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"Inclination Towards Innovation": Deconstructing Neoliberal Educational Discourses from a School Context

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Abstract: *Educational innovation* is a key concept for policymakers, school leaders, and families, but its conflicting aspects make it hard to define clearly. This study explores how pro-innovation narratives are created within Spanish educational policies and how these narratives are received in schools. Using principles of critical discourse analysis, we examined a corpus of ten texts from three different discursive fields with a tailored analytical approach. This paper focuses specifically on findings related to regulations and the private school involved in the study. The results reveal a strong connection between Spanish educational laws and the political environment in which they were developed. Additionally, the study identifies new, economically-driven definitions for key concepts like *education*, *quality*, and *innovation*. A major conclusion is that today's "innovative" schools align with the principles of educational neoliberalism. In this context, the concept of innovation reflects lawmakers' goals, which school leaders endorse. At the school level, administrators adopt a self-promotional discourse that often appears contradictory and propagandist.

Keywords: educational innovation; education policies; neoliberalism; private school; critical discourse analysis

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1. Introduction

With the shift towards neoliberal education [1–6], consumerism now influences teaching and learning processes, positioning innovation as a prestigious element, a desirable asset, and a goal for educational communities [7–13]. Consequently, new generations of principals, teachers, and families have pushed schools to move away from traditional methods and outdated practices. Most schools equate innovation with improving teaching and learning quality [14,15], often without awareness of how neoliberalism has redefined the concept of educational quality [16–20].

In this regard, analyzing educational innovation from a non-critical perspective—that is, without considering its true implications for teaching and its real impact on student learning—can lead to the acceptance of new educational practices that hinder rather than improve teaching and learning processes [21–24]. From a radically critical standpoint, Gramigna [25] defined neoliberal educational innovation as "an ideological construct that aims to maintain the current economic status quo through economic progress and the knowledge necessary for its proper functioning" (p. 59). Works by Morrison et al. [26], Slater [6], and Williamson [27] specifically contribute to acknowledging both the varied and hidden interests driving the transformation of educational systems and the social inequality these processes can generate.

In this context, the present case study aimed to examine the alignment between the expectations created by pro-innovation discourses and their actual impact in schools.

Following recent research [28–33], it specifically investigated how these expectations are produced and received by analyzing educational policies and the organizational documents of a private school in Seville, Spain. The main research questions were as follows:

- What concept of *innovation* is integrated into Spanish educational policies?
- How are such discourses received and experienced in a Spanish school context?

Such motivations make the present study an original and alternative contribution to the majority of research on educational innovation. Generally speaking, the existing literature tends to focus on highlighting the virtues of the current approach to educational innovation, treating the issues and challenges it creates in school practice as isolated or secondary occurrences. In contrast, the combination of a critical-discursive approach with autoethnography in this study allows for the identification and understanding of a range of intrinsic aspects of the phenomenon of educational innovation that go unnoticed in most studies. As will be shown below, this approach effectively connects innovation with educational neoliberalism in an empirical and novel way, by examining it through the internal, day-to-day reality of a school setting.

2. Innovation in the Spanish Educational System

2.1. Innovation and Educational Reforms in Spain

Reform is a key concept for understanding how innovation is officially integrated into education policy, signaling an overall transformation of the educational system. This concept represents a new institutional and political discourse that reshapes various aspects of the educational framework, affecting both surface-level and deep structural elements and impacting a wide array of stakeholders [34]. Paradoxes in these reforms often arise from their top-down nature: since educational institutions do not initiate or manage these changes, reforms may fail to address existing issues or align with institutional priorities [35]. Furthermore, while new policy documents analyze past educational goals, they often lack detail on teaching methodologies [11].

More than twenty years ago, Viñao [36] (pp. 34–36) noted that the reform culture was distant from teachers' culture, describing reformers as formalistic and detached. Likewise, today's political discourse in Spanish educational reforms has been called a new political narrative [37], a repetitive and "magical" rhetoric [14], more cosmetic than substantive [17], and a "neolanguage" used by both left- and right-wing governments (including terms like competencies, outcomes, and learning standards) [38]. Scholars worldwide echo this view, examining educational innovation both in terms of the complex discourses that shape it [39–42] and the challenges these innovation-related narratives pose for schools [43–46].

In Spain, the transition to democracy after Franco's dictatorship was a turning point, highlighting deficiencies that had isolated the country from Europe. Following the Partido Socialista Obrero Español [Spanish Socialist Workers' Party] (PSOE)'s electoral victory in 1983, efforts were directed at enhancing the quality and equity of basic education to close historical gaps with other nations. These efforts led to the enactment of the *Ley General de Ordenación del Sistema Educativo* [*General Law for the Organization of the Education System*] (LOGSE) in 1990, which extended compulsory schooling to age 16 and introduced Compulsory Secondary Education. Despite some contradictions, the LOGSE aimed to reshape curriculum and pedagogy, officially recognizing principles from the Pedagogical Renewal Movements that emerged after Franco's rule. By the late 1980s, there was also a growing focus on integrating audiovisual and ICT materials in schools, with ICT seen as a tool to improve teaching quality and open new paths for innovation [47].

2.2. Neoliberal Educational Discourses

A striking paradox, resulting from the 40-year void left by dictatorship, emerged as Spain undertook a sweeping reform with social-democratic influences in the mid-1980s—precisely when other western nations were shifting toward neoliberalism. This shift soon resonated in Spain. The last major education legislation by the Socialist government before losing power in 1996, after five consecutive terms, was the *Ley Orgánica de la Participación,*

la Evaluación y el Gobierno de los centros docentes [*Organic Law on Participation, Evaluation, and Governance of Educational Institutions*] (1995), which recognized certain management principles aligned with new public management policies.

In any case, the introduction of educational neoliberalism in Spain took on a more pronounced direction with the rise of the Partido Popular [Popular Party] (PP) in 1996 and the appointment of Esperanza Aguirre as Minister of Education. One of its leading thinkers, López Rupérez [48], stated that "quality is the satisfaction of clients' needs and expectations" (p. 43) and that "client satisfaction" is the "primary goal" (p. 57). These ideas underpinned the development of Spain's *Plan General para la Gestión de Calidad en Educación* [*General Plan for Education Quality Management*]. As the global financial crisis of 2008 hit Spain, much like in other countries at that time [49–52], cuts to public education funding accelerated the neoliberal paradigm, supporting the growth of private schooling. Cañadell [1] noted that some entities, presenting themselves as nonprofits, gained influence in this context, such as Trilema or Empieza por educar, with figures like Ana Botín of Santander Bank as board chair. Alongside the Catholic Church, these groups promoted training, publishing, and assessment initiatives.

In Andalucía, significant neoliberal milestones included the *Planes de Autoevaluación y Mejora* [*Self-assessment and Improvement Plans*] (2001), the *Ley de Educación de Andalucía* [Andalusian Education Law] (LEA) (2007), the *Programa de Calidad y Mejora de los Rendimientos Escolares* [*Quality and Improvement Programme of School Outcomes*] (2008), and the *Nuevos Reglamentos Orgánicos de los Centros Escolares* [*New Organic Regulations for Educational Institutions*] (ROC) (2010). Paradoxically, some of these policies, initially championed by conservative parties, were developed by social-democratic parties and supported by major teachers' unions [53].

2.3. The LOMCE

These national and regional education laws reflect a new approach that is more political than ideological. This shift reached its peak with the enactment of the *Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa* [*Organic Law 8/2013, of December 9, for the Improvement of the Quality of Education*] (LOMCE). The LOMCE held the highest legal authority in Spain, second only to the Spanish Constitution of 1978, and served as the foundation for numerous policies regulating educational practices in Spain. The law was ratified in December 2013 with the endorsement of then Head of State, King Juan Carlos I, and Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. At the time, the *Partido Popular* (PP), a moderate conservative and neoliberal party, had been in power with an absolute majority since late 2011, following seven years in opposition. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport was led by José Ignacio Wert, the principal advocate of the LOMCE.

As suggested by its title, the LOMCE aims to improve the "quality of education", yet it does not explicitly define "quality", even though the term appears 47 times throughout the text. Many authors have noted this ambiguity [17,19,20,53], pointing out that the perceived absence or "lack" [16] of a clear quality definition underpins the LOMCE's discourse. In this context, Article 122 bis stands out, addressing "Actions to Promote the Quality of Educational Centers". Key actions in this article include "recognition measures", "internationally recognized management models", "accountability in outcomes", "specialization", "excellence", and, explicitly, "competitive actions".

The language of the LOMCE emphasizes competitiveness, new public management, and marketing, aligning educational practices with business and commercial frameworks. This approach reinforces ideas that had been building in prior years, particularly under the influence of López Rupérez, in a context shaped by the urgent need to address the economic challenges that continued after the global financial crisis of 2008. The LOMCE stands within this ideological framework, though it faced significant resistance from much of the Spanish educational community. This resistance is understandable, given two main factors: the politically turbulent landscape, marked by a succession of governing bodies

(during the 11th and 13th terms), and the incomplete implementation of certain legislative changes (such as final assessments).

Several controversial aspects of the LOMCE, enacted in 2013 and still partly in effect during the 2022–2023 academic year, include the elevation of Catholic Religion to the same status as core subjects; the reduced importance of Spain's co-official languages; the requirement to choose a vocational path early on; the apparent autonomy granted to schools; limited engagement with societal stakeholders and parental associations; and a revalidation exam that ultimately lacked social support and was not implemented. Another point of contention in the LOMCE is its preamble, which ties the concept of "quality" to standards and external evaluations, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [53]. Ironically, international standards like those of the OECD served as a reference when advocating the importance of promoting this particular notion of quality within the Spanish educational system [1,31].

This reflected the dominance of a pedagogical approach influenced by political neo-conservatism and economic neoliberalism [3,35,54–58]. Neoliberalism reinterprets every aspect of education, emphasizing factors like human capital, managerial elements, and business-derived concepts of quality and efficiency. This philosophy has not only hindered the creation of a State Education Pact in Spain, but has also fueled further instability within the educational system [59].

The most recent of Spain's eight educational reforms to date is the *Ley Orgánica 3/2020, de 29 de diciembre, por la que se modifica la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación* [*Organic Law 3/2020, of December 29, modifying the Organic Law 2/2006, of May 3, on Education*] (LOMLOE), which took effect in early 2020. This new legislative framework was led by the Socialist Minister of Education, Isabel Celáa.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Context, Participants, and Corpus

This research employed a case study methodology focused on teaching practices in secondary education, carried out by one of the researchers. The motivation to explore this professional context was closely tied to a private school in Seville, Spain, which promoted "educational excellence" in its institutional discourse, blending traditional and innovative elements. This educational institution has a well-established reputation within Seville's educational landscape, largely due to its focus on an elite demographic and its wide range of academic disciplines, language offerings, extracurricular activities, and innovative teaching methodologies.

It is worth noting that, in the Spanish educational system, private and semi-private schools (privately run but publicly funded) are required to follow the same curriculum mandated for public schools. However, they often expand on this curriculum with additional features to set themselves apart and attract families as clients. In this way, the school chosen as the setting for this study not only allowed for a response to the research questions posed, but also provided an inside look into a school environment—and a workplace direction—that many educational institutions seem increasingly inclined to follow.

During the fieldwork, a corpus of ten texts was produced. The common feature shared by all these texts is that, in one way or another, they influenced how teaching methodology was conceived and practiced in the classroom. Those texts were categorized into three different discourse fields: the legislative framework, the School, and the Department of Social Sciences (see Table 1).

Table 1. Organization and Composition of the Research Corpus.

Discursive Field (Sub-Corpus)	Text
Regulatory framework	(1) Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December (LOMCE) (2) Royal Decree 1105/2014, of 26 December (3) Order ECD/65/2015, of 21 January (4) Decree 111/2016, of 14 June (5) Order of 14 July 2016
School	(6) Educational project (EP) (7) Regulations on Organization and Operation (ROOs) (8) Compilation of the School's methodological materials
Social Sciences Department	(9) Geography and History subject guide for first ESO (10) Annual reports of the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 academic years

3.2. Methods, Techniques, and Instruments

For the development of this case study, the compilation methods and data analysis chosen were autoethnography and critical discourse analysis (CDA). This last was crucial for several key aspects of the study, as it supports a fundamentally discursive theoretical and methodological stance, opposing the separation of discourses from practices or texts from contexts. This approach is based on assumptions such as the relative instability of meaning, the open and incomplete nature of discourse, and the concept of a subject that is socially and discursively constructed. CDA thus serves as a research strategy that allows the examining of the relationship between speaker and audience, as well as uncovering the semiotic mechanisms and meaning-making strategies used across different social contexts, including the educational setting.

Some social implications of discourse and its semiotic mechanisms include the legitimization of ideologies through the naturalization of ideas external to individuals, or the impact of various persuasive argumentative strategies. In this regard, verbal language is conceived as the primary means of interaction and reality construction for different educational agents and their specific intentions [60,61]. In this study, priority was given to remaining true to the complexity of the educational reality that was to be explored, reflecting the close and inevitable connection between discourse and practice. As demonstrated in various collective works [62,63], CDA offers a set of ideal strategies for addressing power and knowledge relations within educational institutions and for examining the mechanisms through which discursive practices shape unexamined beliefs.

On this occasion, this method influenced the overall structure of the analytic process (see next section). The integration of various methodological aspects (see Table 2) was essential for understanding how participants experienced school reality and their interactions with one another.

Table 2. Methods, Techniques, and Research Instruments.

Methods	Data Polling Techniques	Analysis Techniques	Instruments
Autoethnography	Participant observation		Teacher-researcher's diary
	Structured interview		Interview outline
Critical discourse analysis		Pre-analysis	
		Lexicometric analysis	MAXQDA and Sketch Engine
		Content analysis	Mixed category system
		Linguistic analysis	Teacher-researcher's diary

3.3. Data Analysis

Following the methodological approach proposed by Pardo Abril [64] as the main reference—while complementing it with other perspectives—an articulated procedure with four analytical phases was chosen: (1) preliminary; (2) lexicometric; (3) content; and (4) linguistic analysis. The need to employ these four approaches was due to the complexity of both the corpus and the research questions posed, as well as the requirement for sufficient triangulation and complementarity mechanisms to ensure interpretative rigor. Each analytical phase is briefly described below:

1. Preliminary analysis: this phase involved a general characterization of the texts forming the research corpus, including situating them within their respective production contexts. An initial reading was conducted to identify key actors, themes, and topics, thereby confirming the heuristic potential of the corpus in relation to the main research objective.
2. Lexicometric analysis: in the second phase, an exploratory–descriptive analysis of the corpus was conducted using lexicometric techniques, following the approach of the French School of Textual Data Analysis (TDA). The primary tool utilized was Sketch Engine (SE), enabling lemmatized searches (grouping all morphological variants under a single word) and generating various lists of lexical units and associations, organized by their respective scores and/or frequencies. This provided an empirical basis for content analysis by revealing specific patterns and associations within the corpus texts.
3. Content analysis: subsequently, each researcher conducted an iterative, "floating" reading of the corpus, accompanied by exploratory coding based on the lexicometric analysis results, while ensuring participant confidentiality. This was followed by triangulation, rereading, review, and final assignment of categories and dimensions of analysis using MAXQDA software, refining the initial coding. This mixed category system—combining theoretical (T) and emergent (E) categories (see Table 3)—was developed in line with the principles of Grounded Theory [65].
4. Linguistic analysis: the final phase focused on identifying and evaluating a set of grammatical techniques and meaning-making strategies implicit in the texts. This analysis adhered to the theoretical and methodological guidelines set forth by key experts in discourse analysis [60,61,64].

Table 3. System of Research Categories.

Category	Code	Subcategory	Code
Neoliberal school (T)	NEOS	For the sake of change (E) Everyone to their own values (E) An issue of competitiveness (E)	CHAN EOVA COMP
Corporative hierarchy (E)	COHI	Management leadership (T) Desirable students (E) Desirable teacher (T) Teacher uneasiness (T)	MALEA DEST DETE TEUN
Knowledge dispute (E)	KNOD	Competence discourse (T) Disciplinary reality (E) Curricular ambition (E)	CODI DIRE CUAM
Methodological inefficiency (E)	MEIN	Methodological offer (T) Methodological demand (E)	MEOF MEDE
Techno-paradoxes (E)	TEPA	ICT defense (T) Digital incompetence (E) Paper nostalgia (E)	ICTD DIGIN PANO
Neo-standardisation (T)	NEST	Compulsive assessment (E) Lack of attention to diversity (E)	COAS LADI

Following the previously established research questions, the transversal findings of this article correspond to the expectations on innovation that are present in the institutional discourses that integrate the legal framework and the School, respectively. The next section presents a curated set of outcomes organized into three thematic clusters to improve readability: (a) innovation in the LOMCE; (b) innovation at the School; and (c) innovation in the entire corpus. The codes assigned to each highlighted excerpt follow this structure: *INITIALS OF THE (SUB)CATEGORY-TEXT NUMBER* (see Table 3 for the structure and Table 1 for the text number).

4. Results

4.1. Innovation in the LOMCE

The educational reform embodied by the LOMCE was firmly justified by the presumed existence of "new behavior patterns" and "novel requirements" among the "new generations". This justification extended to the corresponding regulations. Complementary analysis of the initial sub-corpus revealed that the concepts of innovation and novelty served as self-justifying rationales for the reform (see Table 4), particularly in light of the subpar performance of Spanish students in international assessments, such as PISA. Specifically, the endorsement of educational innovation by the LOMCE drew insights from a global paradigm, exemplified by the European Union's Horizon 2020 strategy. Building on this internationalist discourse, the subsequent legislative documents, including the official school curriculum, focused on advocating for the conception and implementation of "innovative methodological approaches" and the adoption of "innovative solutions". Both terms are intricately intertwined with the development of competencies and "novel skills", facilitated by the utilization of "emerging technologies".

Table 4. Sample of concordances of key lexical units in the first sub-corpus.

Corpus Text	Prev Co-Text	Word	Post Co-Text
1 (p. 7)	Reforms are consistently proposed within a framework of general stability as deficiencies are identified or	new needs	arise. The proposal for the Organic Law for the Improvement of Educational Quality (LOMCE) arises from the need to address specific issues within our educational system that hinder social equity and the country's competitiveness (. . .).
2 (p. 4)	(. . .) technological development has been driven by the needs demanded by society in each era, by its traditions and culture, while not neglecting economic and market aspects.	Innovation	and the search for alternative solutions have facilitated advancements, and the need for change has always been linked to human beings.
3 (p. 5)	Furthermore, this learning implies a holistic education for individuals who, upon completing their academic stage, will be able to transfer the knowledge they have acquired to	new situations	that arise in the life choices they make. In this way, they will be able to reorganize their thinking, acquire new knowledge, improve their performance, and discover new ways of acting and new skills that enable them to efficiently execute tasks, fostering lifelong learning.
4 (p. 6)	Likewise, there is an emphasis on new approaches to learning and assessment that, in turn, involve changes in school organization and culture, as well as the incorporation of	innovative methodologi-cal approaches.	Competency-based learning, understood as a combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes appropriate to the context, promotes student autonomy and engagement in their own learning, thereby enhancing their motivation to learn
5 (p. 8)	Taking risks,	being innovative,	possessing skills in persuasion, negotiation, and strategic thinking are also included among the competencies that must be mobilized in youth to help shape citizens equipped with the capacity for entrepreneurship.

The ambitious objectives pursued within the framework of the LOMCE, which were implicitly directed towards educators, invoked a new pedagogical narrative that was inescapable and "heralded significant changes in the conception of the teaching and learning process" (CHAN-T3). Among these changes, the aspect of "motivation" gained prominence, as it "entailed a novel approach to the role of the engaged and self-directed student, cognizant of their responsibility for their own learning" (DEST-T3). A meticulous examination of key terms and multi-word phrases allowed for a precise assessment of how certain topics were positioned within the pedagogical model that the normative discourses rooted in the LOMCE sought to cultivate, including "foreign language", "problem-solving", "information technologies", and "daily life". Notably, the notion of competency-based learning, initially introduced in the LOMCE and even earlier in the LOE, found its rationale, clarification, and elaboration in the *Order ECD/65/2015 of January 21*, through a comprehensive exploration of various theoretical and operational facets. The main virtue of competency-based learning was expressed in this last text:

> (. . .) it implies a holistic education for individuals who, upon completing their academic stage, will be able to transfer the knowledge they have acquired to new situations that arise in the life choices they make. In this way, they will be able to reorganize their thinking, acquire new knowledge, improve their performance, and discover new ways of acting and new skills that enable them to efficiently execute tasks, fostering lifelong learning. (CODI-T3)

Within the LOMCE, allocating resources to educational innovation emerged as one of the paramount discursive strategies aimed at achieving the overarching objective of "enhancing the quality of education" (COMP-TI). This strategy was closely intertwined with the broader goal of combating "the deterioration of competitiveness" (NEOS-T1). The LOMCE established a symbiotic relationship between the educational and business realms, particularly evident in its Preamble, which advocated for distinct educational pathways designed to "foster employability and nurture entrepreneurial spirit" (EOVA-T1).

The linguistic clarity within the texts of the first sub-corpus indicated a prevalence of terms associated with competitiveness, new public management, and marketing. This thematic emphasis is reflected in the contexts surrounding the lexeme *economi* within the LOMCE text (see Table 5). Notable focal points within the sub-discourse of competitiveness include the competency labeled as the "sense of initiative and entrepreneurial spirit" (COMP-T3) and specific curricular content in certain subjects, utilizing a vocabulary that was both diverse and explicit (for example, terms such as "employability", "high qualification", "economic growth", "labor market", and "entrepreneurial spirit").

However, the economic viewpoint underlying the LOMCE, within which the discourse of innovation is integrated, gave rise to a series of noteworthy discursive tensions that often went unnoticed. These tensions include the following: the juxtaposition of advocating for "social equity" versus the imperative of enhancing "national competitiveness"; the conflict between competency-based learning and the standardized quantification of learning outcomes; the balance between school autonomy and efficient management; and the invocation of "evidence", "objective results", and "periodic assessment", in contrast to the scarcity of specific data beyond references to the PISA report. In addition to the potential coexistence of opposing forces, there is a conspicuous absence of explicit definitions that could lend nuanced meanings to the terms employed, resulting in imprecision and semantic ambiguity in core signifiers. Examples of these ambiguous terms include "quality", "improvement", "excellence", and "good person".

Table 5. Concordances of the lexeme *economi* in the first text (LOMCE).

Location	Prev Co-Text	Word	Post Co-Text
p. 3	Improve the level of the citizens in the field of education means to open doors for the in high qualification positions, which represents a belief in	economic	growth and in a better future.
p. 4	One of the aims of the reform is to introduce new conduct patterns that place the education at the center of our society and the	economy	
p. 5	This circumstances, with the current	economic	situation, which is increasingly becomingmore global and demanding regarding workers and business persons, are becoming a burden that limits the possibilities for social mobility, when they do not lead to the non-assumable transmission of poverty.
p. 6	The ending of an expansive	economic	cycle and its inevitable budget consequences cannot be an excuse to escape the necessary reforms in our educational systems.
p. 8	The revision of the curriculum after the passing of the Education Law must consider the educational needs linked to the accelerated social and	economic	changes that we are living through.
p. 10	(. . .) it is indispensable for the digitalization model of the school chosen to be	economically	sustainable (. . .).
p. 10	This situation inevitably affects the employability and competitiveness of our	economy,	limiting life options for many young people.

4.2. Innovation at the School

Within the array of offerings presented by the School to its family-clients, several aspects were prominently emphasized. These included instilling values aimed at cultivating students as "good individuals", which encompassed principles such as "respect, nonviolence, justice, solidarity, tolerance, and democracy" (EOVA-T7). Additionally, there was a strong focus on patriotic and religious education aligned with Catholic paradigms. This holistic approach was encapsulated in the School's motto: "the values in our ideology, 'Honor, Glory, and Homeland', must be positioned at the core of the overarching values that steer educational practice" (EOVA-T7). The aspiration behind this amalgamation was "to provide an education service of exceptional quality" (EOVA-T7). However, the Catholic and patriotic dogmatism inherent in this pedagogical initiative contradicted the notion that "educational learning should be geared towards fostering autonomous, critical individuals with their own ideas" (EOVA-T1), a perspective emphasized in the LOMCE.

The contentious teaching and pedagogical framework constructed from these elements, as outlined in the condensed Educational Project (EP), exhibited numerous omissions typically found in such official documents. Notably absent were considerations of the socioeconomic and cultural contexts, the attributes of the students, orientation and mentoring strategies, and teacher development initiatives. Ultimately, this institution operated as a private school, signifying a business entity that offers a service or product grounded in a specific pedagogical or didactic model. This model was intended to be marketed by its proponents, the Head Office. In pursuit of this objective, an appealing discourse was crafted, aiming to obscure deficiencies, shortcomings, and contentious elements (e.g., optional subject offerings, mentoring plans, teacher-training blueprints, internal assessments, etc.), while highlighting what was deemed praiseworthy. This process involved constructing an idealized, sophisticated, and captivating educational model, positioned between programmatic content and promotional rhetoric. This is reflected in the following excerpt:

> Our students will be passionate, principled, cosmopolitan citizens with strong will; and we will work to ensure that they are willing to place the collective

> interest above their own. We will strive to plant these seeds in them and provide them with the tools that enhance their emotional intelligence so that they can navigate the multiple obstacles presented by daily life. (EOVA-T6)

The Educational Project (EP) outlined the "inclination towards innovation" (CUAM-T6) as a pursuit within the context of the "new educational paradigm" (MEOF-T6) that the institution aimed to embrace. However, the prevalent terminology in the second sub-corpus lacked qualifiers or assessments that could clearly characterize the pedagogical model endorsed by the institution or elucidate its conceptualization of innovative education. In fact, the term "innovation" appeared only once in the EP, specifically within a list of personal attributes that students were expected to cultivate through their engagement in various subjects. This list included "the development of personal qualities such as creativity, willingness to innovate, self-confidence, achievement motivation, leadership, and resilience to failure" (CUAM-T6). Essentially, this list represented the virtues of the services extended to family-clients, but it overlooked the minimal content that should be incorporated into such official documents, according to regulatory standards.

The foundational pillars and methodological criteria integrated into the School's institutional discourse were explicitly presented in a compilation of materials outlining the methodologies to be adopted (eighth text of the corpus; see Table 1). This document, crafted by the Pedagogical Office of the school, illustrated a clear intent to propagate the same innovative discourses—pertaining to competencies, active methodologies, educational technologies, student-centered approaches, and more—as advocated by regulatory frameworks. Consequently, these materials were distributed to the teaching staff via email, aiming to provide guidance and exemplification.

The lexicometric analysis of the second sub-corpus, which includes the aforementioned compilation, provided essential evidence to understand the influence of pro-innovation discourses within the School. Terms such as "PBL" (Project-Based Learning), "cooperative", "problems", "active methodology", "team member", "cooperative learning", and "multiple intelligences" underscored the emphasis on innovation. The significance of acquiring "new knowledge" through purportedly new methodologies was also highlighted, portraying a positive impact. As seen in the first sub-corpus, these lexicometric trends continued to position students as the primary discursive agents; however, the teachers' prominent role was also evident, reflected in the multitude of responsibilities assigned to them as outlined in the Regulations on Organization and Operation (ROOs) (see Figure 1).

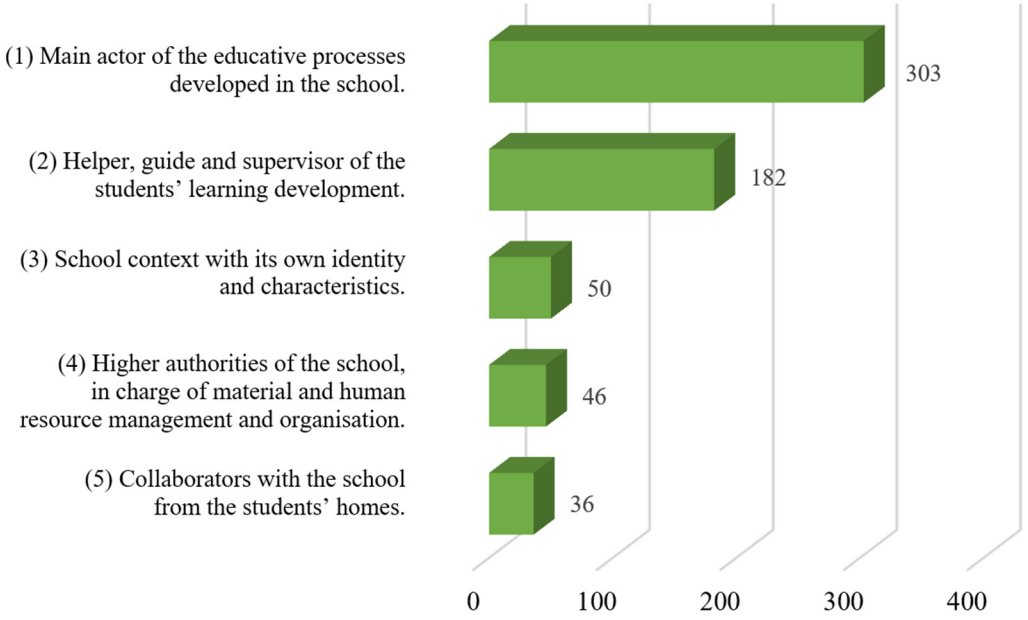

Figure 1. Frequency of the discursive actors in the discourses of the sub-corpus 2.

In broad terms, the attributes of the normative discourses that characterized innovative strategies were seamlessly integrated into the Center's pedagogical philosophy. The School advocated for "a paradigm shift in methodology" (MEOF-T6), an assertion that was substantiated by qualitative analysis. This study revealed a methodological ambition inherent in the Center's discourse, evidenced by the diverse array of didactic expectations outlined in the compiled materials. As suggested by the following table (see Table 6), which presents the main thematic content of the eighth text in the research corpus—a compilation of various materials on teaching methodology—these expectations included fostering self-learning, cooperative learning, problem-based learning, competency-based learning, motivation, inductive and personalized learning. Additionally, the materials referenced Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences framework and highlighted the use of tablets as instructional tools.

Table 6. Thematic structure and topics of the compilation of teaching methodology materials from the analyzed school.

Material	Topics	Pages
Problem-Based Learning: Quick Guides on New Methodologies	Definition of PBL; characterization of PBL; elements of planning; phases of the PBL process; comparison of teacher and student roles in PBL; how to assess PBL.	1–14
Cooperative Learning: A Basic Guide	Presentation of the guide; definition of cooperative learning; differentiation between cooperative and collaborative learning; group formation; role of facilitators; creation of a team folder; roles of team members; use of the team folder; warning to teachers; description of the basic steps of each strategy.	15–23
Simple Cooperative Structures for Easy Implementation	Description of the basic steps for each teaching strategy.	24–26
Multiple Intelligences: Practical Applications for Teaching and Learning	Theory and practice of each type of intelligence according to Gardner; conclusions.	27–232
Case Method: Descriptive and Needs Sheet	General definition and origin of the case method; typology of cases; spatial and material conditions; teacher's role; functions of each group; steps for the teacher to apply the case method; steps for students to work with the case method; phases of the case method; conception of assessment; assessment keys; importance of institutional support; synthesis.	233–254
Methodology of the Social Studies Area	Psychopedagogical and didactic principles; cognitive levels; infographic on multiple intelligences; how to group students; roles within each team; group dynamics; basic work structure; visual organizers; examples of thinking techniques.	255–262

4.3. Innovation in the Entire Corpus

The significance of the Spanish lexemes *nuev* and *nov* [*new*] was established within the research corpus by identifying key collocations associated with innovation (see Figure 2). This approach makes it possible to identify the types of words that typically accompany the term *innovation* in the texts analyzed, highlighting those often found in economic discourses (*development*, *leadership*, *business*, *product*, *lure*, etc.). However, it is important to note that this pivotal term was primarily concentrated within the compilation of materials outlining the School's methodology and the teacher-researcher's diary.

The conducted lexicometric analysis unveiled certain attributes that refined the characterization of the prevailing concept of innovation within the corpus, as delineated below:

1. Innovation was a concept assumed without academic substantiation and employed devoid of scholarly backing. The presence of the sole collocation that explicitly defines innovative education aptly encapsulates the teachers' apprehensions that served as the foundation for this research.
2. Innovation was assimilated within an action typology that was inherently predisposed toward its objectives: to nurture and amplify its advancement (e.g., "generate", "enhance", "promote"); to establish connections with other facets (e.g., "relate", "com-

bine"); or to endeavor to elucidate its nature or objectives (e.g., "specify", "explain", "understand").

3. The analysis revealed that innovation exhibited a close proximity to technology and a comparatively lesser association with methodology.
4. In terms of frequency and significance, the most recurrent collocations in close proximity to a preposition were "Innovation Service", referencing an entity responsible for promoting innovation. Additionally, numerous abstract and ambiguous terms were observed, such as "experience", "concept", "idea", "aspect", "phenomenon", "factor", "topic", and "spirit".
5. Conversely, the antonymous concept, "educational tradition", failed to manifest in the texts even once. Coupled with terms that were associated with the word "tradition" (e.g., "literary", "Western", "mythological", "classical"), it was confined to a conceptual body of knowledge meant for students to internalize rather than a pedagogical concept for educators to contemplate and critically engage with (see Figure 3).

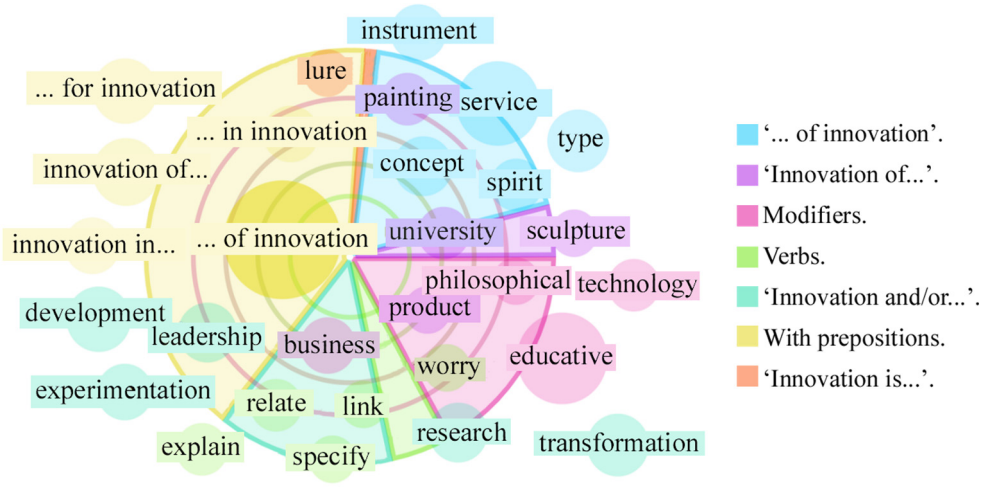

Figure 2. Strategic diagram featuring key colocations for innovation in the corpus.

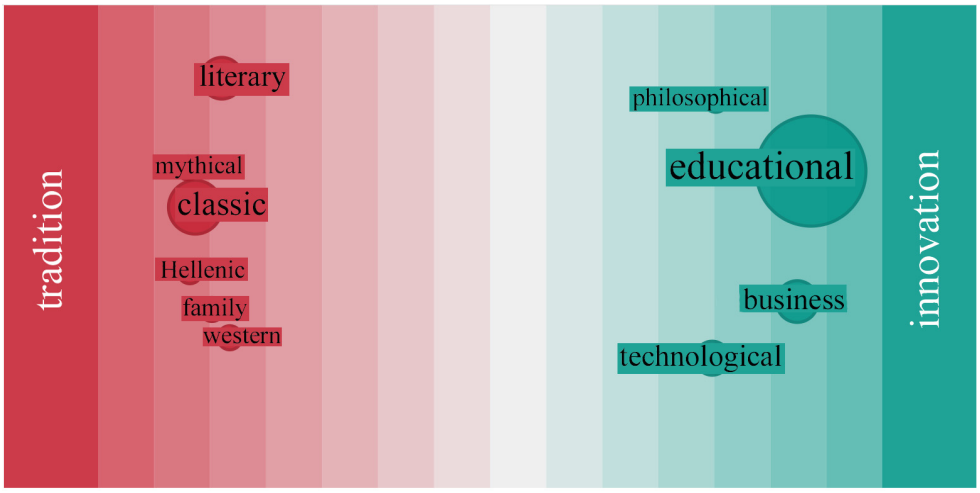

Figure 3. Strategic diagram with the main modifiers for the terms *tradition* and *innovation* in the corpus.

The examination of the connections forged between innovation and other concepts across the entire corpus validated the education–economics-driven approach championed by the LOMCE. The outcomes of the lexicometric analysis yielded the following findings:

1. The primary modifier or qualifier that appeared in proximity to the term "innovation" within the corpus was not educational, but economic in nature.

2. The collocation "innovation and/or..." unveiled numerous semantic domains, with the most pertinent one being linked to the labor field (such as "entrepreneurship", "company", "leadership", "initiative", "productivity", "growth", and "development").
3. A direct correlation between *innovation* and *entrepreneurship* was discerned in the highlighted concordances, likely embedded in the principal objectives of subjects encompassed within the field of Economics.
4. Among the most noteworthy co-occurrences concerning innovation, there was a growing prevalence of concepts pertaining to the economic domain, both explicitly ("intra-entrepreneurs", "business", "female-entrepreneurs", "I + D + I", etc.) and implicitly ("leadership", "risks", "encouragement"). In fact, two recurring terms closely associated with innovation were "economy" and "company", which also featured prominently in the subsequent ranking (see Table 7).

Table 7. Main co-occurrences of the key lexical units.

Rank	Word	%	Rank	Word	%	Rank	Word	%
1	Technologies	12	11	Objectives	2.128	21	Leadership	1.418
2	Education	8.92	12	Company	1.773	22	Methodology	1.418
3	Creativity	5.319	13	Transformation	1.773	23	Business	1.418
4	Maps	4.089	14	Students	1.684	24	Persuasion	1.418
5	Research	3.546	15	Information	1.474	25	Risks	1.418
6	Comprehension	3.368	16	Activities	1.418	26	Studio	1.263
7	Knowledge	3.158	17	Autonomy	1.418	27	Encouragement	1.263
8	Economy	3.114	18	Center	1.418	28	Growth	1.064
9	Assessment	2.947	19	Internet	1.418	29	Female-entrepreneurs	1.064
10	Sociocultural	2.737	20	Intrapreneurs	1.418	30	I + D + i	1.064

5. Discussion

The findings from this case study provide a new perspective on how neoliberal educational discourses are received within schools, supported by a multi-faceted approach and an extended fieldwork period of two academic years. As shown in the work of Tappel et al. [32], this duration is crucial for conducting a thorough analysis of the sustainability of innovative processes. The empirical connection between the reformist discourse of the LOMCE and the criteria set by specific international organizations reveals that the promotion of educational innovation is one of the strongest arguments supporting the very existence of reform initiatives. The following syllogism can aid in obtaining a clearer comprehension: (a) *innovation constitutes a shared objective*; (b) *shared objectives contribute to educational enhancement*; (c) *innovation means educational enhancement*.

Williamson's study [27] revealed that, in addition to the OECD, various supranational actors, including technology companies, seek to reshape education systems to align with their own interests. This indicates that the full integration of innovation into the neoliberal framework [2,3] was confirmed and appears to articulate the very essence of the LOMCE educational reform. This aligns with Carrier's [9] insights, which suggest that innovation is currently promoted through a range of persuasive tactics. These tactics often employ emotive, superficial, and optimistic language that frequently lacks substantial scientific backing.

Conversely, the lack of a minimal critical examination of innovation allows this discourse to function as a strategy for normalizing the underlying reformist interests. These interests are explicitly linked to the pursuit of national economic competitiveness, while neglecting the importance of a holistic education for individuals. This neglect results in certain discursive inconsistencies within the legislative texts themselves. As highlighted by several authors [5,7,53], economic growth serves as a key legitimizing factor within the global discourse of neoliberal reformism. This observation aligns well with analyses of educational policies in the United States [21,41] and similar observations in countries such as Argentina [40], Chile [49], France [51], Ireland [4], and Italy [52].

Building on these prior investigations, this case study has confirmed that the discursive inconsistencies found in educational policies are not only replicated, but also amplified, within educational contexts. According to internal documents from the private school where the fieldwork was conducted, innovation is theoretically conceived as a set of actions that automatically enhance educational quality. These actions sharply contrast with traditional pedagogical renovation projects, establishing a strong connection between the discourse on competency-based learning, the integration of educational technologies, and the fostering of student motivation.

In line with the rhetoric of the LOMCE, the School's Educational Project (EP) was infused with benevolent, positive, and constructive initiatives that, at the same time, lacked substantial justification. This deliberate appeal to the emotions of families as clients resembles the psycho-political techniques commonly found in neoliberal narratives [3,9,10,39,44]. Solé Blanch [13] attributed this phenomenon to the influence of positive psychology and what can be termed the "happiness industry". This perspective is echoed by Slater [6], who pointed out how seemingly neutral or even positive slogans, such as resilience or grit, can obscure the social inequalities generated by neoliberal education systems. Hill et al. [29] also emphasize the importance of not getting caught up in labels, arguing that to improve schools, we must focus on the actual components of reforms (p. 418). This insight is particularly relevant in the Spanish educational context, where, as far back as a decade ago, scholars like Olmedo [56], Pini [57], and Rodríguez Martínez [58] began scrutinizing the ideological underpinnings woven into educational discourses and practices.

At the analyzed School, innovation primarily served as a requirement for educators, who were expected to apply a uniform set of innovative guidelines and measures dictated by the management. This mandate applied regardless of the subject matter, school grades, student profiles, or even the interests and engagement of the teachers as "policy actors" [28,31]. Externally, the school's "inclination towards innovation" was closely tied to concepts of "quality" and "educational excellence", acting as a compelling lure to attract family-clients. This alignment effectively blended the School's institutional discourse with traditional propaganda techniques that tend to obscure underlying issues. This observation reinforces findings by Wilson and Scarbrough [45] regarding similar private school models, which highlighted elements such as elitism, exclusivity, heightened individualism, and, more broadly, the inherent social advantages linked to high-income family backgrounds.

In the specific case of the institution under study, there was a pronounced traditional, patriotic, and Catholic character, aligning closely with the concept of "conservative and neoliberal equality" articulated in the LOMCE [17] (p. 161). Although further exploration of this topic is warranted in subsequent publications, the practical convergence of innovative and traditional educational discourses led to a significant increase in curricular objectives and content that educators and students were required to navigate. This complexity in facing innovative processes is consistent with observations from other studies [23,26], providing an alternative perspective to overly optimistic views on the innovative phenomenon [12].

Moreover, the comprehensive examination of the entire corpus—including discourses from the Department of Social Sciences, as well as Geography and History classes—facilitated the crystallization of a concept of innovation that aligned seamlessly with both legislative and institutional discourses of the School. This synthesis revealed innovation as a well-established, positive, yet vague concept, intricately connected to the economic realm and its specific lexicon (e.g., *entrepreneurship*, *labor market*, *competitiveness*, *efficiency*). From this perspective, innovation is viewed as a commodifiable entity, one to be marketed and consumed, and which is expected to yield profitability [1]. This underscores a deliberate inclination to align educational endeavors with principles akin to those found in commerce and marketing [8,55,56].

Functioning as an educational enterprise, the School exhibited more neoliberal attributes than typically observed in public school settings [42]. Nonetheless, some scholars have raised concerns about the convergence of these two models, arguing that they are increasingly

resembling each other [43]. This assertion is supported by evidence highlighting notable similarities in curricular flexibility, diversification of educational offerings, and the socioeconomic composition of the communities associated with these educational institutions.

6. Conclusions and Limitations

The critical analysis of discourses related to current educational policies and internal school documents enables the identification and understanding of a specific approach to fostering innovation. This perspective encompasses a wide range of diverse expectations but primarily aligns with certain economic interests that necessitate viewing the development of innovation within the framework of educational neoliberalism. In this context, educational innovation must be understood in relation to factors such as economic crises, governing political parties, and models of school management.

Influenced by OECD recommendations, institutional discourses now position innovation as the main avenue for enhancing the quality of education. As a result, it has become a key slogan justifying the transformation of educational systems through reforms like the LOMCE in Spain. This notion reveals a controversial tension between the paradigm of education as a universal right and the neoliberal view of education as a commodity to be bought and sold for those who can afford it.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates a clear correlation between neoliberal educational policies and the functioning of private educational institutions. This connection explains the emergence of pedagogical discourses filled with contradictions in such contexts. These findings highlight the effectiveness of the methodological approach used in this research. Nevertheless, many other important aspects warrant further exploration in future studies, including the conception and practice of innovation in public schools, the normative advocacy and practical development of innovation in other countries, and the role of other discourse fields, such as media that disseminate pro-innovation messages, in similar processes.

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