

Country Report: Colombia

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Introduction

Colombian school education is governed by *Law 115* of 1994, which was enacted after the country's new *Political Constitution* was approved in 1991. *Law 115* establishes that school education is constituted of 11 grades or school years: basic education, from 1st to 9th grade, and secondary education, which comprises grades 10 and 11. Following it, there is higher education. Another way of structuring studies, which is more commonly present in the educational system, considers two major stages: primary education (from 1st to 5th grade) and secondary education (from 6th to 11th grade). In short, a student completes his or her last school year – grade 11 – at 16 or 17 years old.

All 11th grade students in the country take a national standardized test that assesses their knowledge of the contents of the school curriculum. This test allows each student and institutions to compare their knowledge with that of the rest of the country. The test is called *Saber 11*. Universities may require a certain score on this test as part of their admission requirements, depending on the respective bachelor profile.

Law 115 establishes the compulsory subjects of the school curriculum, both for public and private institutions throughout the country. Philosophy appears as a compulsory subject that must be taken in the last two years of secondary education.

Current situation of philosophy in schools

Philosophy has been included in Colombian education throughout its history. During the 20th century, Colombia was considered a Catholic country, as specified in the *Political Constitution of 1886*, which was in force until 1991. Philosophy was considered a relevant subject as preparation or requirement to understand the mysteries of faith, which is why its teaching was present in schools and was fundamentally guided by Neo-Thomism (Montes & Montes, 2019), mainly in private education.

With the *1991 Political Constitution*, Colombia proved to be a secular and pluralistic state, wherewith education and philosophy were transformed towards this orientation. Additionally, international philosophical trends of that time were also explored in Colombian universities throughout the 20th century along with the development of national interests. Even so, nowadays such plurality is becoming stronger and, above all, has already impacted school education.

In addition, two public policy documents help to understand the situation of philosophy teaching in Colombia at school level. In order to update the content and implement the

competency-based teaching perspective, in 2010 the Ministry of National Education published a document called “Pedagogical Guidelines for Philosophy in Secondary Education” (known as *Document 14*), which proposes a curriculum for Philosophy for the school stage, as well as didactic activities and exercises. Although this document is of great relevance for teaching, it is only indicative in nature; that is, it is not mandatory for schools. On the other hand, in 2014, the reform of the *Saber 11* tests was launched in the country. In the new proposal, the specific evaluation of philosophy was taken off the test, and, in its place, the Critical Reading test was established, which merges the areas of language and philosophy. This test is still in force today. The disappearance of philosophy in the tests caused the university and school communities to react strongly to defend the presence of philosophy in educational institutions, since it was considered that such disappearance could be the beginning of the elimination of the subject in the educational system.

Consequently, the situation of philosophy teaching in Colombia is understood through the intersection of these academic and political events. The subject of philosophy continues to be present in the school curriculum. However, as we have pointed out, there is no established curriculum for compulsory teaching in schools and there is no specific philosophical content in state tests, so each institution defines the content, that is to be taught, and establishes its own methodologies. This normative condition, together with the diversity of philosophical trends that circulate in the country's universities, has led to teachers experiencing a certain autonomy in teaching, which confirms the emergence of multiple perspectives on teaching philosophy. To date, we do not have an exhaustive empirical tracking that allows us to identify the content taught in the subject of philosophy, its approaches, methodologies and teaching materials. We have certain accounts of this from the reports presented at conferences or from the systematizations of experiences carried out in postgraduate theses.

However, the competency-based approach and the trends that guide education towards a certain utilitarianism, have directly affected the teaching of philosophy, meaning that, although the subject of philosophy is present in the curriculum, it is used for purposes other than those specific to philosophy, or its content is reduced (Prada 2024) to its specific applications: critical reading, development of work or civic competencies (Tovar 2022). Thus, there is a tension between a certain autonomy to define content and the external pressure that leads to turning philosophy into a useful knowledge.

It should also be noted that, as an effect of the processes described above, in recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the teaching of philosophy, a revival that is evident in phenomena such as the increase in research, teaching materials and university publications around teaching philosophy and the rise of extracurricular activities carried out throughout the country: regional and national philosophical Olympiads, philosophical camps or intercollegiate events. All of this reflects a strong presence of philosophy at school level and an interest on the part of teachers to promote it, despite the pressures and uncertainty generated by public policies.

Current situation of teacher training in philosophy

In Colombia, there are specific bachelors for teacher training, called *Licenciatura*. In the case of philosophy, for example, the bachelor's degrees in Teacher Training in Philosophy (*licenciatura*) are different from the disciplinary undergraduate programs, called “degree” in philosophy or “professional” in philosophy, which prepare students in the specific discipline and do not usually include pedagogical content. Philosophy programs usually last eight academic semesters (four years), while the *licenciatura* usually last nine or ten semesters, because they must address philosophical *and* pedagogical content.

According to data from the National Information System on Higher Education in Colombia (SNIES)¹, during the period from 2014 to 2023, on average 1,957 students were enrolled in the first year of philosophy programs – both *licenciaturas* and disciplinary degrees – (46 programs active annually on average). Of this number, 48% enrolled in *licenciaturas* programs and 52% in disciplinary programs. In that same period, 64% of students enrolled in public universities and 36% in private universities.

During the same period, an average of 798 students graduated from philosophy programs each year. Both degrees (*licenciatura* and disciplinary programs) qualify students to work as teachers in both the public and private sectors. The difference between the two degrees is based on the presence and relevance of pedagogical training in them and, therefore, on the preparation that graduates acquire for teaching. In Colombia, it is common for *licenciaturas* to have a high percentage of pedagogical training and to have school practices to be carried out for 4 or more semesters during training. This guarantees preparation for teaching. Nonetheless, the balance between pedagogical and philosophical content can be challenging. The necessity and presence of both areas creates tension between the preponderance or priority of one over the other in teacher training. In some trends, perhaps the majority in the country, the training of teachers in different areas is a matter that fundamentally concerns pedagogy. In philosophy, however, there has been explored the thesis that teacher training and, therefore, teaching, is also a genuine philosophical issue. This debate is currently taking place.

References

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¹ Source: <https://snies.mineducacion.gov.co/portal/> (August 1st, 2024).

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