LARGE-SCALE EVALUATION AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION: EDUCATIONAL POLICIES OF CEARÁ AND PERNAMBUCO

AVALIAÇÃO EM LARGA ESCALA E QUALIDADE DA EDUCAÇÃO: POLÍTICAS EDUCACIONAIS DO CEARÁ E PERNAMBUCO

EVALUACIÓN A GRAN ESCALA Y CALIDAD DE LA EDUCACIÓN: POLÍTICAS EDUCATIVAS DE CEARÁ Y PERNAMBUCO

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to reflect on both the contributions and contradictions associated with the external assessment systems in the states of Ceará and Pernambuco. The aim was to understand how these assessments, while contributing to the improvement in educational quality highlighted in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), also produce contradictory effects on the daily lives of schools. The results indicate that, while promoting advances in aspects such as school management and performance indicators, these systems reinforce accountability practices and curricular standardization. The conclusion is that the observed contradictions do not invalidate assessment policies, but rather require a critical look at their limits and possibilities in the context of Brazilian educational inequalities.

Keywords: Public Policies. Educational Assessment. Quality.

RESUMO
Este estudo objetiva refletir tanto sobre as contribuições quanto sobre as contradições associadas aos sistemas de avaliações externas dos estados do Ceará e de Pernambuco. Buscou-se compreender como essas avaliações, embora tenham contribuído para a melhoria da qualidade educacional destacadas no Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Ideb), também produzem efeitos contraditórios no cotidiano das escolas. Os resultados indicam que, ao mesmo tempo em que promovem avanços em aspectos como a gestão escolar e os indicadores de desempenho, esses sistemas reforçam práticas de responsabilização, padronização curricular. Conclui-se que as contradições observadas não invalidam as políticas de avaliação, mas exigem um olhar crítico sobre seus limites e possibilidades no contexto das desigualdades educacionais brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Políticas Públicas. Avaliação Educacional. Qualidade.

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RESUMEN

Este estudio busca reflexionar sobre las contribuciones y contradicciones asociadas con los sistemas de evaluación externa en los estados de Ceará y Pernambuco. El objetivo fue comprender cómo estas evaluaciones, si bien contribuyen a la mejora de la calidad educativa, destacada en el Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica (IDEB), también producen efectos contradictorios en la vida cotidiana de las escuelas. Los resultados indican que, si bien promueven avances en aspectos como la gestión escolar y los indicadores de desempeño, estos sistemas refuerzan las prácticas de rendición de cuentas y la estandarización curricular. La conclusión es que las contradicciones observadas no invalidan las políticas de evaluación, sino que exigen una mirada crítica a sus límites y posibilidades en el contexto de las desigualdades educativas brasileñas.

Palabras clave: Políticas Públicas. Evaluación Educativa. Calidad.

1 INTRODUCTION

Public policies are formulated based on political and social interests, and delimited according to the approach of policy cycles, which analyzes everything from the definition of political objectives to the implementation of actions (Mainardes, 2006). In this context, and as the focus of this study, large-scale evaluations are configured as a specific category of these policies, aimed at verifying student performance based on previously established reference matrices.

The evaluation of educational systems appears as the main strategy for regulating education and has become increasingly important in the current scenario of educational policies. This prominence is due to the fact that it is believed that the results of the evaluations serve to reveal possible unsatisfactory results and implement specific government actions. This movement associates evaluation with the quality of education and has led several researchers to affirm that we are experiencing state conceptions called the "evaluating state" (Santos; Azevedo, 2023). This concept, also worked on by Santana (2010), considers educational evaluations as a justification for unequal investment in education, control of the content developed as well as the stimulation of competitiveness and *accountability*.

The topic, therefore, is controversial. An aggravating factor is the notorious performance of *think tanks* linked to large businessmen and business groups, represented by institutions such as "Todos pela Educação", "Instituto Natura" and "Instituto Unibanco", where large Brazilian entrepreneurs signal that they intend to embed business management techniques in the search for greater effectiveness and efficiency in the use of public money. Thus, they believe that by following the guidelines launched in tests such as PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) - an international program for the assessment of 15-year-old students - it is possible to put Brazilian public education on track, but following parameters established by institutions such as the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and the WB (World Bank).

This view seems to reverberate in Brazilianists and foreign researchers with a focus on Brazil, such as the author Ben Schneider (2024), who in his book " *Routes to Reform - Education Politics in Latin America*", defends the joint action of institutions of large businessmen. In fact, when comparing examples of innovation (and success) in Brazilian states such as Pernambuco, Ceará and Rio de Janeiro, he mentions that the main actors that allowed such achievements were: Business Philanthropy, Political Parties and Teachers' Unions. The latter because - supposedly - they did not hinder the advancement of this policy.

It is based on this success that the increase in educational quality indices is observed after the implementation of evaluation policies in the states of Ceará and Pernambuco.

According to data from IPECE (Institute for Research and Economic Strategy of Ceará) in 2023, Ceará reached 6.6 points in the early years of Elementary School (1st to 5th), resulting in an advance of 1.2 points more than the goal established for the state in the first cycle of the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb) (2007-2021). In the final years (6th to 9th) of Elementary School, Ceará also reached the goal, with 5.5 points. In the same year, Pernambuco achieved a score of 4.5 in the Ideb for High School. In Elementary School, the initial years obtained 5.7 points, while the final years registered 5.0 points, both exceeding the established goals. In this way, Pernambuco has also shown significant advances, especially from the implementation of the Integral Education Program and the valorization of High School (Inep, 2023).

The study by Vidal and Costa (2021), in outlining a relevant overview of educational accountability associated with large-scale evaluations, cites the example of Ceará, notably with the use of SPAECE (Permanent System for the Evaluation of Basic Education of Ceará) as a central instrument in Ceará's educational policy. The authors analyzed the trajectory and effects of this model, which combines external evaluation, induction of pedagogical practices and mechanisms for holding school managers accountable. The experience of Ceará is characterized by a strong articulation between evaluation, teacher training, distribution of resources and incentives for performance, configuring a model that seeks to align educational results with management strategies, but that intensifies the teaching work in the face of pressure for results. The analysis of the case of Ceará contributes to reflect on the limits and possibilities of policies based on evaluation, especially in contexts of structural inequalities and disputes over meanings about what is meant by quality of education.

In view of the information presented, this study aims to reflect on the contributions and contradictions associated with the external evaluation systems of the states of Ceará and Pernambuco, where it is intended to answer questions such as: what are the interests behind the various *stakeholders* involved in education policies, notably in the use of evaluations; what conclusions can we draw from the educational experiences implemented in Ceará and Pernambuco? in Pernambuco, and finally, what are the alternatives to the "Evaluating State"?

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Almeida (2023) compared assessment to one of the fundamental human needs, such as food and sleep, since it reflects the way we see ourselves and are seen by society,

reverberating in the way we behave to obtain social approval, leading us to infer that it is one of the most relevant social and psychological phenomena in the life of human beings.

Although this author considers evaluation as something that is part of our social life, he also states that it is influenced by the values of the liberal-individualist-consumerist-financier society, when defining criteria for attributing degrees of approval to a behavior, a way of life or moral and social values. In this way, school evaluation, in addition to being deep and broad, is also influenced by the values and behaviors of its time, which makes it difficult to achieve a fair and dignified evaluation.

The author also warns of the dangers of obedience to the pedagogical dictates of the OECD and the evaluation practices of the WB, not in the sense of opposition to external evaluations, as they stimulate structural thinking about the curriculum and the training of the educator, but in the sense of continuous attention to the possible distortions of results and their political consequences arising from models totally external to our reality. At the same time, it suggests that the external evaluation system can be reorganized in the debates of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), since it is based on the triangulation between didactic materials (standardized books) and external evaluations (standardized evaluations), the latter being understood as guiding the national education system, becoming a beacon that guides the navigation of most educational policies and actions, a scenario that brings the evaluation closer to the term *accountability*, attributing to it the managerial character, thus distancing itself from the democratic educational ideals.

For authors such as Tolentino-Neto and Amestoy (2023), Large-Scale Evaluations (ALE) connect and articulate educational policies endorsed by the BNCC, making them an instrument at the service of legitimizing the idea of a single curriculum, while weakening instruments such as the SAEB (Basic Education Evaluation System) and the Enem (National High School Exam) to the extent that, when applied to the monitoring of basic education, reinforce the classificatory, therefore discriminatory, objective of these exams.

According to these authors, the BNCC reflects the interests of international organizations that interfere in Brazilian evaluations, by emphasizing that in the last two decades there has been an intense movement in the curricula of teaching degrees coming from the National Curriculum Guidelines (DCN) and Resolutions of the National Council of Education (CNE) that encourage evaluations in initial training and in the maintenance of teacher licenses regulated by the National Common Base for Initial Training and Continuous Assembly of Basic Education Teachers (BNC-FP).

The authors argue that external evaluations act outside schools, producing data that collaborate with the monitoring of education, with the signaling of trends and alerts of deviation from the route. On the other hand, they can also lead to public policies of exaggerated standardization, such as curriculum narrowing and decontextualized comparisons, causing effects on student learning, in the process of management, training and performance of the teacher, according to the considerations below:

> It was in the 1990s that investments in external evaluations gained prominence in Brazilian education, with the promise of subsidizing the promotion of quality in education, recently universalized in the Federal Constitution of 1988. Testing, measurements, rankings, standardization, goals, indexes, success and failure are some of the words that cross the concept of quality of education associated with external evaluations. In this context, external evaluations have become increasingly central and trigger educational reforms, both at the national, state and municipal levels. (Tolentino-Neto and Amestoy, 2023, p.17).

It so happens that the results of the evaluations, according to the authors, imply processes of accountability and accountability in an *accountability* model, resulting in initiatives based on competitiveness and meritocracy, resulting in a process of bonuses and awards for performance as an increasingly present reality.

Accountability is the set of consequences arising from the results of these evaluations, with different degrees of impact on the education network and on the teacher's professional routine. For the authors, low-impact initiatives, in general, are symbolic, but result in the disclosure of grades and rankings, determining the success or failure of a certain network or school in the tests, while high-impact initiatives, this same disclosure of test results is converted into rewards (bonuses, prizes, extra salaries) and sanctions (closing classes, transfer of schools, dismissals).

Thus, the authors consider that the ALE has had a progressive, continuous and silent advance in the educational context, playing the role of important connectors and articulators of public policies, as they gained ground in the mid-twentieth century, with the technological and methodological leaps arising from computerization. Thus, the growing demand for information, the inexhaustible volume of data (*big data*) and the dehumanization of the pedagogical and educational process create an idea that the purposes and objectives of education can all be standardized, measured and compared between different countries and contexts.

In this sense, the study by Vidal and Costa (2021) offers a significant contribution by analyzing how Ceará implemented an educational policy centered on accountability and the strategic use of Large-Scale Evaluations, especially through SPAECE. According to these authors, "the state of Ceará has used the results of SPAECE as a basis for a policy of educational accountability that involves evaluation, teacher training, technical support, and financial induction" (Vidal & Costa, 2021, p. 343). It is an articulated model that seeks to integrate external evaluation with quality improvement policies, but which also has complex implications in the school routine.

The text reveals that, by linking the results of the evaluations to induction and bonus mechanisms, the state government "produced an environment of accountability that tensions the teaching work" (Vidal & Costa, 2021, p. 346). Schools and teachers are encouraged to improve proficiency rates, which, on the one hand, fosters collaborative strategies and continuing education, but, on the other hand, can also lead to the intensification of work, the pressure for results and the risk of reducing the curriculum to content required in the tests.

The authors also point out that this policy became viable thanks to a consolidated interfederative cooperation structure in Ceará, with a strong role of the State Department of Education and adhesion of the municipalities. "Ceará's accountability is built not only from the collection of results, but from the systematic offer of technical-pedagogical and financial support" (Vidal & Costa, 2021, p. 349), which differentiates this model from others based only on sanctions.

However, Vidal and Costa (2021) also warn of the contradictions of the model, especially when the logic of accountability overlaps with the commitment to equity: "The risk of homogenization of pedagogical practices and simplification of the educational process is present when the measurement of results is overvalued" (Vidal & Costa, 2021, p. 352). Thus, the case of Ceará reveals the potentialities and limits of Large-Scale Evaluations as instruments of educational regulation, especially in contexts marked by historical and structural inequalities.

3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

In Pernambuco, in 2008, the Program for the Modernization of Public Management - Goals for Education (PMGP-ME) was launched, focusing on the increase of educational indicators of the state and municipal network, which at the time, presented low results in the Ideb - Basic Education Development Index.

This educational policy of the state of Pernambuco added the elements of a structured model of educational *accountability* (evaluation, accountability and accountability), in a movement that is articulated with the indications of a managerialist and neoliberal perspective of governing. In addition, we can say that this model adopted is related to the idea of strengthening school management, increasing rationalization and bureaucracy, monitoring, control, and meeting numbers, in addition to providing rewards for education professionals connected to student results in large-scale assessment tests.

The PMGP-ME is a project that aims to improve the quality of education in Pernambuco through management focused on results and networking. This program adds the following devices: the Educational Evaluation System (Saepe); the Pernambuco Education Development Index (Idepe); the Educational Performance Bonus (BDE); the Educational Information System of Pernambuco (Siepe); and the Additional Management Efficiency (AEG).

Saepe began in 2000, it is a system that, along the lines of Saeb, applies large-scale tests to students in the 9th grade of Elementary School and the 3rd grade of High School, in the areas of Portuguese and Mathematics. Its main objectives are to monitor student performance over time, to contribute to the adaptation of teaching practices to the needs of students, and to associate the results of the evaluation with incentive policies.

Idepe is the exclusive indicator of Pernambuco that measures the quality of state and municipal public education, prepared in the same way as Ideb, but carried out annually and in a census manner, being composed of the combination of the results of Saepe and data from the School Census.

The BDE was instituted by Law No. 13,486 of 2008 and works as an award for results that benefits education professionals and those working in the school units of the state public education network and in the Regional Education Managements (GRE) of Pernambuco. The bonus is proportional to the fulfillment of the goal established for the school or GRE and to obtain it it must reach at least 50% of the stipulated goal, based on the Idepe of each school institution, that is, each school has its Idepe and from this indicator the goal for the following year is stipulated.

Siepe, in turn, is a system developed in 2007 by the Department of Education of Pernambuco with the purpose of ensuring compliance with the objectives of the educational policy and achieving the goals established in the Term of Commitment of each school unit. This system encompasses several tools and platforms, such as the Siepe Portal, the Mobile

Class Diary and applications to facilitate access and communication in the state education network.

Finally, we have the AEG, which corresponds to the specific bonus for the school management group linked to goals and managerial indicators, granted monthly to the occupants of the positions of School Director, Assistant Director, Management Assistant, Secretary and Support Educator assigned to the schools of the state education network, assigned according to the achievement of the Management Efficiency Index (IEG). It should be clarified that this index involves the evaluation of various aspects of school management, such as the allocation of teachers and the insertion of information in the system. The additional amount is paid monthly, and its measurement occurs in the month following the data analysis.

In this sense, it is possible to identify the association of each pillar of *accountability* (evaluation, accountability and accountability) with this public educational policy implemented in Pernambuco, since in the evaluation pillar, we found that the main strategy is in the SAEPE, whose main objective is to produce information on the degree of mastery of students in the skills and competencies considered relevant in the areas of Portuguese and Mathematics, in addition to contributing to improving the quality of education. As for the accountability pillar, it consists of the following elements: educational indicators, publication of results, standards, justification, different uses of information, authority. In turn, the accountability pillar is closely linked to the attribution of responsibilities and/or the imposition of negative sanctions, via the attribution of material rewards (BDE and AEG).

In short, we can infer that the policy model adopted in Pernambuco requires the school to adapt to the process and the margin of authority that managers and teachers can have is the one that leads the school to achieve the goals. In other words, the school management and the teachers end up having a pseudo authority to advance the school's pedagogical proposal.

In the case of Ceará, the analysis carried out by Vidal and Costa (2013) shows a model of accountability that was consolidated through SPAECE, articulated with a broader set of induction and management actions by results. Ceará politics operates with the three pillars of *Accountability* — evaluation, accountability and accountability — in an integrated manner, being considered by many as a prominent experience on the national scene. In the evaluation axis, the SPAECE has a central function as a diagnostic and monitoring instrument, and is applied on a large scale in a census manner, which allows measuring student performance in addition to classifying schools by proficiency levels.

However, SPAECE does not act in isolation, since the results are used to guide teacher training policies, guide the pedagogical planning of schools and feed the bonus system for performance, called the School Grade Ten Award, since "the result obtained by the group of students is considered as a reflection of the quality of the performance of the school's professionals, and based on this result, it is defined whether or not the school will receive an award" (Vidal & Costa, 2021, p. 347).

Accountability is manifested in the wide publicity of school results, in the technical monitoring of municipal networks and in the induction of agreed goals. The Department of Education of the State of Ceará (SEDUC) acts as a coordinator and encourager, promoting technical cooperation with the municipalities and offering systematic pedagogical support. As the authors point out, "the State offers technical advice and continuing education to the municipalities, while demanding counterparts in terms of results and planning" (Vidal & Costa, 2021, p. 348).

Accountability, on the other hand, is materialized through the link between school performance and financial incentives, such as the Escola Nota Dez Award, instituted in 2009, which contemplates schools with better results or with greater advances, rewarding teachers and school managers. It is an induction policy based on meritocracy, which aims to stimulate commitment to educational results, where Vidal and Costa (2021, p. 350) warn of the side effects of this logic: "the search for results can lead to the selection of students for tests, training for the test, and the exclusion of pedagogical practices not directly related to evaluation".

In turn, in parallel with the strengthening of the state and national systems, the autonomy granted to the municipalities – in line with the precepts established by the 1988 Constitution and the LDB – boosted the development of their own evaluation strategies. Such initiatives, often articulated through support programs such as the Literacy at the Right Age Program (PAIC), sought to meet the contextual specificities of municipal networks, allowing a rapid and targeted response to local needs.

According to Silva; Andriola (2023), some municipalities stood out for the implementation of their own evaluation mechanisms, such as the experience in Sobral, instituted in the early 2000s, which stood out due to its trajectory marked by the careful analysis of student performance and the consolidation of professionalized school management practices.

Still in the research developed by these theorists, other municipalities such as Maracanaú, Tauá and Jijoca de Jericoacoara also stood out, since they also developed their

own evaluation systems. In these locations, the evaluation instruments not only allowed the identification of gaps in the teaching-learning process, but also supported the implementation of corrective measures and the continuous monitoring of school performance.

In summary, the Ceará policy revealed a sophisticated strategy of educational governance, which combined external evaluation, technical support and incentives. However, at the same time that it promoted advances in learning indicators, it raised concerns about the pressure for goals, the narrowing of the curriculum and the intensification of teaching work. As in Pernambuco, there is a pseudo school autonomy, because, although managers have formal freedom, their decisions are strongly guided by externally established objectives, especially those related to the results in standardized assessments.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of educational policies in Pernambuco and Ceará, in the light of the literature on Large-Scale Evaluation and accountability, revealed how these Brazilian states have been incorporating the principles of *educational accountability* into their management strategies. Both the PMGP-ME in Pernambuco and the SPAECE in Ceará exemplify models that articulate external evaluation, accountability and performance bonuses as tools for inducing public policies.

These experiences demonstrated that Large-Scale Evaluations, when associated with induction mechanisms and technical support, can contribute to the elevation of educational indicators and to the strengthening of the culture of results. However, they also highlight the risks of pedagogical distortions, such as curricular narrowing, the intensification of teaching work and the standardization of educational practices. Accountability, in these contexts, went beyond the symbolic field and materialized in material impacts on the lives of education professionals, generating tensions between school autonomy and external control.

However, it is necessary to recognize that the advances obtained, especially in Ceará, are not only due to the meritocratic logic of bonuses, but also to the federative articulation, investment in teacher training and continuous technical support. Still, the challenge remains to ensure that these policies are not limited to the pursuit of quantitative targets, but that they promote quality, equitable, and contextualized education.

Thus, the study of the state experiences analyzed allowed us to reflect on the potentials and limits of external evaluations as instruments of educational regulation, revealing that at the same time that they can drive improvements, such instruments must be permanently reevaluated in the light of their effects on educational justice, equity and the

formative sense of the public school, since effective policies are not built only with data and rankings, but with ethical commitment, democratic dialogue and appreciation of the diversity of school contexts.

Furthermore, it is crucial to highlight that the decision of the states of Pernambuco and Ceará to create their evaluation models is a way for the federated entity to request for itself the authority to evaluate the education network itself, instead of waiting for the diagnoses offered by the Union. This definition also reflects the need for the evaluation and the data it provides to be useful, and to be more adjusted to state and municipal specificities.

However, we have to understand that educational evaluation is not na end, but a means to achieve something, being, therefore, na instrument to reveal the strengths and weaknesses, and from these results, implement the continuous improvement of the quality of education.

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