Chapter 5  Comparison Across the Eight European Countries

5.0  Introduction and Methodology

In Chapter 4, the 31 ESI case studies selected from the eight European countries have been analyzed. The findings reveal individual pictures of the impact of the ten contextual level factors on school improvement programs within the eight European countries. To go one step further, in order to merge the individual pictures into a whole, this chapter will conduct a comparison across the eight European countries with a focus on the four research questions stated in Chapter 1. To this end, we have subdivided this chapter into ten sections. Accordingly, the comparison of each of the ten factors across the eight countries forms one entire section of this chapter. The focus of sections 1-10 are: six indicators of national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes and how the national goals influence ESI; the common (or different) issues of school improvement programs as well as the evidence of school improvement enhancing student outcomes; the three common strategies used by the eight governments to centrally steer and empower ESI; the three different roles of the external agents and their positive/negative influences on ESI; the diverse influences of market mechanism; the influences of school accountability; the impact of the different strategies of financial and human resource support; the three different types of local influences on ESI; what kinds of school autonomy fostering or hindering ESI; the three effective strategies related to engendering a culture in support of ESI. Finally, a short summary will close this chapter.

To compare the influence of the ten contextual factors on ESI across the eight countries, the key indicators derived from Chapter 2 and assembled in Table 11 at the end of Chapter 4 will be restructured and reused as a standard for comparison. Some new elements are added to enrich the comparison or to avoid repetition. For example, to compare the factor “national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes” across these eight countries, one more indicator, “the assessment, feedback, rewarding and punishment used for the SI programs in the case studies”, has been added in addition to the indicators derived from the literature reviews.

5.1  Comparing national goal setting in terms of student outcomes across the eight European countries

Looking at the first indicator in Table 12 (see p. 89), we get the impression that all eight countries had written goals and objectives which were reflected in their national curriculum or curriculum guidelines. However, did these written goals have "legs" when they were tried in practice? As far as we know from the case studies, the liveliest part of these national goals was reflected in the textbooks. Except for Greece and Spain, schools in the other six countries have freedom to choose textbooks according to their preference. The publishers have to take the national goals into serious consideration otherwise their books will not be bought by schools. In Greece, there was only one textbook for each subject for all students, the textbooks (with prescribed periodical tests for the teachers) were centrally dispatched to each school. At least in the case studies, we could not find much evidence to show how textbooks influenced effective school improvement except in the 3rd Dutch case study and the 2nd Spanish case study. In these two case studies, the introduction of new mathematics textbooks did have some positive impact on raising the students' interests and ultimate outcomes (see Appendix).
However, more ESI case studies, particularly the 10 English case studies, revealed that not the general national goals but rather the more specified increased academic points for each subject set at the national level had more impact on effective school improvement. In this aspect, Table 12 shows the UK was the only country which had the concrete expected increased academic points to which they aspired for each subject prescribed by the central government (see more in Chapter 4.8 and Appendix). All schools in England were obliged to strive to achieve the national specific achievement targets in their student outcomes. However, without the backing of the whole system of national testing, external assessment, feedback and reinforcement, the specified increased points for each subject set at the national level would not have generated such a great pressure at the different levels involved in the English case studies.

Regarding the numbers of national tests during the whole schooling in Table 12, the numbers of such tests in the eight countries varies widely. England has three to four national tests at the age of 7, 11, 14, and 16 respectively. In contrast to the UK, Belgium (Fr) and Spain have no centrally organized national tests at all during the entire school career of a student. In Belgium (Fr), however, the upper secondary education certificate is externally ratified. In Spain, no centrally organized national exams but there are unified exams organized by Autonomous Communities at the end of secondary education. Some universities conducted their own entrance exams as well. The other five countries all have at least one national test at the end of secondary schooling or at the end of compulsory education (see Chapter 4 and Appendix). Italy had two national exams (though some information sources report only one examination), the second being an exit examination for junior secondary school graduates. Another is the graduation examination of the higher secondary school students (see Appendix). The Netherlands has two national tests, one is at the end of secondary education (obligatory) and another is at the end of primary education (not obligatory, about 85% primary schools participate, see Appendix). With regard to the existence of national inspectors, Table 12 reveals that national inspection exists in Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK but not in Finland and Greece. These two countries had no national inspectors. However, the NBE in Finland (see Appendix) and the P.I. in Greece (see Appendix) are in charge of the educational quality. According to the Greek case study authors, one teacher interviewed stated that in the last 10 years, only one school consultant had visited her school (see Appendix). The English case studies argue, "the government agents such as the National Inspectorate can exert pressure for schools to improve. Other external agents have no such power" (Reezigt, 2001: 57).

With regard to the assessment, feedback, rewarding and punishment system used for the school improvement programs in the case studies (see Table 12), the great majority of the 31 case study schools used monitoring, evaluation and feedback as an instrument in their school improvement programs. Regarding reinforcement (the rewards and punishment), only the UK system has strictly applied both rewards and sanctions nationally while Spain has offered financial incentives (see 4.7). No punishment was mentioned in the Spanish case studies. The remaining six countries neither rewarded nor applied sanctions although this was a very crucial part of guaranteeing the attainment of the national goals in terms of student outcomes. Beyond the case studies and when referring to the whole educational system within a country, the UK was the only country where the system of national assessment, feedback, rewarding and punishment was strictly applied.
The case studies showed that the national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system in most of the eight countries was rather weak (Table 12). In Belgium (Fr) and Portugal, there was neither rewards nor professional benefits for teachers taking part in school improvement programs. In Belgium (Fr), the national proposed methodological and evaluation instruments were available but schools were not obliged to use them (see Appendix). According to D’Arcangeli, et al., (2000: 282), the Italian system had "the weakest of achievement evaluation procedures". In Greece and Finland, the ESI programs were evaluated by internal and external agents, but no information was available concerning the national assessment, feedback and reinforcement system on student outcomes in the whole country except the final national test at the end of the secondary education. In the Netherlands, school student outcomes are made publicly known via Internet and in the newspapers but there are no strict rewards or sanctions. In Portugal, the national exams at the end of the secondary education were mentioned whereas a national assessment system for the school improvement and reinforcement was missing. In Spain, no information was available in the case studies about national assessment, feedback and reinforcement of educational quality in the whole country.

Table 12 The indicators on national goal setting in terms of student outcomes across the eight European countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>National goals and objectives reflected in national curriculum</th>
<th>National specified increased academic points for each subject</th>
<th>Numbers of national tests during the whole schooling</th>
<th>Existence of National Inspectors Y/N</th>
<th>a. assessment b. feedback c. rewarding d. punishment used for the SI programs in the case studies</th>
<th>National assessment, feedback and reinforcement system used for public school section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Fr)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a. b.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Written</td>
<td>3-4 (aged at 7, 11, 14, 16)</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a. b. c. d.</td>
<td>Strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>a. b.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>a. b.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a. b.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a. b.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a. b.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>a. b. c.</td>
<td>Not strictly applied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Comparing national goal setting in terms of SI across the eight European countries

Concerning national goal setting in terms of school improvement, this section focuses on three aspects - the four common strategies used by central governments across the eight European countries.

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<sup>1</sup>No national exam but the upper secondary education certificate has been externally ratified.

<sup>2</sup>No centrally organized national exams but there are unified exams organized by Autonomous Communities at the end of secondary education. Some universities conducted their own entrance exams.
countries (5.2.1); the different strategies used in school improvement programs across the eight European countries (5.2.2); school improvement enhancing student outcomes mirrored in the case studies (5.2.3).

5.2.1 The four common strategies used by Central Governments across the eight European countries
The four common strategies are (see Table 13 on p. 92):
• The overall educational reforms or national curriculum reforms;
• School Improvement Plan or School self-evaluation programs;
• Focusing on literacy, mathematics or science instruction;
• Encouraging schools to participate in school improvement programs at home and abroad.

1. The overall educational reforms or national curriculum reforms
In the last two decades, a common strategy used by central governments across the eight European countries has been legalizing the overall educational reforms or reforming the national curriculum. The relevant legislation is contained in the Educational Acts of 1981-1985 in Greece, the Education Reform Act 1988 of the UK, the overall reforms in Spain (the LOGSE of 1990 and the LOPEG of 1995), the 1991 Curriculum Reform in Portugal (see 4.6), the 1993 CCC Reform in the Netherlands (see 4.2), the 1996 National Curriculum Reform in Italy, the 1997 new Decree in French-speaking Belgium (see 4.1) and the 1999 new School Acts Reform in Finland (see 4.3). This common strategy shows that effective school improvement requires a new battery of central control and central intervention measures. When schools are confronted with new laws or new standards that they are supposed to meet, they need to strive to live up to the new standards. Although we cannot deny that passing laws or Acts for educational reforms is an important step towards effective school improvement, it is only the first step. The plausibility of the reform programs, the available resources (time, financial funding and human support) for implementation, more importantly, a sound and whole structure or system to steer, empower, monitor, assess and reinforce the implementation of the reforms, are undoubtedly necessary complementary steps to achieve the national goals of school improvement. According to the case studies, the impact of this strategy did not only give direction (e.g. the Education Reform Act 1988 of the UK marked the turning point from emphasizing the equality education to emphasizing on market mechanism and school accountability) for school improvement programs but also stimulated "setting up new teaching ways and principles" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 397).

2. School Improvement Plan or School self-evaluation programs
Another common strategy used by central governments was to apply a School Improvement Plan (or School Plan) or School self-evaluation programs. This was done in all countries (while there is no information on this topic in the Dutch case studies information can be obtained from other sources. See Table 13). By doing so, governments exert pressure on school organizations. Thus it is the school as a whole that has to apply organizational learning via organization-wide communications and decision-making instruments to come to a common School (Improvement) Plan.

3. Focusing on literacy, mathematics or science instruction
Another common strategy used by the Central Governments across the countries was to focus on literacy, mathematics or science instruction. This was the case in all the eight countries (see Table 13).
4. Encouraging schools to participate in school improvement programs at home and abroad

The fourth common strategy used by the Central Governments was to encourage schools to participate in the SI programs home and abroad. For instance, the Belgian case studies operated within the framework of SOCRATES to enable every school to develop its own (self-) assessment methods; the 4th Finnish case study was co-funded by the EU/TSR program aiming to create an on-line learning environment; the three Greek case studies were co-funded by the European Union and the Greek State; so was the quality evaluation program in Italian secondary school, Education for All in Portugal; School Year Plan in Spain. In addition, the 3rd Dutch case study (the CCC reform) mentioned the integration into the European system.

5.2.2 Different strategies used in the SI programs across the eight European countries

The different strategies used in the 31 case studies of these eight European countries originated mainly from the different urgent problems faced by each country. This included strategies used to prevent early dropout in Belgium and Portugal; the strategies used for immigrant education in Greece and Portugal; the strategies used to encourage more students to take sciences in Finland; and strategies used to enhance the ethnic minority pupils' achievement (the KEA program) in the Netherlands. An effective strategy used in English case study schools was “quick fix” first (tackling the problems of student behavior, homework, discipline, attendance, physical environment and so on in order to create a positive school climate favorable to learning) and then concentrated on teaching and learning. No case studies from the other seven countries mentioned these behavior or discipline problems. Given the international literature on school discipline and absenteeism, we wonder why only the case studies of the UK explicitly deal with this aspect. This remains an interesting research question.

5.2.3 School improvement enhancing student outcomes mirrored in the case studies

The great distinction between innovation or change and improvement is that improvement has to include some forms of outcomes (Stoll, et al., 2002). The case studies showed the evidence of school improvement enhancing the ultimate student outcomes, particularly in the English case studies. Changing the behaviors of the students and the staff (e.g. absence problem) was the focus of the "quick fix" of seven English case studies (e.g. the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 8th, and 9th English case studies). However, all these 7 case studies clearly came up with data providing the enhanced student outcomes (see Appendix). This held the same for one of the Greek case study (multicultural education), which declared, "although this program did not have stated cognitive goals, at the end of the school year teachers discovered that in certain cases the achievement of students had improved" (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, et al., 2000: 239, see more in Appendix). In short, school improvement enhancing student outcomes was mirrored in seven English case studies, one Greek (the 3rd) case study and one Spanish case study (the 1st).
Table 13 The common or different strategies used by the central governments across the eight European countries
("+" means positive answer and "-" means a negative answer, “YA” means positive answers available from other sources)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>New Laws or National curriculum Reforms</th>
<th>School Plan or School Self-evaluation</th>
<th>Focusing on literacy or mathematics or science instruction</th>
<th>Tackling absence of the students &amp; teachers or behavior problems, etc.</th>
<th>Improving learning environment</th>
<th>Encouraging schools to take part in SI programs home &amp; abroad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium (Fr)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>YA</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>YA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>YA</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Comparing strong central steering and empowering ESI across the eight European countries

The four indicators in Table 11 regarding strong central steering and empowering ESI will be further analyzed in this section. In our comparison, we regroup these four indicators into two groups: giving direction and putting pressure on schools to improve by central interventions and directly or indirectly initiating ESI programs (5.3.1); providing time, financial and human resource support as well as spiritual empowerment for school improvement programs (5.3.2).

5.3.1 Giving directions and putting pressures on schools to improve through central interventions and directly or indirectly initiating ESI programs

Giving direction was mentioned in the case studies of all eight countries while information available in the case studies regarding the application of pressure differed markedly. The strongest pressure was evident in the 10 UK case studies while the pressure from the central government in Belgium (Fr) and Greece seemed much weaker. The positions of the other countries remained somewhere in between. However, in Belgium, the educational policy of reducing early dropout rates was clearly reflected in the 2nd case study. The CCC reform in The Netherlands did not only give direction but also became the "legalized initiator" of the overall reform of lower secondary education in the Netherlands. The new School Acts Reform (1999) in Finland gave direction for the 1st and the 2nd case studies (Chapter 4.3). The new Educational Acts in Greece resulted in the 1st and the 2nd Greek case study (Chapter 4.4). In Italy, new laws directly initiated the two case studies. In Portugal, the two case studies took place under the auspices of the 1986 Comprehensive Law, 1991 Curriculum Reform and the 1993 new mathematics syllabus for secondary education respectively (Lopes da Silva, et al. 2000). The new laws in Spain (e.g. the LOGSE and LOPEG) were repeatedly mentioned in the case studies, with particular attention being paid to the LOGSE which did not only give direction for the 2nd and the 5th case studies but also offered a budget of 1 billion Euro to the participating organizations. More strikingly, the Education Reform Act 1988 marked historical changes in English educational system, which shifted focus from social justice
and equality to a market mechanism. In recent years, more central controls, interventions and increased accountability are applied at all levels in the UK, “OFSTED inspections, performance tables, and performance-related pay have put substantial pressure on teachers and schools and have resulted in increased stress levels” (Wikeley, et al., 2000).

5.3.2 Providing time, financial and human resource support and the spiritual empowerment for school improvement programs

In order to avoid repetition we have included details about financial and human resource support in Section 5.6. Concerning the spiritual empowerment for effective school improvement, the Spanish case studies mentioned the influence of the publication of selected well-developed and achieved PAM programs. The English case studies and the related information stated that schools were being strongly pushed by the publications of League Tables, encouraged by praising top schools and by the Plato awards for outstanding teachers lauding their experience through various national media. Schools were empowered by being offered the ownership of school improvement projects. In addition, more spiritual empowerment for ESI was available at the local level in the English case studies (see 4.8.3). In combination, these are all the important spurs to effective school improvement.

5.4 Comparing external evaluation and external agents across the eight European countries

The influence of external evaluation was regarded as important or favorable in six of the eight countries (with the exception of Portugal and only to a small degree in Finland). Since external evaluation has been discussed in section 5.1 and the exact time the external agents spent on each school improvement programs is not the major concern at the national contextual level, therefore, they shall not be discussed in this section. This section will focus on the other two indicators:

- The influence of the external agents in the school improvement programs (5.4.1)
- The influence of National Inspectors (5.4.2)

Finally, the challenges for external agents will be discussed in 5.4.3.

5.4.1 The role of external agents in school improvement programs

Generally speaking, the role of the external agents can be divided into three types. The first type is described as vital during the whole SI process. The external agents acted as directors, initiators or driving forces for the SI programs. The external agents in the Belgian case studies, in two Dutch case studies and in one Greek case study belonged to this type (see Table 14 and Appendix). As long as they took care of the project, the projects would continue and vice versa. The power of this kind of influence was mainly built upon frequent diagnosing, testing and giving feedback to teachers about their pupils' performance, frequent observation of classroom instruction, offering additional care for students-at-risk and so on. For Greece, the external agent was the P.I., which initiated, financed, supported and evaluated the SI programs in Greece. The Greek case studies argued “it seems that within such a centralized education system, where most initiatives are channelled through the MoE and do not lie with the individual schools, the precise steering of an external change agent (i.e. the P.I.) could direct the efforts of teachers in the desired way” (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides et al, 2000: 244).

The role of the second type of change agents can be described as “important” such as the external agent in the IQEA program in England and in a few of the Dutch and Finnish case studies. These agents provided methods, means, opportunities, and a systematic
approach for schools and teachers to interact with others and for teacher development (Wikeley, et al., 2000: 174). The case studies show that "where IQEA has extended a partnership with LEAs this has provided a considerable boost to ESI efforts". Nearly half of the English case studies showed a direct relationship between the IQEA initiative, departmental plans and the school development plan (ib: 137). For the improved schools, they felt the involvement in IQEA helped them lift off the "plateau".

The role of the third type of external agents can be described as not having an important influence on the whole SI process. Such is the case in Portugal and part of the case studies of Finland. In Portugal, external agents were "not welcomed". In Finland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the external agents were regarded as "not as important as the internal change agents within the schools" (see more in Appendix and Table 14).

5.4.2 The influence of National Inspectors or Governmental agents

The National Inspectors and some governmental agents (NBE in Finland and P.I in Greece) had more influence on school improvement. Other external agents have no such power. The Inspector's influence was often a trigger, detecting problems in the early stages as well as a strong steering and focusing influence at the school improvement planning stage (see more in Appendix and Table 14).

5.4.3 The challenges for external agents

The use of an external change agent as a stimulus is not in itself unproblematic (Wikeley, et al., 2000: 172). The main problem is the ownership of the ESI and the expectations of the schools for external agents. In the two Belgian case studies, the 1st Dutch case study and the Italian case studies, the ownership of the ESI program was always in the hands of the external agents. "After the project ended everything went back to the old situation" (De Jong, et al., 2000: 293). However, the 2nd Dutch case study shows that ownership was gradually transferred from the external agents to the hands of the participating schools and teachers because "after 8 years all teachers have received an intensive and direct support in the classroom and strong educational leadership is fostered as well as a safe and orderly climate. The principal stimulates, check progress and creates conditions for improvement" (ib: 331-332). As a consequence, the effectiveness of the 2nd Dutch program was more stable and lasted much longer than that of the 1st Dutch case study as it became rooted in the culture of the involved schools. The authors of the Dutch case studies strongly argue that "improvement is not something that can be forced upon schools. If schools do not envision the benefits of SI, they will not continue to be involved in the long run" (ib: 319). The 2nd Finnish case study (the credit points/non-graded system) was also a good example. The ownership of the school improvement project was always in the hands of the schools. Although "the project has already been brought to its conclusion, the schools that took part in it are still carrying on actively. There is no wish to return to the old system (Nikkanen, 2000: 198). Therefore, we may predict that strong pressure from the external agents may lead to some effectiveness for a period of time. To help schools gradually gain the ownership of ESI, developing their capacity to manage change is vitally important. Apart from this, the design of the program itself, the time available and the quality of counseling institutes cannot be ignored. The Dutch case studies discovered that the quality of the external agents was important for ESI programs (see 4.2). The table below compares the types of external agents mentioned in the 31 case studies and the roles of the external agents played in the case studies across the eight European countries.
Table 14  Comparison of external agents and their roles in the case studies across the eight European countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>External agents</th>
<th>The role of the external agents in the case studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>University researchers, Inspectors.</td>
<td>The external agents were the “driving forces” and the “directors” in the whole school improvement process. Once the university stopped monitoring the teachers, the innovation 'set up' is at risk of being dropped by the teachers (Demeuse, et al. 2000: 38 &amp; 32). &quot;The school improvement programs were commissioned by the Ministry, not at the behest of the schools or teachers” (ib: 38).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>National Board of Education (NBE), University researchers, Educational research institutes</td>
<td>No national Inspection system existed. The NBE was in charge of evaluations of the schools' quality. Although external agents may have influence in the first stages of improvement they cannot bring about essential changes in schools (Reezigt, 2001: 56).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Pedagogical Institute (P.I)</td>
<td>No national Inspection existed in Greece while P. I. has designed, organized, monitored and partially evaluated the SI programs in Greece. The precise steering of an external change agent such as P.I. could direct the efforts of teachers in the desired way (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, et al., 2000: 244).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>National Committee, European Center for Education, Ministry Inspectors, Consultants, Research Institutes, National Institute for Evaluation of the Education System</td>
<td>The role of the external agents was not very obvious before but in recent years it became more obvious, one case study showed that all the schools in the pilot study decided to ‘use’ a critical friend whose role was mainly to observe, to mentor, to diagnose problems and to find strategies to solve the problems (D’Arcangeli, et al., 2000: 288). The National Committee acted as steering organization by means of national seminars (three times) for the involved schools (ib: 286).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>The counselors, counseling institutes, university researchers and national inspectors.</td>
<td>The external agents were not only the initiators but also the designers, implementers, monitors and evaluators of the whole process of the case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>The regional/local educational services</td>
<td>There is no influence from external agents due to fact that teachers didn’t accept the role and action of these agents (Lopes da Silva, et al., 2000: 366). The interviewed teachers mentioned also the role of external agents from local educational services, in the introducing of these strategies (ib: 376).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>The National Institute for Quality &amp; Evaluation (INCE); The Educational Inspectorate Service of the Ministry; The Center for Teachers &amp; Resources; The external counselors</td>
<td>The INCE was created in 1990 in charge of evaluating the general functioning and outcomes of the Spanish educational system...It carried out a general evaluation but because of its sample characteristics and lack of feedback to schools, these evaluations have some effect on the state and the regional administration, but not directly on schools” (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 381). Teachers consider that it is not possible to understand the program without the proposals and contributions of the external counselor (ib: 405). Every Center for Teachers has a number of schools assigned to it, providing schools with their support, both for professional development and for resources or counseling in order to carry out innovations or improvement initiatives (ib: 382).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>The National Inspectorate, the LEAs, School consultants or advisers, university researchers, etc.</td>
<td>Government agents such as the National Inspectorate can exert pressure for schools to improve. Other external agents have no such power (Wikeley, et al. 2000: 57). Schools declared that they dared not ignore the OFSTED inspections, they planned everything according to or responded to the OFSTED reports. The improved schools felt that involvement in IQEA helped them lift off the &quot;plateau” (ib: 135).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.5 Comparing market mechanism across the eight European countries

The four indicators of market mechanism are freedom in school choice (5.5.1), information provided for school choice (5.5.2), the positive influence of school choice (5.5.3) and the negative influence of school choice (5.5.4).

5.5.1 The freedom in school choice
Within these eight countries, freedom of school choice is much more obvious in the private sector than in the public sector. Parents have freedom to choose schools in the private school sector where schools compete with each other and where there is more interest in using school improvement strategies and where more SI activities are actually going on (remarks of the Greek team, 2001; De Jong, et al., 2000: 247). This provides evidence for the positive influence of market mechanism on school improvement. In the public school sector, the case studies of Belgium (Fr) and the Netherlands showed total freedom for parents to choose schools for their children, even more so than in England and Finland where LEAs had some influence. In contrast, parents in Greece had no real freedom of school choice and their children were allocated to schools that were closest to their residences or to the working places of their parents. In Portugal, parents can choose schools within their residential area. For Spain, although parents had the freedom of school choice, in reality their choice was limited because insufficient places were available in the public schools. In Italy, while there was no information available about market mechanisms reflected in the case studies, other sources revealed that the possibility existed for parents to choose schools for their children.

5.5.2 The information provided for school choice
Market mechanism feeds upon the comparable information either in written form (e.g. published information on the Internet, the national media, etc) or in oral form (e.g. "word of mouth" -the school's local reputation). Comparable information requires external evaluations, value added comparison and feedback. Until 2000, it was only in England where this information was available for school choice via comparable and value added measurement (the League Tables). The opposite was true in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the case of Belgium, Finland and Italy school plans and the school annual report (Belgium, Finland) or school service charters (Italy), or student achievement of schools (the Netherlands) and the Inspection report are also made publicly known, but do not include added value, either on the Internet or in printed media.

5.5.3 The positive influence of school choice
The Finnish and English case studies argue the positive impact of market mechanism on effective school improvement such as: competition to attract students (on this point see also the remarks from the Portuguese team), improvement in order to retain students and the school(s) reputation, using evaluation data to improve the quality and the involvement of parents. The substantial impact of market mechanism in the UK at least yielded some pressure, which triggered school improvement. The published performance tables and other benchmarking data, especially the value-added comparison, could not be ignored by teachers and schools, moreover, they can be used as effective tools to convince school staff members of the need for change (see more in 4.8). Apart from this, schools in England also have the freedom to select their teachers and students.
5.5.4 The negative influence of school choice

Negative influences of free school choice were the equality issue, the reinforcement of division between schools for the elite and schools for the masses. For instance, free school choice has resulted in so-called "Black" and "White" schools in big cities in the Netherlands (De Jong, 2000), and discontinuity of ESI programs caused by frequent fluctuations in the student population in the French-speaking Belgium (Demeuse, et. al., 2000: 33).

5.6 Comparing school accountability across the eight European countries

At the point of writing the case studies, School accountability was not a major concern in Belgium, Finland, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. In French speaking Belgium and in Portugal, there was no equivalent term in their languages for “school accountability”, let alone familiarity with the concepts of accountability. In contrast, school accountability was the major concern in the UK. The 7 indicators of school accountability have been reflected in all the English case studies (Table 11 & Section 4.8). The issue of a School Year Report to parents was the only measure, which existed in five of the eight countries. Although in the Netherlands, the tendency was towards increased school accountability, schools were still learning how to come to grip with it. (De Jong, et al. 2000: 337). The only exception was the English case studies, which provided us with overwhelming information in this respect (in the order of the 7 indicators in Table 11):

- The School Year Report to parents (see Appendix)
- The published National Inspection reports (the published OFSTED reports evidenced in the 10 case studies, see 4.8)
- Responsibility target setting for intended student outcomes at all levels. (Individual teachers and students had to set their increased points targets coherently with the intended increased targets of their department and of their school, which were in tune with that of the LEAs and the nation. The involvement of the pupils in keeping their own records of achievement and setting future targets was a particular strength (ib: 137).
- League Tables with added value comparison (see 4.8 and Appendix)
- Feedback of the national assessment results (see 4.8 and Appendix)
- Positive and negative reinforcement (both “soft and hard” measures were used at the national and the school levels including rewards and warnings as well as the concept of "three strikes and out" (ib: 135) for students. If the teachers could not accept changes and "could not embrace the new directions, they had to leave the school" (see 4.8 and Appendix).
- Measures taken for failing schools (warning → period of time for change, if no improvement → closure).

5.7 Comparing adequate time, financial and human resource support for ESI across the eight European countries

The indicators of the factor adequate time, financial and human resource support are: time allocated for ESI programs (5.7.1), financial support for schools, students and for ESI programs (5.7.2), human resource support for ESI (5.7.3), the concrete support and the spiritual support (5.7.4). One more element has been added - the support and influence from the European Commission although it is not an ESI factor (5.7.5). At the end of this
section, the influence of lack of financial and human resource support for school improvement will be treated (5.7.6).

5.7.1 Time allocated for ESI programs

A striking problem was the issue of time. Lack of time for school improvement and for teachers' professional development was mentioned in some case studies of six countries. One **Finnish** case study mentioned “not enough time” as the No.1 negative factor, which hindered ESI (Nikkanen, 2000: 207). The Dutch case studies stated that "not enough time and resources were available to make the new reform aspects routine in the schools" (De Jong, et al: 343-345). Changes and ESI need time, time for preparation and planning, time for pre-project teacher training, time for getting approval for improvement projects, funding, equipment, space, time for changing process, time for observation, for implementation and for reflection. The time factor seems to be often underestimated.

5.7.2 Financial support for schools, students and for ESI programs

The central governments of the eight countries provided financial support for schools and students, particularly in the public school sector (see Appendix and Table 15). Special funding for school improvement was also mentioned in the case studies although sometimes the funding went directly to the LEAs or the external agents and was allocated to schools involved into the ESI programs from there. The examples derived from the case studies of such funding in each country were listed in Table 15 and will not be detailed here. We now turn our attention to the three different ways of providing financial support and their subsequent impact on the case studies:

1. **Rewarding the winners of SI programs** (e.g. in Spain, Portugal, Greece and England). In Greece, only those schools that were willing to accept the goals of the project and were able to implement the SI programs would be allowed to participate in the project and would be funded by the State. To ensure this, schools had to submit a written declaration stating that at least 2/3 of its staff had accepted the participation in the project (4.4). In Portugal and Spain, only those schools whose School Improvement Plan was accepted would be funded by the government. In Spain and England, rewards were given to the winners of effective school improvement, for instance, the 1 million pesetas in Spain and £25,000 for an outstanding teacher or an outstanding head teacher in the UK.

2. **Financing all schools that were involved in the school improvement or curriculum reforms** (e.g. the CCC reform in the Netherlands, the programs of LOGSE in Spain and the Excellence in Cities program in England).

3. **Encouraging the weak or the failing schools to participate in ESI** (e.g. Belgium and Italy). In Italy, failing schools were supported with a wide range of improvement initiatives. In addition, the Ministry would help them to identify the causes and to start improvement actions funded by the Ministry, the EC and other private sponsors. In Belgium (Fr), the approach of "positive discrimination" was used in providing financial support for schools which failed to achieve the curriculum goals. In Italy, schools and teachers involved in school improvement programs received financial incentives but in Belgium and Portugal there was neither reward nor professional benefit for teachers to participate in school improvement programs.

Concerning another impact of financial support on school improvement programs, the 2nd, 3rd, 6th and the 10th **English** case studies declared that the new school buildings (constructed with the funding provided by the government) affected the morale of the pupils and staff positively and made them feel more valued. The **Greek** case study also
showed that the refurbishment of the classrooms changed the practice in schools and “increased the satisfaction teachers derived from their practice and raised the interest of the pupils in the subjects taught” (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, et al., 2000: 235).

5.7.3 Human resource support for ESI
Owing to the fact that we have discussed the support from the external agents (a major kind of human resource support) in the previous part, in addition, Table 16 has provided the data and details on the influence of human resource support for ESI in the 31 case studies, we will not repeat them here. Please see Table 16 and Section 5.4.

5.7.4 Concrete support and the spiritual support
Concrete support includes providing opportunities for schools to join school improvement projects (evidenced in most of the eight countries), setting networks to facilitate a shared language about school improvement (the UK, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands), providing assessment, feedback and data in “school family groups” (the UK, the Netherlands, Greece, Belgium, Finland), providing training and practical advice in the target setting booklet, advising staff on the definition of objectives, supporting teachers with materials, courses and working alongside teachers (see Table 15 & 16). This was the case mostly in the case studies of the UK, Finland, Belgium, Portugal, the Netherlands and some of the Italian, Greek and Spanish case studies. The degree of spiritual support varied and it can be found in all the eight countries, in one way or another, but most visible in the English and some Spanish case studies, referring to the activities such as creating a “can do” atmosphere, raising morale and aspirations, encouraging ESI from the top, the CEO visiting schools, writing letters of appreciation or congratulations, providing cakes for teachers after OFSTED to celebrate success, encouraging parental and community involvement, national awards in the media, etc. (Wikeley, et al., 2000: 60, 64, 74, 86, 99, 110, 121).

5.7.5 The support and influence from the European Commission
The impact of the support and influence of the European Commission was mentioned in the case studies of Belgium, Finland, Greece, Italy and Spain. No information was available in the UK and the Portugal case studies (see Table 17 below). The OECD (1997b: 32) reports that the Greek MoE has received a loan of 31 billion drachmas for construction and repair to school buildings from the EC. However, apart from the EC programs, encouraging schools to participate in SI programs home and abroad can be found in all the eight countries from other sources.

5.7.6 The influence of lack of time, financial and human resource support for school improvement
The English case studies mentioned the negative effects of too much pressure, too many initiatives, and unsupportive Government policy involving LEAs in improving schools, lack of financial resources for school buildings from the central or the local governments and insufficient funding to cover ESI. The Belgian researchers complained that limited research funding increased the difficulty of planning and completing a co-coordinated project. In several countries, such financial support was not balanced or equal from project to project. In the 1st and the 4th Finnish case studies, the financial support mentioned was adequate. However this was not the case in its 2nd and the 3rd case studies. Staff and student instability may have had a negative influence on the ESI project. For instance, almost half of the teachers in grade 3 were replaced in the 1st Dutch case study. This undoubtedly hindered the ESI project (De Jong, et al., 2000: 320). More
than 60% of the students has left the pilot project during the project time (5 years) and moved to other schools in Belgium. The 2nd Portuguese case study also mentioned the negative influence of the fluctuations in employment of mathematics teachers' resulting in underachievement of students in mathematics (Lopes da Silva, et al., 2000: 375). The Greek case studies mentioned the frequent teacher transfer and the few hours that teachers were physically present at schools did not allow them to develop a spirit of collaboration, shared vision and goals (4.4).

Table 15 shows typical examples of the financial support mentioned in the case studies across these eight countries. Table 16 provides the data about the influence of the human resource support for ESI in the case studies across the eight countries.

### Table 15 Comparison of the adequate financial support for ESI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Financial support for ESI across the eight countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>&quot;Positive discrimination&quot; financial support directed to the schools that failed to achieve the curriculum goals. Financial support directed at those schools that welcome the disadvantaged SES students. However, the funding for educational research was not adequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>FIM 120,000 from the NBE for the PEDANET project - makes it possible for a teacher to take a leave of absence. The funding enables teachers to devote their time and energy fully to the project (a teacher can run the project while a substitute takes care of his/her classes). Without program resources the ideas could not have been turned into an online format (Nikkanen, 2000: 213).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>The SEPIE project and all other programs of the P.I. were exclusively financed by the State. The Greek national level as well as the European Union has co-funded the SEPIE programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>The schools, teachers and staff who take part in the SI programs and reform projects &quot;are awarded with an extra fee&quot; (D'Arcangeli, et al., 2000: 289). The Ministry, the EC and other private sponsors funded the school improvement actions, particularly for those schools that failed to attain the goals and objectives stated at the national level (D'Arcangeli, et al., 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>An average NLG 380,000 was allocated from the central government to each school during 1990-1996 for the CCC reforms. Schools received funds from the government not only according to their enrolled student numbers but also for quality enhancement, training and advice (De Jong, et al., 2000: 301). The SLO, the CITO, Inspections and research institutions were financed by the central government to monitor the process and the results of the implementation (ib: 336). An extra sum of NLG 12 million a year (1997 to 2000) and an additional NLG 1 million guilders in 1997 and 1998 were allocated from the central government to the &quot;Culture and Schools&quot; program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>The MoE has funded &quot;Education for All&quot; (involving 1192 schools) and &quot;Priority Areas of Educational Intervention&quot; program in basic education. The governments allocated extra funding and other benefits to those &quot;program-accepted&quot; schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1 million pesetas awarded to each well-developed and achieved School Year Plan. The economic resources given by the local administration were mentioned in the 2nd and the 4th case studies. &quot;Counseling and resources given by the external change agents have favored the development of the improvement program. Their support has contributed to the success of the initiative&quot; (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., p. 423).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>Special awards (£25,000) to each of the national outstanding headteachers or teachers and his/her school. The school had invested money in these aspects of their work before the government made funds available through the Excellence in Cities program (Wikeley, et al. 2000: 115). Funding from the LEA supported working collaboratively within schools. Nevertheless, collaborative work in all schools had benefited from additional funding (ib: 170). There was also funding from some universities, for example, funding from Nottingham University, for school improvement research programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 16  Comparison of human resource support for ESI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Human resource support for ESI across the eight countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>&quot;They (researchers) proposed the didactic sequences or the methodology to the teachers. They conducted the formative and summative assessment, corrected these sequences during the various sequence evaluation. They elaborated the pupils assessment tests, analyzed the results and reported them to the teachers&quot; (Demeuse, et al., 2000: 38). The researchers &quot;set up a formative assessment framework once a month&quot; and &quot;meeting with the teachers of the experimental group at a rate of one meeting a month&quot; (ib: 17-18).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>&quot;The project is co-ordinated and supported by the National Board of Education, which carries out the evaluation. It arranges meetings, workshops and seminars&quot; (Nikkanen, 2000: 202). &quot;The Department of Teacher Education of the University of Jyväskylä has a strong influence on the school’s activities because it provides many good ideas… It serves as a source of a great deal of stimuli and provides direct contacts with the MoE&quot; (ib: 188). &quot;The teachers can apply for leave of absence (4 months), during which time the National Board of Education pays their salary. A teacher can run the project while a substitute takes care of his/her classes&quot; (ib: 213). &quot;The schools external change agents are experts in information technology and are very important for the success of the program&quot; (ib: 213).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Members of the P.I. supporting team were sent to involved schools, as a monitor, a guide and an &quot;internal evaluator&quot;. In-service training seminars given by experts were held regularly at both the central and the school levels. The human resource support mainly comes from the central government (for selecting and allocating teachers), for the SEPIE project as well as all other programs of the P.I.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>All the schools in the pilot study decided to ‘use a critical friend’ in order to carry out diagnostic/improvement actions. The role and presence of this figure varied a great deal in work groups’ activities. In school contexts where the function of the critical friend was useful and satisfactory, his/her activity was mainly constituted by observation and mentoring, aimed at stimulating the diagnosis of problems and finding strategies to solve. In some schools the presence of the critical friend was not particularly influential, above all for the lack of continuity in his/her activity (D’Arcangeli, et al., 2000: 288). &quot;The European Center of Education (CEDE) carried out a continued guidance and counseling to the schools involved during the program realization and the external evaluation” (ib: 284).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>The SLO, the CITO, Inspections and research institutions were financed by the central government to monitor the process and the results of the CCC implementation. The total time the counselors spent on average during three years (on the eleven schools) exceed the minimal planned 80 hours to a large extent. The time spent for improvement is on average 138 hours&quot; (De Jong, et al., 2000: 310). &quot;Teachers were frequently observed (by the counselors) during the arithmetic and language lessons. Per group 30 classroom observations are made focusing mainly on instruction, learning time, and classroom management” (ib: 325). &quot;Teachers receive intensive KEA-method of class consultations (every two weeks). The instruction behavior is rated every month by a research instrument&quot; (ib: 325). &quot;The 70 times on average that the counselors had a meeting at the schools must have resulted in a pressure to improve” (ib: 318).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Both the central and the local governments provided time, financial, human resource support for school improvement projects. The governments allocated teacher training and human resource support (e.g. 6 assistants were sent to the school) to those &quot;program-accepted&quot; schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>&quot;The Inspectors reoriented the school needs in a positive way and encouraged both the Management Team and the Teachers’ Assembly to join the PAM. This initial support was crucial for the success of the improvement process” (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., p. 395). There have been two other external agents involved positively valued by schoolteachers: the Educational Inspectorate and the Center for Teachers and Resources. The Inspectors has offered a stable relationship of support for the program development, assessment and carrying out the monitoring of the program. The collaboration of the Center for Teachers and Resources has been more occasional, based on economic resources and support seminars (ib: 395).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>Human resource support from the LEA such as providing opportunities to join SI projects, visiting schools, setting networks to facilitate a shared language about SI, providing practical advice in the target setting booklet, advising staff in defining objectives, providing training, supporting teachers with materials, courses, working alongside teachers, providing assessment, feedback and data in “school family groups” (Wikeley, F. et al., 2000: 64, 74, 86, 99, 110, 121).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17 The support and influence from the European Commission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>The support and influence from the European Commission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Three schools took part in the 1997-1998 pilot project (with 98 schools from 17 countries) launched by the EC within the framework of SOCRATES III.3.1. (Demeuse, et al., 2000: 44).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>&quot;At the moment some 100 schools in Europe are using an on-line magazine of the same type as Vitikkala. The project has been integrated into the curriculum&quot; (Nikkane, 2000: 211).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>The three Greek case studies were all co-funded by the EU and the Greek State. In the last ten years, the EU has developed an education policy promoted by the various funding programs. Greek governments, in order to have appropriate funding, adopt and comply with the requirements of EU projects, introducing various innovations in education. A good example of such practice is the establishment of SEPIE in schools. The Greek education system which in various aspects and in different time periods is “corroded” by the introduction of a new feature originating in the EU (ib: 256).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>The European Center for Education (CEDE) supported the project implementation by means of two consultants who, besides monitoring pilot project development at a national level, essentially played a facilitator role and acted with varying degrees of involvement. Another important dimension was the dialogue and exchange between the schools involved in the project, guided and stimulated by the CEDE consultant (D’ Arcangeli, et al., 2000: 288).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>&quot;The government has tried to internationalize its secondary education. It has &quot;set up the European Platform to strengthen the European dimension of education and to promote internationalization&quot; (De Jong, 2000: 354).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>No information was available in the case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>The most usual evaluation combines an external evaluation strategy with a self-assessment one. It is based on the European Model for Quality Management as way to foster improvement processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>No information was available in the case studies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.8 Comparing local support for ESI across the eight European countries

Detailed reflections of the four indicators about the local support for ESI are in Table 18 and will not be repeated here. Table 18 also reveals that the local support for ESI varies a great deal within a country as well as across countries. We need to point out there was no information about the local support in Belgian and Dutch case studies. For the remaining six countries, the influence of the local support for ESI can be divided into three degrees of intensity:

1. Some influence on school improvement in the case studies
2. Considerable influence on school improvement in the case studies
3. Very important influence on school improvement in the case studies.

**Greece and Spain belong to Type 1.** One of the Spanish case studies disclosed the informative role, the support and the pressure of the Federation of Ikastolas for school improvement (see Table 18). The 1st Greek case study also benefited from the local support such as the help from the local Fire Department for the fire-prevention course (see Table 18).

**Finland and Italy belong to Type 2.** The LEAs have considerable influence on school improvement in the case studies. Their influence was mainly giving the schools full backing. The Finnish and the Italian municipalities played a major role here (see more in Table 18).

**Portugal and the UK belong to Type 3.** The LEAs in Portugal and in the UK have a very important influence on school improvement in the case studies. The LEAs in Portugal initiated and guided the school improvement process. They provided teachers with content and teaching strategies for their school improvement programs. They held the
local guidance meetings that allowed the study of the syllabus, the planning of didactic units and the exchange of teachers’ practices in the whole region. Their influence was very similar to that of the LEAs in the English case studies (see Table 18 below).

Table 18  The influence of local support on ESI across the eight European Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>The local support on ESI across the eight European countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>No information available in its two case studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>The provision of compulsory education was the responsibility chiefly of the municipality, which was also in charge of re-allocation of the state subsidy and funding, and taking care of the arrangements needed to comply with the minimum requirements. Therefore, the attitude of the local municipality towards ESI was quite important (see Chapter 4.3. the different attitudes towards ESI between its 3rd and the 4th case studies and the 2nd case study).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Schools benefited from the local support (e.g. the Fire Department support in the 1st case study, the support from the local communities and parents in the 3rd case study) on ESI programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>The Italian municipalities played a considerable role in being responsible for the way the school system was organized and for planning the use of the buildings and other facilities, for setting up or closing primary and lower secondary schools, for drawing up the school timetable and supporting private schools, etc. (Eurydice, 2000: 347).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>No information available in its three case studies. The Dutch municipal authorities are responsible for the maintenance and quality of the school advisory services. They had a specific duty for the publicly run schools in their areas (from interviews).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Carrying out the tasks of the MoE in providing guidelines, co-ordination and support for non-higher education establishments, the LEAs also managed human, financial and material resources. They supervised school physical education and sports, provided schools with additional financial contributions apart from the national budget within their area. They guided the SI process (e.g. gave teachers brochures with contents and teaching strategies for reforms, held local guidance meetings to study the syllabus and to exchange teachers’ practices in the whole region).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>The Autonomous Communities expanded state standards, exercising both the executive-administration and the full educational responsibilities (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 380). The Federation of Ikastolas develops a yearly evaluation report at the end of Primary Education, which shows the results of each student and of every class, every school compared with those of the other schools of the Federation and compared with those of the years before. It also searches for outstanding results at each area. This information and report are given to schools (ib: 401).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>The relationship of the school with its local community was considered part of the process of school improvement not just as an outcome. School improvement in the UK was highly nested in the initiatives of their LEAs. Their relationship was therefore very dependent on local circumstances. The LEAs provided funding or budgets for its schools and for SI projects, providing access to networks, providing expertise in supervising and inspiring ESI (e.g. a linking advisor, a literacy advisor and a numeracy advisor), developing strategies for ESI, raising aspirations for ESI within the community and engaging all of its schools in a concentrated effort to raise standards of achievement…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The differences between the local support of Portugal and of England were "there was a strong sense of affiliation, of being nested within the LEAs" in the English case studies (Wikeley, F. et al., 2000: 176). The LEA of England provided not only funding but also formulated concrete improvement goals and initiated improvement process steps (see 4.8). Moreover, they gave inspiration to schools as well as raising the educational aspiration within the community (ib: 86). The local educational authorities can provide both pressure (to monitor, to give evaluation data and to offer comparable data within the "school family") and support (financial support, offering schools access to school improvement programs) within their district or areas. Three linked strategies used in the English LEAs seemed effective: specific help (e.g. specific expertise of advisory staff,
management audit); networks (establishing school and teacher networks across schools to share good practice, explore ideas and give mutual support and helpful comparisons); and opportunities to join specific improvement projects. For the head teacher of a primary school in England, "developing a shared language of improvement about processes, teaching and learning and improving on previous best practices" had been a significant contribution of the LEA to school improvement (ib: 171). In short, the attitude of the local municipality towards ESI was quite important. The central government can give direction and vision but the local educational authorities and the local organizations can give much more direct (e.g. vision building, goal setting), concrete (funding, strategic planning, quality assurance, research guidance) and timely support for effective school improvement.

5.9 Comparing offering schools some autonomy across the eight European countries

The indicators concerning school autonomy are autonomy in personnel policy (to recruit teachers and staff members), autonomy in selecting headteachers, autonomy in financial management, autonomy in school curriculum and textbook-choice and autonomy in classroom instruction. With respect to school autonomy in financial management, in school curriculum and in classroom instruction, this is introduced in the section regarding the context of each country. Now, we will turn our focus to three major issues (see below) which we have discovered have a massive impact (either positive or negative) on ESI in the case studies (see Table 19 on p. 108). These three major issues are:
- The impact of school autonomy in hiring or firing teachers (5.9.1)
- The impact of school autonomy in selecting head teachers (5.9.2)
- The balance between too much vs. too little school autonomy (5.9.3)

5.9.1 The impact of school autonomy on recruiting and dismissing teachers

An interesting finding from the case studies is that the impact of school autonomy in hiring or firing teachers is crucially important for ESI. When we look at Table 20, only schools (in the public sector) in England and in the Netherlands have the decision-making autonomy to hire or to fire teachers. The remaining six countries, particularly the four Southern European countries had no such decision-making autonomy in personnel policy. According to the case studies and the information we obtained (OECD, 1997b & 1998: 83) and interviews with some teachers from these countries, in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, they have a very strong tradition of centrally recruiting or placing school staff members. Teachers are considered to be public servants so they are centrally recruited, as are other public servants. In some of these countries, the nursery, primary and secondary school teachers are recruited, selected and placed on tenure positions according to lists, which are compiled and maintained by the MoE. In Greece and Italy, recruitment examinations for new teachers are held at the national level, including written exams and interviews (in Italy). Candidates often have to wait for several years before obtaining a teaching position. For example, in Greece, the time spent waiting for a placement is often as long as 10 years (OECD, 1997b:37) because of limited positions and large numbers of candidates, competition is strong. In Spain, "teachers are civil servants and must pass a selection process consisting of a scoring of merits and a competitive examination organized by the autonomic administration but regulated by the state. In private schools, the selection process depends upon the school's competence. Primary and Secondary teachers in public schools accede to a permanent position after some years of temporary posting. The length of this provisional situation varies in the
different Communities, but is generally longer in secondary education. In some schools most of the teaching staff is in an unstable situation which prevents the implementation and institutionalization of improvement initiatives" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 382-383). In Portugal, there is no national exam for selecting teachers for the public schools and what counts is the final marks obtained in teachers’ training schools or universities which are the basis of a national teacher recruitment system of the Ministry of Education. Generally speaking, public schools have no autonomy to recruit teachers or to dismiss them in Portugal.

In these countries, as soon as the teachers are recruited, however, they receive life tenure and school head teachers can do nothing with them even if they perform ineffectively. The newly recruited teachers are placed by the central government first in "disadvantaged" schools (in remote areas). After some years of teaching, teachers can be transferred by the central government to more "privileged" schools (in big cities or near their homes). "The transfer of teachers from one school to another is decided by the Ministry of Education" (see 4.4). Such an employment system has its advantages (quality control for the teachers at the entrance and fair competitions), however, its disadvantages probably overshadow its advantages. *Firstly*, "schools have no authority and no supervisory control over teachers" (see 4.4) because schools can neither hire nor fire them. In many decentralized countries, people dare to curse the President of the country but they dare not to curse their direct boss who has the power to hire or to fire them and who pays their salary. This holds the same for the teacher employment system. When schools have no power to hire/fire teachers, as soon as teachers have been recruited by the central government, they can do whatever they want as long as they do not violate the law. That was why in Portugal the case studies state that "teachers are aware that at the school level all the facilities needed for the development of all syllabus suggestions has been provided, but they felt totally free to use them or not", moreover, when faced the implementation of the new national curricula, "teachers are totally free to decide whether to use the new curricula or not. There was no control and no evaluation" (Lopes da Silva, et al., 2000:362-376). With the central government level being so far removed from classroom teaching, is it possible for MoE to control the quality of classroom teaching and the teachers' behavior without offering schools autonomy in hiring or firing teachers or in monitoring the behavior and career development of teachers? As the Greek case studies argue, in practice, the MoE cannot monitor and evaluate teachers within their school practice. The MoE does not have a detailed picture of the community context around each school. Knowledge of the culture of each school is naturally not accessible for the MoE. *Secondly*, behavioral theories emphasize the importance of the mechanisms of evaluation, feedback and reinforcement in changing behavior (Carver & Sergiovanni, 1969; Debus & Schroiff, 1986). In addition, the findings of the school effectiveness research consistently demonstrate that frequent evaluations and assessment are associated with high achievement (Scheerens, 1994, Creemers, 2002, Bosker, et al., 1999, De Jong & Westerhof, 2001). Effective school improvement requires frequent external evaluations, feedback and reinforcement. If teachers are totally free and school leaders have no influence on them, it is impossible to implement any reforms, innovations or school improvement programs. In addition, effective school improvement needs cooperation, classroom observation, school accountability and teacher responsibility. The overwhelming teacher autonomy (in deciding whether to implement the national curriculum or not or whether to participate in the school improvement projects or not such as shown in Portuguese case studies) greatly resulted from the teacher recruitment and promotion system. If schools had no autonomy in recruiting and promoting teacher
and staff, schools would have neither authority nor the capacity to engage teachers in ESI programs, nor the opportunity to raise the quality of their teaching, nor to change their undesirable behavior. Thirdly, the situation described in Greek case studies "the teacher employment status of few hours per week is coupled by (fairly) low wages" clearly hinders ESI (see 4.4). Moreover, "teachers remain at the school mostly during their teaching hours does not allow them to develop a spirit of collaboration. In Spain, "with respect to the way staff are recruited, teacher instability can be considered negative for improvement processes. This is an endemic problem of the public schools, because the delay in awarding definitive posts makes it possible that up to 50% of the staff in a school change each year. This makes their commitment to a school educational project very difficult." (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 436). The essential way to improve student outcomes required time, motivation and devotions of both the teachers and students. If improvement programs are to function effectively teachers need to spend more time in schools. Therefore their terms of employment should be changed. This means that they need to remain on the premises longer and should not be transferred frequently from school to school, so that they can have the time and the interest to develop shared vision and goals" (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides, et al., 2000: 245). Fourthly, viewed from another angle, the English case studies have shown the importance of the school autonomy in hiring or firing teachers. Schools in England had the decision-making autonomy to recruit teaching staff (see European Commission, 2000 & the 9th English case study), in some English schools even students were invited to participate in the selection panel for recruiting new teachers. According to the case study, this creative hiring has been regarded as very important for the success of ESI. On the other hand, if teachers did not accept the school improvement goals, visions and plans, they had to leave the schools (see 4.8 & Appendix). These personnel strategies have contributed to the success of the school improvement programs in England. Based on the above arguments, we conclude that autonomy in hiring or firing teachers, in teachers' placement and promotions, in reinforcement for teaching performance should be offered to schools. A lack of school decision-making in how teachers should be employed, evaluated and rewarded seems to be one of the main negative elements that yield too much teacher autonomy which in turn, becomes an obstacle hindering effective school improvement in these countries.

5.9.2 The impact of autonomy in selecting school principals
The autonomy in selecting head teachers/principals was encountered in Spain and Portugal. In Spain, the school principal is one of the school teachers, elected by the School Council which is composed of representatives of teachers, parents and, in secondary schools, students for a four-year period. In Portugal, teachers elect the principals. Such election is a feature of a collegial school where "power is shared subject to the statutes and ordinances and responsibility for the school is a collective one" (Hargreaves, 1995: 34). On one hand, the headmaster is an accepted leader in the school who knows what works and what the problems are. On the other hand, coming from the general school population he/she may not be "tough enough" or possess the necessary power to develop change processes (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 435). In addition, collegial cultures are averse to strong, charismatic leaders seeking to transform schools. (Hargreaves, 1995: 41). As one of the results, "the influence of school leaders in the classroom process in Portugal is limited by heavy resistance from teachers who are unused to being restricted in their classroom behavior". Teachers can decide whether to implement the national curriculum or not, whether to participate in the school improvement projects or not (Lopes da Silva et al., 2000: 362-376). The UK case studies
revealed a quite different picture. Among the 10 headmasters interviewed, eight of them had come from other schools and were appointed during the 1990s. "The arrival of the head teacher was acknowledged as the main catalyst for change in the school", as a "turning point" or a "significant key factor" for the school improvement process as is stated in the English case studies (see Table 19). "In all the schools the head teacher was seen to be the key instigator of change. How the role was played out varied however in no school had other members of staff been the main instigator" (Wikeley, et al., 2000: 175). The perception of the role and dominance of (the head teachers as) the internal change agent was also influential in creating a school culture that was conducive to sustaining improvement. Where they were adept at including and empowering other members of staff (e.g. the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 10th case studies), continued improvement looked more likely (ib: 175). One of the crucial differences is that head teachers in England have the power to recruit, evaluate and promote teachers. The success of English ESI programs reveal that changes for effective school improvement require changing force and strong power to steer and empower schools for change; power to hire/fire and to evaluate teachers; change strategies and direct ESI experiences.

5.9.3 The balance between too much versus too little school autonomy
The case studies of Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal stated that too much school and teacher autonomy (in external assessment, in testing student outcomes, in carrying out SI projects) might hinder effective school improvement. The Dutch case studies stated that too much school autonomy in test taking also hindered effective school improvement. However, the Greek case studies mentioned that too little autonomy (in decision-making, school curriculum, time, and teacher employment) might hinder ESI as well. The questions arise what should be centrally controlled and what kind of autonomy should be offered to schools? What has partially contributed to the success of the English case studies is that goals, standards and criteria for national assessment were centrally controlled while the means, personnel and decision-making power to achieve the goals were in the hands of the schools.
Table 19  The influence of the head teachers on ESI in the 10 English case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 10 English case studies</th>
<th>New head teacher &amp; the time when appointed</th>
<th>The role of the head teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; case study (P)</td>
<td>+ 1994</td>
<td>&quot;The major turning point for the school occurred with the appointment of the new deputy head teacher in 1994. The deputy brought with her strategies concerning organization, management, pupil behavior, and curriculum&quot; (Wikeley, et al., 2000: 58).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; case study (P)</td>
<td>+ 1995</td>
<td>&quot;The arrival of the head teacher was also considered significant by the other teachers. They described the school's culture before as isolationist, but now the staff had a culture of sharing and collaboration&quot; (ib: 69).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; case study (P)</td>
<td>+ 1991</td>
<td>&quot;The leadership of the head teacher was a key factor in the improvement process. She has promoted the concept of school ownership and striving for high quality education for the pupils of Royalbere&quot; (ib: 83).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S)</td>
<td>+ 1994</td>
<td>&quot;The arrival of the head teacher was acknowledged by all the teachers spoken to as the main catalyst for change in the school”. &quot;Evidence points to the very determined leadership of the head teacher, as innovator, facilitator, monitor, and model. OFSTED 1999 reported as the first main finding 'the outstanding and inspirational leadership of the head teacher gives the school clear educational direction'. Everyone spoken to during the school visit acknowledged the role of the head teacher in leading, initiating, implementing and sustaining improvements&quot; (ib: 94, 97).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S)</td>
<td>+ 1996</td>
<td>&quot;The appointment of the head teacher in 1996 had been a turning point for the school. On her appointment she had had her suspicions confirmed by carrying out a thorough analysis of the schools examination results and prior attainment data. She presented this to the staff at the first staff meeting. The deputy head teacher, who had been at the school 30 years, described it like a &quot;breath of fresh air&quot;&quot; (ib: 105).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S)</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>&quot;The school is under the positive leadership of the head teacher who works closely with governors, senior staff and all staff to provide an educational experience of real worth&quot; (ib: 115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S)</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>&quot;The head teacher was providing effective leadership as the school was undergoing a period of transition. He is positive, accessible and provides a clear sense of direction for the school.&quot; (ib: 128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S)</td>
<td>+ 1993</td>
<td>&quot;The school is very well managed...The senior team is led very effectively. The head provides strong direction to all. Parents appreciate his educational vision for the school and its future. This has been shared with and steers the work of the senior team and all staff?&quot; (ib: 134)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 9&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S)</td>
<td>+ 1993</td>
<td>&quot;The teachers believed that the improvement was brought about by the head teacher’s zeal. The head teacher was described as “dynamic,” “highly focused,” “excellent,” and “a driving force.” These teachers all agreed that the head teacher’s enthusiasm for improvement was contagious&quot; (ib: 147).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; case study (S) (G)</td>
<td>+ 1993</td>
<td>&quot;First, those interviewed appear to identify 1993 as the time when the changes started to occur, which was when the new head teacher arrived. It was she who instigated the involvement of the school in the IQEA project, through a desire for a more sharpened focus on teaching and learning&quot; (ib: 159).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: "P" stands for primary schools; "S" stands for secondary schools; "G" stands for schools for girls. "+" means newly appointed head teacher who came from other schools.
Table 20  The autonomy of the schools for personnel recruitment and for selecting the head teachers across the eight European countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>How to select school headteachers</th>
<th>Personnel right (to hire or fire teachers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>(S)he must be 35 with 10 years' teaching experience and has to pass a special exam</td>
<td>No autonomy in the public school section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>No autonomy in the public school section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>No autonomy in the public school section; Central government recruits and places the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>No autonomy in the public school section; Central government recruits and places the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>Selected by a commission of the School Board</td>
<td>Schools or School Board have decision-making autonomy in the recruitment of teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Elected by the teachers</td>
<td>No autonomy in the public school section; Central government recruits and places the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Elected by the School Board</td>
<td>No autonomy in the public school section; Central government recruits and places the teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>Appointed</td>
<td>Schools have decision-making autonomy in the recruitment of teaching staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.10 Comparing engendering a culture in support of ESI across the eight European countries

Due to most of the indicators of engendering a culture in support of ESI have been discussed in the previous parts, to avoid repetitions, in this section we would like to concentrate on the following four perspectives:
1. Shared vision and responsibility in the form of a school improvement program contract and special rewards for participating ESI programs (5.10.1).
2. Using both soft and hard measures to change a culture (5.10.2).
3. The importance of data/information in changing a culture (5.10.3).
4. The negative influence of lack of supportive culture for ESI (5.10.4).

5.10.1 Shared vision and responsibility in the form of a SI program contract and special rewards for participating ESI programs

A shared vision and responsibility laid down in the form of a school improvement contract may help to prevent failure of ESI programs. This was the case in the Greek and English case studies. In Greece, negotiations between the external agents and the ESI participating schools, lead to the prerequisite for participating in the programs was that teachers had to accept the goals set by the program. Only schools that were able and willing to do so would be selected into the ESI programs. To ensure this, each participating school had to submit a written declaration stating that at least 2/3 of its staff had accepted it. This has created a shared vision and shared responsibilities among participants. Moreover, it has prevented the miscarriage of the ESI programs and facilitated collaboration amongst all participants. In England, the contract signed by the involved schools and the external agents has helped to guarantee the success of the ESI programs too. In addition with national goal setting focusing on student academic outcomes, the publishing of League Tables, the reports of OFSTED inspections, performance-related payment, rewards and sanctions and so on, a national-wide climate of
pressure and support to improve school qualities has been created. This was an effective strategy for carrying out ESI programs.

Apart from these, in Greece, Italy and Spain, participation in innovation and investigation activities was considered as in-service training, therefore, (in Spain) "it also meant complementary remuneration (salary)" (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 383). In Italy, "the teachers who take part in the programs are awarded with a financial incentive" (ib: 294). In Greece, "the teachers participating in the SEPIE programs, received as remuneration for their participation an extra allowance. Participation in such a program possibly furthers their opportunities for professional mobility (such as the possibility to follow post-graduate studies etc.). In contrast in Belgium and Portugal, there were neither professional benefits nor financial rewards to teachers involved in the school improvement programs, and hence no consequences either positive or negative for their professional careers. So they felt free to participate in SI programs or not (Lopes da Silva, 2000: 363).

5.10.2 Using both soft and hard measures to engender cultural change
Culture is soft but to change it, both soft and hard measures are needed. The English case studies revealed how to use the Soft measures (rewards and other positive reinforcement forms such as creating new images of national "heroes" – “Super headteachers” and outstanding teachers, ranking the excellent schools in the League Tables, teachers payment related to student outcomes, etc.) and the Hard measures (punishment, "naming and shaming", strictly applying school accountability, closing failing schools, etc). These measures would nurture a kind of social climate or a culture in favor of effective school improvement. At the school level, some "quick fix" strategies (a system of rewards and warnings based also on the concept of ‘three strikes and out’) seem unavoidable for changing a negative school culture for one where ESI is promoted. The argument is that schools need to establish good classroom conditions for learning and unless this was done the teachers would not be able to teach properly. The English case studies argued these problems needed to be solved first which could raise the morale and aspirations of the participants for SI programs. It was not only a pre-condition but also a process of effective school improvement.

5.10.3 The importance of data information to change a culture
The English case studies have shown the importance of using data/information to change a school culture. At all levels (the national level, the school level, the classroom level and the student level), data was used to set up the improvement targets, and the school improvement projects in England were strongly data-driven. Wikeley et al., (2000) state: "targeting, monitoring and evaluation all require the use of assessment data, and it was evident in all the (English) schools that testing and handling data had become very familiar to them. Data of many kinds underpinned everything they did and there was confidence in its use. The head of one of the secondary schools described how the teachers used data to ask questions, for example by constructing case studies of students who had exceeded or failed to meet expectations. All the schools valued the statistical data provided by the LEA" (ib: 170). One Finnish case study also stated that “there is a lot of power in net-working” (Nikkaneen, 2000:217). Another Finnish case study has further confirmed this point of view. This was repeated in other country reports as well. The importance of data and information exchange to alter a culture has been pointed out by Fullan (1999:27) who states that 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, they become clearer about how well they are doing. Moreover, cooperation is strengthened, and the organization becomes more of a learning organization working on “commonly generated information”.

5.10.4 The negative influence of lack of a supportive culture for ESI
Lack of supportive school culture, particularly lack of an "evaluation culture", was obvious in many case studies. Some case studies admitted “our system is not familiar with such concepts as evaluation related to objectives or accountability" (Belgium), "evaluation is perceived as something threatening or an intrusion” (Italy), "no school culture and tradition for teamwork among teachers and even less of communication among different curriculum departments" (Portugal), "we have to bear in mind that our political and administrative educational system has been very centralized and therefore there was no self-improvement culture in the schools” (Spain). A lack of culture in support of ESI has greatly hindered effective school improvement. Table 21 (see p. 112) unfolds the culture impact on the ESI case studies across the eight European countries.

5.11 Summary
This chapter compared how the ten contextual level factors influenced the 31 school improvement programs across the eight European countries. The findings show that there was almost no evidence for any one single factor leading to ESI but a tendency toward a “multi-factor interactive type" of influence. This does not mean that the amount of influence is equally distributed over the factors and among the countries or schools involved. Three key ESI strategies came to the forefront: national goal setting with the strong backing up of a whole system including monitoring implementation, external assessment, feedback and reinforcement (rewards and sanctions); a good balance between pressure and support; and a balanced mix of “autonomy-accountability”. In addition, the balance between too much pressure (e.g. in the English schools) and too little pressure (e.g. in the Belgian, Italian and Portuguese schools), too much support and too little support, too much autonomy and too little autonomy (Greece), too much external intervention and too little external intervention, deserves considerable attention which may constitute worthwhile further research topics. From here, we turn to Chapter 6 where the four research questions will be answered and the strengths, limitations and the implications of this study will be discussed.

Table 21  Comparison of culture impact on school improvement programs across the eight European countries
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>The culture impact on the school improvement case studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>&quot;Our system is not familiar with concepts as evaluation related to objectives or accountability&quot; and &quot;appointing somebody to help or to welcome a critical friend seems quite strange in the system&quot; (Demeuse, et al., 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>&quot;There is not yet such a culture to get the teachers collect data for feedback and for follow-up of school improvement. We do not have that kind of 'management culture'. Now after the common decentralization and demands for self-assessment it is quite obvious that change is needed&quot; (Nikkanen, 2000: 215). &quot;Encouraging atmosphere makes it easy for staff and pupils to seek satisfaction to their growth needs. It is helping teachers’ internal and external empowerment&quot; (ib: 216).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>&quot;A prerequisite for the participation in the programs was that teachers accepted the goals set by the design of the program. Only schools that were able and willing to do so would participate in the programs. This fact created to a certain extent a shared vision among participating teachers concerning the implementation of the program and facilitated their collaboration for the achievement of the goals of the program&quot; (Kontogiannopoulos-Polydorides et al., 2000: 243). &quot;The program effected changes in teachers’ attitudes towards certain social issues. One Geography teacher admitted that before his participation in the program he was feeling almost hostile towards foreign pupils, blaming them for the poor educational achievements of the whole school. At the end of the program he stated that he was ashamed for his former attitude&quot; (ib: 240).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>&quot;Evaluation&quot; was perceived as something threatening and an intrusion. &quot;The main problem the Italian school system has to face is the situation of passivity and the feeling of uncertainty and lost of status, spread between teachers because of the fifty years delay in reforming the school system&quot; (D’Arcangeli, et al., 2000: 294).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>&quot;Before the KEA project there was no evaluation culture in the schools. It is the KEA program which has introduced the (internal) counselor system and the evaluation culture into the participating schools&quot; (De Jong, et al., 2000: 329).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>No school culture and tradition of teamwork among teachers, even less communication between different curriculum departments (Lopes da Silva, et al., 2000) The efforts to change this situation were made, particularly in shaping new visions, new routines and new practice for helping students (e.g. the &quot;support room&quot;), for strengthening relationship with local primary schools (e.g. opening the secondary school library to them) and for shaping a self-evaluated school culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>&quot;We have to bear in mind that our political and administrative educational system has been very centralized and therefore there was no self-improvement culture in the schools&quot; (Muñoz-Repiso, et al., 2000: 434). An important change was made in teaching cooperation. The teachers thought that they had developed a highly positive common culture that enabled them to take responsibilities in a collective way. The entire teaching staff was still involved in the project, which nowadays was established as part of the school's culture (ib:401- 421). &quot;The most important result may be the setting-up of an innovative culture at school and the concern for continuous improvement&quot; (ib: 402).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The UK</td>
<td>&quot;Both programs (the LEAs and the IQEA programs) intended to create a culture of improvement that increased the school’s capacity for improvement and this was evident in all the schools. It would appear from the case studies that both programs’ focus on establishing a culture of improvement in the schools is not only important for current success but also for schools’ maintenance of improvement&quot; (Wikeley, et al., 2000: 176). A suitable school climate might favor teaching and learning, the changed attitudes of teachers towards students were the result of the changed culture. In addition, the noticed schools’ routine changes have also noticed in the contents of the department/school meetings, the focus of such meetings, the observation of classroom teaching and shared practice and collaborative work. These are important indicators of the changed school culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 6 Conclusions and Discussions

6.1 Overview

We began the journey of this dissertation with four research questions:
(1) Does the contextual level, particularly the national contextual level, globally influence effective school improvement (ESI)?
(2) If so, what are the concrete factors at the contextual level which influence ESI?
(3) Are there any differences between the influences they exert on ESI (strongly or less strongly, positively or negatively)?
(4) Can common issues be identified in their influence on ESI across the eight European countries?

Chapter 1 introduced the background to the research, the design of the research and described the research problems and accordingly, four research questions were formulated. It drew a general outline of the whole dissertation. Chapter 2 critically reviewed and integrated five theoretical traditions, namely, school effectiveness theory, school improvement theory, curriculum theory, theories of organization, organizational learning and learning organization and public school choice theory. As a result, a research model with 10 contextual level factors and their indicators emerged. The model was composed of three main dimensions: goals, pressure and support, which were later used as a standard of measurement or “filter” in the empirical section. Chapter 3 elucidated the research methodology, the approaches used for data collection and for analysis of the case studies, etc. Chapter 4 closely analyzed the influences of the 10 contextual level factors on the 31 case studies within each country (intra-country-case analysis). The differences between their influence on ESI within each country were demonstrated in the subsequent tables. At the end of the chapter, the indicators of these 10 factors were marked in a table. Chapter 5 further compared and contrasted the common or different important issues that could be deduced from the case study analysis across the eight European countries (inter-country-case analysis). The contributions of all the previous chapters will be summarized in this final chapter. To this end, this chapter is composed of five parts. Section 6.1 reviews the whole dissertation. Section 6.2 answers the four research questions. Section 6.3 points out the limitations of this study. Section 6.4 elaborates the strengths of this study. Section 6.5 presents the implications of this study for policymaking, for theory building and for practice.

6.2 Answers to the four research questions and presentations of theoretical propositions regarding ESI

Before we provide answers to the four research questions, a serious word of caution must be sounded. Our research questions cannot be answered on the basis of experience or well-informed opinions but on carefully analyzed research data. As we stated in Chapter 3, our data stemmed from 31 separate case studies which focused on describing and analyzing school improvement programs at the school level. In addition, the nature of these case studies varies in content, objective and range. Given this fact, our data cannot be used for hypothesis or theory testing but rather in an effort to gather empirical indications or partial answers and theory building at the national contextual level in terms of goals, pressure and support. Therefore, the above research questions can be answered from two perspectives: partially, from the perspective of the empirical study – the case studies themselves – and from the perspective of theory building, policymaking and
practice. The former perspective has been explored extensively in previous chapters. Here the preliminary answers will be presented. The latter perspective can be reflected when formulating propositions. Therefore, each part of the answer to each of the four research questions will end with such propositions.

6.2.1 Answers to research Question 1
Does the contextual level, particularly the national contextual level, globally influence ESI?
The findings of this research, both theoretical and empirical, reveal that the contextual level, particularly the national contextual level, did globally influence ESI. By global influence, we mean the combined influence from three general dimensions: goals, pressure and support. Generally speaking, this global influence was revealed in a good number of the 31 case studies across the eight European countries (Chapter 4 and 5; Appendix). With respect to the influence of national goals in terms of school improvement, this was reflected in legalizing the overall educational reforms or reforming the national curriculum, stimulating School Improvement Plans or School Self-Evaluation programs and so on in all the eight countries in the last two decades (see 5.2). However, setting national goals seems essential but insufficient because goals can only become effective if they are complemented by effective pressure and empowering support. In terms of pressure, relatively speaking, the influence of the intense and strong pressure was more prominent in the English case studies (see 4.8.3 and Appendix). In terms of support, ‘adequate time, financial and human resource support’ was the main indicator. Regarding the influence of financial support, although the ways and means differed, or occasionally funding went directly to the LEAs or the external agents to be reallocated from there to schools, the central governments of all eight countries did provide financial support for school improvement (see 5.7 & Table 11). Meanwhile, the influence of insufficient or delayed financial support was also revealed in the case studies (see 4.4.3 and 5.7). Regarding the influence of the human resource support, almost all the eight countries showed evidence of support from external agents, although the influence of the external agents varied (see 5.4). In general, the national contextual level does globally influence ESI. More specific answers will be spelt out in 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.

Proposition 1: Effective School Improvement involves different levels. At the national contextual level, three sets of factors play a central role: establishing goals and standards for student outcomes and for school improvement, exerting pressure upon lower levels and offering support to schools, teachers and pupils. Without these, the process of ESI at other levels becomes, if not impossible, at least extremely difficult to explain.

6.2.2 Answers to research Question 2
What are the concrete factors at the contextual level which influence ESI?
Considering the 31 case studies, complemented with data from various sources (see 3.3), we can exam the concrete operational influence of the three global dimensions enumerated above. The contextual level factors which influenced ESI in the case studies were national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes and in terms of school improvement, strong centrally steering and empowering ESI, external evaluations and external agents, market mechanism, school accountability, adequate time, financial and human resource support, local support, offering schools some autonomy and engendering a culture in support of ESI.

Our case studies revealed differing results as to the role of these concrete operational factors. Concerning the national goals, relatively speaking, the UK had more specific,
Conclusions and Discussions

measurable and time-constrained prescriptive national goals. Central steering of ESI was evidenced in all the eight countries in respect of giving directions or initiating educational reforms or school improvement programs. They were also reflected in providing resources (financial and human) for school improvement programs. However, the degree of such steering and empowerment varied a great deal. Relatively speaking, evidence of this was more obvious in 4 of the 8 countries (see Chapter 4 and section 5.3). In respect of the influence of reinforcement and the central intervention in failing schools, it seemed that only the English case studies provided evidence. While frequent external evaluation in its various forms was obvious in most of the school improvement programs in all eight countries (5.1 & 5.4), it was not so obvious at the system level in most of the eight countries for evaluating the educational quality of the whole country. Allowing market mechanism to play a role in public school choice and making schools accountable for their teaching and their learning results was far less conspicuous, especially in the four Southern European countries. Providing support to the LEAs and schools in various forms presented a mixed picture: finance and human resources were made available to a degree that was considered relatively fair, (unequal) local support to schools was offered in many of the cases, but offering schools a sufficient degree of autonomy was problematic in a special way. Structurally speaking, schools were given a fair degree of autonomy in most countries – with the exception of Greece – but at the school level, particularly at the classroom level, autonomy became self-sufficient and was exerted without respect for the national context and its regulations (except in the UK). As to the unification of the three dimensions, it appeared that problems arose in reaching a balance between pressure and support – in some cases, strong national pressure is exerted with insufficient financial support (the UK), whereas in other cases, a lack of pressure – especially in terms of accountability – goes hand in hand with intensive support - especially in terms of extensive autonomy (Portugal, Italy, Belgium).

Proposition 2: For a successful implementation of ESI, the 10 contextual level factors have to be integrated with other ESI factors at the school/department level, at the classroom/teacher level and at the student level.

6.2.3 Answers to research Question 3
Are there any differences between the influences they exert on ESI (strongly or less strongly, positively or negatively)?
Undoubtedly, the 10 contextual level factors have been shown to exert different influences on ESI in the case studies. Although we have to be very careful when reaching general conclusions based on so limited a number of case studies and given the lack of comparability, we can arrive at some more general tentative conclusions. Some of the factors seem to have a stronger degree of influence on ESI than others. The Belgian (Fr) case studies showed that five contextual level factors exerted stronger influence, relatively speaking, on the case studies than others, namely external evaluation and external agents; national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes; adequate financial and human resource support; national goal-setting in terms of school improvement; strong centrally steering and empowering ESI. The factor “market mechanism” had negative effects and the factor “too much school autonomy” had a strong negative influence on its case studies. The factor “local support” was not mentioned in its case studies. The Belgian case studies displayed that insufficient attention was paid to student outcomes in national goal-setting and in school accountability. Furthermore, a lack of a monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system has hindered ESI in Belgium (Fr). The Dutch case studies revealed that the factors external evaluation and external
agents, national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes, adequate time, financial and human resource support, strong centrally steering and empowering ESI, national goal-setting in terms of school improvement, engendering a culture in support of ESI and offering schools some autonomy had relatively stronger influences on ESI programs within the Netherlands. The market mechanism factor had both positive and negative influences. Overloaded curricula with too many goals and too much school/teacher autonomy in test taking had negative influence. The Finnish case studies revealed that the factors offering schools some autonomy; local support; external agents and external evaluations, engendering a culture in support of ESI; adequate time, financial and human resource support; strong centrally steering and empowering ESI; national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes, national goal-setting in terms of school improvement and market mechanism had positive influences on ESI. The elements that had negative influence on ESI in Finland were not enough attention to student outcomes in national goal-setting, a lack of time, funding and human resource support in some case studies and the lack of an evaluation culture. The Greek case studies unfolded that the following factors: external evaluation and external agents; national goal-setting in terms of school improvement; national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes; adequate financial and human resources support; engendering a culture in support of ESI and local support all fostered ESI. The factors which hindered ESI in the Greek case studies seemed to be the centrally steering and empowering ESI being insufficiently strong; weak national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system; the current teacher employment system; inadequate school autonomy in decision-making, in school curriculum and in teacher employment and too little time for ESI. In Italy, the influence of contextual level factors revealed some similarities with the findings from the Greek case studies, particularly the national goal-setting in terms of school improvement and national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes factors. The factor that had obvious influence in the Italian case studies was strong centrally steering and empowering ESI while in the Greek case studies it was external evaluation and external agents. The influence of offering schools some autonomy factor was much more obvious in the Italian case studies than in the Greek case studies. The factors that had a negative influence on the Italian case studies were too much school autonomy and a lack of accountability for schools and teachers. In Portugal, the influence of the contextual level factors revealed some similarities with those in Spain. For instance, both of their case studies revealed that the adequate time, financial and human support factor was very influential to ESI along with the national goal-setting in terms of school improvement factor. The “strong centrally steering and empowering ESI” factor appeared to be the most obvious factor in Spain, less so in Portugal. Another similarity was that schools in Portugal and Spain both lacked evidence for school accountability and autonomy in recruiting teachers and in teacher promotion, which has negative influence on ESI in both countries (see 4.6 and 4.7). The differences in the influences of the ten factors between Portugal and Spain were the local support, which appeared to have strong influence in the Portuguese case studies but less so in the Spanish case studies. The influence of the factor engendering a culture in support of ESI was much more obvious in the Spanish case studies than in the Portuguese case studies. The evidence of the case studies clearly argued that deficiency of some factors plainly hindered ESI. The factors absent in Portugal were school accountability, external assessment, feedback and reinforcement; a school culture in support of ESI, time for ESI, and school autonomy in recruiting teachers, in teacher evaluation and promotion. In both Portugal and Spain, a
lack of school autonomy in teacher recruitment, teacher temporary posting or transfer hindered ESI. In the UK, the influence of the 10 contextual level factors was evident in the case studies. Some of them exerted more significant influence, such as strong centrally steering and empowering ESI; national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes; national goal-setting in terms of school improvement, school accountability, local support, external evaluation and external agents, market mechanism, offering schools some autonomy; engendering a culture in support of ESI; and adequate human resource support for ESI. The factors presenting adverse side effects in the English case studies were too much pressure, too many initiatives and a lack of cohesion, government policy of the LEA involvement in inverse proportion to the success of schools and insufficient time and financial support for ESI in some case studies (for more, see 4.8). In brief, of the 10 contextual level factors, the influences of the more obvious factors came to the forefront: national goal-setting with the strong backing of an entire system including monitoring implementation, external assessment, feedback and reinforcement (rewards and sanctions), well balanced “pressure-support” and a good mix of “autonomy-accountability”.

Concerning the negative influence of the contextual level factors, the most visible one is the “market mechanism” factor. Its side effect of “stimulating inequality” was mentioned by Belgian and Dutch case studies (5.5). The second most prominent factor inducing a side effect was “offering schools some autonomy”. Case studies revealed that school personnel autonomy in recruiting teachers was rather important. However, too much autonomy in carrying out ESI programs and in evaluating student outcomes hindered ESI, as seen in Portuguese, Belgian and Italian case studies. Too much school/teacher autonomy has been criticized as one of the main hindrances to ESI in Belgium, Portugal and Italy. The side effect produced by external agents was the school ownership of ESI programs. The side effect of offering additional financial support for failing schools tended to encourage the failure dependent on external support (5.7.3). The factors that had side effects on ESI were the teacher recruiting system in the four Southern European countries, the system of electing head teachers in Spain and Portugal and too little school autonomy (in Greece). Other hindrances were insufficient time, financial and human resources support for ESI and a lack of culture in support of ESI. In short, a lack of school accountability, an ineffective national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system and a lack of school autonomy in personnel policy (particularly in recruiting/dismissing and promoting teachers) were the key factors which hindered ESI in most of the eight European countries.

**Proposition 3:** Regarding the influences of the contextual level factors exerted on ESI, the influence of market mechanism factor was more obvious in the three Northern European countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK) than in the four countries in the South, while making schools accountable for student outcomes was implemented to a greater extent in the UK and the Netherlands. Offering schools some autonomy in the area of personnel decision-making in recruiting or dismissing teachers was less well realized in the four southern countries than in the UK and in the Netherlands. This was probably contributed to by the national politics and different national cultural dimensions, the principle of subsidiaries and the role of the state. With respect to side effects or negative influence on ESI, totally free school choice seemed to stimulate social inequality, leading to the phenomenon of “black” schools for the underprivileged and “white” schools for the privileged. Meanwhile, too much autonomy may induce schools to ignore the national goals, standards and the requirement for effective school
improvement. In brief, how to maximize the positive influence and minimize the negative influence of the contextual level factors merits further research, theoretical and practical.

6.2.4 Answers to research Question 4

Can common issues be identified in their influence on ESI across the eight European countries?

Although the degrees of influence of the ten contextual level factors varied from one country to another, some common issues do exist. The following three common issues deserve attention:

Common issue 1: Lack of a strong national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system

A lack of a strong national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system was the most common issue evidenced in most of the case studies (except in the UK). Although national goal-setting in terms of student outcomes was reflected in the forms of the national curriculum across the eight European countries and mostly in the textbooks used in the schools of each country. However, national goals cannot be achieved without a strong backing up system with effective pressure and empowering support. To achieve the national goals, six out of the eight European countries used national/regional Inspectorates and at least one national standardized examination during the whole compulsory schooling. School effectiveness research argues that the feedback from only one national standardized examination is too distant from primary and lower secondary schooling. Effective evaluation depends on frequent, regular feedback and reinforcement. With respect to the function of the Inspectorates, this differed a great deal across the six countries. Some inspected individual teachers at the classroom level (French-speaking Belgium) while others inspected schools at the school level (the Netherlands, the UK and some other countries). The time lapse between inspections for each school varies from 4 to 6 years, sometimes even longer. The quality of inspection greatly depends on the quality, motivation and experience of the Inspector as well as his/her relationship with individual schools. Inspection is strong in detecting the overall quality of a school, particularly the quality of school management. While the national standardized examinations are more objective, comparable, transparent, subject-comprehensive, they can be used more frequently to detect student outcomes across the whole country. They can easily provide feedback to policy makers and LEAs as well as to schools, parents and students by publishing the results on the Internet or newspapers. Therefore, the establishment of a sound national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system requires both.

Common Issue 2: The four common strategies used by the governments for ESI

Another common issue is the four common strategies used by the central governments of these eight countries for steering school improvement. These four strategies were to initiate overall educational reforms or national curriculum reforms (5.2.1-1); to initiate or to imply School Improvement Plans or School self-evaluation programs (5.2.1-2); to emphasize the importance of Literacy, Mathematics or Science instruction (5.2.1-3); and to encourage schools to participate in school improvement programs both at home and abroad (5.2.1-4). These common issues reveal that ESI requires a new battery of central control and central intervention through the supply of directions, the exertion of pressure on schools, the direct or indirect initiation of SI programs, the encouragement of schools to participate in national and international projects and the provision of time, financial and human resource support as well as spiritual support to ESI programs (see more in 5.3). The case studies show that when schools are confronted with new laws or new
standards that they are supposed to meet, accompanied by effective pressure from a coherent external assessment, feedback and reinforcement system, they are motivated or pushed to live up to the new standards. With adequate support and empowerment, they are much more likely to succeed. According to the case studies, the impact of this strategy not only provides directions for schools but also sets up new methods and principles for teaching (5.2.1).

**Common issue 3: Lack of school accountability**

The case studies revealed that a lack of “school accountability” was a common issue across the eight European countries except the UK (in the Netherlands there was an increasing tendency toward school accountability). School accountability has successfully “conquered” the USA. However, to date, school accountability has not yet become a major concern in Belgium, Finland, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain (5.6 and Chapter 4). When we compare school improvement in these six European countries with the case of the UK, a more lucid picture emerges. Those six countries were more or less influenced by the other eight or nine contextual level factors, except the “school accountability” factor and its complement – a strict national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system. In contrast, only the English case studies revealed the increasingly strong influence and pressure from the school accountability factor (see 4.8). When school improvement in the other countries is considered, remarks such as the virtually unobtainability of effective school improvement programs (see Appendix) contrast with a more visible and intense rate of school improvement in the UK. Here, it is appropriate to use a metaphor to describe this situation: imagine that a lack of ESI is the SARS illness that recently influenced global travel. The ten contextual factors are like ten different medicines used to combat or cure SARS. Imagining the six countries to be six patients, the same medicines are given to the six patients with the exception of an additional medicine given to only one patient. If this patient recovers, then the additional medicine is clearly the key. To know which “medicine” is missing in the six countries is of vital importance in discovering what the crucial and effective “medicines” (national contextual level factors) are for curing SARS (obstacles for ESI). School accountability can be assumed to be this kind of medicine.

### 6.3 The limitations of this research

In addition to the limitation of this study specially mentioned as a warning earlier in this chapter, five weaknesses of this research need to be addressed.

First, the case studies in this research were contributed by eight European countries. We can never say that they were the best and most true representatives of effective school improvement programs across the European continent or even of the eight countries concerned. However, they did serve as windows offering a glimpse of effective school improvement at a particular time, in particular areas and at particular schools in these eight European countries.

Second, measuring the outcomes of the case studies using value-added measurement proved completely out of the question because most countries did not have information about pupil intakes or their final academic outcomes. The lack of such information was largely blamed on the lack of an evaluation or management culture in the field of education, or even on the fact that their programs had different goals (e.g. Italy, Greece, Spain and Finland). The possibility of qualitative and further quantitative analysis would
strengthen the findings of this study. However, in practice, it is impossible to do so with the available data.

Third, effective school improvement is such a complex and dynamic process that it is crucially important to examine how the process occurs. However, the descriptions gathered from many of the case studies render this task impossible, probably owing to the fact that SE and ESI were rather new concepts in six of the eight countries (except the UK and the Netherlands). More international comparisons are required, with more first-hand data collection and fieldwork preferably including visiting the schools involved in the case studies, while more comparable samples should be more strictly selected. The perspective of the research can thus be largely enriched and enhanced.

Fourth, as a non-European or “outsider”, I may run the risk that my observations vary in clarity and perspective to those of European researchers with their own experience of their country’s culture and deeper insights into the educational system gleaned from their own schooling.

Fifth, in the field of the social sciences, different researchers may have different ways of interpreting the same data or the same reality. In addition, as human beings, we all have our limitations and we are all influenced by certain theoretical paradigms or philosophy. The way of doing research, the way of designing the research and the way of interpreting the research results are always colored by the “sunglasses” we are wearing. However, knowing that we are wearing “colored sunglasses” is one thing, ignoring this fact while claiming that our findings apply universally is quite another. This study cannot pretend to be more than a small part of initial findings at a national contextual level in a relatively new field – Effective School Improvement research. In addition, our empirical analysis largely depended on the descriptions of the 31 case studies, and the extent to which the national contextual level was described greatly depended on the researchers who composed those descriptions. Undoubtedly, these case studies were also colored by the researchers’ “tinted spectacles” and by the diversity of their cultural and theoretical backgrounds, their research orientations, focuses and methods. As Stoll, et al. (2002: 461) described, “effectiveness means different things to different countries. School improvement also carries with it a range of meanings. Similarly, the differences in our understanding of what could be considered as a school improvement program were significant”. As a consequence, several case studies did not completely conform to the selection criteria of the ESI project. Therefore, “the comparison of the school improvement case studies within a country and across countries has been limited and extremely difficult” (Stoll, et al. 2002). It took a tremendous investment of time to repeatedly and consistently analyze and reanalyze all the case studies and to find additional information to compensate for the shortcomings of the data that derived from these case studies.

### 6.4 The strengths of this research

In view of the above considerations, it may seem risky to speak of the “strengths” of this research. We feel, however, that this research does have some strengths. First, this research is innovative in that it “was born” and “grew up” within a relatively new research field – Effective School Improvement. Without the ESI project, it would have been impossible to conduct this research. Strictly speaking, some national contextual factors have previously been mentioned in the School Effectiveness literature (e.g.
Conclusions and Discussions

However, the national contextual level factors were not the main focus of those research projects, therefore, they were not systematically explored and researched. As Reezigt (2001: 72) declared at the end of the ESI project final report, “Up till now, the importance of the context is rarely acknowledged and analyzed”. Murillo in the ESI Spanish team (2002: 388) also pointed out that “nowadays, when we are witnessing the appearance of a new theoretical-practical movement such as ESI, it is especially important to learn from experience and to start working with the national context from the beginning”. As far as we know, this research is fortunate enough to be the first in this relatively new field, which focuses on the relationship between the national contextual level factors and effective school improvement with the empirical support of 31 case studies across eight European countries. The innovative features of this study may throw some light on theory development in School Effectiveness and School Improvement research. The chair of the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement stated (Stoll, et al., 2002) that, “we need to know which ESI contextual level factors vary between countries and which factors cross country borders”. Our findings have provided some tentative answers, both theoretical and empirical, at the national contextual level. The analysis and synthesis of the five different theories are original work. The research model with the ten contextual level factors and their indicators derived from the literature review and the findings from the analysis of the 31 case studies are original research. In short, this study may enrich SE research and ESI from the above-mentioned perspectives.

Second, this study has made some contributions to the debate surrounding school autonomy issues in ESI research, particularly for the teacher recruiting system in the four Southern European countries. This study is the first to uncover that the present teacher recruiting, placement and promotion system in the four Southern European countries has a rather negative impact on effective school improvement in these four countries (5.9.1). Although the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish case studies mentioned this phenomenon incidentally, the mass of information about the teacher recruiting system in these four countries was gathered from our further investigations, including telephone interviews, print literature, website reviews and interviews with scholars and students from these countries. This finding has implications for other countries as well. As long as schools have no autonomy in personnel policy, i.e. the decision-making freedom to recruit/dismiss teachers, to supervise teachers in their professional career and behavior, to evaluate their teaching and performance and to link it to their income and career prospects, no matter how much training, time and guidance, no matter how good other improvement strategies are, they would have limited impact on teachers who lack intrinsic motivation.

Third, our research is one of the firsts to point out that the head teacher selection system in Spain and Portugal may result in side-effects for ESI (5.9.2), although the system itself sounds attractive and has served to increase the democracy and autonomy enjoyed by teachers in Spain and in Portugal. However, we arrived at this conclusion with theoretical (Chapter 2 and international journal articles) and empirical support (5.9.2, 4.8, Table 19). Theoretically, ESI needs strong driving forces and firm leadership. A school head teacher is the most crucial internal driving force for ESI within a school. In struggling schools, particularly in failing schools, the internal driving forces are not strong enough to initiate changes alone, external driving forces are needed. This point of view is shared in the works of many researchers (Creemers, et al., 2001a; Fullan, 1999; Reynolds, et al., 1996; Miles, 1986, 1998; Hargreaves, 2003). Empirically, we read all the case studies of
Chapter 6

Portugal, Spain and the UK closely, we compared the leadership influence on the case studies of these three countries and intensively discussed this issue in 5.9.2 and in Table 19. If further research can confirm this assumption, it may offer a little real help for effective school improvement in these two countries.

Fourth, this study has challenged the predominant belief that “centralization and decentralization are the decisive factors for ESI”. Our findings argue that to rank centralization and decentralization as the decisive factor for ESI at the national contextual level is too simple and superficial. First, it is impossible for a country to be regarded as totally centralized without any decentralization at all and vice versa. For example, Greece is widely regarded as a highly centralized country (see details in 4.4). However, its case studies uncovered that there was no national inspection, no regular national testing (one examination at the end of secondary schooling), no control and monitoring system, no power at school level, head teachers had no supervisory control over the teachers, “school councils had no essential role… teachers can practice freely both in schools and in the classroom as long as the School Council in the school and the community do not make an issue of it” (see more in 4.4.3 & Appendix). We received the impression that although everything is officially highly centralized and controlled by the central government in Greece, in reality, Greek teachers have ten times more autonomy at the classroom level than their colleagues in the UK who had their hands full trying desperately to live up to the specific increased student performance outcomes in the League Tables, enduring higher levels of stress induced by the high pressure of student performance related payment and the threat of closure of the failed schools. Essentially, effective school improvement should be assessed at the classroom level. Given this, we can say that at the classroom level, Greece is a non-centralized country with no control system. Second, what is documented in laws or in archives may differ a great deal from what really occurs in the classrooms at schools; a typical example can be found in the Greek case studies (see Appendix). The example revealed that even when the Greek law prescribes teacher behavior, Greek teachers ignored it. We can assume that a similar level of attention is paid to the compulsory textbooks and teaching content. According to the OECD (1998), teacher autonomy exists worldwide, no matter how centralized the country. Teachers are subject to relatively little supervision in most OECD countries in terms of curriculum delivery as long as they follow the official program and operate within social norms.

Third, if decentralization were the key to ESI, within these eight European countries, Belgium (Fr), as the most decentralized educational system (see 4.1 and Chapter 5), would display the most effective school improvement. On the contrary, its case studies revealed the reverse. According to the authors of the Belgian case studies “it was extremely difficult to find ESI programs there. School quality varies tremendously”. The decentralization typical of the system in Belgium shows clearly that decentralization is definitely not the decisive factor for ESI. On the contrary, too much autonomy becomes an obstacle to ESI. Fourth, if decentralization were the decisive factor, logically speaking, the implication would be that there would be no effective school improvement at all in a centralized system. The reality is, in centralized systems such as Italy, Portugal and Spain, there were and still are ongoing school improvement programs (Chapter 4 and 5). In the history of education, school innovations, reforms and school improvement do occur in countries with different educational systems (either centralized or decentralized); this was the case in Europe and in other highly centralized countries and areas as well (Japan, China, Hong Kong, etc.). This further confirms that centralization or decentralization is not the decisive factor for ESI. It depends more upon what should be centralized and what should be functionally decentralized according to a nation's context.
The fifth strength is that our research has thrown some light on the relationship between central intervention and school autonomy for ESI. Our findings show that effective school improvement requires more central intervention (see 4.8). School autonomy alone is not the decisive factor for ESI, either in highly centralized or decentralized educational systems. Our finding is consistent with the findings of other research projects (Malen et al., 1989; Levin and Driver, 1997; Rounds Parry, 1996, OECD, 1998). As the OECD report (1998: 78-79) points out: yet, despite the widespread belief that decentralized education and school autonomy produce better education, there is no evidence anywhere in the world that such reforms of themselves produce educational improvement. Autonomy has a positive influence if the autonomy is used to improve school quality. It can be negative if it is interpreted as total freedom without quality control. The essential aim of school autonomy is to provide schools with the means to improve quality and to foster student learning. Like issuing a driver's license to schools – metaphorically speaking – it is up to the school, following the basic legal framework, to decide which kind of car they are going to use, how they are going to drive and so on. However, the destination and the minimum time for arrival at the destination should be centrally decided by the national government. This research has partly provided some answers to what should be centrally controlled and what kind of autonomy should be offered to schools. The 31 case studies and our literature review argue that the educational goals/standards, national benchmarks, inspections and a system of monitoring implementation, assessment, feedback and reinforcement with appropriate strategies should be established at the national level and be centrally controlled, while the means for achieving goals (how to teach, strategies for school improvement) and the school organization (administration, management, resource areas, time schedule for different classes, the decision-making power to recruit or dismiss teachers, autonomy in choosing external agents, etc.) should be in the hands of the schools. In short, it is essential to link school autonomy and school accountability directly and clearly to the goals of effective school improvement.

6.5 The implications of this study for policymaking, theory and practice

In the final section of this thesis, a triple set of implications will be formulated: for policymaking (6.5.1), for theory or theory building (6.5.2) and, last but not least, for practice (6.5.3).

6.5.1 The implications of this study for policymaking

Based on our data and our analysis, three major implications in the area of developing adequate policies can be discerned: (a) the need to set up a comprehensive strategy for policymaking; (b) the need for a national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system; (c) the importance of combining school autonomy with accountability.

(a) The need to set up a comprehensive strategy for policymaking

Our findings indicate that education is intensively guided and shaped at the national level. Clear and prescriptive national goals are important due to their two-fold function: informing schools of the achievement of their students on the one hand and as important benchmarks for the comparison and evaluation of the overall educational system on the other. Effective national goal-setting should be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time constrained. A good example of this can be found in the UK case studies (4.8.3 & Appendix). SMART goal-setting is effective and applicable not
only at the national level, but also at the local level, the classroom level and even at the student level (4.8). However, clear and prescriptive national goals can only be effective if they are “complemented by” effective pressure and empowering support. Effective pressure may include strong centrally steering and empowering ESI, external evaluations with national or international benchmarks, especially the state standardized examinations and external grading of the test results, publishing student outcome data (with added-value comparison), timely reinforcement, using free public school choice and the National Inspections, strictly applying accountability at different levels and, eventually, central intervention in failing schools. Effective support may consist of strong centrally empowering ESI, creating a “can-do” climate, raising morale and aspirations, encouraging ESI from the top, national awards for ESI “heroes” in the media, providing adequate time, financial and human resource support, fully encouraging the involvement of the LEAs and parents, while offering schools some autonomy, particularly autonomy in decision-making in personnel, pedagogic issues, finance and management, special training for head teachers to adapt to the process of ESI. Finally, engendering a culture in support of ESI is relatively important and can result in both pressure and support for ESI. The national government as a “product” of a certain culture is also the “cell nucleus” in the process of shaping the national culture (Sun, 2002). Thus governments, at whatever level or whatever country, have a tremendous influence on cultural attitudes towards education.

(b) The need for a national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system
The findings of our research stress the importance of installing a strong national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system combined with school accountability. In most cases, the Ministry of Education itself was not able to monitor or assess teachers’ practices within schools without the help of such a system. If the central government does not have instruments and processes to monitor the SI implementation in practice, then the law, the targets, the national goals are no more than rhetoric. To give the laws “teeth” (the English expression) and “legs” (the Portuguese expression), the establishment of such a nationwide system is needed. What about self-evaluation, then? We argue that although self-evaluation may have a positive influence on ESI at the school level in some countries, self-evaluation does not allow comparative assessment of the educational quality across schools in the whole country. Moreover, the weakness of school self-evaluation is that “a micro-culture of evaluation will develop in individual schools which then fall back on their own uniqueness rather than being part of a system of comparison, taking each school's particular circumstances into account” (OECD, 1998). The argumentation of the uniqueness of each individual school makes the challenge and pressure applied by the national tests and national comparisons in vain. Therefore, the national monitoring, assessment, feedback and reinforcement system is the key.

(c) The importance of combining school autonomy with accountability
Rigorous accountability accompanying autonomy in some domains seems to be critical for the success of ESI in a country. Offering schools some autonomy serves as a powerful stimulus to improving educational quality, therefore, schools should be involved in external assessment, support and accountability. Within the domain of rigorous accountability, external standards for student performance are an essential ingredient for ESI. Our research shows that school accountability was most visible in the UK (see 4.8 and 5.6). As its ESI team (in Sun, 1998) predicted, “If greater autonomy for schools and external accountability go hand in hand, then this will create a broad framework for ESI”. The teachers in the UK case studies declared that the published performance tables and other benchmarking data, the value-added comparisons in particular, could not be
Conclusions and Discussions

ignored, moreover, they could be used as effective tools to convince school staff members of the need for change and improvement (see more in Appendix). Nevertheless, accountability is not the major concern in most of the ESI participating countries in Europe. However, “school accountability” has crossed the pond to the USA where the national drive for school accountability has become a huge concern (see 2.5.2).

6.5.2 The implications of this study for theory or theory building

As we have pointed out previously, effective school improvement is a relatively new research field and there are few theories concerning the relationship between national contextual level factors and effective school improvement. Therefore, the findings of this study may have implications for theory building in this field from the following three perspectives: (a) the relationship between increasing the improvement driving forces and empowering schools to become learning organizations; (b) the relationship between the personnel decision-making rights at the school level and ESI; (c) the relationship between school accountability and ESI.

(a) The relationship between increasing the improvement driving forces and empowering schools to become learning organizations

Theories of Organization and Organizational Learning have contributed a very insightful point of view to ESI theory building: changes need to upset the balance (the status quo) between driving forces and restraining forces (see 2.4.1). Only when the driving forces are stronger or greater than the restraining forces can change occur. Such driving forces can be internal or external. In most cases, to change the status quo of a struggling organization or school, external driving forces are required. At the national level, to strengthen improvement driving forces requires strong central steering and empowerment as well as central intervention. The strategies used by the UK, the Dutch and the Spanish governments (see details in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) are worthy of further exploration. Internally, “driving forces” can also be generated when schools share information, react proactively to external changes, learn from their mistakes and develop ownership and a school culture for ESI – in short, through organizational learning to become a learning organization.

(b) The relationship between personnel decision-making rights at the school level (recruiting/dismissing teachers and school staff members) and ESI

Until now, very few studies have been performed within the fields of School Effectiveness and School Improvement on this issue – the relationship between the personnel decision-making rights (or autonomy) at the school level in recruiting or dismissing teachers and school staff members and effective school improvement. The preliminary findings of this issue in our research reveal the importance of personnel decision-making autonomy at the school level and its impact on ESI. How teachers are employed, evaluated, rewarded and promoted may greatly influence ESI (evident in the Portuguese, Greek, Belgian, English and Finnish case studies). The lack of this decision-making autonomy in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain has a negative impact on ESI (see Chapter 4 and 5). More research needs to be carried out to further explore this relationship in the SE, SI and ESI fields. However, the literature review in the previous section has revealed that organization theory may contribute some insights to this perspective (see 2.4.3).
(c) The relationship between school accountability and ESI
School accountability is a fairly new term for many School Effectiveness researchers. The content of this term, the relationship between school accountability and ESI merits further exploration. To the best of our knowledge, school accountability has become the central theme of the 2003 conference of the American Education Research Association. A new law about school accountability (see 2.5.2) was passed and implemented in 2002 in the USA. School accountability in the USA even goes a step further than in the UK – each state must implement a system of high-quality, annual student academic assessments in basic subjects. For failing schools, tough measures are threatened (see 2.5.2). However, in most European countries, “strict school accountability” has not yet been put on the agenda of the government or the MoE for serious consideration. Therefore, we strongly recommend the necessity of further research.

6.5.3 The implications of this study for practice
The implications of this study on practice are reflected in the following three aspects: (a) accountability in the form of target setting underpinning all levels; (b) “quick-fixes” before concentrating on teaching and learning; (c) the importance of the local support – “train the trainer” approach and information sharing.

(a) Accountability in the form of target setting at all levels
School accountability in the form of target setting underpinning all levels may have implications for practitioners. In the English case studies, the LEAs had their targeted schools. Schools had their targeted departments or subject matters. A department had its targeted points for each teacher. Teachers targeted their individual students to raise their grades. Each student established his or her future targets. To establish targets, teachers used a variety of nationally available assessment results. In some schools, departments and teachers were given responsibility points. Their improvement plans contained measurable success criteria. SMART goal-setting can be applied at the school level, teacher level and the student level. The key strategy used to guarantee student success was the use of data with pupils to set targets at the group and individual level. Some Dutch schools use a similar strategy, as we found from our interviews with some Dutch parents and students. The involvement of pupils in keeping their own records of achievement and setting future targets was a particular strength that motivated many students.

(b) “Quick-fixes” come first, before concentrating on teaching and learning
Quick fixes refer to a system of rewards and warnings (also based on the concept of “three strikes and out”) to combat the immediate issues that concerned teachers and students most. The English case studies show that quick fixes are necessary. Only then could schools embark on the larger issues of teaching and learning.

(c) The importance of local support – “train the trainer” approach and information sharing
Local support, particularly support from the LEAs, is fairly important. The UK and the Portuguese case studies provide a lot of valuable experience in this respect (see 5.8). One of these experiences is the “train the trainer” approach. The LEA numeracy adviser demonstrated a lesson to the co-coordinator. The adviser then observed a lesson by the co-coordinator. The co-coordinator then demonstrated lessons to the Key Stage teachers, then taught jointly with them and, finally, the co-coordinator observed the teachers’ lessons. After each stage, feedback was offered and discussed. Research suggests that it is this combination of theory, demonstration, practice and coaching which is the most
Conclusions and Discussions 127

successful. Another recommendation for practitioners is the information-sharing network. The more information that schools can acquire in terms of successful strategies, the more likely it will be that all schools show gains. Examples can be found in 5.8. The Greek case studies provided evidence to argue that there was considerable power in networking. Teachers were more motivated when cooperating with colleagues from other schools (see Appendix).

As a final conclusion, it should be noted that the crucial message from the ESI case studies is that the kind of strategy used by the central government of a country to spur ESI greatly depends on the nature of its visions and goals for education. As described earlier, the vision and goals of the UK government have been consistently economic and market-orientated since the switch of policy focus under the Thatcher government. This explains why the UK central government puts such great pressure on schools through increased accountability for student outcomes and a more centralized intervention approach for failing schools. For many other countries, the vision and goals of governments for education focus more on the happiness of the child, social justice and equality. This kind of vision and goal tends to reject notions of competition. Therefore, the strategies that spur competition are largely dismissed. The key issues are “what do you want or prefer?,” and more importantly “what is the best for the development of the child, the nation and the country?” These two kinds of national goal-settings are deeply rooted in the national culture and particularly the values of each nation. Although extremely difficult to achieve, however, the culture of a country can be gradually changed. China is a typical example of cultural change (Sun and Jiang, 2000), from a communist country with a deep “hatred” of the market economy (before 1978) to “falling in love” with market economy. One deeply rooted Chinese philosophy and belief is “qiang guo fu min” which means “enrich the country and enrich the people”. The underlying meaning is that only when a country becomes rich and strong can its common people’s lives be enriched and attain better quality. In building up a country with freedom, democracy, equality and a strong economy, it is clear that both government and all those involved in providing education – the LEAs, educational researchers, schools, teachers, etc – have significant roles to play. In respect of improving educational quality, the Effective School Improvement project has undoubtedly provided a good opportunity for us to examine how the national contextual level may and can help schools to improve their pupils' achievement and the schools' capacity for further improvement. It has enabled us not only to find the influence of the national contextual level factors on effective school improvement across eight European countries but also to envision what the possibilities are and what can be learned from other countries. Effective school improvement requires a long-term effort involving the cooperation of the central government and educational authorities at different levels in conjunction with schools, teachers and students, along with the support of the whole society. We hope that the findings of this study and the findings of the much larger ESI project (Creemers, et al, 2001a) may offer some insight to those schools and nations who are willing to improve their schools and are eager to raise educational quality. Finally, we would like to end our journey with a quote from the World Class School (Reynolds, et al., 2002) – “rather than being frightened by a world of educational experiences, it is surely time for us to learn from them. It is time to look broadly across the planet and then integrate what we see with what we do, so that we may do it better. The children of the world deserve it, now”.