

# School evaluation in Spain: missing leadership?

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## **Abstract**

In spite of national differences, greater accountability combined with increased decentralisation and autonomy (particularly by using high-stakes assessments) is becoming widespread and likely to lead to a reconfiguration of the roles of school leaders. The focus of this article is focused on changes affecting evaluation of Spanish schools and, subsequently, those in a position to play a major role in school evaluation, including school leaders. In addition to an overview of school evaluation in Spain and the the roles of school bodies and leaders in it, the projected use of high-stakes exit assessments in schools as reflected in national regulation is presented and analysed. The article

concludes with a discussion of the implications of this trend supposedly leading to alignment with the prevailing policy environment. In particular, it is highlighted that schools are increasingly considered as targeted objects to be managed and, accordingly, the managerial role of school leaders is likely to be emphasised, while school evaluation as such is losing importance as an ongoing joint process to promote shared improvements.

**Keywords:** School evaluation, accountability, school leadership, Spanish education system.

## **Introduction**

In Spain, school evaluation is not neatly differentiated from other forms of evaluation involving schools. Rather, there are

a number of realms susceptible of being associated with it. In addition to ‘school evaluation’ itself, schools need to be involved in ‘evaluation of teaching practice’, ‘evaluation for diagnostics’, ‘inspection’ processes or ‘evaluation of the school system’. These domains of evaluation are not well defined in every case and, thus, their boundaries are often blurred. This situation coalesces with evaluation being infused with an overarching sense which embraces virtually every relevant aspect of education. Our 2006 Education Act (*Ley Orgánica 2/2006, de 3 de mayo, de Educación*) states: “The evaluation will cover all education areas governed by this Law and will apply to the learning processes and results of students, teacher performance, education processes, management, the performance of schools, inspection and the Education Administrations themselves” (article 141).

An illustrative instance is provided by the so-called ‘individualised assessments’ (LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble and article 144; see below). They are clearly a case of use of large-scale student testing proving to be particularly relevant in our education policy (e.g. Olmedo, 2013). Although its primary focus is student attainment of key competencies and objectives (e.g. LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble, VIII), this statutory assessment pursues a number of interrelated, yet heterogeneous, wide-ranging goals: in its original formulation, it aimed “to provide infor-

mation about the situation of the students, the teaching institution and the education system itself, encouraging the adoption of relevant measures to overcome possible shortcomings” (LOE, Preamble); after amendments, it, yet more ambitiously, aims to ensure required standards of learning, to standardise academic qualifications, to better inform students’ choice of educational pathways and other decisions to be made by parents, schools and education authorities, and to improve student learning, school management, education policies and the quality of the education system overall (LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble, VIII). It will be ultimately used to hold the education system accountable for its accomplishments and functioning to the Parliament (LOE, Preamble and article 147.1). Moreover, a number of institutions and constituencies are to be involved: design is under the jurisdiction of national authorities, implementation conforming this national framework falls to regional authorities, and additional stakeholders (including inspectors, school leaders, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and students themselves) are to participate through a number of intermingled ways which are often ambiguous (although it is clear that teachers are responsible for administering and scoring tests) (LOE as amended by LOMCE, article 144).

Nevertheless, school evaluation is still a distinct and acknowledged domain of evaluation, although its boundaries and

relevance are blurred and changing and it usually combines with other assessments and evaluations, sometimes in a piecemeal fashion. This article is focused on these changes affecting Spanish schools and, subsequently, those in a position to play a major role in school evaluation, including school leaders. Setting aside this introduction, it starts with an overview of school evaluation in Spain, including a brief account of recent rearrangements and a more detailed one of its major traditional approaches: a) an external evaluation based on supervisory inspections and b) an internal evaluation based on school self-evaluation. The roles of school bodies and leaders in these evaluative processes are then presented in the second section. The third one deals with the latest trend aiming to align the Spanish education system with what it is believed to be part of a broader global agenda (Sahlberg, 2004): the so-called ‘individualised assessments’. These are not school evaluation per se but are likely to significantly affect schools, their evaluation and the role to be played by school leaders and stakeholders. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of the preceding analysis.

Recent scholarship and empirical research on these issues are rather scarce and, thus, the article will be primarily based on the analysis of legal documents. In addition, the nation-wide decentralisation of our education system is an additional reason for limiting the scope of the

article to school evaluation in the Spanish education system taken as a whole (not to its developments in regions), although privately-owned and privately-funded schools (‘centros privados no concertados’, or ‘non-chartered private schools’) will be excluded because they are not subject to the provisions regarding school structure relevant to schools expected to need to meet the public interest in the provision of education: i.e. publicly-owned and publicly-funded schools (‘centros públicos’, or ‘public schools’), and privately-owned and publicly-funded schools (‘centros privados concertados’, or ‘chartered private schools’).

### ***1. School evaluation in Spain: an overview***

Particularly since the 1990s, the relevance of education quality has been increasingly emphasised in education policy in Spain. For instance, improvement of education quality is, since 1990, among the major goals of reforms launched in this country (e.g. 1990 General Organisation of the Education System Act, Preamble, and LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble). Moreover, according Engel and Rutkowski (2014) successive reforms “suggest a growing attention to the production of evidence for quality education” (p. 774) and “the focus on providing evidence for educational quality features more strongly over time” (p. 775). Evaluation has been considered to be a crucial means not only to capture that evidence

but also to use the evidence captured for improvement of quality. Accordingly, evaluation has been conferred the status of major ‘factor’ leading to education quality in Spain and is a ‘principle’ informing the education system in 1990 and 25 years later (1990 General Organisation of the Education System Act, article 55, and LOE, articles 1 and 2.2). In turn, a subsequent need to devise effective devices for assessment and evaluation (and their use) emerged and has remained unchanged. School evaluation might be considered to be a device (or, rather, a cluster of devices) among others.

Note that school evaluation has been primarily considered to be an instrument for evaluating the education system. According to Tiana (2002, 2014), a professor of History of Education who held senior positions in the Ministry of Education, the main focus of education reforms has been evaluating the education system, and school evaluation not has been pivotal over time, albeit never absent and sometimes gaining more significance. The 1995 Participation, Evaluation and Governance in Schools Act gave prominence to school evaluation and, especially, school-based evaluation, whilst emphasising the complementary nature of the internal and external evaluation of schools (article 29). In addition, a participative and democratic approach was adopted at least formally. A change of Government after the 1996 general election and previous political circumstances however contributed

to the failure of the implementation of this reform (Tiana, 2002, p. 178). Some initiatives informed by the ‘total quality management’ philosophy followed but the use of student achievement data to evaluate and improve the education system (and, thus, schools) through the promotion of heterogeneous purposes has been of increasing importance over time (see below). An alignment with demands from an international agenda backed by supranational actors has happened along the way (e.g. Engel & Rutkowski, 2014).

The Spanish school system continues to differentiate, at least implicitly, between two approaches to school evaluation: external and internal evaluation. For years, schools have been regularly inspected (an action traditionally associated with external evaluation) and have conducted regular self-evaluations (an action traditionally associated with internal evaluation) (Faubert, 2009).

However, both are not even explicitly mentioned in our current national legal framework on education. Moreover, school evaluation as such is barely mentioned in it. The only article particularly devoted to school evaluation in our 2006 Law on Education states:

1. Within the framework of their competences, the Education Administrations [education authorities] can define and execute plans for the evaluation of schools (...).
2. At the same time, the Education Administrations will support and facilitate

self-evaluation by schools (article 145).

According to this provision, school evaluation is not limited to school self-evaluation and, thus, can include external evaluation. Interestingly, both are under the purview of education authorities. On the one hand, as education authorities “can define and execute” their own school evaluation plans, they would not be, in a strict sense, statutorily obliged to include external evaluation, although it is common include it among their areas of responsibility. On the other hand, schools need to self-evaluate and education authorities are obliged to ‘support’ and ‘facilitate’ this process. The scope of both forms of evaluation is also determined by education authorities, although it nonetheless embraces processes and results (see Faubert, 2009).

Internal evaluation has been virtually conflated with school self-evaluation. There is no common statutory framework and each education authority is responsible for devising its own one. According to the national profile for Spain included in the European Commission’s report *Assuring quality in education: policies and approaches to school evaluation in Europe*, internal evaluation “is intended to be a thorough analysis of school achievements and failings, with a view to rectifying any deficiencies identified” (p. 92). An outline is provided in that report (pp. 92-94) but similarities between regions often combines with significant

differences to produce a variety of approaches which, in turn, has accommodated a variety of particular projects, which are sometimes loosely coupled.

On the other hand, external evaluation has been attributed, to a significant extent, to a set of Inspectorates, which virtually operate as branches of education authorities (see LOE, articles 152 and 154). Therefore, it may be asserted that “schools are evaluated through inspections attached to the higher educational authorities” (Faubert, 2009, p. 13). However, ‘evaluation’ itself is barely present the terms used in the national delineation of minimum duties of Inspectorates and inspectors (see LOE, articles 152 and 154). Inspections are usually focused on schools and are even expected to have a positive effect on them: according to inspectors themselves, schools are the main “object” of inspection and, moreover, even the “pillar” of it (Secadura, 2014, p. 18). But, according to Secadura (2014), an inspector at Madrid, most of relevant responsibilities are still connected with supervision, this being understood to be examining and checking the performance of schools and teachers in order to control them (that is, to ensure that they perform as expected - often as revealed by compliance with regulations), whilst taking for granted that they are under the authority of the supervising agents. Inspectorates are statutorily responsible for monitoring and ensuring “that schools comply with the laws, regulations and other provisions

in force that affect the education system” (LOE, article 151) and this has been traditionally among their major concerns (Penzer, 2011, p. 22). In this context, evaluation is not entirely absent from inspection but is rather dependent on and even subsumed under supervision and control.

**2. The role of schools and school leaders in school evaluation**

Throughout Spain, there is a legal obligation for every publicly-funded school to have two decision-making bodies, whose responsibilities include participation in evaluation: a school council and a teacher assembly. Participation of the school community in school management and control is channelled through the former one and participation of teaching staff in school governance (educational

aspects) is channelled through the latter one. For most of the time since 1985, the school council was a school governing body in every publicly-funded school but the latest amendments removed this status and lessened its responsibilities in school governance. The teacher assembly is one of the two school governing bodies in public schools. In the case of chartered schools, it is ultimately up to the school owners to decide whether this body is a governing one or not.

In both types of publicly-funded schools, both bodies to a large extent share a number evaluation-related responsibilities, which are somewhat ambiguously formulated (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 127 and 129 and 1985 Right to Education Act as amended by LOMCE, article 57):

	Public Schools	Chartered Schools
School Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluates school development plans as a whole.</li> <li>- Analyses and evaluates the running of the school, changes in student achievement and results of internal and external evaluations in which the school is involved.</li> <li>- Produces proposals and reports on the functioning of the school and improvements in the quality of school management, as well as on other related aspects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Evaluates and reports on the annual school development plan.</li> <li>-Participates in evaluating the running of the school in its administrative and educational aspects.</li> </ul>
Teacher Assembly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluates school development plans in their educational aspects.</li> <li>- Analyses and evaluates the running of the school, changes in student achievement and results of internal and external evaluations in which the school is involved.</li> </ul>	

Source: own study.

The management team is the other governing body in public schools although national regulation on it is very scant. It needs to include at least a headteacher, a head of academic issues and an academic secretary. On the other hand, chartered schools just need to include at least a headteacher. Non-chartered private schools have full autonomy on management and leadership issues.

In publicly-funded schools, the official role of school leaders in school evaluation is quite limited. In the case of chartered schools, there is even no prescribed responsibility, this meaning that it is ultimately up to the schools owners to decide on the headteacher's involvement in evaluation. In the case of public schools, among headteachers' responsibilities is "encouraging the internal evaluation of the school and collaborating with external evaluations and teacher evaluations" (LOE, article 132).

### **3. Our 'new' trend: high-stakes exit assessments in Spanish schools**

As anticipated above, there has been also an increasing interest in using hard evidence on student learning progress in Spain. In addition to incorporation of standards and intended learning outcomes in the curricula (LOE as amended by LOMCE, article 6), our country has adopted what are currently called 'individ-

ualised assessments' (see above). Interestingly, the statute itself refers to them as "one of the measures geared most directly to improve the quality of the education system" (LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble, VIII). According to a prominent scholar in Spain, these assessments are "at the core" of the most recent reform (Bolívar, 2013). Regulation of them is much more centralised and detailed than in the case of inspection and, to a larger extent, school self-evaluation. For instance, Spain is -according to the OECD- among the countries where reporting of school evaluation is less common (2013a, p. 81). Relevant national regulation is scant. The exception are however those 'individualised assessments', especially in secondary education (nonetheless in need of further specification). Of course, these assessments are not school evaluation per se but are expected to significantly affect schools and their evaluation.

Several of its features are highlighted:

- a) It is primarily focused on the achievements of individual students: as stated above, its primary focus is student attainment of key competencies and objectives.
- b) Assessments need to be equivalent to those used by international agencies, especially the OECD (LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble, VIII). In the case of secondary education, standardised testing is required (LOE as amended by LOMCE, article 144).
- c) Most of these assessments are clearly terminal: students are required to be as-

sessed at the middle and end of primary education and at the end of lower and upper secondary education (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 20.3, 21, 29 and 36 bis).  
 d) Assimilation to a census-based (not sample-based) assessment is deliberately sought (LOE as amended by LOMCE, preamble, V). However, not every student at specific grade or age levels will participate: setting aside that some types and levels of education are excluded (e.g. vocational education at regular schools), all students enrolled in primary education are expected to participate but only students enrolled in secondary education having passed a number of specific subjects in lower secondary ed-

ucation and all subjects in upper secondary education are allowed to participate.  
 e) Assessment is external: as anticipated above, a common framework (including assessment criteria) is arranged by national authorities, its implementation falls to regional authorities and administration and marking are responsibilities of external teachers (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 20.3, 21, 29, 36 bis and 144).

Purposes and consequences deserve special attention. When information is available, these assessments are clearly summative (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 20.3, 21.3, 29, 31, 36bis and 37):

<b>Mid of Primary Education</b>	...
<b>End of Primary Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessment result is expressed in the form of a grade (among several ones).</li> <li>- Parents (or guardians) receive a report including the grade obtained by each student.</li> </ul>
<b>End of lower Secondary Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessment result is expressed in the form of a mark (i.e. a score from 0 to 10).</li> <li>- Both the test mark and the average of marks obtained in all subjects taken throughout the stage are aggregated to produce a final mark (weights are 30% and 70%, respectively, and at least 5 points in the test are nonetheless needed to complete the stage and obtain the certificate).</li> </ul>
<b>End of upper Secondary Education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Assessment result is expressed in the form of a mark (i.e. a score from 0 to 10).</li> <li>- Both the test mark and the average of marks obtained in all subjects taken throughout the stage are aggregated to produce a final mark (weights are 40% and 60%, respectively, and at least 5 points in the test are nonetheless needed to complete the stage and obtain the certificate).</li> </ul>

Source: own study.

Although terminal assessments are usually associated with summative assessment, ‘formative’ and ‘diagnostic’ purposes –in the words used in the statute (LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble, VIII)– are espoused. Our national legislation does not provide a explicit definition of them, but it is implied that assessments aims to inform and improve learning (and teaching and schools providing it) whilst attempting to identify needs and even problems affecting progress in order to deal with them (see OECD, 2013a for a delineation of both notions). However, there are additional purposes: for instance, it also aims to provide a summarisation of students’ achievements that have taken place at the end of certain stages, ensure that academic qualifications comply with common standards or, in general, monitor the performance of the education system altogether (see above). With regard to the consequences of school evaluation, national regulation is scant too, although some common patterns have been identified (European Commission/ EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

Interestingly, a change introduced by the amendment of our 2006 Education Act in 2013 is however that education authorities are required to use indicators common to all regions (and all schools within them) in their evaluations and make evaluation results public to stakeholders in accordance with a regulatory framework set by national Government, “with socioeconomic and sociocultural contextual factors being taken into consideration” (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 120.3 and 147.2). The publication of school results (namely, data on performance on such indicators) is explicitly required – for two times (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 120.3 and 147.2). Moreover, the statute state that all publicly-funded schools need to be accountable for their results (LOE as amended by LOMCE, article 120.3).

This is in line with the somewhat more detailed regulation of ‘individualised assessments’. In a few words, the more advanced the assessment required, the more defined and serious its consequences for students and schools (LOE as amended by LOMCE, articles 20.2, 20.3, 21.3, 29, 31, 32.2, 36bis, 37, 41, 120.3 and 144):

	Consequences for students	Consequences for schools
Mid of Primary Education	Assessment “results” taken into account in grade repetition decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “If assessment is unfavourable, the teaching team must adopt the most appropriate measures (including regular and/or special ones).”</li> <li>- In the case of public schools getting lower results than expected according standards, education authorities ‘may’ set programmes for improvement.</li> </ul>
End of Primary Education	Assessment “results” taken into account in grade repetition decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The report produced is used to ‘inform’ and ‘guide’ students themselves, parents (or guardians), teaching teams and schools.</li> <li>- In the case of public schools getting lower results than expected according standards, education authorities ‘may’ set programmes for improvement.</li> </ul>
End of lower Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If positive, exam mark determines completion (leading to a certificate) and future educational route (vocational or academic one).</li> <li>- Unlimited number of opportunities to resit the exam available to failing students or those that, having passed the exam, are interested in a higher mark (at least two ones per school year).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the case of public schools getting lower results than expected according standards, education authorities ‘may’ set programmes for improvement.</li> <li>- “Equitable comparisons” available.</li> </ul>
End of upper Secondary Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If positive, exam mark determines completion (leading to a certificate) and future educational options.</li> <li>- Unlimited number of opportunities to resit the exam available to failing students or those that, having passed the exam, are interested in a higher mark (at least two ones per school year).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In the case of public schools getting lower results than expected according standards, education authorities ‘may’ set programmes for improvement.</li> <li>- “Equitable comparisons” available.</li> </ul>

Source: own study.

Individualised assessments’ may thus be considered to be high-stakes assessments, particularly when used in secondary education: a) reported results lead to defined and definite decisions; b) these decisions are referred to consequences; c) importantly (see above), consequences adopt the form of sanctions (namely,

rewards and penalties); d) these consequences are significant (that is, they matter to a variety to stakeholders) and, therefore, e) are usually public. Interestingly, high-stakes assesment would be being used also as formative assesment despite 1) the application of stakes to formative assessments is likely to change the nature

of assessment to summative (and “this change may render [even] a high-quality formative assessment into a poor-quality summative one”) (Heywood, 2015, p. 120) and, moreover, 2) the OCDE itself (2013a) warns of the risks of using a specific assessment for purposes different to that or those that it served originally or for many purposes (p. 160).

#### 4. Concluding thoughts

A prominent scholar in Spain (Pérez Gómez, 2014) has recently linked the aforementioned trend to what Sahlberg (2011, 2015) has called ‘Global Education Reform Movement’ (GERM), which includes as one of its central features the adoption of hard evidence-based accountability; namely, holding teachers and schools accountable for students’ achievement through external tests. As a consequence of this trend, student measured achievement is closely tied to the processes of evaluating, inspecting, and even rewarding or punishing schools and teachers. According to Sahlberg himself (2015, p. 146), the problem with such a kind of accountability “is not that students, teachers, and schools are held accountable per se, but rather the way accountability mechanisms affect teachers’ work and students’ studying in school”. However, these ‘mechanisms’ do not lack support from research (e.g. Hanushek & Woessman, 2011, 2014) and the ‘individualised assessments’ adopted in Spain draw on this research (INEE, 2014). The

OECD’s report ‘Teachers for the 21st century: using evaluation to improve teaching’ (2013b), which also argues for evidence-based accountability, highlights that use of student results as an evaluation instrument is likely to be particularly relevant for whole-school evaluations (more than for individual teacher appraisals). Nonetheless, it is not clear that such hard evidence on student achievement will be used to evaluate either schools or teachers in Spain as testing is primarily used to assess student progress toward key competencies and objectives, the scope ultimately targeted by these assessments extends to the school system and, above all, details on how to evaluate schools (and teachers) through such assessments are virtually absent.

Rather, the expectation would be as follows. The performance of a education system has been considered to be affected by the incentives that actors face; namely, rewards (and penalties): “if the actors in the education process are rewarded (...) for producing better student achievement, and if they are penalized for not producing high achievement, then achievement is likely to improve” (Hanushek, 2013, p. 134). In turn, the incentives to produce such results and the process leading to them would be “created by the institutions of the education system — the rules and regulations that explicitly or implicitly set rewards and penalties for the people involved in the education process” (Hanushek, 2013, p. 134). In this context,

“schools matter for student outcomes, but not so much in terms of traditional inputs” but “through teacher quality and institutional structures that determine incentives” (Hanushek & Woessman, 2011, p. 159, 2014, pp. 171-172). In particular, a number of ‘institutional policies’ have been found to be associated with higher achievement levels: competition, combination of accountability measures (e.g. external exit exams) and school autonomy (especially in process and personnel decisions), and public financing (see Hanushek, 2013; Hanushek & Woessman, 2011, 2014). Taking into account that, in Spain, a) school choice and, thus, competition are limited (although particularly the latter one is often latent and nonetheless increasing), and b) most of schools are publicly-funded (although funding has decreased), efforts to improve the performance of the education system might have turned out to rely more on combining autonomy and accountability. Moreover, as schools -particularly public ones- undergo severe restrictions in making decisions on staff (and other significant issues such as curriculum or financial ones), accountability through terminal standardised assessments signalling performance emerges as a critical (and not too costly) mechanism of governance (Klein, 2013).

As mentioned above, schools matter in this context, but school evaluation as such does not matter significantly in it. School self-evaluation is decaying – as two Spanish experts hold (González &

Escudero, 2013). In addition, school inspection is also being displaced in favour of agencies specialised in assessment and evaluation which design and implement student testing – as inspectors themselves have highlighted (Secadura, 2011, 2012). In contrast, school leaders are seemingly expected to play an important role in the new scenario. ‘Individualised assessments’ are among the ‘pivotal principles’ of the latest reform wave but the ‘strengthening’ of school management and leadership is also among them (LOE as amended by LOMCE, Preamble, VI and VII). As evaluation (see section 1), school management and leadership has been also conferred the status of major ‘factor’ leading to education quality (LOE, articles 1 and 2.2) and, specifically, the headteacher is expected to be accorded a significant (yet limited) extent of autonomy in order to undertake actions leading to quality education (LOE as amended by LOMCE, article 122 bis). However, school leaders (like other school bodies) are not even mentioned when the national basic regulation articulates ‘individualised assessments’, although the terms used are significantly more detailed than when other forms of evaluation affecting schools are considered. They and, in particular, headteachers are rather expected to lead a number of actions regulated outside schools by education authorities and, above all, manage their implementation in schools in order to increase results as reflected by those ‘individualised assessments’. In this vein, they will be primari-

ly playing a managerial role which would be instrumentally key in putting in place a stringent accountability regime (understood as a set of mechanisms and ‘rules of play’ aiming to ensure accountability). Moreover, the role of the headteacher is thus strengthened to render him/her (and, along the way, the school) more accountable to external stakeholders (in the first instance, to education authorities). In this context, schools are likely to be considered to be “bases for management” and “targets for change” rather than “centers for decision making and renewal” (Sirotnik & Clark, 1988), and school leaders themselves might significantly contribute to.

This is not different from what has been conceptualised as a form of school-based management: “principal control” (Wohlstetter & Odden, 1992) or “administrative control” (Murphy & Beck, 1995) (see also Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). According to this approach to school decision-making, the headteacher assume substantial authority over resources (i.e. budgets and staff) and, accordingly, exercise substantial control. School autonomy is, in this view, largely conflated with headteacher autonomy. Interestingly, authority and control are invested in the headteacher in combination with the incentive to make the best use of resources by increasing accountability to external authorities and other stakeholders, this supposedly resulting in higher efficiency when serving students (Leithwood & Menzies, 1998).

Although focused on the Spanish context and in need of further exploration when this policy is being developed and implemented, the issues explored here might be relevant for other education systems and it might worth considering them in analysing global agendas. In spite of national differences (e.g. Hangartner & Svaton, 2013; Møller & Skedsmo, 2013; Keddie, 2015; Serpieri, Grimaldi & Vatrella, 2015), combinations of increased autonomy and greater accountability are proving to be and likely to lead to redefine the role of school leaders and have impact on them (e.g. McGhee & Nelson, 2005). The Spanish education system is not an exception in this regard but the singularities (and commonalities) linked with this particular context presented here can shed light on the phenomenon.

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