

Marketisation, managerialism and high-stake testing

A tale teachers' views on national assessments in South Africa

Sybert Mutereko

*School of Management Information Technology and Governance,
University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa*

Abstract

Purpose – Using a South African district of education as a case study, the purpose of this paper is to explore how high-stake assessments informed by marketisation and managerialism have been embedded in the South African education system.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper draws on data that were collected through a mixed method approach in the secondary schools of the uMgungundlovu District, which is in Kwazulu-Natal province (KZN) in the eastern part of South Africa. This paper emerged from multiple sources of data, that is, from documents, interviews, questionnaires, and observation as well as secondary sources.

Findings – The paper demonstrates how the pincer movement of markets and managerialism have used high-stake testing as a mechanism of performativity. It illustrates how test scores are published in newspapers to provide consumers with information that is needed for full participation in the marketised education system.

Practical implications – The insights from this paper have profound implications for school managers and policy makers. While high-stake tests are logically consistent and theoretically defensible, overdependence on them portends the replacement of traditional values of schools by the market value of the education.

Originality/value – The study contributes profound insights into how the high-stake testing serves the purpose of social control and subjugation mechanisms for students, schools, and teachers by the state and the invisible arm of the markets. The problem with the use of high-stakes testing as performativity mechanisms is not just that they hinder learning and teaching, but it changes the work of schools and teachers who are at the chalkface of education system.

Keywords Managerialism, Assessments, Performativity, High-stake testing, Marketisation

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The high-stakes tests, which are defined as tests which have “consequences for student grade promotion or graduation, teacher accountability, the reputation of schools or the funding of schools” (Stevenson and Wood, 2013, p. 2), continue to be the preferred mechanism of educational accountability throughout the world (Gonzalez and Firestone, 2013; Koretz, 2015; Pearce *et al.*, 2015; Penk *et al.*, 2014). Stevenson and Wood (2013) demonstrate how the neoliberalism, markets, and managerialism, have been central to the adoption of high-stakes tests as mechanisms for controlling the teachers' work in the UK during the post-Margret Thatcher era. While high-stakes tests are logically and theoretically defensible, the contestations around their purposes and effectiveness have raged on for decades. Little research has paid attention to the views and perceptions of those who are at the chalkface of high-stake testing – the teachers. A deeper insight into how teachers and school managers perceive the purposes of high-stake testing could provide profound insights into design and implementation of tests. Many countries have adopted high-stake testing for different reasons, without paying much attention to the effects it might have on the teachers that are involved. Ball's (2003) provocative and yet insightful work, Stevenson and Wood (2013) argue that, beyond reshaping the teacher's work – what they do and how they do it – high-stake tests also shape the teacher's identity. A critical question is how high-stake



tests are used as instruments of “marketization” are and “managerialism” is the South African education system. If they are, how they manifested? The current study applies Stevenson’s and Wood (2013), Ball’s (2003) works to demonstrate how high-stake tests in the post-apartheid South Africa are embedded in neoliberalism, “managerialism”, and markets. The study contributes profound insights into how the high-stake testing serves the purpose of social control and subjugation mechanisms for students, schools, and teachers by the state and the invisible arm of the markets.

Ball’s (2003) and Stevenson and Wood’s (2013) emphases on performativity engendered in markets is useful in the analysis of the purpose of high-stake testing in South Africa as it allows a deeper understanding of how such tests are being used to advance the ideas of the New Public Management in the education of the future generations. Stevenson and Wood’s (2013) conceptualisation of the relationship between high-stake testing and markets is critical for grasping how different players in the education sector perceive national examinations. It is, here, also that Ball’s (2003) attention to performativity and the quantification of education outputs through examinations and how such tests are used to reduce the learning of students over a period of 12 years to mere numbers through test scores, is useful in this study’s analysis of high-stake testing in South Africa.

Following this introduction, the next section will draw on Stevenson and Wood (2013) and Ball (2003) to explore how neoliberalism, managerialism, and marketisation are manifested in high-stake testing. A section on the issues related to the use of high-stake testing as social control or accountability mechanisms will follow. It outlines the literature on the use of high-stakes testing as a form of accountability. Next, the paper outlines the methods that were employed in the collection data for this study. Then, a section on a case study of perceptions of teachers of the high-stake testing in uMgungundlovu, a district in South Africa is presented before the discussion and conclusions are drawn in the final two sections.

2. Theoretical perspectives

2.1 *Marketisation and high-stake testing*

Stevenson and Wood (2013) demonstrate how markets are embedded in the education system through high-stake testing. They argue that there are symbiotic measures which have embedded market forces deep within the public education system. Among these measures, he lists parental choice policies. The arguments for this policy are based on the idea that parents should have a choice on the education of their children with regard to where and what their children learn. Stevenson and Wood (2013) illustrate how the proponents of this position, who are mainly from the political right believe that such choice can have beneficial impacts on the quality of education (cf. Nixon *et al.*, 2016; Tomlinson, 2017). Schools, in this sense, are producers, will strive to improve the quality of their outputs in the form of high scores in high-stake tests. For instance, Tomlinson’s (2017) study in the UK shows that many stakeholders, invariably, perceive students, and parents as consumers in what they call “consumerism of education”. This position is supported by the school funding policies, which are dependent on the number of students at school. Tomlinson (2017) and Ball (2003) argue that the “marketised” education system has a way of disciplining non-performers and incentivising high performers through reduced funding for poor performers.

Using a UK case study, Stevenson and Wood (2013) trace how the markets became deeply embedded in England’s education system through the 1988 Education Act. This Act brought in the new testing arrangements at various levels that were coupled with the publication of results in the form of league tables. This was also accompanied by naming and shaming schools that did not meet the targets. Like in South Africa today, these tests that were run by the government brought a “marketised” education system. Stevenson and Wood view this shift of the purpose of tests from a “sift-and-sort” function to one of teacher

and school accountability. The logic behind these measures was to give parents information (consumer information) that they need for them to make informed choices between different providers (schools). Stevenson and Wood (2013) note that markets and parental choice did not work as expected as some communities remained loyal to their schools that were not performing to the expected standards. Although empirical studies are scarce, anecdotal evidence shows that this may be the case in South Africa but the reasons are not loyalty, but on the number of high-performing schools that are usually few, particularly in provinces that had the largest homelands during the apartheid era. Furthermore, high-performing schools often have entrance restrictions such as the student potential to succeed in tests and parents' financial position (such schools ask for parents payslips). Parental choice seems to be a privilege of middle class families who are able to send their children to historically well-funded schools (Hunter, 2017). In that sense, South African parents can be characterised as consumers with, for the part, no choice (captive consumers). Stevenson and Wood (2013) observe that managerialism has been linked to marketisation of education through the integration of tests into school inspection. Among other measures, poorly performing schools are often subjected to school inspection.

Ostensibly, the high-stake testing plays a critical role in the marketisation of the education system. It provides the information that is needed by the consumers to make better decisions about the producers. Stevenson and Wood (2013) underscore the value tests in the marketisation of education when he argues: "test scores represent a valorisation of value in the school system – a numerical expression of a school's output that acts as a signal to consumers as they are encouraged to express their preferences" (Stevenson and Wood, 2013, p. 49). However, this is not a value determined by supply and demand in the traditional sense of the markets, as the state determines what counts as valuable (knowledge). Although this makes market sense, particularly to those on the political right, these have not been proven valuable (Ball, 2003; Stevenson and Wood, 2013; Tomlinson, 2017). Ball (2003) sees marketisation of education as the erosion and replacement of the social agenda of education with one that is led by image of the school and budgetary concerns, and the replacement of a caring ethos of the school with an academic ethos. Neighbouring schools now view each other as competitors, which can limit cooperation and sharing of ideas.

2.2 Managerialism and high-stake testing

Ball (2003) and Stevenson and Wood (2013) view the new policy technologies of managerialism, and performativity as being underpinned by the New Public Management with its high-stake testing. The school management draws heavily on these policy technologies (Fitzsimons, 2017). The performance management and whole-school evaluation that are both underpinned by the managerialist policy technologies reflect the adoption of private sector practice in the management of schools and education in general (Page, 2016). At school level teachers experience managerialism which is underscored by test scores (Stevenson and Wood, 2013). They argue that the numeric test score is used to track the teachers and students progress. Such tests make it easier to quantify the output of each teacher and allows for comparison that epitomises Taylor's scientific management principles as it is an attempt to quantify the teachers work which is later used to determine pay progress through performance pay. Stevenson and Wood (2013) summarise the importance of high-stake testing in the British education system in this statement: "[i]n reality, the process is often experienced as one of perpetual observation and surveillance as the monitoring of pupil performance in tests is buttressed by 'work scrutinies' (management checking of student work to monitor teacher performance, often conducted with no notice and sometimes without teacher knowledge) and lesson observations" (Stevenson and Wood, 2013, p. 51). For teachers in South Africa, results from high-stake tests have had different ramifications which included formal actions such as

being singled out for some kind of assistance programme like mandatory attendance at weekend schools for teachers whose students performed below a prescribed pass rate threshold in the National Senior Certificate examinations (Mutereko, 2013).

What one gleans from this brief discussion is that high-stake tests are designed for different reasons. Primarily, assessments should be about improving teaching and learning and about ensuring accountability for the quality of such learning. They should act as the panopticon tower overseeing students, teachers, and schools. All this takes place in the context of managerialism and a “marketised” education system. The perceptions of different stakeholders in education, regarding the purposes of high-stake testing, are not always uniform or explicit. This is even more complex in South Africa, which is emerging from a deeply divided society and evidence of such division is still reflected in the education system as it is in other sectors of the social system.

3. Methodological issues

This paper draws on data that were collected through a mixed method approach in the secondary schools of the uMgungundlovu District, which is in Kwazulu-Natal province (KZN) in the eastern part of South Africa. uMgungundlovu District has 547 schools and about 179 (both public and independent schools) of these are secondary schools which are also known as high schools.

3.1 Participants

The broader project from which this paper emerged used data from multiple sources, that is, from documents, interviews, questionnaires, and observation, as well as secondary sources. The official documents used in this study include those from government, Department of Basic Education (DBE) and *Umalusi*[1]. This paper draws on data that were collected through questionnaire surveys and interviews. Although the schools were purposively selected, participants for the survey were 100 practising secondary teachers from schools in the uMgungundlovu District that volunteered to participate. In total, 25 of them were from independent schools (private schools), 48 from former Model C public schools (well-resourced formerly white public schools that are largely funded by a governing body of parents and past students), and 27 from townships public schools. In total, 55 of them were black Africans, 20 whites, 19 Indians, 4 were coloureds while 2 of them did not indicate their race. Six school principals were purposively selected to participate in the face-to-face interviews.

3.2 Instrumentation

A survey questionnaire was designed to solicit the perceptions of teachers regarding the purposes of high-stake testing. Three broad themes were covered in the questionnaire to gain some insights into how managerialism and marketisation have become increasingly embedded in South African education. The first theme sought to understand the respondents' views on the use of assessments as a mechanism for determining performativity, which engenders managerialism. The aim of this was to analyse and to deconstruct this mechanism at the level of teachers, schools, and students. The respondents were asked how they view high-stake testing as an accountability mechanism for schools, teachers, or students in the context of high-stakes testing to determine both rewards and sanctions for each group concerned. The data collection instrument was a five step Likert scale where respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement in terms of the purpose of high-stake testing in the South African education system (1 = Never, 2 = Almost never, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Almost always and 5 = Always). The Cronbach's α coefficient was 0.74. The questionnaire also contained open-ended questions where respondents could express

themselves further or add any views regarding the use of high-stake testing. An interview guide was also used to gain some deeper insights into the understandings the school principals had regarding high-stake testing.

3.3 Data collection procedures

Following the granting of permission to conduct the field work by the provincial DBE in KwaZulu-Natal and permission from specific schools and the pilot test, the researcher went to schools and explained the purpose of study to the participants that had volunteered. Questionnaires were hand-delivered to each participant and collected later which yielded a 100 per cent response rate. This was the advantage of the volunteer sampling method although "it does not pretend to represent the wider population" (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 104). This was followed by the interviews that sought to understand high-stake testing, as a mechanism of accountability within the context of marketisation and managerialism, which were factors, experienced by school principals. For these interviews, appointments with the selected school principal were made telephonically days before. The face-to-face interviews took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. These interviews were useful particularly in capturing the non-verbal responses and body language. With the permission of the respondents, the interviews were audio recorded.

3.4 Data analysis

Given that the respondents came from three types of schools, the data analysis was done based on responses from the closed-ended questions in the questionnaire for the educators that were analysed quantitatively, using SPSS Windows version 21 based on the schools they came from. Crosstabs were useful in illuminating the similarities and differences in perceptions of respondents from different schools. The χ^2 tests were used to compare the views of teachers from independent schools, former public Model C schools and township public schools on the purposes of high-stake testing. The thematic content analysis was used to analyse responses to the open-ended comments in the questionnaires and interviews. Data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed through pattern matching logic, which "compares an empirically-based pattern with a predicted one" Data were then analysed on the basis of the theoretical framework of the study. The purpose was to grasp the nuances of the data by identifying manifest and latent themes and patterns emerging from it. This was done repeatedly and each identified unit was labelled with a code.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Managerialism: high-stake testing in the uMgungundlovu district

4.1.1 *High-stake testing as a performativity mechanism for teachers.* Do educators in the uMgungundlovu District view learner high-stake testing as a performativity mechanism? Their responses are displayed in Table I.

About 21.4 per cent of all the respondents indicated that "almost always" the purpose of high-stake testing is to make teachers accountable. A slightly larger percentage (38.8 per cent) indicated that this is "sometimes" the case. In total, 26.5 per cent of all the respondents believed that learner high-stake tests are "almost never" used as an accountability mechanism while for 13.3 per cent of the respondents it was an outright "never". Further analysis revealed that while 16 per cent of those from independent schools believed that high-stake tests are "almost always" used as a performativity mechanism, 22 per cent thought that it is so "sometimes", while 44 per cent indicated that this is "almost never" the case and 8 per cent that this is "never" so. The stronger negative reaction proved to be characteristic of the independent schools. A majority (76.9 per cent) of all respondents who indicated that

high-stake tests are “never” used as a performativity mechanism were from former Model C schools. Furthermore, 41.3 per cent of these respondents were also in the majority (50 per cent) of all those who indicated that “sometimes” education authorities use high-stake testing as a mechanism of accountability. Only 17.4 per cent of respondents from these schools suggested that high-stake tests are used “almost always” for performativity purposes. Nearly half (40.7 per cent) of respondents from township public schools said that “sometimes” high-stake tests are a mechanism of performativity. Furthermore, 33.3 per cent of respondents from these schools were most of those who indicated that learner high-stake tests are “almost always” used as a performativity mechanism for educators. Only 3.7 per cent of respondents, who were surveyed in township public schools, believed that high-stake tests are “never” used for performativity purposes and they were also in the minority of all those who took such a view. Respondents from township public schools mainly affirmed that high-stake testing was used as a performativity mechanism in the uMgungundlovu District in the implementation of National Curriculum Statements (NCS).

Overall, although responses from the three types of schools differed, they all confirmed that high-stake tests are used as a mechanism of performativity by education authorities. A χ^2 test conformed that the variations in the perspectives of teachers from different types of schools were not statistically significant ($p = 0.1$). However, what is clear from this data is that most teachers affirm the performativity-mechanism role played by high-stake tests on them. From this data, the influence of markets and managerialism on the autonomy and professional discretion is evident. It can be argued that, because of the influence of markets and managerialism, teachers may redirect their focus from other comprehensive values that may not be tested in the high-stake testing. It should be acknowledged that a small but significant proportion (39.8 per cent) of respondents did acknowledge the performativity role of high-stake testing.

4.1.2 High-stake tests as performativity mechanisms for schools. Schools, as street-level bureaucracies which implement NCS through the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements in the uMgungundlovu District, are sometimes themselves subject to performativity mechanisms. This stems from their position in the hierarchy of the DBE. Table II illustrates the perceptions of respondents of how high-stake tests are used to make schools accountable. The perceptions are presented in accordance with the types of schools in which the respondents taught.

Few respondents acknowledged the performativity role of high-stake testing on schools. Approximately, 39.4 per cent of respondents indicated that high-stake tests are “almost always” meant to make schools accountable. Another proportion (38.4 per cent) simply

Type of school	Never	To make educators accountable			Total
		Almost never	Sometimes	Almost always	
Independent	2	11	8	4	25
	8.0%	44.0%	32.0%	16.0%	100.0%
Public former Model C	15.4%	42.3%	21.1%	19.0%	25.5%
	10	9	19	8	46
	21.7%	19.6%	41.3%	17.4%	100.0%
Public township	76.9%	34.6%	50.0%	38.1%	46.9%
	1	6	11	9	27
	3.7%	22.2%	40.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Total	7.7%	23.1%	28.9%	42.9%	27.6%
	13	26	38	21	98
	13.3%	26.5%	38.8%	21.4%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table I.
Respondents' perception of high-stake testing as accountability mechanism for educators, according to type of school

believed that “sometimes” high-stake tests are used for this purpose. Those who said that high-stake tests are “never” used to make schools accountable were in the minority (6.1 per cent) while another 16.2 per cent said they are “almost never” used for this. Analysing the responses according to the type of school revealed that half (50 per cent) of all respondents who said that high-stake tests were “almost never” used to make schools accountable were from independent schools. Respondents from these schools also constituted 33.3 per cent of all those who indicated that high-stake tests were “never” used as a performativity mechanism for schools. However, about 32 per cent of respondents from these schools pointed out that high-stake tests are “almost always” used for school accountability intentions. Generally, most respondents from independent schools seemed to suggest that high-stake tests in the uMgungundlovu District are aimed at making schools accountable for implementing NCS.

Nearly half of the respondents from former Model C schools (40.4 per cent) indicated that “sometimes” high-stake tests are used to make schools accountable while 36.2 per cent said they are “almost always” used for such a purpose. Although only 6.1 per cent of all the respondents thought that high-stake tests are “never” used to make schools accountable, respondents from former Model C schools were in the majority (66.7 per cent) of all those who took such a view. Most respondents from these schools affirmed the use of high-stake tests as a performativity mechanism that is directed at schools. Turning to township public schools, a majority (51.9 per cent) of respondents indicated that “almost always” the purpose of high-stake testing is to make schools accountable while 44.4 per cent believed that they are “sometimes” used for this. Very few (3.7 per cent) respondents from these schools indicated that high-stake tests are “almost never” used as performativity mechanisms in the implementation of NCS. Generally, most respondents confirmed that, in the uMgungundlovu District, high-stake tests are used to render schools accountable. From in-depth interviews, one principal commented that:

The Annual National Assessments are used to measure the performance of the school. The schools are judged on the results of these national assessments. But it is hard to measure all the outcomes of education thorough assessments. So [this] is an unfair accountability method (Pr12).

No significant differences were found between perceptions of respondents from different types of school. It is apparent that most of the respondents, regardless of the type of school where they taught, believed that high-stake tests are used as performativity devices for schools. However, teachers from township public schools felt the strongest about this although the χ^2 test did not show any significant differences between types of schools ($p = 0.2$).

4.1.3 *Using high-stake tests to make students accountable for their education.* In trying to elicit the perspective of teachers on the purposes of assessment, respondents were asked to give their opinion on high-stake testing as performativity mechanisms for students. Their responses are displayed in Table III.

A majority (54.5 per cent) of all respondents suggested that high-stake testing “almost always” aimed at making students accountable for their learning while 23.2 per cent believed that sometimes they are used for such a purpose. Only 18.2 per cent said that they are “almost never” used to make students accountable for their learning while only 4 per cent felt that this is “never” so. This may suggest that such respondents did acknowledge the marketised influence of high-stakes tests in stimulating students to take responsibility for their work to avoid the sanctions and to make use of the incentives provided by the markets. A further analysis of this data reveals that 32 per cent of respondents from independent schools constituted 14.8 per cent of all the respondents who said that “almost always” high-stake tests are used to make students accountable for their learning. A further 28 per cent of the respondents from these schools indicated that

“sometimes” high-stake tests are aimed at making students accountable for their education. The respondents from independent schools, who constituted 25.3 per cent of all the respondents, were in the majority (50 per cent) of all those who suggested that high-stake tests are “almost never” used to make students accountable for their education. This observation may be explained by the fact that most the teachers’ employment contracts are indirectly linked to students’ performance in high-stake tests, which is a proxy for their performance. Only 4 per cent of the respondents from these schools pointed out that high-stake tests are never used to make students accountable.

Regarding Model C schools, a majority (70.2 per cent) of their respondents indicated that high-stake tests are “almost always” aimed at making students accountable for their education. They also comprised the majority (61.1 per cent) of all respondents who took such a view. However, 19.1 per cent of respondents from these schools indicated that “sometimes” high-stake tests are used for such purposes while 6.4 per cent thought that this is “almost never”. Although a mere 4.3 per cent of respondents from these schools said that high-stake testing “never” makes students accountable for their learning, they were in the majority (50 per cent) of those who took such a position. In township public schools, only 48.1 per cent of their respondents confirmed that “almost always” high-stake tests are used as performativity mechanisms for students while 25.9 per cent said they are “sometimes” used for such purposes. Only 3.7 per cent of their respondents rejected this assertion while 22.2 per cent said it was “almost never” so. In general, Table III shows that the respondents from these schools agreed that high-stake tests are used as a performativity mechanism for students. Most respondents from all types of school acknowledged that high-stake tests are an instrument used to make students accountable. Regarding this issue an interviewee said:

The purpose of education and assessment is not assessing the teachers; it is to distribute the limited resources. If there were no high-stake tests how were we going to determine who gets the scholarships, who goes to which university, who pursues which degree and who does which job? In a way, students need to be accountable if they don’t want to be deprived of what they want and desire. One of my matric [Grade 12] students is crying now because she was not taken into medical school because she does not have enough “As”. Isn’t that depriving? (Tr14).

The resources referred to by Tr14 are the incentives provided by the markets to those who succeed in the high-stake testing. For the National Senior Certificate assessments, this might imply scholarships and enrolment in programmes and universities of one’s choice. Respondents from former Model C schools seem to have the biggest proportion of those who regarded assessment as a performativity mechanism which made students accountable.

Types of schools	To make schools accountable				Total
	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Almost always	
Independent	2	8	7	8	25
	8.0%	32.0%	28.0%	32.0%	100.0%
Public former Model C	33.3%	50.0%	18.4%	20.5%	25.3%
	4	7	19	17	47
Public township	8.5%	14.9%	40.4%	36.2%	100.0%
	66.7%	43.8%	50.0%	43.6%	47.5%
Total	0	1	12	14	27
	0.0%	3.7%	44.4%	51.9%	100.0%
Total	0.0%	6.3%	31.6%	35.9%	27.3%
	6	16	38	39	99
	6.1%	16.2%	38.4%	39.4%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table II.
Perceptions of high-stake testing as performativity mechanism for schools, according to type of school

As Table III shows, there is a significant difference ($p=0.03$) between the three groups. The results ($p=0.03$) suggests that such a variation was not by chance.

In summary, it is apparent that high-stake tests are multipurpose instruments of bureaucratic accountability that is embedded in markets and managerialism. Whether they are used to make schools, teachers, or students accountable, it is generally agreed that they remain a crucial performativity mechanism in the implementation of NCS in the uMgungundlovu District.

5. Marketisation and managerialism in the uMgungundlovu

The current study has established that among other purposes, high-stake testing serves as a fulcrum for marketisation and managerialism in the uMgungundlovu District education system. Table I has shown that 59.8 per cent of the respondents (21 per cent) felt that high-stake tests were meant to make teachers accountable. Such evidence is barely distinguishable from Ball's (2003) and Stevenson and Wood (2013) observations. On the one hand, Ball (2003) acknowledged how the use high-stake testing has induced fear and stifles creativity in teachers. On the other hand, Stevenson and Wood's (2013) work shows how the use of high-stake testing has taken a central role in the UK education system, which has taken control over the teachers' work. The evaluation of teachers through assessment could be based on the conjecture that if schools and teachers became aware of their performance through assessment they would change their behaviour to improve their teaching. This may be an indication of how markets are entrenched in the education system not only in the uMgungundlovu District but in the whole country. After all, high-stake testing could be the only way to measure the work of teachers. Regarding this assertion, and drawing on Connell's work, Stevenson and Wood (2013) points out that the outcomes of teaching are notoriously difficult to measure. Thus, Linn suggests, "a fundamental premise of high-stakes accountability systems is that instruction and student learning will be improved by holding teachers and or students accountable for results".

Turning to high-stake testing as a performativity mechanism for schools, this study has established that the implementation of a fair and uniform high-stake tests and a mandatory curriculum for all the public schools, and some independent schools, can be seen as a performativity mechanism. Close to 20 years ago, Angelo speculated that the reason for this was based on the presumption that "educational accountability should focus schools' attention less on compliance with rules and more on increasing learning for students" which could be measured through high-stake testing. Because of the marketisation and managerialism, schools (as producers) place a high premium on NSC examination results,

Type of school	To make students accountable for their education				Total
	Never	Almost never	Sometimes	Almost always	
Independent	1	9	7	8	25
	4.0%	36.0%	28.0%	32.0%	100.0%
Public former Model C	25.0%	50.0%	30.4%	14.8%	25.3%
	2	3	9	33	47
	4.3%	6.4%	19.1%	70.2%	100.0%
Public township	50.0%	16.7%	39.1%	61.1%	47.5%
	1	6	7	13	27
	3.7%	22.2%	25.9%	48.1%	100.0%
Total	25.0%	33.3%	30.4%	24.1%	27.3%
	4	18	23	54	99
	4.0%	18.2%	23.2%	54.5%	100.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table III.
High-state testing as performativity mechanism for students, according to type of school

especially considering that the results are published in the media for all (consumers) to see. As stated earlier, the purpose of this could be to attract well-off parents and students with a potential to pass. It is not unusual for schools that are considered to be “good” in the uMgungundlovu District to ask for prospective parents’ salary advice slips to determine their capacity to pay fees or to administer an entrance test to prospective students. Stevenson and Wood (2013, p. 47) expressed this notion as follows:

The logic reflects elementary market economic theory. “Consumers” require information to make rational choices. Published test results, ranked in league tables, facilitate “like-for-like” comparison, whilst open enrolment allows parents to exercise choice. Formula funding, driven overwhelmingly by pupil numbers, ensures that high performing schools generate large numbers of parental preferences, and with them additional resources.

Naturally, high scores in high-stake testing tend to attract such parents and students. This is particularly so in South Africa where Section 21 schools[2] can determine their fees for the proper running of the schools. From a managerialist perspective, schools that fail to make the grade in the high-stake tests are often subjected to inspection visits and mandatory training workshops.

Regarding high-stakes testing as performativity technology for students, this study revealed that most respondents felt that high-stake tests were aimed at students. This is consistent with Stevenson and Wood’s (2013) definition of high-stake definition, which they argue, is any test that has consequences for students and parents. Ball (2003) agree that high-stake testing is an important performativity mechanism as it can be used to encourage students to be accountable for their results. However, this study has also shown that there were some who did not fully agree with the marketisation narrative of the high-stake testing. They argue that tests can also be used as a teaching tool. This observation corroborates the ideas of Linn who suggested that “tests and high-stake tests are designed to provide information about student achievement which will be helpful to teachers, schools and parents, although it is seldom specified in what way”. This argument is consistent with the DBE’s (2016) view that beyond providing a summary of the student’s achievements, high-stake testing can be used to guide teaching and learning. This seeming contradiction can be explained by the nature of high-stake testing in the South African education system, which runs on a quasi-continuous assessment model. This may also explain a significant proportion of respondents who did not view high-stake testing as a performativity mechanism for them but, instead, as a way of helping students to see their strengths and weaknesses. This is usually termed diagnostic analysis where teachers analyse the results of high-stake tests by perusing each answer script to discover where students performed badly and to propose remedial measures. Every year, the DBE publishes such a report for each subject. This study has established the dual purpose of high-stake testing in South Africa although the scale seems to tilt more in favour of the performativity function. This binary function of high-stake tests is expressed in Angelo’s (1999) work when he asserts: “assessment should be used for student learning and secondarily to determine accountability for the quality of learning produced”.

It is clear from the discussion that high-stake tests in South Africa play a profound performativity role within the marketised education system. This may have the undesirable effect of redirecting the schools focus from the original values of social concern, student needs, and a caring ethos, to market values such as budgetary concerns, “able children”, student performance and academic ethos (Kairuz *et al.*, 2016). School managers are caught up in trying to balance these tensions, knowing that in the absence of alternative options to measure teacher performance and to reward market performers, high-stake tests are likely to remain entrenched in the education sector.

6. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the profound influence of markets and managerialism in the South African education system and the use of high-stake testing as a mechanism of performativity. The markets are embedded in the high-stake testing to the extent of eroding professional discretion and the autonomy of teachers, schools, and students. The documentary and survey evidence has invariably shown the influence of markets on the schooling system. The upshot of this is the possibility that the performativity culture in schools has the propensity to alter the teachers' identity and professional role in the academic as distinct from the formative bias in the school curriculum. This might mean a total neglect of schools' values that are not examinable through high-stake testing. The problem with this is not just that performativity hinders learning and teaching, but it changes the work of teachers and schools as well by redefining the teachers' work and ultimately their identity. Underlying these shifts is the doctrine of performativity that is fuelled by the pincer movement of markets and managerialism. These insights have profound implications not just for education but also for all the public-sector institutions that employ performativity mechanisms. Policy reforms must ensure that they do not subordinate professional judgements and discretion to the dictates of performativity driven by market forces.

Notes

1. Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training.
2. The South African Schools Act identifies two kinds of schools: Section 20 and Section 21 schools. Section 21 schools manage their own finances.

References

- Angelo, T.A. (1999), "Doing assessment as if learning matters most", *AAHE Bulletin*, Vol. 51 No. 6, pp. 30-36.
- Ball, S.J. (2003), "The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity", *Journal of Education Policy*, Vol. 18 No. 2, pp. 215-228.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, a.K. (2007), *Research Methods in Education*, 6th ed., Routledge, New York, NY.
- Fitzsimons, P. (2017), "Managerialism and education", in Peters, M. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*, Springer, pp. 1-5.
- Gonzalez, R.A. and Firestone, W.A. (2013), "Educational tug-of-war: internal and external accountability of principals in varied contexts", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 51 No. 3, pp. 383-406.
- Hunter, M. (2017), "Parental choice without parents: families, education and class in a South African township", *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, Vol. 47 No. 1, pp. 2-16.
- Kairuz, T., Andriés, L., Nickloes, T. and Truter, I. (2016), "Consequences of KPIs and performance management in higher education", *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 30 No. 6, pp. 881-893.
- Koretz, D. (2015), "Adapting educational measurement to the demands of test-based accountability", *Measurement*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 1-25, doi: 10.1080/15366367.2015.1000712.
- Mutereko, S. (2013), "Analyzing accountability in street-level bureaucracy: managing the implementation of national curriculum statements in the uMgungundlovu district in South Africa", unpublished doctoral thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

-
- Nixon, E., Scullion, R. and Hearn, R. (2016), "Her majesty the student: marketised higher education and the narcissistic (dis) satisfactions of the student-consumer", *Studies in Higher Education*, pp. 1-21, available at: <https://srhe.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075079.2016.1196353>
- Page, D. (2016), "Understanding performance management in schools: a dialectical approach", *International Journal of Educational Management*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 166-176.
- Pearce, J., Edwards, D., Fraillon, J., Coates, H., Canny, J.B. and Wilkinson, D. (2015), "The rationale for and use of assessment frameworks: improving assessment and reporting quality in medical education", *Perspectives on Medical Education*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 110-118, doi: 10.1007/s40037-015-0182-z.
- Penk, C., Pöhlmann, C. and Roppelt, A. (2014), "The role of test-taking motivation for students' performance in low-stakes assessments: an investigation of school-track-specific differences", *Large-scale Assessments in Education*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 1-17, doi: 10.1186/s40536-014-0005-4.
- Stevenson, H. and Wood, P. (2013), "Markets, managerialism and teachers' work: the invisible hand of high stakes testing in England", *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, Vol. 12 No. 2, pp. 42-61.
- Tomlinson, M. (2017), "Student perceptions of themselves as 'consumers' of higher education", *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 38 No. 4, pp. 450-467.

About the author

Sybert Mutereko is a Senior Lecturer at University of KwaZulu-Natal in the Public Governance Discipline. He received the PhD Degree in Policy and Development Studies. He has a wealth of experience in both basic and higher education. Sybert's research interests include public policy, policy implementation and evaluation, education policy, education management and vocational education. His current research focusses on the supply and demand dynamics of the engineering labour market. Sybert Mutereko can be contacted at: sybertm@yahoo.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.