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Pedagogical Renewal and the Role of Teachers in Secondary Schools: Insights From Five Case Studies in Spain

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☞ This article presents the results of a research project funded by the Ministry of Science and Innovation of the Government of Spain, which aims to analyse secondary schools whose teaching practices are transformative because they go beyond temporary innovations, generating changes and improvements that impact the school, students and the local community and promote inclusion and meaningful learning. This article examines the role that teachers play in secondary education in relation to teaching practices and methodologies in the current context of demands for constant transformation, through the study of five secondary schools in different regions of Spain. Observations, focus groups, analysis of school documents and in-depth interviews were carried out, and the data were analysed using Atlas.ti software. The results show how pedagogical renewal in secondary education is based on teaching aspects such as educational leadership, strategies to promote personalised learning that place students at the centre of educational action, the establishment of relationships with the community to share educational and social projects that promote a sense of belonging to the local context, and the need to modify resources, spaces and times to accommodate more global and transversal teaching and learning processes.

Keywords: teachers' role, professional identity, pedagogical renewal, secondary education, case studies

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Pedagoška prenova in vloga učiteljev v srednjih šolah: ugotovitve iz petih študij primerov iz Španije

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~ Ta članek predstavlja izsledke raziskovalnega projekta, ki ga je financiralo Ministrstvo za znanost in inovacije Republike Španije, katerega cilj je analiza srednjih šol, katerih pedagoške prakse so transformativne, saj presegajočasne inovacije ter ustvarjajo spremembe in izboljšave, ki vplivajo na šolo, učence in na lokalno skupnost ter spodbujajo inkluzijo in smiselno učenje. Članek preučuje vlogo, ki jo imajo učitelji v srednješolskem izobraževanju v povezavi s pedagoškimi praksami in z metodologijami v trenutnem kontekstu zahtev po nenehni transformaciji, in sicer prek študije petih srednjih šol v različnih regijah Španije. Izvedli smo opazovanja, fokusne skupine, analizo šolskih dokumentov in poglobljene intervjuje, podatki pa so bili analizirani s programsko opremo Atlas.ti. Izsledki kažejo, kako pedagoška prenova v srednješolskem izobraževanju temelji na pedagoških vidikih, kot so: vodstvo v izobraževanju, strategije za spodbujanje personaliziranega učenja, ki učence postavljajo v središče izobraževanja, vzpostavljanje odnosov s skupnostjo za izmenjavo izobraževalnih in socialnih projektov, ki spodbujajo občutek pripadnosti lokalnemu okolju, ter potreba po prilagajanju virov, prostоров in časa, da se omogočijo bolj globalni in prečni procesi poučevanja in učenja.

Ključne besede: vloga učiteljev, poklicna identiteta, pedagoška prenova, srednješolsko izobraževanje, študije primerov

Introduction

This article draws on research conducted within the project *(Re)Situating pedagogical renewal in Spain from a critical perspective: Five case studies in secondary schools in Aragon, Catalonia, Castile and León, the Valencian Community and the Basque Country* (PID2019-108138RB-C22). The aim of this project is to study the current pedagogical renewal taking place in secondary schools in Spain, looking at the role of teachers, the educational practices they promote in their schools and the connections they establish with their social environment and community. In Spain, compulsory schooling includes both primary education (ages 6–12) and secondary education (ages 12–16). This article focuses on secondary education.

In the Spanish context, the concept of pedagogical renewal goes beyond that of innovation (Torrent & Feu-Gelis, 2020) and aims to advance a global, critical and emancipatory educational approach that is responsive to its social context, grounded in democratic and participatory principles, and underpinned by a socially and politically committed vision oriented towards the transformation of the educational model (Carbonell, 2022). Its educational practices are characterised by being sustainable and permanent over time and reviewed through constant teacher reflection for improvement, considering students as agents in their own learning. The important role of the community is recognised, and the relevance of the changing role of teachers is highlighted (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023).

This work complements other work on the role of teachers and their attitude and leadership in schools (Aliu & Kaçaniku, 2023; Šarić & Šteh, 2017), but provides an additional perspective which addresses a gap in the research, given the scarcity of work on transformative teaching practices in secondary schools (De Castro-Calvo et al., 2024).

The Professional Identity of Secondary School Teachers

Compulsory education is constantly under scrutiny due to the expectations placed on the teaching and learning processes and the development of a critical, tolerant and inclusive youth (UNESCO, 2022). This becomes more evident after the publication of international comparative educational results (PISA), as educational reports tend to focus on the challenges that remain to be met in different educational systems rather than on achievements, calling into question the changes in educational practices in schools. This process also questions the role that teachers play in schools, casting doubt on the profile, the

competencies and teaching identity of teachers (Bolívar, 2007).

It is essential to consider how teachers perceive and practice their profession (Bolívar, 2007) in the face of a constantly changing and evolving educational and social context that impacts organisational, work, relationship and learning systems. This has a direct impact on how they develop their practice and construct their teaching identity in a constant process of professional development and reflection (Berbegal et al., 2024). It is essential for teachers, as agents of change in educational institutions (Serrano & Pontes, 2016), to develop a professional profile that enables them to respond appropriately to the new challenges, demands and needs of today's society (OECD, 2005; UNESCO, 2022).

Teacher identity is made up of cognitive, emotive and affective factors, resulting from the relationships and tensions with personal, cultural and social identity (Bolívar, 2007; Olave, 2020). It is the result of a process in which each teacher reconfigures the way they carry out their professional practice based on their personal experiences, initial training, experiences at the beginning of their professional career, relationships with other teachers and students, the social context and the culture of the school in which they work (Flores & Day, 2006; Serrano & Pontes, 2016). There are processes of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of professional identity that coexist with pre-established social expectations about the figure of the teacher (Olave, 2020) and with a shared social representation of their role and attributes (Orozco-Gomez, 2023). Some of the key elements of these processes include initial and ongoing training to promote their professional development (Bolívar, 2007), as well as other factors including cooperation between teachers, co-teaching and structured spaces for coordination among teachers. In addition, attention to emotional aspects and external support are highly important, even more so than the accumulation of years of experience (Martínez et al., 2022).

Teacher training, particularly in secondary schools, should be a primary objective of the education system to improve the quality of education (García, 2010; OECD, 2005) and should be integrated alongside disciplinary training (Bolívar, 2007). To achieve this, it is necessary to explore teachers' motivations, needs and challenges, while also considering the high rate of school failure and early school leaving, factors that clearly impact teaching quality (Scholes et al., 2017) and academic success in Spain. However, an increasing number of schools are promoting a new approach to secondary education, rethinking their educational project, including the school's vision, goals, values, and priorities for student learning, as well as their methodological approach, encompassing how teaching is delivered and incorporation of new learning methodologies. They

are also reflecting on their school culture, projecting new challenges and responsibilities for teachers. In this context, actions that aim to change the pedagogical perspective and provide greater shared meaning on how to carry out one's own professional practice can be considered rejuvenating, since they aim to transform educational contexts, placing students at the centre and considering the community and the area (Fargas Malet & Bagley, 2024; Ndayisenga & Sindayigaya, 2024).

Pedagogical Renewal in the Current Educational Context

Changes in education are necessary to keep up with social progress. While some are driven by external pressure, such as international comparative testing, others are implemented due to the contributions that educational sciences make to teaching and learning processes, or new methodological and didactic processes (Bromley et al., 2020).

Change in itself does not imply improvement (Domínguez Rodríguez, 2016), and if it does appear, it must come from the consolidation of scientific advances that aim to guide the future. The difficulty lies in identifying those changes that appear in educational practices and that go beyond the introduction of mere innovations (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023). Renewal pursues a profound change that permeates the culture of the school, encompassing a global approach to educational action that goes beyond specific changes in classroom contexts (Pericacho & Andrés-Candela, 2018), and it does so from a conception of education as a tool for social transformation.

The difficulty of moving towards transformative educational contexts is also made explicit by the vagueness of its conceptual definition, since it has changed over time across different historical periods in Spain (Martínez Bonafé, 2021; Torrent & Feu-Gelis, 2020). It has been associated with educational innovation as it shares certain elements, such as the desire to move towards approaches that focus on improving the quality of learning, leaving behind more conventional school models (De Castro-Calvo et al., 2024). However, we do not consider these terms to be synonymous (Díez-Gutiérrez et al., 2023) since renewal aims at a profound transformation from an inclusive and critical perspective, with a clear commitment to social justice and the desire to promote an authentic democratic participation of the educational community (Pericacho & Andrés-Candelas, 2018).

A transformative educational context moves away from the hegemonic model, favouring a reflective and metacognitive attitude among teachers towards educational action (Postholm, 2012). It is the teaching team that engages

in dialogue, debates and makes collaborative decisions about the educational practices developed in the school to offer quality education that is tailored to the interests of the students, the educational context of the school and the challenges of today's society (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023; Pericacho & Andrés-Candelas, 2018).

It is critical to rethink the professional identity of teachers in order to move towards an educational context in which, beyond seeking academic results at the end of secondary education, we can influence how educational outcomes have been reached by learners. It is also important to consider whether the learning process is in place to respond to the intended pedagogical purposes rather than to the demands of the school graduate, which are more or less linked to strategies of ephemeral market fads and neoliberal policies (Díez-Gutiérrez & Rodríguez- Fernández, 2021).

The article aims to analyse the role played by teachers in the implementation of practices and methodologies aimed at pedagogical renewal, in the context of a constant demand for improvement and transformation in secondary schools. Based on a case study of five schools in different regions in Spain, the article poses the research question: How are secondary school teachers' professional practices experienced within contexts of educational transformation in Spain?

Method

This research aims to analyse how professional teaching practices are experienced within complex educational contexts, such as secondary education, and how they are linked to processes of educational change that contribute to sustainable and profound transformations in schools and their communities. Taking into account the interpretative paradigm, and based on a qualitative approach, a multiple case study was chosen as the research method (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Stake, 1995), emphasising the opinions and experiences of the participants (Korthagen, 2007).

Participants

The cases, intentionally selected for their connection to the concept of renewal in teaching practices, correspond to five secondary schools in the communities of Aragon, Castile-León, Catalonia, the Valencian Community and the Basque Country (Spain). They were selected considering criteria related to accessibility, interest in participation, territorial distribution, the validity of the

renewal project, and the schools' connection with the educational community and the surrounding environment (De Castro-Calvo et al., 2024). They all share a common commitment to improving educational quality and implementing pedagogical practices that contribute to the global education of students and the well-being of the local area.

The sample (Table 1) includes 107 participants belonging to four key profiles within the educational community: teachers ($n = 39$), members of the management teams ($n = 16$), secondary school students ($n = 32$) and families ($n = 20$). This composition ensured a broad and balanced representation of the main actors involved in school life and decision-making processes. Although different participant profiles were considered, the analysis was conducted holistically with Atlas.ti, integrating all opinions in the results presented below.

Table 1

Distribution of participants by region and profiles (%)

	Teachers	Management team	Students	Families	%
Catalonia	6	4	6	6	21.5
Aragon	9	2	7	4	20.6
Basque Country	12	3	10	3	26.2
The Valencian Community	5	3	5	5	15.9
Castile and León	7	4	4	2	15.9
Total participants by profile	39	16	32	20	
(%)	37.4	14.0	29.9	18.7	100

Instruments

Data collection took place during the 2023-2024 academic year, following a multimethod qualitative design. To capture the complexity of organisational cultures and participatory practices in schools, four complementary instruments for gathering data were developed. Each instrument was supported by its own protocol to ensure consistency, reliability and comparability across the five participating regions. Four instruments were designed: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, observations and analysis of the school's institutional documentation. Voice recordings were used in the interviews and focus groups for transcription and data analysis. A total of 78 documents (Table 2) were obtained for subsequent analysis using Atlas.ti software, version 23.

Table 2
Data collection instruments (by region)

Region (Spain)	Semi-structured interviews	Observations	Focus groups	School's documentation
Catalonia	5	5	4	4
Aragon	2	6	4	6
Basque Country	3	4	3	1
The Valencian Community	2	5	4	0
Castile and León	9	2	2	7
Total (n)	10	22	17	18

Research Design

The study followed a qualitative content analysis design, integrating data from interviews, focus groups, observations and institutional documents. Content analysis using Atlas.ti was carried out through data coding, the selection of representative quotes from the transcripts and the identification of relevant information.

The analysis began with a systematic coding process applied to the full dataset. Transcripts and documents were read in detail to identify meaning units relevant to the research questions. Coding was carried out using a codebook of pre-established analytical categories, selected on the basis of the project's theoretical framework and previous literature on pedagogical renewal and teacher roles. These categories included: methodology and strategies, time management, spaces, organisation and grouping of students, curriculum, teacher/educational agent role, work with the community and the environment, commitment to the school, identity traits, leadership, assessment and digital culture. These codes were chosen for their connection with educational practices, the methodologies used and the teaching role in contexts of educational transformation. For the interpretation and analysis of the results, elements of pedagogical renewal were considered, based on a systematic review carried out under the scope of the project (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023). These elements include the following students placed at the centre of educational action, relationship between educational stages and levels, reflective teaching attitude, actors and scenarios showing commitment to and responsibility for the region and school innovation in the digital age.

Interpretation of the results also considers credibility criteria for selecting and obtaining the most representative results (Table 3).

Table 3

Data analysis process

Process followed for data analysis (content)	Criteria for data credibility
- Detection and coding of information based on pre-established codes and a review of the specific literature - Identification and selection of significant quotes and information	- High frequency of code appearance - Saturation and representativeness of quotes that justify content interpretations - Comparison of the descriptions and interpretations with the results reported in other similar studies on pedagogical renewal and the current teaching role

The project followed the ethical principles of educational research in the university setting; the privacy and anonymity of participants' personal data were guaranteed throughout the process. Furthermore, efforts were made to encourage the involvement of various stakeholders in the study, periodically sharing the findings to enable joint monitoring and incorporate new information when necessary.

Results and Discussion

The main results obtained from the analysis are presented below, based on the selected quotes and the triangulation and complementarity of the data collected. It should be noted that the results presented here integrate the perspectives of the different participant subsamples, which were analysed jointly. As this study forms part of a larger project, it was decided to consider all quotes and information from all participants together in order to address the study objective.

This approach allowed us to capture a wide range of perspectives across the topics presented in the results section. In general, the focus in writing the results was on the diversity of responses rather than on participants themselves. However, in certain cases, it was considered appropriate to highlight a particular subgroup of participants, due to the significance of the information they provided for achieving the study objectives.

Thus, by examining the analysis performed with Atlas.ti on the number of quotes obtained per code (Table 4), we can identify the relative weight of each code within the analysed documents.

Table 4
Categories, codes and number of quotes analysed

Code	Quote	Category	%
Teacher/educational agent role	104	Teaching culture and teacher training	31%
Leadership	8		
Curriculum	39		
Organisation and grouping of students	25	Student-centred learning approach	17.7%
Methodology and strategies	50		
Assessment	11		
Time management	8	Organisational, temporal and didactic elements	20.3%
Spaces	40		
Materials	51		
Work with the community and environment	81	Commitment to the local area	26.9%
Commitment to the school	28		
Identity traits	22		
Total number of quotes analysed	487		100%

The analysis of the 487 coded quotes revealed an uneven distribution (Table 4), enabling the identification of the predominant themes. Categories were established to structure the interpretation of the data around the most relevant aspects. These categories were defined in relation to the codes, grouping those that share a common logic or address complementary dimensions of the phenomenon studied. This thematic organisation facilitates a comprehensive reading of the results and highlights the main areas of focus, with the following categories:

- Teaching culture and teacher training: This includes the role of teachers as educational agents, their leadership, ongoing training and professional positioning.
- Student-centred learning approach: This includes references that place students at the centre of the educational process, highlighting their active participation, autonomy and decision-making capacity.
- Organisational, temporal and didactic elements: Aspects relating to the planning and development of the educational practice, including management of time, spaces, materials and methodological strategies.
- Commitment to the local area: The school's relationship with its local area, highlighting collaborative work with the community and institutional commitment.
- Digital age: Digital transformation in the educational field and

transversally related to the opening towards new ways of teaching and learning mediated by technology.

- Global approach: This encompasses a transversal and integrative category that runs through all the previous ones. It is not linked to a single code, but rather emerges from the interrelationship between them. The global approach allows us to understand how the different elements are structured to promote meaningful and contextualized learning that is connected to the social and physical environment.

The results from these six categories are described below.

Change in Teaching Culture

As shown by the results obtained from the study, the reflective attitude of teachers in schools experiencing educational transformation is essential. Processes of change are enhanced if the faculty is strong in strategic decision-making, for which training is also necessary. Shared leadership and having a committed and adequately trained teaching staff in the school's working methods and philosophy is important to optimise the implementation of transformative practices, although most schools approach changes with a lack of training in specific tools and practice a certain degree of self-teaching, an aspect that is also consistent with other studies (Bolívar, 2007). The teachers involved in our study mention the exhaustion, overexertion and need for preparation required when teaching in a renewal environment in secondary schools, this being precisely one of the aspects that stands out in this type of school (Bergebál et al., 2024).

Participants also reported solutions such as freeing up teaching staff to develop ad hoc materials that are implemented, evaluated and constantly improved, and providing ongoing training tailored to the specific needs of the schools to ensure project continuity. In particular, members of the management teams emphasised the stability of teaching staff to help them face the challenge of working in complex and more professionally demanding environments (Olave, 2020). The participants highlighted the importance of strengthening the sustainability of the educational project through shared pedagogical debate with the teaching staff, addressing the challenge of the usual dynamics of each academic year, such as the mobility of the teaching staff, complex relationships with the administration and lack of coordination time.

Students as Protagonists of the Educational Process

Different learning experiences have been identified in schools that place students at the centre of the educational process so that they can develop holistically. The methodological and organisational aspects are conceived and designed by teachers so that students can become protagonists of the learning process (Ndayisenga & Sindayigaya, 2024; Pericacho & Andrés-Candelas, 2018).

Teachers from our study view students as proactive agents with the capacity for participation, debate and decision-making. They promote problem-solving, critical thinking, mutual aid and peer cooperation. Teachers work towards achieving inclusive schools that adapt to students' needs and respond to their diversity, contributing also to their personal, emotional, academic and social well-being (De Castro-Calvo et al., 2024).

An example of educational experiences that promote greater student protagonism and awareness of learning can be found in an initiative called the "Free Project", a dedicated project-based learning time that provides a space for students to develop their own interests or abilities, fostering self-knowledge and individual development. It can also be found in the linguistic and mathematical fields, where teachers have designed and organised various multilevel learning activities. This structuring aims to enable each student to focus on the activity that best suits their level of proficiency and previously defined individual goals. In these experiences, teaching practices are organised to foster student autonomy and self-management, as well as responsibility for their learning process, seeking to develop a critical perspective in these contexts, in line with other studies (Pericacho & Andrés-Candelas, 2018).

In this student-centred approach, assessment is also understood as part of the learning process, not the reproduction of information. In the five participating schools, self-assessment and peer assessment are encouraged for the self-regulation of learning. Most schools adopt a perspective less focused on conventional exams and more focused on formative assessment, which includes multiple sources of evidence of learning, an aspect that pupils themselves report as particularly valuable. Assessment activities are also aligned with the level and progress of each student and class group, ensuring that teachers respect the diversity of learning paces.

Organisational, Temporal and Didactic Elements

Considering the educational centres and participants analysed, teachers propose a time structure based on educational and pedagogical reflection,

serving educational projects. They state that the split schedule (morning/afternoon) is the one that benefits students, concluding that teachers' preferences for a compact schedule (intensive in the morning) are not a pedagogical justification.

The five participating schools agree that flexible scheduling is important for students to make the most of their class time, and it is a source of debate and reflection for teachers. Its implementation is demanding since it requires a high level of student concentration on the planned activities, but it is an element is beneficial while respecting the diversity of needs and learning rhythms. The data analysed shows the need to have specific times for individualised tutoring to ensure a personalised follow-up.

The schools studied organise time slots with extended durations that are not distributed according to subjects in a conventional format. Class hours are distributed according to a pedagogical pattern that alternates between individual activities of personal and independent work and cooperative and global work, individualised tutoring and multigrade work experiences. This point was agreed upon by the teachers and the management team.

Regarding the use of spaces, the results obtained indicate that the classroom is losing its central role as a regular work space, with the school (classrooms, corridors, staff room etc.) and its immediate surroundings (school playground and exterior, neighbourhood) becoming the spatial context in which the teaching activity takes place. Regarding internal uses, there is a need to find a balance between making spaces multipurpose and facilitating student interaction with the need for specific spaces that allow for individual work. In the schools studied, teachers are redesigning them with the goal of making them versatile and multifunctional to adapt to active and participatory methodologies. In addition, free student movement is encouraged, given that sometimes questions need to be resolved regarding an aspect of learning that does not fit the discipline of the teacher currently in the classroom.

Regarding teaching materials, teachers comment that the process of replacing resources involves abandoning the textbook as the basis for teaching, and focusing on different types of texts, alternate reading strategies and other pedagogical practices related to the use of more active and participatory methodologies. The changes occur progressively, moving from the individual use of textbooks to the sharing of materials, then replacing the content of the books with photocopies from various sources, eventually leading to the creation of their own materials. They do not question the validity or appropriateness of the textbooks within the regulatory framework, but they emphasise that the creation of materials provides pedagogical value and clearly entails reflection both on the appropriateness of the materials for students in real-life contexts and on teaching practice itself.

The learning of curricular content is promoted, and the development of personal skills, emotional education and the individual growth of each student is also essential. For teachers, creating their own materials allows them to decide on the precise content and choose the appropriate teaching methodology, fostering meaningful learning and a sense of belonging to their place of residence (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024). It is also the result of working pedagogically based on the integration of content and learning areas, creating possibilities for changes in the established order of textbooks and thus being able to adapt it to current school projects. Teachers are responsible for creating the materials, which entails an investment of effort and time from their personal life to coordinate and design the educational proposals (Carrete-Marín et al., 2024).

In most of the schools that participated, the teaching resources are presented as a coherent extension of their ideological and pedagogical approaches (Domínguez Rodríguez, 2016), embodied in a trust-based, person-centred pedagogical model. The goal is to generate resources that foster students' personal experiences and relationships with their social environment and the world from a local and global perspective (Abós et al., 2021).

Commitment to the Local Area

Schools involved in processes of reflection and educational transformation feel a clear commitment and responsibility towards its immediate surroundings (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023; Champollion, 2018; Feu et al., 2025), which leads teachers to design, organise and develop practices that aim to improve relationships with and the conditions of the context in which the school is located. It feels to them as if it is a responsibility to strengthen and improve the community. To achieve this, the participating schools are implementing projects committed to the local area, with a particular focus on environmental care (Pericacho & Andrés-Candelas, 2018), in a mutual relationship that contributes to the community and to the education of the students as active citizens in the world. As the study showed, these projects and connections are also highly valued by families and pupils.

Although the various renewal schools analysed share this perspective, this connection between the local area and the school is changing and diverse. The participating agents are not always the same; however, students and teachers are key players in promoting commitment and responsibility to the local context. Organisations and associations, public administration and management and the business sector are all involved.

Based on the research findings, three main areas of development can be

identified. The first area occurs in direct relationships with stakeholders in the local community. Teachers in renewal schools expect participation in school activities, whether from families, organisations, the administration or local resources. The ways, spaces and moments in which these stakeholders participate are diverse, and no renewal school uses the same formula for participation, neither where, how, with whom nor when. Evidence of this is found in some schools that require families to contribute to the acquisition of new materials or to the organisation of school days, in learning communities or school cooperatives. The same is true of municipal organisations and associations; some schools leverage these institutions to build community, such as festivities at senior centres or theatre performances open to the community. The same applies to the relationship established with businesses, which become educational settings that in addition to being part of a professional self-discovery programme, offer visitor spaces that enrich students' learning. These experiences connect the local community with young people's personal and professional interests, expanding their knowledge and fostering a more contextualised understanding of reality.

The second area of connection occurs indirectly in the classroom. It is there that teachers encourage students to develop a critical view of society, particularly by encouraging reflection on aspects of social impact related to human rights, global conflicts, ecology, hate speech and gender perspectives. These projects allow students to undergo transformational experiences both within their local community and personally, incorporating a more human and transformative perspective (UNESCO, 2022).

The third area focuses on the school's relationship with its local area. Teachers promote the educational institution as an agent of social change (Serrano & Pontes, 2016), contributing to the sustainability of education, the preservation and promotion of local culture, language, and traditions, and the advancement of human rights, through practices designed to enrich learning experiences and cultivate critical thinking.

School Innovation in the Digital Age

In renewal schools, educational innovation often emerges through the introduction of technological resources to enhance the learning experience and make it more engaging for students; teaching the appropriate use of screens, recognising the shared responsibility between the school and families in the adequate use of technology; teaching students to discern between true and false information, fostering the development of critical skills to evaluate and use it

with responsibility; improving teaching and learning; and educating on basic digital tools and how to use them effectively (Biloisova et al., 2025).

The data show that most activities at the participating schools are conducted digitally, with easy access for students, through autonomous and asynchronous use or by leveraging technological tools that support specific subjects. Faced with this transition between school innovation and technological innovation – from analogue to digital – teachers who implement transformative practices face various challenges to equal access and digital opportunities (Beneyto-Seoane & Collet-Sabé, 2023).

A first challenge that emerges from the research is supporting students in the rational use of screens and electronic devices, as well as setting limits and appropriately managing the time spent on digital activities within the school grounds. Digital dependence worries teachers, especially if it can lead to the loss of conventional skills in terms of holistic development. There is concern that excessive use of technology influences the loss of interpersonal contact and in-person social activities. A second challenge is the lack of training and skills. The introduction of technology in classrooms highlights a digital divide between teachers and students, an aspect that must be addressed in ongoing training (Beneyto-Seoane & Collet-Sabé, 2023). While students may lack a complete understanding of the tools they use, teachers need greater specialisation in specific digital tools and applications. A third challenge has to do with the growing concern about the proper use of technology and the information available on the internet, given the indiscriminate access to content that is not always verified (Biloisova et al., 2025). Finally, a fourth challenge lies in the difficulty keeping students focused on educational activities since there is a temptation to get distracted by games or social media.

An Integrated Approach to Learning

Teachers' reflective attitudes towards educational action also calls into question the pedagogical and methodological approaches within schools. The teachers participating in the study constantly seek to create, design and generate new teaching and learning proposals, experimenting with alternative pedagogical methodologies and seeking continuous improvement in their teaching practice. Thus, they alternate conventional classes with other transdisciplinary projects that promote collaborative work among students.

They emphasise the importance of sharing experiences and knowledge among teachers, as well as collaboration and teamwork, to successfully implement these innovative methodologies. They discuss the advantages of this

approach in relation to teachers' freedom of action in the classroom, in a way that shows that personal effort also results in professional improvement.

The methodological changes are based on a curriculum vision that overcomes the fragmentation of subjects and opts for the integration of knowledge and its learning content, breaking away from disciplines. This means that all teachers must be involved and work together, with varying degrees of responsibility, in all the projects. This represents a challenge as they must support students in learning different subject areas, and it means dealing with resistance from teachers, who are very tied to the content of their subject matter (Bolívar, 2007).

In the renewal schools studied, this broader vision of the teacher's role in the learning and teaching processes is addressed by investing in shared discussion time and strengthening action models in practice as part of their identity, understood as collaborative spaces where teachers identify and discuss good educational practices. However, it is evident that the shift towards interdisciplinary and global projects entails a change of mentality among teachers and educational staff (De Castro-Calvo et al., 2024).

Conclusions

In the secondary education in Spain, teachers work in an environment marked by strong social and administrative pressures aimed at improving educational outcomes. Pedagogical renewal is not conceived as a mere occasional incorporation of innovative methodologies or technological tools (Díez-Gutiérrez et al., 2023), but as a process of profound transformation that stems from the collective reflection of the teaching staff, together with the social environment and the community. This is evident in the five schools who participated in this study, where change does not respond to passing fads, but rather to pedagogical debates that permeate all aspects of the school and seek to influence not only internal improvement but also the transformation of the local area in which they are located (Pericacho & Andrés-Candelas, 2018).

The research results show that there is no single model for renewal. The key principles translate into the need to comprehensively review the components of the educational system: the material (spaces, digital resources, contextualised materials), functional (time management, interdisciplinarity, flexible scheduling) and personal (distributed leadership, collaborative work, connection with the community) components. Far from being implemented in a linear manner, these changes require a continuous process of adjustment, monitoring and improvement, which entails a sustained investment of effort

and commitment on the part of teachers (Bolívar, 2007; Olave, 2020). It is precisely in this process – often complex and fraught with tension – that teaching practice gains meaning and is strengthened.

From this perspective, educational renewal in secondary schools places students at the centre of pedagogical action, promoting their autonomy, active participation and development. Through active methodologies, formative assessment, personalised support and commitment to the local community, more inclusive, contextualised and meaningful learning contexts are generated. The schools studied are committed to a pedagogy of trust, based on mutual responsibility and the collective construction of knowledge, which promotes both student well-being and strengthens the role of teachers. This renewal model represents a comprehensive transformation that, while demanding, opens paths towards a more just, humane and socially committed education.

Finally, it is essential for educational authorities to recognise and support these transformation processes from a structural and sustained perspective. While the findings of this study highlight the importance of ensuring the stability of teaching teams, offering ongoing training linked to the school's current context, and promoting policies that facilitate organisational and pedagogical autonomy (Fatsini-Matheu et al., 2025; Scholes et al., 2017), several limitations must be acknowledged. These include the contextual nature of the cases analysed and the challenges associated with transferring such processes to other educational settings with different structural and policy conditions. In this regard, future research should explore how these transformation processes can be adapted and sustained across diverse contexts, as well as examine their long-term impact on educational practices and student outcomes. Addressing these challenges is crucial to consolidating educational change that does not rely exclusively on teachers' individual commitment and overexertion, but is instead supported by solid, institutionally legitimised structures aligned with an educational vision committed to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

Ethical Statement

The research study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Vic-Central University of Catalonia (UVic-UCC) and was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for pedagogical research in the social sciences.

Data Availability Statement

The datasets analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy considerations at UVic-UCC to protect the research participants. However, the data is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

They further confirm that no artificial intelligence tools were used in the processing of the data or in the writing of this manuscript. The authors accept full responsibility for the content and integrity of the publication, which was conducted exclusively for academic and scientific purposes.

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