

Unveiling educational practice in Primo de Rivera's Spain through the First Education Inspectorate (1923-1930)

Desvelando la práctica educativa en la España de Primo de Rivera a través de la Inspección de Primera Enseñanza (1923-1930)

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Teresa Rabazas Romero

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5545-5879>

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Carlos Sanz Simón

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5786-4024>

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Abstract

The dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) was a period of authoritarianism, which in the field of education was expressed in the desire to put an end to illiteracy, improve schools and control the inspection of primary education ideologically and professionally. In order to carry out these measures, the Directorate wanted to take a radiography of the education system in Spain and, by Royal Order of August 29, 1924, instructed the Inspectorate to draw up a series of reports on the situation of schools throughout the country. In order to contribute to the historical-pedagogical study of this period from the perspective of pedagogical practice, we use the analysis of these inspection reports, a new, previously unpublished source. To this end, the historical-pedagogical method is applied, using the technique of content analysis in three fundamental areas of early education: literacy and truancy, the ideological control of the regime and the professional identity of the educational inspectorate. The conclusions allow us to recognize that the inspection reports constitute a historical source with an important potential for the study of educational practice. In them we

can see the high illiteracy rates and the lack of school attendance —due to child labor and the lack of social consideration for education on the part of families—, the punitive nature of the dictatorship towards those professionals who did not defend the unity of Spain and the Spanish language, and the professional redefinition of the Inspectorate of Education, which for the first time had a superior, military figure supervising its own activity, and which was to find in the orientation and guidance of teachers a new perspective for their professional performance.

Keywords: history of education, contemporary history, educational inspection, primary education, absenteeism, identity, nationalism, Spain, Miguel Primo de Rivera.

Resumen

La dictadura de Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923-1930) representó un periodo de autoritarismo que, en el plano educativo, se tradujo en el deseo por acabar con el analfabetismo, la mejora de las escuelas, y el control ideológico y profesional de la inspección de Primera Enseñanza. Pero, para poder llevar a cabo tales medidas, el Directorio se propuso realizar una radiografía del estado de la enseñanza en España, y para ello, mediante la Real Orden de 29 de agosto de 1924, ordenó a la inspección confeccionar una serie de memorias que dieran cuenta de la situación de las escuelas de todo el país. Con el objetivo de contribuir al estudio histórico-educativo de este periodo desde la perspectiva de la práctica educativa, se emplea el análisis de estas memorias de inspección, una fuente inédita hasta la fecha. Para ello, se parte del método histórico-educativo, empleando la técnica del análisis de contenido en tres ejes fundamentales de la educación primorriverista: la alfabetización y el absentismo escolar, el control ideológico del régimen y la identidad profesional de la inspección educativa. Las conclusiones nos permiten advertir que las memorias de inspección constituyen una fuente histórica con un importante potencial para el estudio de la práctica educativa. En ellas, se pueden entrever los altos índices de analfabetismo y la falta de asistencia escolar —derivadas del trabajo infantil y la escasa consideración social hacia la educación por parte de las familias—, el carácter sancionador de la dictadura con aquellos profesionales que no defendieran la unidad de España y la lengua castellana, y la redefinición profesional de la inspección educativa, que por primera vez contó con una figura superior, militarizada, encargada de la supervisión de su propia actividad, y que encontraría en la orientación y guía del profesorado una nueva perspectiva para su desempeño profesional.

Palabras clave: historia de la educación, historia contemporánea, inspección educativa, primera enseñanza, absentismo, identidad, nacionalismo, informe, España, Miguel Primo de Rivera.

Introduction

An emerging trend in the historiography of education attempts to reconstruct the history of education using new documentary foci and sources that allow us to compare educational discourses and scientific culture with school practices or empirical culture in order to offer an overall history, as the historians of the French school of *Annales* explained (Le Goff, 1997). In the present paper, the focus of pedagogical practice will be examined through the analysis of inspection reports. This is a gap in recent historical work on school inspections, where a range of topics of a regulatory and regional nature have predominated, as well as research focusing on specific historical themes. And as Montero (2021) has recently pointed out, this is a topic that should be explored in more depth due to its crucial role in the future of education.

In the international context, school inspection has established itself as a field of research in the history of education (Rousmaniere, 2019), with recent examples alluding to this professional body, some of them from the perspective of pedagogical practice in other delimitations (Evertsson, 2022; Grigg, 2020; Lapot, 2022). In Spain, José Luis Castán (2021) has carried out a state of the question on this field of study in which the interest in this topic is presented from a bibliometric point of view, taking into account scientific publications and academic papers. A production that has barely produced a hundred studies in the last decade and with a concentrated authorship. A brief overview of recent works — without overlooking historical references such as López (1987), Jiménez (1998), Maíllo (1989), Ramírez (1993) and Mayorga (2000)— allows us to categorize these works as generalist (Castillo, Mata and Palacios, 2019; Fajardo, 2019; López, 2015; Montero, 2021; Ramírez, 2017; and Vázquez, 2017); those that focus on specific historical contexts, such as the origins of this professional body (Camacho, 2015), nineteenth-century Spain (Camacho, 2016), the first half of the twentieth century (Flecha, 2018) or its evolution since the democratic transition (Esteban, 2010). Finally, we should point out those studies focused on the genesis, legal regime and developed roles by the educational inspection (Galicia, 2016; Hernández, 2019; Rodríguez, 2019).

It follows that educational inspection has traditionally been analyzed through documentary sources of a normative nature. It is therefore necessary to explore this reality through primary sources that deal with

the perspective of educational practice, a line of study opened by Depaepe and Simon (1995) and Braster et al., Grosvenor and Pozo (2011), and which has been incorporated in Spain in studies such as those by Barceló et al., Comas and Sureda (2016), Comas and Sureda (2021) or Pozo and Rabazas (2013), among others.

The aim of this article is to analyze the inspection reports, which represent an as yet unexamined source for the perspective of school practice, from the point of view of one of the key figures, the primary school inspector, in the context of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. This period of the dictatorship was turbulent and strict ideological control over school inspections was exercised through the appointment of government delegates —professional members of the armed forces—who also carried out political inspections (Camacho, 2019). To carry out this supervision, shortly after the beginning of the dictatorship, Primo de Rivera commissioned the school inspectorate to produce a report outlining the situation of schools in each territory or judicial district (Royal Order of August 29, 1924). The purpose of this report was to gain first-hand knowledge of the situation of the education system and thus evaluate possible solutions. Among many other objectives, the Military Directorate led a crusade against illiteracy and the poor state of the schools. To this end, as explained below, the dictator initiated an unprecedented process of building and modernizing educational centers that surpassed even the efforts of the Franco dictatorship, as noted by Hispanist Carolyn Boyd (2000). These processes were deeply politicized and characterized by authoritarian measures and ideological control, inspired by the recent Italian fascism of Mussolini.

The research presented here is based on the study of these inspection reports with the aim of analyzing pedagogical practice in relation to three of the basic principles of the primordialist regime: Literacy and truancy, ideological control and the redefinition of the professional identity of the school inspectorate. To achieve this, the study relies on the historical-pedagogical method (Ruiz, 1997), using 114 examples from the different regions of Spain written after the aforementioned Royal Order. These reports are located in the Archivo General de la Administración [General Archive of the Administration] (Madrid, Spain) and have been grouped geographically and by categorical units such as those analyzed here. Other primary sources were also used, such as educational inspection manuals, legal texts, statistical yearbooks and personal records of Spanish inspectors.

Based on this approach, we propose the following questions: To what extent do inspection reports reflect the problems of school absenteeism and what proposals are made to address them? To what extent do these reports reflect the political ideals of the military directorate? What kind of tensions are reflected in the reports between the government representatives and the Inspectorate of Primary Education? We will find out some of the answers as we analyze these sources. As Antonio Viñao (1999) noted in relation to the reports of teachers and inspectors, many of these documents provide very relevant information about school practices. Thus, we can compare the pedagogical practices that the inspectors found during their visits with the pedagogical discourses from this period that related to the theoretical-regulatory proposals on educational inspection. Part of the value of these reports lies in the fact that they were directed by the government to attempt to describe the educational situation in the various inspection areas. We believe that their aim was twofold: on the one hand, to inspect teaching and, on the other, to record the state of Spanish elementary school.

Educational inspection during the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera

Miguel Primo de Rivera came to power when Spain was in a serious crisis, characterized by nationalist tensions in Catalonia and the Basque Country, the recent defeat in the Battle of Annual, the rise of the fascists in Italy and a system of power alternation that had become worn out and contaminated by political corruption. These factors were added to the “catastrophe of 1898”, when the loss of the last Spanish colonies triggered a debate on the redefinition of Spain’s identity that continued into the 1920s.

Ideologically, this was an anti-liberal period, reminiscent in some ways of Regenerationism, albeit always from an authoritarian perspective. An ideological basis developed in all aspects of Spanish political life, including education. Against this backdrop, an ambitious plan developed to improve and build infrastructure, increase the number of children in school and improve literacy. Between 1924 and 1929, around two thousand schools were built. Similarly, between 60 and 65% of women were literate in 1930, ten percentage points more than a decade earlier

(Boyd, 2000; Puelles, 2010). However, the short duration of this dictatorial period left policies such as these unfinished and, paradoxically, had to be tackled during the republican period (Rodríguez et al., 2020).

However, the authoritarian nature of the government led to strict ideological control of the curriculum —with a reinterpretation of the past in terms of imperialism, the fight against nationalist movements in the Spanish regions and an exclusionary concept of the homeland, with rituals such as the *Fiesta de la Raza* (Festival of the Race), school relays and military exercises (Pozo, 2000)— as well as over academic freedom and the selection procedures for leadership positions and the selection exams for primary school teaching posts. Ultimately, a series of ideals were implemented that focused on the family, property, religion and the nation in education, especially in the case of primary school teaching and inspection (Puelles, 2010).

The role of the inspector thus became one of monitoring teaching activities. However, this was not the only change that was to affect this professional body. The dictatorship of Primo de Rivera introduced government delegates, a total of 490 army officers dismissed from service, who represented the dictatorial regime and acted as overseers of local life, including education (López, 1987). They were appointed directly by the government and one of their main tasks was to "promote "patriotic and national values in the schools and in the community" (Boyd, 2000, p. 155), although they also had the task of visiting schools, had jurisdiction over local primary school committees and inspected the condition of school buildings, housing and deficiencies of teaching staff, as well as reviewing reports produced by the school inspectorate (Flecha, 2018).

In this way, and through a Royal Order of August 29, 1924, the need for cooperation between the school inspectorate and the delegates was established. The government delegates were thus closely linked to the school inspectorates and carried out a political inspection that preceded the pedagogical one (Camacho, 2019). However, this royal order was not limited to forming the shape of these delegates. In this provision, the Military Directorate established a task that would later determine the measures taken by Primo de Rivera in the field of education. Specifically, he ordered the preparation of a report on the state of education in the municipalities, districts or jurisdictions of each inspector, to be accompanied by these delegates. These reports were finally submitted between October 1924 and the beginning of 1925. They were signed

individually or jointly by the school inspectors and always required the approval of the government delegates in the respective areas. Their length and content varied, although most of them took a critical stance towards the reality of education under their supervision. They contain observations on noteworthy matters and elements that could be improved in each area or center.

Spain's schools seen from the inspection of 1924. Towards an initial appraisal of primary education

Why do children not attend school? The contrast between theoretical discourses and educational practice

With regard to poor school attendance, a direct correspondence was found between the theoretical discourses developed in the Escuela de Estudios Superiores del Magisterio, such as the manual *Técnica de Inspección educativa* [Technique of School Inspection], edited by Francisco Carrillo¹, and the practice described in the inspection reports during the time of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship. The manual cites several factors that lead to poor school attendance: the financial hardship of families, the ignorance and lack of interest of families, the shortage of schools and teachers, unattractive teaching methods and the lack of a national organization in the field of primary education (Carrillo, 1915).

One of the causes of school dropout was child labor, which was caused by the economic hardship of families. Poverty in some rural areas led parents to send their children to work. Child labor was one of the problems that the school inspectorate had to deal with during this period to ensure compliance with the compulsory schooling established in the regulations. An inspector from Cantabria, Daniel Luis Ortiz, noted in the reports of his inspection visits that some of the pupils interviewed were not enrolled in school:

¹ This guide, written by Professor Francisco Carrillo Guerrero, was one of the main texts about Primary Education Inspectorate during the first third of the 20th Century. Francisca Montilla Tirado, one of the most remarkable inspectors in Madrid during the second third of that century, wrote a review proving that there were no other guides until 1941 (Montilla, 1953).

In some towns and villages there are parents or guardians who hire their children for five or ten pesetas a month or a hundred pesetas a year with board, even if they are only nine, ten or twelve years old, to work in other towns and villages as servants and as small shepherds for sheep and other livestock. They are also employed for agricultural and domestic work and have to look after their younger siblings (Ortiz, 1924, p. 6).

The reports also reflect some gender differences in girls' absence from school and work. A female inspector from Cádiz, Teresa Izquierdo, confirmed that girls' lack of school attendance was in most cases due to "staying at home to work as maids and look after younger siblings" (Izquierdo, 1924, p. 7). Another demand made by some female inspectors was to establish more kindergartens to enable working women to reconcile family and work, as in the case of Josefa Herrera (1924), who advocated the reconciliation of work and family.

Among the measures proposed in the text to alleviate the economic hardship of families was the creation of facilities linked to schools: Canteens, sewing classes, mutual aid and support associations and the provision of materials, etc. An inspector from Pontevedra, Juan Novás, makes this clear in his report: "Canteens, sewing classes, vacation camps; financial support for poor families who cannot do without their children under the age of 15 to get by in everyday life, etc." (Novás, 1924, p. 10). Another gender-specific difference that becomes clear in the reports is the organization of sewing courses in girls' schools (Álvarez, 1924).

Ignorance and lack of interest in families was another of the causes identified. By and large, parents did not know how their children could benefit from school because they did not see the benefits and any reason was a good excuse to miss school. One possible solution that was suggested was the imposition of sanctions or fines by the local authorities on parents or caregivers. In this sense, a direct correspondence between the education received and the inspection reports is evident (Yubero, 1924).

Absence, the lack of schools and teachers to cater for the entire school-age population, is also cited as a factor in school absenteeism. There is a direct correspondence between the content of the text of the regulation—the theoretical curriculum—and the practice of inspection—the inspection reports. Most of the reports from rural areas describe the poor condition of schools: "but it should never be as low as a hovel

or a miserable, dark and insanitary shed, a dungeon for children, driving them away from school so that they prefer freedom” (Ortiz, 1924, p. 5). In this context, it was proposed to compensate for these shortcomings by establishing schools in the most remote places (Sánchez, 1924) and by setting up school groups in large population centers (Aznar, 1924).

In addition, the fourth cause cited is unattractive, rudimentary, outdated and impractical teaching methods and procedures. This was a requirement of the Escuela de Estudios Superiores del Magisterio and we believe it was passed on to the schools by the inspectors, given the comments in many of the reports. The inspector for Ciudad Real Gaspar Sánchez put it as follows: “The schools operate with inappropriate programs, with procedures that are not usually renewed and have an indefinite direction, with an element of intellectualism and a lack of practical application, which we understand as one of the causes that maintain the observed distance between the possibilities of the students and the social realities” (Sánchez, 1924, pp. 1-2). In addition to this situation, the school lacked suitable premises, modern teaching materials and resources.

The last measure to combat absenteeism was the lack of a serious national organization in the field of primary education. The theory set out in the regulatory manual is that there should be no legal regulation of compulsory education in terms of the start of the school year or the school calendar. Nevertheless, certain discrepancies between theory and practice are evident in the reports. Some reports called for greater autonomy for communities in relation to the school calendar to allow for some flexibility in adapting the calendar to the climate and terrain, as well as to the socio-economic activities of families. One of the collective reports from this province of Galicia mentions the need to adapt legislation to the specificities of each region (Díaz et al., 1924).

Ideological control of teaching. Spain and Spanish as bulwarks

Patriotic education is one of the objectives of civic education emphasized in the regulatory manual for education inspectors. In this category, there is also a certain overlap between the traditional values that were taught in theory and the educational policy of the Directorate, which aimed to develop national sentiment and had already been present since teacher training in the previous decade (Carrillo, 1915). To this end, this body

had to ensure “the political neutrality of the school” (Carrillo, 1915, p. 56) so that the school was not used as a propaganda tool.

Ideological control was exercised by the inspectors and the representatives of the Ministry, who developed a civic and patriotic sense through the school work. The chief inspector of Tarragona, Salvador Grau, attached a circular to his inspection report, which he sent to the teachers in his district and with which he tried to demonstrate his willingness and agreement with the directorate, because “the school educates the child to become an adult and, as such, this child belongs to a people, which has its laws, its language, its institutions, its religion and its history, elements whose synthesis constitutes the way of being of this people, its characteristics, its personality”, and he concludes by stating that “in them lies the root, the tradition of citizenship, of patriotism” (Grau, 1924, p. 1). This was a widespread point of view: the rejection of regional identities or teaching in a language other than Spanish in favor of the national language was a fundamental principle of the regime and was particularly evident in the teaching of regions such as Catalonia and the Basque Country.

The case of Catalan reflects the dictatorship's reaction to the widespread use of Catalan in schools (López, 1994). In the province of Girona, the Inspectorate notes this situation and the challenge it poses for teachers:

But we encounter the special case of a region where the child constantly speaks a language other than the national language. The province of Gerona is purely Catalan; the language in which the child has been formed is Catalan: his mother tongue. Hence there is a difficulty for our teachers and for the general state of teaching in the schools. We cannot accept half measures when resolving the problem of language. Teaching in schools must be wholly in the national language. (Muné *et al.*, 1924, pp. 1-2)

Nevertheless, the schools of Girona present a remarkable situation: Catalan was used by both teachers and pupils. The inspectors saw this as a lack of patriotism and the need to make the teachers in the area more Spanish. An idea that the inspector from Lleida Antonio Michavila summarized in the aim that “the teaching of Spanish becomes the main concern of teachers” (Michavila, 1924, p. 4), and which his colleagues in Girona saw as a prerequisite for working as teachers, claiming that “the teachers who work in Catalonia must be more teachers than those in the rest of Spain” (Muné *et al.*, 1924, pp. 2-3), as pupils outside school disregard Spanish in favor of Catalan.

Concern about the performance of primary school teachers and their loyalty to Spain even affected the selection procedures for posts. In Barcelona, the inspector Ibarz noted that the national school offered the most guarantees, which "is not surprising since the teachers enter via selection exams and adhere to the strictest orthodoxy in terms of politics, morals and religion" in their declarations", to then state that "perhaps in some cases a certain degree of half-heartedness can be observed in some official teachers, but they never lapse into nationalist excesses or other types. The fear of sanctions was an extremely effective brake" (Ibarz, 1924, p. 3).

The greatest expression of the control exercised by the military dictatorship, however, can be seen in the closure of educational centers that did not follow the basic principles of the Directorate. Ibarz himself described the closure of schools in his memoirs in relation to teachers' behavior, a measure he considered "sufficient to ensure that factionalism and passions did not arise" and he went on to note that "we have nothing to say about the impunity with which certain propaganda was disseminated in some private schools", concluding that "the political always prevails": "the political always triumphs over the purest patriotism" (Ibarz, 1924, pp. 3-4).

Noteworthy is the introduction of experiments aimed at building ties between regions that, like Catalonia, had recently experienced nationalist movements. In the summer of 1924, a group from Barcelona and a group from Madrid took part in an exchange that Ibarz interpreted as a project to build ties between Catalonia and Castile:

In a pleasant and very patriotic way, this report must relate what happened to a Catalan school group that spent the summer in Madrid and El Escorial and a Castilian group that spent the summer in Barcelona. Both were given the most attention and everyone competed to entertain the children [...] In this way, children from different regions get to know each other better and it will help to eliminate prejudices, which are always unpleasant. We should educate children to love Spain and try to ensure that they receive a healthy education in order to become good and useful citizens. Schools can be effective in calming minds and removing the shadows and fears that passionate and partisan people have spread. (Ibarz, 1924, p. 7)

It is different in the Basque Country, where there is a separation between the language spoken by the teachers and the language spoken by the pupils. The inspection of Vergara and Azpeitia in the province of

Guipúzcoa, led by José Luis Jaume, reported on this situation: “[Teachers] are faced with the well-known difficulty that those who do not know Basque, who are in the majority, have to make a gigantic effort to be able to communicate with the children who are used to the Basque language. Nevertheless, good results are achieved” (Jaume, 1924, p. 1).

Similarly, there were also notable pedagogical practices that posed a challenge to the national identity desired by Primo de Rivera. In the Tolosa district, inspectors registered two diametrically opposed realities that defined what it meant to be a good or bad teacher. The first example was a teacher from Legorreta whose limited motivation and family commitment was noted and whose behavior was questioned. The Inspectorate intervened to ensure that “he made the children learn patriotic songs and hung the portrait of His Majesty the King in a place of honor in his school” (N. A., 1924, p. 7). Ultimately, in Primo de Rivera’s Spain, teachers’ ideological affiliations were more important than their pedagogical skills.

It is worth mentioning the case of the provinces of Valencia, where the inspectors also found linguistic coexistence, albeit to a lesser extent. The teaching of Valencian fell under what Juan Patiño, an inspector from Valencia, described as “disruptive teachings” that were “against the unity of the fatherland, the institutions and the language” (Patiño, 1924, p. 11). In the province of Alicante, the inspector Gregorio Rodríguez notes that it is difficult for teachers to confront this situation, since “the Valencian vocabulary that the child speaks at home, in the street, in all parts, abusively prevails, so that the educator in these places is forced to translate this lexicon into Spanish”, a situation that “the delegation and the Inspectorate [...] have given instructions to put an end to so that teachers always express themselves in Spanish in their schools” (Rodríguez, 1924a, p. 7). In this case, Rodríguez even notes a proposal for legal sanctions for the families of students who do not use Spanish (Rodríguez, 1924b).

Redefining educational inspection: the appearance of governmental delegates

After the political change that occurred with the beginning of Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, the professional identity of inspectors took a step

backwards compared to the pedagogical progress that had been made in the first decades of the 20th century, with more interest in the control function than in teaching. A dissonance between the pedagogical culture of the time and the educational policy of the context is obvious.

Looking at the attributions in the theoretical and normative discourses on educational inspection before the dictatorship, it was supposed to have a threefold function: "to convey to the elementary schools the state action and pedagogical guidance of the Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts; it must also report on the state of the educational system and propose suitable reforms for its regulation" (R.D. November 18, 1907, p. 723). In addition, the competence to lead the teaching profession was institutionally recognized, to organize conferences or pedagogical talks and to provide exemplary teaching, leading to a pedagogical model and away from an interventionist function that had prevailed in the 19th century and was taken up again with Primo de Rivera.

A tension between the professional identity of the inspectors and the ministerial representatives is evident throughout the analysis. There was a conflict of function and inspectors felt undermined when these representatives issued different reports on the evaluation of the school situation and the ideological control of education. An example of this suppression can be found in areas such as La Coruña, where the delegates even proposed the abolition of the school inspectorate due to the high illiteracy rate in the region: "This delegation believes that the inspectorate should be abolished and a procedure sought that would ensure not only the teaching but also the attendance of the pupils in a definitive and safe manner" (Castrobens, 1924, p. 1). In the province of Cuenca, the individual reports of the political subalterns focus more on the lack of patriotic and religious ideology in the schools, arguing that "patriotic and religious ideas should be engraved in the hearts of the children instead of being explained to them" (Sáez, 1924, p. 15). We should also note that some governmental delegates supplanted the inspectors' role, as shown by the fact that they promoted these competencies themselves, organising pedagogical training courses like the one put on in the judicial district of Tineo intended for all of the teachers of that area.

One of the causes of the inspectors' lack of professional identity is the lack of competences and responsibilities. Many experts declared the Inspectorate to be a completely useless body (Novás, 1924; Martínez, 1925). The lack of powers to reward or punish teachers was something

that a large majority of this sector wanted to change, as their reports had no practical consequences. An inspector from Albacete, Ángel Martínez, went even further and proposed issuing a decree that would give inspectors more powers in awarding distinctions, economic rewards and reprimands. He even argued for the expulsion of unreliable teachers and suggested that the Inspectorate should take over the management of practical schools (Martínez, 1925). Similarly, an inspector from Cantabria, Daniel Ortiz, made proposals for the training of primary school teachers and called for more powers for inspectors to reprimand, punish or retire teachers who failed to produce results (Ortiz, 1924).

In other instances, it is observed that the professional identity of the inspection sought to distance itself from this supervisory role, aiming in its reports to highlight a more professional function by proposing potential organizational solutions to the issues faced by teachers. One of the major concerns mentioned in the reports was the ongoing professional development of teachers through the organization of training courses by the inspection during school vacations in provincial capitals, financed by the State, covering both teachers' accommodation and materials (Gabaldón, 1924). In this regard, the inspector of Ciudad Real, Mauricio Morales, promoted pedagogical discussions with teachers on practical lessons in methodology "of a familiar and friendly nature to guide and motivate them to undertake professional work that meets the high objectives of the school and the various demands of Spanish educational activity" (Morales, 1924, p. 14). At the same time, the inspector of Albacete, Salvador Artiga, advocated for this pedagogical role of the inspection:

He understands that an inspector must be something of an evangelist, with lofty vision and serene persistence, and that on the journey from school to school it is important to exemplify this new pedagogy — which embraces sensitivity— that wants teachers to be treated with dignity, both for their competence and for their efforts. Inspection is a difficult task that cannot be fully realized given the limited powers of inspectors and the sometimes systematic resistance that the environment of ignorance, the poverty of communities and — why not say it— - neglect by many primary school teachers who are not fully dedicated to their exalted position. (Artiga, 1924, pp. 3-4)

In contrast to the vast majority of reports, a small number of inspectors expressed some affinity with the delegates, although we do not know to what extent they were conditioned by the political situation, since

the reports were produced in an atmosphere of control that required their approval. This can be seen in the case of the inspector from Cádiz Filomeno Blázquez, who went so far as to argue that inspectors needed to be supervised by an authority if they were to perform their duties well: "I have said it a thousand times and I will repeat it now: as long as the inspectors have no one to supervise us, the nation's schools will become more and more decadent" (Blázquez, 1924).

Conclusions

The inspection reports drawn up at the beginning of Primo de Rivera's period in power have helped to paint a fundamentally practical picture of education in Spain in the 1920s. The different situations described by the educational inspectors — and in some cases by the government delegates — make it possible to observe certain experiences and behaviors which, due to their repetition and generalizability, offer a perspective on teaching during this period.

The desire to improve the literacy of the Spanish population was one of the fundamental principles of the dictatorship's education policy and required an end to the high rates of absenteeism in schools. This fact underlines the challenges that teachers faced in fulfilling their task, as they had to contend with families and their lack of appreciation for education. In this way, significant differences could be identified between the different regions of Spain and their agricultural traditions, which made the school calendar an odyssey for teachers. Low school attendance was a direct consequence of child labor, a situation that was amply demonstrated by the inspectors in their reports, which proposed financial penalties for families.

Thank you to this primary source, it was also possible to establish that the ideological control introduced by the Military Directorate in 1925 was already visible in the early years of the dictatorship. The Primary School Inspectorate had the task of detailing situations or professional behavior that could undermine the concept of national unity established by the regime, especially in the case of Catalonia and the Basque Country. The use of languages such as Catalan, Basque and Valencian was seen as undermining the social order of the state. To alleviate this situation, in addition to punishing renegade professionals, initiatives were launched that attempted to create links between regions or promote regional culture, even if this meant using pedagogically less qualified teachers.

This ideological control took shape with the appointment of government delegates and other measures. Their appearance entailed, on the one hand, a rejection of hierarchy and the subordination of inspection to this military figure, which led to strong tensions in some areas, and, on the other hand, a redefinition of professional competencies based on the orientation and guidance of teachers, to the detriment of sanctioning or punitive measures.

The schools portrayed from the Spain of this period thus reflect the many differences between the rural and urban environments, between the peculiarities of each region, which, despite the authoritarian yoke of the directorate, had cracks that were evident in pedagogical practice. Cracks that made it possible to take a look at how parts of the state were unwilling to give up their identity. Teachers and inspectors who were selflessly dedicated to their profession, despite practicing it in difficult circumstances, with a high level of international training that allowed them to bring the most innovative methods to the most isolated schools and to question these methods. All these differences and contrasts are in themselves new lines of study that we want to continue using the same sources.

We cannot conclude without pointing out some of the limitations we have encountered in this study. Inspection reports, like other similar sources that have been used recently, have proved to be an underutilized tool that, despite its subjective nature, offers great potential for the analysis of educational practice. On the one hand, they draw a profile of concrete and specific educational situations, albeit over time, as the visits took place regularly. On the other hand, they were written in an atmosphere of political control, which meant that they had to be approved by government representatives. Nonetheless, subjectivity as such is an element common to numerous primary and truly human sources in the study of educational history, and we therefore believe that these accounts are a suitable subject for historical study.

In short, the study of the empirical culture of the school from the inspection of primary education reveals numerous themes that have yet to be investigated at this stage. The sources analyzed reveal new lines of research concerning women's education, rural schools, adult education and the situation of educational buildings and spaces. These lines of research can help to shed light on the history of education in this dictatorial period from a source that has not yet been researched.

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Contact address: Teresa Rabazas Romero. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Facultad de Educación - Centro de Formación del Profesorado, Departamento de Estudios Educativos. E-mail: rabarom@ucm.es

Appendix

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