



Who expects to become a teacher? The role of educational accountability policies in international perspective

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Accountability is negatively associated with teaching career expectations.
- Accountability discourages primarily high-achieving students to pursue teaching careers.
- Teacher salary levels are positively associated with teaching career expectations.
- Low-achieving students are more sensitive to salaries than high-achieving students.

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ABSTRACT

In this study, I examine between-country differences in students' expectations of becoming teachers. I use data from 365,298 students from 50 countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015. The results reveal that high-achieving students in countries that implement test-based educational accountability policies are less likely to expect to work as teachers than students in systems that do not use such policies. This suggests that test-based accountability policies may discourage highly skilled candidates from entering the teaching profession and these policies may act as barriers to attracting high-quality teacher candidates.

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1. Introduction

Several countries around the globe have begun implementing test-based accountability policies to improve teacher quality as well as student performance. A recent report showed that on average across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)¹ countries, 50% of 15-year-old students are in schools whose principal reported that standardized student tests are used to make judgements about teacher effectiveness (OECD, 2013). Moreover, 30% of 15-year-old students are in schools

whose principal reported that these teacher evaluations lead directly to a financial bonus or other financial benefits, and 27% of students are in schools where these evaluations lead directly to a change in salary (OECD, 2013).

With the rise of test-based accountability policies, researchers have focused on the effects of these policies on in-service teachers' work lives and retention (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008; Ryan et al., 2017; Von der Embse, Pendergast, Segool, Saeki, & Ryan, 2016). While there are many reasons to believe that accountability policies could affect who enters the teaching profession, the research on the effects of accountability on teacher recruitment is relatively sparse. With insufficient monetary rewards in the teaching profession compared to other professions, accountability policies may cause the profession to lose much of its ability to attract high-achieving and motivated candidates because these students are more likely to have high-paying job options.

I attempt to fill this void in the literature by examining the association between teaching career expectations of students and

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¹ On December 14, 1960, 20 countries originally signed the Convention on the OECD. Since then, 15 additional countries have become members of the OECD. OECD member countries include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

test-based accountability policies. This would allow us to answer whether accountability policies have an impact on who enters teaching, since a student's career aspiration (i.e., a student wants to become a teacher) is an important predictor of entry into teacher training programs and the teaching profession (OECD, 2018). I also assess if the association between test-based accountability and students' teaching career expectations vary across students' reading and mathematics performance levels because teachers' literacy and mathematics skills are strongly related to student outcomes (Hanushek, Piopiunik, & Wiederhold, 2014; Meroni, Vera-Toscano, & Costa, 2015). Given the policy discourse on the importance of ensuring that teachers come from the top tertile of the performance distribution (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; Barber & Mourshed, 2007), I examine if the association between accountability and teaching career expectations vary by performance tertiles in reading and mathematics. This would allow us to answer whether top-tertile students in reading and mathematics performance are more or less likely to expect to work as teachers in countries with test-based accountability policies. I expand on research objectives below, after an overview of previous research that investigates the effect of test-based accountability on the teaching profession, followed by the implications of findings for teacher recruitment and the teaching profession.

2. Review of the literature

Several researchers have investigated the reasons why students enter into teacher education programs and choose teaching as a career (for example, Aksu, Demir, Daloglu, Yildirim, & Kiraz, 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2012). The most commonly cited reasons include: intrinsic factors, such as a personal interest in the subject area; extrinsic motives, such as job security and money; and altruistic factors, such as the desire to make a social contribution (Aksu et al., 2010; Richardson & Watt, 2006; Watt & Richardson, 2012). To gain a deeper and more comprehensive picture of the motivational pathway to career choices, Richardson and Watt (2010) assert that it is important to extend the focus of research to the effect of critical contextual factors (such as salary and different workplace environments across cultural and country settings) on a student's career choice.

There are only a few empirical studies in which the effect of critical contextual factors on students' career choice in teaching was investigated. When such studies were conducted, the focus was primarily on teacher salaries. Some evidence suggests that teachers' low salaries in comparison with other professions contribute to academically talented students, students from minority backgrounds, and males pursuing more lucrative and prestigious careers than teaching (Cunningham & Hargreaves, 2007; Donlevy, Meierkord, & Rajania, 2016; Park & Byun, 2015).

More importantly, little is known about whether or not the primary motivators driving teaching career choices apply among high- and low-achieving students. This is an important question in order to understand how education systems might potentially attract high-achieving candidates to the teaching profession and thus improve teachers' cognitive skills. Using data from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006, Han, Borgonovi, and Guerriero (2018) find that while teacher salaries can promote more 15-year-olds overall to expect a career in teaching, they do so predominantly among students with low ability in mathematics.

2.1. The effect of test-based accountability on the teaching profession

Over the past three decades, several countries have made

dramatic changes in the way they measure and evaluate school and teacher effectiveness. For example, in the United States, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 ushered in an unprecedented era of accountability wherein standardized test scores became a national yardstick for evaluating school effectiveness, classroom instruction, and teacher effectiveness. England passed the Education Reform Act of 1988, which resulted in a nationalized curriculum, national assessments, national inspection for schools, and the ranking and comparison of schools based on students' test performance (Rustique-Forrester, 2005). In other countries, such as New Zealand and Australia, schools face very similar accountability pressures (Crooks, 2011).

In countries where test-based accountability is introduced, there is wide variation in whether the reforms are national or regional, the type of test-based accountability (e.g., whether it is the school or teacher or both that are censured or rewarded based on student test scores), and whether the school scores are made available to the public. For example, educational policymakers in the United States view the teacher as the critical lever of educational improvement, applying the principles of accountability to individual teachers (Kelly, 2011). Each school's overall score is then made publicly available online (Education Commission of the States, 2014). In Latin America, scores are publicly reported in Brazil, Chile, Columbia, and Mexico (in some regions), and most governments record school-level reports for internal purposes (Figlo & Loeb, 2011; Vegas & Petrow, 2008).

In other countries, such as the United Kingdom, there is a clear move away from test-based outcomes as the sole means of measuring students' progress and achievement (Gardner, Harlen, Hayward, Stobart, & Montgomery, 2010). In addition, there is evidence that the implementation of test-based accountability varies across regions within countries such as Scotland (Hayward, 2015) and Australia (Stanley, MacCann, Gardner, Reynolds, & Wild, 2009).²

With rise of test-based accountability policies, there is also increased interest in test-based accountability, mainly in the United States and England, and especially on how accountability pressures influence teachers' work lives and their decisions to leave or stay in the profession. It has been shown that test-based accountability policies cause teachers to not only leave one school for another, but also to leave the profession altogether (Figlo & Loeb, 2011; Ryan et al., 2017) because these policies increase teacher stress and lower job satisfaction (Ryan et al., 2017; Von der Embse et al., 2016). Flores and Clark (2003), in their US-based qualitative study, noted that both teacher candidates and teachers consider leaving the profession or avoid entering the profession in the first place, due to the excessive pressure from test-based accountability policies.

To assess if accountability policies can improve the overall quality of the teacher workforce, it is important to investigate the varying effect of accountability policies across the skill distribution of teachers. For example, if these policies are more likely to make less effective teachers leave the profession, rather than more effective teachers, then accountability policies can improve teacher quality. There is evidence that the teachers who leave the

² In Australia, for example, the Victorian system in Australia provides performance reports on every government school that includes students' A-E performance as well as the annual National Assessment Program in Literacy and Numeracy performance and other indicators of school climate and school satisfaction (Santiago, Donaldson, Herman, & Shewbridge, 2011). The school's A-E summary scores are simply an aggregation of the individual student report card grades. In Queensland, the Queensland Comparable Assessment Tasks (QCATs) are administered to provide teachers and parents with information on student learning. The QCATs are seen as relatively low stakes because they are not used for measuring teacher or school effectiveness (Stanley et al., 2009).

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