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# Analysis of Corporal Expression in the Degree in Primary Education

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A young sprinter prepares
herself with a track series
to work on her explosiveness.
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#### **Abstract**

Corporal expression is a well established component of physical education in Spain. However, there is a historical deficiency in the training that prospective teachers receive in this regard. The standardisation of degrees introduced after the establishment of the European Higher Education Area has led to a credit reduction in the degree in Primary Education, specialising in Physical Education, compared to the previous degree in Teaching, specialising in Physical Education, which may have aggravated the situation described above.

The aim of this study was to analyse the current situation in which corporal expression has been included as a training component in undergraduate degree courses at Spanish universities.

For this purpose, the syllabuses of the 113 university centres that offered a degree in Primary Education in the 2021/22 academic year were analysed, specifically selecting those subjects that included corporal expression among their contents.

The results revealed a lack of training; in some cases training was non-existent, and in others it combined several topics within the same subject, with less than half of the centres offering at least one subject exclusively dedicated to this discipline. Consequently, there was no guarantee of quality training to meet the employment needs of graduates in their future as teachers, at least as far as corporal expression as a physical education content in primary education is concerned.

**Keywords:** curricula, higher education, Physical Education, primary school teacher, training.

#### Introduction

Corporal expression (CE) is a discipline that has been included in the subject of Physical Education (PE) as its own content area since the implementation of the Law on the General Organisation of the Education System (LOGSE, 1990), both in primary and secondary education. Under the previous General Education Law (LGE, 1970), it was included as part of dynamic expression, together with musical content (Coterón, 2007). However, there are numerous authors who have recorded a lack of training among teachers and professors in this discipline over the years (Archilla & Pérez Brunicardi, 2012; Cuéllar & Pestano, 2013; Hernández Álvarez, 1992; Monfort Pañego & Iglesias García, 2015; Montávez, 2011; Sánchez-Sánchez & López-Pérez, 2019; Villada, 2006; Villard, 2014). This situation, as pointed out by Cuéllar and Pestano (2013), was aggravated by the reform carried out following the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which replaced the diploma in Teaching, specialising in PE, with a specialisation in PE as part of the degree in Primary Education, which does not provide sufficient training in this area, thereby jeopardising the quality of teaching in the subject of PE at this stage of education.

To mitigate this impact on quality, Cuéllar and Pestano (2013) proposed actions aimed at making better use of the credits taught in degree programmes, redirecting the teaching guides towards more diversified content. They proposed broadening educational interventions in line with current trends by means of a more innovative subject design, greater coordination between subjects to promote the acquisition of transversal competences and avoid overlapping between subjects, adjusting training to the needs of future employment, offering training scenarios that complement what is learnt in the degrees, increasing resources and increasing coordination between specialists and PE teachers.

In this regard, Canales-Lacruz and Sanagustin (2019) considered that school PE has followed a path towards "sportsmanship" at the primary education stage in Spain, ignoring other content areas such as CE, which has repercussions on the time allocated by teachers to this area. This devaluation of CE in teaching practices was based on the prioritisation of other content and the lack of confidence to implement it. Montávez (2011) detected something similar when defining the profile of PE teachers in primary education and suggested, based on the comments of the teachers themselves, that CE is a new subject with

little tradition in PE, in addition to having a low credit load in initial training plans. An inversely proportional relationship was observed between time on the job and time dedicated to CE, with teachers stating that, in some cases, this content was non-existent in their classes. They claimed that they lacked experience in CE, not only in their university studies, but also in their previous training (primary and secondary), which resulted in its negligible presence in their teaching practice.

#### **Initial training**

The lack of teacher training can be observed in the findings of Sánchez-Sánchez and López-Pérez (2019) in their analysis of the training provided in CE in Spanish public universities offering a degree in Primary Education. They conducted a descriptive analysis of 24 teaching guides, revealing a predisposition towards optional CE in the training of future primary school teachers. They highlighted the scarce presence of specific CE techniques, although they were combined with other disciplines such as dance or theatre, and even with "expressive techniques" which are not included in the teaching guides. A previous study carried out by these authors pointed out the importance of including disciplines that encourage the development of creativity and free expression through movement in the educational environment, thus alluding to CE (Sánchez-Sánchez & López-Pérez, 2017).

Lafuente and Hortigüela (2021) observed a change of perspective on CE in students taking the Primary Education degree specialising in PE, before and after taking the subject. The qualitative study carried out presented the students' perception of CE prior to their taking the subject, and found that they considered the content to be difficult or far removed from the usual concept of PE and highlighted the lack of training of PE teachers in this discipline. During the course, they began to appreciate aspects of CE, such as the need for progression in terms of disinhibition and the ease of teaching CE without overly specific material.

After having studied the subject and the experience it offers to students, they perceived the content as easy to teach and showed willingness to carry it out in their future teaching. They expressed a need to increase the credit load of CE in the training of future PE teachers. In addition, they highlighted the benefits in terms of social relationships, emotional work, self-awareness and the development of creativity (Lafuente & Hortigüela, 2021).

#### **Regulations and legislation**

The syllabus, corresponding to Royal Decree 1440/1991 of 30 August, which established the official university degree of Teaching in its various areas of specialisation and the general guidelines for the syllabuses required to obtain it, was the key reference for the establishment of the different specialities within the professional profile of teacher. It established the speciality of Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, Foreign Language, PE, Music Education, Special Education and Hearing and Language, all of them with the classification of a university degree. In the specific case of specialisation in PE, in the field of CE didactics, motor learning and development and perceptual-motor skills were proposed as core related subjects, in the same way that psychomotor skills were proposed as a related subject for the specialisation in Infant and Primary Education. There is no explicit mention in the regulations of CE as PE content. Cuéllar and Pestano (2013) considered that its absence was not in keeping with training needs or the curriculum for this stage of education. Sánchez-Sánchez (2012) argued that the main reason for the absence of CE in primary classrooms was the lack of training of PE teachers, who at that time were still trained according to speciality. However, in the analysis carried out by Villada (2006) on Spanish universities teaching the subject of PE, it can be observed that in 36 of the 43 syllabuses analysed, at least one subject related to this discipline was offered, although in five of them it was optional.

As part of the process of homogenisation of university degrees in Europe, in accordance with the EHEA, the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) produced a series of white papers with guidelines on what the curricula of the new bachelor's degrees should consist of. In the case of teaching qualifications (ANECA, 2005), the competences related to the CE content in the Primary Education teaching qualification were indicated. Specific teaching competences were identified for disciplinary knowledge (to know), such as "Knowing and mastering the basics of corporal expression and nonverbal communication" (p. 110). As well as for professional competences (know-how), "Using the fundamentals of corporal expression, sports training, development of physical abilities and different types of motor games at school" (p. 112). CE was also among the competences to be developed in the specialisation in Foreign Language, as a professional competence (know-how) and as a teaching competence specific to the Foreign Language

profile. However, the current Order ECI/385/2007, which establishes the requirements for the qualification, sets out generic competences for the PE module, in which reference is made to the need to develop the contents of the school curriculum for the subject.

The aim is therefore to analyse the way in which CE has maintained its presence in the curricula, leading to the current specialisation in PE in the degree of Primary Education in Spanish universities.

## Methodology

#### Sample

All degrees in Primary Education (or Teaching in Primary Education) taught in Spain have been analysed, including those taught at public and private centres, taking each centre teaching this degree as a sample unit. Those centres that belonged to the same university but had a specific curriculum (their own or adapted) and/or differentiated teaching guides, whether they were different faculties, sites (geographical adaptation) or affiliated centres, including if they had a differentiated distance learning modality, were established as different centres. Expired programmes or those that had not yet started were discarded. The sample used covered the entire sample population of Spain.

#### **Procedure**

The Registry of Universities, Centres and Degrees (RUCT) was used in order to identify all the universities that, in the 2021/22 academic year, offered degree courses in Primary Education, by collating the data on the website of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Source: Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, date accessed 21/02/2022), selecting those universities that had a current curriculum at the date of access.

Within each university, the centres offering the degree, different faculties, branches of the same faculty or affiliated centres were identified. In the case of two curricula coexisting in the same centre, it was decided that the one with the greatest number of current curricula should be selected.

The data were obtained from the official websites of each faculty, school or study centre, compiling the curricula, from which the learning guides of the subjects that could include CE content and whether or not they offered the specialisation in PE, were obtained.

For each of the sample units (centres), aspects related to the Autonomous Community taught in, the ownership of the centre, the offer of a specialisation in PE, and the subject most closely linked to the contents of CE were taken into consideration. Within each subject selected, the name, compulsory or optional nature, the year of teaching and the responsible teaching staff were identified.

In order to select the subjects, those belonging to the subject area of PE were initially analysed; in the event of not finding any subject whose content included CE content, all subjects in the syllabus that referred to "PE", "movement", "corporal", "expression" or similar terms were analysed.

The nomenclature in the selected subjects was very heterogeneous, which, on occasions, could be due to a preference for synonymous terms (equivalent nomenclature), with terms analogous to CE, names analogous to the content blocks that the educational regulations set out in primary education, such as "The body: expression and communication" (LOGSE) or "Artistic-expressive physical activities" (Organic Law of Education). In other cases, however, the title bought together the different content and subjects covered by the subject in question.

Four different groupings were established according to whether the title referred exclusively to CE, physicalexpressive activities (PEA) or equivalent (and could include terms such as "movement" or "communication"); whether it was a specific CE subject that simultaneously dealt with content linked to motor development (basic physical education or psychomotor skills); whether it was a specific subject dealing with another of the manifestations of motor skills, such as playing or the performing arts (PA), not as a working technique within CE, but as an autonomous subject; and finally, subjects of a more generic nature, which combine three or more subjects and in which CE is approached as a specific topic or content in a more superficial way. In case of doubt about the nomenclature of a subject, the teaching guide was analysed in depth in order to infer the approach and purpose of the subject.

The categories established to group the subjects were as follows:

- A. Exclusively CE (PEA or equivalent).
- B. CE-specific, linked to motor development.
- C. CE-specifc, linked to manifestations of motor skills.
- D. Generic subjects in the field of PE (not exclusive or specific to CE).

#### **Statistical Analysis**

In order to categorise the subjects according to their nomenclature, a qualitative analysis was carried out, both of the degree itself and of the contents of each learning guide, using QSR Nvivo software (v.10).

All data were collected and imported into SPSS software (V. 26) for subsequent quantitative and descriptive analysis of the values obtained, focusing mainly on presence and frequency values.

Analysis was carried out by groups of subjects related by geographical distribution, ownership of the centre, the presence of a specialisation in PE, the nature of the subject and the year in which it is taught.

#### **Results**

#### Presence and geographical distribution

During the 2021/22 academic year, the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education was taught in 67 Spanish universities, offered as a degree in 113 centres and present in all the Autonomous Communities (AC) and autonomous cities, according to the distribution presented in Table 1.

Madrid is the region with the highest number of centres offering the degree, as well as the one with the highest number of private centres. Andalusia was second in terms of number of centres, while Castile and León was third in total, but first in terms of public centres. 54% of the centres offering the degree are publicly owned, compared to 46% that are privately owned.

#### **Specialisation in Physical Education**

The majority of centres offered specialisation in PE (Table 1), with a similar percentage among publicly and privately owned centres. The offer of this specialisation was present in all the ACs, either in public (except Cantabria) or private centres (except Castilla-La Mancha, Galicia and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla). The Autonomous Communities of Andalusia and Madrid have the highest number of centres offering a degree specialising in PE, Madrid was once again the region with the largest number of private degree programmes, while Andalusia had the largest number of public programmes.

 Table 1

 Degree in Primary Education, distribution by Autonomous Community and ownership.

Autonomous Community	No. of Universities	Public centres	Private centres	Total centres	Public centres specialised in PE	Private centres specialised in PE	Total PE specialisation
Andalusia	9	8	8	16	8	7	15
Aragon	2	3	1	4	3	1	4
Asturias	1	1	1	2	1	1	2
Balearic Islands	21	3	1	4	3	1	4
Canary Islands	3	3	1	4	2	1	3
Cantabria	2	1	1	2	0	1	1
Castilla-La Mancha	1	4	0	4	4	0	4
Castile and León	7	9	5	14	6	5	11
Catalonia	10	6	5	11	6	4	10
Ceuta	11	1	0	1	1	0	1
Valencian Community	6	3	6	9	3	4	7
Extremadura	1	2	1	3	2	1	3
Galicia	3	5	1	6	2	0	2
La Rioja	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
Madrid	12¹	4	14	18	4	11	15
Melilla	11	1	0	1	1	0	1
Murcia	2	2	2	4	2	2	4
Navarra	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
Basque Country	3	3	3	6	1	2	3
Total	70¹	61	52	113	51 <sup>2</sup> (83.6%)	43 <sup>2</sup> (82.7%)	94 <sup>2</sup> (83.2%)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The University of Granada offers the degree in the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla. The University Pontificia de Comillas offers degrees in Madrid and the Balearic Islands.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The percentage of centres offering a specialisation in Physical Education in relation to the total number of centres (public, private and total) is shown.

PE: Physical Education.

# Presence of CE content in the degree and nomenclature

After analysing the different curricula and reviewing the subjects offered, in 105 of the centres analysed it was possible to find at least one subject in which the teaching guide identified CE as content to be developed. While in eight of the centres no subject including this topic could be found (four public and four private), in three of these centres specialisation in PE was offered (one public and three private).

In Table 2, it can be seen that 76 centres (72.4%) had a subject dedicated to CE ("Corporal Expression"), while it was exclusive for 40 subjects (52.6%). In the remaining 36 subjects (47.4%), their content was linked to another discipline ("Image, perception, expression and body communication"). In the remaining centres (29), CE was approached as a content block of a more generic subject covering three or more disciplines related to PE ("Physical Education and its didactics").

Looking at the characteristics of each subject, it was found that most of the subjects were optional (80%), although generally compulsory to qualify for specialisation, with a predominance of subjects exclusive to CE (46.4%), while among the compulsory subjects (20%), generic subjects clearly predominated (85.7%), with the exception of the universities of Lleida and Vic (specific subjects) and the University of Navarra (exclusive).

With regard to the ownership of the centres, the predominance of exclusive subjects (42.1%) in public centres stands out, with a more homogeneous distribution in private centres.

Although the majority of centres offered specialisation in PE, less than half of them offered a subject exclusively focusing on CE (42.9%), with almost a quarter of them opting to include it as part of a generic subject (23.1%). In two specific centres, CE content was presented in a specific subject, but linked to another subject (Foreign Language at the University of the Mid-Atlantic and Music at the University of Alicante).

In the centres that did not offer a specialisation in PE, the majority (57.1%) included CE content within a generic subject, in particular, the School of Education and Tourism of Avila (USAL) was the only centre that does not offer specialisation in PE that offers a subject exclusively in CE, while the International University of Valencia offered a specific subject together with music content within the degree in Music.

In terms of year, the majority of subjects were taught in the 4th year (55.2%). In the first two years, the majority of subjects offered were of a generic nature (78.6%), while in the 3rd year there was a clear predominance of exclusive subjects (48.5%). In the 4th year, exclusive subjects continued to predominate, although in a less noticeable way (37.9%).

**Table 2**Characteristics of subjects by nomenclature.

Nomen	clature	A CE Exclusive	B Linked to motor development	C Linked to other manifestations	D Generic about Physical Education	Summation
Nature	Compulsory	1	0	2	18	21
	Optional	39	19	15	11	84
Ownership	Public	24	10	10	13	57
	Private	16	9	7	16	48
Specialisation in PE	Yes	39	19	12	21	91
	No	1	0	5	8	14
Year in which it is taught	1st	0	0	0	3	3
	2nd	2	0	1	8	11
	3rd	16	8	4	5	33
	4th	22	11	12	13	58
TOTAL subjects (Percentage)		40 (38.1%)	19 (18.1%)	17 (16.2%)	29 (27.6%)	105 (100%)

#### **Discussion**

The data on the number of centres offering the degree (113), as well as specialisation in PE (94) are in line with the upward trend reflected in Villada's contribution (2006), which identified 56 centres offering a teaching degree, 43 of them offering specific PE teaching (already present in all the Autonomous Regions except Navarre). Cuéllar and Pestano (2013) reported the specific presence of 47 different curricula for the teaching degree, specialising in PE (four more than Villada, 2006), and Sánchez-Sánchez and López-Pérez (2019), who analysed public universities where the degree in Primary Education is taught, found 79 records. A clear increase in the number of centres offering the degree can therefore be seen.

The lack of subjects developing CE content in three of the centres that did teach the subject in PE may appear to indicate a decrease in comparison with the data of Villada (2006), who recorded seven centres where Corporal Expression (the subject's name) was not taught, or those of Cuéllar & Pestano (2013), with another seven records of centres where no subject related to body language, CE, traditional dances, dance, drama, theatre, mime, drama or rhythm (a broader nomenclature) was taught. Both investigations were on teaching degrees, specialising in PE. However, in the specialisation in PE within the degree in Primary Education, there are generic subjects, which aim to provide a basic introduction to any of the disciplines that may be covered by the degree, as Villada (2006) has already recorded in relation to the didactics of PE, which is present in all teaching specialisations. In these cases, it has been observed that the content (and, by extension, the amount of time devoted to it) on CE in this type of subject, when there is any, is very superficial (one topic or section), which is incompatible with a basic minimum of specific training. The presence of this content has also been noted in two subjects linked to other specialisations (Foreign Language or Music), different from the subject of PE, in line with the development of motor competence postulated by Cañabate et al. (2018). Bearing these considerations in mind, it must be affirmed that, with respect to the previous specialisation in PE, in the current specialisation in PE there is a notable increase in the number of centres (26) that do not offer exclusive or specific subjects in CE linked to this specialisation, perhaps opting to prioritise sportsmanship in the training offered (Canales-Lacruz & Sanagustin, 2019), such that the specific training in this discipline of students graduating from these centres would be deficient.

With regard to the presence in a single subject of CE contents together with those of some other discipline (specific

subjects), Villada (2006) has already pointed out a possible justification for being able to combine subjects, stating that "it seems to be understood that expressive contents are integrated within motor perceptual skills, thus justifying that body perception as well as spatial and temporal perception are key elements in expressive development" (p. 386), in clear reference to subjects such as Psychomotricity or Motor Development. Perhaps for the same reason, Royal Decree 1440/1991, which regulates the teaching degree and its specialisations, included subjects such as psychomotor development (specialisation in Early Childhood Education) and motor learning and development (specialisation in PE) among the subjects to be developed in the area of knowledge Didactics of corporal expression. For their part, it has already been observed that Cuéllar and Pestano (2013) included among the subjects related to CE those artistic manifestations linked to dance, drama or rhythm, an argument supported by Castillo-Viera et al. (2021).

For its part, the white book for the degree in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences (ANECA, 2006) considered CE to be one of the manifestations of motor skills, among which it also included games. Therefore, the agglutination of two subjects that could be considered related in the same subject is justified, in accordance with Cuéllar and Pestano's own recommendations, despite the fact that this results in a lower capacity to develop the contents of CE.

The majority of subjects considered exclusive or specific to CE are optional (but not the generic ones), an aspect already described by Cuéllar and Pestano, stating that "in many curricula, there are no compulsory subjects on Corporal Expression" (2013, p. 125), ratified by Sánchez-Sánchez and López-Pérez (2019), although Villada (2006) reduced this requirement to five of the subjects offered. However, these subjects must be taken in order to specialise in PE, such that, even though they are not formally required, they could be considered compulsory for this specialisation.

In closing this discussion, it is worth returning to Cuéllar and Pestano's assertion in their prediction that:

The offer of the subject Corporal Expression for teachers specialising in Physical Education was not sufficient for its role in the educational curriculum and the training needs of the graduates. However, the implementation of the current reform and the removal of specialisations poses an even more uncertain future, raising the question of whether these changes will lead to a further deterioration of the profession and, consequently, of the quality of Physical Education in schools. (2013, p. 126)

#### **Conclusions**

The main conclusions of this work are considered to be the following:

- There is a clear regression in the training of Primary Education teachers with a specialisation in PE in relation to CE content.
- The presence of CE in the curricula of the subject area of PE is in many cases associated with some other subject or even as a topic within generic subjects that are dealt with in an introductory way together with other PE content.
- Adequate CE training is not guaranteed, in accordance with the demand established in the educational legislation in relation to the contents of PE, due to the absence or superficial treatment of this discipline.

In addition, the following secondary conclusions have been drawn:

- There has been an increase in the number of mainly privately owned institutions training teachers in PE at primary level.
- The nomenclature of the subjects that deal with CE content has been replaced by synonyms or terms associated with their use in conjunction with other subjects, which makes it difficult to assess the real time spent on the teaching of this content.

As a foresight, it is considered necessary to ensure adequate and specific training in CE for future PE teachers. This discipline could be considered a core subject in the Primary Education degree, as its influence is not only limited to the subject of PE, but also has a place in other subjects such as Foreign Language or Music. Likewise, and in terms of employment, CE is valuable in the fulfilment of other professional opportunities associated with the degree.

At the same time, it is considered appropriate to propose a specific qualification in PE in primary education which, taking the former specialisation of Teacher Training as a reference, would guarantee students specific, quality training for the specific professional practice of the subject of PE in general and of CE in particular.

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Figure 1
Institutional logos of the funding entities (UPM, M° Universities and UE-Next Generation)



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