

SATISFACTION LEVEL OF PORTUGUESE PUBLIC PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS WITH TEACHING PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROCESS

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Abstract

The Teacher Performance Evaluation (TPE) has raised controversial issues, leading to changes in the evaluation models implemented in Portugal. Nevertheless, it seems consensual that it should be part of the teachers' professional development process to improve the quality of all educational activity. In this context, the main purpose of this study is to assess the satisfaction level of Portuguese public primary and secondary school teachers considering the TPE process. The study is based on a qualitative and quantitative methodology considering the literature review and the statistical analysis of the applied survey. The results show that teachers agree with the existence of a TPE model, but their satisfaction degree is negative since the professors consider the referred model as an excessively bureaucratic and inflexible process; unfairly due to allocation of quotas; causing strong pressure for assessment to be summative rather than formative in nature; leading all these problems to a climate of demotivation and mistrust among teachers which, consequently, translates into a more individualistic and uncooperative work. It was also evident that the implementation of TPE models must actively involve teachers and promote the teaching activity, in order to promote a collaborative culture, providing effective opportunities for development and professional satisfaction, with an impact on the quality of the educational action and on the improvement of schools as well as the service they provide to the communities in which they operate.

Keywords: Education, public administration, teacher performance evaluation, satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The Teacher Performance Evaluation (TPE) raises a wide range of theoretical and practical issues related to its implementation, and it is a difficult process to conceive and put into practice (Fernandes, 2008). In Portugal's case, it is almost an external imposition, a consequence of the systematic feedback that the Ministry of Education has received.

It comes in a scenario of profound social transformation that is having repercussions on the school context, forcing deep reflection on the educational, organisational and pedagogical framework. In this context, particular reference is made to the OECD and its various reports on the state of education in Portugal, as well as the PISA programme (Programme for International Student Assessment), promoted by the OECD since 2000, whose main purpose is to carry out an international assessment of students' learning in order to evaluate their skills and knowledge and thus provide countries with credible indicators of the success or failure of the educational policies promoted (Queiroga, 2015).

In this context and considering the central role that teachers play in the education system, specifically for its evolution and improvement and, consequently, for students' success, TPE, based on the analysis of a set of control indicators related to the quality of teaching services, has assumed particular relevance in recent decades (Queiroga, 2015). As well as their continuous training and development, with a view to improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of education and the school (Alonzo, Labad, Bejano, & Guerra 2021; Georgia, 2019; Marques, 2017; Mandinach & Gummer, 2016).

Nevertheless, as Silva, Machado and Leite (2014) highlight, although TPE is recognised by the teachers themselves as a necessity, this recognition disappears when it comes to developing and implementing a system that operationalises this assessment. This is because developing teacher appraisal systems that are geared towards professional development and improving practices, while at the same time monitoring activity, accountability and career management, i.e. trying to reconcile the formative function

of appraisal with the accountability function, is not an easy endeavour (Day, 1993; Avalos & Assael, 2006; Formosinho & Machado, 2010; Stronge, 2010). Therefore, considering teacher performance evaluation from a formative perspective requires the development of supervision processes, whether developed by peers or non-teaching professionals, a self-evaluation dimension and the creation of collaborative learning environments in schools. TPE would thus emerge as an instrument that facilitates teacher individual development (Wei, Chow, Huang, Huang & Cheng, 2023) and, consequently, as a driver of organisational development (Afonso, 2016; Silva et al, 2014).

However, developing and implementing a TPE system based on this logic of conciliation and valuing teachers has proved to be a very complex process. Although the appraisal process should be ethically irreproachable, treating each and every appraisee fairly, studies carried out over the last few decades have shown that this is not the case in Portugal. On the contrary, it has contributed to teachers perceiving it as a mere value judgement and not as a tool for professional development and teaching practices improvement (Queiroga, 2015), although there seems to be a consensus that it should be part of teachers' professional development process in order to improve the quality of all educational activity (Serrano, 2015).

According to Afonso (2016), as a result of political and social pressures and the transformations that have occurred in society, TPE has been used as an instrument of control and accountability, in a logic of administrative management of the teaching career and has proved to be a detrimental factor for the school climate and interpersonal relations, leading to superficial understandings and reducing performance evaluation to a purely technical instrument. Vaz (2019) reinforces this position by stating, still for the Portuguese case, that TPE has emerged more in connection with the rationalisation and management of the education system's resources and legitimised by the necessary promotion of teaching quality, rather than out of perceived need or desire for teachers' professional development. The same author concludes from his study that teachers are unfavourably disposed towards the possibility of TPE having a transformative effect on teacher practice in order to improve student learning or contribute to teacher professional development.

Even so, Afonso (2016), states that from his study it is possible to identify some positive aspects of the TPE in Portugal, namely reflection on performance appraisal, teamwork and raising awareness of the need for performance appraisal. For his part, Vaz (2019) also identifies a favourable opinion on the teachers' part in terms of accepting the presence of external and internal evaluators as a guarantee of fairness and impartiality, as well as the desire to have evaluators from the same scientific area as the teacher being evaluated, with recognised experience and professional competence and with specific training in supervision or evaluation. The data also pointed to a lack of appreciation for the participation of partners from the educational community in the evaluation process. Gamero (2018) in this regard, concludes that there is a certain ambiguity on the part of teachers in some central aspects of TPE, since, on the one hand, teachers agree with the influence of TPE on learning, highlighting indicators such as reflection, cooperation and promotion of teacher training and, on the other hand, they disagree when considering indicators such as bureaucracy, reduction of useful working time, lack of motivation, lack of knowledge sharing, bad environment and conflict of interests. This duality of perceptions on the part of teachers in relation to the TPE process was also confirmed by Serrano (2015), when he stated that teachers agree with the existence of a TPE, provided that it is fair and impartial and that it contributes to improving the conditions that determine the teaching-learning process. They also consider that evaluation should be done by the director and by colleagues from the same school, as long as they receive the needed training. However, their perception of the teaching performance assessment model is that it does not promote educational development and quality in the school, nor does it improve the teaching-learning process, but rather contributes to discontent and conflict between teachers.

From the various studies presented, we can conclude that the TPE process in Portugal is considered to be too bureaucratic and inflexible because it uses an excessive number of standardised registration instruments, making it a consumer of time and resources, which instead of improving the quality of teaching, generates conflicts and mistrust (Matos, 2014; Soares, 2013). This results in a negative conception of the TPE process as a consequence of the routinisation of professional practices, the lack of coordination between teachers, the bureaucratisation of change and the demotivation of teachers (Martins, Candeias, & Costa, 2010; Gonçalves, 2023). Based on this framework, we decided to evaluate the satisfaction level of public primary and secondary school teachers with the TPE process in Portugal.

Based on the above theoretical framework and the consequent definition of the general objective, this article is structured in four sections. The first is an introductory section with a theoretical framework and identification of the problem; the second section deals with the design and objectives of the study, and the results analysis and discussion and conclusions are presented in the third and fourth sections.

2. Design, objectives, hypotheses and methods

This study is based on qualitative and quantitative methodology using various data collection methods, which will be described in the following sub-sections.

2.1. Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the satisfaction level of public primary and secondary school teachers with the TPE process. In order to achieve the general objective, i.e., to verify teachers' satisfaction with the appraisal process, four specific objectives were defined:

1. To understand to what extent the current TPE model contributes to teachers' personal and professional development;
2. To identify the main strengths and weaknesses of the appraisal process;
3. To analyse supervision practices in TPE;
4. To understand to what extent there should be a new appraisal model or what restructuring should be considered and implemented in the current system.

2.2. Hypotheses

Based on the literature review and the defined objectives, we have formulated the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis H1: ADD is an important tool for teachers' professional and personal development;
- Hypothesis H2: The current SADD negatively affects school climate;
- Hypothesis H3: The current SADD negatively affects the relationship between teachers;
- Hypothesis H4: A negative perception by teachers of the ADD process negatively affects teachers' level of satisfaction and motivation.

2.3. Methods

This study was based on a qualitative and quantitative methodology using various data collection methods. The qualitative methods used were: document analysis; analysis of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire; research into online databases; articles; newspaper reports. The quantitative data collection method consisted of analysing the closed questions in the questionnaire. The questionnaire is structured in three main parts: Part I - Sociodemographic information; Part II - Teachers' appraisal of the current ADD regime and, Part III - Prospects for a new ADD model. The questionnaire consists of twelve questions, the vast majority of which are closed-ended and uses a list scale and two five-point Likert scales. Our sample consists of 198 questionnaires completed using *Google Forms*.

3. Results analysis and discussion

3.1. Socio-demographic characterization

The socio-demographic respondents' characterization is as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Characterisation of respondents.

| <i>Variables</i> | <i>Categories</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------|------------------|
| <i>Gender</i> | Male | 24,24 | 48 |
| | Female | 75,76 | 150 |
| <i>Age group (years)</i> | Mean | | 52 |
| | Age range | | 28-66 |
| | 20-30 | 1,01 | 2 |
| | 31-40 | 4,04 | 8 |
| | 41-50 | 33,33 | 66 |
| | 51-60 | 54,04 | 107 |
| | Over 60s | 7,58 | 15 |
| <i>Length of service (years)</i> | Years of service range | | 3-45 |
| | Less than 10 years | 4,04 | 8 |
| | 11-15 | 4,04 | 8 |
| | 16-20 | 8,59 | 17 |
| | 21-25 | 19,70 | 39 |
| | 26-30 | 33,33 | 66 |
| | 31-35 | 22,73 | 45 |
| <i>Academic degree</i> | Over 35 | 7,58 | 15 |
| | Bachelor's degree | 1,52 | 3 |
| | Degree | 74,24 | 147 |
| | Master's degree | 22,22 | 44 |
| | Doctorate | 2,02 | 4 |

Regarding the respondent's characterization, we found that women are more representative, with 75.76% of respondents being female and 24.24% male. They are aged between 28 and 66, with the vast majority of teachers in the 51-60 age group. The average age is 52. This confirms the scenario of a high number of retirements in the near future. As for years of service, they range from 3 to 45 years, with the majority in the 26-30 years range, totalling 56%, with an average of approximately 27 years. When we characterised the sample, we saw that the vast majority of respondents (74.24%) had a bachelor's degree, 22.22% a master's degree, 2.02% a doctorate and 1.52% a bachelor's degree. We also found that the respondents consider *evaluation to be important*, above all, for career progression (21.17%) and for promoting professional development (12.55%). Identifying training needs in order to improve the quality of teaching (11.03%) and recognising professional merit (10.39%) are very closely related. These 4 factors account for 55% of the respondents' answers.

From the average responses to each question, we can verify regarding to *supervisory practices*, that it is very common for the evaluator to be concerned about complying with legislation, with an average of 4.05 responses. On the other hand, the majority of respondents say that the least positive aspect of TPE supervision practice is the fact that the evaluator doesn't provide feedback on weaknesses, with an average of 2.85 responses.

Regarding the *main strengths and limitations of the TPE process* the teachers taking part in the study recognise few positive aspects in the current TPE model. Nevertheless, they identify training and the fact that the assessment is carried out by an external assessor as strengths of the model. Concerning the negative aspects of TPE, the agreement among respondents stands out, considering that the model does not translate into a fundamental requirement for the quality of education, not contributing to the improvement of school results or student learning or even to improving teachers' knowledge. In this regard, we can see that one of the most negative aspects lies in the existence of quotas. According to respondents, this condition gives the model a reductive and completely maladjusted character, creating a feeling of injustice. In what concerns the *contributions of the TPE process*, teachers do not recognize major contributions from the model. There is indeed an agreement regarding the development of negative feelings (discomfort, distrust, insecurity, lack of motivation, stress and a competitive atmosphere among colleagues) with an average of 4.36 responses.

4. Conclusions and hypotheses confirmation

The significance level (p-value) is $\alpha=0.05$.

From the chi-square test (χ^2) we can conclude that TPE process does not promote professional or personal development of teachers, implications only in terms of career progression, not confirming *H1*. We can also observe that the TPE model is pointed out and perceived by the vast majority of teachers as being negative. Thus, the respondents argue that the current model has caused, to a significant extent, the degradation of personal and professional relationships between teachers, generating tensions that have destabilized and penalized the school climate. Hypotheses *H2* and *H3* were therefore not confirmed. On the contrary, *H4* was confirmed, since a negative perception of teachers regarding TPE corresponds to a significant level of dissatisfaction and demotivation among teachers.

The results allow us to highlight that teachers agree with the existence of a TPE model, but do not identify with the current model and point out some gaps in the process and final results, which are not always considered fair. Teachers look at assessment as a means of advancing their careers. Therefore, they continue to consider the current model as unfair and incoherent, due to the quota granting system, which makes the transparency and fairness of the process unfeasible, generating feelings of instability and rivalry in the school and among the teaching staff.

The limitations of the ADD model also include the likelihood of inflation in assessments, largely due to the lack of definition of an evaluator profile with adequate training, which undermines the credibility of the assessment process. Furthermore, the quantification of the evaluation has a negative impact on the school environment and the excessive bureaucracy of the process.

The conclusions drawn are in accordance with the literature review carried out. We can therefore reinforce that a quality TPE model must be based on a climate of trust where teachers receive feedback on their work, have confidence in those who evaluate them, recognizing their skills, and feel that TPE effectively contributes to improving their performance. It also allows teachers to view their colleagues as potential partners and professional colleagues and not as direct competitors. Develop the feeling that the whole school is involved in a culture of mutual understanding and respect, feeling that TPE is, above all, a means for professional development and organizational improvement and not just for grading teachers.

4.1. Limitations

The main limitation of our study lies in the low response rate, which implies a weak generalization of the data.

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