Chapter 2  Literature Review

2.0  Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to review the literature relevant to contextual factors so as to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1. Obviously, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a historic overview of all the related theories. Under consideration are the factors and indicators, especially at the contextual level, from the following theoretical fields: School Effectiveness theory (2.1); School Improvement theory (2.2); Curriculum theory (2.3); theories of Organization, Organizational learning and Learning Organization (2.4); and Public School Choice theory (2.5). The main purpose is to search for the theoretical “input” for this research and to see which contextual level factors and indicators derived from these related theories can be used as filters for the empirical analysis of the study. The derived contextual level factors and the indicators are synthesized in Section 2.6, elaborated in Section 2.7 and the whole chapter is summarized in Section 2.8.

2.1  School Effectiveness Theory

Basically, the study of School Effectiveness has two aims – to distinguish factors that are characteristic of effective schools and to identify differences between school outcomes. Essentially, School Effectiveness is student outcome-oriented. Most effectiveness research defines the output criterion as achievement in basic cognitive skills (Creemers, 1994; Creemers and Hoeben, 1998). The “touchstone” for effective schools remains the impact on students’ educational outcomes. Without it, decisions about what constitutes a “good” practice would be made on the basis of personal taste or would depend on the whim of an “expert” (Mortimore, 1998, 2001). In an age of accountability, schools must demonstrate to themselves and to the wider community that they do make a difference to student outcomes (Mortimore, et al., 1988, 2000). Without doubt, school effectiveness research has demonstrated that schools can and do make a difference regardless of students’ socio-economic status (SES). School effectiveness, with its focus on equity and value-added student results, has had a significant impact on educational research and on school teaching and student learning.

Within the field of school effectiveness, distinctions are drawn between “educational effectiveness”, “instructional effectiveness” and “school effectiveness”. According to Creemers and Scheerens (1989) and Bosker and Scheerens (1989, 1994), “educational effectiveness” refers to the effectiveness of the educational system in general, “instructional effectiveness” refers to the effectiveness at the classroom level while “school effectiveness” refers to the effectiveness at the school level (schools as an organization). The book “Effective Classroom” (Creemers, 1994: 22) highlights the importance of the national system level, stating that the national government has to safeguard education quality and fulfill this task in many ways, for example, by assigning financial means, by taking care of examination regulations and by maintaining the Educational Inspectorate, by financing centers for the development of curricula, tests, and a huge network of advisory centers for schools. Starting and promoting debates on educational topics can also be considered as a new policy instrument to give guidance to educational organizations. Examination regulations are an important instrument for national governments. This instrument will probably become even more powerful when national goals are established and examinations are adapted in line with these goals. In addition, national governments influence education through regulations for timetables
and financial mechanisms. In short, the organization of education is intensively guided by the national level.

In the aspect of goal setting, although schools have to set specific goals for improvement, normally educational goals are set at the national level (Creemers et al., 2001a). They are expressed in terms of the standards or targets that have to be achieved in core subject areas. The role of national standards is considered to be two-fold: as a powerful tool for assessing student outcomes and allowing schools to know the level of achievement of their students. Without goals or standards, it is impossible to make the standardized tests, without standardized tests, the National Inspectors are not able to assess the achievement of schools in a fair way. Therefore, using standardized tests makes it possible to give feedback to students, teachers, schools and LEAs. According to Scheerens and Bosker (1997:6) "goals that can be operationalized as pursued outputs are the basis for choosing effect criteria with which effects are measured". The implication is that goals can serve as means to evaluate schools and the entire education system. To this end, goals must be stated in terms of skills and capacities to be developed rather than merely as content to be learned. In the UK this has been evidenced by the national specified increased academic points for each subject and the number of national tests during the whole schooling. This approach is essential if goals/standards are to become an effective instrument for student assessment and a powerful tool for school improvement. Barber (1998: 763) points out that the governments have invested substantial political capital in education and training targets or goals. However, unless they are translated by local governments or schools into targets for improvement, they are unlikely to change attitudes or motivate teachers. Where it does happen, it can help to bring real change (ib: 763). The local governments are well placed to provide schools with extensive data relating to test results, financial, management information and with a range of training, consultancy, advice and even financial support.

The national goals need to be shared and educational practitioners need to be empowered. In this respect, the International School Effectiveness Research Project (ISERP) has cited the Pacific Rim societies as a good example. In those societies, educational meetings to determine national policy include the major educational players. In this way changes can be rapidly conveyed to teachers who can not only share the national goals but also directly contribute to the national goal setting and policymaking. If teachers do not share goals or if the sets of goals are unclear, this will definitely result in schools and classrooms being unpredictable and lacking in consistency, constancy and cohesion (Reynolds, et al., 2002: 290). As a matter of fact, this is a good strategy of strong central empowerment - involving the major players at the very beginning, listening to their voices, recognizing their expertise, encouraging their participation and offering them the ownership of change.

However, clear and shared goals are not enough. Effective pressures are needed to fulfill the national goals. According to Barber (1998) there are various ways in which effective pressure might be applied. Apart from the establishment of targets, the second means is to publish the performance data. The third element of pressure on schools is independent inspections. Finally, there needs to be a much clearer national policy for ensuring effective intervention in schools which are found to be failing. The school effectiveness research in the UK shows that external/central intervention to help failing schools is necessary, even necessary to exert pressure on local authorities. In one case, the case of Hackney Downs School, the UK government took the view that the school was so poor
and its relations with the local authority so poisoned, that there was no alternative but to use the central government’s powers of intervention. Quite often, it is difficult for a failing school to design its own improvement strategy, in this respect, an external consultant can make a difference. “Critical friends” can be effective in both failing and successful schools. The focus of the external agents, however, needs to be on creating the capacity for sustainable improvement rather than on creating dependency.

According to Barber, 1998; Creemers, et al., 2001; Meuret & Scheerens, 1995; Sun and de Jong, 2001, pressure has to go hand in hand with support. It is necessary that the national and local contextual level resources education consistently. A much greater investment in teachers’ pre-and-in-service training is needed because of the pace of technological and social change as well as the increased expectations towards education. In addition, teachers’ workload should be lightened and teachers should have time for in-service training. It is also essential for government to invest in the provision of a range of extra curricular activities, homework clubs and other after-school options, which would provide attractive and motivating alternatives for young people to the dubious attractions of the street. Furthermore, offering schools some autonomy especially in the domains of finance, school management and personnel is of primary importance because teacher selection, recruitment and output monitoring and the way in which evaluation are carried out are key areas of higher-level control and facilitation in educational organizations (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997: 310). If this balance of pressure and support were established, it is possible to imagine that many more schools would succeed than do at present (Barber, 1998).

School effectiveness emphasizes highly the importance of evaluation, feedback and reinforcement at different levels. Creemers (1992: 121) points out that an emphasis on basic skills, evaluation, and feedback can contribute to school effectiveness, as long as these are connected in a consistent and continuous way with classroom instruction and the hiring of competent principals and teachers. According to Scheerens (1992) evaluation is to be seen as the key mechanism of effective schooling and the precondition for all cognitive adaptation or learning and for all cognitive (or motivational) stimulation. According to Scheerens and Bosker (1997: 118-120), aspects of the evaluation concept include priority given to assessment and monitoring, evaluation of technology, use of evaluation results and records at the school level, assessment to meet external accountability requirements, assessment to be used as a basis for marketing the school and informing parents and other stakeholders, evaluation of pupils’ progress taking place by means of standardized tests, and use of evaluation results. Barber (1998: 762) argues that at the national contextual level, governments normally have control or influence over national assessment and the qualification framework. This is of central importance, since through national assessment schools across the country can gain a common language of standards and achievement and compare their performance to that of others. Stringfield (1995) notes that several U.S. states have created new curriculum standards and new, more demanding and more performance-based tests. This is the case in some other countries as well. The growing concern across society for higher standards of performance has led to a growing emphasis on outcomes. It is through the qualification framework that this information is conveyed publicly. At the national level, monitoring by means of educational indicators makes permanent quality control possible (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997: 30). To evaluate the outcomes, the value-added approach for comparison (output – input = added value) is preferable.
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School effectiveness research (SER) emphasizes the influence of culture/climate on the effectiveness of schools (Creemers and Reezigt, 1997, Creemers et al., 2001b; Bosker, et al., 1999; Cheng, 1996a; Reynolds & Teddlie, 2000; Barber, 1998, Hofman & Guldemond, 2001, Sun, et al., 2003). Culture is considered important as it provides the normative glue that holds the organization together. It influences the attitudes and behavior of the members of the organization. School climate (ethos) issues entered into SER through the study of Edmonds (1979a, 1979b), Rutter et al. (1979), Brookover et al. (1978, 1979) and Stringfield et al. (1992). One of Edmonds' five effective factors is an "orderly climate conducive to learning", while Rutter et al. linked the notion of school culture with the effectiveness of secondary schools. The studies of Brookover et al. (1978, 1979) argue that school climate factors could be powerful predictors of student achievement. Stringfield & Slavin (1992), Stringfield, et al. (1992) believe that individual schools have discernible school cultures, and that the nature of those cultures has an impact on the quantity and quality of instruction received by students, and hence on students’ achievement gains. Accordingly, school principals are in an almost ideal position to shape the culture of their schools through careful hiring, frequent classroom visits, targeted staff development, program coordination, judicious use of rewards, and when necessary, the quiet removal of an unproductive or socially destructive staff member. Cheng provided empirical evidence on the association of strong vs. weak school culture with overall academic achievement in secondary schools (1993, 1996b). Scheerens and Bosker (1997: 112-117) have divided school climate into two types: orderly atmosphere/effectiveness orientation on the one hand and good internal relationships on the other. The former includes the factors: rules and regulations, punishment and rewards, absenteeism and dropouts, good conduct and behavior of pupils, learning environment, satisfaction with orderly school climate and the latter: positive interpersonal relationships for staff and students, shared goals and values by staff and students, student and teacher motivation, commitment/enthusiasm of teaching staff, teachers like pupils, support them, want them to associate nicely, know what every pupil wants, treat them fairly, etc. However, school culture cannot exist in a vacuum and is inseparable from its embedded national culture. The impact of the national culture on education, particularly its value and norms on education, cannot be underestimated (Sun, 2001). One perspective emerging from the literature on educational effectiveness stresses the linkage between the culture of a nations’ education system and its particular schools with the innovative capacity of societies and their educational organizations (Hofman, et al., 2002: 1). According to Reynolds et al. (2002: 292), the differences between countries were related to the coherence and the strength of the system itself. The place of the educational system and the value that is placed on it indicates how much strength the system has. It became apparent that an effective education system level can (but not necessarily will) create effective schools and classrooms, however that depends partly on the value that is placed within the society on the educational system and the importance of the teaching profession. They state further on that in some countries education is not regarded highly and is seen as something that only schools have to deliver. In other societies education is seen as a task for society as a whole, in which teachers and schools are important and highly respected. In the first case, one can imagine that the well being of teachers, their own ideas about their profession, and the work they are doing are affected negatively by their own position and the position of education in general in the society. In this case it is difficult for schools and teachers to ask or to expect assistance from families, and for the wider society to be involved and to assist in what schools are doing. What is needed for educational effectiveness is a paradoxical, complicated set of societal features: namely, the perception that education and teachers matter and are
worthy of support, and beyond that a *culture* that in its day-to-day functioning does the job of educating their young themselves because they feel that education is not just a school responsibility. In short, to engender and to build up a supportive national *culture* for educational effectiveness and improvement is crucially important (Creemers et al. 1998; Creemers et al. 2001; de Jong, ed. 2000., MacBeath and Mortimore, 2001).

In the 1990s, several models for school effectiveness have been developed. A basic idea behind all models for school effectiveness is to distinguish between the impacts of different levels on education (Creemers, 1994; Hoeben, 1998b & 1999; Teddlie, et al., 2000). Several levels are included in these models: student level, classroom level, school level and the contextual level. The general assumption is that the higher level influences the lower level conditions (Creemers, 1992; Scheerens, 1990, Stringfield and Slavin, 1992a). School effectiveness researchers argue strongly that the classroom level has greater impact on pupils’ progress than that of the school level (Creemers, 1994; Hill et al. 1995; Sammons 1999a, 1999b; Hill and Rowe, 1996). However, the higher levels provide conditions for what happens at the classroom level. Thus it is not just one level but also a combination of levels that induce results (Creemers and Hoeben, 1998). Given the focus of this research, a brief overview of Creemers’ comprehensive educational model (1994), especially at the context level, is necessary and relevant.

### 2.1.1 Creemers’ Comprehensive Educational Model and the contextual level factors

In 1994, after careful reflection on SER and Carrol's model (1963, 1989), Creemers contributed a comprehensive model of educational effectiveness. The main features of his model can be briefly summarized as: **one focus, two ‘4-components’, and three criteria**. The *one focus* is located at the classroom level. The *two “4-Components”* are the four levels (the student level, the classroom level, the school level, and the context level) and four formal criteria: consistency, cohesion, constancy and control. The three main factors are *quality, time and opportunity*. In Creemers’ model, the context level embraces all the levels above the school level within an educational system, i.e. Ministries of Education, the district/local educational authorities and so on. The same components: *quality, time and opportunity to learn* can be distinguished at all the levels. *Quality* at the context level refers to *national goals and policies* that focus on educational effectiveness; the availability of an *indicator system or policies on evaluation* or a *national testing system*; *training and supporting systems* for promoting effective schools and instruction; *funding and resources* for schools based on outcomes. *Time* refers to national or regional guidelines with respect to the *time schedule* of schools and the supervision of the maintenance of schedules. *Opportunity to learn* refers to national guidelines and rules with respect to *curriculum development*, the school working plan and the activity plans at the school level through a national curriculum. *Resources* include the availability of *materials, teachers* and other components that support education. The three criteria - quality, time and opportunity, serve as three main filters within the model, determining which effective factor fits into the model and which does not. Culture variables are included at the contextual level of this model. Creemers (1994: 37) points out "there are (cultural) variations between, for example, education in the US and education in the European countries. These variations apply to areas such as the autonomy of teachers, the decentralization of educational policy, the influence of local educational boards, the influence of curricular materials on educational practice and state-determined obligations to use materials. Such variations have to be taken into account when results of research on the effectiveness of teaching are interpreted in a specific national context".
2.1.2 A comparison and integration of the contextual level factors in two models
Apart from Creemers’ model, another model exists that we consider may contribute to this study. It is Scheerens’ model (1992). It incorporates contingency theory (Mintzberg, 1979), in that a school’s effectiveness can depend on situational or contextual conditions. A multilevel framework has been used to identify pupil, classroom, school characteristics, as well as environmental and contextual influences. Although the "covariables" in his model belong to the contextual level factors, essentially, they are more associated with the school contextual level factors, therefore, they will not be regarded as the national contextual level factors in this research. The table below contains the contextual level factors within these two models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Effectiveness Models/frameworks</th>
<th>The contextual level factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creemers’ model (1994)</td>
<td>Quality (national policies focus on effectiveness of education, the availability of an indicator system or a national policy on evaluation or a national testing system, training and supporting systems which promotes effective schools &amp; instruction, funding of schools based on outcomes)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Time (national guidelines with respect to the time schedule of schools, supervision of the maintenance of schedules)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Opportunity to learn (national guidelines and rules with respect to curriculum development, the school working plan and the activity plan at the school level)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Resources (availability of financial/materials, teachers and other components supporting education in schools and classrooms).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheerens’ model (1992)</td>
<td>Achievement stimulants from higher administrative levels</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Development of educational consumerism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Covariables (school size, student-body composition, school category, urban/rural)</td>
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2.1.3 Synthesizing the contextual level factors derived from School Effectiveness Research
Based on the previous literature review, we get the following contextual level factors and indicators derived from the School Effectiveness theory and research. We can divide these factors/indicators into three categories: goals, pressure and support. This division is possible because of the profound empirically proven characteristics of the paradox of goals, pressure and support (see Fullan, 1999 and Miles, 1986). Some of the factors, for example, “development of educational consumerism”, essentially belong to market mechanism (public choice), therefore, we classify it as pressure renamed “market mechanism”. In addition, we distinguish the national/state tests from the tests given by external agents for research purposes. We distinguish the national inspection from the other external agents. The former is grouped with national goals while the latter is grouped into the external evaluation and external agents’ part because of the Inspectors’ special position and influence on schools.

Summary of the contributions from the SE theory
The following ideas from School Effectiveness theory seem to be important for this study:
• National goal-setting in terms of student outcomes (for curriculum development, time for each subject, national test system with the specified targets for each subject, the numbers of national tests during the whole schooling, the National Inspection, etc.);

• Strong central steering and empowering educational effectiveness (strictly applying national monitoring, evaluation, feedback and reinforcement system, effective central interventions, offering schools decision making power, spiritual support, e.g. the importance of education and the teaching profession);

• External evaluations and external agents (evaluation technology, value-added comparison ...);

• Market mechanisms (informing parents and developing educational consumerism);

• School accountability (using evaluation results and records; the measure taken when schools fail);

• Time, financial and human resource support for educational effectiveness;

• Local/district support for school effectiveness;

• Offering schools some autonomy (in pedagogy, finance and management particularly in hiring/firing teachers and staff);

• A supportive culture (at the national, local and school levels) for educational effectiveness.

2.2 School Improvement theory

School improvement researchers argue, "a picture of the current effectiveness of schools does not tell schools how to become successful. This is where School improvement is important, because it focuses on the journey to success and the necessary conditions to support successful change" (Stoll and Wikeley, 1998). In other words, how one investigates more deeply the how rather than the what, not simply what the characteristics are but rather how they are acquired or lost. Not simply what do effective and ineffective schools look like but rather how do they get that way – is the point of departure for School Improvement research (SIR) (McBeath and Mortimore, 2001).

School Improvement researchers consider that schools not only serve the general developmental needs of their students, but also serve the professional development of teachers, and the needs of the community. That’s why School Improvement aims to achieve a range of goals that will enhance learning, achievement and development amongst students. Since the 1990s, School Improvement research has become more focused on school effectiveness issues such as teaching and learning processes and student outcomes.

2.2.1 The importance of the context in School Improvement

Context is viewed as important to School Improvement. Any good ideas or programs that hope to spread must include in their theories of action, a focus on context (Fullan, 1999: 21). Meanwhile, “successful implementation of any given policy requires those implementing it to be simultaneously provided with support and put under pressure” (Fullan, 1999). Pressure without support creates alienation and resistance, while support without pressure, tends to be a waste of resources. The existence of pressure is therefore a very important feature of successful change, as long as it is combined with support (Miles, 1986). This pressure-support paradox has been increasingly recognized as a profound insight. Having examined successful change and innovations, Miles derived 14 key factors, which are associated with successful change. Among them, eight are related to the contextual level. They are: linking to a high profile need, clear model of
implementation, one or more strong advocates, active initiation, shared control, pressure and support, ongoing technical assistance and early rewards for teachers. The research of Earl and Lee (1998) discloses the \textit{external role of pressure and support for evaluation, networking, professional development and expectations for accountability} – as catalysts for the engagement of teachers that they found in successful schools. Fullan compares three researches (Bertelsmann, 1996; Elmore and Burney, 1998; Bryk et al., 1996) and points out that two of the implications are: all three districts practiced \textit{“support and pressure” capacity-building strategies} and obtained cumulative results because of these strategies. In addition, pressure and support must be integrated and must flow within the interaction of internal and external forces (Fullan, 1999: 78). In one-way or another, pressure reminds us of the top-down model. Having made an overview of the research done by Oakes et al. (1998), Elmore and Burney (1998), Fullan (1999: 19) argues that neither top-down nor bottom-up strategies by themselves can achieve coherence – the top is too distant and the bottom is overwhelmed. Top-down strategies cause grief but no relief. Bottom-up approaches produce the odd spurt but eventually drown in a sea of inertia. Top-down mandates and bottom-up energies need each other. By the 1990s, school improvement scholars were suggesting that change occurred best with a ‘top-down, bottom-up’ approach in which the larger system provided \textit{direction and support} and the actual change process \textit{was left to schools} through \textit{school-based decision making} and \textit{school development planning} (van Velzen, et al., 1985).

Top-down mandates and bottom-up energies together may not be sufficient. At the national level, the \textit{national policies} for school improvement are also important. With respect to national policymaking, the framework of Bryk et al. (1998: 292) for establishing local “extra school infrastructures” is totally compatible with what one needs to have at the national level (Fullan, 1999). The components of their framework are:

- Policymaking to support \textit{decentralization},
- \textit{Local capacity-building},
- \textit{Rigorous accountability}
- \textit{Stimulating innovation}.

Obviously, decentralization is associated with \textit{autonomy and empowerment}. Local \textit{capacity building} is more or less associated with the widespread involvement, dispositions and strategies to undertake reform activities. Setting up a rigorous \textit{accountability system} is essential. According to Fullan (1999), a rigorous accountability is both a policy and a capacity-building proposition. Among the rigorous accountability, \textit{external standards for student performance are an essential ingredient for reform at the school level}. This system can generate and make \textit{available data on student achievement}. One key role of the external accountability system is to help \textit{build local capacity for examining and taking action on assessment data} (Hargreaves and Fullan, 1998). The other role is to \textit{intervene in persistently failing schools and school system}. Since new ideas are crucial, and since the educational system is traditionally weak at accepting and \textit{spreading new knowledge and practices}, a deliberate system of \textit{stimulating innovation} is required. Policy initiatives, according to Fullan (1999: 58), that combine \textit{rigorous external accountability} with mechanisms for \textit{focusing on local capacity development} are critical for success. External accountability requires the four-stage cycle of school development planning, that is, \textit{assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation}. According to Stoll and Wikeley (1998), this cycle underlies all change processes. The concepts (focus on effectiveness issues, readiness for change, ownership mentality and a favorable school culture) all have their own places within this cycle.
Stimulating innovation at the national level is important. In the school improvement project carried out in Missouri (King, 1992: 341), "it is found that the role of the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education is extremely important to successful statewide changes". This has reminded us of the lessons learned from the research of Lezotte (1989a: 1820) who points out that "creating an effective school requires leadership, collaboration and support of the school board and the central office". Their research encountered reluctance to change from these two directions. Recently, Hargreaves (2003: 7 & 11) re-emphasized this point of view. He declares, "innovation is a social activity, not a private, individual affair, so the process of innovation depends on social structures and cultures… If the system itself (the national level) does not become transformed, innovative schools will not arise, let alone prosper; but once in operation, innovative school will be the cause of the further systemic change".

2.2.2 The importance of culture in School Improvement
School Improvement emphasizes the importance of culture (Fullan, 1991, 1993; Hargreaves, 1994, 1995., Stoll & Fink., 1994, 1996., Vandenberghe, 1995). “Collaborative cultures are innovative not just because they provide support but also because they recognize the value of dissonance inside and outside the organization (Fullan, 1999: 27)... The combined effect of collaborative cultures serves to mobilize three powerful change forces. Moral purpose (the spiritual) gains ascendancy. Power (politics) is used to maximize pressure and support for positive action. Ideas and best practices (the intellectual) are continually being generated, tested and selectively retained. In collaborative cultures these three forces feed on each other. They become fused (ib: 40). The need is to foster and fuse intellectual, political and spiritual energies – to have these powerful forces feed on each other (ib: 80). The more the infrastructure builds on continuous learning, generates accountability data, promotes feedback, stimulates innovation and so on, the more the system is capable of large-scale reform (ib: 78). School improvement has shifted its focus on re-culturing, which is the process of developing new values, beliefs and norms. For systematic reform it involves building new conceptions about instruction and new forms of professionalism for teachers (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). The central government has not only responsibility for establishing the policy framework but also for creating the climate in which policy development takes place. This includes the establishment of effective working relationships with the teaching profession, local education authorities and other “producers” of education as well as consumers. The government at all levels in all countries significantly influences cultural attitudes to education (Barber, 1998).

2.2.3 The importance of local or school district support for SI
School Improvement recognizes the crucial role of school district or LEAs in supporting school improvement (Humberman and Miles, 1984; Rosenholtz, 1989; Corbett and Wilson, 1992; Stoll and Fink, 1996; Fullan, 1991, 1999). Fullan (1991: 209) states, “The role of the district is crucial. Individual schools can become highly innovative for short periods of time without the district, but they cannot stay innovative without the district action to establish the conditions for continuous and long term improvement”. McLaughlin (1998: 72) claims, “What matters most to policy outcomes are local capacity and will. The local experience, organizational routines, and resources available to support planned change, the presence of the will or motivation to embrace policy objectives or strategies is essential to generate the effort and energy necessary to a successful project”. Based on their observations of the school improvement programs in
American, British and Canadian schools, Stoll and Fink (1996) recommend the following on how the district or LEAs can aid school improvement (ib: 140-142):
1. Teacher and leadership development
2. Assistance to schools
3. Support for development planning
4. Creation of interconnections between innovations
5. Provision of an overarching vision, focusing on teaching and learning
6. Monitoring of school effectiveness and school improvement

Drawing on the North American literature and case studies, Fullan (1999) points out that successful organizations employ many methods of examining evaluation data about their performance. The more the school collaborates and the more interesting changes it makes, the more that school staff seek (not avoid) evaluation data, including information generated through external standards assessment. Such schools actively seek external standards to test and extend their performance. They are data-driven by choice (ib: 47). They were reflective about the strategies using data and feedback to adjust or add components to address weakness or gaps as their experiences evolved (Fullan, 1999: 69).

The school improvement researchers learned a lot about the importance of time for school improvement. Lezotte (1989b) summarized his research by stating it took much time and energy for teachers to learn how to innovate and then to validate the new practices. Although they had frequently referred to the research that said change took time, only then did they realize how true this was. In a few of their pilot schools it took three and a half years to ensure that the school growth planning process was well under way. At the other extreme, however, they still had schools for whom neither planning nor collaboration was a part of their culture. The last three years have taught them the process could not be rushed.

**Summary of the contributions from the School Improvement theory**

The following ideas from School Improvement theory seem to be important for this study:
- The integration and interaction of pressure and support at different levels for school improvement;
- National goal-setting in terms of school improvement (providing directions; the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation cycle);
- Strong leadership in steering and empowering school improvement (a system active initiation and stimulation, capacity-building, spreading new knowledge and good practice, providing data and feedback);
- External evaluation and external agents (external standards for assessment);
- School accountability (setting accountability data at all levels, higher level intervention in failing schools);
- Adequate time, financial and human resource support for school improvement (particularly the "time" issue);
- The importance of local support (vision-building, networks, teacher training and professional development, School Plan, initiating, monitoring and evaluating);
- School autonomy (ownership of the change process);
- An innovative and collaborative culture (climate and attitudes towards education, reculturing, etc.)
2.3 Curriculum theory

The national curriculum is the major educational planning document of a country. It embraces the goals of the national educational objectives and contains guidelines for the delivery and presentation of the contents. What teachers will teach and what students will learn is mostly embodied in curriculum (Creemers, 1992; Hoeben, 1989, 1994; Scheerens, 1993; De Jong, 2000a). No matter how diverse the forms of a curriculum are, they are all in one way or another related to educational goals and realization of these goals (Hoeben, 1994, 1999; Lowyck, et al., 1995, Flinders & Thornton, 1997).

Researchers (Creemers, 1996; Hoeben, 1998; Creemers & Scheerens, 1989; Scheerens, 1990; De Jong & Westerhof, 2001) point out that the influence of curriculum on student outcomes has been constantly demonstrated. The national curriculum/guideline creates the opportunities to learn and time for learning which are important variables in school effectiveness. The following two elements derived from curriculum theory are insightful and useful for effective school improvement at the contextual level:
1. The national goals, implementations and the cycle of assessment, feedback, reinforcement mechanism (2.3.1)
2. Curriculum functional (de)centralization (2.3.2)

2.3.1 The national goals, implementation and the cycle of assessment, feedback, reinforcement mechanism

The evaluation feedback mechanism is seen as the most likely effectiveness enhancing principle (Scheerens, 2000). This mechanism has a dynamic feature reflected in the goals, implementation, evaluation/assessment, feedback and reinforcement cycle. Goals are crucially important in a national curriculum. They provide a “common language” for all schools within a country. According to Creemers (1994), the educational goals clearly indicate what national governments and the majority of citizens in a society expect from their educational system. To serve this purpose, national educational goals have to be translated into national educational standards/benchmarks. When national standards are absent, the outcomes of schools will vary more greatly and, as a consequence, the school attended makes a greater difference for individual students. In addition, if teachers are responsible for the effectiveness of the teaching/learning process, they will only be able to accomplish this responsibility within a framework of clear educational goals (Bollen, 1996). Schools are organizations whose main goal is to foster students’ learning. According to the research done by Darling-Hammond (1997), teachers reported that curriculum prescriptions influenced their work in different ways, depending on how specific the guidance, how rigidly enforced and how high the stakes for students. In their meta-analysis, Fraser et al. (1987) conclude that curricula are indeed productive factors. They found an average correlation of old and new curricula with achievement of about 0.20. This finding assumes that new curricula have been developed and implemented in different classrooms (Hoeben, 1998a). In articulating the curriculum and by indicating clear targets, the curriculum could function as a powerful co-ordination mechanism (i.e. a form of standardization). Such standardization, however, is usually balanced by the opportunity for teachers to exercise their own professional autonomy (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997).

Curriculum implementation is the process of putting a change into practice (Fullan, 1993:378). In this process, even when documented curricula that teachers use in their classrooms live up to all the criteria for effectiveness, their effects may be small when the implementation is not optimal (De Jong, 2000a; Reezigt, 2001). This holds the same for
those countries where national curricula are extremely prescriptive (what should be taught, to whom, in what way, at what time, by what kind of approach). For those countries too, the effectiveness of such curricula strongly depends upon how they are implemented by each individual teacher in his/her classroom. Essentially, what is going on inside the classroom is not directly determined by the documented curriculum but rather by how the curriculum is implemented. What the teachers know, believe and are able and willing to implement is the decisive factor to make the national curriculum "walk". But it is none the less true that the instruction, motivation and behaviors of the teachers can be greatly influenced or conducted by the mechanisms of the assessment, feedback and reinforcement cycle.

**Assessment** has two facets. Firstly, it can inform policymakers about the state of education or about the performance or achievement of certain groups of children. Secondly, it can be used as an administrative device to implement policy (Madaus and Kellagham, 1992). If targets and assessment are provided, professional teachers may be expected to decide on methods and teaching sequences and to **learn from assessment feedback** (Angelis, 1998). **Regular assessment** of student achievement turned out to be an important condition for achieving curricular goals. Evidence from many studies (Madaus, et al., 1979; Haney and Madaus, 1986) demonstrates that when high-stakes decisions are attached to scores, tests can be expected to exert a strong influence on “what is taught, how it is taught, what pupils study, how they study, and what they learn”. School effectiveness research has consistently demonstrated that evaluation and assessment are associated with high achievement (Scheerens, 1994). It’s no wonder that regular assessment or evaluation has been a variable of effective schooling in different models of educational effectiveness (Creemers & Reynolds., 1996; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Hoeben, 1998b, de Jong, 2000b).

Assessment is not enough. **Feedback** is also important. Many researchers have regarded curricula as vehicles of control because they function as feedback systems (Fullan, 1991; Pratt, 1991; Simons, 1990; Snyder, et al., 1992). The basic explanation of the effectiveness of curricula may well be found in the **feedback loops inherent in curriculum design** (Pratt, 1991). Feedback brings about the re-orientation of the process. It can be **summative** or **formative**. Summative feedback serves the demands of accountability while the formative feedback aims at improvement. After an evaluation or assessment, the results should be fed back to the students, teachers, the schools, or the local district or the public media, depending on the purpose of the assessment. Control is determined by who receives the feedback and who makes decisions on what is done with the feedback: the teacher, or the school principal or the central authorities. People, who receive no feedback, may not be expected to have any degree of control (Hoeben, 1998b).

Feedback is closely related to **reinforcement**. Reward is a positive reinforcement, while punishment is a negative reinforcement, which intends to weaken (undesirable) behavior. Reinforcement effectively stimulates behavioral change by rewarding observed behaviors when they conform to a norm and by punishing observed behaviors when they differ from the norm (Melchiori, 1998). Reinforcement can only be classified as positive if it maintains or accelerates the desired behavior (Rollinson, et al., 1998: 221). The power of the real positive reinforcement can never be over-emphasized. It greatly stimulates extrinsic motivations and strongly reinforces the desired values, norms and behaviors. Lens (1996: 447) argues that educational psychologists seem to assume that extrinsic motivation is far less important than intrinsic motivation, but this is **not** the case. Most
students – even those with a strong intrinsic motivation – are highly motivated by extrinsic rewards and goals. This applies to organizations as well. Having compared the positive and negative reinforcement, Hoeben (1998) concludes that in a long term a balanced mix of positive and negative reinforcement tends to work best. According to Creemers (1994), Hoeben (1998) and de Jong (2001), a curriculum as a feedback system provides teachers and schools with control of their own educational process and thus provides empowerment. In addition, it provides national policy makers control over basic processes in schools and in classrooms. When integrated with other effective factors (grouping procedures, teacher behavior, consistency, cohesion, constancy and control), an effective curriculum is not a list of separate effective elements but a "Gestalt" of these elements. As a matter of fact this cycle is useful for any segment of curriculum and also for different levels (Lopes da Silva, 1998).

2.3.2 Curriculum functional centralization and decentralization

The concept of functional (de)centralization is useful since it enables combining decentralization in certain domains with centralization in others by well integrating the strengths and minimizing the weakness of the both. At the contextual level, goals and standards should be centrally made because they provide the only “common language” and benchmarks for all schools within a country. When national goals or standards are absent, the outcomes and quality of schools will vary tremendously (see previous part). According to the research carried out in OECD countries by Scheerens et al (2000), in certain functional domains, particularly in the domain of curriculum and assessment, there are rather centralizing tendencies. Other centralization tendencies which can be noticed concern the setting of national education objectives and the (re)introduction of national tests and examinations. In England and in Wales, “the tide had begun to turn towards the subject-stratified national curriculum and age-based testing which now dominate curriculum and assessment policy, strengthening detailed control through a highly elaborated national curriculum and national testing (Skilbeck, 1998: 128). Effective control by the national government may be less influenced by centralization of the educational system but more by the national structure of goals and rewards (the national evaluation and reinforcement structure) in education. However, what is new is an increasing emphasis on student performance as the touchstone for state governance. Moreover, the focus on performance has led to using outcome data, such as test scores and dropout rates, as criteria for accreditation (Elmore et al., 1996). This increasing centralizing tendency has resulted from the negative effects of too much curriculum autonomy. Dating back in the 1960s in the U.K, the hopes attached to teacher-led curriculum reforms as a means of educational change failed to be realized. Since the 1970s, the dominant trend has been against teacher-led curriculum reform and in favor of increased control and prescription on the part of the state. As a result, the Education Reform Act of 1988 introduced a centrally prescribed National Curriculum, aiming to match the needs of the 21st century Britain and to achieve higher pupil standards (Baker, 1993, Barber & Dann, 1996). Leune (1994) argues that completely autonomous primary and secondary schools create problems in offering a common educational level for further education. According to the research carried out in seven European countries by Amelsvoort and Scheerens (1997), autonomy particularly with respect to the curriculum will lead to lower performance, due to lack of a common educational core and monitoring of national standards. Therefore, centralization is needed for making national educational policies, goals, objectives, time, standards or benchmarks for national testing and national evaluations, for monitoring implementation and for allocating resources in an equitable way so as to ensure the overall quality of education.
Governments are not good, however, at specifying precisely how “educational treatments” and resources should be conceived and delivered. Given the nature of knowledge and the diversity of human experience and paths to learning, it is not plausible to make decisions about exactly how, when, and in what way ideas and contents ought to be taught in a setting remote from the classroom or school (Clune, 1993; Sizer, et al., 1992). Darling-Hammond (1997) argues that policy makers who want teachers to succeed with a new curriculum must understand that the process of change requires time and opportunity for teachers to reconstruct their practice through intensive study and experimentation. Therefore, decentralization (by offering some autonomy to schools) is needed in the domains of what is exactly taught, how to teach, when to teach, in what way ideas or contents ought to be taught, how to manage human (e.g. recruiting teachers) and financial resources.

Summary of the contributions from the curriculum theory
The following ideas from curriculum theory seem to be important for this study:
- National goal-setting in terms of student outcomes (clear and prescriptive goals, common educational core, time for learning, national standards for testing and evaluation, age-based testing);
- Increasing central control, monitoring, implementation and empowerment (by using national assessment, feedback, reinforcement and National Inspection);
- External evaluation and external agents (using national standards for tests design, regular monitoring, evaluation and feedback);
- School accountability (summative feedback, rewards and punishment, publishing data and information);
- Providing adequate time and in-service teacher training;
- Functional decentralization and offering school some autonomy.

2.4 Organization, Organizational Learning and Learning Organization Theories

Organization, organizational learning and learning organization have become attractive terms in the field of Human Resource Development since the early 1990s. Organizations need to be highly adaptable and continue to improve if they want to prosper and take the lead in a fast-paced, competitive and unpredictable world. One of the major recommendations for successful organizations concerns ‘organizational learning’ and becoming a ‘learning organization’. Organizational learning can be regarded as a collective learning and improvement process (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Daft and Weick, 1984; Fiol and Lyles, 1985; Dixon, 1994), aiming to build up a learning organization. While ‘learning organization’ is a concept which functions as a guiding vision picturing an organization as a living organism with an open, powerful learning environment which inspires, facilitates and empowers the learning of its members so as to enhance its capacity for change, adaptability, improvement and competition (Senge, 1990, 1994; Pedler, et al., 1991; Kim, 1992; Marsick and Watkins, 1999; Walton, 1999, Sun, 2003). Through learning, organizations may be better equipped to meet the challenges caused by "permanent white water". It is those organizations which understand how to adapt themselves to change and who willingly learn and implement new ideas that will triumph. Regarding the contextual level factors, the theories of organization, organizational learning and learning organization offer the following aspects:
1. The need for strong driving forces for change (both internal and external) (2.4.1)
2. The need for higher level steering change (2.4.2)
3. The need for higher level empowerment (2.4.3)
4. The need for using both soft and hard measures for change (2.4.4)
5. The need for information sharing (2.4.5)
6. The need for a learning organizational culture (2.4.6)

2.4.1 The need for strong driving forces for change (both internal and external)

-- Lewin’s model and the model of Bullock and Batten

Different models emerged in organizational theories and research. Most of them adopt either a macro- or a micro-level approach to change. Among them, Lewin’s (1951) “force field analysis” has been regarded as the landmark model of change (Rollinson, 1998) as almost all theories of organizational change stemmed from it. Lewin suggested that in a change of situation there are two sets of forces: restraining forces, those striving to maintain the status quo; and driving forces, those pushing for change (Cummings and Huse 1985) as shown in the figure below.

![The status quo]

According to Lewin, change will not occur if the forces of the two sides maintain the balance. To bring about change one needs to cause an imbalance between the two forces. Therefore, one needs to increase the driving forces and decrease the restraining forces that inhibit a move from the current state. Change always needs driving forces. It doesn’t matter whether the driving forces are internal or external, top-down or bottom-up. If the internal driving forces are weak, external driving forces are essential. Only when the driving forces are stronger or greater than the restraining forces, can change occur. In other words, only when the increased driving forces are stronger than the inertia, can change happen. When we look very closely, the basic ideas of this model can be applied to educational change and effective school improvement as well. For instance, concerning the driving forces in schools, competition does exist among schools, ‘decreasing profits’ equals to ‘decreasing student outcomes’, ‘increasing organizational size’ can be read as ‘increasing student outcomes’ or ‘increasing educational quality’. In any case to bring about change, driving forces are essential and are the most important condition for change.

The importance of the role of external agents can be found in the “Integrative Model of Planned Change” of Bullock and Batten (Cummings and Huse, 1985). Drawn on the analysis of over 30 other models of planned change, this integrated model has divided the change process into four phases (Rollinson, 1998):
1. Explanation: creating awareness about the need for change with the help of an outside organizational development specialist.
2. Planning: the use of an outside consultant to work with employees to diagnose organizational problems and develop plans of action for their solution.

3. Action: implementation of the change program, evaluation and feedback of results to employees.

4. Integration: stabilizing the change, that is, they become adopted as the new way that the organization will function.

In sum, the contributions of these two models to the contextual level are: the importance of increasing the driving force (both external and internal) for change, the external agents, the evaluations and feedback during the change process, giving feedback regarding assessment results to the person who has been assessed and creating awareness of the need for change.

2.4.2 The need for higher level steering change

The need of higher level steering change in a centralized system can be traced back in Hofstede’s research. He used five dimensions to distinguish the culture of different nations. These five dimensions include power distance (large vs. small), individualism vs. collectivism, feminine vs. masculine, uncertainty avoidance and Confucian dynamism (see more in Hofstede 1994, Sun, 2001, 2002). In a country with a large power distance, collectivism and strong uncertainty avoidance culture, stronger external change forces are needed, particularly the strong change forces from the national contextual level.

2.4.3 The need for higher level empowerment

The need of empowerment is evident in the study of Marsick and Watkins (1999: 14), where they state, “a collective vision cannot be developed and implemented without empowerment. Empowerment puts ownership for the vision into the hands of those who must implement it. Organizations must have financial and human reserves if they are to build learning capacity. Empowerment creates reserves in human capacity by increasing freedom of decision making and movement, and by freeing people to experiment and take risks, and then learn from results and from ‘mistakes’”. One of the key issues related to empowerment is the decision-making autonomy of personnel (in hiring or firing staff members). Research shows that “personnel departments which pre-select people to be hired play a very important role in maintaining an organization’s values (for better or for worse), a role of which many personnel managers are not quite conscious” (Hofstede, 1994: 183). As a matter of fact, those who select the employees are the gatekeepers in protecting and shaping an organizational culture.

2.4.4 The need for both soft and hard measures for change

The need of using both soft and hard measures for change has been described by Hofstede (1994: 201). He states although culture is soft, changing it calls for ‘hard’ measures. Cultural changes can be influenced in more or less predictable ways by changing structures and systems. Structural changes include closing departments, opening other departments, merging or splitting activities, or moving people and/or groups geographically. These have been partially examined in the research done by Marsick and Watkins (1999: 209). They summarize their findings as follows: several core drivers of the learning organization are culture, including rewards and measures; an approach to strategy that emphasizes learning; processes and practices for learning; leadership that champions learning; and people practices that include their selection and development.
2.4.5 The need for information sharing
The need of information sharing, the flow of information and a learning organizational culture is quite important. It is an indicator of empowerment. Organizations are subject to constant pressure to change. Information and data have the power to influence, even to change an organizational culture. In some industrial organizations, failure to adopt the new technologies (or information) is a form of economic suicide (Fincham and Rhodes, 1993). Organizations already know that the flow of knowledge and information is the key to success or failure (Barber, 1997: 240). However, “information only provides access to power when it is linked to reason and thought” (Barber, 1997: 181). That’s why in the organizational learning cycle described by Dixon (1994), four steps which are all related to information, must be taken by an organization: generation of information, integration of new information, collective interpretation of the information, and authority to take action based on the interpreted meaning.

2.4.6 The need for a learning organizational culture
Organizational theories, particularly the theory of Learning Organization, highlight the importance of culture. Although less visible or tangible, culture is carried in the minds of organizational members and has a pervasive effect on their behavior. It has been evidenced that a strong organizational culture is associated with superior organizational performance and leads to organizational success (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman 1982; Goldsmith and Clutterbuck 1984). The analysis of Lundberg (1990) and Sun et al (2003) make it clear that a culture provides people with a set of normative rules to regulate certain aspects of their behavior, and this becomes an invisible force that prompts many of their actions. In the respect of national culture, Hofstede (1980) provides convincing evidence that national cultures give rise to sets of work-related attitudes, and the same is almost certainly true of cultures in organizations. Therefore, if an organization has a strong culture, where all its members firmly subscribe to the same set of core values (Luthans, 1995) this could well give rise to attitudes, motivations and a sense of shared identity that contributes to its effectiveness (Rollinson, 1998: 658). A learning organizational culture distinguishes itself by collaborative activities such as: dialogue, negotiation, effective communication, exchange of ideas, learning from colleagues, comparing solution strategies, mutual adaptation, knowledge sharing and utilization and so on. In brief, a learning organizational culture is innovation-oriented and a process of improvement is continually taking place as a part of daily life instead of an isolated, unusual event. It is the ideal setting and environment for effective school improvement. It is no wonder that many researchers (McGill and Slocum, 1993; Leirman, 1994, Nikkanen, 1998) conclude that a Learning Organization explicitly acknowledges a link between culture, change and effectiveness, and seeks to establish a culture that is receptive to continuous change.

Summary of the contributions from the theories of organization, organizational learning and learning organization
The following ideas from the theories of organization, organizational learning and learning organization seem to be important for this study:
- Goal setting for better outcomes and profits (i.e. cost-effectiveness);
- Goal setting for enhancing adaptability and capacity for change;
- Strong higher level steering and empowering change (increasing driving forces, offering organizations the decision-making autonomy, rewards and sanctions, information sharing);
- External agents (in initiating changes through consultation);
• Market mechanism (competition, customer-orientated);
• Organizational autonomy (the ownership of change, freedom in decision making particularly in selecting or firing staff members);
• A culture of learning organization in support of change (see details in 2.4.6).

2.5 Public/School Choice theory

The term “public school choice” is widely used in America and is equivalent to “school choice” or “parental choice” used in the UK and other English-speaking countries. Public school choice concerns the freedom of the parents to choose schools for their children and the freedom of the schools to have their own admission policies, for instance, to hire or fire their own personnel and to select their own students. It is believed that when this market mechanism is introduced into the educational field, schools will be obliged to strive for survival and for competition. As a consequence, it will result in more effectiveness, more efficiency and a higher quality. Therefore, public school choice has been regarded as a powerful external driving force to spur effective school improvement in several directions, such as towards more responsiveness to parents (Bauch and Goldrin, 1995) or towards more effectiveness (Chubb and Moe, 1990). Based on these assumptions, public school choice theory may contribute to the contextual level from the following three perspectives:

1. Using market mechanism as a driving force (2.5.1)
2. Using school accountability to spur ESI (2.5.2)
3. A system of evaluation and control with value added measurement (2.5.3).

2.5.1 Using market mechanisms as a driving force for ESI

The founding father of the market-based theories was Milton Friedman, a Nobel laureate economist. Friedman's (1955, 1962) early arguments for a market-based approach to public education centered upon moving the discussion from a government-provided service to a government-subsidized service. He admitted that government had both responsibilities for ensuring children received an education and for setting minimum educational and fiscal standards. He disagreed that the state government ought to be the sole provider of the actual service. His argument was that competitive markets are far superior to state-run bureaucracies for allocating social services. His ideas did not attract much attention until the late 1980s when they started to gain widespread support due to the fact that the social climate had greatly shifted from focusing upon educational equity to academic excellence in order to ensure and foster national economic competitiveness.

In 1983, the report “A Nation at Risk” was released in the USA, again linking academic excellence with economic competitiveness. The public schools were deemed to be so inadequate as to be a menace to the national economic health (Tyack, 1993). If markets were good for economic development, why not “open up” the markets for educational services? It was believed that competition between public and private schools for students would lower costs, foster greater equality of opportunity and spur academic excellence. Market forces, privatization, and public school choice were seen as the “answer” to poorly functioning state educational systems (Boyd, 1998; Chubb & Moe, 1990). This argument was fueled by the snail’s pace at which educational reforms were progressing. The idea that only radical reform (especially market forces and privatization) could change this situation gained strength. All these, according to Boyd and Kerchner (eds. 1988), resulted in the rise of a politics of excellence and choice in education. Therefore,
Friedman's ideas were viewed as powerful tools for spurring state educational bureaucracies towards better "behavior" (Ambler, 1994; Henig, 1994). When all students are provided with high-quality educational options, and when all parents receive enough information to make intelligent choices among these options, it is assumed that public school choice may increase both equity and excellence in education. In order to remain competitive, the schools have to change and to improve; they have to be more responsive to parents. In addition, the competition between schools for students was also seen as a way of fostering better teaching and reducing administrative bloat. For a period of time in the US, school choice was proclaimed as a panacea for all that ailed education (Boyd, 1998). Apart from these, public school choice gained political and internationally visibility when the Education Reform Act of 1988 was enacted in Britain (Walford, 1994; Bagley, et al., 1996). In fact, the key issue whether parents have the possibility to choose the schools for their children or whether they have to accept the reality of their children being assigned to a school is also a characteristic of the regulation in an educational system (Creemers, et al, 2001b). Essentially, parental choice as a power in school improvement depends greatly on the national system, the actual possibility to choose, the available information and the parents’ criteria (Creemers & Hoeben, 1998).

International comparative research has repeatedly cited the Netherlands as one of the two most successful examples in public school choice. The current Dutch educational system was established by the 1917 Constitution as part of a political compromise between the emergent Socialist party and an alliance of Catholics and Calvinists. It was designed to reduce tensions among these three "pillars" of Dutch society (Ambler, 1994). The result was a guarantee of full state funding for all schools (Ambler, 1994; OECD, 1994). Parents in the Netherlands have total freedom of public school choice. About two-thirds of all the pupils are enrolled in privately governed schools (OECD, 1994).

2.5.2 Using school accountability to spur ESI
School accountability for student outcomes becomes a dominant theme in education reform in the UK and in the USA where the national drive for school accountability is a huge concern. Schools, like any other public services, are expected to be accountable to the taxpayers, particularly towards the parents. Accountability pertains to the need to provide students with benchmarks for learning, the demands of the public to be able to assess school improvement on the basis of quantifiable results, and the need to make clear what children should be prepared to know and to do as they face ever-increasing challenges in a competitive marketplace. Furthermore, it is believed that when children are regularly tested, teachers know where and how to improve, when scores are made known to parents, parents are empowered to push schools for change. Schools doing well are rewarded for their achievement, with their good practices made available for others to emulate, while schools not doing well are provided assistance to enable them to meet their particular education challenges within a given period of time ([www.edreform.com/pubs/account.htm](http://www.edreform.com/pubs/account.htm)).

The research of Carnoy and Loeb (2002) shows that accountability system changes student performance. In those states of the United States with stronger accountability, the overall National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) math gains are higher. Since 2002, a new law entitled the "No child left behind act of 2001" (NCLBA) - contains a legislated accountability system which has been implemented nation-wide across the United States. This accountability system based on academic standards and assessments will include achievement of all students, sanctions and rewards to hold all
out and repetition omitted. As a result, ten effective school improvement factors at the contextual level and some main indicators emerged. The ten factors are grouped under the concepts of goals, pressure and support respectively and their major indicators are shown below in Table 2.

Table 2  Synthesis of the factors and the major indicators derived from different theories at the contextual level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. National goal-setting in terms of student outcomes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The national goals and objectives reflected in national curriculum</td>
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<td>• The national specified increased academic points for each subject</td>
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<td>• The numbers of national tests during the entire period of schooling</td>
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<td>• The existence of National Inspections</td>
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<td>• The national assessment, feedback and reinforcement system.</td>
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<td><strong>2. National goal-setting in terms of school improvement</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The new laws or national curriculum reforms</td>
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<td>• School Improvement Plan or school self-evaluation</td>
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<td>• School improvement programs focusing on Literacy or Mathematics or Sciences instructions</td>
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<td>• Focusing on improving the learning environment</td>
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<td>• Encouraging schools to take part in school improvement programs at home and abroad.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pressure</strong></td>
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<td><strong>3. Strong central steering and empowering ESI</strong></td>
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<td>• Giving directions and putting pressures on schools to improve through central intervention</td>
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<td>• Directly or indirectly initiating school improvement programs</td>
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<td>• Providing time, financial and human resource support</td>
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<td>• Spiritual empowerment for school improvement programs.</td>
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<td><strong>4. External evaluation and external agents</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The time spent by the external agents on school improvement programs</td>
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<td>• The role of the external agents in the school improvement programs</td>
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<td>• The influence of the National Inspections</td>
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<td>• The quality of the external agents.</td>
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<td><strong>5. Market mechanism</strong></td>
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<td>• The freedom in school choice (in the public school section)</td>
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<td>• The positive influence of school choice</td>
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<td>• The negative influence of school choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The information provided for school choice (published or not).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6. School accountability</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The School Year Report to parents</td>
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<td>• The published National Inspection reports</td>
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<td>• Responsibility targets setting for student outcomes at all the levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>• League Tables (added value comparison)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Feedback of national assessment results</td>
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<td>• Positive and negative reinforcement for the national assessment</td>
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<td>• Measures taken for failing schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
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<td><strong>7. Adequate time, financial and human resource support for ESI</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Adequate time allocated for school improvement programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Financial support for school improvement programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Financial support for schools and students (materials, network, information, data)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Human resource support for school improvement programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Spiritual support for school improvement programs.</td>
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</table>
8. The local/district support for ESI
- Additional financial support
- Supervision and expertise for school improvement programs
- Access provided for schools to participate in ESI programs
- Information (evaluation data and network provided for schools).

9. Offering schools some autonomy
- Autonomy in personnel (in recruiting/dismissing teachers and staff members, improving their quality, etc.)
- Autonomy in financial management
- Autonomy in school curriculum and textbooks-chosen
- Autonomy in classroom instruction
- The ownership of SI programs

10. Engendering a culture in support of ESI
- New laws, concepts or systems introduced into the national culture (new laws, new curriculum, data information, new evaluation system, etc.)
- Shared vision and goals at all levels (accountability at all levels, etc)
- Using both soft and hard measures to engender cultural change
- A collaborative and supportive climate
- The changed attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and practice in schools.

2.7 A brief elaboration of the ten contextual level ESI factors
These ten contextual level ESI factors will be used as the main criteria and the "filter" for the empirical section of this dissertation (Chapter 4 and 5) and will be used to evaluate the 31 school improvement programs selected from the eight European countries. For the sake of clarity, a brief elaboration of these ten factors is necessary.

2.7.1 National goal-setting in terms of student outcomes
According to Creemers et al. (2001), national goals refer to "the centrally determined goals in which knowledge and skills that all or at least most students need to achieve are expressed". Normally national goals are expressed in terms of the standards or targets set by the central government that have to be achieved in core subject areas. If national standards are to be considered as a means to evaluate the education system, they must be stated explicitly enough to allow comparisons. They must be stated in terms of skills and capacities to be developed rather than merely as content to be learned. In addition, national goals should be time constrained; everyone takes the same grade-level (or age-level) test at the same specific time of the year. As Rollinson concludes (1998: 436) "without goals or objectives, no control system can operate effectively, and without a control system to monitor goal attainment and where necessary to take corrective action, the activity of goal-setting becomes little more than an exercise of pious rhetoric".

2.7.2 National goal-setting in terms of school improvement
National goal-setting for school improvement may include goals that restructure school organizations, offer more autonomy to schools, improve school management and administration, decrease early drop-out rates, improve the school climate and opportunity to learn, improve the leadership at different levels in triggering and stimulating school improvement, improve the behavior of students and teachers, improve the learning environment (school buildings, classroom equipment, ICT and internet used for teaching), improve teaching and learning, improve co-operation among teachers and students, improve the school and classroom culture (or multicultural integration), or improve the school-parental relationships, to mention just a few. The indicators of school improvement may include: new laws or national curriculum reforms, the School
2.7.3 Strong central steering and empowering effective school improvement
Strong central steering and empowering ESI is a vital factor, which applies pressure as well as support to effective school improvement. Hardy and Redivo (1994) point out that change is a political act which needs power to make it happen. Barber (1998: 762) emphasizes that “central government needs to provide consistent leadership to urge consistently higher standards and to draw the public’s attention both on the pressure the government is applying and the support it is providing”. Governments exceed other organizations with respect to power, they can, for example, make laws for educational change, initiate educational reforms, update national curriculum, oblige schools to participate in the national tests, conduct the National Inspection system, oblige schools to apply school accountability and School Year Plan and publish the League Tables. They can empower educational organizations by offering autonomy in the domain of finance and management, the decision-making power in personnel (hiring/firing teachers and staff members), the ownership of school improvement. They can decide how and in which way to allocate time, financial and human resource support for teacher training and effective school improvement. Moreover, governments at all levels in all countries can significantly influence cultural attitudes towards education. They can exert both pressure and support for schools to improve, no any other external agents have such power. The main indicators of strong centrally steering and empowering ESI are shown in Table 2.

2.7.4 External evaluation and external agents

External evaluation refers to the evaluations organized by external agents or external educational authorities such as the evaluations from the national, district and local educational authorities, educational researchers and so on. Without external evaluation, parents are unlikely to have the technical capacity to judge a school’s effectiveness and its performance compared with the similar schools (OECD, 1998). However, external evaluation must be fair otherwise schools will not accept the results of the external evaluation for school improvement. Thus, value-added measurement of schools is needed in order to compare the actual contributions of an individual school to its student achievement.

External agents may include Inspectors, educational consultants, educational institutions, educational researchers and so on, depending on the national context. Among the various external agents, the National Inspectorate has more influence on school improvement (Stoll, et al., 2002). The inspectorate has become a key player in educational market regulation because of its power to determine what constitutes a successful school (Rea, J., and Weiner, 1998: 26). They can exert pressure for schools to improve. Due to its special position, we can place national inspectorate both in the national evaluation, feedback and reinforcement section and the external agents’ section in this study. Although external agents do not directly improve schools, they help to create the conditions for ESI. From this point of view, external agents are not only regarded as a source of pressure but also as a great source of support.

2.7.5 Market mechanism
Market mechanism in the domain of ESI mainly refers to free public school choice, including the freedom for parents/students to choose schools, the freedom for schools to
choose their students, teachers and other staff members. To a certain degree, *market mechanism* functions as a natural driving force, increasing competition between schools. If the enrolment in schools remains open to the society and parents have free school choice, they should be well informed about the quality of the schools. This can be expressed as a need for an external standardized evaluation for student outcomes across the country as well as for feedback and reinforcement. As a consequence, competition would exist among schools. Thus the information (e.g. published performance tables) should be available to parents in the process of making their choice. To minimize the side effects of market mechanism, the yearly publications of the schools' outcomes should be compared with an added value measurement. The main indicators of market mechanism are in Table 2.

### 2.7.6 School accountability

School accountability acknowledges the public’s rights to know what actions have been taken in schools and how effective these actions have been. If education is to be held accountable for student performance, the desired performance must be clearly stated and specified in advance and the performance must be adequately measured. Accountability is unthinkable without proper external evaluation. Accountability also implies responsibility and obligation on the part of administrators, legislators and the public to provide the support, financial and moral, necessary to the provision of effective education (Anderson, et al., 1976). Once there was pressure on public expenditure, it was inevitable and right that questions would be asked about how effectively public money was spent. Accountability therefore became a central issue across the public services (Barber, 1997: 47). According to Fullan (1999: 58), a rigorous accountability system is essential. This is both a policy and a capacity-building proposition. One of its key roles is to help build local capacity for taking action on assessment data. The other role is to intervene in persistently failing schools and school systems. In addition, true accountability means broadly shared responsibility, not only among educators and students but also among administrators, policy-makers, parents, the community and educational researchers (Linn and Whiteburst, 2003). Everybody needs to take responsibility and play his/her part in improving education and assuring the future success of the society.

### 2.7.7 Adequate time, financial and human resource support for ESI

Miles (1998) declares that change is a notoriously resource-hungry process. It requires resources and support - scanning for the substantial increment of resources which change requires in order to subsequently acquire them: money, but also time, educational content, technical assistance, and influence. These are the important variables for implementing educational change and school improvement. Support can embrace the time, the material, human resource and/or the spiritual domain. *Time* is an important element, which is often ignored. ESI needs time, time for preparation and planning, time for pre-project training, time for getting funding, equipment, time for changing processes and time for ESI to take root. *Material support* refers mainly to financial aid, educational content, availability of data, teaching and learning conditions, technical assistance, information providing and sharing, networking. While the *human resource support* mainly refers to the availability and stability of qualified teachers, teacher professional pre-service and in-service training, external expertise guidance and support, availability of substitutes and so on. *Spiritual support* mainly refers to sensitizing the whole society with the influence of the media to create an encouraging social environment, climate and culture in support of effective school improvement. This kind of spiritual support is far beyond the concept of "resource" per se with much broader contents than resource alone.
2.7.8 Local support for ESI
According to Creemers et al. (2001a), local support includes the wider community of the school, the LEAs, district officials, school governors, School Boards and various organizations within the local community. Schools are directly embedded in the local culture and the local environment both geographically and economically. Compared with national support, local support may influence schools in a far more direct and timely manner, particularly in urban areas. They can play a leading role in bringing together the other partners such as business, community organizations and local higher education institutions in support of effective school improvement. In some countries, the LEAs not only have their representatives participating in the school governing body but also provide additional funding, access for schools to participate in SI programs as well as information, evaluation data, network, supervision and expertise for SI programs. They can also offer schools a range of training, consultation and advice.

2.7.9 Offering schools some autonomy
According to Creemers et al. (2001a) 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. Giving schools autonomy for enhancing self-management also implies offering them a good and efficient support system. Concerning autonomy in educational means, entrusting decision-making to teachers (how, when, in what way to teach) is also important (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In a highly centralized educational system, offering a school more autonomy requires change to the school governance and management structure. In any case, school autonomy should not be an end in itself. It should serve to improve educational quality and to enhance student learning. It has been evidenced that full autonomy in all domains does not lead to improvement. Nor does the absence of autonomy in all domains.

2.7.10 Engendering a culture in support of ESI
Engendering a culture in support of ESI includes two aspects: engendering a national culture in support of ESI and engendering a school culture in favor of ESI. Climate can be regarded as the surface level of a culture while lying at the deep level of culture are values (Sun, 2002). Values are reflected in national visions, goals, laws, policies, curriculum and the beliefs or desires of the public. At the national level, engendering a supportive culture includes sensitizing the whole society's awareness of the importance of education, of the significance of the teaching profession, of the perception that teachers and schools matter and are worthy of support, and that education is not just a school's responsibility. These can be done by public calls and advocacy through various media, initiating educational reforms, establishing new laws, policies and goals, changing curriculum, developing a shared vision and shared language for ESI at all levels, establishing effective working relationships with the teaching profession, with the LEAs and other educators. Besides this, the importance of data information to change a culture cannot be ignored. Fullan (1999) states when data on the performance of the school is made available, and when collaborative cultures examine these data in order to make changes based on the information, schools become clearer about how well they are doing. Indeed, they become clearer about their values, goals and what they should be doing. At the school level, a supportive, collaborative school culture, the changed attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and practice of the teachers and students are all indicators on this aspect.
public schools accountable for student achievement. Each state must implement a system of high-quality, yearly student academic assessments in mathematics, reading/language arts and, beginning in the 2007-2008 school year, Science. For failing schools, the possible corrective actions include: replace school staff relevant to the failure; institute and implement a new curriculum; significantly decrease management authority in the school; appoint outside experts to advise the school; extend the school year or school day; restructure internal organization of the school. Furthermore, students in the failing schools can choose other schools (www.ed.gov/legislation/ESEA02/).

2.5.3 A system of evaluation and control with value added measurement
The critics for public school choice are that it may stimulate inequalities in education and reinforce the divergence between schools for the elite and schools for the masses (Hirsch, 1994, Hoeben, 1998, de Jong, 2001, Reezigt, 2000) and that the schools may not be rewarded for efficient goal-oriented performance (Scheerens and Bosker, 1997: 278, Demeuse, et al., 2000). In addition, better-educated families are better informed and more likely to use school choice actively than their less advantaged counterparts (OECD, 1994; Willms and Echols, 1992; Fuller and Elmore, 1996). A study of a largely unregulated inter-district school choice plan in effect in Massachusetts found that "92 percent of the families participating were white. They had higher average incomes than both the families who remained in their home districts and the state as a whole. Most researchers fear that this pattern of behavior will exacerbate social class segregation and the disadvantages of the lower classes" (Viadero, 1997: 12). Therefore, Hoeben (1998) and Boyt (1998) argue that the real challenge is to design and maintain national policies that structure and control school choice in fair and socially desirable ways. For instance, yearly publication of the schools’ outcomes with an added value measurement could be one of the effective ways of control.

Summary of the contributions from Public/School Choice theory
The following ideas from the theory of Public/School Choice seem to be important for this study:
• Strong national drive for school accountability for student outcomes;
• Yearly external assessment for student outcomes with added value measurement;
• Market mechanism as a driving force (freedom of students and parents to choose schools, freedom of schools to choose their students, teachers and staff members);
• Using school accountability to spur ESI (central intervention in reforming failing schools, rewards and sanctions, enabling the public to access school quality);
• School autonomy in management and personnel (selecting their students, teachers and staff members).

2.6 Synthesis of the factors derived from different theories at the contextual level
Since there are many factors, which overlap among the different theories, for the sake of clarity, we shall group them according to their similarities. For example, the factor "goal-setting in terms of student outcomes" has been mentioned in slightly different ways by SE theory, SI theory, Curriculum theory and Public School Choice theory. Therefore, they are summarized under one theme - "national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes". Some factors are not easy to alter or observe and some do not apply in school improvement settings (e.g. "goal-setting for enhancing adaptability and capacity for change", or "the integration and interaction of pressure and support at different levels") and thus have been left out of this study. After grouping, some factors were also filtered.
2.8 Summary

In order to answer our research questions, we have presented a review of the literature on five theoretical paradigms, which are relevant to our central topic in this chapter. The main purpose of the literature review was to search for relevant dimensions and contextual factors. This purpose has been achieved. The five theoretical traditions have contributed from different perspectives, to the theoretical model of our research – the three main interrelated contextual dimensions - goals, pressure and support (see Figure 2 in Chapter 3). Moreover, the literature review has enabled us to derive ten contextual level ESI factors that transcend the limits of any one single theory, which in turn, will function as ten "filters" to analyze the case studies in the coming chapters.