13 In and out of the 'pressure cooker': Schools' varying responses to accountability and datafication

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Introduction[1]

In educational research, performance-based accountability (PBA) systems have often been likened to 'pressure cookers' (cf. Agrey, 2004; Perryman et al., 2011; Tan, 2018). PBA puts high levels of pressure on schools by holding them liable for their performance, sanctioning underachievement and rewarding success. With high-stakes accountability systems in particular, underperforming schools experience higher levels of pressure, since continuous low performance has significant implications, from having restrictions placed on schools' pedagogic, organizational and economic autonomy to being forced into closure (Diamond, 2012a; Kim and Sunderman, 2005; Mintrop, 2004). By exerting these and other types of pressures, PBA is expected to make schools more responsive to the achievement of centrally defined learning goals and more inclined to use learning metrics in their daily practices and decisions. Overall, PBA policies aim to schools more consciously aligning their instruction with the mandated curriculum, and more intensively using achievement data to identify learning gaps and define educational and organizational improvement programmes. Through the promotion of these changes, PBA systems not only aim to improve learning achievement in aggregated terms but also to ensure that schools (especially underperforming schools) pay sufficient attention to their most disadvantaged students.

Although the expectations with PBA are high, existing research shows that the impact of PBA on school organizations is rather uneven. Accountability instruments can generate a broad range of outcomes and responses, from altering the goals and organizational identity of schools to more short-term strategies and cosmetic changes, such as intensifying teaching to the test (i.e., focusing instruction on predictable test content and/or test formats) or narrowing the curriculum (i.e., dedicating more time and resources to tested subjects) (Au, 2007; Mittleman and Jennings, 2018). In the latter case, rather than aligning school practices with accountability expectations, such responses are more likely to decouple from them. Varying school responses to PBA are identified in both high-stakes and low-stakes accountability systems, as well as in countries where these systems

have been installed for shorter or longer periods of time (see Candido, 2020; Diamond and Spillane, 2004; Landri, 2018; Maroy and Pons, 2019). Even in the US context, where decades of high-stakes accountability have turned schools into testing- and data-intensive organizations (see Mittleman and Jennings, 2018), schools' pedagogic and organizational responses are far from homogeneous.

Existing research tends to attribute the varying responses to accountability pressures to variables of a different nature, ranging from school leadership styles to the broader socio-economic contexts in which schools operate. However, to date, research has overlooked the role of subjective variables (such as school actors' perceived and experienced pressures) in the mediation and enactment of PBA. To address this gap, this chapter aims to analyze the production of different patterns of responses to PBA within schools from a policy enactment perspective. On the basis of a mixed-methods study conducted in Chile, we analyze how school actors' interpretations of and dispositions towards PBA, on the one hand, and their experienced levels of pressure, on the other, influence how they respond to the accountability regulatory system. As we will show, the responses to PBA that have been identified go beyond conventional alignment–decoupling dichotomy and include a more varying range of options. Our perspective is premised on the assumption that the way school actors respond to policy prerogatives is contingent on the way these actors make sense of PBA pressures and expectations within their broader social and institutional frameworks. In other words, the responses to PBA that we identify are the result of analyzing how school actors *see* and *live* accountability regulations in their reference contexts.

To build our main arguments, the chapter is structured as follows: in the first section, on the context of the research, we introduce Chile's long trajectory of experimentation with learning metrics and a broad range of related accountability measures. In the second section, we present our theoretical framework, where we highlight the importance of focusing not only on policy interpretation but also on perceived regulatory pressure to understand how policies are enacted. After presenting the methodology of our study in the third section, in the fourth one, we offer the main findings of the research in the form of a new categorization of school responses to PBA regulations. Finally, the conclusions highlight the key mediating role of subjective variables in the configuration of different patterns of school responses to PBA, and we reflect on the research and policy implications of our study.

Context of the study: Governing schools through performativity and markets in Chile

Chile is a country where PBA has played a long tradition in the governance of education. Chile was an early adopter of national, large-scale assessments in education, the first of which was implemented at the start of the 1980s, in the context of an ambitious and drastic market reform promoted by the civic-military dictatorship (1973–1990). At that time, the main intention of the national assessment, known as the System for the Measurement of Quality in Education (SIMCE), was to inform school choice (Bellei and Vanni, 2015). Nevertheless, it was not until the

restoration of democracy in the 1990s (specifically, in 1995) that SIMCE results started being publicly disseminated on a regular basis (first in the media and later on the Ministry of Education website). Since then, more and more functions and uses have been found for this standardized test. To start with, in 1996, the SIMCE became a fundamental component of a merit-based pay system for teachers, in which collective salary bonuses were attached to schools' performance (Mizala and Schneider, 2014).

During the early 2000s, the government implemented various compensatory programmes aimed at low-performing schools, to promote data use and school improvement processes (Falabella, 2020). This policy approach crystallized in the enactment of the Preferential School Subsidy Law in 2008. Under this scheme, the state gave an additional subsidy to schools for each 'vulnerable' student enrolled. As a condition of accessing this subsidy, schools accepted additional accountability measures. Schools were classified according to their SIMCE performance, and in the case of continuous poor performance, the state could impose sanctions which included the possibility of school closure (Valenzuela and Montecinos, 2017).

In 2011, a new Education Quality Assurance System (Law no. 20529) was created, whose provisions allow the Chilean state to adopt new data-intensive policy instruments and tools to inspect, evaluate and sanction all types of public and publicly subsidized private schools – not just those receiving the preferential school subsidy (Parcerisa and Falabella, 2017). Since then, schools have been classified in four performance categories (high, medium, medium-low and insufficient) according to SIMCE results, data on students' learning progress, and a set of personal and social development indicators.[2] Poorly performing schools are meant to receive pedagogical support and external evaluative visits from the Ministry of Education for a period of four years, and if their performance remains insufficient, schools can be closed. In parallel, the Education Quality Agency (EQA) has put a great deal of effort into making performance data intelligible and actionable for the elaboration of school improvement plans through various initiatives, online tools and training seminars.

In short, Chile is a country where both performativity and datafication, in interaction with market rules, have a great potential to alter school practices and to discipline teachers' behavior. Chilean education is a distinctive scenario within which to study the combined effects of market forces and different forms of administrative accountability pressure on educational organizations and practices.

Understanding the variation in school responses through enactment theory

Interpretation as a key moment in policy enactment

Enactment and sense-making theories are well suited to exploration of how school actors 'construct the demands of, and appropriate responses to, accountability systems differently' (Jennings, 2010, p. 229). Such theories broadly state that the

way educational actors interpret and make sense of new policy mandates is key to explaining how such mandates translate into everyday practices (Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012; Spillane et al., 2002). These theories do not portray teachers and principals as simple policy takers but as policy shapers who actively adapt, modify and reframe new policy prerogatives to suit their preferences and the needs and constraints of their particular school contexts. Following a policy enactment approach, school responses to policy instruments such as PBA will 'depend on how the aims and purposes ascribed to them, and the meanings and representations they carry, are perceived [and] understood […] by key actors' (Skedsmo, 2011, p. 7). This does not mean that policy interpretation is mainly guided by instrumental rationality and causal beliefs. Principled beliefs, personal biographies, previous experiences or emotional scripts co-constitute the interpretive frames through which educators approach educational policy, and respond to it. Furthermore, policy interpretation, beyond an individual act, results from the interaction between school actors, and within a broader network that includes parents, the school owner, inspectors and external consultants, among others (Spillane et al., 2002).

Policy interpretation is key to understanding why some schools align themselves with new policy reforms, but others avoid implementing them. According to Malen (2006), school actors align with new reforms when they perceive that these reforms easily couple with their previous way of working and/or their particular or collective interests; the opposite is also true, and school actors with a more conflicting approach to a reform will be those that disagree with its main goals and/or instruments. School actors might dislike an educational reform due to concerns about its usefulness, validity or fairness, or out of concern that it goes against their interests (or the interests of students) or contradicts their professional values and educational beliefs. When negative interpretations predominate, schools tend to address the external pressure to comply with new regulations through dilution strategies and obstructive bureaucratic games, such as neglect, overt resistance or subtle adaptation (Malen, 2006). Some of these dynamics have been observed in several francophone countries, where teachers justify ritualistic (but not substantive) adoption of accountability instruments because they consider that these instruments clash with their own notions of good instruction and student assessment (see Maroy et al. in this volume).

The role of actors' subjective perceptions of accountability pressures

PBA systems assume that the more pressure is exerted on schools, the more measures will be taken to enhance the educational quality of school provision. Pressure is likely to be exerted based on schools' performance levels; thus, schools on probation will be subjected to stronger and more coercive forms of accountability pressure. High levels of pressure may result in different responses, typically defined as alignment or decoupling, depending on whether the accountability expectations are met or not – with the latter usually being associated with tactical or symbolic responses in order to cope with regulatory pressures, at least in the short term (cf. Boxenbaum and Jonsson, 2017).

Research conducted in high-stakes accountability settings often concludes that schools exposed to coercive sanctions – which, not coincidentally, are those that tend to serve the most disadvantaged student populations or concentrate on students who are more challenging to teach (see Pallas, in this volume) – are those that more frequently adopt instructional tactics through which to inflate test results, without necessarily adopting 'deep' changes in pedagogy (Mittleman and Jennings, 2018, p. 481). Thus, schools facing higher levels of administrative pressure tend to intensify test preparation practices and the number of teaching hours dedicated to subjects evaluated externally; to focus further on so-called 'bubble students' (i.e., students who are closer to the proficiency cut-off score); or to track students according to their performance level in order to customize their training (Au, 2007; Mittleman and Jennings, 2018; Watanabe, 2008).

Accountability research typically assumes that pressure is equally high (once school performance is held constant), while contextual factors foster or hinder full implementation of school improvement policies. Specifically, instrumental responses may depend on factors such as school composition or performance levels (which, in turn, are related to composition). Schools' socio-economic and institutional characteristics define the limits of what is possible and desirable in terms of school improvement and performativity, and how much pressure PBA exerts on them. For example, in deprived schools (where aggregate performance levels are likely to be lower and pressure is likely to be higher), school actors will be more prone to carrying out superficial strategies to increase scores in a short amount of time. Research also shows that privately managed schools tend to be more reactive to administrative accountability pressure than conventional public schools and articulate more instrumental responses (Berends, 2015; Zancajo, 2020).

Although we acknowledge that all these dynamics do indeed occur in PBA systems, we also assume that the reality of schools is highly complex, and it cannot be taken for granted that objective school characteristics alone determine the performative pressure that school staff experience. In our view, the intensity of administrative accountability pressures, which are objective in nature, is not constant, as is subjectively mediated. What makes schools reactive to the regulatory framework is not only the level of pressure that regulations and authorities exert (whether schools are put into the 'pressure cooker' or not), but also the pressure that school actors perceive, live and experience. School actors' perceptions thus, together with the characteristics of the school, play an important role in explaining divergent school responses to PBA.

But on which factors does the intensity of the perceived pressure depend? High-performing schools, and/or schools whose educational provision has a clear focus on academic excellence, will readily align with external PBA demands, so they do not necessarily perceive the PBA system as a source of pressure (see Keddie, 2013). Nonetheless, we expect that there might be teaching staff in well-performing schools who feel higher-than-expected performative pressure because their 'significant others' (i.e., their more direct competitors) are doing better than they are; or the school owner, the principal, families and/or teachers themselves might think that the academic results of the school have room for improvement.

At the same time, schools with poor levels of performance may have staff who do not experience high levels of performative pressure due to the fact that for moral, professional or pedagogic reasons they do not put academic achievement at the center of their work.

In short, school responses to regulatory environments are the result of complex policy enactment processes in which variables of a contextual and subjective nature interact. From a sense-making perspective, it follows that two subjective variables are particularly significant in terms of understanding different patterns of school responses to accountability pressure. The first is how school actors interpret and position themselves in the PBA policy debate, and the second one is the perceived level of performance pressure that school actors experience within PBA frameworks.

Methodology

Data

The data used in this research have been drawn from the REFORMED project database, which applies to a sample of countries, including Chile.[3] We have also used secondary administrative data provided by the Chilean educational authorities.

The Chilean database includes data collected from questionnaires administered to teachers (n = 1130) and school leaders (n = 200), distributed among 79 schools that were selected through a stratified sample strategy (Ferrer-Esteban, 2020). These questionnaires provide rich information about school contexts, the professional profiles of teachers and principals, school organization, teaching practices, use of standardized test data, perceptions of the PBA system and other teachers' beliefs (Levatino, 2020).

Method

The research follows a sequential mixed-methods design approach (cf. Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2006), which integrates two different empirical stages. The *first stage is eminently quantitative*. In this stage, we constructed school categories based on variables related to both attitudes and beliefs about PBA, and perceived performance pressure (as introduced in our theoretical framework). These school categories, in combination with school composition variables (socio-economic composition and performance), were then used to construct the school sample for the qualitative analysis.

During the *qualitative research stage*, we conducted interviews with teachers, principals and other school leaders. This phase was essential in order to identify (using the interpretative framework for the school categories) all those school-level practices that actors may adopt to deal with the accountability system. The manner in which these school practices are enacted (and the intensity) within each category allowed us to characterize and define varying school responses to performance-based accountability.

Quantitative research stage: Constructing school categories

This stage was carried out with the entire Chilean sample of schools (n = 79). The survey responses of all school actors involved (school leaders and teachers) were considered.

The first step was to identify broad categories of schools on the basis of attitudes and beliefs about PBA and perceived performance pressure. To construct composite indexes of PBA beliefs and performance pressure, we first identified the most significant variables in our survey database in order to capture each of these constructs through factor analysis. As a result of this analysis, the *PBA attitudes/beliefs* index is based on three variables related to both the perceived fairness and validity of the PBA system, as follows: (a) whether it is fair to measure school quality through the results of standardized tests; (b) whether it is fair to disseminate test results in the media and/or the internet; and (c) whether test scores reflect the efforts and ability of teachers. The index of *perceived performative pressure* includes variables relating to pressure from different account holders: the Ministry of Education, the EQA and the municipality (public schools) or school board (private schools).

From the intersection of the two indices, we then defined quadrants, which were used to frame the surveyed schools. Table 13.1 shows the frequencies of teachers and schools according to school categories, each of which covers between 22% and 30% of the sampled schools.

Qualitative research stage: Characterizing school responses

Qualitative fieldwork was conducted using a smaller sample of schools via semi-structured interviews with teachers and school leaders, covering similar topics to those of the survey. The schools for this stage were first selected taking into consideration their social composition (school vulnerability index, MINEDUC, 2019) and level of performance (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018). In Table 13.2, we can see how the selected schools for this stage related to our subjective categories (perceived pressure and beliefs about PBA), along with the indicators of social composition and performance. From Figure 13.1, it can be seen that the same schools are spatially distributed across the quadrants.

Table 13.1 Schools and teachers by performative pressure and culture

School categories	Teachers		Schools	
	Freq.	*Perc.*	*Freq.*	*Perc.*
High pressure and con-PBA	322	28.5	24	30.4
High pressure and pro-PBA	262	23.2	18	22.8
Low-pressure and con-PBA	249	22.0	18	22.8
Low pressure and pro-PBA	297	26.3	19	24.1
Total	1130	100	79	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.2 Schools of the qualitative stage

School	School SES	Performance category	Pressure/PBA approach
1	Low SES	Low-Medium	Low pressure, pro-PBA
2	High SES	High	Low pressure, pro-PBA
3	High SES	Medium	Low pressure, pro-PBA
4	Med-high SES	High	Low pressure, pro-PBA
5	Low SES	Insufficient	Low pressure, con-PBA
6	Med-high SES	Low-Medium	Low pressure, con-PBA
7	Med-high SES	Low-Medium	Low pressure, con-PBA
8	High SES	High	Low pressure, con-PBA
9	Med-high SES	Medium	Low pressure, con-PBA
10	Low-med SES	Low-Medium	Low pressure, con-PBA
11	Low-med SES	Low-Medium	High pressure, pro-PBA
12	Low SES	Medium	High pressure, pro-PBA
13	Low-med SES	Low-Medium	High pressure, con-PBA
14	Low-med SES	Medium	High pressure, con-PBA
15	Low-med SES	Medium	High pressure, con-PBA

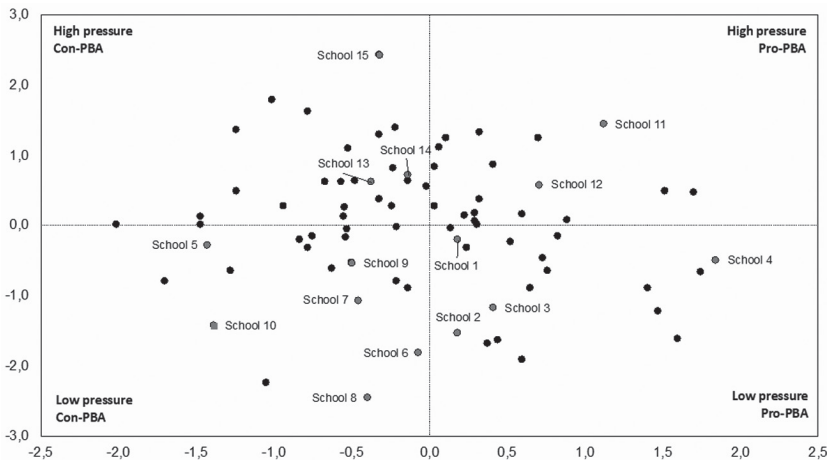Source: Reformed database. Chile

Figure 13.1 Distribution of schools according to school responses.
Source: Reformed database. Chile

Our typology of school responses was mainly defined and constructed through interview data, although administrative data and data from the survey were also used. The tables in the Appendix show more detailed information about the schools' main characteristics (namely, school ownership, socio-economic composition and performance) by quadrant but also in terms of PBA-related school

practices (with a focus on data use and teaching to the test). The interviews enabled us to reconstruct and capture the narratives, rationales and logics of action that predominate in the different groups of schools, and to build patterns of responses to PBA accordingly.

All of the interviews with principals and teachers were transcribed and ana-lyzed with QDA software. To analyze the qualitative material, we combined the use of emerging and pre-established codes for key factors, the most relevant of which are as follows: school context and culture; leadership style; actors' opinions about PBA; knowledge about the quality assurance system; the importance given to test results; data use; test preparation strategies; classroom management prac-tices; external support; and teacher autonomy.

Findings: School responses to accountability regulations

In this section, we present the most defining characteristics of our school catego-ries, with a focus on depicting the responses to PBA that were found to predomi-nate in each category. The resulting typology of school responses includes induced alignment, accommodation, fabrication, dilution and de facto opting out. Conceptually, this typology draws on previous categorizations of educa-tional organizations' responses to regulatory pressures (see Coburn, 2004; Landri, 2018; Malen, 2006).

High pressure and pro-PBA: Induced alignment

In schools with a high level of perceived pressure and a more positive approach to PBA, we found that teachers and principals proactively embrace the mandate of PBA and put data-intensive instruments at the centre of the governance sys-tem of the school. The academic requirements for these schools tend to be high. In terms of the student population, schools in this category are predominantly 'middle class': almost three-quarters of their students are distributed between the second and third SES quarters (see Table 13.A.2). Both public and private schools are represented in this category, but private subsidized schools predom-inate. Specifically, 66.7% of the schools in this category are private subsidized schools.

These schools devote significant effort to incorporating the accountability mandate into not only instructional strategies but also broader pedagogic and management approaches. They do so not necessarily because they need to improve their learning achievement data (in fact, only 5.6% of the schools in this category obtain low results), but because they are externally pressured to improve their performance and/or reputation in the reference school market. This is why we describe the predominant response in this category as *induced alignment*.

Performative pressure is inflicted by the school owner to a great extent. As the principal of one private subsidized school pointed out, the school owner pressures them 'to achieve better results' on the SIMCE test because one of the central

missions of the corporation is that its schools become 'top performing institutions'. Nonetheless, rather than being seen as stressful or frustrating, these pressures are regarded as 'necessary tensions' that trigger school change and activate internal improvement dynamics (principal, school 12).

Schools in this category tend to attach a lot of importance to SIMCE results and use them to identify learning needs and school improvement challenges. Almost 50% of the teachers in this category were found to be very positive about how much guidance the SIMCE gives them to help improve the quality of their teaching, while only 21.5% reported that test results are not used or are seldom used (see Table 13.A.5). Leadership teams and teachers use learning metrics as benchmarks and planning tools, and articulate and elaborate discourse on the importance of data-management practices.

> Look, actually, I think that they [SIMCE results] have affected my work from the perspective that they make an important point; you have to think about them. But you know that what I [get] from SIMCE is that when I see the distribution of results, I say: 'How many students are not learning?' and in reality, what drives me there is that this percentage or this number decreases. In my opinion, they are a new impulse to say: 'How do we make [that number] go down? How do we do it?' These [results] illuminate my tasks during the year, more than anything else.
>
> (Pedagogical coordinator, school 12)

In the schools where induced alignment predominates, test preparation practices are intensive, systematic and routinized. Teaching to the test is not only a remedial activity but an educational practice that permeates the educational dynamic of the entire school. Of the teachers in this category, 61.2% reported that they not only prepare their students for the test beforehand but throughout the whole year (see Table 13.A.4). 'Teaching to the test' is a common practice across different grades (beyond the SIMCE-assessed grades) and is strategically supported and reinforced by external testing services.

> We are working on the SIMCE courses with specific support. Ok? We work in the mode of the SIMCE questions, which means, let's say, … in certain ways …, preparing them (the students) to answer in a better way, ok?, in the courses that are evaluated by the SIMCE each year, which are always the 4th grade, and it varies in the 6th and 8th grades. Ok? [But it] is not only the teacher of the 4th grade; all teachers support, let's say, these reinforcements, in the collaborative work that … as I told you, characterizes us as a school.
>
> (Management team, school 11)

To sum up, schools' alignment with PBA in this category results from the coupling between an academic-oriented school ethos and an externally induced climate of pressure to improve school results. These are schools that regard learning achievement (and high academic standards) as being one of the main focuses of their educational provision.

Low pressure and pro-PBA: Easily accommodating accountability requests

Schools with a positive attitude towards PBA and which do not feel a high level of performative pressure are those that accommodate PBA regulations more readily. The schools in this category are predominantly private (68.4% are privately owned), and they enroll socially advantaged students (42.1% are in the first top SES quarter) (see Tables 13.A.1 and 13.A.2). Teachers in these schools have high expectations of their students and prepare them to access the best universities in the country. In terms of performance, 84.2% of these schools are distributed among the highest categories of achievement (see Table 13.A.3). Accountability regulations are convenient for these schools; rather than generating pressure, the regulations reinforce their educational and teaching approach. Thus, these schools easily accommodate the PBA regulations.

Order and discipline, and a culture of effort and academic rigour, are the main hallmarks of accommodating schools. These values are instilled into teachers by the school management team and, in turn, are instilled into students by teachers. These schools have a culture of continuous improvement and aim to boost their scores year after year. Nonetheless, their improvement plans can also be holistic, integrating goals and dimensions which go beyond learning achievement. Decisions about teaching strategies, materials and methods are centralized at school level. Some teachers in these schools miss the level of autonomy they had in previous placements and consider their job to be demanding and competitive. However, they also appreciate having clearly defined targets and goals, frequent meetings with school staff and regular feedback from the management team.

Test preparation is a common practice (with 55% of teachers in this category stating that it takes place throughout the year), but it is not necessarily seen as a strategy mainly focused on boosting test scores (see Table 13.A.4). Teachers in these schools realize that 'reinforcement activities' are more than just 'SIMCE simulations' (not fully focused on the SIMCE) and include, for instance, elaboration and delivery of lesson plans inspired by the most challenging SIMCE questions (teacher, school 3). They also do not feel the need to prepare for the SIMCE explicitly because doing well in the SIMCE 'should be like a natural process' if they do their job properly throughout the year (vice-principal, school 2).

Data use is highly routinized in these schools: 52% of teachers stated that SIMCE results guide all or most of their teaching, while 28% stated that SIMCE results are useful to a certain extent (see Table 13.A.5). Managers and teachers make numerous decisions at school level on the basis of performance data, not only to find room for improvement contingently but also to address more structural problems that might have been generated in previous years or in different subjects to those assessed by the SIMCE.

Accommodating schools are very positive about SIMCE data. They trust in the SIMCE's validity and believe that it provides a trustworthy representation of actual school performance. Staff in these schools feel that, if anything, the SIMCE should provide even more information and details, and they argue that they would

like more time to analyze and discuss the data, and take further advantage of this information. Overall, accommodating schools have a very elaborated discourse on data use, and they can give numerous examples of how they use data in their everyday work.

> We use all the actions recommended by the system. The SIMCE tells us how to focus the question; that is, when we ask a question at an appropriate level, when we ask too [easy] questions … there are teachers who use the tests as feedback; deliver the tests to the students […]; then the teacher works [out] the questions. This works as a pedagogical space rather than as a learning or evaluation space …
>
> (Pedagogic coordinator, school 1)

Low pressure and con-PBA: Between dilution and opting out

In the category of schools that perceive a low level of performative pressure and are openly critical about PBA, we found two distinct types of response: dilution and de facto opting out. These responses emerge in two drastically different school contexts, which is why it is difficult to characterize this category in terms of school performance, socio-economic composition and ownership. However, schools in this category share a low level of test-data use and a very low frequency of teaching to the test (with more than 50% of teachers in this category stating that they never conduct this practice) (see Tables 13.A.4–13.A.6 and 13.A.6).

Dilution

Dilution emerges in schools that feel a low level of performance pressure and do not put academic performance and metrics at the centre of their educational approach. The educational provision of these schools tends to focus on critical thinking, students' personal development and/or socio-emotional skills. Some of these schools define themselves as 'revolutionary', as in the case of school 6, whose principal is proud of having adopted a 'circular and integrative neuropsychological educational approach'. This principal made it clear that he is not averse to numerical data, but believes achievement data to be too narrow and limited to inform the most important school decisions. He has created his own data governance and assessment tools, which he considers to be more comprehensive and aligned with their pedagogical approach and beliefs.

Managers and teachers in these schools openly avoid using SIMCE data for competition purposes (see Table 13.A.6) or to assess and improve teachers' work (see Tables 13.A.4 and 13.A.6) because they believe that quality teaching cannot be developed under 'stress' and when students are put under 'high pressure' (teacher, school 7). Test simulations are not a frequent practice either. The owner and/or management teams of these schools do not ask teachers to intensify teaching to the test before implementation of the SIMCE, but some teachers nonetheless take the initiative to implement test simulations before the SIMCE as

a way to familiarize their students with the rules and procedures associated with standardized test conditions. These teachers argue that they provide test preparation out of consideration for students' wellbeing on the SIMCE day, but not to inflate the results. Accordingly, test simulations are low-intensity and mainly happen in relation to SIMCE grades and subjects.

> [A]lthough it is not something that … they demand from me, we do a couple of essays as a matter of protocol, [so] they know who Ruth [is], that she has to sit in a [certain] way, that you have to fill out an answer sheet, because it is not usual for us to use [these tests] here.
>
> (Teacher, school 8)

Overall, the schools where PBA pressures are diluted are well placed in the local education market, and their educational provision and their expectations are not mainly concerned with academic achievement. The combination of these factors counteracts performative pressures from the regulatory environment and allows them to develop educational, governance and data-management practices that they think better serve their educational vision.

De facto opting out

De facto *opting out* also emerges in schools that have low levels of perceived administrative pressure and are also critical of the accountability system. However, the logic of action and socio-material characteristics of the schools articulating this response are entirely different from what we saw in relation to policy dilution. Opting-out schools perform worse and enroll much higher rates of disadvantaged students. Rather than emphasizing alternative pedagogy, their educational approach emphasizes the importance of 'living together' and 'security'. These schools are located in disadvantaged neighborhoods where violence is a common concern among both parents and school staff. Families in these predominantly public schools do not have high academic expectations, and what they most value is the security that the school can give to their children.

> I believe that [the increase in student enrollment in our school] has to do with [our reputation] that … parents can rely on … [F]or example, they bring their children to the school with two eyes, a nose, and all his/her extremities, and at the end of the day we will deliver the same child back to them. I think that this creates confidence.
>
> (Principal, school 5)

Principals and teachers feel powerless in the face of the improvement requirements coming from the educational authorities. A central characteristic of this type of school is a low level of academic ambition, framed by the perception that given the socio-economic disadvantages of their students, there is no room to reverse poor SIMCE performance. Contrary to PBA expectations, in these

institutional contexts, the threat of school closure does not translate into higher levels of performative pressure.

These schools rarely enact test preparation activities. Management teams do not advocate teaching to the test, and if test simulations are conducted, it is because teachers have decided autonomously to do so. For instance, one teacher told us that she voluntarily took the initiative to conduct a few test simulations before the SIMCE, but mainly for the purpose of familiarizing students with how answers are marked in standardized tests.

Interviewer: Is the decision to not do SIMCE simulations yours or…?
Teacher: Yes, it's mine.
Interviewer: … or is it school policy?
Teacher: No, it was mine; it was mine with my PIE [School Integration Program, in English] partner […] I think we did a test simulation, but it was [for the purpose of] marking the answers.

(Teacher 2, school 5)

Another feature of these schools is a certain disaffection with learning metrics. School staff stated that data from standardized tests are decontextualized and misaligned with their educational focus, and that their professional judgement capacity as educators and related tools (e.g., 'class evaluations') (teacher 2, school 5) are more reliable than test data.

To conclude, de facto opting out should not be confused with overt or even covert forms of resistance. Far from being a type of conscious resistance or a policy dilution strategy, de facto opting out is a common non-reaction among schools operating in highly marginalized contexts, which feel powerless and resigned in front of unattainable improvement expectations. This response is thus characterized by indifference and passivity in the face of the external pressures generated by the quality assurance system.

High pressure and con-PBA: Fabricating better scores

Schools that experience high levels of performance pressure and are critical of PBA react to accountability regulations superficially and fragmentedly. Within this category, there are three main contextual features that stand out: a clear predominance of public schools (62.5%); low levels of educational performance (with 62.5% of schools in the low and mid-low achievement categories); and an overwhelming presence of disadvantaged students (with more than 90% of the students in these schools coming from the bottom and second quartiles) (see Tables 13.A.1–13.A.3). Despite the performance pressures faced by these schools and experience from different sources (educational authorities, school owner, etc.), they do not transform their core practices (namely their educational provision, their evaluation systems and/or their governance structures) as a response to such pressures. Instead, they adopt various practices and strategies to overcome accountability pressures but in a way that does not substantively alter their educational values and approach.

In these schools, learning achievement data are used moderately, mainly to define benchmarks and targets in core subjects and competences, but is not central to schools' evaluations of their teaching and planned educational improvement. Of the teachers in this category, 62% affirmed that SIMCE results do not provide useful guidance for improving teaching or that they do so only moderately (see Table 13.A.5).

The schools in this category are reactive to PBA, but instead of following the administrative expectations *verbatim*, they adopt partial practices to fabricate better results and, in a way, 'game' the system. They adopt many of these practices reluctantly, and are aware of the limitations and risks of doing so. To start with, fabrication schools are prone to focusing their teaching on the basic competences at the centre of the accountability system – so-called 'narrowing' of the curriculum. Nonetheless, despite the managers of these schools dedicating more teaching hours to the subjects externally assessed, with the clear intention of improving test results, they are also aware of the risks of these types of tactics and try to minimize them:

> I also have to [ensure] that this does not go to the other extreme, because in this… search to get positive scores, other subjects are also [cast] aside [like] music [and] art; then I give more literacy when I [should really have been doing] art. Or I do more math when I [should have been doing] music. I have to be … attentive that this does not happen.
>
> (Pedagogical coordinator, school 15)

Teaching to the test is, as could not be otherwise, another very frequent practice to boost test scores – with more than 50% of teachers reporting that they conduct this practice throughout the whole year, and more than 20% doing it just before delivering the SIMCE test (see Table 13.A.4). In these schools, test preparation materializes in numerous test simulations, in order to familiarize students with predictable test questions and the test format. As happens with narrowing the curriculum, the managers of these schools promote teaching to the test reluctantly and mainly in the grades covered by the SIMCE to try and minimize the risks. A common complaint, for instance, is the fact that 'instead of generating a pedagogical practice', standardized tests such as the SIMCE oblige them to engage in 'repetition of exercises to practice an evaluation style' (principal, school 13).

This is the only school category where we found that students' tracking was conducted with the explicit intention of boosting test scores, which is indicative of a fabrication response. When asked what they do to improve test scores, this principal stated:

> Well, the teachers have been very creative [a]nd … have developed several strategies. One of the strategies that has given us the best result is dividing the children into groups. For example, there are three third-grade courses. So, based on the results, we divide the children. Those who achieved the learning

objective, those who are average, and those who are low. [At certain times], the course structure is broken [into these groups] and the teacher who has greater competencies, because she has to have greater competencies, is the one that takes the low-performing students […] This is what has been giving us the best results.

(Principal, school 14)

Tracking students seems paradoxical in a school that defines itself as 'inclusive', 'integral' and 'non-academicist' (principal, school 14). However, tracking is not a constitutive characteristic of schools' educational provision or philosophy but an experimental and pragmatic reaction to performative pressure, with the sole intention of making schools conform to performance expectations. Furthermore, as the principal of school 14 emphasized, tracking is only conducted in mathematics and literacy.

Conclusions

Schools do not respond to accountability regulations uniformly. This chapter shows that PBA regulations generate a broad and varying range of school responses, which go beyond conventional classifications mainly focusing on alignment vs decoupling or high-low fidelity implementation. Based on a mixed-methods study conducted in Chile, we identified five school responses to PBA, namely, accommodation, induced alignment, dilution, fabrication and de facto opting out. Our study does not imply that these are all possible or existing responses to accountability regulations. For instance, open and covert forms of resistance to PBA – which have not been identified in this study – are to be expected in a country like Chile, where quality assurance and accountability reforms have generated important debates, controversies and even public boycotting campaigns.

Our study highlights the mediating role of subjective variables in the enactment of PBA. Although interpretation practices have been considered important in previous enactment research, our study emphasizes the mediating role of perceived pressure in terms of understanding how and to what extent schools make sense of and react to external accountability prerogatives. Theoretically speaking, our research shows that the way policy actors translate and respond to policy mandates is contingent not only to interpretation dynamics, but also to the levels of pressure that actors experience to comply with the policies in question. We have tested this idea by developing a unique heuristic approach in which school actors' perception of accountability pressures and their conception of the fairness and validity of PBA have allowed us to build school categories, as a preliminary step to identify schools' varying responses.

This study perspective revealed that the levels of perceived pressure among school actors in terms of PBA systems vary significantly, and they do so partly independently of objectively defined pressure measures enforced by the

educational authorities. The perceived pressure factor contributes to better understanding the non-linear and often 'unexpected' nature of school responses to PBA. The school responses we identified reveal that high-stakes accountability does not operate as a performativity device in all circumstances. Not all schools that authorities subject to the 'pressure cooker' experience high levels of performative pressure. Feeling powerless in the face of quality assurance expectations, being more inclined to please audiences other than educational authorities or embracing an academicist ethos are very different factors in nature, but all they help to take the pressure off schools.

We have also identified many schools where the staff experience strong performative pressure. This includes, counterintuitively, schools with satisfactory levels of performance. However, our data reveal that performative pressure is especially strong within low-performing public schools with disadvantaged student populations. Teachers and principals in these schools tend to be critical of PBA regulations, and are those who more frequently resort to instrumental practices in an attempt to fabricate better scores and escape performance pressure. The fact that fabrication responses (and also opting out) predominate within schools serving disadvantaged students challenges to a great extent the equity and educational opportunity rhetoric of many accountability reforms.

The high levels of instrumental and fragmented responses generated by accountability pressures can compromise students' learning experiences. Indeed, alternative forms of accountability (process-based and/or oriented towards rewarding meaningful change) would be more meaningful for schools in the long term and less distracting than accountability systems that put an excessive focus on performance. However, advancing these alternatives in educational systems like the Chilean one is likely to be challenging as numerous accountability instruments, agents and expectations overlap (not always formally and not harmoniously), and accountability relationships have been shaped by threats and mistrust between key stakeholders reform after reform.

Appendix

Table 13.A.1 Share of schools by performative pressure and PBA approach, and ownership

School categories	Ownership			
	Public	*Private-subs.*	*Private*	*Total*
High pressure and con-PBA	62.5	37.5	0.0	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	33.3	66.7	0.0	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	38.9	55.6	5.6	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	31.6	52.6	15.8	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.A.2 Share of schools by performative pressure and PBA approach, and socioeconomic level

School categories	SES quarters				Aggreg. SES quarters		Total
	Low	Low-med	Med-high	High	Low / low-med	Med-high / High	
High pressure and con-PBA	45.8	45.8	4.2	4.2	91.6	8.4	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	16.7	33.3	38.9	11.1	50.0	50.0	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	22.2	27.8	22.2	27.8	50.0	50.0	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	26.3	10.5	21.1	42.1	36.8	63.2	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.A.3 Share of schools by performative pressure and PBA approach, and performance levels

School categories	Performance levels				Aggreg. levels		Total
	Low	Low-med	Med-high	High	Low / low-med	Med-high / High	
High pressure and con-PBA	33.3	29.2	37.5	0.0	62.5	37.5	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	5.6	27.8	55.6	11.1	33.3	66.7	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	5.6	33.3	50.0	11.1	38.9	61.1	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	5.3	10.5	36.8	47.4	15.8	84.2	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.A.4 School categories and teaching to the test

School categories	Activities focused on preparing students for the national tests			
	Never	Month before	Whole year	Total
High pressure and con-PBA	26.81	20.65	52.54	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	25.57	13.24	61.19	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	50.23	17.67	32.09	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	29.41	15.29	55.29	100
Total	32.44	16.89	50.67	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.A.5 School categories and data use (to improve teaching quality)

School categories	National test results provide useful information and guidance to improve the quality of teaching in the school			
	Not at all / a little	*Some*	*Much / completely*	*Total*
High pressure and con-PBA	36.0	26.1	37.9	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	21.5	30.1	48.4	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	48.5	22.6	28.9	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	20.1	27.9	51.9	100
Total	31.2	26.7	42.1	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.A.6 School categories and data use (to assess teachers' work)

School categories	Uses of national test: to assess teachers' work		
	No	*Yes*	*Total*
High pressure and con-PBA	58.7	41.3	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	45.4	54.6	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	62.7	37.4	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	44.8	55.2	100
Total	52.8	47.2	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Table 13.A.7 School categories and data use (to build reputation)

School categories	Uses of national test: to build reputation		
	No	*Yes*	*Total*
High pressure and con-PBA	59.9	40.1	100
High pressure and pro-PBA	52.7	47.3	100
Low pressure and con-PBA	73.5	26.5	100
Low pressure and pro-PBA	52.9	47.1	100
Total	59.4	40.6	100

Source: Reformed database. Chile

Notes

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2 https://www.agenciaeducacion.cl/se-obtiene-la-categoria-desempeno/
3 See www.reformedproject.eu.

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