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Modernizing Schools in Mexico: The Rise of Teacher Assessment and School-based Management Policies

Jaime Echávarri

The University of Manchester
United Kingdom

&

*Cecilia Peraza*¹

UNAM
Mexico

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Abstract: In this paper we analyze the evolution of the teacher assessment policy and the origins of school-based management initiatives in the Mexican education context from the late 1980s until the last 2012 – 2013 Education Reform (RE2012–2013). Mexico joined the Global Education Reform

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Movement during the 1990s through the National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education, under which the program Teachers Career Services was created to increase teacher quality. Later, the Quality School Program was implemented in order to decentralize school management and increase school accountability. Lastly, the institutionalization of Monitoring and Evaluation in the Mexican Education System gave birth to the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education. Using a documentary analysis, we review the origins of such accountability policies in order to map out the involved stakeholders, and identify how these influenced and effected the development and implementation of last 2012-2013 Education Reform's teacher high-stakes assessments. Finally, we outline the results and consequences of such policies as they have been implemented and provide a contextual analysis of the implementation and resistance to the latest reform in some regions of Mexico².

Keywords: High-stakes assessment; Monitoring and Evaluation; Mexico; teacher assessment; School-based management; Education Reform

La modernización de las escuelas en México: El origen de las políticas de evaluación docente y la gestión basada en la escuela

Resumen: En este artículo analizamos la evolución de la política de evaluación docente en el contexto educativo mexicano, así como el origen de las iniciativas de gestión basada en la escuela, desde finales de la década de los 80s hasta la última Reforma Educativa 2012-2013. México se incorporó al Movimiento Global de la Reforma Educativa durante la década de los 90s a través del Acuerdo Nacional para la Modernización de la Educación Básica bajo el cual se creó el programa Carrera Magisterial, buscando mejorar la calidad de los maestros. Posteriormente, se implementó el Programa Escuelas de Calidad para descentralizar la gestión escolar e incrementar la transparencia en las escuelas. Finalmente, la institucionalización del Monitoreo y la Evaluación en el Sistema Educativo Mexicano dio origen al Instituto Nacional para la Evaluación de la Educación. Mediante un análisis documental, revisamos los orígenes de las citadas políticas, delineando a los actores involucrados e identificando cómo éstos han influenciado y afectado el desarrollo e implementación de la última Reforma Educativa 2012-2013, en lo que concierne a la evaluación docente. Por último, el artículo ofrece un panorama general de los resultados y consecuencias de la implementación de las políticas mencionadas y provee un análisis contextual de la implementación y boicot de la última reforma educativa en algunas regiones de México.

Palabras-clave: Evaluación de Alto Impacto; Monitoreo y Evaluación; México; Evaluación Docente; Gestión Basada en la Escuela; Reforma Educativa

A modernização das escolas no Mexico: A origem das políticas de avaliação docente e de gestão escolar

Resumo: Este artigo analisa a evolução da política de avaliação de professores e as origens das iniciativas de gestão baseados na escola no contexto educacional mexicano, desde os finais dos anos 80 até a última Reforma da Educação 2012-2013. O México se juntou ao Movimento Global pela Reforma Educacional durante os anos 90 através do Acordo Nacional para a Modernização da Educação Básica, sob a qual o programa Carrera Magisterial foi criado, tentando melhorar a qualidade dos professores. Posteriormente, o Programa Escolas de Qualidade foi implementado para descentralizar a gestão escolar e aumentar a transparência nas escolas. Finalmente, a institucionalização de Monitoria e Avaliação no Sistema Educacional Mexicano deu origem ao

² Within the article, the names of policy names and government offices will be provided in English and the acronyms will be indicated in Spanish in order to be consistent with existing research and policy literature in both languages.

Instituto Nacional de Avaliação Educacional. Através de um análise documental, revemos os origens dessas políticas, descrevendo os atores envolvidos e identificamos como eles influenciaram e afetaram o desenvolvimento e implementação do mais recente Reforma da Educação 2012-2013, como as preocupações de avaliação de professores. Finalmente, o artigo apresenta uma visão geral dos resultados e as consequências da aplicação destas políticas e oferece uma análise contextual da implementação e boicote da última reforma educacional em algumas regiões do México.

Palavras-chave: Teste de Alto Impacto; Monitorização e Avaliação; México; Avaliação Docente; Gestão Escolar; Reforma da Educação

Introduction

After the Revolution (1910-1917), Mexico's development model was based on state centered economy that has been accounted for the 'Mexican Miracle'. Hence, from 1940 to 1970, Mexico's gross domestic product grew at a steady rate of 6% (Buffie, 1990, p. 398; Cárdenas & Castañeda, 1994). By then, education policy focused on expanding access to education, especially to basic level, and simultaneously, on increasing the education levels in order to support the economic development of the country.

However, after 1980, the nature of Mexico's development model changed towards a model of economic "modernization" that essentially meant opening the country's economy towards liberalization, and regional integration. Accordingly, the state's functions were reduced and decentralized, state-owned industries and infrastructure were sold to the private sector, and market liberalization was hugely promoted (Cabrera, 2015; Cejudo 2003; Villareal, 2000). It was no different for education and simultaneously, the Mexican state began the "modernization" of the Mexican Education System (SEM).

In this paper we aim to analyze a series of education policies implemented during this modernization period as Mexico joined the Global Education Reform Movement (Hargreaves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001; Sahlberg, 2011) up to these days. Our objective is to outline the evolution of the teacher assessment policy through Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) initiatives and the origins of school-based management (SBM) policies in the Mexican education context started, with the late 1980s reforms up to the last one, enacted in 2013. Similarly, our purpose is to set out the educational and political context to understand how the assessment culture became institutionalized within the SEM through these reforms. Our contribution also seeks to provide a systematized landscape of the complex processes of education policy that introduced accountability and testing culture across the Mexican schools and upon the teachers. In doing so, we offer an articulated read of the reforms in education and the stakeholders that have been involved in the policy-making processes.

For this purpose, we conducted a document analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). We collected around 130 publicly available documents or 'documentary sources' (Mogalakwe, 2006), covering the period from 1980 to 2016, and which were relevant to teacher assessment and school based management policies in basic education in Mexico by using digital search engines (Scopus, EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and Google). At the first stage, we identified the documents concerning National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education (ANMEB), Teachers Career Service (CM), the Quality School Program (PEC), the National Institute for Education Assessment (INEE) and Education Reform 2012–2013 (RE2012–2013), and selected 90 of those. The main selection criterion was based upon the document's relevance vis-à-vis understanding the processes of teacher assessment institutionalization and of school-based management education policies in recent education policy in Mexico. In a second stage of the analysis, we classified our data

into four categories: a) Government policy documents, which included enacted laws, congress policy assessments, policy briefings, federal/national policy frameworks, and government agreements; b) NGO policy assessment documents, which included policy reports, briefings, recommendations, and communications; c) academic research, which included empirical studies and policy assessments; and d) press articles, which included news articles, feature articles and opinion pieces strictly related to the policies and their context. We selected diverse documentary evidence in order to cover several angles of the object of our research.

The third stage involved grouping the policy government articles into the following categories, a) specific policy documents that shaped/enacted the policy; b) specific policy recommendations/assessments shaping/assessing the policies; c) research/examinations that investigated the effects/outcomes of such policies; d) articles that reported about the policy reactions or its effects. Aided by common word processing and document software, (Acrobat Reader and Word) we were able to aggregate document descriptions, passages and quotes that allowed us to narrow down our analysis. Within this stage the objective was to understand the policy mechanisms and rules of operation in order to sketch a road map of the policies workings in regards to teacher assessment and SBM throughout the subsequent education reforms and policy agenda.

The final stage involved drafting our policy analysis road map, which was then informed by academic research regarding those policies. While we were not looking to triangulate, the interactions between the literature we explored, allowed us to contrast policy documents with policy recommendations and with academic research in order to provide a more complete analysis. In this sense, Berg (2004, p 270) suggests having a minimum of three pieces of evidence for each interpretation of an inquiry.

Similarly, in order for the reader to better identify the policies and historical stages that the SEM has undergone across Mexican history, we devised the following timeline seeking to provide a bigger picture and spatial representation from the context we address within the article.

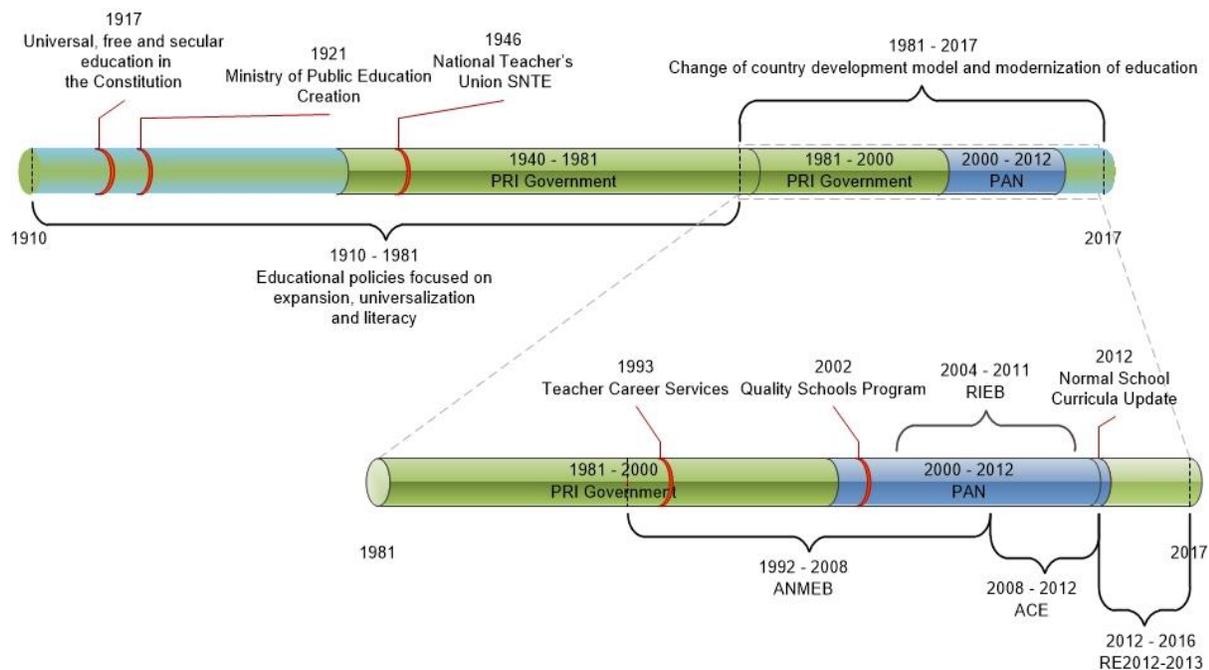


Figure 1. Mexico Policy Timeline

Consequently, our analysis across the paper is divided into five sections. In the first section, we outline the context under which Mexico joined the growing support for the global education reform movement in the 1990s. The ANMEB became the first among the set of reforms aiming to modernize the state-centered and stagnated education system. Under the ANMEB, the CM program sought to increase teacher quality and student performance. Branded as a true-merit pay system, in reality, CM constituted one of the first assessment devices to implement an evidence-based policy agenda and inform education policies in order to improve quality in education.

In the second section, we introduce the subsequent wave of reforms that took place in the 2000s dovetailing with CM in order to analyze the PEC, implemented to decentralize school management and increase school accountability by introducing five-year school grants. This section will also introduce how the basic education reform based on competencies related to the PEC and to teacher assessment.

In the third section, we analyze the institutionalization of the assessment culture within the SEM. In doing so, we review the genesis of the M&E mechanisms and its evolution from an office embedded within the SEP until the last RE2012–2013 where the INEE acquired constitutional autonomy.

Further, in the fourth section, we map out the stakeholders involved in the CM, PEC, and INEE, and thus identify how these influenced and effected the development and implementation of last RE2012–2013 teacher high-stakes assessments.

Finally, in the last section of the paper we discuss the main results and consequences of these accountability policies as they have been implemented, and we provide a contextual analysis of the implementation and the resistance to the latest reform in some regions of Mexico.

The Modernization of the Mexican Education System

The alleged exhaustion of the Import-Substitution Industrialization and centralized economy development model, due to “shift[ing] from foreign direct investment to increasingly heavy amounts of borrowing” (Gereffi & Hempel, 1996, p. 20), an overvalued exchange rate, and the international oil crisis (Villareal, 2000), led the Mexican government to declare the debt moratoria in 1982. As a consequence of the default crisis, Mexico abandoned the state-centered development model and liberalized the economy in order to access the financial rescue packages. In doing so, the defaulted Mexican state, had to adopt the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1990), which implied a series of policy recommendations and reforms enforced by the Washington financial institutions (i.e. World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and US Treasury). These measures changed the Mexican state policy-making foundations and would become one of the cornerstones of the new Mexican development model towards its modernization.

The SEM also reflected the modernizing tendencies and started to reform the basic education accordingly. The first policy framework issued by the government was the Program for Educational Modernization (PME) from 1989–1994, and it was to give birth to a series of subsequent education reforms aimed to decentralize the SEM and to update education policy in order to improve the quality in education.

The first move towards “modernization” made by the PME prioritized several areas that education policy required to address (Valle Cruz, 1999). The areas outlined by the PME policy document were: a) the decentralization of the SEM; b) increasing the quality of education; c) reducing education backwardness and illiteracy; and d) the education model integration to the recently adopted economic development model (Poder Ejecutivo Federal, 1989). Nevertheless, the

PME faced the National Union of Education Workers' (SNTE) 3 boycott and its enactment stalled (Vázquez, 1997).

The National Agreement for the Modernization of Basic Education and the Teacher Career Services

To overcome the stalemated PME, the federal and local levels of government together with the SNTE signed an agreement. Thus, in 1992 came into effect the ANMEB, which apart from its stronger decentralizing agenda sought: a) to reform the pedagogic model by updating and renovating the textbooks and curricula; b) to modernize the elementary schools by transferring the provision of initial and basic education services to the local governments and; c) to improve the education services by giving the teachers a role in transforming the education (DOF, 1992; Martínez, 2001; Zorrilla & Barba, 2008). For Latapí (2010), the ANMEB became one of the main Education Policies of State⁴ from 1992 onwards.

The ANMEB's policy aim referring to the revalorization of the teachers' role, established the National Program for Permanent Training in 1993. This turn out to be the basis of the CM, which effectively became the first attempt to establish a true merit-pay system training program. Initiated in 1993, the CM program was expected to shape a professional development career. It was structured into a five stages path (A, B, C, D and E), aiming to improve teaching quality and simultaneously allowing teachers to scale up positions within service while remaining at schools instead of being commissioned to managerial positions within the local or federal education ministries or the teacher union. At the outset of the CM program, the teachers' assessment considered the following items: a) years of experience; b) teachers' professional development and education (consisting of 'update modules coursework' and teaching degrees); c) a peer review and; d) their students' performance. Further, the subsequent amendments to the CM's assessment criteria in 1998 and 2011 would eliminate the teachers' education requirements and the professional development would include school-based management (INEE, 2015, p. 62).

While in theory the ANMEB granted teachers a role within policy through SNTE's participation in the teachers' peer review assessment item, in reality the introduction of the CM tier had evident implications for assessing the practice of teachers. M&E practices within teaching profession appeared as a policy motivation and as such CM program is recognized as the "first systematic teachers' assessment" (INEE, 2006, p.9). Hence, the CM program could be considered as an initial stage of a high-stakes teachers' assessment given that the program "[tied] teacher salary increases to student performance as well as other measures of teacher quality" (Vegas & Umansky, 2005, p. 17). Further, the subsequent amendments introduced by the Alliance for Quality in Education (ACE) agreement in 2008, were expected to dovetail with the SBM initiatives –PEC to be specific.

However, since participating in the CM was not mandatory for teachers, this led to have two tiers of group teachers: the ones within the CM path and the teachers that were just randomly taking in-service training on the basis of their personal interest. Similarly, there were differences in terms of the update modules across the country, CM Modules were facilitated by the Federal level or local level education ministry and the content of the courses was designed by the government but often outsourced to other Higher Education institutions (ITESM, 2008; SEIEM, 2014). Additionally, since the decentralization of education was one of the aims of the ANMEB, the supply and demand for

³ We refer to the SNTE as teacher union or national teacher union indistinctively.

⁴ Pablo Latapí defines as *Education Policies of State* those who are to remain or survive the subsequent government changes, and that will serve as a framework for future education sector policies (Latapí, 2010, p. 49).

training courses differed from state to state and from one region to another. Therefore, CM in-service training often had overlapping timetables, lacked consistency, and was not adequately structured to be recognized by the National System of Continuous Training for In-service Teachers (Sistema Nacional de Formación Continua y Superación Profesional de Maestros en Servicio, no date).

The Second Set of Reforms in Mexico: Relating SBM to Assessment

In 2000, after 70 years of rule, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) lost the elections and the conservative National Action Party (PAN) took office. During the first and second terms of the PAN government, –from 2000 to 2006, and from 2006 to 2012 accordingly, a series of reforms were crafted in order to give a stronger push to the quality in education policy agenda. For this purpose, the government implemented initiatives a series of policies consisting on school autonomy initiatives, a reform to the basic education curricula, an update to CM (as mentioned in the preceding section), and the creation of the INEE. Likewise, during the second term of the PAN’s mandate, a new agreement between the government and the SNTE was signed; this was the ACE, which aimed to renovate the alignment of the teacher union with the reforms promoted by the government.

Shortly after the first PAN mandate started, the INEE disclosed the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) assessments, which demonstrated Mexico’s poor international education standards⁵ (Martínez-Rizo & Silva-Guerrero, 2016). Therefore, the then new regime’s education policy framework, the National Education Program 2001–2006 (PRONAE) gave continuity to the AMNEB quest for “quality in education” as a policy motto to increase Mexican education standards. However, while the ANMEB was still in place, the 2000–2006 PAN’s government crafted a more discrete program in terms of a nationwide policy/agreement: the Social Commitment for the Quality of Education, created to increase society stakeholders participation within the education policy-making process. Nevertheless, this agreement did not materialize as it was subject to boycotts from the same teachers (Observatorio Ciudadano de la Educación, 2009). Consequently, the succeeding agreement was to depart from this experience, like in the past with, PME. Hence, as a result, during the next PAN’s presidential term, 2006–2012 the ACE was born in 2008.

The PRONAE also emphasized the use of assessments as an essential tool for continuous improvement and quality assurance of education as well as for accountability. In addition, the requirement to disclose the assessments’ outcomes was also stressed in order for these to be useful for policy decision-making (SEP, 2001). The educational policies emanated from the PRONAE underlined that education quality improvement required “to enable schools to improve their institutional capacity to teach [and] to allocate the school at the center of the management systems” (Gómez-Morín & Reimers, 2006, p. 28).

⁵ According to Gómez-Morín and Reimers, the poor results of national and international assessments have been attributed to a number of external and internal factors in schools, notably a) the fact that educational reforms tend to reach schools very slowly; b) the socioeconomic and cultural conditions in which public schools operate (as shown by lower learning outcomes in regions of extreme poverty and with high levels of marginality, and in the indigenous, rural and marginal urban groups); c) the lack of relevance of some curricula, the predominance of traditional teaching styles and a number of problems that have arisen in the management of the education system at various levels (2006, p. 31).

The Quality Schools Program (PEC)

One of the initiatives instigated in the PRONAE and introduced by the PAN government was the PEC. Identified as a SBM policy (Murnane, Willett, & Cárdenas, 2006; Reimers & Cárdenas, 2007), PEC sought to increase quality and accountability in public basic level schools by providing extra funding to selected elementary schools while at the same time adopting strategic planning tools to improve management, infrastructure and teacher development within the school (DOF, 2011).

The PEC was initially conceived to address quality school problems in highly marginalized settings (Bracho, 2008). The program's adoption was voluntary for schools and it was aimed to increase autonomy and improve schools' performance by fostering the joint collaboration of parents, teachers and school authorities. The PEC aimed as well to improve pedagogies and planning processes by transferring a small amount of resources to the school budget on a yearly basis during five years. Funding for the program came from the Mexican government, complemented with World Bank loans as part of the bank's strategy for results-based financing in education (World Bank, 2015a, 2015b). Grants were awarded for up to five years for each eligible school, and subject to an annual assessment. Federal funding was expected to be matched by states in a ratio of two (federation) to one (local). To participate in the program, schools were required to conduct a diagnose assessment and submit a strategic work and action plan.

According to the PEC's policy rules of operation, once schools were accepted in the program, these were required to prepare and submit the Strategic School Transformation Plan and the Annual Work Plan. The first plan was a strategic management-based action plan where the school and community members determined how they would improve the school within the next 5 years. The second plan was the annual-basis operationalization from the former. Additionally, once the acceptance in the PEC was granted, the school was also subject to external and internal assessments (ROPEC, 2004). Therefore, although the program was mainly expected to increase school-level autonomy, it also included a component of accountability that required reporting whether the objectives set out in the planning exercises were reached or not.

From the PEC's policy document, it is possible to elucidate that the program sought to bring central authorities in line with the needs, scenarios and terms of the schools. The objective was to improve the educational quality supported by collegiate diagnoses and recommendations produced by the principals and teachers within schools (SEP, 2009).

The Basic Level Education Reform and the PEC

The Comprehensive Reform of Basic Education⁶ (RIEB) aimed to reorganize the basic level education and it was consolidated during the second term of the PAN's mandate. The RIEB was started in 2004 with the pre-schooling curriculum update, followed by the secondary education in 2006, and it was completed from 2009 to 2011 with primary education curriculum update (Ruíz Cuellar, 2012). In addition to updating the basic education curriculum, the RIEB made secondary education compulsory (as per constitutional amendment of the article 3°). More importantly, it aimed to increase quality in education by articulating the three levels of basic education through a systematized transversal curriculum, using skills and competencies as building blocks in order to face global challenges (SEP, 2011). These competencies related directly to the OECD competencies assessment framework (cf. OECD, 2005; SEP, 2010). Similarly, the RIEB would be assessed by the INEE's National Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Schools (ENLACE) standardized tests which aimed to measure students' competencies and quality in education framework; but would also serve to assess teachers' performance (OECD, 2012, 2014).

⁶ The SEM's basic level of education integrates pre-schooling, primary and secondary education.

Correspondingly, the RIEB supported school management as one of the pillars over which the reform was to build up its success. This was expressed both in the Strategic School Management Model (SEP, 2009) and in the 2009 primary education curriculum (SEP, 2008). Thus, the PEC survived beyond the last PAN mandate and it was to continue until its last implementation during the 2014–2015 school term.

The Education Reform of 2012–2013 and the Institutionalization of Assessment

Since the alternation in power in the federal government in 2000, a growing number of academics and stakeholders pointed out that a national agreement was required as a precondition to give certainty in the federal elections, and moreover, it was essential for a political change. With the alternation in power, the negotiation system amongst the ruling elites demonstrated to be ineffective to reach fundamental policy agreements, since negotiation with the ruling party was conceived as confrontation, and as a permanent opposition when a different context of plurality and democracy was already in place in Mexico. Then in 2012, the PRI returned to power, and its government aimed to restore the old regime that was believed to be already overhauled (Zamitiz, 2016, pp. 9-11).

Preceded by the Alliance for Mexico (Pacto por Mexico), an agreement where the political stakeholders via the political parties agreed to foster a state reform agenda, the 2012–2018 government soon launched a series of 11 structural reforms. These were considered to be a second wave of neo-liberal reforms “to the satisfaction of transnational corporations and supranational organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank” (Laurell, 2015, p. 249). These structural reforms basically sought to push for a stronger deregulation in the following sectors: energy, telecommunications, treasury, fiscal, electoral, judiciary, labor, economic, and of course, education (Gobierno de la República, 2017).

Hence, enacted in 2013, the RE2012–2013 can be summarized into of four basic aspects: the creation of the Teachers Professional Service, a track career teacher system to access and advance teachers positions within the SEM; the institutionalization of an assessment policy towards the National System for Educational Evaluation and the INEE, which subsequently was constitutionally vested to conduct assessments and issue quality standards in national education; a greater autonomy for schools to introduce SBM; and the creation of the Education Management Information System (SIGED), to survey schools nationwide and serve as a platform to cede the financial autonomy over school budget, and, increase the school autonomy (Presidencia de la República, 2013, 2017).

The reform presupposed that from that point on teachers were going to be assessed and could eventually be separated from their professional activities depending on their scores. Although the teachers will not be sacked after failing the third time, they will be redeployed to other areas and tasks, or asked to join a voluntary retirement plan (LGSPD, 2013, p. 30). Similarly, the reform aimed to enforce the previously enacted (but boycotted by SNTE and CNTE) teacher licensing examination in order to access teaching positions after completing the teaching degree (Cuevas and Moreno, 2016; OECD, 2011).

The National Institute for the Evaluation of Education

Since the modernization of the SEM was initiated in the 1980s, Mexican government policy efforts were also focused on producing evidence-based policy making. For this purpose, several institutions were created within the SEM. For example, at higher education, in 1984, the National System of Researchers was created to assess Mexican researchers and higher education research

programs. Another example is the National Assessment Centre for Higher Education created in 1994 to assess higher education candidates.

Additionally, Mexico started to take part in international standardized tests in elementary education. In 1995 the country participated in the TIMSS. In 1997, came the Latin American Laboratory for Assessment of the Quality of Education, and from 2000 onwards Mexico joined the OECD's assessments, Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) and the PISA.

At the national level, SEP via the General Directorate of Evaluation (DGE), and recently through the INEE, was responsible for the Academic Achievements in Schools National Assessment (ENLACE) and the Quality and Academic Achievement Assessment, both in basic education.

Before being decentralized and granted with constitutional autonomy, the INEE origins can be traced to the SEP's embedded DGE at the end of the 1970s. Back then, assessment was initially conceived as sampling student's attainment and part of accreditation processes of open and distance education. It was not until the alternation in power in 2000 and partially due to the diffusion of international assessments outcomes, that M&E became part of the strategic policy agenda as the DGE established the National Educational Evaluation System. Further, in August 2002, the INEE was created by a presidential decree (Tamez Guerra, Knaul & Reimers, 2006, p. 15; DGE, 2002). Then, from 2002 until 2008, the INEE was a decentralized organization but still embedded within the SEP. Finally, the RE2012-2013 recognized the INEE's legal autonomy, to assess the quality, performance and outcomes of the SEM in preschool, primary, secondary and upper secondary education (INEE, 2016).

The INEE inherited from the DGE the coordination of the National Educational Evaluation System (DGE, 2002), a task force initially expected to be integrated by other government and academic institutions, and stakeholders (i.e. unions and civil society) (SEP, 2007). However, it is currently integrated by the INEE president, the INEE board of directors, members of the SEP (under-ministers) local level education ministers, and the M&E processes, standards and rules of operations of these (INEE, 2016).

It is possible to identify the genesis of the INEE between the strains of acquiring legal and organizational freedom to conduct assessments, and the SEP's entitlement to conduct analysis for the SEM. Education assessments beforehand, were a responsibility of several government institutions working under different frameworks. To exemplify these tensions Pérez-Moreno and Martínez note that between the period from 2001 to 2006, and the one from 2006 to 2012, the federal government budget allocation to the INEE increased around 24% –mainly for assessments and for disseminating their results. However, the extent of the INEE's actions was neither relevant nor linked to any government actions. Thus, the RE2012–2013 emphasized the need to increase the level of action of the INEE and the recalibration and scope of its assessments. For this purpose, the RE2012–2013 sought to give constitutional autonomy to the INEE in order to build on the State's credibility regarding its interventions in education policy (2015, p. 36-39, 45-46).

Stakeholders' Influence on Education Policy

The education reforms period covering from the 1980s up to date has demonstrated that there have been essentially two main stakeholders: the government and Teacher Unions. Although this scenario has changed with the alternation in power, policies have maintained a quality and assessment leitmotiv, where the teachers have been particularly active within its unions. Nevertheless, civil society has been the big absentee during these reforms (Grindle, 2004), despite being mentioned both in the ANMEB and in the ACE, it is just until recently that society has been

increasing its involvement and participation in education policies. In that respect, there has been a growing involvement of NGOs and think tanks. During the last 10 years, its presence within the education policy debate noticeably increased. Apart from the government, we have mainly acknowledged the incidence of three stakeholders within the reviewed policies. Within this section we introduce these and describe how they influenced the enactment of SBM and M&E policies.

The first to be noted is the NGO Mexicanos Primero Foundation, created in 2005. The Foundation's patronage convened an advisory board which included the Chairman and CEO of Televisa (the largest mass media conglomerate in Latin America), and several other high profile Mexican business executives. To chair this foundation, Claudio X. González Guajardo, a former Televisa Foundation chairman and also former member of the advisory staff from the Ministries of Labor and Agribusiness (Mexicanos Primero, 2011). Throughout its history, Mexicanos Primero has produced several working papers where the Foundation describes the state of the art of education in Mexico (i.e. 'Contra la pared: estado de la educación' (2009); 'Brechas: estado de la educación' (2010); 'Metas: estado de la educación' (2011); and 'Ahora es cuando. Metas 2012–2024' (2012)). The NGO, which also produced a film 'De Panzazo' (2012), has had a controversial role as an education stakeholder since Mexicanos Primero campaigns in favor of accountability and transparency in education, and clearly emphasizes the NGO's vocation for quality through M&E and the production of accurate datasets to inform education policies (Ornelas, 2016). Similarly, Mexicanos Primero has advocated the RE2012–2013 and has condemned teachers' unions, both the SNTE and especially the National Coordinator of Education Workers CNTE. In fact, Mexicanos Primero has created a subsidiary NGO named "Aprender Primero" and aimed to exercise legal action against SEP, SNTE and CNTE when these contravene the NGO's interests.

In this regard, the main teacher union is the SNTE. Post-revolutionary governments grouped workers and patrons within guilds, unions, and industry to maintain a "checks and balances" system within the government. These associations later became indispensable for the ruling party (PRI) to remain in office. The PRI would control them by granting them positions within the government (known as "cuotas"). The SNTE was one of these indispensable associations and became the largest union in Latin America, grouping 1.5 million affiliated teachers. During the brinks of alternation in power, the lifelong secretary of the SNTE, Elba Esther Gordillo, "la maestra", was expelled from the PRI prior to the 2000 elections but managed to create a new political party, the New Alliance Party (PANAL) which has been used as a political leverage, allowing SNTE to maintain control of educational policies. This is how the SNTE was able to bypass the education reforms even after the alternation in power. However, in 2013, the SNTE, represented an obstacle to current RE2012-2013. A day after President Peña Nieto presented his reform on February 2013, Gordillo was arrested and charged with embezzling nearly 95 million USD in union funds. With this move, a major political player was ousted after 23 years of leading SNTE thus, warranting with this practically no opposition from the teacher union to the new reform.

The CNTE is another important stakeholder, a dissident faction from SNTE originated in 1979–1980; it clusters various sections of the SNTE mostly in the states of Guerrero, Michoacán, Distrito Federal, Puebla and Oaxaca, but has also some presence in other states where SNTE local sections dominate. Factions that integrate the CNTE have tried to recover the teacher union's significance and democracy within SNTE (Murillo, 1999). However, the CNTE is often regarded as conflictive and subversive, while the SNTE is mostly aligned to the ruling party, and it supports the Federal Government policies, its requirements and assessments. Conversely, the CNTE identifies as a union that fights against neo-liberal policies and in favor of free public and non-religious education. Therefore, the CNTE does not participate in standardized national assessments and has

opposed to the modernization and quality in education agenda and the RE2012–2013, striking ever since this was enacted.

Finally, global governance institutions have gained an important space as stakeholders in Mexican education system. After the 1980s the production and creation of curricula started to be heavily influenced by the new governance system imposed by the Washington Consensus. These influences were evident in recommendations made to make changes to national curricula. As the former Under-ministry of Education from 1992 to 1993, Gilberto Guevara Niebla explained that with the curriculum content modernization, the idea was “to go back to basics as was also proposed by the World Bank,” which meant the abandonment of the interdisciplinary approach in education and a return to the idea of subjects instead (Camacho Sandoval, 2001, p. 6). Similarly, as we already noted, the World Bank has invested in results-based financing programs in education, which has evident policy implications. Further, Mexico’s ascension to the OECD in 1994 and the WTO in 1995 implied to adopt global governance principles. One outcome of these engagements was Mexico’s contribution towards the data aggregation. Mexico’s production of databases yielded via assessments and measurements marked the country’s contribution towards a unified global vision of education theory and policy information (Luna, Murillo & Schrank, 2014).

It is important to note that Mexico has signed several agreements with the OECD, and education is amongst the more important topics these agreements cover since the country has participated all the PISA assessments. More recently, Cuevas and Moreno (2016), also explore OCED’s emphasis in terms of teacher assessment in Mexico via these agreements and policy recommendations. The logic, fostered by these international institutions, promotes an emphasis on leveling the education globally through top-down driven policy approaches. Another example of this is the recently and yet unfinished RE2012–2013’s pedagogic model which has been heavily criticized for even plagiarizing an OECD document (cf. Lloyd, 2016).

Analysis of the Implemented Education Reforms

With the subsequent education reforms that go from 1980 to 2011, educational policies in Mexico steered into two avenues. First, the decentralization of education entitled local governments to manage their resources and contractual relations with the teachers until 2012 (from 2013 on, the current reform works backwards –we explain why within further down this section). Secondly, the federal level maintained the tutelage over policy formulation and curricula creation. The federal education reforms and the education policies emanated from these, aimed to achieve better quality in education and improve its efficiency, essentially, to increase completion rates. However, the outcomes of these reforms and policies were quite mixed. While in theory these federal reforms intended to “pass the baton” down to the local level governments in order to cede autonomy over education policy making, these reforms became a sort of political alliances between the local and the federal governments, and the SNTE (Loyo, 2010; Zorrilla, 2002; Zorrilla & Barba, 2008).

Although it was expected that these reforms would undermine the political power of the unionized teachers, in practice, it was the same unionization that maintained the status quo between the teachers and the state by increasing the union bargaining power with the then disaggregated federal education administration. Back then, the SNTE could negotiate salaries directly with each governor at the local level, since the federal government was transferring the decentralized funds contributions. In fact, these contributions totaled roughly 27% of the federal budget allocation to the states (Villanueva Sánchez, 2010, p. 235) which then make the case for the strengthened SNTE.

Simultaneously, the modernization of the Mexican Education System took place “coinciding with the Reagan and Thatcher dominant trends of that time” (Martinez, 2001, p. 41), in this sense,

education policy rhetoric did start to change by adopting New Public Management practices as this happened simultaneously in other sectors of the Mexican public administration and economy (Cejudo, 2003, 2008, Kettl, 2005; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2003).

New Public Management influences were evident in the cases of the CM and the PEC. However, the outcomes these two programs have not shown any substantial impact in terms of advancing SEM's position within the OECDs assessments. In the case of the CM program, Vegas and Umansky (2005) study has found no positive association between students' attainment and the teachers' participation in the program. Likewise, López-Acevedo (2002), apart from sharing the same conclusions, also found that socioeconomic factors are a stronger determinant of student attainment since students at participating schools obtained better scores depending on their socioeconomic condition. Similarly, Santibañez and Martínez (2010) note that the participation in CM decreased and that the program had not demonstrated any important benefits over quality in education.

Along these lines, concerning teacher policy assessment, Diaz Barriga (2009) suggests that policy programs oriented to improve teachers' quality appear to be dominated by a subsequent increase in the levels of degrees acquired; however, it is still unclear how this affects or ameliorates their score. Yet the new RE2012–2013 pushes an even stronger teacher assessment policy.

With regards to the PEC, for Murnane et al. the goal of improving student attainment levels was sufficiently clear. No significant improvements were identified in educational outcomes for students, although it was noticed that the PEC was positively associated with a reduction on the students' dropout rate by nearly 6%. Similarly, greater participation and leadership was observed across the participating schools. In addition, as more schools signed in for PEC, the financial resources decreased causing each time, to allocate less budget to the schools (2006, p. 490).

Similarly, Díaz Barriga states that although the PEC is based on assessment evidence and is described as a bottom-up policy, "it collides with the state education control at the federal level", thus, it appears to be difficult to clearly identify the aims towards quality measurement within PEC. Besides, given the variegated nature of the SEM (i.e. geographically, socioeconomically, culturally), it is impossible to "correlate the school work carried out after a certain school joined the PEC due to dropout rates, academic failure and non-correspondence between age group and school level" (2009, p. 22). In any case, it is very difficult to conclude whether or not PEC has contributed positively to the improvement of the students' performance.

With regards to the RE2012–2013, this also established an assessment policy where a rationale of homogeneous assessment is applied in a very heterogeneous educational system; and finally, it opened the door for private investment in the public system as it increased school autonomy. In this sense, dissident teachers were concerned that SBM autonomy were to become an ideal gap to insert privatization schemes and an alibi to charge parents with the school improvements where these were before a state responsibility; this was to their eyes, limiting the education gratuity (Pérez-Arce, 2016, p. 223).

Similarly, Pérez-Arce considers the RE2012–2013 and its subordinate statutes and regulations, on the one hand sparked teacher protests and demonstrations, and on the other, never-ending government advertising campaigns about the benefits of the reform to the SEM and the Mexican people. To his view, one of the biggest mistakes of the reform, was the lack of participation of the teachers in the reform and policy formulation processes (2016, p. 215, 219).

High-Stakes Assessments and the RE2012–2013

Magaña and Parga (2015, p. 125) consider the RE2012–2013 is a hybrid policy given its labor and educative traits. In fact, in words of the former 2012–2015 Ministry of Education, Emilio

Chuayffett Chemor “it is partially about labor but deeply about education” (Aristegui Noticias, 2013). Hence, for Aboites, “the amendments on the 3rd article of the Constitution imply a change in labor contractual conditions” (2013, p. 31).

However, the ‘Agreement for the Universal Assessment of Teachers and Directors in Service at Basic Education’ was signed a year before the RE2012–2013 took place, still under the ACE. This meant that the assessment was then agreed by both the SNTE and the federal government. This agreement became the basis of the Teachers Professional Service, recovering the idea of advancing the teachers’ position according to their assessment (Magaña & Parga, 2015, p. 134), but also establishing that teachers needed to be assessed immediately after graduating from normal schools in order to become group teachers. In this sense, instead of prioritizing the reform efforts towards pre-service teacher training, the RE2012–2013 focuses on assessing teachers with dissimilar training credentials. Hence, the response to the teachers to the RE2012–2013 high-stakes assessments has been one of resistance, especially from the CNTE. In 2013 after the protests erupted, the RE2012–2013 education reform was halted by the CNTE teachers, precisely because the reform’s disregard of teachers within the formulation of the assessment framework.

During the spring of 2016, when the SEP tried to give another push and enforce the deadlocked reform’s assessments, the CNTE’s opposition built momentum among the teachers of Guerrero, Michoacán, Chiapas, Mexico City and Oaxaca mainly, but eventually also teachers from northern states joined the strikes (Bacon, 2016). Perceived as a political maneuver, the federal government then arrested the CNTE leader and charged him with fraud (Hernández Navarro, 2016). At the same time, Federal Police charged teachers in a demonstration in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca and eleven people died in the violent outburst (Moser, 2016) causing the Ministry of Interior’s (SEGOB) intervention to deescalate the conflict. As the school year began in early September, the CNTE leader was released in August 2016 (Matías, 2016), and teachers returned to their schools but the reform implementation stalled. While, the rhetoric of the SEP political discourse still emphasizes it, in practice the reform’s implementation is still much in doubt as the assessment’s compliance was declared ‘voluntary’ by the INEE for one more year (Hernández, 2016).

Overall, the RE2012–2013, ties up high-stakes teacher assessments with SBM and M&E platform through the INEE. The articulation of these policies towards the RE2012–2013 also, rises them at a constitutional level when in the past were sector policies emanated from a policy framework. Thus, these reforms reinforce the marked alignment of the INEE’s assessment culture with the OECD as evidenced by the same agency (OECD, 2014, p. 11). Similarly, as we have reviewed, CM was tied to student attainment assessments as well as the RE2012–2013 high-stakes teacher assessments relate now to student attainment. Along these lines, Sellar and Lingard point out the OECD’s new ‘holy grail’ lies in assimilating students and teachers’ assessments by combining TALIS with PISA in order to increase the explanatory power of M&E mechanisms (2013a, p. 199).

Furthermore, the institutionalization of the assessment as core an education policy, is evidenced by the historical development of the same INEE: born within the ministry of education, later separated from it and finally almost legally equalized to the ministry as its autonomy was constitutionally granted. However, the INEE’s integration raises question about the centralization of education. While in the period from 1989 to 2012 the decentralization processes tried to subsequently disaggregate the education system –or at least initiated it, the RE2012–2013, seem to actually work backwards. For example, in financial and fiscal terms, the ANMEB represented a change in the federal budget allocation rules. New budgetary allocations and funds (such as the Contributions Fund for Basic and Normal Education and the Multiple Contributions Fund) were required in order to yield the federal budget to the local level of government in order for these to “pick up the baton” and take over the teachers’ payroll locally (CEFP, 2007).

On the contrary, with the RE2012–2013 the education's budgetary allocations were now set to become the responsibility and jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance and the state (local) allocations were abolished (CEFP, 2014). With this, the national teacher payroll was centralized again and became part of the SIGED; as a consequence, the teachers' union bargaining power with the local level was de facto eliminated (at least the SNTE's one). Therefore, once the government had recovered SNTE's control, and the teachers' payroll, the SEP would maintain the education policy tutorship, and prevent any possible boycott of the RE2012–2013 from the teachers as they were now in theory not able to strike without being summoned.

Another effect from the RE2012-2013 has been the corruption claims against SEP and SNTE and CNTE unions. Regularly instigated by think-tanks, and frequently biased towards the CNTE, these claims have been seconded by the media and have also contributed to demean and relegate the opposition to the top-down driven reforms and the demands for teacher participation in the policy-making process. Similarly, these “led claims” (Ornelas, 2016, p. 103) have served as a baseline for the think tanks' growing rhetoric demand for accountability and transparency in education, given the disastrous results obtained in international education assessments. By the same token this rhetoric has also been utilized to advertise among the society and the public opinion the need for the RE2012–2013 implementation in order to increase quality in education. To this extent, the Minister of Education recently expressed that “PISA 2015 results evidenced the need for advance in the implementation of the RE2012–2013” (El Financiero, 2016). Verger and Curran (2014) and Kamens (2013) also note this “advertising” strategy has been used to push the reforms. In fact, these was also observed in 2001 when in order to foster the INEE's development and the need to nurture M&E through the PRONAE, the then PAN government, spread the first PISA results in Mexico after a long time of assessment silence (Martínez-Rizo & Silva-Guerrero, 2016). However, Díaz Barriga (2009) recognizes that after over ten years of assessments in Mexico, the production of scores has had no significant outcome use for policy-making as these did not uncover exactly where the education deficiencies are allocated; neither did these scores describe where the pedagogical emphasis should be made to improve education policy.

Conversely, with the RE2012–2013, Magaña and Parga state that “within this context, it is obvious that the teachers will be more professionalized as they acquire specific pedagogic education, thus, contributing to the credentialization of the profession” (2015, p. 142). Once the Teachers Professional Service was included in the RE2012–2013, this policy redefined the standards of good professional practices, and with good practices epistemic communities and economic interests start to emerge (Sellar & Lingard, 2013b). Along those lines, Díaz Barriga (2009), Ball (2012) and Gunter, Hall and Mills (2015), also note out that under the trend of the assessment culture, a market driven rationale for education policy appears, where advisors, consultants, assessments experts and other forms of edu-businesses thrive and blossom through all education levels. One example of this is private universities increasing provision of in-service training and reforms updates, to the SEP (cr. ITESM 2016; SEP, 2016).

Similarly, for educational publishing houses it is becoming a common practice to approach schools to sell specialized training ‘guidebooks’ or ‘studying kits’ (with multimedia material included) for the standardized tests’ PISA and ENLACE (Echávarri, 2016, p. 167). However, not just the legal edu-business has profited with standardized tests. While empirical research has documented teachers –sometimes using unorthodox methods (i.e. obtaining special guidebooks leaked within the SEP) to train for the tests to improve school scores and help public schools to perform better than private ones (Peraza, 2015, p. 14), the CNTE has also been outspoken and has denounced the illegal sell of the ENLACE exams in several parts of the country, before the test was even applied to students. The dissident union accused the SNTE and the SEP of setting up a lucrative business where both

teachers and the ministry benefit from better student scores, the former advancing in CM levels and the latter by advancing quality in education (Reforma, 2013). In this sense, corruption has been acknowledged by Eduardo Backhoff, member of the INEE's board of directors, as a reason for the discontinuation of ENLACE in 2014 (although it was later substituted by another assessment) (Milenio, 2014).

Likewise, the growing importance of standardized assessments in basic education and the weight of these over school status and reputation often leads group teachers to devote more time to prepare the students for the tests than to develop and cover the curricula both in public and private schools (Echávarri, 2016; Peraza, 2015), and has even led to local level "enlace-like" tests (Martínez Rizo & Blanco, 2010, p. 116). Teaching to test then becomes a common practice, which has even been reported by the OECD (2012, 2014) as one of the prevalent problems related to the ENLACE education assessment. These, are part of the side effects or "opportunistic behaviors" that a high-stakes and standardized testing culture trigger in education (Jones, Jones & Hargrove, 2003; Stetcher, 2002; Verger & Parcerisa, 2017). Similarly, evidence suggesting that these dominating approaches have undermined civil society and increased the cost of education for the parents, has also been pointed out by Poppema (2012) and Edwards (2016), who conclude that in the case of El Salvador, similar approaches had informed the implementation of policies like EDUCO, which aimed to increase local school accountability by introducing SBM models. Instead, these have implanted a neo-liberal logic within a previously truly community-based popular education, and had rendered the cost of infrastructure to parents.

Finally, as the RE2012–2013 progresses, this not only sees the participation of the private sector in education via the so-called edu-business, think tanks, or international governance institutions. As of December 2015, and September 2016 the SEP, through the federal government, issued bonds to raise capital for infrastructure investment in education. This now opened the door to the financial sector participation in education. As part of the RE2012–2013, these debt instruments were placed at the Mexican Stock Exchange, in order to raise 2,500 million USD and finance infrastructure investment in basic education (El Economista, 2015, 2016). Academics and consultants have agreed on the lack of clarity in this policy's rules of operation (Orozco, 2015a) which has already been financially intermediated by global financial institutions such as BBVA Bancomer and Bank of America-Merrill Lynch (Orozco, 2015b).

Concluding Remarks

After 30 years of educational reforms that have sought to modernize, systematize and improve the SEM. However, paradoxically, these reforms have evolved in parallel to the constant stagnation of public education. Furthermore, while these reforms have stressed M&E and accountability as an underscoring element to increase the quality in education, the SEM and the reforms this has gone through seem to neglect other essential elements related to students' attainment. For example, UNICEF, has reported that stunting is prevalent in 13.2% of Mexican children (UNICEF, 2016). Similarly, the 2012 Health and Nutrition National Survey reported that 10% of the childhood in primary school age, suffer from anemia (Gutiérrez et al., 2012). While these issues might constitute a problem of public health they relate to student attainment and learning; in fact, the OECD child well-being index considers some of these aspects, and accordingly, rates Mexico far below from the rest of the OECD members only above Turkey. In this same respect, the OECD's report 'Doing Better for Children' highlights that "Mexico has the highest rate of children lacking key possessions important for education, with more than one in 10 children being deprived

of study tools like a computer and internet connection, a desk or quiet place to study, or textbooks” (OECD, 2009).

Similarly, the Inter-American Development Bank report on School Infrastructure and Learning in Latin American Elementary Education highlights that in Mexico only one third of public schools have an ICT laboratory; less than 10% of the schools have a science lab; and more than 70% of the schools in Mexico have lack of proper toilets (Duarte, Gargiulo & Moreno, 2011). Likewise, the INEE reports that just in pre-schooling, more than 30% of the school classrooms have infrastructure deficiencies (i.e. lacks whiteboards, chairs, etc.) and more than 10% lacks electricity with this numbers increasing in indigenous schools (INEE, 2010). Nevertheless, teachers are commonly blamed for their reluctance to be assessed and to implement a reform that has not seen their participation in the formulation stages of this. Consequently, as the failures of the implemented reforms in the SEM are reported, teachers are held accountable. We believe the implications of these salient issues, namely infrastructure and health deficiencies, should also be weighted in terms of the implications these issues have vis-à-vis the reform, since up to date there is not enough research about how these variables affect the overall RE2012-2103 implementation.

In addition, the RE2012–2013 repeats the mistakes of the previous reforms, consistently denying the effective participation of teachers and the imposition of education models that do not respond to the real needs of a culturally diverse nation and a socioeconomically variegated country. The punitive assessment of the teachers that also “bears a striking resemblance to the high-stakes testing inaugurated by No Child Left Behind in the United States” (Levinson, 2014) blames and backstab the teachers the PRI and PAN have used to support their government terms in office through the SNTE. It should be acknowledged that the substitution of the SNTE leader during the outset of the RE2012–2013 takes place under a similar context as with ANMEB implementation and Gordillo’s ascension to the leadership of the teacher union (cf. Grindle, 2004). As Alvarez, Garcia-Moreno, and Patrinos (2007) acknowledge, teacher unions are important to support changes in education policies (i.e. reforms), however, in Mexico, unions have been constantly used for political motivations, beyond educational ones, thus, eroding the teachers’ participatory spaces within policy. Moreover, the reform sentences teachers before giving them the benefit of the doubt. Nonetheless, the latest reform was even more concerned with teachers’ standardized assessments.

One avenue for future research that derives from our research points out at the existing gap between policy makers and teachers. Teachers have extensive and in depth ‘field knowledge’ that tends to be left aside. In this sense looking effective participatory models of policy making in education (cf. Carr & Kemmis, 1986), beyond politicians’ rhetoric, offer another avenue that can both respond to the need to improve quality in education, as well as the teachers’ knowledge and adequate in-service training requirements. Instead, the RE2012-2013 seems to privilege a teachers’ deficit by increasing their laying off to the detriment of labor and professional rights instead of an ad hoc inclusive and participatory formulated in-service teacher education. Although the Supreme Court has declared the Teachers Professional Service General Law as constitutional in 2015, initially some academics like Constitutional Law Professor Burgoa, questioned the violation of the constitutional principle of protection against the retroactive application of the law for those teachers that were already in service (García, 2012). As for those teachers that have not yet obtained a permanent position, the INEE has noted the lack of observance of the Teachers Professional Service General Law with some teachers even after successfully passing the assessments (i.e. teachers have not been assigned a permanent position), situation that contributes to increase teachers precarious work conditions.

In our view, the RE2012–2013 and its predecessors juxtaposed both the assessment and the pedagogic model based upon competencies. The latter supposedly aimed to detach from the

traditional model of education that privileged repetition and memorization for both students and student teachers. However, as we have noted in this article, these influences have continued as the pedagogic model based on competencies was introduced in education policies to match the same competencies rhetoric proposed by international development agencies. While these reforms allegedly distance from this old model, the M&E actually supports it by enforcing standardized tests that actually make use of practices such as the specialization in teaching for tests or better said “training for testing” seem to be setting the school and classroom goals. With this article we also aim to set up a baseline for further in-depth research with regards to the effects of accountability and testing cultures across the schools in Mexico and especially with regards to the effects in teachers and their daily practices. It is essential, in our view, to elucidate the implications of enacting top-down driven policies across a diverse education sector, especially in terms of the re-contextualization processes of these policies at the school level.

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About the Authors

Jaime Echávarri

The University of Manchester

jaime.echavarri@manchester.ac.uk

Jaime Echávarri, Ph.D., is a Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Environment, Education and Development at the University of Manchester. His research looks at the intersections of education, ICTs and development policies vis-à-vis the emergence of global education/digital governance with a particular interest in critical approaches to development.

Cecilia Peraza

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)

cecilia.peraza@politicas.unam.mx

Cecilia Peraza is a Lecturer in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the UNAM. Her research focuses in education for global citizenship, values in education and education for peace, with an emphasis in comparative education policy analysis in the cases of Spain and Mexico. Currently, she coordinates the research project “Autonomy and Accountability in the Mexican Education Reform”, within the PAPIIT research framework at the UNAM.

About the Guest Editors

Jessica Holloway

Deakin University

Jessica.holloway@deakin.edu.au

Jessica Holloway, Ph.D., is a research fellow at the Centre in Research for Educational Impact (REDI) at Deakin University. Her research draws on post-structural theory to understand contemporary modes of accountability and its production of new teacher and leader subjectivities.

Tore Bernt Sørensen

University of Bristol

t.b.sorensen@bristol.ac.uk

Tore Bernt Sørensen completed his doctorate at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, UK, in 2017 with the dissertation “*Work In Progress: The Political Construction Of The OECD Programme Teaching And Learning International Survey*”. Tore’s research centers on comparative studies of education governance in a global context. Tore has a background as teacher and teacher trainer in Denmark. Before starting his doctorate, he worked in the Analysis and Studies Unit of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture.

Antoni Verger

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Antoni.verger@uab.cat

Antoni Verger is associate professor at the Department of Sociology of the UAB. A former post-doctoral fellow at the University of Amsterdam, Antoni’s research analyses the relationship between global governance institutions and education policy, with a focus on the study of public-private partnerships and accountability policies in education. Currently, he is coordinating the research project REFORMED - *Reforming Schools Globally: A Multiscalar Analysis of Autonomy and Accountability Policies in the Education Sector* (ERC StG, 2016–2021).

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