

Developing a Competency-Based Approach to Enhance Initial Teacher Selection in Spain

Desarrollo de un enfoque basado en competencias para mejorar la selección inicial del profesorado en España

Resumen

En esta revisión conceptual, exploramos los procesos de selección de los candidatos a los programas de formación docente en España. Nuestro análisis tiene como objetivo descubrir oportunidades para mejorar el sistema educativo a través de la implementación de procedimientos de selección más rigurosos. Comenzando con un diagnóstico exhaustivo del estado actual de los procesos de selección en España, identificamos las brechas existentes y proponemos soluciones potenciales para mejorar estas deficiencias. Abogamos por la adopción de un enfoque basado en competencias, fundamentado en la teoría e investigación reciente, que abarque la evaluación de atributos no académicos. Este cambio estratégico tiene el potencial de elevar significativamente la calidad y el estatus profesional de la fuerza laboral docente. Los resultados no solo contribuyen a una comprensión matizada de las estrategias efectivas de evaluación y selección de los candidatos, sino que también amplían su relevancia a distintos contextos educativos a nivel mundial.

Palabras clave

Selección del profesorado, candidatos a docentes, formación inicial, métodos de selección

Abstract

In this conceptual review, we explore the selection processes for teacher education candidates in Spain. Our analysis aims to uncover opportunities for enhancing the educational system through the implementation of more rigorous selection procedures. Commencing with a comprehensive diagnosis of the current state of selection processes in Spain, our examination involves identifying existing gaps and proposing potential solutions to rectify these deficiencies. We advocate for the adoption of a competency-based approach, rooted in theory and research, which encompasses the evaluation of non-academic attributes. This strategic shift has the potential to significantly elevate the quality and professional standing of the Spanish teaching workforce. The findings not only contribute to a nuanced understanding of effective candidate assessment and selection strategies but also extend their relevance to educational contexts worldwide.

Keywords

Teacher selection, teacher candidates, teacher education, selection methods

1. Introduction

Education systems worldwide are consistently challenged with the task of attracting and selecting the best possible candidates to enter teacher preparation programs. The process of identifying high quality candidates is a historical problem: over 100 years ago, the educational psychologist F.B. Knight criticized teacher selection processes of the day, noting that ‘The kind of information usually asked of a candidate does not correlate... with successful (teaching) performance’ (1922, p. 216). Most current teacher candidate selection systems focus on assessing academic competencies (e.g., subject knowledge, numeracy and literacy skills) that are relatively easily derived from academic records and well-established measures. However, evaluating non-academic attributes—motivation and other personal characteristics—that are important predictors of teaching success is much more difficult, and many education systems around the world have struggled to develop reliable and valid methods to assess these important ‘people skills’ that are closely related to teacher success. Notably, recent developments in fields outside of education, spanning medicine, nursing, business, and civil service, have made inroads in appraising non-academic attributes in job candidates. We suggest that education can successfully build on these cross-disciplinary developments to improve the selection of prospective teachers.

In this conceptual review, we explore the selection of teacher education candidates in one country, Spain, home to one of the largest national education systems in Europe. Our exploration encompasses an in-depth analysis of the current teacher candidate selection process, the identification of existing gaps, and the proposal of potential solutions to address these shortcomings. While our primary focus is on the Spanish context, the insights garnered possess broad applicability to diverse educational settings grappling with fundamental questions such as, *How can we identify the best possible candidates to enter our teacher education programs? What can we do differently to ensure that the methods we use for selection reflect the latest research? How can we implement these changes?* Recognizing the pivotal role teachers play in the overall success of education systems, we acknowledge the complexity and multifaceted nature of the teacher candidate selection predicament.

This review analyses the teacher selection process in Spain and argues that a theory- and research-informed competency-based approach could strengthen the education system. Drawing lessons from the analysis of the teacher selection process in Spain, our aim is to contribute to a nuanced understanding of effective candidate assessment and selection strategies with broader implications for educational contexts worldwide.

2. The importance of teachers and teacher selection

Teachers are pivotal in shaping individual lives and influencing a nation's intellectual and economic well-being. It is clear that the role of teachers extends far beyond the classroom; they leave an indelible mark on students, influencing not only their immediate learning but also their long-term development. Teachers are not just educators, but also mentors and role models, providing behavioural examples that resonate with their students' future roles as citizens. They play a pivotal role in developing life-necessary qualities and skills, enhancing or impeding both their current opportunities and their life-long motivation for learning.

Influencing roughly 30% of the variance in student outcomes—and up to 60% for those with additional educational needs—teachers can significantly level the playing field for students from less privileged backgrounds (Maulana et al., 2023). The distinction between the impact of proficient and underperforming teachers is stark, with some research indicating a variance of up to one academic year's learning between highly effective and less effective teachers over a single school year (Hanushek et al., 2019; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012). This influence is not fleeting; it accumulates over a lifetime, affecting students' educational and social prospects in profound ways (Bardach et al., 2020; Chetty et al., 2014; Hattie & Zierer, 2019; Klassen & Kim, 2021).

The calibre of educators, therefore, must be held to the highest standard, encompassing not only pedagogical skills but also the intrinsic qualities that foster a transformative educational experience. Identifying the most effective teachers implies several interventions throughout the career span, beginning with recognising and selecting prospective candidates who exhibit a strong foundation of desirable attributes for the teaching profession.

Researchers and policy-makers emphatically state that the 'long-term success of an education system depends on the "raw materials" that enter the system because there are significant individual differences in the developmental trajectory of new teachers' (Atteberry et al., 2015, p. 3). These differences are largely conditioned by the entry qualities of the candidates, particularly considering that some attributes are more influential in future performance and that their capacity for change varies over time. While academic attributes such as cognitive or verbal skills are modestly predictive of teaching prowess (Bardach & Klassen, 2020), traits like motivation and self-efficacy tend to have greater predictive power (Bardach et al., 2020). The selection process, therefore, is crucial, aiming to recruit candidates with optimal characteristics for a teaching career while filtering out those whose personal characteristics are less aligned with the profession's rigorous demands. Examining and improving selection processes promises to cultivate a robust and capable teaching workforce, vital for the future of education.

Finally, high-quality selection processes are advantageous even when selection itself is not the primary goal (e.g. when the 'selection ratio' of applicants to available places is low). These procedures have the potential to optimize costs and resources by the implementation of standardised processes; they enhance the social image and prestige of the profession by conveying that not just anyone can become a teacher; and most importantly, they can provide valuable insights into the entry profile of candidates—especially about the non-cognitive or non-academic attributes—which can guide the design of policies aimed at improving initial training, professional development, and even recruitment strategies.

3. Teacher selection in Spain

In Spain, the primary mechanism for selecting candidates for teacher training programmes is the national university entrance examination, known as EvAU (Evaluación de Acceso a la Universidad in Spanish). This assessment evaluates candidates' academic knowledge acquired during secondary education. While a section of the EvAU is tailored to the candidate's chosen field, it maintains a universal character applicable across all disciplines. Achieving a pass in the EvAU, typically requiring a score of at least 5 out of 10, serves as the initial criterion for enrolment in any teacher training programme, with available spots subsequently assigned based on applicant scores.

Exceptions to this practice exist, notably in Catalonia since 2016, where an additional competency exam has been mandated for those aspiring to enter teacher training programmes. This specific examination assesses communicative and critical reasoning skills, as well as logical-mathematical abilities—collectively referred to as CCiRC and CLOM. The primary aim of this assessment is to evaluate the acquisition of these crucial competencies through problem-solving exercises, acting as a barometer of candidates' preparedness for teacher training programmes. Success in this examination is mandatory for admission, regardless of the candidates' scores in the EvAU (Martínez et al., 2015).

Following Catalonia's lead, the Balearic Islands introduced a specialized entrance exam for teacher training programmes in 2020. This exam also evaluates CCiRC and CLOM skills and incorporates an oral communication segment. After successfully passing these cognitive assessments, candidates are required to complete a video presentation and participate in a group interview. These subsequent phases aim to assess non-academic attributes, such as interpersonal skills, career motivation, prior experiences, personal beliefs, psychosocial adaptability, and orientation towards professional development. In the video presentation, applicants are encouraged to reflect on questions like Who am I? What are my interests and hobbies? Why do I wish to become a teacher? and What qualities do I bring to the future educator role? The group interview obliges candidates

to reach a consensus on a relevant educational issue, fostering dialogue, reasoning, and the expression of their viewpoints in a collaborative environment (Oliver-Trobat et al., 2021). Successful completion of all these stages is a prerequisite for securing a place in the programme.

Furthermore, some private institutions in Spain have implemented even more stringent selection criteria for prospective teacher candidates. These institutions not only consider academic transcripts but also mandate a comprehensive assessment encompassing logical, spatial, and verbal reasoning skills. They conduct personal interviews to evaluate a candidate's suitability, taking into account their experiences, knowledge, technical and professional competencies, motivation, and attitudes, alongside other personal qualities aligned with the ethos of the teaching profession. Additionally, applicants are required to produce a personal presentation document articulating their motivation and enthusiasm for their chosen area of study and to submit a letter of recommendation from a former teacher or academic advisor. A specialized English language proficiency test is also a requirement (Valero, 2023). While these comprehensive criteria aim to ensure that only the most suitable candidates are selected for the teaching profession, there is limited information available on the fairness, reliability, and validity of these additional measures. For any selection process to be effective, it must address issues of bias and fairness, demonstrating that the measures used accurately assess the desired attributes targeted during the selection process.

4. What's missing in the Spanish selection process?

With the exception of the previously mentioned cases, it is challenging to assert that the Spanish education system employs selection processes that reflect a rigorous application of current research in teacher training programmes. Instead, admission procedures are primarily determined by general university access criteria and the supply-demand dynamics for each programme. Consequently, the criteria for entry into teacher training fail to specifically address the unique requirements of the teaching profession. This broad approach leads to a deficiency in the selection process at the entry point of teacher education, contributing to various professional issues. It is imperative to improve these processes, and the following sections will elaborate on the associated problems, their connections to the current state of selection in Spain, and identify gaps within the system.

4.1. Implications of lacking a selection process: two main issues to address

The initial concern revolves around the insufficient academic and motivational profiles of individuals applying for teacher training programmes in Spain. Entry scores are consistently low, often ranging from 6 to 8 out of 14 points, particularly when compared to other fields such as Medicine (12-13 out of 14) or Architecture (10-11 out of 14)

(Ministry of Universities [MU], 2023). Additionally, a dearth of STEM background among candidates results in lower achievements in disciplines such as Language, Literature, and History (where they perform better in the entry examination), coupled with significant deficiencies in Mathematics and Science (Asensio et al., 2022), adversely affecting their performance during training (Fernández-Mellizo & Constante-Amores, 2020; Jiménez et al., 2021).

The proportion of students opting for teacher training programmes remains modest. The preference score for these programmes was 162.3 for the 2022/23 academic year, surpassing Engineering (111.2) and Business (140) but lagging significantly behind more sought-after fields like Health Sciences and Social Services (501.5). The suitability rate of 65.3% indicates that many admitted students did not consider teacher training as their primary choice (MU, 2023), despite its high demand, ranking as the fifth most sought-after field (MU, 2023). This suggests that motivations for pursuing a teaching career may not always align with the ideal aspirations for the profession (Ministry of Education and Vocational Training [MEFP], 2022).

Moreover, a disparity exists between the number of teacher training graduates and the available teaching positions. The provision of places in teacher training programmes is often adjusted to meet enrolment interest, provided minimum training conditions are met (MU, 2023). This has resulted in high acceptance rates and a surplus of qualified teachers, potentially contributing to poor employment prospects and the devaluation of the teaching profession (Han et al., Guerriero, 2017). The ease of programme entry and completion may perpetuate the perception that teaching is accessible to all, regardless of suitability (Valero, 2023). Therefore, a rebalancing of supply and demand is advisable, along with increased academic stringency in teacher training.

These challenges underscore the necessity for more rigorous selection processes, a topic that will be explored in the subsequent section detailing gaps in the Spanish teacher selection process.

4.2. Identifying gaps

Recent discussions bring to light three significant drawbacks in Spain's current approach to selecting candidates for initial teacher training. Firstly, there is a call for a shift from minimal to maximal entry criteria, advocating for tailored requirements specific to teaching roles. This entails recognizing that teacher training institutions hold the responsibility to ensure only the most suitable candidates gain entry, rather than those barely meeting the minimum standards. While concerns about providing equitable access to education are valid (MEFP, 2022), the success of unique entry standards in other specialized fields, such as fine arts or sports, supports the feasibility and benefits of implementing similar standards for teaching. Experiences in Catalonia and the

Balearic Islands suggest that changes in the selection process are both achievable and advantageous.

The second shortfall concerns the lack of research-based validation for current selection methods, which often rely on traditional practices uninformed by contemporary international research. Relying on generic university entrance examination scores as the primary criterion diverges from international trends and, importantly, from the core objective of selection procedures: to identify those with the highest potential for effective teaching. Spain should align with international standards by establishing rigorous selection processes that assess a range of cognitive and non-cognitive attributes pertinent to future teaching practice. This can be achieved by employing validated tools such as Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs) or Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs) (e.g., Klassen & Kim, 2021).

The third issue is the absence of an initial competency-based framework for selection procedures. Although MEFP recognizes the importance of competency assessments throughout professional development stages, there are no explicit competencies defined for the initial selection phase. With the exception of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, the criteria for entering teacher training programs do not align with the requisite skills and knowledge vital for teacher education and the teaching profession. This misalignment is evident when the focus is restricted to assessing basic knowledge and skills, rather than implementing a more holistic competency-based evaluation.

In summary, these identified gaps underscore the need for Spain to undergo a paradigm shift, establishing rigorous selection processes aligned with international evidence and underpinned by a robust competency-based framework that evaluates candidates across academic and professional domains.

5. How to strengthen the Spanish selection process?

After identifying the principal issues and gaps in the Spanish selection process, we suggest potential solutions and measures that could enhance the robustness of this process. We propose that adopting a competency-based approach, informed by theory and research and encompassing the assessment of non-academic attributes, could significantly strengthen the education system.

5.1. A competency-based approach

The pivotal role of teachers in shaping positive student outcomes prompts an important question: Does the quality of the selection process of individuals for teacher training significantly influence how people perform in the classroom? If yes, what are the competencies and attributes that we should search for in a screening or selection process? The evaluation of prospective teachers' competencies, spanning both academic

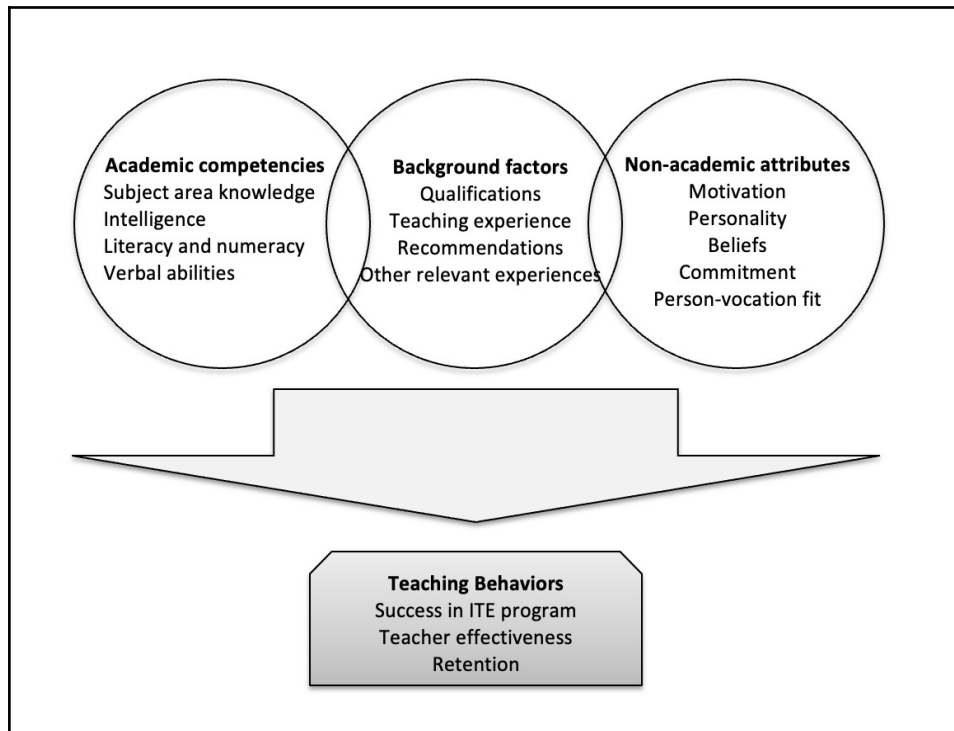
and non-academic realms such as knowledge, skills, abilities, and values, poses an enduring challenge in education. To implement a theory- and research-driven selection system, there has to be consideration of which competencies and attributes to target, and there has to be a method of how to assess the agreed-upon competencies and attributes.

An education system is faced with a range of challenges in this assessment process. First, there are a very wide range of personal characteristics (e.g., academic competencies and non-academic attributes) and contextual factors to consider, making the determination of (a) the most crucial competencies and attributes and (b) reliable evaluation methods difficult. Second, making decisions regarding the selection of prospective teachers at the very beginning of their careers is inherently challenging, steeped in a substantial degree of uncertainty about making predictions of future teaching success even before applicants step into the classroom.

Teacher selection presents as a complex and multilayered problem, requiring the careful navigation of a wide range of personal and contextual variables. However, anchoring the selection process in robust evidence-supported competencies and attributes that are supported by theory and research enhances the likelihood of identifying the best possible teaching candidates, resulting in an effective teaching workforce. We suggest a 'competency-based approach' that has the potential to support the selection of the most suitable candidates from a pool of applicants.

In Figure 1, we graphically portray a competency-based framework for teacher selection that takes into account three factors: academic competencies, background factors, and non-academic attributes. Included in the academic competencies and background factors domains are the kinds of factors traditionally assessed in education systems: academic achievement as an indicator of subject knowledge, intelligence, literacy and numeracy skills, and verbal abilities, and perhaps a review of background factors that might include past experiences and recommendations from knowledgeable referees. However, the factor of non-academic attributes is much more difficult to assess, and might include motivation, personality, beliefs, occupational commitment, and the candidate's 'fit' with the teaching profession. Research suggests that this latter category is at least as important as academic competencies and background, but much less frequently assessed in selection processes (Klassen & Kim, 2021).

Figure 1. How competencies, attributes, and background factors influence teaching behaviours



The assessment of academic competencies and background factors is relatively straightforward, as records of academic achievements, such as transcripts and employment records, are readily available. If additional data is needed, standardized tests measuring subject knowledge and literacy/numeracy are available. However, the evaluation of non-academic attributes—motivation, personality, beliefs, and commitment to the profession poses a greater challenge during the screening or selection process compared to assessing academic skills.

While teacher selection methods may reference teaching standards as behavioural benchmarks indicative of various competencies and values (e.g., Casey & Childs, 2007), the chosen methods may not consistently and reliably assess these competencies. In any domain, selection methods must undergo regular evaluation for their reliability (consistency over time), validity (demonstrated predictive utility), and fairness toward all applicants, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, or socioeconomic status.

An evidence-supported, competency-based approach to teacher selection involves first identifying a framework of desired competencies based on theory and research, followed by the development of reliable, valid, and unbiased methods to assess these competencies.

5.2. How non-academic attributes contribute to teacher effectiveness

In reflecting on their school experiences, individuals often recall their teachers' personal attributes more vividly than their specific teaching practices (Pajares & Urdan, 2008). These attributes significantly influence students' engagement and interact with how

teachers teach in complex ways. Selecting the best possible teacher candidates involves aiming to identify individuals possessing the right mix of personal attributes and teaching knowledge. However, there are challenges involved when selecting questions arise: Can these attributes change, and is it crucial for applicants to exhibit them during selection, or can they be cultivated over time?

Teacher effectiveness involves a dynamic interplay of personal attributes and contextual factors. Interactionist approaches propose that traits and attributes are manifested based on the interplay between individuals and their specific situations. While individual attributes underlying teacher effectiveness may evolve, their patterns of expression remain consistent within individuals. Identifying and evaluating these attributes, particularly during entry into the teaching profession, is crucial due to the potential benefits of recognizing individual variations in teacher effectiveness (Atteberry et al., 2015).

Recent research has explored how the factors related to teacher effectiveness—emphasizing background factors, academic abilities, and non-academic attributes—predict teaching effectiveness. Academic abilities, often considered crucial at the selection stage, are relatively easily measured through proxies like college entrance scores. However, the ‘bright person hypothesis’, asserting that effective teachers possess high levels of intellectual capacity, is challenged by findings suggesting that general cognitive ability is unrelated to student achievement and enjoyment (Kunter et al., 2013). Our recent research indicates that non-academic attributes—motivation, personality, and person-environment fit—may offer more promising insights into teacher selection.

Non-academic attributes present challenges in assessment during teacher selection. While attributes like self-efficacy are robustly linked to effectiveness, evaluating them in high-stakes situations can be problematic. Applicants may respond in socially desirable ways, potentially skewing results. Research has expanded to explore various non-cognitive attributes, including motivation (especially self-efficacy), personality, and emotions. However, the challenge lies in reliably and fairly assessing these attributes during selection processes.

In summary, teacher effectiveness is a complex interplay of academic and non-academic factors, and their interaction with background factors and experience. These personal competencies and contextual factors all play roles in shaping effective teaching. The dynamics of these factors vary, with non-academic attributes holding promise for future research and development in teacher selection processes.


5.3. Assessing non-academic attributes in teacher selection

Selecting teachers involves predicting their performance in both short-term training and long-term professional practice. A robust and defensible selection process becomes crucial when the number of applicants exceeds available positions, necessitating the screening of unsuitable candidates and identifying strengths and weaknesses for future development. While competency-based selection methods have been extensively researched in various fields, they have not been widely applied in teacher selection. Traditional methods like academic records, personal statements, group interviews, reference letters, and structured interviews often lack predictive power and may exhibit harmful biases. In contrast, two competency-based methods, situational judgment tests (SJTs) and multiple mini-interviews (MMIs), have recently been adapted and tested for use in education settings.

5.3.1. Situational judgment tests and MMIs

Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs) have gained popularity in the last two decades due to their high predictive validity compared to other selection tools. They are based on desired competencies and typically present a challenging workplace scenario with response options, delivered in text-only or video + text formats. See Figure 2 for an example of a computer-administered SJT. Originally developed in World War II, SJTs were initially used to assess officer candidates and were later adopted in medical training, civil service, and large corporations. The underlying theory, implicit trait policy, explores individuals' beliefs about expressing personality traits in specific situations. SJTs aim to capture how competencies like empathy, adaptability, and commitment manifest in diverse contexts.

Figure 2. Example of a computer-administered situational judgment test used in the UK.



You are teaching a 9th-grade science lesson when you notice one of your students, Jake, using his mobile phone. Your school has a 'no phone in class' policy, and you have already warned Jake about using it in your classroom. Jake seems to have forgotten your warning, and is now openly using the phone while you are teaching.

How appropriate are the following responses?

	Inappropriate	Somewhat inappropriate	Somewhat appropriate	Appropriate
Go to get assistance from a senior member of staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ignore that Mark is using his phone and continue with the lesson	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ask Mark to put the phone away again, but more sternly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Give school sanctions for having a mobile phone in class and for refusing the teacher's instruction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Research indicates that SJTs, administered at the start of training programs, robustly predict job performance and exhibit lower susceptibility to group biases than other methods. Developing SJTs for teacher selection offers advantages such as clear links to competencies, efficiency in implementation, especially for screening numerous applicants, and effectiveness, as SJTs are among the most predictive selection tools. Despite these benefits, SJTs are relatively new in teacher education, possibly due to historical reluctance to move away from less effective but more intuitive selection approaches.

Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs) for selecting candidates into teacher education or the teaching profession have, until recently, not been implemented in education systems. However, there has been a notable increase in their usage in recent years, in particular through the research conducted in the UK through the Teacher Selection Project. According to Klassen and Kim (e.g., 2021), teacher education programs rarely implement selection methods with a published evidence base, such as SJTs, Multiple Mini-Interviews (MMIs), or other evidence-based approaches. Research on the use of SJTs for teacher selection is gradually emerging, with growing evidence of their effectiveness in identifying high-quality candidates. In the UK, research on teacher selection tools revealed that SJTs administered to primary and secondary teaching applicants accurately predicted performance in subsequent stages of selection (Klassen et al., 2020) and up to six months into teacher training (e.g., Klassen & Rushby, 2019).

Another approach to measure the non-academic attributes of prospective teachers is multiple mini-interviews, or MMIs, particularly in use in Finland (Metsäpelto et al., 2022), a country that typically ranks highly in international education system comparisons. Traditional interviews, characterized by a low-to-medium structured format with significant interviewer flexibility, are widely employed for selecting candidates into teacher training in certain contexts (Davies et al., 2016). However, these interviews are generally labour-intensive and have proven to be poor predictors of subsequent performance (Dana et al., 2023). A more recent advancement in recruitment research is the emergence of MMIs, a method extensively utilized in medical education (e.g., Eva et al., 2018) and more recently adopted for teacher education selection (Metsäpelto et al., 2022). MMIs designed for teacher education selection are built on core competencies and have demonstrated superior reliability, validity, and fairness compared to traditional interview methods.

MMIs were originally conceived and developed by Eva and colleagues (2004) with the aim of enhancing the fairness of the interview process for medical school applicants. Distinguished from traditional interviews, MMIs employ independent, highly-structured stations with corresponding scoring protocols. MMIs inherently feature multiple stations, typically ranging from 3 to 10, each targeting specific non-academic

competencies. Notably, these stations operate independently, with interviewers unaware of candidates' profiles or performance in other stations. The content and scoring protocols of each station are meticulously structured, employing standardized scoring schemes. MMIs are typically collaboratively developed by experts and a diverse group of program staff who identify key target competencies, subsequently crafting and testing stations designed to assess these competencies (see Table 1 for a description of stations and attributes in a 3-station MMI used for selecting candidates for teacher education in the UK).

Table 1. Attributes assessed at each of three stations in a teacher selection MMI

Station	Activity	Description
Station 1. Values and beliefs	<i>Teacher profiles:</i> picture profile stimulus and discussion	The task requires candidates to show an understanding of a range of approaches to teaching, an appreciation of the value of diversity in teaching, and a commitment to exploring and establishing their own teacher identity.
Station 2. Diversity and social justice	<i>School play:</i> Discussion with picture and text stimuli	The task assesses candidates' understanding of issues related to social justice, equality and inclusion in day-to-day teaching.
Station 3. Professionalism	<i>Always, sometimes, never:</i> Card-sorting activity	The task evaluates candidates' awareness and understanding of a range of teacher professional values and behaviours.
Communication	Assessed at all three stations	Defined as the ability to articulate well-reasoned arguments and to respond effectively to new information.

In this case, the attributes chosen for each station developed following a multi-step process of: (a) identifying key attributes to assess, (b) considering the logistics of the MMIs (e.g., how many applicants, how many assessors, etc.), (c) station writing and review, developing a scoring guide, and pilot-testing with existing students. For a further look at the development of MMIs (and SJTs), see Klassen and Kim (2021). Overall, these two examples of research-based teacher selection processes—SJTs and MMIs—provide some examples of how to revise traditional selection methods that lack a strong evidence base.

6. Discussion

This article underscores the vital importance of implementing rigorous selection processes to identify the most qualified candidates for teacher education. Our examination delves into the current state of teacher candidate selection in Spain, addressing issues stemming from a lack of rigour in entry requirements and pinpointing existing gaps. In this section, we specifically focus on outlining strategies for implementing a research- and theory-informed selection process within the Spanish educational context. By drawing on insights from sections 6 and 7 and empirical evidence from Catalonia and the Balearic Islands, our aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced landscape surrounding teacher selection.

An effective enhancement of teacher selection processes in Spain requires the incorporation of both a competency-based approach and the evaluation of non-cognitive attributes in candidates. Initially, this approach involves considering scores from the university entrance exam (EvAU), with a preference for candidates exhibiting superior academic performance. Subsequently, we advocate for a bespoke examination gauging key competencies relevant to teaching practice, such as linguistic, mathematical, or critical reasoning skills. This comprehensive method also emphasizes the imperative to assess a diverse range of non-cognitive attributes—encompassing applicants' motivation for pursuing a teaching career, beliefs about teaching and learning, and social skills—utilizing MMIs and SJTs. This holistic approach aims to address the identified issues of deficient academic and motivational profiles among candidates, thereby enhancing the overall suitability of applicants for the teaching profession.

MEFP is actively engaged in formulating a competency framework for teaching practice, intended to guide various teacher policies (see MEFP, 2022). The anticipation is that this framework will align with international evidence regarding attributes that significantly impact teaching effectiveness, a premise demonstrated by the Balearic Islands in refining their selection processes (Oliver-Trobat et al., 2021). Concurrently, educational authorities could benefit from research such as Alonso-Sainz's (2019), which identifies desirable entry characteristics for Spanish teaching programs according to teacher training institutions. These characteristics span a broad spectrum, encompassing cognitive skills, social and emotional competencies, and a commitment to innovation and societal improvement. As previously suggested, evaluating these characteristics could inform recruitment and selection strategies, guide the development of curricula aimed at nurturing these qualities during initial teacher training, and collectively contribute to elevating the professional standing of teachers in society. Regarding the design of suitable selection instruments, Spain could leverage the MMI adapted to the Spanish context, developed in the Balearic Islands and subjected to rigorous validation. This instrument is ideal for evaluating applicants' interpersonal skills, career motivation, personal beliefs, psychosocial adaptability, and communication, among other attributes. As a complement, an SJT could provide a more

reliable, valid, and equitable assessment of candidates' dispositions toward teaching compared to MMIs, offering a more comprehensive view of their initial profile (Valero, 2023). The design of this measure would necessarily consider recommendations from relevant works (e.g., Nadmilail et al., 2023; Nadmilail, Mohd Matore, and Maat, 2022), international evidence on dispositional factors with the highest predictive capacity (Kim et al., 2019), and, of course, the Spanish competency framework.

This model, if implemented nationwide, aligns seamlessly with existing university legislation, affording educational institutions the flexibility to introduce additional admission criteria to EvAU, provided adherence to the principles of equitable access to education (Official State Gazette [BOE], 2023). Under this regulatory provision, the selection process could incorporate a variety of evaluations designed to measure both academic and non-academic attributes, mirroring the successful model observed in the Balearic Islands.

The urgency for a strategic overhaul in teacher selection processes is pressing, supported by compelling evidence suggesting that such a recalibration could significantly enhance the education system. Research from Catalonia and the Balearic Islands indicates the positive impact of stringent selection criteria, evident through higher admission scores and increased student motivation (Catalonia Government, 2022; University of Balearic Islands [UIB], 2022). These regions have witnessed a surge in the number of applicants choosing teaching as their primary career, accompanied by decreased dropout rates and program changes. Additionally, innovative approaches such as video presentations and group interviews in the Balearic Islands have led to favourable shifts in the non-cognitive attributes of program entrants (UIB, 2022).

Supplementing these findings, a stricter selection process has resulted in reduced program capacity, increasing competitiveness for available slots. This trend serves a dual purpose: aligning the supply of new teachers with the actual demand in the job market and raising the entry bar to ensure that only the most qualified individuals are admitted (Catalonia Government, 2022; MU, 2023).

Stringent selection criteria could reshape public perception, communicating the message that teaching is a specialised and demanding profession not suitable for everyone. This, in turn, could inform other educational policies, fostering a cohesive strategy that encompasses initial selection, ongoing professional development, and even compensation models for educators. All of this has the potential to contribute to the much-needed paradigm shift—from a minimal to a maximal approach—in line with international evidence.

Conclusion

If Spain aims to address current challenges in its educational sector, a focus on strengthening initial selection processes is indispensable. By adopting a nuanced, holistic approach—encompassing academic competencies, non-cognitive skills, and other key attributes—the country could significantly enhance the quality and professional standing of its teaching workforce.

The findings from analysing the teacher selection process in Spain greatly contribute to a better understanding of effective candidate assessment and selection strategies. These insights have broader implications that go beyond the specific context of Spanish education. The lessons learned are applicable across various educational settings worldwide, providing valuable guidance. As we tackle the challenges of identifying the most suitable candidates for teacher education, the strategies discussed in this analysis offer a roadmap for informed enhancements in teacher selection processes on a global scale. This, in turn, supports the development of a more robust and effective approach to shaping the future of education.

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