technology¹.

According to Junta de Andalusia the contents of this subject is written below.

Table 1. Natural Science contents
Tabela 1. Treści edukacji w zakresie przyrody

Year of education	Contents
1 st	Our surrounding, Food, Human body, Our health, Animals, Plants, Jobs and the appliances for them, Means of transport and communication
2 nd	Human body, Food, Animals, Plants, The water cycle, Machines and appliances, The Solar System, Landscapes, Means of transport, Agriculture
3 rd	The world we live, The air and water, Life on the Earth, Animals, Plants, Taking care about our health, Human senses, Jobs, Inventions, Social life, Our community, From Ancient Times to Present
4 th	The weather and the climate, Water on the Earth, Rocks, Animals, Plants, Ecosystems, The living things, How to protect the Earth, Work and free time, Social life, Social changes in time, Energy, Machines and technology, The planet for all
5 th	Living things, Animals, Plants, Food and digestion, Breathing, Blood circulation, Growing, Relationships between people, The Solar System, Matter and its features, Energy, Earth's surface, Water on the Earth, The weather and the climate, Social life, Spanish administrative system, Prehistory, Ancient Times, the Middle Ages
6 th	Living things reproduction systems, Human reproduction system, Animals' relationships, Humans' relationships, Living things and the environment, Energy, Light, Sound, Electricity, Magnetism, Landforms and waters in Spain, Spanish administration system, Europe, Modern Ages, Our times

Source: Enseñanzas propias de la comunidad autónoma de Andalucía para la educación primaria, Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Educación (2007).

In the Spanish primary school each lesson lasts 60 minutes. Children do not usually have any breaks between the lessons. There is just one 30 minute-long

¹ Enseñanzas propias de la comunidad autónoma de Andalucía para la educación primaria, Junta de Andalucía, Consejería de Educación (2007).

break around 11.00–12.00. Children start school at 9 a.m. and finish at 2 p.m. every day. During the whole primary school period, they have the main tutor that teaches them Spanish, Mathematics and Knowledge about the Environment. They have usually different English, Music and P.E. teacher. So the main teacher usually spends about 3–4 hours a day with his/her class. There are no bells between the lessons, every teacher has to remember to switch the class at the right time.

Textbooks are free of charge in the primary and secondary school. The schools buy them with the money the government ensures for it. Students cannot write in them so they have to buy the workbooks. Schools receive different amounts of money depending on: the number of the students but especially depending on the different projects the schools take part in also bilingual system, Comenius Assistantship, Auxiliares de Conversacion. Many schools take part in all those aforementioned programs.

Every two years, at the end of each cycle, students have an external diagnosis tests in the primary school and after the first cycle in the secondary school. The tests are meant to check the linguistic and maths skills but their grades do not influence the final grades.

In comparison to the Polish system children in Spanish school learn different topics and they come back to the same topics every two years. In my opinion this knowledge is not as detailed as in Poland but it teaches the understanding of our world and society better. The students do not have as many tests as the children in Poland nor that many grades. They usually write 2–3 tests in one subject per term. Each term lasts three months (mid August–November, December–February, March–mid June). The teachers do not have registers, and they do not keep records of the topics nor the marks. They put this information in their calendars.

I was teaching in the bilingual school. It is a very popular program in Spain now that many schools want to join, to teach in English. So if it is possible (there is a qualified teacher or a Comenius Assistant) they teach the Knowledge of Environment and sometimes also P.E., Music or Mathematics using some English. Children learn some vocabulary for each topic in English, repeat it mostly orally, do some simple worksheets or write a few sentences. They use different methods than we usually use in Poland. On this stage, they still learn the way we do in the first three years of the primary school. The students draw a lot of pictures with labels, they talk a lot, and learn English vocabulary all together orally. They sing Spanish and English songs connected to every topic and they sometimes dance. Although, they do not carry out any experiments, they go around their town to get to know where a theatre, a cinema or a town

hall are, and what those places are built for. They solve some worksheets, colour the pictures, and watch short movies using multimedia projectors. There was no SMART board in the school where I taught, however, every classroom was equipped with a computer connected to the projector, and the Internet. The children in Spain write very little in their notebooks. The only type of homework given to students were exercises in the books.

In many lessons there are two teachers because in every class there are some children with special needs (not more than three). Therefore, another teacher helps these children with writing, counting or drawing. Sometimes, the students with some disorders or problems with learning have individual classes. They are usually provided with different workbooks than the rest of the children.

PLACE OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

My American friend was teaching in the Secondary School in the same town (Vélez-Málaga), also in the bilingual school. She was helping the teachers to teach English vocabulary on different subjects. Also in Geography and History classes.

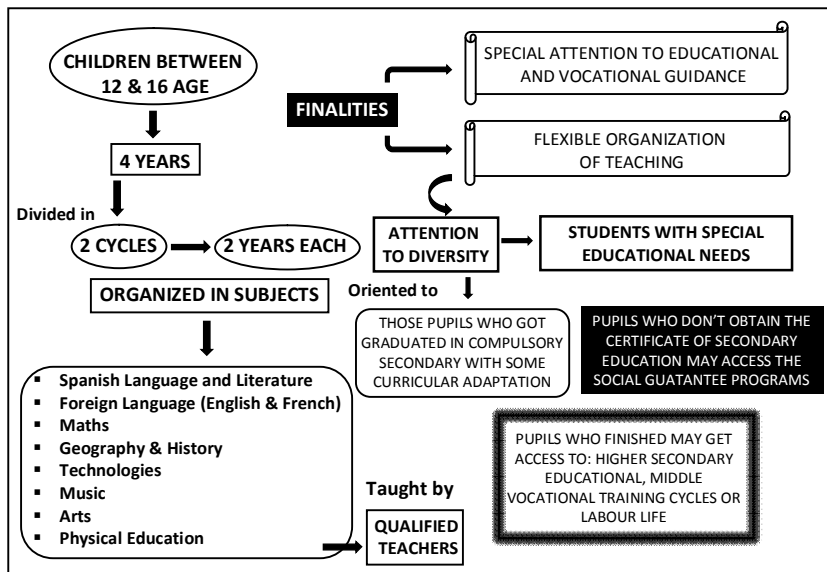


Fig. 4. Compulsory secondary education (ESO)

Ryc. 4. Obowiązkowa edukacja na poziomie średnim

Source: on the basis of the graph from <http://www.slideshare.net/pacobati/spanish-educational-system>

In Andalucia, in the secondary school, in the first year, children have the following eight obligatory subjects: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences: Geography and History, P.E., Art and Visual Education, Spanish Language and literature, Mathematics, Music and English. There are also some other optional subjects such as: French, Social changes and Applied Technology. In the second year Applied Technology becomes an obligatory subject in addition to all the aforementioned. In the third year, the subjects are divided into more specific ones: Biology and Geology, Physics and Chemistry, Social Sciences: Geography, P.E., Citizen education and Human Rights, Spanish language and literature, English, Mathematics, Music, Art and Visual Education plus some optional ones. In the fourth grade, there is no Geography. In Social Sciences there is only History (Fig. 4). But they have new subjects like: Alimentation, Nutrition and Health, and Latin (Salguero, Gómez Vallecillos 2012, <http://www.donquijote.org>).

Geography and History are taught together. Children do not learn about the world context or about the geography and history of Europe. They learn only about their region and a little bit about Spain in general. Usually they have 3 hours a week of Social sciences every year. Below there are the main contexts:

- 1) historical, social and cultural construction of Andalucia,
- 2) cultural heritage of Andalucia,
- 3) equality, co-existence and multiculturalism,
- 4) technological progress and the models of development,
- 5) responsible usage of natural resources,
- 6) tradition and modernization in rural environment in Andalucia,
- 7) industrialization and its problems in Andalucia,
- 8) urbanization processes in Andalucia,
- 9) work and tourism in Andalucia,
- 10) social and political participation.

We can easily see how different it is from geography taught in Polish schools. First of all, geography and history are taught together as they have many common elements on the regional level. Additionally, human geography outweighs physical geography. They get to know some definitions and geographical phenomena talking only about their own region so the area that is very close and familiar to them. They usually have a trip to one of the main cities in the region to get to know it better. In the lessons they read and analyze texts, watch some movies and discuss controversial topics. If it is taught bilingually, they read some texts in English and they get to know some new vocabulary. Even though they used to have a lot of practice in the primary school, many children have problems expressing themselves in English.

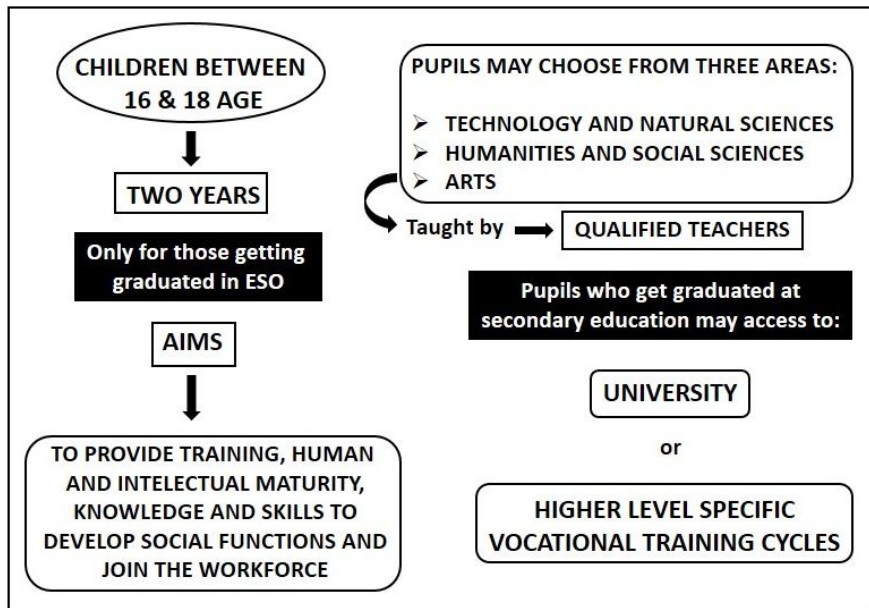


Fig. 5. Bachillerato – higher secondary education

Ryc. 5. Edukacja na poziomie szkoły średniej (do poziomu matury)

Source: on the basis of the graph from <http://www.slideshare.net/pacobati/spanish-educational-system>

In the Bachillerato course Geography is located in the Social Sciences profile (Fig. 5). Geography context remains local but treats not only about the region but also about the whole country. Students learn on this level about the climate of Spain and Andalusia in particular, topography of Spain, geology and geomorphology of Spain, hydrology of Spain and then in the second semester there is human geography: population in Spain, urbanization in Spain, agriculture in Spain, industry and administration, Spain in the European Union, etc.² Again the students stay on the regional scale. Their knowledge about other continents remains very basic. On the one hand, it is a disadvantage of the system but on the other, they have what we are missing. In Poland, we do not even have one semester of Geography when we can teach only about our region and its past and present situation and problems.

² http://contenidos.educarex.es/sama/2010/csociales_geografia_historia/geografia.html (18.11.2013).

CONCLUSION

Thanks to Comenius Assistantship the author of this article was able to get to know another culture, traditions, education models, teaching methods and get the first teaching experience.



Fig. 6. Bilingual Music lesson (left photo) and the first grade of primary school (right photo)

Ryc. 6. Dwujęzyczna lekcja muzyki (lewe zdjęcie) i pierwsza klasa szkoły podstawowej (prawe zdjęcie)

Source: author's photos (C.E.I.P. Juan Herrera Alcausa Bilingual School, Velez-Málaga)

As we live in the European Union it is extremely important to know a lot about other countries, their realities and cultures and cooperate. Thanks to this program one can become a more conscious, progressive, and eager to take part in international projects teacher. Additionally, it is worth familiarizing himself/herself with different methods of teaching. Spanish educational system differs a lot from the Polish one if it comes to the structure, division of school year and daily routine. They teach different topics in primary schools in Natural Sciences subject and in the secondary school Geography is connected with History. What is more, Geography as a subject concentrates mostly on the local issues. Furthermore, the way of becoming a teacher in Spain is more complicated than in Poland and includes official exams.

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GEOGRAPHY IN THE SPANISH EDUCATION SYSTEM – COMENIUS ASSISTANTSHIP EXPERIENCE

Summary

In this article the author writes about the structure of the Spanish education system that she familiarized herself with during her stay in Andalusia when she took part in the Comenius Assistantship program. In the first part of the article, the author describes the general structure of the Spanish education system starting from kindergarten. In the third chapter, Natural Science as a subject in the primary school is described. This part of the education system the author got to know best as she used to teach Natural Science in English in one of the Andalusian bilingual primary schools. She described the topics taught, the principles, and the internal and external system of students' evaluation. Afterwards the position of Geography in the secondary school in Spain is presented. The author mentions the topics covered on this stage of education and the place of Geography among other subjects. In the conclusion, one can find the author's thoughts about her stay in Spain and about the Comenius Assistantship program.

Key words: Spain, education system, Comenius Assistantship, Natural Science, Geography.

GEOGRAFIA W HISPANSKIM SYSTEMIE EDUKACJI - DOŚWIADCZENIE ASYSTENTURY COMENIUSA

Streszczenie

W opracowaniu autorka przybliżyła strukturę systemu edukacji w Hiszpanii, który poznała bliżej podczas swojego rocznego pobytu w Andaluzji w ramach asystentury Comeniusa. W pierwszej części jest opisana ogólna struktura systemu edukacji w Hiszpanii – od przedszkola do studiów. W trzecim rozdziale autorka przedstawiła pozycję przedmiotu przyroda w szkole podstawowej. Ten etap poznała najlepiej, ponieważ osobiście nauczała przyrody w języku angielskim w jednej z andaluzyjskich szkół dwujęzycznych w ramach asystentury Comeniusa. Zaprezentowała zatem tematykę zajęć, zasady pracy oraz system oceniania wewnętrznego i zewnętrznego na tym poziomie edukacyjnym. Następnie została przedstawiona pozycja geografii w szkole średniej w Hiszpanii. Autorka wskazała tematykę zajęć oraz miejsce geografii wśród innych przedmiotów. Podsumowanie zawiera wnioski płynące z pobytu autorki w Hiszpanii oraz przemyślenia dotyczące programu Comenius.

Słowa kluczowe: Hiszpania, system edukacji, asystentura Comeniusa, przyroda, geografia.