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CRITICAL APPROACH TO KEY AND SPECIFIC
COMPETENCES OF THE LOMLOE AS LEADERSHIP
FOR AN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION. THE CASE
OF LANGUAGE DIDACTICS

APROXIMACIÓN CRÍTICA A LAS COMPETENCIAS
CLAVE Y LAS COMPETENCIAS ESPECÍFICAS DE
LA LOMLOE COMO LIDERAZGO PARA UNA
INNOVACIÓN EDUCATIVA. EL CASO DE LA
DIDÁCTICA DE LA LENGUA

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# Resumen

La nueva legislación en cuanto al aprendizaje competencial (LOMLOE) refuerza elementos aparecidos en anteriores legislaciones educativas (LOMCE) y, desde su inspiración europea, representa un auténtico liderazgo en la innovación educativa, en tanto en cuanto promueve modelos inductivos, indagatorios y creativos que pretenden constituirse en alternativa frente a los modelos tradicionales de enseñanza transmisiva, de enfoques reglamentistas y formulísticos; el aprendizaje competencial dinamiza de manera holística los contenidos conceptuales, puestos al servicio de procedimientos y actitudes. Sin embargo, resulta relevante preguntarse si la legislación educativa se construye desde un diagnóstico crítico de la situación actual y si se contempla el peso que en las aulas sigue presentando el protagonismo de los libros de texto como material rígido (u otros materiales similares), o la disposición docente sucursalista frente a estos materiales. Por otra parte, se presentan reflexiones en torno al papel que desempeña la competencia en comunicación lingüística y su repercusión en la didáctica de la lengua, en general, y en la concreción de las competencias específicas como elemento central del currículo, en particular. Por último, se pergeñan algunas estrategias didácticas enraizadas en la innovación educativa— para dinamizar las competencias específicas en el área de Lengua castellana y Literatura.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje por competencias, liderazgo educativo, innovación educativa, competencia en comunicación lingüística, didáctica de la Lengua.

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# **Abstract**

The new legislation on competency learning (LOMLOE) reinforces elements that appeared in previous educational legislation (LOMCE) and, from its European inspiration, represents a real leadership in educational innovation, insofar as it promotes inductive, inquiring and creative models that aim to become an alternative to traditional models of transmissive teaching, with and formulaic approaches; competency-based learning dynamizes conceptual content in a holistic manner, placed at the service of procedures and attitudes. However, it is relevant to ask whether educational legislation is constructed from a critical diagnosis of the current situation and whether it considers the weight that textbooks (or other similar materials) continue to play in classrooms as rigid material, or the branch teaching disposition towards these materials. On the other hand, reflections are presented on the role played by competence in linguistic communication and its repercussions on language teaching and on the implementation of specific competences as a central element of the curriculum. Finally, some teaching strategies —rooted in educational innovation— are devised to boost specific competences in the Spanish Language and Literature.

**Keywords:** Competency-based learning, educational leadership, educational innovation, linguistic communication competence, language didactics.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

It is particularly striking that, although the last two educational laws (LOMCE and LOMLOE) have insisted so much on the teaching-learning competency, the inertia of the classes and reference materials continue to follow the paths of merely transmissive teaching of the traditional type. Certainly, textbooks reinforce this type of models that mimic formalist approaches and strictly philological consideration, without inquiring approaches in the didactics of language itself. Therefore, the revision of legislative frameworks does not guarantee any valid radiography of the reality of the classroom, since on the one hand, educational laws are in force while, on the other hand, daily teaching inertias unfold, deeply rooted in diachrony, and still absolutely conditioned by the textbook or some related material.

In this sense, the initiatives promoted by the laws are developed in advance and, in general, outside the state of the art in the current didactic situation in the classrooms. In addition to the need to train and involve teachers in a law that will govern their performance, it seems essential to carry out a prior diagnosis, an exhaustive critical analysis of the situation to avoid legislation in a vacuum, and to embrace initiatives that promote classroom dynamics for competency education (Ruiz, 2022).

It is somewhat contradictory that, from a pedagogical point of view, the need for competency learning (dynamic, relational, contextually situated) and constructivist (Romero, 2019), which articulates new knowledge from known knowledge, is insisted upon and yet the legal frameworks are formulated without a concrete diagnosis—scientifically contrasted— of the real situation in our classrooms. There is no denying the supposed diversity in teaching-learning methods in the different educational centers, nor the certain autonomy that in some pedagogical matters is conferred on them,

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but it seems that the transcendental role that textbooks or substitute materials continue to play in curricular teaching decisions is not known. In reality, it is not so much a question of whether there are more advantages or disadvantages in their use, but rather of carrying out an effective critical analysis that can offer us a contrasted idea of their level of implementation and the type of decisions that teachers delegate to these materials and — above all— from what critical assumptions these materials are assumed. Moreover, very recent research accredits this generalized use of textbooks, which mediate between knowledge and learners, and which determine curricular concretions:

It should be noted that textbooks continue to be used more frequently in secondary school classrooms and in many cases are the main vehicle for the transmission of knowledge to students. (Martínez, 2022: 218)

All of this is in the interest that, if we really intend to lead changes in educational transformation, we must carry out an adequate critical analysis and promote teacher training proposals that specifically deal with providing teachers with sufficient critical tools to adapt their teaching to the curricular frameworks of reference and to provide them with specific instruments that allow for a thorough evaluation of the materials used in their classes, in order to avoid making transcendental decisions (sequencing of contents, didactic approaches, methodologies, activities, evaluation) from merely subsidiary roles. If this diagnosis is not carried out adequately, we must assume the risk of operating educational transformations with little or no impact from the legislative frameworks. Certainly, the mere allusion to the control of materials by educational administrations is highly controversial, but it is possible to influence the training of teachers and their scientific

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updating, which must unfailingly follow a critical perspective in the use of didactic materials. The annual program to be designed by aspiring teachers in the selection procedures contributes to fostering this critical spirit, but it becomes an isolated and insignificant task when it later arrives at an educational center and is integrated into the dynamics and inertia of each center; on the other hand, more than a critical spirit towards the materials, it is enough with a certain orchestration of the same, considering, in addition, that it does not have to reach a consensus on the lines of action in the elaboration of the document that it will defend in the selection procedure, unlike the reality of the centers, in which the criteria of qualification, the choice of resources (usually textbooks) are agreed upon; on other occasions, materials whose effectiveness and compliance with the curricula have not been contrasted and which, for the most part, are limited to replacing textbooks without enriching the teaching-learning process.).

However, in this article we will try to approach to the design of the specific competences included in the LOMLOE for the subject of Spanish Language and Literature, and we will try to propose didactic possibilities to dynamize them in the classroom effectively.

#### **BRIEF FUNDATION**

In an education that is embedded in European budgets, it is crucial to understand the importance of the competency approach, both in the teaching-learning processes and in assessment. In fact, the key competences that backbone education in the LOMLOE are inspired by European educational guidance councils; the eight competences that have appeared in European documents since 2018, specifically in the Official

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Journal of the European Union (OJEU, 2018), and referred to lifelong learning, already appear in the LOMLOE as the eight key competences, as opposed to the seven that were collected in the LOMCE; along with reformulations of the previous seven, the multilingual competence is added as a reinterpretation of the multilingual competence of the European framework.

Though Europe continues to insist on the importance of competences in education, classrooms maintain an inertia that is radically distant from competency-based teaching and learning. Indeed, it seems that the concept of competence has been reduced to a utilitarian version that is detrimental to training in general, in that it is instrumentalized and excessively reified. However, competency education points to meaningful, contextualized teaching-learning, to contents energized in action and diversified/enriched in three ramifications: conceptual, procedural and attitudinal, so that training is articulated both in the assimilation of concepts from a relational point of view and in the acquisition of procedures and skills, and in education in attitude and values; so that the application of competency enhances the educational dimension to broaden the mere transmission of contents to critical, relational and holistic learning.

The question is whether these European initiatives, which have found resonance in the last two Spanish educational laws (LOMCE and LOMLOE), are reflected in the didactic approaches of the Secondary and Baccalaureate classrooms, because the supposed assessment by competences seems to be indisputable by virtue of the legislative frameworks that have been in force for years. It seems obvious that, in order to assess by competences, it is necessary to design teaching and learning by competences, but is this really the predominant model in the classroom?

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Once again, it seems that the intentions of the legislation are far removed from the usual classroom practices and, specifically, from the didactics of the language, since teaching and learning, rather than the acquisition of competences, is determined by the choice of the textbook or similar materials, and these —due to their rigid, traditional and regulatory nature—promote an eminently transmissive didactics, in which the students play a passive role, as recipients of learning, but with little competency dimension.

# KEY COMPETENCES. EUROPEAN LITERACY SKILLS IN SPAIN ARE CALLED LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

Therefore, the core issue does not lie so much in the legislative framework, but in how its application is articulated in the day-to-day classroom, so that the approaches reflected in the legislation do not guarantee novelties in the respective didactics. Embedded in the competences, the European educational guidelines (OJEU, 2018) insist on the need to acquire literacy competence from a conception that goes beyond the conception of the simple code. Specifically, although it refers expressly to the acquisition of skills in reading and writing, it alludes to oral and written expression and to the overcoming of exclusively grammatical and literal knowledge, by mentioning broad-spectrum communicative skills:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, express, create and interpret concepts, feelings, facts, and opinions orally and in writing, through visual, sound or audio and digital materials in different disciplines and contexts. This implies the ability to communicate and connect effectively with other people, in an appropriate and creative way. (DOUE, 2018: C/189: 8)

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Thus, in the linguistic dynamization of communication, both contents and procedures as well as attitudes are included and, in addition, the linguistic and grammatical aspects are considered, but sociocultural, strategicpragmatic, cognitive and literary (insofar as creative) elements are incorporated, although this denomination still maintains an unquestionable protagonist of the linguistic aspect, which assumes all types of communication; in this sense, probably, if we want to ensure that the key competences give a good account of the performances that students must demonstrate in order to meet the objectives of an educational stage, we could suggest that nominations such as verbal and nonverbal (or linguistic and paralinguistic) communication competences would help to achieve greater precision, insofar as it is a matter of providing students with valid skills to face all kinds of communicative exchanges, and this necessarily involves both the mastery of the verbal code and skills in micro-skills that do not directly concern the code: nonverbal communication, as complex in its definition as it is essential in its knowledge and in its methodological articulations for teaching-learning (Cestero, 2016), and which are related to eye contact, body language, facial expressions, kinesics, proxemics or haptics (Pinto, 2012).

Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this article to deal with such interesting issues as the success of terms such as communication, nor its questioning, which has arisen from the proposals of renowned linguists, particularly from studies in the philosophy of language, who express their doubts about whether languages really serve to communicate, what it might be to communicate, what is supposedly communicated (meanings? but do meanings exist; can we define them?). Moreover, some linguists such as Mario Montalbetti, at the time professor and poet, consider that meaning

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might not exist and, therefore, it would not make sense to think that languages serve us to communicate or, at least, not only to transmit information, but also to insult, to tell jokes, to interact? (Montalbetti, 2005) Although this is an issue that we cannot address here and now, it should be noted that this type of findings from linguistic studies should have repercussions on teachers' reflections and, therefore, on the legislative formulations of education. Moreover, issues such as the fact that the field of language is probably the only one in which the object of study (language) and the tool of study (language) coincide, should cause us to be more reflective in the drafting and implementation of curricula if what we want is for learners to gain access to a multifaceted, complex, vital and, at times, highly paradoxical dimension. The fact of promoting a rigorous metalinguistic reflection should be an indispensable precondition to face an effective didactic competence. Therefore, if our aim is to make learners competent in their everyday interactions, we must first of all ask ourselves about the nature of these exchanges and the dimensions they involve. For the reasons given above, it seems that these demiurgic inquiries are still pending or -at least- deserve further reflection and justifying contributions of greater precision and significance, since we have simplified aspects that are, in reality, extremely complex, protean and multifaceted. All in all, although the competence in linguistic communication does contemplate, verbi gracia, such significant extremes as acquiring micro-skills in learning to listen or absolutely vital inferential interpretative skills in our interactions, it aims at an education that calls for an active role for the learner. It is therefore necessary to ask ourselves basic questions, prior to any pedagogical decision, which are still pending: do we only communicate with language or is this a reductionist solution? Can we face daily interactions with the undisputed priority of the verbal code when, in reality, it

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represents the least significant part of our exchanges? Is it possible to acquire competences in interaction with other human beings without taking into account micro-skills such as listening skills or the complex ability to interpret statements by extracting information not expressed linguistically, in diverse and changing communicative situations? Is it possible to achieve a valid communicative competence without having considered the elements that really make up its nature? Is it possible to make learners competent in their exchanges without grammatical knowledge? Is it possible to acquire conversational skills without the indispensable assistance of pragmatic elements?

As can be seen, this is not a minor issue, since we are referring to a key competence and, therefore, to a dynamization of contents, procedures, and attitudes of a transversal nature, essential in all areas and which, moreover, is the backbone of the area of Spanish Language and Literature, and its articulation in the specific competences.

On the other hand, if we connect with the allusions that opened this article, we quickly realize that, even with a dubious delimitation and characterization of the key competence in linguistic communication and even with a complex articulation of education by competences, neither the textbooks nor the substitute materials claim the active role of the learner that this pedagogical approach demands.

Although in the case of Spanish legislation, the European competence in literacy has been reinterpreted as a competence in linguistic communication which, besides including the principles of literacy, enhances aspects of orality, it does not match the relational implication of the pragmatic aspects present in our daily exchanges. Being a competence in linguistic communication, it stresses grammatical issues, of the language domain, but

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does not insist sufficiently on strategic-pragmatic aspects, which remain tacitly:

Competence in linguistic communication involves interacting in oral, written, signed or multimodal form in a coherent and appropriate manner in different environments and contexts and with different communicative purposes. It implies mobilizing, in a conscious way, the set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow understanding, interpreting and critically assessing oral, written, signed or multimodal messages, avoiding the risks of manipulation and misinformation, as well as communicating effectively with other people in a cooperative, creative, ethical, and respectful way. (Real Decreto 217/2022: 26)

Above all, pragmatic issues are implied when mentioning the appropriate manner and communicative purposes, as well as the interpretation and critical evaluation of all kinds of messages or cooperative, creative, ethical, and respectful communication. All these aspects pivot in the field of pragmatics, but they are not alien to the reflexive and creative knowledge of grammatical type —think, for example, of Searle's theory of speech acts (1969)—, which is concerned with establishing certain links between grammatical form and the purpose of interactions). Of course, this does not entail that direct relations between grammatical form and intentionality can be established, since indirect speech acts that generate their message in relation to Grice's (1989) principle of cooperation and its observance, apparent violation, violation of one for not violating another that is considered of greater importance or the overtly deliberate violation of the four maxims in which the principle of cooperation is articulated predominate; or that there is no contextual meaning, by virtue of the theory of relevance (Sperber; Wilson, 1986) and, therefore, of the human interaction model (of

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ostension-inference) as opposed to the mechanistic and very infrequent code model. Hence the absolute need to defend grammatical studies, but from the metalinguistic, inquiring, investigative and creative reflection that characterizes speakers in their performance; therefore, it is essential to establish a grammatical-pragmatic basis that takes into account the interactional multidimensionality (verbal and nonverbal) among human beings, and that tries to justify (although it cannot radically suppress it) the fact of misunderstandings and of the constant dynamic strategies in the games of intentionality to generate and interpret messages.

However, the identification of language with thought or the discursive side of communication explicitly appears in the enunciation:

Competence in linguistic communication constitutes the basis for one's thinking and for the construction of knowledge in all areas of knowledge. Therefore, its development is linked to the explicit reflection on the functioning of language in the specific discursive genres of each area of knowledge, as well as to the uses of orality, writing or signification for thinking and learning. Finally, it makes it possible to appreciate the aesthetic dimension of language and enjoy literary culture. (Real Decreto 217/2022: 26)

In addition to insisting on the aesthetic dimension of language, it is a key competence in which natural transversality is literally mentioned in its epistemological condition, which makes it the protagonist and trigger of knowledge itself, and in its articulation through discursive genres (types of texts) valid in all areas, This supports the idea that all teachers, in some way, are language teachers, insofar as they must train students -in the written modalities- both in science reports or comments on artistic works and in reviews, problem statements, etc., In the line of promoting the teaching-

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learning of writing through the different areas of the curriculum, but it does not forget the need to also promote the oral modalities; here we encounter another traditional obstacle, established throughout the successive courses, of separating oral and written modalities in a strict manner, taking for granted that they present not only differentiated features, but also conflicting ones. We will adjust much more and much better to the Exit profiles proposed by the LOMLOE at the end of the educational stages if we understand that we are dealing with modalities of the same language that, in addition to feeding back on each other, present habitual hybridisms (think of genres such as the conference or WhatsApp); in addition, the fact of emphasizing the different types of text means emphasizing the discursive organization more than the oral or written modalities that, although they may present tendencies, do not allow rigid interpretations or impassible behaviors.

# FROM KEY COMPETENCES TO SPECIFIC COMPETENCES IN SPANISH LANGUAGE

The specific competences embedded in the curriculum become perfect articulations between the key competences, the assessment criteria, and the basic knowledge, turning them into curricular concretions of the first order in the different areas. On the other hand, they reinforce and concretize both competency-based teaching-learning and competency-based assessment, so that they represent a central place in the curricula; in a way, the four blocks that make up the basic knowledge (languages and their speakers, communication, literary education, and reflection on language) are energized as the teaching-learning of content, procedures, and attitudes through the acquisition of specific competences. In addition, the specific

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competences, by concretizing the key competences and occupying a central place in the curricula, are directly linked to the so-called Exit profiles, due to the fact that they are designed as elements to achieve the attainment of both the general objectives of the stage and the Exit profile, which includes the acquisition of the key competences through their descriptors and promote their acquisition through learning situations.

Singularly, in Spanish Language and Literature, in Compulsory Secondary Education the specific competences are distributed in two blocks (for the first and second year, on the one hand, and for the third and fourth year, on the other), although in reality their enunciation in ten items is practically the same both in the two blocks of Compulsory Secondary Education and in the Baccalaureate stage, with very slight variations and levels of deepening.

The ten specific competences that structure the curriculum of the area include contents, procedures, and attitudes, and the conceptual is articulated by means of the procedural and attitudinal to avoid non-meaningful and non-contextual learning; this fact does not respond so much to reasons of pedagogical innovation as to the unfailing perspective of the processes that teaching by competences imposes. On paper, the central role given to specific competences constitutes an obvious alternative to traditional models of transmissive teaching and, thus, to regulatory and formulaic approaches. This is precisely why procedures and attitudes are given the position of guarantors of the learning of conceptual content; thus, the acquisition of specific competences ensures that the learning of concepts (linguistic diversity, textual properties, elements of communication, language units, main aesthetic movements...) is necessarily placed at the service of reflection, analysis, comparison... (procedures) and of respect, appreciation, critical spirit... (attitudes). All of this creates a space for a

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different teaching-learning approach, capable of bringing together active methodologies (which demand that students play a leading role in their own learning) and of promoting inductive models (specific competences reinforce the idea of starting from nearby linguistic contexts, of strengthening knowledge of our surroundings to induce general norms, universal behaviors, in order to build knowledge) that offer a different alternative to traditional models. This type of learning, so flexible, adaptable, protean, polyhedral, ductile, creative, is very difficult to match with rigid materials and sequences that are well known and reiterated ad nauseam, as well as with transmissive teaching models. In the face of this, learning situations generate the necessary space to acquire specific competences through inquiry-based, investigative, inductive, and creative models.

Specific competences create the space to go beyond traditional language teaching, which consists in identifying, labeling and - at best - describing linguistic units as ends in themselves, since it rather starts from them to energize them in reflection, comparison, contrast, induction, research, analysis.... In fact, specific competences design a learning rooted in the most eloquent taxonomies in teaching-learning studies, such as Bloom's taxonomy of learning (1956) or Marzano and Kendall's theories (2008). This is so because they promote learning that is based, in the first place, on knowledge, then on analysis and, ultimately, on synthesis and creation, since they promote the strategies of judging, evaluating, deciding, arguing and demystifying, without forgetting that through creation the possibility of generating new knowledge and of assuming the previous categories of learning is achieved, all of this with the help of motivation as a transversal element.

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It is important to point out that, despite educational legislation and through the teaching-learning competency, the acquisition of the pinnacle in the categories of learning is promoted, but neither the means nor the methods by which it can be put into practice are expressed in a meaningful way. This is one of the main problems of the matter. Therefore, in this article, in addition to a critical diagnosis of the situation, we propose lines of action that offer alternatives for putting the legislative provisions into practice in the classroom. For example, although we address the need to strengthen the critical reader, we do not express concrete ways to achieve it. Thus, we propose contributions that make it possible to articulate legislative designs in the reality of the classroom, since we propose concrete activities that start with knowledge, continue with analysis and lead to creation; this learning sequencing constitutes a design guide for meaningful activities. On the other hand, it is necessary to present rigorous initiatives to promote competency teaching such as the inclusion of critical literacy (Cassany & Castellà, 2010) to promote critical reading and, therefore, situated, polyhedral, dialogic reading, etc. Or to make essential contributions in the teaching-learning of models that go beyond the exclusive conception of the code and that promote epistemological and processual writing as opposed to finalistic conceptions of product (Álvarez; Ramírez, 2006). In the case of the study of grammar, in addition to the necessary inclusion of pragmatics to understand grammar in action, inquiry and creative methodologies that promote relational learning (minimal pairs, agrammatical sequences, everyday examples of language to induce the norm...) are essential. Among other fundamental contributions, we find initiatives such as those of competencyoriented grammar (Bosque, 2015; 2016; 2018; 2021), which have an impact on competency learning, given that it is based on knowledge and analysis to achieve creativity and the generation of new knowledge; it is no longer a

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matter of posing words and having the learners divide them into morphemes, or of having them carry out endless morphological analyses or analyses of very long sentences (since they do not participate in competency learning), but of having them reflect on identical morphological structures which, however, respond to different word-formation procedures, around similar syntactic structures that include some ungrammaticality to encourage reflection (leismo, laismo or loismo, for example), discrimination between different grammatical categories that in use have the same form (to differentiate from concrete linguistic realizations between adjectives and participles, among many other possibilities).... In short, by means of a rigorous grammatical study that starts from the linguistic context closest to the student and that demands an active and creative role for him/her. Thus, the competent learning of grammar is essential to boost the specific competences of the area of Spanish Language and Literature, including the aim of achieving the key competence in linguistic communication, but competence in linguistic communication cannot be achieved without the help of disciplines such as pragmatics, anthropology, sociocultural knowledge, or cognitive studies, among others.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this contribution is therefore to highlight the importance of systematically and rigorously reviewing the concept of communication (it is given an exclusive and excluding role, it is articulated only in linguistic terms, there is a lack of methodological considerations for its mastery...), probably very successful, but reductionist in competency learning, as well as to investigate how the advances in educational legislation (revisable, but effective in the pursuit of a different learning, more in line with the 21st

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century) are articulated through specific competences to deepen the competency learning promoted by Europe and corroborated in the latest legislative frameworks for education in Spain, however, they require previous rigorous and comprehensive studies that offer a valid radiography of the teaching-learning processes in the classrooms of our country, since — otherwise— the legislation will not be based on reality in order to make improvements, but will construct a situation far removed from the daily situation, increasing the risk of constructing a parallel and unattainable virtuality that does not affect either educational innovation or transformation.

On the other hand, the perspectives of competency-based learning cannot be materialized in the classroom through the rigidity of textbooks and similar materials (which does not imply their disappearance, but rather their use from critical perspectives), nor can they take place through traditional approaches of transmissive teaching or formulaic models of a regulatory type. Particularly, the specific competencies form a central referent of the curriculum since they communicate the generality of the key competences and the descriptors for the Exit profile (identified with the stage objectives) with the evaluation criteria and basic knowledge. Therefore, focusing efforts on the ways to materialize the acquisition of specific competencies in the classroom is as much as implementing valid springs for educational innovation and effective learning models (satisfying Bloom's taxonomy and matching Marzano and Kendall's updated proposals), and vehiculating teaching-learning models in line with the 21st century: inquiry-based, investigative, inductive, and creative.

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