



**Contradictions and compromises on the ground:
Unpacking the Educational ‘Performance Commitments’ in
Peru**

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Contents

Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Research Puzzle	1
1.2 Research question and objective	2
Chapter 2 Literature Review	4
2.1 Evidence and Practice in Education Policy Implementation	4
2.1.1 Between policy frameworks and practices	4
2.1.2 Agency within structures	5
2.2 Theoretical framework	7
2.2.1 Agency in policy implementation	7
2.2.2 Policy as practice	9
2.2.3 The role of relationality	10
Chapter 3 Contextualising Performance Commitments	11
3.1 Background and foundations of the policy	11
3.2 Policy's technical framework	12
Chapter 4 Methodology and Research Process	15
4.1 Research setting and participant selection	15
4.2 Data Collection methods and data analysis	15
4.2.1 Primary data collection	15
4.2.2 Secondary data analysis	16
4.3 Scope and Limitations of the Research	16
4.4 Positionality, risks and ethical considerations	17
Chapter 5 Findings: The Lived Realities of Educational Policy	18
5.1 Understanding of roles and accountability in practice	18
5.2 Challenges and dilemmas in practice	23
5.3 Facing the reality: coping mechanisms and agency	26
Chapter 6 Interpreting educational practices: A theoretical discussion	30
6.1 Between commitment, care and performance targets	30
6.2 Balancing roles, identities and professionalisation	31
6.3 Autonomy, Discretion and compliance mechanisms	33
Conclusions	34

List of Tables

Table 1 List of Commitments	13
Table 2 Indicators by Commitment	13

List of Figures

Figure 1. Theory of Change of ‘Performance Commitments’	12
Figure 2 Stages of ‘Performance Commitments’ policy	12
Figure 3 ‘Performance Commitments’ policy in practice	29

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide	39
Appendix B: Overview of Research participants	40

List of Acronyms

UGEL	Local Educational Management Unit
MINEDU	Ministry of Education
NPM	New Public Management
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SLB	Street-Level Bureaucrats

Abstract

This research aims to unpack how the 'Performance Commitments' policy challenges the roles of implementation of three types of agents, mid-level officials, principals and teachers through the lived experiences in Lima, Peru. The main question of the research is how these policy actors navigate the demands of their roles under the 'Performance Commitments' policy related to the student retention rate and the delivery of education materials within the framework of New Public Management? Through the lens of collaboration and relational work and using qualitative methods such as semi-conducted interviews and classroom observations, I have presented the understanding of the roles from the perspective of the people on the ground, challenges and dilemmas trying to meet the performance targets, and the ways they cope with these problems. The findings unveil how the New Public Management sets expectations and managerial roles that end up undermining the ethical commitments, care and agency of the practitioners on the ground, creating more layers of bureaucracy.

Relevance to Development Studies

Research for critical education policies that fit into the academic debates of policy framework and practice and agency within structures. This research aims to contribute to analysing how an educational public policy based on the New Public Management stresses commitment, care, roles, relationality, identities and autonomy of the practitioners on the ground in front of the professionalisation, performance and control.

Keywords

Relational agency, education public policy, practice, Street-Level Bureaucrats, New Public Management, performance targets.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research Puzzle

The governance of the education system has become a major responsibility among the states. It is argued that good educational governance must portray a scenario where the different stakeholders and actors in the decision-making process have a clear role and where there are accountability mechanisms attached to educational outcomes (Vaillant, 2012). In the last decades, in order to achieve better educational governance, the New Public Management (NPM), as a result of neoliberal ideas, has settled on how governments manage education. As Clarke & Newman (2024) state that the NPM has promises to seduce how governance can be managed with discipline, performance targets, and an objective orientation.

Peru adopted the NPM approach through the National Policy for Modernization of Public Management in 2013, where the education management adopted a results-based performance through a citizen orientation, with a focus on the students who received education services within territorial contexts (Ministerio de Educación, 2013). This adoption provoked changes in the way the public administration was oriented and how public policies were designed and implemented.

One of the parts of the modernisation of public management was decentralisation. It was thought it would be different from the first process of decentralisation in 2003, when it was focused on the transfer of functions from the Central Government to the Local Government (ibid, 2013). However, Quesquén and Callao (2022) found that the decentralisation happened by transferring competencies and responsibilities and not enhancing school autonomy. In addition, Correa (2024) pointed out that, in this process, the regional and local governments gave up their role of designing and strategically planning educational policies. This is not different from what happened in 2003, highlighting that even if the government had an initial commitment to give more autonomy and enhance capacity building.

Strengthening decentralisation and modernisation, in 2014, Minister Saavedra's administration introduced an incentive mechanism called 'Performance Commitments' policy. Its goal was to improve the quality of the delivery of education services in a results-based approach, targeting specific levels of improvement in some areas where it is necessary to make progress (World Bank, 2021). One of the biggest assumptions of this policy was that the local government's ability to improve administratively was limited, and it was necessary to support them using a carrot, which would be the money (ibid, 2021).

Even though the New Public Management tries to modernise the State and promote efficiency with less bureaucracy, the mode the policy has been working in the past ten years and the results in the education performance of the students are not the desired. In 2022, the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) demonstrated that the performance of students had worsened compared to the assessment in 2018 (Ministerio de Educación, 2024). This reality clashes with the low drop-out rate reported in 2021 of 6.3%, considering how poor the quality of public education can be (Creciendo con las Escuelas Rurales Multigrado del Perú, 2022).

In fact, as Connell (2013, p.104) points out neoliberalism has a particular understanding of education as a “human capital formation”, forgetting how “education involves encounter between persons, and that encounter involves care”, and hence is relational. For the author, the government institutions have to create an environment where the teaching-learning process is the most appropriate. However, even if the school and the Local Education Management are recognized as the first and second agencies of the decentralised system according to the General Law of Education (Álvarez, 2010), they are not trusted by the Ministry of Education to launch policies in an effective way, neither are they supported with sufficient resources, autonomy and recognition of their efforts.

In another note, as Freeman, Griggs and Boaz (2011, p.128) explain that “policy ...[is] unthinkable without a concept of practice” emphasising that it is important to conceive policy beyond being an abstraction of only a recipe that commands rules. What the Central Government is forgetting when the policy is designed is that there will be actions and efforts from the workers on the ground that will have to be done in order to fulfil the commitment.

Then, a central question may arise: can a system based on performance indicators and the assumption that the central government keeps the “levers to pull” (Clarke and Newman, 2024; Apthorpe, 2012) to mechanistically control implementation, in the eyes of the policy-makers, actually substitute the relational work, social systems and collaboration at the local level in order to enable good education practices? And how do agents of education on the ground cope with the reality of the NPM-dominated system?

In this Research Paper, the focus is going to be on two performance indicators: improving the retention rate and distribution of education materials on time, in order to present the central argument that an NPM-oriented system can clash with the relational work in these two specific indicators and how critical is the care, the commitment, and ethic to provide public education. Also, I am going to show how even though if the NPM challenges traditional bureaucracy by seeking to reduce its rigidity, promote efficiency and increase accountability, it can create, in practice when the teachers, principals and mid-level officials implement the policy, new layers of bureaucracy are created to handle data, collection, reporting and auditing since bureaucracy is “internally self-perpetuating” (Lea, 2021, p.61). Even more importantly, considering how education is about ethics and care, I am going to discuss how the NPM and its policies do not take into account care, commitment, affect or emotions of solidarity from the professionals who are implementing and facing the practice of the market features that are introduced in the education service. Finally, I am going to stress how NPM is opposed to viewing policy practices as relational, embodied and culturally embedded, in favour of seeing individuals as market-driven actors who respond to clear rules, roles and incentives from above.

1.2 Research question and objective

This research aims to answer the following main research question:

How do education mid-level officials, principals and teachers navigate the demands of their roles under the ‘Performance Commitments’ policy related to the student retention rate and the delivery of education materials within the framework of New Public Management?

From this question, three sub-questions have arisen:

1. How do they understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the performance targets while balancing the policy mandates with the everyday reality?
2. What challenges or dilemmas arise in practice when trying to meet the demands of performance indicators while addressing educational needs?
3. What coping mechanisms or adaptations do they employ to face these challenges or dilemmas?

The **objective** of this Research Paper is to analyse how the three types of agents, mid-level officials, principals and teachers deal with the roles of the implementation of the 'Performance Commitments' policy in every practice in reality, considering how New Public Management sets expectations and managerial roles that end up undermining their ethical commitments, care and creating more layers of bureaucracy.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This research is rooted in critical studies of education policies. Different debates, empirical reviews, theories and concepts are used to understand the Peruvian case of ‘Performance Commitments’ policy in action.

2.1 Evidence and Practice in Education Policy Implementation

2.1.1 Between policy frameworks and practices

Since the focus of my research is on how a policy is implemented on the grounds, studying how the gap between policy intentions or mandates and the ground realities or in practice is relevant. The principal debates on how formal frameworks define policy and how they are actually enacted are considering to what extent a policy can be practised or how the workers implementing the policy are more than implementers.

Ball et al. (2012) after studying four schools in London regarding their role when they have to apply some educational policies, came up with the conceptualisation of ‘policy enactments’, explaining that going beyond implementation, the actors interpret, translate and face these policies every day; then it is not about the implementation of the policies by the schools but its enactment. Also, the authors stated that the policy actors do not act independently, but they are interconnected, defining and redefining their roles as teachers. Through understanding the context where the policies are enacted (localisation of schools, history and students enrolled) and how important the interpretation and translation of the educational policies are, the authors show how a policy is enacted. This study of how the school staff make sense of an educational policy corresponds with the execution of the principals and teachers of the ‘Performance commitments’ policy.

Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003, p. 51) in their work stressed that “street-level workers care as much about who a person is as about what the person has done”, explaining through stories of the workers of the government at a street level are doing more than implementing the policy because they will care and judge, based on their beliefs and discretion. This dichotomy between following a policy framework and practising the policy is a constant when the work is about working with other people and when it is more relational, as is the case of education. This is why educators might feel this tension between accomplishing their roles according to the policies the state commands and the practice of the policy on the ground.

Furthermore, Sempé (2017) analysed the implementation of some indicators of the ‘Performance Commitments’ policy back from 2014 to 2017 through interviews with mid-level officials who worked in Local Management Units. He found that when the policy was implemented, it was very different in practice from its design, mostly because of the role of the Ministry of Education regarding the technical guidelines. Even though his study focused on the administrative part of the policy, he discovered that the ‘Performance Commitments’ policy did not completely correspond to the final outcomes of students’ learning or the

necessities of the Local Management. Furthermore, the workload of monitoring and following up on the implementation of the indicators overshadowed other activities they needed to do.

Also, in 2022, the Peruvian Ministry of Education conducted an impact evaluation of the 'Performance Commitments' policy. They found a high effectiveness of the policy in the fulfilment of the three evaluated indicators; however, regarding the achieved value, the effectiveness is moderate (Carbajal and Campos, 2022). One of the indicators was the student retention rate in high school. As part of their duties, the mid-level officials have to track and visit the students since they supervise how they drop out of school. In the implementation of actions to fulfil the indicator, the workers informed that there was not enough budget for the visits, the workload was a limitation, and there was limited availability of data about students and schools (ibid, 2022). Then, this evaluation shows how different the policy is in practice and how much effort from professionals is not even counted in the policy's design.

Another case in which applying a policy means more than following the policy document is the policies implemented in Colombia since 2015, which are a monetary incentive in a performance-based mode with the aim to improve the performance and quality of educational management. The Incentive program resembles the 'Performance Commitments' policy since the objective is to accomplish the Minimum Annual Improvement in the schools and excellence goals through the provision of economic resources (Ministerio de Educación Nacional, 2015, p.53). In this case, in the practice of the policy, the Ministry of Education of Colombia noticed that it was necessary to involve all the actors in the school and the workers in the Territorial Educational Management, which at the very moment of the design was not considered.

On another note, when policies are based on the New Public Management principles such as "managerialism, performance measurement and accountability" (Tolofari, 2005), it can reshape the roles of the workers in practice. For example, Horton (2006) explains that the identities of public servants are being modified in the sense that they see themselves as managers. This happens when the public administration acquires business principles from the private sector through the NPM reforms. This reality provokes public employees to look for their organisational identity (Horton, 2006). Also, principals of schools can be considered street-level managers who are vital for street-level implementation and are in charge of the execution and assessment of the policy (Gofen *et al.*, 2024), they will have to perform and be held accountable to the government. Nevertheless, this performativity as, Ball (2003, p.215) mentions that it "produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organisations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications". Then, their ethics as managers can be challenged by the performance they want to show their school is accomplishing.

2.1.2 Agency within structures

The other important debate where I can locate my research is about agency and structures, where the agency of the practitioners regarding autonomy and discretion is tested within the big structures in real-life contexts. Along with this idea, there are some structural constraints of the New Public Management (NPM) in education; thus, analysing how structure can shape the agency is important.

Educational governance has an impact on all the components of the education system through the different organisation levels and ends up reaching the students (López, 2022). This is the big structure that the agents are dealing with. According to Balu et al. (2009), education governance is defined as a complex interaction between institutions, norms or values and the ones governed. Considering this, Vaillant (2012) proposed five key elements of educational governance: the level of decentralisation of the education system, the public type of financing public-private, accountability mechanisms, incentives for stakeholders and the political interest of actors.

Recognising the importance of having a ‘good education governance’, López (2022) provides six characteristics of this governance. Out of them, three of them are related to the big structure. The first one is that governance should have a holistic and multilevel focus where when governance takes into consideration the relationship between different levels of the system: individual, institutional and of the government, looks for consensus and promotes participation of actors or inferior levels, principally from the teachers, but preserves the importance of the state level. The second is governance based on capacity building, where governance establishes methods to share knowledge with principal actors about policies and their implementation and help them to use relevant information for the success of policy implementation. Finally, governance should be linked to accountability through transparency processes and responsibility mechanisms.

Moreover, according to Wilkins and Olmedo (2018), education governance is “about strengthening the transparency (or visibility) of the internal operations of schools through engendering a culture of evaluation and self-review”. In addition, it is a “*vehicle of empowerment* since it concerns developing the capacities and skills of others to self-regulate and pursue their own freedom in the absence of any overarching authority” (ibid, p. 11). These concepts are related to the ideas that the NPM is proposing, such as autonomy, targeting, and accountability. When the NPM is in the role of managing educational governance, these characteristics might be taken into account when public policies are being designed and implemented.

Knowing that the NPM frequently alludes to a managerial strategy for school organisation and the expansion of school autonomy (Verger and Curran, 2014), then the identities and agency of the principals and teachers are influenced by this phenomenon. In fact, Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (2024) found that NPM can undermine the teachers’ agency since they will have to be accountable for school performance, and their capacity to make decisions or have discretion is reduced. Also, the teachers, in order to work in a performance-based environment, can abandon their personal convictions, beliefs and commitments (Ball, 2003).

The structure where the NPM influences can diminish the applicability of relationality in education. However, as the process of education is about relationships, Lejano and Kan (2022) stressed that even in the case of Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), where the goal is to improve attendance in public schools, there is a strong relational component between frontline agency workers and policy receivers to achieve the outcomes of the policy. Even though the ‘Performance Commitments’ policy is not directly aimed at a cash transfer to the families of the students, there is a component of the Theory of Change of the policy that matches directly to the students.

Regarding coping strategies, Karaevli, Çeven and Korumaz (2022), through lived experiences of local administrators, principals, and teachers, reveal how the agency of these actors has a role in the implementation of a top-down policy document called the '2023 education vision' that was a reform in most of the aspects of the public education administration in Turkey. They also explained how they employ coping mechanisms at their discretion. The practitioners, according to the authors, would prioritise some areas of the policy at their discretion. In addition, Durose (2007, p. 217) claims that when front-line workers face dilemmas in interpreting public policies, they would be able to manage these dilemmas when the policy reform asks for devolving responsibility at the local level using their agency.

Tummers et al. (2015) in an effort to conceptualise the ways of coping, identified three groups of coping families: moving towards clients, moving away from clients, and moving against clients. In the first one, they include rule-bending, rule-breaking, instrumental action, prioritising among clients and use of personal resources. In the second one, routinising and rationing are included. In the third group, rigid rule-following and aggression are found. These types of coping strategies are also useful for my research since the practitioners can go against the structure founded on NPM principles to make the policy work through these characteristics.

Additionally, Vedung (2015) expressed that frontline practitioners can use their autonomy to adopt adaptive strategies, including limiting client demand and creaming (Lipsky, 1980) and using the work of Winter and Nielsen (2008), the author recognises that automating outputs can also be considered as a way of using their discretion. From the coping mechanisms he mentions, creaming, which means selecting the best of the group of people they are attending, can be useful for my research. Specifically, Vedung (2015, p.17) mentions that creaming for substantive success, where "frontline operators choose to work with clients with good prognoses for recovery and/or rehabilitation", can be applied to educational policies where some students are considered the best in their classrooms and receive more attention than others students in can be considered as lost cases.

2.2 Theoretical framework

I am pursuing this research to be rooted in the critical studies of education policies by showing what is happening on the ground in the implementation of the policy. To do so, I need to use three concepts that are part of my analytical framework. The first one is the agency of the agents in the education sector at the local level, specifically the teachers, principals and mid-level officials in the local management. The second is practice; I am explaining how practices go beyond a policy document and how it is necessary to approach policy as a practice to understand the work on the ground. The third one is relationality, which shows how relationships between the agents can enhance policy outcomes.

2.2.1 Agency in policy implementation

Agency is a key concept to understanding the investigation of how mid-level officials, principals and teachers, the agents of public education on the ground, navigate, shape, reshape,

influence and make sense of the requirements of the 'Performance Commitments' policy. I am proposing that the three of them present agency in their different positions.

In a broader context where social structure is about a set of rules and institutions, humans can react in an active way (Berner, 1998). The concept of agency as the "capacity of humans to ultimately decide what action to take" (ibid, p. 4) sets the base to state that agents can also have the power to intervene and act. However, it is important to see that there is a duality in this area as Gaventa (2003, p. 7) explain based on the idea of Giddens (1984) and Baert (1998), taking into account that since there is a "duality of structure", then even if people are free and have the power to act, they can reproduce the social structure through their actions. These notions can help to understand how there is a big social structure in the central government that can dictate top-down policies, and even if the policy actors have agency and power in the implementation on the ground, they are also obligated to replicate what the central government dictates.

To study how far a local implementer is actually implementing in a rational way, trying to fulfil the policy outcomes or have enough agency and discretion, reviewing the work of Lipsky (1969, 1980) is useful. Nevertheless, in this research, I am considering only the teachers of the public schools as Street-Level Bureaucrats (SLB) since they are "those men and women who, in their face-to-face encounters with citizens, represent the government to the people" Lipsky 1969, p.4). The author explains in his work that the SLB deals with some problems regarding the limit of resources, threats that can be physical or psychological, and ambiguous, contradictory, and unattainable role expectations" (ibid, 1969, p.4). Under these conditions, the SLBs have to work; however, they have discretion in applying different rules to different situations to populations and, therefore, they are making policy, interpreting guidelines according to the situations and their own professional ethos (ibid, 1969).

Lipsky (1969, p. 11-12) points out that the SLB have strategies to cope with the situations they are affronted to, considering their discretion: simplification and routinisation. The first one will be constructed symbolically of the perceptions they have of the population they have to attend. Then, it will be biased as part of their work that will become routines that would be the "establishment of habitual or regularised patterns in terms of which tasks are performed" (ibid, p.12). Then, the concept of Street-Level Bureaucrats is also related to the agency. Although this agency can be impacted by the "state capacity shortages and institutional weakness, as well as different political traditions and cultures" (Lotta et al., 2022, p.3). Then, the relationship between agency and how the state is conformed and how this duality can shape one another can be seen. The politicised bureaucracy, poor conditions of the formalisation of the work, and extreme resource insufficiency (ibid, p. 4) can undermine the agency that actors can have.

Furthermore, when the agency is studied within the context of New Public Management, a relevant association appears with policy alienation. According to Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn (2009, p.688), 9 is a "general cognitive state of psychological disconnection from the policy programme being implemented", and it is shown in public professionals when they feel powerless, meaningless and have role conflicts. When NPM influences the policies that they implement through performance and output controls, the agency of the public professionals is limited, and their discretion power is diminished (ibid, 2009). This connection reveals how much agency a practitioner can have when there are pressures top-down from the structure of the government.

2.2.2 Policy as practice

The practice theory is relevant in this research because policy, when implemented, is more than a document; it is interpreted, adapted and set up on the grounds. When Foucault (1991) refers to governmentality in his essays, shows that new forms of governance have been extended and how policies execute control. This is related to what is happening with the 'Performance Commitments', where this policy can control the actions of the workers on the ground. However, as Bourdieu (1990) explains practices are embedded in the "habitus" where the actors can resist, for example, policies, because these can be shaped by social structures.

Specifically about policies and practices, Freeman, Griggs and Boaz (2011, p.128) explain that "policy ...[is] unthinkable without a concept of practice", emphasising that it is important to conceive policy beyond being an abstraction of only a recipe that commands rules. They defined practices as three main configurations: action, norms and knowledge.

As the authors explain, practice is considered as actions that entail "people doing things" (ibid, p.128) socially and materially: interacting with other people and using tools. Also, these actions can convert into norms when repeated, and they are interpretable and comprehensive for practitioners (ibid, p.129). Nevertheless, even when there are common recognisable patterns, practice can be improvised whenever the situation needs to be changed. Then, "practice maintains a tension between repetition and innovation" (ibid, p.129) since policymakers can use prior practices but also innovate new practices according to the circumstances.

In a third arrangement, practice is considered knowledge too by Freeman, Griggs and Boaz (2011, p.129). As practice has to be learned and consists of actions, then "reproduce particular knowledge of when and how they are to be performed" (ibid, p.129). Then, practice means knowledge in the terms that practitioners have to execute different activities that will entail the creation of information and will lead to an understanding of actions that delimit the performance.

Taking into account the definition of practice, Freeman, Griggs and Boaz (2011, p.131) point out that the significance of practice in the policy process is in the reconstruction of the last. For instance, practice means a "rediscovery of agency" working with other people and artefacts in actions where values, beliefs and identities are important (ibid, p.131). Furthermore, according to the authors, practices "order the complex webs of routines and roles of individuals, artefacts and elements that together produce policy" (p.131). In other words, in the process of policy-making, practices are the glue that links the different parts to the point that they can even operate by adopting a structure or institution (ibid, p. 131-132).

As long as practices are part of the whole process of policymaking, this study will focus on two ways of seeing practice. The first one is the practice of implementing the policy by considering a policy document, which sets instructions and decisions (ibid, p.133). In this case, the policy of 'Performance Commitments' sets a document as technical regulation of how the policy must be done by the Street Level Bureaucrats working in the Local Management and schools. The second one is analysing practices as a way of governing (ibid, p.133), since the primary idea of this policy was to decentralise the government and reach out lower forms of governing.

2.2.3 The role of relationality

Biesta (2009, p. 39) states that the notion of ‘education’ invariably connotes a relationship: “someone educating someone else” through this connection, the educator has a specific understanding of the purpose of their actions. Thus, education can be understood as a service provided by people to people, which, as many other public services, means a “model of human interaction, caring and responsibility” (Lipsky, 1980, p.71). Although education is a matter of care, for Lipsky (1980), this service is provided, nevertheless, by a bureaucracy that involves a “model of detachment...under conditions of resource limitations and constraints, making care and responsibility conditional” (ibid. p.71). This is a contradiction that people who have to deliver this public service have to live in their everyday lives.

In this scenario, relationality matters because it sheds light on the relationship between policy actors instead of their independent characteristics and identities (Alta and Mukhtarov, 2022). Lejano (2021, p. 366) proposes that relationality improves the rational framework of policy analysis and is an “institutional logic by which established patterns of action in the public sphere emerge from the working and reworking of relationships among policy actors”.

Then, the policy actors can show how they care and feel responsible to each other through their relationships and commitments to each other. This happens because policy actors “are to be understood not just as rule-setting and rule-following beings but relational agents who work out the substance of policy through interpersonal relationships and everyday transactions” (Lejano, 2021, p. 361). This understanding of how they work is an explanation of realities when, more than followers, the actors work alongside to make the policy work.

Furthermore, a person’s relationship with another affects their decisions and actions (Lejano and Kan, 2022). Relationships might be understood as a structure of different forms of identity: “relationship with another, in other words, is defined by who I am, who I am in contrast or with regard to the other and who I am conjoint with the other” (Lejano, 2021). Then, the idea of working together is associated with the idea of the identities and how they influence each other. As Lejano (2021, p. 368) states “relationality pertains to how policy emerges from the interaction of different constructed identities”.

After analysing the three concepts, Edwards (2005, p. 168) reflects on how new forms of practice need a different way to work through a relational agency, which is defined as “the capacity to work with other practitioners”. Not only the relational model illustrates how relationships among policy actors are constructed and rebuilt, resulting in policy results (Lejano, 2021), but also, the agency is relevant to create these relationships and networks. Moreover, understanding that policy and administrative processes are influenced by dynamic, circumstantial and self-organising networks with multiple stakeholders with high levels of communication and negotiation (Bartels and Turnbull, 2020) makes acknowledged how practice, agency and relationality work together.

Chapter 3 Contextualising Performance Commitments

The purpose of this chapter is to provide context and background on the policy I am analysing. It is relevant to understand how the ‘Performance Commitments’ were launched and the technical parts of the policy that are going to provide a scenario to explain how, in practice, a policy can deviate from what the document or guidelines said.

3.1 Background and foundations of the policy

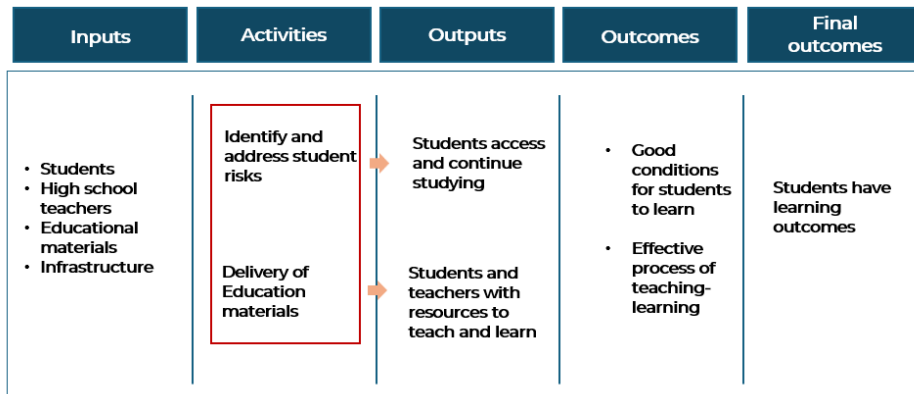
Delivering quality public education to kids and teenagers is a challenge for most governments in developing countries but also an obligation. Providing sufficient and efficient education materials, teachers and infrastructure throughout the country for all the public schools needs integration between the stakeholders at the local, regional and central lines (World Bank, 2021). This process is challenging for Peru since the institutions are not strong enough (Lotta *et al.*, 2022) and the collaboration between different parts of the government might require constant follow-up and integration.

The ‘Performance Commitments’ policy was initially introduced as a form of education reform in the administrative process of delivering high-quality education, and it was focused on a better achievement of outcomes in children’s learning (Balarin and Saavedra, 2021). However, when this policy was planned, its goal was to improve the quality of the delivery of education services in a results-based approach, targeting specific levels of improvement in some areas where it is necessary to make progress (World Bank, 2021). The term of ‘Commitment’ comes from an agreement between the local government institution and the Ministry of Education (Ministerio de Educación, 2022). Then, the focus of the policy is more related to a managing approach, as well as the form of the policy's working. Leaving behind the main issue: poor performance of children in schools (World Bank, 2021).

According to Ministerio de Educación (2022) the policy is based on the Theory of Principal – Agent and responds to a Theory of change. Regarding the first foundation, the Ministry understands that the local management units plays a role as an agent and the Ministry as a principal, and they both do not have the same objectives, this is why the Ministry have to give a monetary incentive to align the objectives (Ministerio de Educación, 2022). Tolofari (2005) stresses how this theory of Principal-Agent is related to the New Public Management in the sense that control and managerialism are the main inspirations.

In respect of the second foundation, the Ministry developed a theory of change where the final outcome is the student’s learning outcomes in Basic Education (primary and high school) across different other outcomes (Ministerio de Educación, 2022). According to Gertler et al. (2016, p.32) a theory of Change is a “description of how an intervention is supposed to deliver the desired results”, and it is used as an instrument that defines the story behind a policy, explaining step by step how the process meets the final outcomes (Freer and Lemire, 2019). Then, the following figure portrays the theory of change of the ‘Performance Commitments’ and tells the story behind the policy, where the indicators under study are listed in the red box.

Figure 1.
Theory of Change of ‘Performance Commitments’



Source: Author’s elaboration based on Ministerio de Educación (2021)

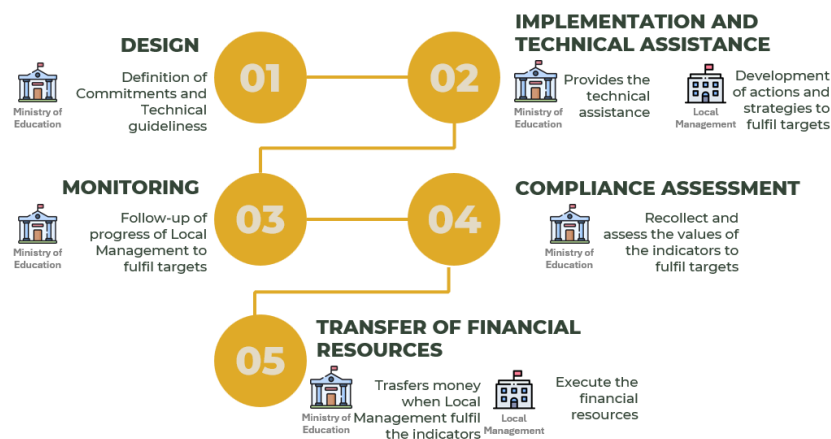
Note: Streams related to the indicators the research aims to analyse

3.2 Policy’s technical framework

In this section, I am going to set the ground to understand the most relevant technical parts of the policy that will serve in the next chapters to analyse. I am doing this by explaining the, first, the stages of the policy; second, the commitments involved and indicators; and third, how this indicator are measured by the Ministry of Education.

This policy has five phases, from the design to the delivery of the monetary incentive. According to Roca (2020) The first phase is design, followed by implementation and technical assistance, followed by monitoring, the fourth phase is compliance assessment, and the last is the transfer of financial resources.

Figure 2
Stages of ‘Performance Commitments’ policy



Source: Author’s elaboration based on Ministerio de Educación (2021)

For the 2024 edition, this policy presented seven commitments for Basic Education and three for Non university higher education, as it showed in Table 1. In Table 2, it is portrayed the indicators who this research is focusing on, which are 3.1 and 6.2.

Table 1
List of Commitments

Educational Level	N°	Description
Basic Education	1	Timely incorporation of school authorities, teachers and administrative assistants
	2	Student's recovery learning
	3	Timely distribution of educational materials
	4	Adequate operational conditions of educational institutions
	5	Closing infrastructural gap in educational institutions
	6	Strengthening student well-being and retention
	7	Pedagogical support for teachers
Non-university higher education	8	Timely incorporation of principals and teachers in Technical-Productive Education
	9	Strengthening Non-university Higher Education
	10	Timely registration of enrolment in Non-university Higher Education

Source: Author's elaboration and translation based on Ministerio de Educación (2024)

Table 2
Indicators by Commitment

N°	Commitment	N°	Indicator
3	Timely distribution of educational materials	3.1	Percentage of modular codes that received educational materials on time and appropriately
6	Strengthening student well-being and retention	6.1	Percentage of alleged cases of sexual violence against the students reported in SiseVe Information System and registered in SIMEX System on time
		6.2	Percentage of high school students retained who remain enrolled in education programs in 2024 compared to the previous year
		6.3	Percentage of students enrolled in Special Basic Education services with a timely Psychopedagogical Report and Personalized Educational Plan
		6.4	Percentage of cases of school violence reported in SiseVe Information System that have been resolved within the established timeframes

Source: Author's elaboration and translation based on Ministerio de Educación (2024)

According to Ministerio de Educación (2024), the indicators 3.1 of delivering educational material on time and 6.2 of improving the retention rate are measured by the Ministry of Education as follows:

Indicator 3.1:
$$\frac{\text{Number of modular codes}^1 \text{ that received timely and adequate educational material}}{\text{Number of number of modular codes receiving educational material}}$$

¹ A public school can have three modular codes: kindergarten, primary level and secondary level.

$$\text{Indicator 6.2: } \frac{\text{Number of students of secondary level enrolled in 2023 in educational services that are enrolled in 2024}}{\text{Number of students of secondary level enrolled in 2023 in educational services}}$$

Basically, these two indicators have been chosen because they are more related to actions realized by mid-level officials and principals and teachers. The first indicator is regarding the delivery of education materials; it ensures that the workers and students at the public schools have the materials and education resources on time to contribute to sessions. The second indicator is the retention rate; this aims to tackle the problem of dropping out of school since the attendance numbers of students have been alarming. This commitment aims to prevent students from having a vulnerable future with the risk of violence and premature pregnancies (Ministerio de Educación, 2022, p. 105).

According to Ministerio de Educación (2021), in the design of the policy, the administrative workers of the regional and local management facilities are the direct beneficiaries, and the indirect beneficiaries are the principals, teachers and parents of the students. This might be because the logic of the policy is only thought through the monetary incentive that the regional administration receives after accomplishing the agreement with the central government. However, the measured and evaluated indicators correspond to the direct actions of principals, teachers, parents, and students. Thus, there is a mismatch between how the policy is landed and how it is practised. Also, it is important to stress that the literature has demonstrated that students who have positive and strong relationships with their teachers are more likely to understand how important is to finish secondary school (Burns, 2020). Likewise, giving feedback in class to encourage permanence in school by the teachers is crucial (Berry, 2020).

Chapter 4 Methodology and Research Process

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the qualitative methods I used to collect data and how the research process was done in detail. As the objective of my research paper is to understand how mid-level officials, principals and teachers navigate the demands of their roles, considering how a policy actually works in practice, the personal experiences of these education actors are the main data of this research. To do so, I conducted semi-structured interviews and observations of classes in an ethnographical way to enrich my research.

4.1 Research setting and participant selection

I conducted the fieldwork in Lima, Peru, in August 2024. I chose Metropolitan Lima specifically since this part of the city represents Peru for the diversity socially and economically and because of the access that was easier compared to other cities since I used to live there and work there too.

In my research, I had to contact local management units and public schools. Regarding the first ones, the target was to reach two local management units out of seven in Metropolitan Lima due to access restrictions for administration reasons and four schools that belonged to the local management units. Both the local management units and schools are located in districts with high levels of delinquency and crime. The interviewees of schools were recruited through a snowball process, asking the local management workers for potential schools. In the Appendix B, it is explained in more detail their characteristics.

I gave pseudonyms to the interviewees to connect them more personally with their experiences. *Manuel, Rosario, Jorge* and *Roberto* are from the local education management units. *Pedro, Claudio, Fernanda,* and *Leandro* are the principals, and *Jessica, Carlos, Bruno, Brenda, Alejandra, Daniela, Sofia, Monica* and *Melissa* are the teachers.

4.2 Data Collection methods and data analysis

4.2.1 Primary data collection

Interviews with mid-level officials, principals, and teachers, as well as class observations, are my primary sources of data collection. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in Spanish; I followed a questionnaire based on the theoretical framework and empirical review, which can be found in Appendix A. To analyse the data, I used thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify and code themes. Manually, I coded the interviews using first concepts associated with practice, agency and relationality, such as autonomy, bureaucracy, strategies, upward accountability, challenges, relationships, monitoring, real practice, efforts, implementation reality, downward accountability, actions, innovation, adaptation, coping mechanism, care, ethos, empathy, believes, and beyond regulations; and second related with the New Public Management such as role perception, improvisation, identity, pressures, tensions, performance, commitment and dilemmas.

Regarding classroom observations, I took field notes to analyse them. My role there was only observation. I did not want to interrupt classes as my goal was to develop an idea of the day-to-day work of the teachers and principals to “find social meanings as they are implicitly forged and sustained in everyday interaction” (Boellstorff, 2015, p.75). When analysing the field notes, I coded them too, but focusing on the efforts that teachers make to engage in classes to prevent dropout and the materials they use to compensate for the insufficient educational materials.

4.2.2 Secondary data analysis

My research is based on the policy goals of the policy document of ‘Performance Commitments’, then I had to review the guidelines carefully, focusing on the general roles that the policy commands the mid-level officials in two specific indicators: improving retention rate and delivery of educational materials on time. I analysed the technical sheet of these two indicators to see how different the considerations are to measure the indicators on the document from how, in reality, actions must be done by the practitioner to meet the performance targets. I did this in contrast with the stories of the practitioners of my primary data.

4.3 Scope and Limitations of the Research

Regarding the scope of the research, the implementation of the policy is oriented to the two hundred and forty-six Local Units of Management in the whole country; however, for his study, only two were located in Lima, the capital city. In addition, the policy for 2024 contemplates evaluating fifteen performance indicators, but for this study, only two indicators regarding the retention rate in secondary school and the delivery of education materials were considered.

In the big picture, one limitation of this study is that the perspectives and stories that will be told correspond only to a few experiences of some of the mid-level officials, principals and teachers. Therefore, it will be difficult to generalise from these samples. However, this study will be a starting point for understanding the policy ‘Performance Commitments’ from the practice in real life and everyday practice by the implementers. Another limitation is the setting of the interviews. Even if I wanted to interview the teachers in a different place and not the school, this was almost impossible. When I try to reach out to teachers first on my own, they will ask me if I ask for permission from the Principal. Otherwise, I will have to do it before. Also, when I asked the Principals to introduce me to the teachers, they selected not only the available teachers that day but also who they believed would be comfortable talking to me or would be friendly enough or would have time for an interview. Thus, the access to the teachers was through the principals, which means that the information gathered can have a bias since the teachers know beforehand that the principal might know what they can say in the interview.

Regarding the selection of participants, considering how difficult access was to the schools, the aim was to interview the principals, but some of them were in meetings in the local management unit or were absent at the time of the day I visited the schools. Actually, I only managed to interview one principal, and the rest were deputy principals who oversaw

high school. This might be a limitation in the sense that those who are more involved in the achievement of the performance indicators are the principals rather than the deputy principals.

4.4 Positionality, risks and ethical considerations

My engagement with educational policies and motivation in studying this topic was driven as part of my identity as a daughter of public teachers; both my parents worked as public teachers in rural areas for more than twenty years. Listening to their stories, struggles, ways to cope and personal relationships with the students have tailored my focus on research and life. This fact was also one of the reasons I wanted to work as a public servant in the Ministry of Education of Peru.

In 2022, I was part of the design process of this policy. Specifically, I was in charge of the design of the incentive for non-university higher education. Having this experience showed me how to work in the Central Government designing a top-down policy; when working there, I had biases, pretending to know which indicators or targets were better to assess for the whole country, and not aware of how a policy in practice works because before I have not been on the ground. However, this last position gave me knowledge and access to talk with some of my interviewees. I activated this past position to be more critical in my research position now and question how the policy was implemented by the agents.

Regarding the ethical considerations, I ensured that all the participants understood the purpose of my research and how the information gathered would be used only for academic purposes. Moreover, I made sure to protect the identities of mid-level officials, principals and teachers. In the case of teachers and principals, I have special empathy with them. In class observations, I made sure that my position was as a researcher and recognised the local characteristics of every school. Finally, I ensured that I was careful to include the representative participants' voices and experiences and stick to them as I wanted to report them honestly.

In the fieldwork conducted in Peru, visiting schools in challenging socioeconomic territories, I acknowledged that some potential risks to my safety were compromised since some of the schools are located in districts with high rates of crime or insecurity, so I coordinated my visits beforehand to reduce risks. Also, my visits could interfere with the school lessons, then I ensured that I did not disrupt the routines.

Chapter 5 Findings: The Lived Realities of Educational Policy

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the findings of the fieldwork in the two Local Educational Management Units and in the five schools; in other words, through the lived experiences of the practitioners on the ground. Even if what is happening in the Local Education Management Unit is not the same as in the school, I believe these two ‘different worlds’ are intertwined and deserve to be analysed jointly. Also, as mentioned before, the interviews and classroom observations were conducted on two specific subjects of the policy: improving the retention rate and delivering educational material in high school on time. Quotations and vignettes are used to portray the experiences of the interviewees in a deeper and more vivid way.

The order of this chapter is according to the sub-questions of the research, and some concepts are used to give a structure and an initial analysis of the data; however, the discussion of the research question itself is done in the next chapter within the theoretical framework and the literature review. Thus, first, it explains the understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the agents of education related to the policy while balancing their identities in everyday practice. Second, it describes the challenges and dilemmas that arise in the implementation of the policy through the practitioners’ experiences, focusing on the practices they have to encounter to fulfil their roles and commitments. Third, it illustrates the different coping mechanisms that the practitioners have developed to face the challenges and dilemmas.

5.1 Understanding of roles and accountability in practice

In this section, I am going to explain the **major pressures** that the practitioners experience when executing their roles, such as the pressure of multiple accountabilities, balancing between caring and being accountable, and the more layers of bureaucracy that they have to encounter navigating their roles.

Pressures of multiple accountabilities

Doing fieldwork, I found that the professionals are balancing the **upward and downward accountability** with their professional identities within the New Public Management. The **mid-level officials** can feel pressures from the **upward accountability**. Also, there is a tension between implementing their roles according to the policy and their identity as public workers because even if they are not directly involved in the teaching-learning process, they have a commitment to education delivery. Roberto (from the Local Management Unit 03), who is in charge of the performance of the indicator of the distribution of materials, put emphasis on this **tension** as follows:

“I am a civil servant who works for conviction because I know that if the distribution of the materials is not done or done poorly, the students will be the ones paying the consequences. However, I know that I am also being assessed for my performance, as this indicator is part of the ‘Performance Commitments’. Then I also know that I have to deliver and fulfil a target that the Ministry of Education has set”. (Roberto, Author’s translation)

Manuel, who is also in charge of the performance of the indicator of the distribution of materials in the Local Management in Unit 05, also explains how his work is determined by their values, but also how the policy can pressure him.

“My reason for being is the educational service [referring to his ethics], and we have to do it timely so the students are attended, but yet the Ministry will set these performance targets with specific times and expect us to face them without any excuse. For me, it boots what we already are doing. But also, I know that if something happens with this indicator, the head of my Local Management will ask me to be accountable”. (Manuel, Author’s translation)

Rosario (from Local Management 05), who is in charge of the performance of the indicator of retention of students, feels that her role is taken for granted by the Ministry of Education and how accountable she has to be.

“...what is most important to us is that the students go back to the school and not stay in the streets... we are whom every day devoting to pedagogical management; if we let them go, the students probably will never return to the school...but the Ministry only looks at the numbers of students who have not enrolled anymore and supposed to be so and not understand all our efforts”. (Rosario, Author’s translation)

In schools, principals also face the contradiction of being accountable for performing according to the policy and their roles as agents of education. For example, Pedro (Deputy Principal of School A) shows how much work means for them:

Vignette: Pedro, sitting at his desk in his office, shows a paper that contains a list of students. Some of the names are in red. "The ones in red are the students that have been transferred to other schools; they are attending other schools, but the other in black [which is the majority] are students that are not attending. They are a lot, and we do not know why they are not attending", he indicates. His expression gets more worried when he shows me more lists. He says: "This is only second grade, I have been here for third, fourth and here [showing me more papers] for fifth". He looks at me and says: "I know this is part of the performance indicators, and what we do is try to find the students somehow through calling them, though social media".

Also, in this case, Pedro explained his view about how they also feel **downward accountability** to the students:

“I am a principal who wants the students to feel that they are cared for and that they are with them. For me, it is not to make a plan; it is simply to listen to them, be attentive to them and keep watching. I always look for a way to enhance the activities they like to do, and I try to attend all the students in the school”. (Pedro, Author’s translation)

Claudio (Principal of School B) explains too that he has to fulfil his role in the education service and, as his identity, he would do everything in his power to keep the commitment the government has given to him.

“I have to keep the commitment that the government has assigned me as a Principal: the achievement of students’ learning and preventing dropping out. I am willing to intervene and find the students when they do not attend school when I believe the parents are depriving them of education. The government pays me the salary for educating the students, to make them learn and to make sure that the teachers teach them”. (Claudio, Author’s translation)

Regarding the **technicalities of being accountable**, for Pedro (Deputy Principal of School A), there is constant pressure from the Local Management whenever they ask for information or a report of actions to provide the report to the Ministry of Education:

“In reality, more than support, we receive warnings. They [the mid-level officials from the Local Management] told us they will be assessed by how the retention rate is performing. They tell us that we must look for strategies to retain the students at school. They show us the performance target, which is a high percentage, and warn us that if we do not contribute to the target, then classrooms will be closed, contracts will be missed, and teachers will not be hired anymore”. (Pedro, Author’s translation)

Contrary to what Pedro expressed, for Claudio (Principal of School B), even if the Local Management provides some recommendations, talks or workshops, they are not useful because, in the end, who manages the school is them.

“I do not feel any pressure from the local management to fulfil the ‘Performance Commitments’ because I will report and inform you in detail about the performance of my school. However, they [the mid-level officials from the Local Management] cannot tell me anything about that because we are the ones facing the students and parents and providing the education” (Claudio, Author’s translation)

This contradiction between how the principals perceive the pressures of the policy can occur depending on how many students each school can have, but also on the **agency** of the principals if they feel that they can respond to the pressures from the Local Management and on the relationship between them and the mid-level officials.

Regarding the experience of the **teachers**, they can feel that they will have to compromise their job of teaching to be accountable. Melissa (teacher in School E), being a teacher is a matter of conviction, and beyond being part of an organisation where she has to perform, she cares about them. However, she recognised that there is tension when it comes to their roles. In the next quote, she stresses how being empathetic is part of her work:

“Gray hairs are not for nothing. A lot of patience is needed to teach and put yourself in the children’s shoes” (Melissa, Author’s translation)

Also, Jessica (teacher in school A) feels powerless because she said that before she could demand more from the students and the backup from the Local Unit and Ministry, but now all they expect is targeting high number of student attendance but not about the education itself, as she explains:

“...But now the Ministry ask you: why do you have so many students who failed?... They do not pay me to go visit student’s house and knock on the door to find them and make them attend school... I have studied to teach, to talk, and communicate with students, not to reprimand parents when the students do not go to school” (Jessica, Author’s translation)

Then, teachers, principals and mid-level officials have to adapt to multiple accountabilities in order to fulfil the demands of the ‘Performance Commitments’ policy. These reflections in the field show the tensions that they have to experience in everyday practice.

Balancing between caring and being accountable

Not only the roles of the practitioners as agents of education are stressed when they have to fulfil them according to the policy mandates, but considering that the students are adolescents of rebellious age, and, according to the teachers and principals, a big part of them come from dysfunctional homes, it is vital to the **care** that they receive at school since they are in the age of being educated.

For the **principals**, balancing caring for the students and being accountable to the Local Management is a matter of worry. Leandro (Deputy Principal of School D) highlighted how now, for the Government, it is more important to meet performance targets rather than care about the students and train them in values, as he stresses:

“...before respect, punctuality, and responsibility were taught and practised, so the students were trained with those values, but not now. As the State says, it does not matter values; it is only important that the student passes the year...Education is a means to transform the country and be better, but the State does not understand that”. (Leandro, Author’s translation)

Claudio (Principal from School B) also mentioned that caring about the students is to make policies more rigid and studying must be compulsory, but he recognises how his intentions in practice can be diminished when he must confront parents:

“...I do not understand why I have to be in trouble when asking parents to send children to study...I am the devil for the parents...neither the head of the Local Management nor the Minister of Education represents this figure to them, only me because none of them knocks on the door of the student’s house and demands them to go to study. I do so, and I am the devil for that” explained”. (Claudio, Author’s translation)

In the group of **teachers**, Jessica (Teacher of School A) believes that there is a clear line between being a professional and caring about the students. Even though she cares about them, she knows that she cannot play a life-changing role in their lives, which shows a **professionalisation** more related to being accountable than teaching the students:

“...it is like if I was their second mom, I have to be attentive if they come punctual or why they are missing classes, if they have any problem at home, also, the students sometimes have doubts because they do not understand how important studying is, but most importantly, because of the way their parents think, and this I cannot change. I have to be clear with them; I am not going to lie to them saying that I am going to change their lifestyle because sometimes the parents do not send them to school to make them work”. (Jessica, Author’s translation)

For Alejandra (Teacher of School B) one of the actions they take to fulfil the commitment they have with the institution (high number of students attending schools) but also with the students is motivating them, explaining that the only way to get ahead is studying, she expressed:

“... they have a lot of dreams and goals, so it is very important to talk to them and get incentives to attend school and not drop out. I would tell them that if they do not finish school, it will be very difficult for them to accomplish their dreams”. (Alejandra, Author’s translation)

For Brenda (Teacher of School B), the motivation that she brings to classes is daily, and as a mentor even more often, she gives ideas for progressing in life to the students to motivate them. However, she knows that she is a professional and education starts from home, and she cannot be involved more than being a teacher, as follows:

“...some of the parents will ask me “*¿Por qué no le jala la oreja usted a mi hijo?*” (Why do you not pull the ear to my son?) [referring to physical reprimanding, which is a common phrase of parenting]. I cannot do that because education and parenting start from home, and I am only the teacher”. (Brenda, Author’s translation)

A common feeling among the teachers was vulnerability while doing their job in the sense that parents’ students, principals, and workers from the Local Management and Ministry all expect most of them with little support.

Bureaucratic compliances

After phase four of the policy, it is required to make a final report, which means more bureaucracy, and sometimes some mistakes can be made in the report. This is a pressuring process for the mid-level official, most of all because the Ministry of Education can see how the process of distribution is going since all the numbers have been recorded in the information systems. As Manuel (from the Local Management Unit 05) explains:

“There are always remarks or comments from the Ministry. Digitation errors are common, and they [The Ministry] will be noticed only when it is a blank space or a zero... I will have to do paperwork in order to explain why this school, for example, did not receive any materials. Normally, when the Ministry notices this is in the cases where the school is closed, and I will have to explain every year the same story, which is tiring. I do not understand why I have to be accountable for that when the Ministry counts with real-time information”. (Manuel, Author’s translation)

To respond to the remarks from the Ministry, they will have to prepare a report to the Regional Directorate of Education of Metropolitan Lima, which will wait for the other Local Management to do the same and send a Report absolving all the objections that the Ministry made. For Manuel, these actions are more work. This feeling is shared by Roberto (Local Management Unit 03), they confirmed that whenever any person wants to speak up about these errors that make their work more complicated, which is practically filling numbers for the numerator and denominator of the fraction that is the performance indicator, they do not find any room to talk to the people of the Ministry.

The same can happen with the retention rate. According to Jorge (Local Management Unit 05), when the Ministry finds some remarks, they will ask them for proof that they have made the Principals record what they have done to retain the student.

“This process of accountability makes me feel under huge pressure all the time, every year. As the indicator not only applies to public schools but also private schools, it is very difficult to have the same number of students enrolled year by year. Some of them are migrants, and they move to other cities or countries, or they transfer to other schools in different districts”. (Jorge, Author’s translation)

Then, more bureaucracy is created. Not only do they have to explain why they did not meet the performance target, but they also will have to show through paperwork how the schools could not make the student come back to study or not drop out.

In the **schools**, the effects of more bureaucracy can be felt, too. For example, for Fernanda (Deputy Principal of School C), having to be more accountable means having more bureaucracy that can deviate them from their pedagogical duties:

“Now everything is more bureaucratic. They [the Ministry of Education] are always asking for documentation, and this distracts us from the pedagogical part of our jobs. The administrative part is huge. Also, because it is more administrative, the teachers are seen also as employees without any authority. So it is harder to work in this sense”. (Fernanda, Author’s translation)

5.2 Challenges and dilemmas in practice

When the policy is implemented in a real-life scenario, some gaps can be found that tell more than the document of the policy itself. These adaptations to the practice are surrounded by a tension between performing and everyday practice realities, where the agents of education have to navigate as a mandate of the policy and also provide a quality education service. All of these produce challenges and dilemmas that the practitioners have to encounter. In this section, I am going to explain the main challenges they face.

Inputs to accountability: data from the Ministry

One of the major challenges the **mid-level officials** have to face is related to the data they need to monitor the performance of the indicators. Even though the Ministry of Education launched the policy document of ‘Performance Commitments’ in January (when the beginning of the school year is in March) every year since ten years ago, the information they use to assess the results of the indicators is sent after the documents and depending on the availability of it. The policy itself is about outcomes; other regulations support the implementation of this policy. In the case of delivery of educational materials, the Ministry of Education and Regional Directorate of Education of Metropolitan Lima set guidelines to distribute the material months ago, before January, to ensure that the process of distribution starts in January or February, but this information is not accurate. As Manuel (from Local Management Unit 05) confirms:

“...to perform properly, we need the necessary information about the number of materials the students will be provided by the school. There are 240 schools in this District. It is very difficult to know the accurate number of students, not only because of not knowing the actual number of students that will enrol next year but even worse because the quantity of materials that the Ministry sends is always wrong”. (Manuel, Author’s translation)

Roberto (Local Management Unit 03) agrees with Manuel and explains one more reality that is happening that affects the implementation of the policy: the government has allowed since a few years ago to enrol the students until two months before the school year finishes. This becomes a challenge to them in the sense that they do not have the latest numbers to operate, as he explains:

“This situation frustrates me. I recognise that every student must study since it is a right and obligation at the same time, but what the government is doing [allowing the students to enrol late] is a contradictory mandate because the school can receive students late in the year, but, at the same time, they expect us to provide all the materials with a wrong forecasting of the number of students”. (Roberto, Author’s translation)

Also, as the policy ensures numbers rather than the quality of the service, Manuel and Roberto from the Local Management state that the materials of the Ministry of Education are not sufficient, but in the measurement of the indicator, this shortcoming cannot be seen.

“When they [the Ministry of Education] checks in the information system the numbers of the indicator of delivery of materials, they do not care if they send enough materials or not; they only care if in the list [showing me a paper with a list of schools] next to the name of the school there is a number of materials. So, for example, if next to one school there is a “1” rather than “20” like if they were texts, for them, that is okay, as long as there is not a “0”. The problem is when they see a “0”, because that would mean that zero materials were sent to that school, that is when they email me or call me”. (Manuel, Author’s translation)

The government expects the indicator of delivery of materials to be high since they send the information that will be needed to distribute the materials; however, it does not take into account that this information has been wrong since several years ago, and on the grounds to implement the policy, the reality is other.

Regarding the retention rate, the government expects the performance target to be high on paper. However, in practice, according to Rosario and Jorge (Local Management Unit 05), there is a big challenge when they do not have the latest data:

“...the Ministry sent us data in which we can see exactly the quantity of students who are not attending school, but this information is not the latest, and we have 100 schools under our administration, so we cannot trust this data. To do our jobs, we need useful data. This becomes a challenge to us...”. (Rosario, Author’s translation)

Working with other policy actors

Another challenge for the **mid-level officials** is **working alongside the principals**; all of them will need to have a close relationship with them since they need the information that the Ministry of Education does not provide and work with them applying some strategies. For example, Rosario (Local Management Unit 03) explained that to locate the students and to make the principals register the list of students who are attending school and are at risk of dropping out, there has to be done work with them.

Also, for Jorge (from the Local Management Unit 05), whose job is more technical because he has to help the principals record the data on the attendance of the students or of enrolment in an information system, a dilemma has arisen in this process:

“...sometimes, because [the Government] ask us to have a high number in the retention rate as a performance target, we feel like we have to obligate the principals to record the enrolment of the same number of students every year even when some students are not longer attending schools. Sometimes, some principals will do as we ask because we are the authority, but sometimes, they will not. When principals refuse to do that, our numbers decrease, and then the head of the Local Management will ask me: why is this happening? Sometimes my boss will understand, sometimes not”. (Jorge, Author’s translation)

For him, this is a big dilemma that he has to face since the indicator was introduced in the policy after the COVID-19 pandemic in order to prevent drop-outs. However, in practice, setting a high retention rate creates dilemmas for the workers, who are forced to act in a certain way even if they do not want to perform. Thus, this creates perverse incentives for the implementation of the policy.

According to **principals**, in order to **work with the students** regarding the retention problem, the Ministry is giving them psychological tools and making the teachers less hectic in their jobs by hiring psychologists for them. However, as Pedro (Deputy Principal of School A) explains, secondary is the stage where the students need the most psychologists because they can help them understand the changes that the kids are having to become teenagers.

“...you know, you must have heard that [the Government] is going to spend a certain amount of money for all the schools to have psychologists, but in practice, this is not happening. So, ¿what do we do? We look for partnerships with Universities that have psychologists who can work with the students. They come twice a week. One in the morning and the other in the night”. (Pedro, Author’s translation)

To give the pedagogical support needed to the teachers, give them normative documents, and implement strategies to accomplish the best performance to impact the students' learning experience. Specifically, he monitors the teachers and works with them to improve the pedagogical part of their job. However, he also said, “I do not create the young people who do not study or work”, which demonstrates the boundaries of his job regarding the future of the students.

For the **teachers**, not only is working with the students a challenge, but also **working with the parents** is. For Melissa (teacher in School E) and the other teachers I interviewed, working with the parents can present a dilemma for them since having them on board and making a team with them is key to working with the students. However, sometimes, the parents are not committed to the education of the students.

“Education depends on three agents: parents, teachers and students. If we do not count on parent’s support, our job is very difficult, if we do not have the parents, we cannot find out what is happening at home” when the student does not talk. (Melissa, Author’s translation)

Furthermore, Brenda (teacher in School B) explained that sometimes parents are not concerned or engaged with students' performance.

“...they [the parents] usually do not attend meetings and they are not committed with school’s activities. Parents tend to think that extracurricular activities are only a waste of money, but they do not see that there are other modes to engage them and educate them in different ways. Out of thirty student’s parents, only two mothers are committed to the school”. (Brenda, Author’s translation)

This idea is reinforced by what Pedro (Deputy Principal in School A) shows that working with students is more than merely teaching them. It is about connecting with them and working with the parents as well:

“There is no student who does not learn what one [the teachers and him] wants. This is why it is important for a teacher to connect emotionally with the students. Also, we have to include the work with parents; without them, we can not do anything”. (Pedro, Author’s translation)

It can be seen how the mid-level officials, principals, and teachers have to work alongside each other to make the policy happen. In these encounters, many dilemmas and challenges

occurred that in a policy document cannot be predicted or taken into account if the policy is not studied and analysed from the ground.

5.3 Facing the reality: coping mechanisms and agency

In this section, I am going to explain the coping mechanisms that the practitioners developed when navigating their roles under the 'Performance Commitments' policy. Recognising that there are gaps between the policy mandates and the reality on the grounds, the agents have found means to adapt and improvise to ensure the implementation of the policy.

Agency in creation of database

From the **mid-level officials'** perspective, in the case of meeting the target of distributing the materials, they have to create their own database, since are not provided the Ministry of Education of the 'real' number of students that will be enrolled next year, which is a vital input for the number of needed materials. For example, Manuel (from Local Management Unit 05) among the mid-level officials, explains his actions as follows:

"I call the Principals of the schools months before the school year ends and try to get the correct information. I will have to make them sign an affidavit in order to them not to lie to me or invent information". (Manuel, Author's translation)

They learnt to create their own information when the policy was launched back ten years ago, they 'believed' in the numbers the Ministry sent to distribute the materials, but they made so many mistakes and asked for new materials or reallocating them more work. Nevertheless, even though they send the materials based on their calls to principals, mistakes can be made. Another adaptation made by local management is the reallocation of materials. For the Government, a reallocation of materials from one Local Management to another must be done a month after the distribution is done, but for Roberto (from Local Management 03), this is not a solution:

"This solution is outrageous. I am a rebel because I do not follow this order; I call my peers in other Local Management Units and ask if they have leftover materials, and I go for them and exchange some other materials they need. I cannot make the students wait one month [as the policy mandates say] to receive their material if I can work my way and resolve this problem. This practice, I know now, that the seven Local Managements do that, they learnt from me". (Roberto, Author's translation)

This informal practice is how they have been working to fulfil and perform how the policy expects and how the Ministry expects. This is a form to cope with the lack of accurate information.

Strategies to cope with retention rate

In the **schools**, the **principals** and **teachers** have developed many strategies to engage the students with the school and prevent drop-outs. For example, Claudio (Principal of School B) explains that when they notice a student is not attending school for a long time, it is the first sign that the student is at risk of dropping out:

“...then I will have to look for the ‘Supportive Parents’ to find information on the student who is no longer attending school. This program is very helpful for us since it is a group of parents who are also neighbours. They are part of the community, and they can approach the families whose children are missing school classes. So, we ask for the community of San Juan de Lurigancho District to help us and they do, they are committed with the education of their children”. (Claudio, Author’s translation)

This initiative that was born in the pandemic continues to be one of the most powerful tools that School B has as a way to cope with the students that are unreachable. Then. The ‘Supportive Parents’ play an intermediate role in creating awareness between the school and the parents. This initiative is also an active response from the community facing the negative response from the parents of the students at risk of dropping out when the school staff tried to intervene, as Claudio explains:

“...when me or the administrative staff go to the house of the students who do not attend school, the parents are usually upset about that. I think they trust more the ‘Supportive parents’. However, there are some cases where the parents were rude even with them. In those cases, we will have to fill out some paperwork and then report to the authorities that the parents are not sending the students to study”. (Claudio, Author’s translation)

In school B, Pedro will mention that to encourage the students to continue studying (and directly to the performance indicator), he will engage them in different extracurricular activities.

Vignette: Pedro stands up from his seat and goes to the corner of his office. He brings a large black bag. He starts to take some balls and chess games out of there. He says: “The problem is tackled from all angles: improving the school’s symphonic band, Mathematical Olympiad and Student Olympics. I have donated these balls [holding the volleyball balls] because I want my children to commit to the school and not drop out. My colleagues have donated some of the uniforms for the Student Olympics”. He said, pointing to a pile of clothes in the other corner. He replicates, “We do what we have to do for our students”. Then he says with a smile on his face and proudly: “I want the students to feel that their efforts [of attending school despite challenges] are recognised; we want them to feel content, happy and motivated”.

Pedro also explains, like the other principals, that their principal allies are community members such as the public health centre and the faculty of sports education or psychology from the Public or Private Universities where the university students can do their internships in the school. Leandro (Deputy Principal of School D) included the police station as one of the biggest allies of his school since they help to locate the students when the school needs them.

Monica (Teacher of School D) and many other of the teachers I interviewed explained that even if the Ministry of Education or the Local Management requires them to locate the students who are not attending school to prevent them from dropping out, they are not able to do it because it can be very dangerous to go to their houses, and sometimes the students do not tell where their house is located. What they do for the students is talk to them and reprimand them when necessary. For example, Monica, in everyday work with the students, will explain why they have to attend school:

Vignette: Monica starts the second lesson of the day, taking attendance. Only two of the students on her list are absent. There are fifteen students in the class. She reminds the students that late that day, the parents have to come for a meeting with her and the Principal to talk about their grades. She also stated that “there is a new policy from the Ministry of

Education, you guys now can repeat the school year if you do not have good grades". The students who were laughing and joking with each other, or not paying attention now, after hearing her words, started to look astonished and worried at the same time. Monica says: "keep missing classes... keep not attending school...if you think that in Maths or Spanish Language's grades, you guys are going to have good marks like A or AD" she said trying to make eye contact with them, especially with the ones who miss classes I guess, [it sounded like a threat but a threat of someone who cares about you].

Lack of educational materials

Another big challenge for the schools, and especially for the teachers, is that they have not received sufficient materials. This reality is shared by the principals, as Pedro (Deputy Principal of School A) said, "*cada profesor baila con su pañuelo*" (every teacher does their own thing), explaining that every teacher must do their own materials and provide them to the students.

Jessica (Teacher of School A) explained that it had been a few years since the Ministry of Education sent books. Now they work with workbooks, but this is not enough for all the subjects they teach. Then, all the teachers I interviewed had to prepare their own materials, copy them, and charge the students for the copy. The prices of the copies vary between 0,10 soles (which is 0,024 euro) to 0,20 soles depending on the number of pages of the sheets. If they need more materials to teach, they will also have to spend their own money to acquire them.

Brenda (Teacher from School B) stated that some of the students would think that the government would give them the study material, but that is not true. Furthermore, she would say that buying the materials is optional, but if the students do not do it, they do not have any material to work on. For example, Bruno (Teacher of School A) would try to charge the students through one of the classmates so he does not look like he is obligating them to acquire the material.

Vignette: Bruno starts the lesson by taking attendance for the twenty students who didn't attend that day. He looks very concerned and asks the students if they know something about their classmates. The girls did not say anything. He said: "Well, I will talk to the parents of the students because it is not good if they are not attending school, then they fall behind in the lessons". When it is time to start the lesson, the teacher takes some photocopies out of his backpack. He gives it to one of the students, who is sitting in the first row of the papers and leaves the class. The student stands up and starts to distribute the papers, but in exchange, she receives some coins. One of the students did not receive the paper and said: "I do not have money today". So, the student who distributes the product continues to do so to other students. When the teacher returns to the classroom, he checks if all the students have their educational material and starts the lesson. Then he noticed that one of them did not have the sheet. He approaches her and asks: "why do you not have your material?" she answers, "I am going to buy it next class, not today". So he nods and continues explaining.

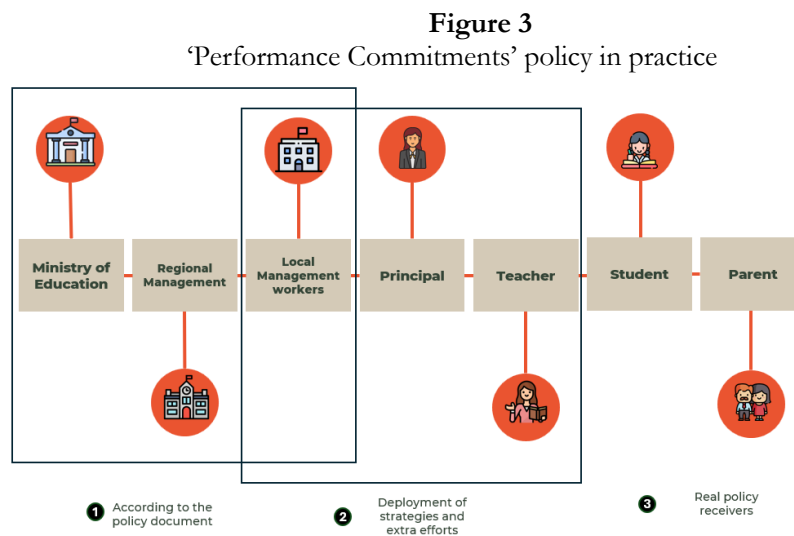
Daniela (Teacher from School C) would try to do the same as the other teachers and do not charge directly to the students, but sometimes this is inevitable:

Vignette: When I was talking with Daniela inside the class while the students were doing an assignment. One of the students comes closer to us, look at us, look at me, and then looks at Daniela. He ask her: "Miss, do you have white paper sheets?". Daniela answers: "No, I am sorry, I do not have". And then the student insists "No, miss, I want to buy them, by any chance, do you have some? I remember last class you had them". Daniela look at me flustered

and embarrassed, and responds seriously: “I do not sell them, and I do not have them”. Then the students looks a little bit confused and return to his seat.

From these vignettes, it can be seen the experience of the teachers coping with the lack of educational materials. Even though the mid-level officials send all the materials that the Ministry of Education sends to the school, these are not enough for all of the students. Then, the teacher cope by creating their own materials and introducing an idea of market across the classrooms inevitable, because they could not also provide the materials for free since the costs will have to be covered by them.

Finally, as a summary from the information of my fieldwork, in the next Figure, I am showing how the ‘Performance Commitments’ functions in practice according to my interviewees and my personal experience in classroom observations and reviewing the policy document:



Source: Author’s elaboration based on the Technical Rule (Ministerio de Educación, 2024b) and field-work

Then, it can be seen that in number 1, there is an application of the technical guidelines from the Ministry of Education to the Local Management. In number 2, there is a deployment of strategies and extra efforts from the local managers, principals and teachers. Finally, in number 3, I showed that the students would be the real policy receivers since the idea of improving the educational service have an impact direct of them.

Chapter 6 Interpreting educational practices: A theoretical discussion

In the last chapter, I presented my principal findings of the fieldwork done in Peru; from these findings, three themes emerged, which I am going to analyse, interpret and locate in the principal debates, theories and past studies from the literature review. I am going to do this using a meta-theme: collaboration and relational work. This lens will help to understand other concepts.

Collaboration and relational work are the foundations of education, and it is shown behind every encounter of the teachers, principals and mid-level officials working with each other to make the policy enacted. As Lejano (2021) indicated relationality is a way to understand how this relationship formed on the ground by the policy actors makes the policy work in the end. This relationality also shaped the identities of the three of them, but as the policy of 'Performance Commitments' is based on the New Public Management characteristics, the practitioners have limited agency to cope or to adapt to the local realities. Like Durose (2007) stated that as the educational workers are part of a bureaucracy, their roles are undermined by the big structure, which is different from what Lipsky (1980) mentioned about the street-level bureaucrats because even if they will have some discretion and autonomy, the NPM has rooted its way of work and managerialism in schools and in the local management units to the point that it changed their essence already (Tolofari, 2005).

6.1 Between commitment, care and performance targets

The complex dynamic between the commitment and care of the practitioners, mid-level officials, principals and teachers at different levels, and the pressures to meet performance targets challenges the relational underpinnings of education. Education involves relationships between the actors and caring about them (Biesta, 2009; Connell, 2013), but this idea clashes with the policy mandates of meeting a high retention rate or delivering the educational materials on time.

There are various ways in which this tension between achieving performance goals and care for the students shows up. The contradiction is more direct in the case of the teachers, who as Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) stated care about the students and create a special connection with them in order to engage them in school and prevent dropping out. Nevertheless, this relationship is weakened by the impositions of performance by the policy. The teachers would have to set aside their commitment and accountability to the students to be accountable to the principals and the Local Management Unit. This finding is consistent with what Tolofari (2005) stated: NPM has caused changes in the patterns of accountability. In addition, they, strengthening relationality, have individual relationships with their students no matter if it is too personal which confirms what Bodone (2005) stated about the relational investment of the teachers with the students.

The principals are also involved in a caring relationship with the students but not as committed as the teachers, as they were also teachers before becoming principals, they try to have a personal relationship with the students and try to assist the teachers pedagogically.

They try to balance this care with being accountable to the Local Management Unit. In fact, as Tolofari (2005) mentioned with NPM the impact on performance and output measures have changed the foundation values of schooling, this is also happening in the schools where I visited and the principals, whose role have changed in a more managerial tone, noticed that and try to not lose their commitment to educate the students. The NPM does not incentivize a good behaviour since it is creating ethical tensions and accountability demands.

The mid-level officials have demonstrated that have a clear commitment to the education service that goes beyond the performance target. My findings match with what (Carbajal and Campos (2022) found in the evaluation they did of the 'Performance Commitments' policy: the mid-level officials in their eagerness of improving the service education will make more efforts like tracking and visiting the students' house. This way to show their commitment also reinforces the revelation of Sempé (2017) who stressed how the policy in practice was different from the document. However, it is also true that the actions they do can be motivated by the pressure of accomplishing the target that the Ministry of Education has set. Moreover, the findings confirmed that Lejano and Kan (2022) lens of relationality takes place in the education service, since the relationship of the mid-level officials with the school staff is vital to make sense of the policy.

Then, the three actors enact the policy rather than only implement, supporting what Ball et al. (2012) affirmed. However, the roles and responsibilities that every actor in this ecosystem of the education service at the local level has to accomplish according to the idea of being more efficient and accountable is creating additional accountability and more bureaucracy. The findings support this fact when the mid-level officials have to (Lea, 2021) found that what is happening in reality is what Lea (2021) pointed out that in order to have more control, there is an addition of more layers of bureaucracy that, in the end, creates more bureaucracy.

6.2 Balancing roles, identities and professionalisation

Karaevli, Çeven and Korumaz (2022) stressed the importance of the school staff in implementing top-down policies such as 'Performance Comitments'. Even if in the policy document neither teachers nor principals are considered part of the implementation, in practice, they actually are, and their roles are vital to preventing dropping out and having educational materials. Nevertheless, since the policy has foundations on the New Public Management, in the relational work that is happening between the actors, there is a difficult trade-off between accomplishing their jobs and their identities as workers in education. Bezes et al. (2012) affirmed that NPM "seeks to make professionals loyal to their organisation's culture and develops assessment and control procedures", and then the practitioners can fall into the 'managerial trap' of trying to meet the performance targets.

Lejano (2021) stated that the identities of the policy actors influence the relationship with others. This is why the professional identity of the teachers, principals and mid-level officials is now in play; from the interviews, it was clear all three agents really wanted to help and improve the public education service, but they also have learnt throughout the years how to maintain their professional identities: what to do and what not to do in a managerial way where efficiency is the goal. They have set some boundaries not to reach the level of parenting when it comes to relating to the students, and they care about them. They are worried

about if they are attending school or not, or if they have enough educational materials or not. Still, they are also professionals working for the government and willing to meet the performance targets that will make them better professionals.

Therefore, in the local management units, the identities of the public servants have been modified in a managerial way, which corresponds with the observation of Horton (2006) regarding the shift in the public servants' identities when they see themselves as managers. The mid-level officials have been monitored by their bosses and the Ministry of Education, and at the same time, they have been planning, organising, and using resources in order to achieve the performance targets. In some cases, some perverse incentives have been deployed when they would have to demand the principals to enrol students on the system when actually they dropped out or when they would have to check if, in the recording system, there is at least one workbook for an entire school. They are forced to perform in order to carry out the Ministry of Education's plans.

According to Tolofari (2005), NPM has provoked structural changes in the educational public administration sector, especially inside the schools. Imposing their characteristics of marketisation and efficiency has impacted the way a school works, and one of the major changes was in the roles and relationships. My findings support this statement: even if relationality is vital in the matter of education, with the new management of schools, the relationships between teachers, principals, parents and students have changed. In fact, Tolofari (2005, p. 85) stressed that the role of the principals has become a role "more of a manager, in the business style" which is what is happening on the ground; the principals, as Gofen et al. (2024) expressed have become street-level managers who prepare the administrative arrangements and get distracted from the pedagogical support that they can provide to the teachers

In addition, Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (2024) explained that NPM can undermine teachers' agency by asking for hyper accountability, and they can even abandon their beliefs and commitments (Ball, 2003). My findings support this statement. The teachers are who are feeling all the pressures from the principals and mid-level officials to accomplish the performance targets. Despite all the efforts they are making to face the challenges of informally working with parents to engage them in the education of their children, the obligation they have to become more accountable leaves little room to exert their agency. Although they use their relational agency to work with the other policy actors, they will have to do it by setting boundaries so they can stay as professionals.

In this scenario, what the mid-level officials, principals and teachers are doing is rediscovering their identity in the face of policy mandates. Even if they feel like they are more administrative than humans, they do not forget that they are serving the country by improving the quality of the educational service, in the case of mid-level officials. On their side, principals and teachers look for ways to preserve their reason for being: teaching and creating better students through learning and motivating them to engage with studying.

6.3 Autonomy, Discretion and compliance mechanisms

In the context of the New Public Management, the controversy between autonomy and control is rooted in the relationships among mid-level officials, principals and teachers. Bezes et al. (2012) affirmed that NPM is reinforcing the control over frontline professionals, and that the professional judgment to respond to student needs is in play within the constraints of compliance targets. This is also happening with the principals and mid-level officials, who are constrained by managerial constraints.

In addition, the 'Performance Commitments' policy, even if it was designed as part of the target of decentralisation of the education sector is not enhancing school autonomy, which is congruent with what Quesquén and Callao (2022) found since the Ministry of Education is only transferring competencies and responsibilities. Therefore, in the school, discretion is undermined by the rules the school staff will have to follow. For instance, the capacity of teachers to make decisions or have discretion is reduced which is consistent with the research of Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (2024).

Nevertheless, the practitioners have found ways to adopt strategies to cope with the challenges in everyday practice. Just like Vedung (2015) stated, my findings support that the frontline practitioners are using their autonomy to fight against the lack of educational resources and the lack of support from the parents to send the students to study (Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn, 2009). The mid-level officials use their discretion to find a way to create their own database, taking the initiative to call the principals or help them to register the students. The principals develop many strategies to motivate the students to come back to study every day, or if they are at risk of dropping out, they will work with the parents or with neighbours to find them. The teachers create their own educational material for every student since the materials that the Ministry of Education is not enough or simply are not sent. All of these strategies are their coping mechanisms. According to Tummers, Bekkers and Steijn (2009) these strategies will be grouped into the coping family of 'moving towards clients' to make the policy happen.

Understanding how the local management units and the school need each other in order to have the correct information about the number of students enrolled is understanding that beyond performance policies, there is a collaboration between them. Also, all the interviewees who are now mid-level officials or principals have been teachers before, in some cases for more than twenty years. In other words, they use their relational agency of relationships to negotiate spaces of autonomy. As Ball et al. (2012) stated that policy actors do not act independently, which is proved in my research, showing how important relational work is.

Conclusions

This research paper aimed to answer the following question: How do education mid-level officials, principals and teachers navigate the demands of their roles under the Peruvian 'Performance Commitments' policy related to the student retention rate and the delivery of education materials within the framework of New Public Management? Using qualitative methods such as semi-conducted interviews and classroom observations, I have presented the understanding of the roles from the perspective of the people on the ground, challenges and dilemmas trying to meet the performance targets, and the ways they cope with these problems.

Through the lens of collaboration and relational work, I have proved, using the lived experiences of the teachers, principals and mid-level officials, how the New Public Management, in the end, has a different view of what practitioners are, how they work, and to what they stand, stressing the collaboration and relational work that is the base of education work. The New Public Management can suck the life out of education management and convert the policy actors into agents with many tensions. They are between commitment, care, and trying to reach performance targets. Also, they are balancing their roles, identities and professionalisation in the schools and local management units in order to provide an education service. As well as they are challenging control through autonomy and discretion.

Furthermore, I have presented how policy is different from practice and how important relational agency is. First, the professionals in the schools and local management units are not only implementing the policy; they are making it happen and enacting it. Second, I am stressing through their lived experiences the relationality, interconnectedness, and interdependences in the work of the teachers, principals and mid-level officials, where relationships between each other matter.

I have introduced how professionalisation, care and ethics have become inextricably intertwined. This makes the teachers, principals, and civil servants struggle to find an ethical commitment to care and a bureaucratic and managerial identity. What is more, I have shown how much agency they have and how much they have to improvise; in other words, how complex and creative their work is. However, this does not fit in the dominant foundations of NPM and, in fact, these foundations create additional layers of accountability that are taking away the agency of the three agents. More importantly, the performance-based approach teachers and principals have to encounter affects the affection, trust, and contact with the students.

This research provides a glimpse of the everyday lives of teachers, principals, and mid-level officials who face the implementation of a policy founded on NPM principles within the framework of relationality. It also sheds light on how the design of a top-down policy can be improved considering the practice, struggles, and relationships of people on the ground. Nevertheless, additional research is necessary in order to have more nuances of the work of these agents in more schools and local managements and in different parts of Peru.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview guide

I used this interview guide for the semi-structured interviews, but some of the questions were only focused on the mid-level officials. Also, the interviews were made in Spanish, and the questions presented were translated into English.

Section 1

1. Could you tell me about your current role in your job? (mid-level official, principal, teacher)
2. For how long have you been in this position?
3. What are your principal responsibilities in this role?

Section 2 (some of these questions were only for mid-level officials and principals)

4. Can you describe the specific actions you take to implement it related to student retention rates?
5. What strategies do you employ to ensure the timely delivery of educational materials?
6. How do these tasks impact your daily responsibilities?
7. What are the main challenges you deal with the student retention rate and delivery of education materials, and how do these challenges impact your performance?
8. What kind of support do you receive from the Ministry of Education (or Local Management) for the student retention and distribution of materials?
9. Can you provide specific examples of dilemmas or conflicts you have encountered?
10. Are there any resources (training, materials, funding) provided to help you meet the 'Performance Commitments'?
11. What additional support or resources would help you overcome the challenges you face?
12. Can you provide examples of successful initiatives that have improved student retention rates or the delivery of educational materials?
13. How do you report your activities and outcomes related to 'Performance Commitments' to higher-level officials?
14. How do you collaborate with your colleagues to achieve results?
15. How do you ensure that your actions meet the needs and expectations of the students and their families?
16. How do you navigate any gaps or conflicts between policy expectations and practical realities?
17. What improvements would you suggest to enhance the retention rate and distribution of materials?

Appendix B: Overview of Research participants

Overview of Institutions

Institution	Characteristics
Local Management Unit 03	Their purpose is to guarantee a quality education service in Basic Education and Technical Education, in its jurisdiction that includes nine (09) districts: Cercado de Lima, Breña, Jesus Maria, La Victoria, Lince, Magdalena, Pueblo Libre, San Isidro and San Miguel.
Local Management Unit 05	Their purpose is to execute and implement the actions to guarantee adequate education service in its jurisdiction, which includes two (02) districts: San Juan de Lurigancho and El Agustino. These two districts are the biggest in Metropolitan Lima.

Source: Fieldwork

Overview of Public schools

Institution	Characteristics
School A	It is located in El Agustino District and belongs to Local Management Unit 05. This school has been operating for seventy years. For basic education, it has three shifts: one in the morning and the other in the afternoon and night. It has a big main square, and there is a photocopier that is used not only by students but also by teachers.
School B	It is located in San Juan de Lurigancho District and belongs to Local Management Unit 05. This school has three shifts and attends Basic Education and Alternative Education at night. This school does not have a Main Square since a football field is in its place.
School C	It is located in the Lince District and belongs to Local Management Unit 03. This school has a better infrastructure than the other schools. It is difficult to enrol the students because the demand for vacancies is big. This school also have a photocopier but not in the main square in a corner of the soccer field.
School D	It is located in the La Victoria District, and a stadium belonging to Local Management Unit 05 is nearby. This stadium plays a big role in how the students have to be taken care of because when there are some games, classes have to be finished before. Delinquency and drugs are a recurrent problem in the school. The police are one big ally for this reason.
School E	It is located in the Ventanilla District. I could not visit the school since the access was only online.

Source: Fieldwork

List of interviewees from the Local Education Management Units

Entity	Role	Type of data collection	Date of data collection	Code name
	Specialist in the supervision of educational institutions	Interview	01.08.2024	Manuel

Local Education Management Unit 05	Specialist in Education		05.08.2024	Rosario
	Specialist in information system		02.08.2024	Jorge
Local Education Management Unit 03	Administrative assistant	Interview	01.08.2024	Roberto

Source: Fieldwork

List of Principals or Deputy Principals by school

School	Role	Type of data collection	Date	Code name
School A	Deputy Principal	Interview	05.08.2024	Pedro
School B	Principal	Interview	07.08.2024	Claudio
School C	Deputy Principal	Interview	09.08.2024	Fernanda
School D	Deputy Principal	Interview	13.08.2024	Leandro

Source: Fieldwork

List of Teachers by school

School	Role	Subject they teach	Type of data collection	Date	Code name
School A	Teacher 1	Spanish Language	Interview	07.08.2024	Jessica
	Teacher 2	Religious Studies	Interview	07.08.2024	Carlos
	Teacher 3	Personal Development, Citizenship and Civics	Classroom observation	07.08.2024	Bruno
School B	Teacher 1	Personal Development, Citizenship and Civics Mentoring	Interview	07.08.2024	Brenda
	Teacher 2	Social Sciences Mentoring	Interview	07.08.2024	Alejandra
School C	Teacher 1	Personal Development, Citizenship and Civics Mentoring	Interview and Classroom observation	09.08.2024	Daniela
	Teacher 2	Religious Studies	Interview	09.08.2024	Sofia
School D	Teacher 1	Vocational education	Interview and Classroom observation	13.08.2024	Monica
School E	Teacher 1	Personal Development, Citizenship and Civics Mentoring	Online interview	10.08.2024	Melissa

Source: Fieldwork

Project details, Checklists, and Approval Status

A) Project/Proposal details

1. Project/Proposal Title	
2. Name of MA student (applicant)	
3. Email address of MA student	
4. Name of Supervisor	
5. Email address of Supervisor	
6. Country/countries where research will take place	
7. Short description of the proposed research and the context in which it is carried out:	

B) Research checklist

The following checklist acts as a guide to help you think through what areas of research ethics you may need to address. For explanations and guidance please refer to the background document 'ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA students'. Please complete both sections (B1 and B2)

	<i>Please tick the appropriate box</i>	YES	NO
B1: LOW-SENSITIVITY			
1. Does the research involve the collection and or processing of (primary or secondary) personal data (including personal data in the public domain)?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Does the research involve participants from whom voluntary informed consent needs to be sought?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Will financial or material incentives (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Will the research require the co-operation of a gatekeeper for access to the groups, communities or individuals to be recruited (e.g., administrator for a private Facebook group, manager of an institutions, government official)?		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Does the research include benefit-sharing measures for research which takes place with people who could be considered vulnerable? – please revise the background document (Guidelines) for more information.		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked 'yes' to any of the above boxes (1-5), please discuss with your supervisor and include more information in your RP design describing the issue raised and how you propose to deal with it during your research.

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B2: HIGH SENSITIVITY	YES	NO
6. Does the research involve the collection or processing of sensitive (primary or secondary) personal data? (e.g. regarding racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, biometric data, data related to health or a person's sex life or sexual orientation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Does the research involve participants for whom voluntary and informed consent may require special attention or who can be considered 'vulnerable'? (e.g., children (under 18), people with learning disabilities, undocumented migrants, patients, prisoners)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the research without their knowledge and consent (covert observation of people in non-public places)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Will the research be conducted in healthcare institutions, in healthcare settings, or will it involve the recruitment or study of patients or healthcare personnel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Could the research induce psychological stress or anxiety or cause harm or negative consequences for research participants, researchers, or persons and institutions connected to them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Could the situation in one or several of the countries where research is carried out put the researcher, individuals taking part in the research, or individuals connected to the researcher, at risk? Presence of an infectious disease such as COVID-19 is considered a risk – please provide information as outlined in the background document (Guidelines).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Does the research require ethical approval or research permission from a local institution or body?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have ticked 'Yes' to one of the above (5-11), please complete section 'C' below describing how you propose to mitigate the risks you have identified. After discussion with your supervisor, please submit the form to the Research Ethics Committee. In addition, if you have ticked 'Yes' to a question on any kind of personal data, please also complete the privacy questionnaire.

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YOU ONLY NEED TO COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ONE OF THE QUESTIONS IN SECTION B2 ABOVE (Questions 5-11)

C) Statement of Research Ethics

Using the background document 'ISS Research Ethics Guidelines for MA students', please address how you are going to deal with the ethics concern identified, including prevention measure to avoid them from manifesting, mitigation strategies to reduce their impact, and preparedness and contingency planning if the risks manifest.

Please number each point to correspond with the relevant checklist question above. Expand this section as needed and add any additional documentation which might not be included in your RP design, such as consent forms.

[TO BE COMPLETED BY MA STUDENT AND DISCUSSED WITH THE SUPERVISOR. IF THE SUPERVISOR FINDS IT NECESSARY TO SEEK FURTHER REVIEW, THE STUDENT MUST SUBMIT THE FORM TO THE RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE]

D) Approval from Research Ethics Committee

*To be completed by the Research Ethics Committee only if

Approved by Research Ethics Committee: **Date:**

Additional comments for consideration from Research Ethics Committee:

If the REC needs more information before approving, the REC secretary will be in touch with the MA student. If after requesting more information the REC still has concerns, the REC secretary will ask the supervisor to discuss these with the student. In the unlikely event that there is still no resolution, the REC will refer the application to the Institute Board.