THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN SPAIN

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1. RECENT SPANISH EDUCATIONAL REFORMS

The Spanish education system is currently undergoing a deep process of overall reform as a result of the gradual implementation of "the Law on the General Organization of the Education System" (LOGSE) in 1990. This deepening reform has affected the schools' general administration, autonomy, management, structure, curriculum, organization of the teaching staff and other elements (CIDE, 1996; UNESCO, 2000). This overall reform can be traced back to the new Spanish Constitution which started a new political and social model that had an effect on all areas in 1978. Education was no exceptional. The three core guiding principles in this 1978 new Constitution were: the right to education, the school community participation in the teaching management, and the establishment of a decentralized education system. Therefore, three laws have been enacted to regulate the basic educational system: the Law on the Right to Education (LODE) in 1985; the Law on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE) in 1990 and the Law on Participation, Evaluation and Administration of Educational Establishments (LOPEG) in 1995. According to Muñoz-Repiso *et al*. (2000: 379), "the main initiatives at the national contextual level, which have fostered school improvement in Spain, are the reform of the secondary school by LOGSE and its previous experimental phase and the PAM proposed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC)".

The Law on the General Organization of the Education System (LOGES) sets out new structures for Spanish education with the extension of compulsory schooling (from 8 to 10 years) and changes in the curriculum (EURYDICE, 2000: 333). LOGSE is a top-down initiative, aiming to reform the Spanish educational system with an implementation of the new curriculum. It has proposed restructuring the secondary education, organizing it in two cycles: compulsory comprehensive education (14 to 16) and post-compulsory education (16-18 years of age, with two alternatives: academic branch and vocational training branch). Consequently, the overall changes include curriculum, subjects, tracking system, contents, teaching methodology, assessment, school and department organizations, and administration. In 1991 this new system started the implementation in the lower grades and will finish in 2002. Until the year 2000, this new system was implemented in more than 75% of the grades at the non-university level, although the former system was still in effect (UNESCO, 2000: 137).

PAM stands for the Annual Plan of Improvement for Public Educational Centers. Since 1996, the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) has publicly proposed PAM. The MEC awarded *1,000,000 pesetas* (the Spanish money unit before 2002) to those educational centers that have developed the best school improvement programs for a school year (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 385). "There have been three calls for PAM corresponding to the school year 1996/97, 1997/98 and 1998/99. The number of schools participating in this initiative increases from year to year: from 268 in the first call to 782 in the last call" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 388). According to the Spanish MEC, the PAM plan must have the following general characteristics:

- An explicit diagnosis should precede the school's initial situation focusing on high-priority area. It should be oriented towards those organizational aspects which are strictly educational.

- The identification of improvement areas must be objective and based on factor results rather than on subjective tests or mere appearances.

- Improvement objectives must be realistic, concrete, and measurable in school year and adequate for a several-year improvement plan.

- It should define the objectives, procedure, performance and timetable, together with the resources and required support for its implementation. The plan should also establish the people responsible for its monitoring and evaluation.

- It should involve the school community (e.g. management team, inspections teachers' council, etc), so that they participate in the plan. Moreover, the school head should be the driving force and the effective leader of the plan.

The five Spanish effective school improvement (ESI) programs that we are going to analyze are fully embedded in this national context.

2. A BRIEF INTRODUCTION OF THE FIVE SPANISH ESI PROGRAMS

2.1. Students learning improvement in the first cycle of compulsory secondary education - Rosa Chacel (Colmenar Viejo, Madrid)

The 1st ESI program belonged to the PAM. It took place at a secondary school. The school started the PAM program when faced the sudden increase of the students, from 400 to 900 at the beginning of a school year. Moreover, many of the new students had not achieved the goals of previous school level and their basic knowledge was far below the expected levels. An important feature was that school problem diagnosis went before identifying the improvement areas. The school held an initial diagnosis on curriculum competence, individual working habits, the acquisition of instrumental techniques, and student learning process. Based on this initial diagnosis, improvement areas were identified and prioritized. The school decided to focus on the first cycle of the secondary education. A detailed plan for improvement was made to develop students' general aptitudes, including the strategies to adapt curriculum, to re-organize the school timetable, to flexibly regroup students when they have mathematics or foreign language classes and to use small class for pupils with special needs. The student outcomes were "significant advance in the acquisition of capacities, curricular competence level, classroom atmosphere, individual working habits" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 389) which prevented them from abandoning the school. Moreover, a new concept of teaching (closer coordination among teachers) and learning has been formed. The school is in a continuous improvement attitude.

2.2. ESI program in Mathematics - Ikastola Ander Deuna (Sopelana, Basque country)

The 2nd ESI program belonged to the LOGSE, mainly about the innovations in mathematics teaching at a comprehensive school (including both primary and secondary education). The main goals were to improve the students' attainment in mathematics, to improve the teaching methodology in mathematics, to foster an evaluation school culture, etc. A series of improvement strategies have been used regarding school curriculum, the school organization and teacher development. Guided by an

experienced school Counselor, the school started to use new teaching materials for mathematics and new teaching methodology. Each classroom was divided into two groups to reduce the teacher-pupil ratio and to pay more attention to each student. Different time schedules were established to support the students at risk or with more learning problems. The experienced Counselor became the trainer of the new teaching methodology. He and the involved teachers worked together throughout the whole improvement program. The teachers were requested to use an agreed key indicator to monitor the students. The teaching task had also been evaluated. At the end of each academic year, the head of studies surveyed all the teachers, gathered information on different issues to find whether the plans had been completed or not and what actions should be followed and so on. The student outcomes obtained both in the internal and external evaluations showed rather convincing results. "The average of the school is over the average of the Federation of Ikastolas. On a quite balanced way, this is attained in issues as statistics, numeration, mental arithmetic and problem-solving, except geometry" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 401). In addition, an evaluation culture has been formed at this school and the teachers felt quite satisfied with this program.

2.3. The reform of the reading and writing process at a Rural Grouped School Teruel I (Perale del Alfambra, Teruel)

The 3rd ESI program belonged to the PAM. It took place in a rural primary school with nine isolated schools. These nine schools were located in different villages at an average distance of 40 kilometers from the region's capital. Classrooms were separated by several kilometers and each of them enrolled students of different ages. The improvement program covered two areas: Spanish language and literature; library resource management. It focused on improving the reading ability based on the belief that "reading favors other types of learning". Various strategies have been used such as distributing students in flexible groups, adopting a "five-step" reading approach, restructuring school timetables, establishing the "traveling library" by increasing the number of books and optimizing the use of the library books. The students' level of effective reading, spontaneous reading and orthography has highly improved. In the first cycle of primary education, the average of effective reading increased in more than 50% compared with that of the 19% of the control group. In the second cycle, the difference was even greater (50% versus 3% with that in the control group) (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 407). The average number of books read by each student in a school year rose from two to seven. This ESI program was a good example to reveal that high quality schools were not the big ones nor those being provided with lots of resources but those even in adverse conditions could carry out improvement process and could better themselves.

2.4. "Open Reading Groups" --- Nuestra Senora de La Vega (Haro, La Rioja)

The 4th ESI program belonged to the PAM. It concerned about the school improvement in a public primary school with many underprivileged students. It focused on mastery reading and writing. Based on the results of the students' pre-test, "Open Reading Groups" were established which contained five different levels, accordingly, the appropriate reading materials had to be selected for each different level. This program has involved the school's counselor, both teaching and non-teaching staff, and many parents. The students' involvement was regarded as a core aspect of the program development. The way of teaching reading has changed. Teachers became the initial model. Various evaluations were carried out by the internal and external agencies, firstly by each teacher, then by the program coordinators, afterwards by the Pedagogical Coordinating Commission and by the Inspectorate Service of the Ministry of Education. The reading speed and reading comprehension of the students have been improved. A positive attitude towards reading has been evidenced. It has

affected the students' performance in other subjects as well. The whole teaching staff is still involved in this program and it has become a part of the school culture and a daily activity.

2.5. The new compulsory secondary education teaching and the attention to diversity in the Educational Center Padre Piquer (Madrid)

This ESI program belonged to the LOGSE. It took place at a private secondary school with a large number of students coming from disadvantaged social classes and with special educational needs. The school enrolled students from 23 different nationalities. Around 35% of the students were with one or two years' learning delay. The program used discovering learning and paid a special attention to student motivations so as to meet the students' diversity and their special needs. The most motivated and specialized teachers have been allocated to the students at risk, the school offered new optional subjects (e.g. social skills workshops). Moreover, remediation, support activities and new curricular adaptations were also carried out for students who could not reach the intended goals. As an extreme measure for those at-terrible-risk students, the curriculum was modified into one or two year diversified programs. The teaching staff and the external agents periodically evaluated this ESI program. The results showed that the number of the students who obtained the Secondary Education Certificates increased (higher than the national average) while the percentage of the drop-out decreased. It was a typical example of how to use the deep reforms of the educational system to optimize the school's improvement process and the students' outcomes.

The major characteristics of the five selected Spanish effective school improvement programs are shown in the Table below. To see the full descriptions of the five programs, please read the article entitled "Effective school improvement: Spanish case studies" written by Muñoz-Repiso *et al*.

	The 1st ESI program	The 2nd ESI program	The 3rd ESI program	The 4th ESI program	The 5th ESI program
Ownership	Public	Private	Public	Public	Private
Educational level	Secondary	Kindergarten, Primary & secondary	Primary	Primary	Secondary
Environment	Semi-urban	Semi-urban	Rural	Rural	Urban
Autonomous community	Madrid	Basque county	Aragon	La Rioja	Madrid
The intended improving subjects	Mathematics & foreign languages	Mathematics	Reading & library facilities (e.g. a "traveling library")	Reading	All subjects
Program type	PAM	LOGSE	PAM	PAM	LOGSE
Outcomes	no quantitative data	with quantitative data	with quantitative data	with quantitative data	No quantitative data

3. THE IMPACT OF THE CONTEXTUAL LEVEL FACTORS ON THE FIVE SPANISH ESI PROGRAMS

In this article, ESI stands for "effective school improvement" which is an integration of school effectiveness theory, school improvement theory and some other theories such as curriculum, behaviorism, organization and organizational learning, and public choice. Effective school improvement is defined as "planned educational change that enhances student learning outcomes as well as the school's capacity for managing change" (Hoeben, 1998). According to the comprehensive model of educational effectiveness (Creemers, 1994), contextual level refers to all those levels that are beyond/above the school level, classroom level and student level. For instance, the local or regional level (including the external evaluation agents), the national level, even the European level if the country belongs to the European Commission. According to Sun (2003), there are nine ESI factors at the national contextual level that influence effective school improvement. Concerning the Spanish case, we would like to locate our focus on the following seven contextual level factors that do have impact on the five Spanish ESI programs:

1. National goal setting in terms of student outcomes and intermediate outcomes

2. Strong centrally steering and empowering ESI

3. External evaluation and external agents

4. The adequate financial and human resources

5. Offering school some autonomy

6. Evoking a culture in support of ESI

7. Other factors (e.g. the influence of the European Commission, time for change).

3.1 National goal setting in terms of student outcomes & intermediate outcomes

National goals may be divided into two types: goals for education (for equality, criterion for each subject in national curriculum, etc.) and goals for improvement (for initiating educational changes and innovations, for effective school improvement, etc.). The first type of national goal setting is more associated with *the ultimate student outcomes* while the second type of national goal setting is more associated with *the intermediate outcomes* (Sun, 2003). The first type of national goals refers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students are supposed to learn at schools. To be more specific, it includes the key goals for national curriculum and the final goals for testing. They essentially concern about what to teach and what to achieve within a set period of time for schools. While the second type of national goals refers to all the improvement which helps to foster student achievement, for instance, the improved school climate and opportunity to learn, the improved school management and administration, the improved leadership in triggering and stimulating improvement, the improved behaviors of the students and the teachers, the improved learning environment (school buildings, classroom equipment, ICT and internet used for teaching), the improved teaching and learning strategies, the improved co-operation among teachers and students, the improved school and classroom culture, the increased parental satisfaction for schools, to mention just a few. Moreover, there are twin parts of the national goal setting: one part is "planning" which includes national goal formulation → national guidelines for curriculum → editing textbooks, etc. Another part is "evaluation and reinforcement" part which includes the implementation monitoring → standardized testing → external assessment → feedback → rewarding, etc. These twin parts are inseparatable, without any part, the national goal setting remains mere "paperwork" (Sun, 2003). National goals can only have a function if they are visible in the classroom; if they are traceable in the curriculum and if

they are measurable in the different kinds of testing; if they are up to date based on the discussions between different scholars in society, etc.

Regarding national goal setting in terms of student outcomes, Hofman, *et al*. (2002: 48) point out that in Spain the minimum core curriculum is determined at the State Level. The Autonomous Communities establish their own curriculum based on the State minimum core curriculum and schools develop and adapt the curriculum to their own context. The 3rd and the 5th Spanish ESI programs mentioned the following:

> *"The results obtained in both evaluations show that, as a whole,* the average of the school is over the average of the Federation of Ikastolas. *On a quite balanced way, this is attained in issues as statistics, numeration, mental arithmetic and problem-solving" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 401).*

> *"The most significant result has been that* the percentage of the pupils achieving the Secondary Education Certificate *has increased to slightly higher than the national average" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 429).*

Regarding national goal setting in terms of intermediate outcomes, the five ESI programs argue that they were all the consequence of the two big national initiatives: the LOGSE and the PAM. It was the Spanish Ministry of Education and Culture that has proposed and developed both the LOGSE and the PAM. Furthermore, the PAM has been praised as "the most important institutional initiative developed in the last three years for the school improvement in Spain" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 387). While the 4th case study states:

> *"This school agreed to take part in the PAM due to the fact that its initiative offers some* useful guidelines *and support for the school. The school staff has used this call to improve reading and to foster positive attitudes towards reading, which also has an impact on all the other subjects" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 415).*

About the textbooks, the national evaluation and reinforcement structure in Spain, Hofman *et al*. (2002: 48) declare: "concerning textbooks, there is no need for approval from any educational authority. Every subject area department is responsible for the choice of its textbooks. ***There is no national or regional system of testing.*** The minimum core curriculum includes basic guidelines for assessment, which is an integral part of the curriculum and must be global and continuous. While in primary education, the form teacher is responsible for decisions on student promotion, in lower secondary, all the teachers of the student have to decide on promotion collectively". In order to avoid repetitions, the national goal evaluation and reinforcement will be described in the external evaluation and external agents part.

3.2 Strong centrally steering and empowering ESI

Effective school improvement, to a certain degree, is a lasting process, and even more, a lasting educational campaign of a nation or a country. During this lasting process or campaign, the central government and its educational ministry are the "Chief commander". School improvement will become much more effective, easier and less problematic if having the strong centrally steering and empowering (Sun, *et al*. in press). More or less, the government holds the leadership for the effective school improvement at the national contextual level. Moreover, in highly centralized educational systems, strong centrally steering and empowering ESI become vital because in such systems, without the orders and permissions from the "Chief Commander", schools will face great problems if they go their own way.

National goal-setting is only an initiative step. Without the pressure to implement the goals, the goals would remain in the air. Goals need to be carried out with a control system to monitor the degree of goal attainment. The effective national control can be achieved by a national reinforcement

structure. Such a reinforcement structure consists of the external evaluation, feedback and rewarding system. This structure inevitably results in pressure for schools.

Centrally steering and empowering ESI in Spain have played a rather important role in the five Spanish case studies, especially through the LOGSE and PAM initiatives. A typical example was "the MEC will award 1,000,000 pesetas to the educational centers which have developed the best improvement programs for a school year" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 387). The existence of an external stimulus or pressure to develop an improvement process is a common element in the five selected case studies. All these initiatives directly come from the central that result in a kind of pressure and competition for schools as well due to the fact that the well-developed-and-achieved PAM programs will be published and will be rewarded by the MEC. The PAM, as a strategy for centrally steering and empowering ESI, has been experienced in three out of the five Spanish ESI programs. As the 2nd program states:

> *"By joining the call of PAM it has been possible to systematize the program and to receive the award given by the Ministry in recognition of the quality of the Plan developed, which has given some publicity to the initiative and to the work carried out by the school. Moreover, the school has enough autonomy to carry out its projects as the Educational Administration has not hampered the improvement plan but rather has supported its development, favoring its success and the development of new improvement experiences" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 413).*

While the LOGSE has influenced or initiated ESI in Spain through the form of legal law to implement the reformed national curriculum, thus it means "not just the reorganization of the educational levels but setting up new teaching ways and principles as well" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 397).

> *"The improvement program (LOGSE) has introduced various organizational changes at school. (new cycle distribution, deeper co-ordination among teachers, agreed minimum goals and contents, agreements on the methodology and use of the resources ...). Moreover, it implied new modifications that fitted in with the school's objectives and principles, such as some changes in methodology and evaluation. Therefore, this Educational Reform is not seen as an imposition but as an opportunity to institutionalize teachers' efforts and way of working" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 405).*

In short, the PAM and the LOGSE are valued as effective strategies and an external pressure for centrally steering and empowering ESI in Spain. This seems to be an essential factor in the five Spanish ESI programs.

3.3 External evaluation and external agents

External evaluation refers to the evaluation organized by external agents or external educational authorities, such as the evaluations from the national, the local, and educational researchers. External agents may include independent inspections, local educational authorities, educational consultants or educational researchers. External agents tend to provide pressure as well as support to help to bring about change. They play the role of a critical friend who connects research to practice. They help to create conditions in which schools can improve themselves. From this point of view, they are not only regarded as a source of pressure but also as a source of support. The targets for external evaluation are normally the student outcomes. Value-added measurement is needed in order to compare the actual contributions of an individual school to its student achievement. According to Barber (1998), in most schools preparation for inspection has led to improvement and that following inspection there is a concerted effort to address any problems the inspectors have identified.

Spain has various external agents. The three external agents that have more impact on the ESI programs are: the National Institute for Quality and Evaluation (INCE), the Educational Inspectorate Service of the Ministry and the Federation.

> *In the last few years the evaluation is getting a special importance as an important factor for the quality of education. In 1990 the INCE was created by the MEC to carry out the educational system evaluation in the whole country. A general evaluation of both primary and secondary schools has already been carried out by the INCE. Because of its sample characteristic and lack of feedback to the schools, these evaluation have some effect on the state and the regional administration, but not directly on schools"* (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 381).

The Educational Inspectorate Services of the Ministry and the Federation have played an important role in the five ESI programs.

> *"The Inspectors reoriented the school needs in a positive way and encouraged both the Management Team and the Teachers' Assembly to join the PAM. This initial support was crucial for the success of the improvement process. The Inspector was also in charge of carrying out the external evaluation at the end of the first year, and helped make the whole process easier by allowing some flexibility in the organization of the school"* (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., p. 395).

> *"When each school developed PAM program finished, the Educational Inspectorate Services carried out a global evaluation of the results achieved and followed up the sessions closely, by means of both observing activities in every classroom and meeting with the school's teaching staff"* (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., p. 420).

> *"The Federation of Ikastolas offered itself to evaluate the program and the students' achievement in English and Basque Language. This organization develops a yearly evaluation of pupils from different schools at the end of Primary Education. Information is gathered about different dimensions of their achievement, using it to make a report which is given back to school. This report shows the individual results of each student and of every classroom compared with the other groups. The overall results of the school are also compared with those of the other schools of the Federation. Moreover, the results of the school itself are compared with those of the years before. On the other hand, the Federation of Ikastolas also searches for outstanding results at each area. On basis of that, the Federation fosters the exchange of experiences among those school with better and worse results, what favors the comparison between experiences and the optimization of the improvement processes of the schools"* (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 401).

Anyhow, the functions of the external agents in Spain are more associated with support rather than pressure. The pressure from the external evaluation and external agents were not strong in at least four out of the five ESI programs.

3.4 The adequate financial and human resources for ESI

School improvement will be successful more easily with adequate support of financial and human resources. There should be a commitment to resourcing education consistently and adequately from the national and local contextual level. Financial resources are important, probably not as a direct influence but as a means to increase relevant ESI (Sun and Jong, 2001). Here human resource refers to the external assistance (external agents, researchers, etc.) and the availability of qualified teachers (including pre-service and in-service training). When there are not enough teachers for the necessary daily routines, improvement efforts will easily be suppressed. In addition, the daily workload influences the teachers' motivations to improve.

There are some evidences about financial and human resource support in the five Spanish ESI programs. The 1 million pesetas awarded to each of the well-developed-and-achieved PAM program are the special financial encouragement for effective school improvement in Spain. As the 2nd case study points out "thanks to the *economic resources* obtained from the Educational Administration for

the quality of the plan developed, this 'travelling library' has meant a new impulse to the reading program". The similar statement can be found in the 4th case study, "counseling and *resources* given by the external change agents have favored the development of the improvement program. Their support has contributed to the success of the initiative" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 423). Regarding the human resource support, the five Spanish ESI programs have offered several evidences.

> *"Every center for teachers has a different number of primary and secondary schools assigned to it, providing schools with their support, both for professional development and for resources or counseling in order to carry out innovations or improvement initiatives" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., p. 382).*

> *"Besides the economic resources given by the local administration, there have been two other external agents involved positively valued by the school teachers: the Educational Inspectorate and the Center for Teachers and Resources. The Inspectors has offered a stable relationship of support for the program development, assessing and carrying out the monitoring of the program. The collaboration of the Center for Teachers and Resources has been more occasional, based on economical resources, support seminars" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., p. 395).*

The Spanish ESI programs also mentioned the influence of the external **counselors** and the other external agents, the 2nd program described how the external counselor played his role for PAM as the following: it was undoubtedly the external counselor the one who played an important role in the plan. He was the one who suggested the starting point for the program (goals and proposals for training and development), and also contributed with the materials he had already elaborated… He was the guide of the process and carried out the counseling to the teachers on materials revision and on agreement of goals and contents for each cycle. He also took part in the elaboration of some for the tests which are internally used for the valuation of the achievement in mathematics" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 404). "Teachers consider that it is not possible to understand the program without the proposals and contributions of the external counselor" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 405). In short, the support from the external agents varied and there was considerable overlap in the five programs.

3.5 Offering schools some autonomy

Offering schools some autonomy is essential for the success of improvement efforts. The crucial aspect of the context in the light of improvement seems to be the autonomy of schools (granted and actually used) to decide about their own situations, including improvement plans and activities. According to Creemers *et al*. (2001) autonomy of schools relates to several domains: educational goals (what to teach), educational means (how to teach), organizational management and administration (including hiring and firing personnel), and finances. Concerning autonomy in educational means, entrusting decision-making to teachers (how, when, in what way to teach) is also important (Darling-Hammond, 1997). It has been evidenced that full autonomy in all these domains does not lead to improvement. Nor does the absence of autonomy in all domains.

Spanish political and administrative educational system is very centralized and there is still a lack of autonomy in many aspects (Muñoz-Repiso, M. *et al*., 2000: 380). Public schools have a limited autonomy in choosing teaching methods and school textbooks; no autonomy in deciding teaching time, the number of hours devoted to each subject, no autonomy in staff recruitment and their working conditions; and little autonomy regarding the management of financial and material and resources. Recently, a new impulse has started to offer schools more autonomy, according to Murillo (forthcoming), Spanish public schools are starting to have some autonomy in the management of financial, material and pedagogical resources. Changes have taken place in the last few years moving from a uniform educational system to the one characterized by increasing autonomy. The school principal selecting system is a good example. In Spain the school principal is one of the teachers in the school who is elected and appointed by the School Council every four years. The School Council has the same right to dismiss the school principal as well. While a School Council is composed of

representatives of teachers, parents and, in secondary schools, even students. This system has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that the headmaster is an accepted natural leader in the school who knows the school reality; who knows what the school needs and what works, who can more easily initiate effective school improvement (ESI) and mobilize the staff within the school. The disadvantage is that since he/she was one of the common teachers and who will be so after four years, thus he/she may not be too "tough" to use the necessary power to develop the school change process.

3.6   Evoking a culture in support of ESI

The importance of a school culture and in particular a school's guiding value system is enabling change and enhancing educational provision (Fullan, 1982). It is the cultural change that supports the teaching-learning process which leads to enhanced outcomes for students (Hopkins, *et al*., 1994). However, school culture cannot exist in vacuum and is inseparable from its embedded national culture. A national culture is like the roots of a tree while school cultures are like different branches or leaves of this tree. Although every single leaf differs, they all manifest from the same roots and they all share the same genes (values) from their own national culture tree (Sun, 2002). Therefore, evoking a culture in support of ESI includes two aspects: evoking a national culture in support of ESI and evoking a school culture in favor of ESI. They are both equally important.

Culture is a soft characteristic. Lying at the deep level of culture are the values. Values are reflected in national constitutions, laws, educational policies, curriculum guidelines, national visions and goals, public calls, to mention just a few. They are the major reflections of the values of a national culture (Sun, *et al*., in press). According to Hofstede (1991: 201), "culture changes can be influenced in more or less predictable ways by changing structures and systems". Although culture is soft, changing it needs 'hard' measures. At the national level, this may be done by sensitizing the whole society's awareness of the significance of ESI by public calls, advocacy through various media. This can also be done by initiating educational reforms or school improvement through establishing new laws, new national policies and goals, changing curriculum guidelines, closing failure schools, providing special financial and human support for ESI, developing a shared vision and shared language for ESI at all levels, etc.

The LOGSE and PAM can be regarded as typical examples of evoking a national culture in favor of ESI, because they create the new visions and bring the new values to the public and to the whole nation for educational improvement. As a matter of fact, they are also the indicators of the changed culture in Spain because the overall reforms were possible only after the death of Franco. "After his death, Spain entered a phase of major political transformation. Followed by the establishment of a democratic regime influenced by *a climate favorable to socialist and interventionist ideas*, the educational authorities slowly moved from the very doctrinaire approach towards a more programmatic conception of school management" (EURYDICE, 2000: 330). In this sense, LOGSE and PAM can be seen not only as a stimulus for change, and the development of the educational reform, an external pressure for change, but also as a way of evoking a culture in support of effective school improvement.

Regarding evoking a school culture in favor of ESI, the 1st case study evidenced "an important change was made in the teaching cooperation, teachers' teamwork became more frequent. Teachers meetings are more useful now, and the school timetables are reorganized. The teachers think that they have *developed a highly positive common culture* that enables them to take responsibilities in a collective way" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 401). In addition, "students show a positive attitude towards the reading sessions and have increased their motivation, specially the underprivileged pupils.

Besides that, the whole teaching staff is still involved in this project which nowadays is established *as part of the school's culture*" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000. p. 415, p. 421). "The most important result may be the *setting-up of an innovative culture at school* and the concern for continuous improvement" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., 2000: 402).

3.7 Other factors that influence ESI

- **The influence of the European Commission on ESI**

The influence of the European Commission to effective school improvement has been evidenced in the five Spanish ESI programs. They argue: "the most usual evaluation combines an external evaluation strategy with a self-assessment one. It is based on the European Model for Quality Management as way to foster improvement processes" (MEC, 1997).

- **The importance of Time for ESI**

The importance of time is repeatedly emphasized in the five Spanish ESI programs. "It is necessary to point out the scarce availability of time as a factor that, to a certain degree, has posed many difficulties for carrying out the improvement process. The different collectives involved in the program consider that this limitation has always been present (and it still is)" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p.405).

4. DISCUSSION

The most apparent factors that foster ESI at the Spanish contextual level seem to be '*the strong centrally steering and empowering ESI* ' and '*evoking a culture in support of ESI'*. These two factors have been widely evidenced in the five ESI programs. The Spanish central government has used various ways to centrally steer and empower school improvement such as new laws (e.g. LOGSE) to implement the reformed national curriculum, public calls (e.g. PAM) to advocate ESI, the special financial award (e.g. 1 million for each well-developed-and-realized school year plan), publicity of the well-done school PAM plans, the Inspectors' evaluations, to mention just a few. The factor 'evoking a culture in support of ESI' has also been clearly evidenced in these five programs. The Spanish government has used public calls and various media to sensitize the whole society's awareness of the significance of ESI and the necessity of the educational reforms. It has tried to bring new visions and new values into the public through advocacy and through establishing new constitutions, laws, national goals and policies for change, accompanied with special financial and human support to encourage school improvement.

As for the national goal setting in terms of student outcomes and intermediate outcomes, the five ESI programs do show "the emphasis is put more on the distance improved from a disadvantaged situation to a better one, than on the academic achievement itself" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 433). In other words, the national goal setting is evidenced stronger in intermediate outcomes compared with the ultimate student outcomes, although they have, more or less, lead to improve the ultimate student outcomes as the five programs show. Besides, the national evaluation and national reinforcement system to guarantee how to achieve the national goals is rather weak due to the fact that there is no unified national testing nor the unified regional testing system. The INCE evaluation lacks of feedback to schools and has no direct influence on schools. Although the external evaluation and agents have exercised some pressure and support for the success of the five programs, however, the pressure and support vary in degrees and in perspectives. For example, the 1st, the 3rd and the 4th ESI programs have evidenced more pressure and support from the Inspectors while the 2nd program mentions more about

the pressure and support from the external counselor. The special features of the Spanish Inspectors are that not only they evaluate the school quality, but also suggest, initiate, monitor the school improvement programs. This differs from the functions of the Inspectors in some other European countries. In brief, the function of the Inspectors mentioned in these programs is more associated with support rather than evaluation and pressure for school improvement.

In the respect of school autonomy, one surprising finding in the five Spanish ESI programs is the principal-elected system. School principals are not appointed or dismissed by local or national administrations but elected by the School Council composed of representatives of teachers, students, parents, etc. In the respect of other ESI contextual factors, the importance of time has been repeatedly emphasized in the case studies. The influence of the European Community for effective school improvement have been evidenced as well, particularly the European Model for Quality Management was regarded as an effective way to foster school improvement process.

Apart from the contextual factors that foster effective school improvement, the five Spanish ESI programs have also unfolded the factors that hinder ESI at the contextual level. These negative factors are:

a.   The *curriculum and assignment of resources* do not fit the characteristics and needs of the rural schools. Many of the curricular elements do not take the rural educational context into account (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 414).

b.   *The way of pointing teachers* appears to be negative for ESI improvement process. Since only after some years of temporary posting, the teachers in public schools can obtain a permanent job at schools. The length of time of this temporary posting varies and is longer in secondary education. "The delay in awarding definitive posts makes it possible that the 50% of the staff in a school changes every year" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 436). Undoubtedly, this unstable situation of the teachers in public schools will greatly hinder the continuity and implementation of school improvement process.

c.   Schools have *no decision power in teacher development and recruitment*. In-service training is organized by specialized centers, without taking schools' needs into account. (Murillo., forthcoming).

Concerning the question "how and in which way do the contextual level factors influence ESI in Spain?", in the specific context of Spain, in recent years the factors at the contextual level influence ESI at Spanish schools mainly through the initiatives of LOGSE and PAM at the national level. Meanwhile, each educational center and schools develop their own improvement programs in line with PAM and being evaluated by Inspectors. The LOGSE has influenced or initiated ESI through the form of legal law to implement the reformed national curriculum, thus it means "not just the reorganization of the educational levels but setting up new teaching ways and principles as well" (Muñoz-Repiso, *et al*., p. 397). And create the new vision and bring about new values. The improvement program (LOGSE) has introduced various organizational changes at school (new cycle distribution, deeper co-ordination among teachers, agreed minimum goals and contents, agreements on the methodology and use of the resources). Moreover, it implied new modifications that fitted in with the school's objectives and principles, such as some changes in methodology and evaluation. Therefore, this Educational Reform is not seen as an imposition but as an opportunity to institutionalize teachers' efforts and way of working. While the PAM has influenced ESI through the central public calls, attractive rewarding (1 million) and co-operated with the monitoring and evaluation of the Inspectors. However, only one or two factors may have little effect on ESI, the greater impact results from many factors working

together. In the case of Spain, at least 7 factors at the national contextual level have impacts on the success of the effective school improvement in Spain.

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APPENDIX

The factors at the contextual level which influence ESI in the five Spanish ESI programs (foster or hinder or new)

The factors which foster ESI at the contextual level	1. Strong centrally steering and empowering ESI
	2. Evoking a culture in support of ESI
	3. National goal setting in terms of student outcomes and intermediate outcomes
	4. The adequate financial and human resource support
	5. External evaluation and external agents
	6. Offering school some autonomy
	7. The influence of the European Commission and the importance of time for ESI.
The factors which have negative influence on ESI at the contextual level	1. The curriculum and assignment of resources
	2. The way of pointing teachers
	3. Schools lacking of autonomy in teacher development and recruitment.