

Basic Vocational Training: an alternative to school failure?

La Formación Profesional Básica: ¿alternativa al fracaso escolar?

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Abstract

Introduction: In the European context, one of the challenges of the next few years focuses on reducing academic failure and school dropout as measures to promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. In the case of Spain, the latest statistics provided by Eurostat have revealed that this aim is still far from being achieved, since we experience high rates of academic failure and school dropout. The Spanish Organic Law 8/2013, for the Improvement of the Quality of Education, promotes Basic Vocational Training (BVT) with the aim of providing students with a professional qualification, while helping them to continue their studies. The implementation of this training started in the 2014-2015 academic year, over a period of two years. Given this framework, our work is aimed at providing a diagnosis of BVT in terms of the opportunity that it entails for students to stay in the educational system. **Methodology:** A technique which involves analyzing scientific and legal documents, and statistical sources was used, with the purpose of delving into the topic under study, broadening the existing knowledge on the topic, clarifying the state-of-the-art, and organizing official statistical data, currently disaggregated and dispersed. **Results:** there is evidence of important differences among the Autonomous Communities regarding the suitability rate, as well as the evolution of enrollment in BVT between the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 academic years. Besides, in the transition from the first to the second year 47,82 % of the student body is lost. **Conclusion:**

Basic Vocational Training courses fail to achieve their most basic objective, which is to keep students in the educational system.

Keywords: vocational training, school failure, dropout, educational research, statistical data.

Resumen

Introducción: En el contexto europeo, uno de los desafíos para los próximos años se centra en reducir el fracaso escolar y el abandono educativo como medida para promover la equidad, la cohesión social y la ciudadanía activa. En el caso de España, las últimas estadísticas de Eurostat ponen de manifiesto que este objetivo está todavía lejos de conseguirse, debido a las elevadas cifras de fracaso escolar y abandono. La Ley Orgánica 8/2013, para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa, impulsa las enseñanzas de Formación Profesional Básica (FPB) y uno de sus objetivos es ofrecer a este alumnado una cualificación profesional, al tiempo que contribuir a su continuidad en el sistema educativo. Con una duración de 2 años, se implantan en el curso 2014-15. En este marco, lo que nos proponemos es realizar un diagnóstico de la FPB con relación con la oportunidad que pueda suponer para potenciar la permanencia del alumnado en el sistema educativo. **Metodología:** Se ha procedido a utilizar la técnica de análisis de documentos científicos y legislativos, y de fuentes estadísticas, con la finalidad de profundizar en nuestro objeto de estudio, ampliar el conocimiento existente sobre el mismo, clarificar el estado de la cuestión sobre el tema, y organizar datos estadísticos oficiales disgregados y dispersos. **Resultados:** Se constatan diferencias importantes entre las distintas comunidades autónomas en lo que respecta a la tasa de idoneidad, así como en la evolución de la matrícula en FPB entre los cursos 2014-15 y 2015-16. Por otra parte, en la transición de 1º a 2º se pierde el 47,82% del alumnado. **Conclusión:** Las enseñanzas de Formación Profesional Básica no logran su objetivo básico, esto es, mantener al alumnado en el sistema educativo.

Palabras clave: formación profesional, fracaso escolar, abandono de estudios, investigación educativa, datos estadísticos.

Problem Statement

The strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) adopted by the Council of Ministers of the European Union at its meeting on May 12th, 2009 (Council of Europe, 2009) establishes as main purpose the development of education and training

systems in the Member States. This objective is justified by their capacity to provide all citizens with the means to exploit their potential and to ensure sustainable economic prosperity and employability. Accordingly, four strategic objectives are established, including promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship.

Within this objective, a key indicator is the rate of early leaving from education and training, which is also part of the *Eurostat Sustainable Development Indicators* and *Gender Equality Indicators*, as well as the *Employment and Social Policy Indicators of the European Union*. By 2020, this dropout rate is expected to be reduced to less than 10% among young people aged between 18 and 24 years, which in Spain would be 15%. In order to respond to this challenge, different initiatives, such as the *Entrepreneurship and Youth Employment Strategy 2013-2016*, have been launched, which propose measures aimed at reducing school failure and early school leaving.

However, the reality is that this does not take us in the right direction. The latest Eurostat data from April 2016 have shown that Spain leads the European Union in early school leaving, with a rate of 20%, compared to the EU average of 11%, and it is still a long way off the set goal. In a working document from February 2016, the European Commission have warned about the low level of basic skills of the working population who left school early, with direct effects on long-term unemployment (Commission, 2016 a). This is an obstacle to competitiveness, innovation capacity and social cohesion of the country, and is therefore a major political and social issue (García, Casal, Merino & Sánchez, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the data are alarming and the problem is particularly complex, due to the great disparity in dropout rates (European Commission, 2015). However, most worrying is how difficult it is to modify these figures in our system. Since the 1990s, different initiatives have been carried out in the political sphere to reduce school failure and dropout (Escudero & Martínez, 2012), and to minimize their effects through actions focused on the employability of all individuals (Suárez, 2016). This is translating into the design and development of different programs which, linked to the labor market, provide a level-one professional qualification, according to the guidelines of the European Commission.

In recent years, the Education Reform, which is specified in the Spanish Organic Law 8/2013, for the Improvement of the Quality of

Education (hereinafter LOMCE), has introduced Basic Vocational Training (hereinafter BVT) as a vocational training grade. In addition to the aims and objectives generally established for vocational education, this grade will help students to stay in the educational system, promoting continuity, pursuing their post-compulsory secondary studies, in line with the European guidelines (European Commission, 2015). Designed as a two-year program, it was implemented for the first time in the 2014-15 academic year.

Notwithstanding its importance, the extensive literature search implied that there are hardly any studies on this topic, with scarce and limited scientific production, as shown in previous studies (García, 2014). One might think that this is due to the recent implementation of BVT, but it rather responds to a widespread trend in the field of Vocational Training, where studies are clearly fewer compared to other levels of the education system (Merino, García & Casal, 2006). This adds up to the fact that studies are not always sufficiently systematized or available to researchers in the field (Tarabini & Curran, 2013).

For this reason, the reflection on these programs, their implementation, development and application is an unavoidable issue in the field of educational research, so that one can identify strengths and weaknesses for their optimization. In order to understand the role played by vocational training in reducing early dropout, an analysis is required on both the phenomenon of failure and the potential of vocational training to attract, keep and reintegrate young people into the education system. These aspects are challenging areas of research (EURYDICE & CEDEFOP, 2014).

This article begins with a theoretical approach to the problem of school failure and its relation with dropout, followed by an analysis of BVT and its preceding programs. These two aspects are described in the following section from a statistical approach, which provides an overview of the situation in terms of school failure, both in relation to BVT and Compulsory Secondary Education (hereinafter CSE), since this is the educational stage from which BVT students come. Finally, some reflections and recommendations are provided by way of discussion and conclusion, which hopefully will serve to stimulate a more effective debate on BVT and what, in our opinion, should be its main objective: to reduce school failure and avoid early dropout of those who have not completed Secondary Education.

Preceding programs and theoretical grounding

The classrooms of the Spanish educational centers show a reality characterized by heterogeneity, and in which academically successful students coexist with others, who present learning difficulties derived from low performance, curricular lag and lack of motivation, situations of social and educational risk, etc.

With the entry into force of the Spanish Organic Law 1/1990, of October 3, of the Education System General Order (hereinafter LOGSE) and the corresponding extension of the compulsory education to the age of 16, a so far non-existent problem arises: “to keep in the classrooms, by force of law, many students who would otherwise have left” (Fernández-Enguita, Mena & Riviere, 2010, p.176). This situation leads to behaviors and attitudes considered inappropriate “according to the hegemonic criteria of the educational institution” (Merino et al., 2006, p.84), while fueling the paradox of an institution which, despite the fact it is designed to help, it ends up enhancing, punishing and certifying failure and exclusion (Escudero & Martínez, 2012).

Therefore, once the universalization is achieved, the next step is to promote better results both in compulsory and post-compulsory education (Pérez-Esparrells & Morales, 2012), which will necessarily require “reducing the high rate of school failure and early dropout in Spain” (p. 42).

A conceptual approach to school failure

School failure and dropout are terms which are sometimes used as synonyms, although the emphasis on one term or the other has much to do with how each society views its educational system. Thus, while the former is commonly used in Europe, it is hardly used in the United States, for example (Fernández-Enguita et ál., 2010). Both concepts are widely used in educational research, as they are viewed in close connection. As a result, there is a fundamental difference in whether, within the Secondary Education stage, they are linked to either compulsory (school failure) or post-compulsory (dropout) education (Pascual & Amer, 2013, Roca, 2010).

The term *school failure* is far from uncontroversial, sometimes being ambiguous, as there are multiple meanings of this concept (Pérez-Esparrells & Morales, 2012). This paper focuses on school failure, while being aware of the problem involved when approaching this concept, given the complexity of the topic and its multiple facets (Escudero & Martínez, 2012). Thus, it becomes subject of discussion for two reasons: its denotative value, since it has no clear definition, and its connotative value, because it would entail disqualification and even stigmatization of the student. A conceptualization of school failure is a problem in itself, which in practice leads to a dichotomous definition, “students’ multiple differences being reduced to a binary division: success or failure” (Fernández-Enguita et al., 2010, p.11).

Since researchers are aware of this, a broad view of failure is assumed, including “any form of non-achievement of the educational goals proclaimed by society” (Fernández-Enguita et al., 2010, p.23). This is why, school failure is understood as a situation in which students who complete Compulsory Secondary Education fail to achieve the goals generally set for the age group, in line with what is called *objective failure*. Given the context, there would be risk of failure situations, which will set the scene for school failure (retention, lack of motivation, chronic absenteeism, learning difficulties etc.) and *de facto* failure (for example, retained students who do not reach the required learning outcomes). This creates a “vicious cycle of low performance and lack of motivation, leading to more bad grades and loss of commitment to their school” (OECD, 2016 b, p.5).

Consequences of failure and dropout

School failure and dropping out of the education system before completing upper secondary education have serious consequences and negative repercussions, giving rise to a higher level of vulnerability among the affected population (OECD, 2016 a, 2016 b). From an individual perspective, there are greater difficulties related to employment and reintegration (EACEA, 2016), less job stability, less secure jobs, lower wage levels, or a less healthy lifestyle (European Commission, 2016).

One should not leave aside that today, working environments and employment present special characteristics which imply numerous

challenges that intensify in the case of young people, leading to a spiral in which many young people are neither in employment nor in education or training (the so-called “NEETs”). A recent World Bank study has warned about the growth of this group and the possible consequences with respect to the future increase of existing social inequalities (De Hoyos, Rogers & Székely, 2016). In Spain, as pointed out by the OECD (2016 b), the percentage of young people aged between 15 and 29 years in this situation is around 20% and, although it improves compared to 2014, when it reached 24,3%, there is still a lot to be done.

Therefore, the consequences of school failure and dropout are not reflected only at an individual level, but also in the economy through tax revenue accruing to the State (Pascual & Amer, 2013) and, obviously, in the social context, by decreasing the equality and cohesion indexes (OECD, 2016 b, Tarabini & Currán, 2015). These are closely linked dimensions, since “the working force which left education early contributes to long-term unemployment and constitutes a barrier to the country’s competitiveness, innovation capacity and social cohesion” (European Commission, 2016, p.56). Society as a whole would be affected, given the high social and economic costs of school failure (EURYDICE & CEDEFOP, 2014, OECD, 2016 b).

Basic Vocational Training

The development of measures aimed at reducing both school failure and dropout, and at increasing the qualification level of young people is a need justified by several reasons. The first reason refers to the importance of a solid basic training, which allows building for the future learning throughout life; the second reason is linked to the rapid evolution of work environments, implying constant adaptations to the new qualification requirements; and finally, the third one makes reference to the necessary competitiveness of the economy, beyond neo-fordism economic models (García et al., 2013). Since 1990, different programs and initiatives, aimed at addressing this situation, have been structured and developed in accordance with the political institutions’ guidelines. Each of these programs include “its corresponding organizational and curricular designs, along with teaching and learning processes, and in-service training” (Amores & Ritacco, 2015, p.106).

The first precedent of BVT refers to the Social Guarantee Programs (SGPs), set up by LOGSE. They are aimed at young people over 16 and under 21, who dropped out of formal education, without obtaining a minimum qualification, and with obvious difficulties to join the workforce with certain guarantees (Marín, García & Sola, 2014). Their purpose is to provide students with a basic and professional training that allows them to join the workforce or to continue their studies in Intermediate Training cycles through an entrance test. In line with Alegre and Benito (2010), it could be stated that the implementation of SGPs revealed the capacity of this training to favor “the permanence in the education system of students who, in other systems, could be inclined to drop out at an early age” (p.66).

However, these programs were also a cause for strong criticism, linked to certain essential characteristics. The stigmatization attached to these studies stand out in this sense (Fernández-Enguita et al., 2010), along with the important disparities in the implementation of SGPs in each Autonomous Community, and the refusal to allow the reintegration into the general education system (Merino et al., 2006). This occurred because students who had finished the program did not obtain any type of academic certification, and subsequently they were obliged to enroll in Adult Education Schools for people over 18 years old, if they wanted to obtain the degree of Compulsory Secondary Education Graduate (Marín et al., 2014); or, because the excessive orientation towards the school model (Merino et al., 2006) caused a discrepancy between expectations and reality, as students considered that this was a “false start” for not providing the expected knowledge (Fernández-Enguita et al., 2010).

The Spanish Organic Law 10/2002, of December 23, on Quality in Education (LOCE) replaces SGPs by the In-Service Training Programs (ISTP). However, the *de facto* cessation of this Law stopped their development, SGPs continuing to be conducted until the entry in force of the Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education (LOE), when they are replaced by the so-called Basic Vocational Qualification Programs (BVQPs). In the new perspective of these programs, “the years spent on SGPs and the new regulations on qualifications and vocational training” had a notable impact (Marín et al., 2014, p. 34).

Such programs were directed at students over the age of 16 years, who had not obtained the degree of Compulsory Secondary Education Graduate. Exceptionally, and in agreement with students and parents or

guardians, this age could be reduced to 15 years in the cases in which students, once enrolled in the second year of CSE, and having been retained once during secondary education, do not meet the requirements for promotion to the third year.

Some of the positive aspects that stand out have to do with teachers' work (Aramendi & Vega, 2013), the increase in age range at which students can access these programs (15 years), or an extension to two years of these programs (Marín et al., 2014), as well as the opportunity of obtaining the degree of CSE Graduate. However, the latter aspect has been a cause for criticism, alleging an academicism superior to SGPs (Marhuenda, 2012).

BVQPs are maintained until the entry in force of the Spanish Organic Law 8/2013, of December 9, for the Improvement of the Quality of Education (LOMCE), which sets up BVT. The Preamble of this Law refers to the *equity* and *quality* of the education system as two sides of the same coin, stating that it is virtually inconceivable that a quality education system might not consider a priority to eliminate any kind of inequality.

In the third paragraph of the single article, it is stated that the BVT cycles shall be mandatory and gratuitous. This paragraph was developed by RD 127/2014 which, in its general provisions, set out the creation of these cycles as a measure to facilitate the permanence of students in the education system and provide them with better chances of achieving their personal and professional development. These cycles also include modules related to common blocks of applied sciences, and communication and social sciences, which enable students to achieve and develop lifelong learning skills to pursue post-compulsory secondary education.

Taking as reference the terms established for Spain in the Royal Decree 127/2014 (articles 3 and 4), BVT is part of the vocational training of the education system and is organized in cycles, which in turn are grouped into modules. It has to respond to a profile that includes, at least, a level-one full professional qualification from the National Catalog of Professional Qualifications (NCPQ).

Articles 8 to 10 elaborate on the characterization of the professional modules in which BVT cycles are organized, expressed in terms of learning outcomes, evaluation criteria and contents.

Regarding access to this type of training (article 15), it is established that students must meet all of the following requirements: to be aged

between 15 and 17 years; to have completed the 3rd year of CSE or, exceptionally the 2nd year; and to be proposed by the teaching team to the legal guardian, who must give their consent.

The duration of the Basic Vocational Training cycle is 2000 hours, equivalent to two academic years, with the possibility of taking these courses over a period of maximum four years through the common system. However, obtaining this degree does not initially entail the degree of CSE Graduate. This situation was modified by the Royal Decree 1058/2015, of November 20, where it is envisaged (Single Transitional Provision) that, during the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 academic years, the BVT graduates will be able to obtain the CSE degree, provided that, in the final cycle assessment, the teaching team considers that they reached their objectives and acquired the corresponding competences. Recently, the Royal Decree 562/2017 of June 2, in Article 2.5, has consolidated this *sine die* situation until “the entry into force of the regulations resulting from the Agreement on the Social and Political State for Education” (Article 1). The Basic Vocational Training was implemented in the 2014-15 academic year, therefore, the first graduating class completed their studies in 2016.

Over a decade ago, Marhuenda (2006) criticized the lack of attention paid to the research studies on vocational training programs, in spite of their role in “basic education, educational compensation, initial vocational training and integrating social and career guidance” (p.17). However, over the past few years, a higher number of studies focusing on this topic have been conducted, along with case studies published in educational journals that address this issue from complementary dimensions related to the topic. For literature reviews, the turning point occurred at the end of the past decade with the works published in *Revista de Educación* on “Basic Vocational Qualification” (2006) and “Early dropout of education and training” (2010), and in *Revista de Curriculum y Formación del Profesorado* (2009) on “School failure and educational exclusion”. From that moment on, it is becoming increasingly common to find works that delve into the opportunity of this type of training as a measure of social, personal and occupational integration (Escudero, 2016, González, 2015). Some of them are mentioned in our study.

Taking these precedents as reference, the study was performed, with the characteristics presented in the following section.

Design and methodology

Objectives

This work is aimed at *making a diagnosis of the Basic Vocational Training in relation to its opportunity as a measure to promote students' staying in the educational system*. In order to approach it, BVT serves as an analysis unit, making use of the statistical data.

Method

The research study was conducted in three stages, which included the use of different methodological approaches. This option is justified by the conviction that school failure is not an exclusive consequence of students' personal characteristics, which would imply a particular type of responsibility (Domingo & Martos, 2016), but a number of circumstances that require a complementary analysis.-

Initially, a technique which involves *analyzing scientific and legal documents, and statistical sources* was used, with the purpose of delving into the topic under study, broadening the existing knowledge on the topic, and clarifying the state-of-the-art, in line with previous studies (Cordero, Manchón & Simancas, 2014, Marín et al., 2014, Palomares & López, 2012). This is precisely the dimension on which the article is based.

Results

While exploring about school failure in statistical terms, something frequently reported was found, that is, scarce and scattered official data and figures (Merino et al., 2006). A second obstacle was provided by the generic term itself, since it would be strange to find official statistical data on education about 'school failure' as such. The common practice is to avoid a direct reference to this situation, using descriptors such as "academic results" "suitability rate", "promotion", "students who complete their studies" or "retained students", among others.

Another problem is caused by the timing of the publication of the data referring to some of the above-mentioned descriptors. For example, the

latest available data on “academic results” date back to the 2013-2014 academic year, three academic years of delay.

In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, a statistical overview is presented, elaborated from the official data provided by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport on its website. In order to adjust ourselves to the current situation, it was decided to address only the available data corresponding to the last three academic years.

The existing situation of Compulsory Secondary Education

Although BVT is part of the vocational training of the education system, it significantly affects CSE students who leave the latter to pass to a new study stage. To this end, the ‘suitability rate’ is an appropriate indicator if we are to glimpse the future BVT students. This indicator is often taken as a reference in studies which address school failure and dropout (Fernández-Enguita et al., 2010, González, 2016). It can be understood as the “percentage of students enrolled in the theoretical course corresponding to their age” (MECD, 2016, p.55). Considering the theoretical ages of 14 and 15 years linked to the third and fourth year of CSE, the available data point to relatively stable rates during the years under study (Table I), both in the entire Spanish education system and the different Autonomous Communities. The suitability rate in the 3rd year is between 70% and 71%, and that of the 4th between 62% and 63%, allowing us to determine that the degree of connection between age and year of study decreases, as the latter increases. The differences between the Autonomous Communities are undeniable: While in Catalonia the rates (2014-15 academic year) are 82% for the 3rd year and 76,6% for the 4th, in other communities such as Melilla (57.3% and 47.3%) or Ceuta (55, 4% and 47.9%), these values are significantly lower.

TABLE I. Suitability rate in the 3rd and 4th year of CSE

Autonomous Communities	2012-13 academic year		2013-14 academic year		2014-15 academic year	
	3rd year	4th year	3rd year	4th year	3rd year	4th year
ANDALUSIA	66.4	58	67.5	59.6	68.2	60.7
ARAGON	66.9	60.3	66.5	60.2	57.5	51.2
ASTURIAS	75	66.7	75.7	69.2	74.5	68.5
BALEARIC ISLANDS	64.8	56.3	65.9	57	66.9	58.5
CANARY ISLANDS	65.4	57.4	66.2	57.4	67.2	58.1
CANTABRIA	71.8	63.3	73.9	64	77.1	65.2
CASTILE AND LEÓN	70.9	61.7	70.3	63.1	71.4	62.8
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA	65.8	56.8	65.3	58	67.1	56.9
CATALONIA	79.5	73.7	81.1	75.1	82	76.6
VALENCIAN COMMUNITY	68.9	59.1	67.3	60.1	67.7	57.9
EXTREMADURA	68	57.8	68.7	60.2	69.7	61
GALICIA	71.4	63	71.9	63.1	72.6	64.8
MADRID	72.2	63.1	72.5	64.8	73.4	65.3
MURCIA	63.9	55.6	63.5	54.6	65.6	57.4
NAVARRRE	74.8	68.9	76.6	69.3	76.6	71.2
BASQUE COUNTRY	77.6	72.8	77.2	72.6	78.6	72.7
LA RIOJA	70.1	59.1	69.3	61.5	69.8	61.2
CEUTA	52.4	39.4	56.7	43.5	55.4	47.9
MELILLA	58	46.9	55.4	47.9	57.3	47.3
TOTAL	70.6	62.5	71	63.6	71.7	63.9

Source: elaborated by the authors

The existing situation of Basic Vocational Training

The 2014-15 academic year is the first in which students have access to BVT, accounting for a total of 39,867 students (Table II). In terms of gender, it was observed that the proportion of male students (71.38%) is much higher than that of female students (28.46%). This trend is generally maintained if we consider the different professional families, except for *Self-Image* and *Sociocultural and Community Services*, with greater female participation:

TABLE II. Students enrolled in BVT by professional family. 2014-2015 academic year

CYCLES OF BVT	Male students		Female students		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N
	28456	71.38	11411	28.46	39867
Agricultural	1848	79.66	464	20.34	2320
Merchant Marine and Fishing Fleet	8	100	0	0	8
Food Industries	106	63.85	60	36.15	166
Self-Image	485	14.81	2788	85.19	3273
Mechanical Manufacturing	2812	96.63	98	3.37	2910
Installation and Maintenance	146	98.65	2	1.35	148
Electricity-Electronics	5481	95.14	280	4.86	5761
Transportation and Vehicle Maintenance	3983	90.00	81	10.00	4064
Construction and Civil Works	321	83.59	63	16.41	384
Glass and Ceramics	30	68.18	14	31.82	44
Wood, Furniture and Cork	953	92.52	77	7.48	1030
Textile, Clothing and Leather	114	49.78	115	50.22	229
Graphic arts	142	55.90	112	44.10	254
Computer Science and Communications	4845	80.15	1200	19.85	6045
Administration and Management	3948	51.55	3710	48.45	7658
Commerce and Marketing	993	49.35	1019	50.65	2012
Sociocultural and Community Services	33	27.27	88	72.73	121
Hotels and Tourism	2208	64.04	1240	35.96	3448

Source: elaborated by the authors

Comparing the data for 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years, and focusing on the first year of study (Table III), it is observed that throughout the country there is an increase of 1373 students enrolled in the second year compared to the previous one, the different Autonomous Community displaying a very different behavior. For example, while the number of students recorded in Valencia was increased to 964, Andalusia lost 813, and other Communities, such as Cantabria or Murcia, remained stable.

TABLE III. Students enrolled in the 1st year of BVT by Autonomous Communities.

Autonomous Communities	2014-15 academic year		2015-16 academic year		Difference	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
	39867	100	41240	100	+1373	+3.44
ANDALUSIA	8633	21.66	7820	18.96	-813	-9.42
ARAGON	1438	3.61	1590	3.85	+152	+10.57
ASTURIAS	430	1.08	421	1.02	-9	-2.09
BALEARIC ISLANDS	982	2.47	1149	2.79	+167	+17.00
CANARY ISLANDS	2279	5.72	2199	5.33	-80	-3.51
CANTABRIA	451	1.13	449	1.09	-2	-0.44
CASTILE AND LEÓN	2502	6.27	2563	6.21	+61	+2.44
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA	2860	7.17	2903	7.04	+43	+1.50
CATALONIA	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0
VALENCIAN COMMUNITY	5435	13.63	6399	15.52	+964	+17.73
EXTREMADURA	1433	3.59	1471	3.57	+38	+2.65
GALICIA	2086	5.23	2424	5.88	+338	+16.20
MADRID	5229	13.11	5628	13.65	+399	+7.63
MURCIA	2196	5.51	2208	5.35	+12	+0.54
NAVARRRE	497	1.25	524	1.27	+27	+5.43
BASQUE COUNTRY	2242	5.62	2374	5.76	+132	+5.88
LA RIOJA	581	1.46	534	1.29	-47	-8.09
CEUTA	262	0.66	238	0.58	-24	-9.16
MELILLA	331	0.83	346	0.84	+15	+4.53

Source: elaborated by the authors

If we compare the number of students enrolled in the 1st year, 2014-15, to those enrolled in the second one, 2015-16, (Table IV), the following is observed:

TABLE IV. Students enrolled in the 1st (2014-15) and 2nd year of BVT (2015-16)

Autonomous Communities	1st year 2014-15		2nd year 2015-16		Differential	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
	39867	100	20785	100	-19082	-47.86
ANDALUSIA	8633	21.66	4165	20.04	-4468	-51.75
ARAGON	1438	3.61	771	3.71	-667	-46.38
ASTURIAS	430	1.08	217	1.04	-231	-53.72
BALEARIC ISLANDS	982	2.47	570	2.74	-412	-41.95
CANARY ISLANDS	2279	5.72	941	4.53	-1338	-58.70
CANTABRIA	451	1.13	242	1.16	-209	-46.34
CASTILE AND LEÓN	2502	6.27	1241	5.97	-1261	-50.39
CASTILLA-LA MANCHA	2860	7.17	1191	5.73	-1669	-58.35
CATALONIA	0	0.00	0	0	0	0
VALENCIAN COMMUNITY	5435	13.63	3043	14.64	-2392	-44.01
EXTREMADURA	1433	3.59	677	3.26	-756	-52.75
GALICIA	2086	5.23	1072	5.16	-1014	-48.60
MADRID	5229	13.11	2986	14.36	-2243	-42.89
MURCIA	2196	5.51	1080	5.20	-1116	-50.82
NAVARRRE	497	1.25	295	1.42	-202	-40.64
BASQUE COUNTRY	2242	5.62	1690	8.13	-552	-24.62
LA RIOJA	581	1.46	351	1.69	-230	-39.58
CEUTA	262	0.66	112	0.54	-150	-57.25
MELILLA	331	0.83	141	0.68	-190	-57.40

Source: elaborated by the authors

The high number of students who “disappear” from the 1st to the 2nd year reaches 47.82% in the entire educational system. Particularly significant, given the high percentages, is the case of three Autonomous Communities: the Canary Islands (58.70%), Melilla (57.40%) and Ceuta (57.25%). The Basque Country (24.62%) is the Autonomous Community with the lowest number of students who do not return for a second year.

Discussion

The literature review allows us to establish a number of both coincident and discordant elements between BVT and its preceding programs. First, the suitability rate of CSE students shows the same trend as that observed by González (2016) compared to the past decade in three aspects: percentage throughout Spain as a whole (around 60%), its decrease as the years of study increase and, finally, the marked differences between Autonomous Communities. In González's study (2016), Ceuta and Melilla had the lowest rates, whereas the Basque Country obtained the highest, and five years later, the same data are observed in this work.

In terms of minimum age of access to these stages, for SGPs was 16 years, for BVQPs was 15 years in exceptional situations, whereas for BVT is usually 15 years. This increase in age range is considered positive compared to BVQPs (Aramendi & Vega, 2013, Marín et al., 2014). However, other voices, in the context of BVT, speak of "a game of statistical engineering of which there is no precedent in our country" (Bolívar, 2013, quoting Tarabini & Montes, 2015, p.6), which would allow progress toward the goals set in Europe 2020, since these students would no longer be part of CSE.

On the other hand, the inclusion of BVT within the education system solves one of the problems that were attributed to the preceding programs (Marín et al., 2014). One of the most frequent criticisms of the BVT design refers to its inability to motivate students to stay in the education system, by not allowing them to obtain the degree of CSE Graduate (Marín et al., 2014; Merino et al., 2006). This aspect was temporarily solved by the Royal Decree 1058/2015, which made it possible to obtain a CSE degree which led to students' permanence in the education system. At the end of the 2016-17 academic year, RD 562/2017, of June 2, has consolidated this situation until the entry into force of the regulations resulting from the Agreement on the Social and Political State for Education, responding to a social need which goes beyond the education system. It is to be hoped that we will not have too long to wait.

What these programs offer is another important aspect. The literature on the topic pointed out the small range to cover the needs of the potential population (Abiétar-López, Navas-Saurín, Marhuenda-Fluixá & Salvá-Mut, 2017), as well as their lack of attractiveness (Fernández-Enguita et al., 2010). It seems that the same thing is happening to BVT, which

may be described as “repetitive”. Analyzing certain data from the study carried out in Galicia by the *GEFIL* research group and the *RIES* Network, it was noted that in the 2015-2016 academic year, 190 cycles, grouped into 15 professional families (57.5%) out of a total of 26, were distributed throughout the Community. In addition, 119 cycles (62.3%) were distributed among four professional families, with the possibility of choosing from five degree programs. In other words, six degree programs condense 62.3% of BVT specializations, which cannot be classified as varied.

This is directly linked to the contents of training. The main idea of this research study, especially from an inclusive perspective, is that the curricular elements should create interest and increase capacities (Escudero, 2012), which requires not only significant content for students who should not be mere receivers of information, but also methodologies that favor more and better understanding (Núñez et al., 2014). At this point, it seems naive to think that a curriculum such as that of BVT can contribute to this goal, especially in view of the strong presence of secondary education contents, which are not very significant for students (García et al., 2013) and an academicism that had already been reported with respect to SGPs (Marhuenda, 2012).

The little adjustment between students’ interests and curricular elements has a direct impact on motivation toward learning and, consequently, academic success. Marín et al. (2014) placed the dropout rate in BVQPs around 50% in the transition from first year (compulsory) to second year (optional), reporting also a more positive perception of the former (González & Porto, 2013). The information revealed in this work, derived from the statistical analysis (Table IV), shows that the figures are steady, 47.86% of the students not promoting from first to second year. As if the situation was not bad enough with BVQPs, it becomes alarming in BVT, as these students leave the education system without any professional qualification or academic certification, which will make them more vulnerable and reduce their chances of job stability and satisfaction, as already noted in recent international studies (European Commission, 2016, OECD, 2016 *a*, 2016 *b*). In addition, big differences were observed between the Autonomous Communities in terms of academic success, according to González’s (2016) perceptions on BVQPs.

The contrast between these objective data, and the expectations expressed by the BVT students are particularly interesting. In a recent

study, Abiétar-López et al. (2017) have shown that “87% of adolescents believe that they will successfully complete the year and, subsequently, the program” (p. 43). This demonstrates the gap between perception and reality, and requires a combination of complementary methodologies to delve into the understanding of the problem and avoid a decontextualized reading, as Domingo and Martos (2016) pointed out. Moreover, in agreement with the study performed by Merino et al. (2006) it is necessary, in our opinion, to establish monitoring mechanisms that address both the “quantitative and qualitative evolution of the programs, students’ profile and the subsequent itineraries. Without these data, ten years on, we could be facing the same problems of evaluation and analysis” (p.95). It is also interesting to mention the observations of Fernández-Enguita et al. (2010) with respect to SGPs that students considered a “false start” due to the discrepancy between their expectations and reality. It seems that the same thing is happening to BVT.

Conclusions

The aim of this work was to make a diagnosis of BVT and its opportunity with regard to the necessary momentum for students’ permanence in the educational system.

It was determined that in the transition from 1st to 2nd year (Table IV), 19,082 students do not return, accounting for 47.86% of those enrolled in the previous year. The obvious question is: Where do these students go? There are two possibilities: the students are either retained, or have decided to drop out without completing the cycle.

The first option is hardly credible, since it would mean a considerable increase in the 1st-year enrollment in the 2015-16 academic year, which does not correspond to what is shown in Table III. As soon as the data are available according to whether it is first or second enrollment, this hypothesis can be verified, but the logic and the review of the studies on previous programs spur us to maintain that probably most of the “disappeared” students have dropped out of the BVT cycles. We must not forget that first-year students who have been enrolled for a year have already turned 16, and legally they cannot be forced to stay in the education system.

In any case, regardless of the more persuasive argument, the situation analysis and the results presented herein led to the most substantive conclusion. Nowadays, BVT has not reached its fundamental objective: to make students who are enrolled in this education stage stay in the educational system. That is why, the present study should be understood as a starting point for a critical reflection on the opportunity of BVT as a measure aimed at addressing school failure. Further studies are obviously needed within this framework, along with other lines of research, a matter already considered by the authors of the current work.

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