

Political education in public schools: experiences and perceptions of teachers ¹

Ana Paula Lopes Spinati Macedo ²

Alexsandro do Nascimento Santos ³

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of lower and upper secondary school teachers regarding political education in schools. The study aims to understand how teachers assess the relevance and implementation conditions of this theme in daily school practices. A quantitative approach was adopted, based on a cross-sectional survey conducted with 319 public school teachers in São Paulo, using a previously validated instrument. Data were analyzed through descriptive and comparative statistics. The results indicate that political education is widely recognized as relevant, especially in upper secondary education, but faces fragile implementation conditions, associated with limited continuing education and restricted institutional support. It is concluded that there is a gap between the prescribed and enacted curriculum, highlighting the need for institutional policies and teacher training.

KEYWORDS: Political education. Curriculum. Teacher Perceptions. Teacher Experiences.

¹ Translated from Portuguese by Pedro Surreaux. *E-mail:* surreauxpp@gmail.com.

² MA in Education. Universidade Cidade de São Paulo (UNICID), São Paulo, SP, Brazil. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6127-1592>. *E-mail:* anamacedo@tisp.jus.br.

³ PhD in Education. Ministério da Educação e Universidade Cidade de São Paulo (UNICID), São Paulo, SP, Brazil. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2337-3104>. *E-mail:* alexsandrosantos1980@gmail.com.

Educação política em escolas públicas: experiências e percepções docentes

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa as percepções, crenças e experiências de professores dos anos finais do ensino fundamental e do ensino médio sobre a educação política na escola. O estudo tem como objetivo compreender como esses docentes avaliam a relevância e as condições de implementação desse tema no cotidiano escolar. Adota-se uma abordagem quantitativa, com aplicação de survey seccional a 319 professores de escolas públicas de São Paulo, cujo instrumento foi previamente validado. Os dados foram examinados por estatística descritiva e comparativa. Os resultados indicam amplo reconhecimento da importância da educação política, sobretudo no ensino médio, mas revelam fragilidades em sua implementação, associadas à baixa formação continuada e ao limitado apoio institucional. Conclui-se que há distanciamento entre o currículo prescrito e o praticado, reforçando a necessidade de políticas de apoio e formação docente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação Política. Currículo. Percepções docentes. Experiências docentes.

Educación política en escuelas públicas: percepciones y experiencias de docentes

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza las percepciones, creencias y experiencias de profesores de los últimos años de la educación básica y de la educación secundaria respecto a la educación política en la escuela. El estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cómo estos docentes evalúan la relevancia y las condiciones de implementación de este tema en la práctica escolar cotidiana. Se adopta un enfoque cuantitativo, basado en una encuesta transversal aplicada a 319 docentes de escuelas públicas de la ciudad de São Paulo, utilizando un instrumento previamente validado. Los datos fueron analizados mediante estadística descriptiva y comparativa. Los resultados indican que la educación política es ampliamente reconocida como relevante, especialmente en la educación secundaria, pero enfrenta

condiciones frágiles de implementación, asociadas a la limitada formación continua y al escaso apoyo institucional. Se concluye que existe una brecha entre el currículo prescrito y el aplicado, lo que refuerza la necesidad de políticas de apoyo y formación docente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación Política. Currículo. Percepciones Docentes. Experiencias Docentes.

Introduction

In recent decades, political education has taken center stage in educational debates, especially in contexts marked by democratic crises, the growth of authoritarian discourses, and the intensification of sociopolitical conflicts (Dahl, 2001; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mounk, 2019). In different countries, we observe simultaneously the weakening of democratic institutions, the delegitimization of public debate, and the expansion of forms of intolerance—phenomena that reposition the school as a strategic space for the political formation of new generations (Diamond, 2015; Brown, 2015). In this scenario, political education emerges as a tense field, traversed by normative, ideological, and pedagogical disputes.

In Brazil, this debate takes on particular contours. Normative documents for basic education reaffirm the school's commitment to citizenship education, democratic participation, and the development of critical thinking (Dantas, 2019; 2021; 2025; Santos, 2021). At the same time, pedagogical work with political themes has been increasingly associated with public controversies, moral disputes, and attempts at external control over teaching practice (Penna, 2018). The construction of an environment of surveillance and insecurity directly impacts the conditions for carrying out political education in daily school life.

Educational literature has shown that the formal presence of content in curricula does not guarantee its effective implementation in pedagogical

practice. Between the prescribed curriculum and the lived curriculum lie institutional, cultural, and subjective mediations that shape what actually reaches the classroom (Gimeno Sacristán, 2000; Pinar, 2012). From this perspective, curriculum implementation is understood as a non-linear process, traversed by interpretations, negotiations, and adaptations produced in the contexts of practice.

Teachers occupy a central position in this process. As those responsible for the daily translation of educational policies, they exercise varying degrees of discretion in planning, selecting, and conducting their teaching practices (Lipsky, 2019). This exercise occurs in contexts marked by material constraints, normative expectations, and risk assessments. In the case of political education, these conditions tend to intensify, since working with sensitive topics can generate conflicts in the classroom, tensions with families, and questioning from instances external to the school (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004; Apple, 2006).

Despite the growing academic production on political education, studies investigating how teachers perceive this field of teaching and what experiences they accumulate in its daily implementation are still relatively scarce, especially from an approach that articulates curriculum, implementation, and teaching practice (Santos, 2025). Understanding these perceptions and lived experiences is fundamental to illuminating the mechanisms that contribute to the irregular presence of political education in schools.

It is within this context that the present article is situated, whose objective is to analyze the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of teachers in lower and upper secondary schools regarding pedagogical work with political education in public schools in the city of São Paulo. Using a quantitative approach, based on a survey of 319 teachers, the study seeks to highlight the conditions under which this field of teaching is recognized, challenged, and, in many cases, weakened in the daily life of schools.

Theoretical Basis

Political Education

Reflection on political education for citizenship is intrinsically linked to debates that articulate the State, democracy, citizenship, rights, and social participation. Marshall (2002) highlights the historical constitution of citizenship based on the articulation between civil, political, and social rights, indicating that its effectiveness depends not only on the formal recognition of rights, but also on the material and symbolic conditions that enable their exercise. In this context, education assumes a strategic role by enabling the appropriation of codes, values, and skills necessary for participation in public life.

Similarly, Bobbio (1986) argues that modern democracy presupposes informed citizens capable of exercising public control over power, while also highlighting the recurring gap between formal and substantive democracy. This tension shifts political education to the field of necessary—though not sufficient—conditions for the realization of democratic life. Convergingly, Sen (1999) expands this understanding by situating education within the scope of expanding human capabilities, emphasizing that democratic participation requires not only formal rights, but also cognitive and social conditions that allow individuals to act, deliberate, and choose in an informed manner.

In the field of comparative civic education, studies conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) demonstrate that political learning is unevenly distributed across social and school contexts, being favored in environments that promote debate, student participation, and discussion of controversial topics (Amadeo et al., 2002). In this direction, authors such as Print and Milner (2009) advocate a conception of political education oriented towards democratic action, articulating knowledge about institutions, the development of participatory skills, and the formation of democratic

values. These perspectives converge in emphasizing that political education is not reduced to the transmission of content, but depends on pedagogical practices and experiences lived in daily school life.

In the Brazilian context, the field is marked by significant conceptual and terminological plurality. Jardim (2018) highlights the coexistence of different denominations—such as political education, political literacy, education for citizenship, and civic education—which, although diverse, share the understanding that this formative process involves knowledge, values, attitudes, and dispositions for democratic participation. This multiplicity reflects both different disciplinary traditions and normative disputes about the meanings of citizenship education.

This dispute takes on specific contours in the Brazilian historical trajectory. As Santos (2018; 2021) argues, debates on education for citizenship have been present since the 19th century, but were deeply strained during the period of the civil-military dictatorship, when civic education was appropriated by authoritarian ideological inculcation projects. The resumption of a democratic perspective occurs from the redemocratization and consolidation of normative frameworks in the following decades, although the meanings of political education remain unstable and contested.

In this context, authors such as Westheimer and Kahne (2004) problematize normative models of citizenship education, distinguishing between conceptions centered on individual behaviors, participation, and social justice. This typology highlights that different projects of political education imply distinct ways of understanding the role of the school in democratic formation. In dialogue with this perspective, critical approaches emphasize the need to recognize power relations, structural inequalities, and epistemological disputes that permeate the field, advocating for a political education committed to critical thinking, social justice, and active participation (Andreotti, 2014; Torres, 2023).

Taken together, these contributions allow us to understand political education as a broad, multidimensional formative process, permeated by disputes over meaning. Far from being restricted to the transmission of content, it involves the articulation between knowledge, values, practices, and experiences that enable participation in public life and the construction of democracy in daily social and school life.

Dantas (2017, p. 26) argues that “political education plays a crucial role in consolidating the democratic regime,” mainly because it allows individuals to appropriate democratic values and political participation, “an essential process for consolidating a democratic culture – especially in Brazil where the redemocratization process is still relatively recent.” The author does not limit political education processes to formal schooling experiences. Although he recognizes that schools can and should be spaces for citizenship education, Dantas considers that different forms and institutional arrangements are important in the constitution of a social ecosystem committed to this task.

The discussion about the responsibility of educational systems in carrying out political education for citizenship is a topic discussed by Santos (2018; 2021). According to the author, proposals for citizenship education that articulated the formation of citizens as a structuring element in the constitution of democracy and the Republican form of state have been present since the second half of the 19th century. However, in the context of the civil-military dictatorship established with the 1964 coup d'état, there was a progressive appropriation of this discussion by anti-democratic segments installed within the State, but also in the social fabric, and the creation of curricular instruments that, under the argument that they were contributing to the civic formation of students, proved to be undertakings of ideological inculcation of an authoritarian matrix and political justification of the dictatorial regime itself and its crimes. The most explicit feature of this process was the imposition of the subjects of Moral and Civic Education and Social and Political Organization of Brazil (OSPB) in basic education.

According to the author, this authoritarian interlude in debates about political education is a key variable in interpreting the difficulties in resuming the democratic tradition of political education processes within educational systems. Only with the proposal of the National Curriculum Parameters in the second half of the 1990s, and with the publication of new National Curriculum Guidelines for the different stages of basic education, also during this period, did the country have legislation guiding these efforts throughout the national territory. Even with this resumption, the meanings and significance surrounding political education remain contested and unstable. More naive perspectives, where individual behaviors, associated with the measurement of exclusively cognitive skills and combined with the uncritical transmission of moral values, are the gravitational center of citizenship education, coexist with proposals of a critical and emancipatory matrix, in which students are invited to understand and analyze the dilemmas, ambiguities, and conflicts existing in their society and in the world, to interpret and act for the strengthening and continuous improvement of political and social institutions, and to assume co-responsibility for common life.

This finding aligns with the contributions of Joel Westheimer, who problematizes the normative models of citizenship education prevalent in different educational systems. The author distinguishes between conceptions of personally responsible, participatory, and socially justice-oriented citizenship, drawing attention to the fact that many educational initiatives emphasize individual behaviors and moral values, to the detriment of critical analysis of social structures and inequalities. For Westheimer, a political education committed to substantive democracy should foster students' ability to question power relations, identify injustices, and participate in collective processes of social transformation (Westheimer; Kahne, 2004).

This critical perspective is broadened by the contributions of Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti, especially in the field of education for global citizenship. The author warns of the risks of naive or normative approaches that promote a depoliticized global citizenship, based on abstract notions of tolerance, diversity, and individual responsibility. Andreotti advocates for a political education that recognizes global power asymmetries, colonial legacies, and the epistemological disputes that structure the contemporary world, proposing pedagogical practices that stimulate reflexivity, dissent, and situated ethical responsibility (Andreotti, 2014).

Political Education, Schooling, and Teacher Curriculum Action

The normative documents that organize basic education in Brazil establish that the pedagogical work of schools must be committed to citizenship education, explicitly outlining the skills and competencies to be developed through the intentional action of teachers with content of a conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal nature (Santos, 2018; 2021).

However, curricula are “complicated conversations” (Pinar, 2012), and their implementation is not linear. Between the prescribed curriculum, the teaching-learning experiences produced in the classroom (Dewey, 1938; Jackson, 1968), and the relationship with knowledge constructed by students (Charlot, 2000), institutional and contextual mediations intervene, shaping what is effectively realized in the daily school routine. In this sense, the multilevel perspective proposed by Gimeno Sacristán (2000; 2013) allows us to understand the curriculum as a process that involves different moments of realization—from the prescribed to the effectively learned—traversed by interpretations, negotiations, and translations.

This curricular implementation occurs through the actions of individuals embedded in institutions. Understood as relatively stable systems of norms, values, and practices, institutions organize expectations, reduce the unpredictability of interactions, and define

possibilities for action. It is within this framework that teachers act as central agents in curricular implementation.

This understanding engages with the literature on public policy implementation, especially with the notion of street-level bureaucrats as actors who exercise a certain degree of discretion in the encounter between the State and citizens (Lipsky, 2019). In the educational field, teachers exercise this discretion by translating, in daily practice, curricular prescriptions and institutional guidelines into concrete pedagogical actions. This process involves situated decisions, made in contexts marked by material constraints, normative pressures, and ambiguities.

In this sense, discretion can be understood as the space for judgment and decision-making that these agents mobilize when interpreting rules and defining courses of action in concrete situations (Lipsky, 2019; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003). In the curricular context, it is expressed in the choices that teachers make when selecting content, defining approaches, and managing teaching situations, based on repertoires accumulated throughout their careers and the conditions present in the implementation scenario.

All of this dynamic is mediated by teachers' beliefs and perceptions. The literature indicates that such beliefs constitute relatively stable structures, anchored in prior experiences, values, and sociocultural contexts, which guide the interpretation of prescriptions and influence pedagogical decisions (Pajares, 1992; Fives & Buehl, 2012). They function as filters that define what teachers consider legitimate, possible, or desirable in pedagogical work.

Furthermore, teachers draw upon experiences accumulated throughout their professional careers, which constitute practical knowledge built through action and reflection on action (Schön, 1991). This knowledge, as Tardif (2002) argues, is plural and results from the articulation between initial training, curricular prescriptions, and concrete lived experiences of daily school life. Marked by interactions, conflicts, and improvisations, these

experiences constitute central references for decision-making and for how the curriculum is effectively implemented.

It is within this framework that the present research is situated, which seeks to understand the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of teachers regarding political education in lower and upper secondary schools, taking curricular implementation as an analytical key to interpret this process.

Methodology

This research adopts a predominantly quantitative approach, structured around the application of a cross-sectional survey, whose objective was to analyze teachers' perceptions and experiences related to pedagogical work with political education in schools. Although the research design incorporated exploratory qualitative procedures in its initial phase, the data produced by the survey constitute the empirical core of the analyses presented in this article.

A cross-sectional survey was chosen because it is a methodological strategy particularly suited to investigating value perceptions, beliefs, and professional experiences, allowing the identification of response patterns, regularities, and internal tensions within a specific social group (Babbie, 2001).

The reference population consists of teachers from public schools in the city of São Paulo who work in lower and upper secondary schools. The sample, defined by convenience, involved 10 schools that agreed to participate in the research, out of 18 initially contacted. In total, 437 teachers were invited to answer the questionnaire, resulting in 319 valid respondents, corresponding to approximately 73% of the teaching staff of the participating units. Although not probabilistic, the sample presents diversity in terms of territory, age, gender, and subject areas.

The data collection instrument consisted of a self-administered questionnaire, applied through the Google Forms platform. Its development was guided by a qualitative exploratory phase, with semi-structured interviews conducted with nine teachers, which allowed the identification of relevant categories and supported the construction of the items. The preliminary version of the instrument was submitted to a pre-test, allowing adjustments regarding the clarity and adequacy of the scales.

The final questionnaire is organized into three modules: (i) sociodemographic and professional characterization; (ii) professional and lived experiences related to political education; and (iii) teachers' perceptions on the relevance, challenges, and conditions for implementing this work. The items in the experiences and perceptions modules were structured on four-point ordinal scales, without a neutral point.

For analytical purposes, the responses were recoded into dichotomous categories, grouping lower and higher levels of frequency or agreement. In the perceptions module, the items were organized into five analytical dimensions: curricular relevance, teaching materials, conflicts and prohibitions, biases in teaching work, and institutional preparation and support. For each dimension, a Dimension Agreement Index (DAI) was calculated, obtained from the average of the agreement percentages of the corresponding items.

Data collection took place in the second half of 2023, through invitations to professors via institutional email, with a guarantee of voluntary participation and anonymity. All ethical procedures related to research with human subjects were observed.

Data analysis was performed using descriptive and comparative statistics. Initially, the internal consistency of the item sets was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which showed satisfactory levels of reliability. Subsequently, frequency distributions and comparisons between subgroups defined by gender, age range, and subject area were analyzed, with an exploratory character.

The comparative analyses were exploratory and interpretive in nature, seeking to identify differences in patterns between groups, without resorting to strict inferential hypothesis testing. This methodological choice stems both from the sample design and the central objective of the research, which prioritizes understanding the meanings attributed by teachers to working with political education and the conditions under which this work takes place in the daily school routine.

Although the results do not allow for statistical generalizations to all teachers in the public school system, the rigor in the construction of the instrument, the validation procedures adopted, and the consistency of the analyses lend robustness to the findings, enabling relevant analytical inferences about the processes of implementing political education in schools and about the perceptions and experiences of teachers working in this field.

Results and discussion

This section presents and discusses the main research findings, organized into two major analytical axes: (i) teachers' professional and lived experiences in working with political education in schools and (ii) their perceptions of the relevance, conditions, and challenges of this pedagogical work. Whenever relevant, the results are discussed in light of the literature on the implementation of educational policies, curriculum, and teacher discretion.

Of the 437 teachers invited to participate in the research, 319 fully responded to the questionnaire, representing a response rate of 73%, considered high for educational surveys administered electronically. The distribution of respondents among the ten participating schools was relatively balanced, avoiding an excessive concentration of responses in a few schools.

Table 1 – Respondent profile

Variable	Category	Percentage
Gender	Women	54.9%
	Men	45.1%
Subject area taught	Languages	25.1%
	Humanities	28.8%
	Natural Sciences	18.2%
	Mathematics	16.6%
	Optional Courses	11.3%

Source: data collected in the survey

The sample is predominantly composed of women (54.9%), reflecting the characteristic gender composition of teachers in basic education. In racial terms, there is a significant presence of self-declared mixed-race and Black teachers, who together represent approximately half of the respondent population. Regarding age range, the group between 46 and 55 years old predominates, followed by teachers between 36 and 45 years old, indicating a sample composed mainly of teachers with a consolidated professional trajectory. Gender and subject area were the sociodemographic variables identified as most relevant for understanding the experiences and perceptions related to political education in schools in the studied sample.

Professional and Lived Experiences

Data regarding teachers' professional and lived experiences reveal a scenario of low institutionalization of work with political education in schools. Table 2 presents the distribution of teachers' professional and lived experiences related to political education, explicitly incorporating the gender variable. The data reveal a general pattern of high exposure to conflict and low participation in training processes and institutional projects, with relatively slight differences between men and women. It is observed that female teachers more frequently report the development of individual initiatives and the lived experience of conflicts in the classroom, while male teachers show slightly higher percentages of

participation in continuing education situations. Regarding negative interferences—both from school management and external movements—the percentages are quite close between the two groups, suggesting that the restrictions and pressures associated with working with political education affect both men and women in the teaching profession in a cross-cutting manner.

Table 2 – Professional and Lived Experiences (high frequency)

Professional/Lived Experience	% High Frequency	% High Frequency (Men)	High Frequency (Women)
Participation in continuing education	18.5%	20.8%	16.6%
Participation in institutional projects	11.9%	7.6%	15.4%
Development of individual projects	23.8%	20.8%	26.3%
Classroom conflicts	73.4%	68.1%	77.7%
Conflicts with families	70.5%	71.5%	69.7%
Management guidance to avoid the topic	22.9%	19.4%	25.7%
External questioning	58%	57%	58.9%

Source: data collected in the survey

From the perspective of distribution by subject areas, some relevant differences can also be observed. Table 3 presents the data with this breakdown. It can be seen that teachers of Humanities concentrate the highest percentages of participation in pedagogical initiatives, both institutional and individual, while teachers of Mathematics and Natural Sciences show less involvement with this type of activity. At the same time, classroom conflicts appear as a recurring experience in all areas, indicating that exposure to tensions is not restricted to teachers who most frequently develop projects in this field.

Table 3 – Professional and Lived Experiences by subject area

Professional/Lived Experience	LANG.	NS	HS	MATH	OP/EL
Participation in continuing education	22.5%	12.7%	27.18%	11.32%	8.34%
Participation in institutional projects	10%	12.7%	16.31%	7.54%	11.12%
Development of individual projects	27.5%	13.79%	39.13%	9.43%	13.9%
Classroom conflicts	76.25%	81.03%	77.17%	71.69%	52.77%
Conflicts with families	22.5%	13.8%	28.72%	9.62%	5.72%
Management guidance to avoid the topic	22.5%	14.6%	28.72%	10.7%	8.34%
External questioning	70%	48.28%	67.4%	41.5%	47.22%

Source: data collected in the survey

The data collected also indicate that continuing education processes, which are central elements for the implementation of political education actions, are not being prioritized by education systems and schools. The insufficiency of these processes weakens not only the technical capacity of teachers, but also their availability and engagement in the implementation of this dimension of the curriculum.

Beliefs and Perceptions

An analysis of teachers' beliefs and perceptions regarding political education reveals a picture marked by structural ambivalences. In general, teachers recognize the relevance of this field of study for student development, but express insecurity regarding the concrete conditions of its implementation in daily school life. This tension between symbolic recognition and institutional fragility runs through the different groups analyzed and helps to understand why political education, although foreseen in curriculum documents, has a low level of implementation in schools.

Table 4 summarizes teachers' perceptions of the curricular relevance of political education. This dimension was operationalized through three statements to which teachers were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement using a four-point Likert scale. The statements are: S.1. "It is important that the curriculum of lower secondary schools includes content and themes of political education"; S.2. "It is important that the curriculum

of high schools includes content and themes of political education”; and S.14 “Developing content and themes of political education is something that goes beyond what should be a priority in school.” Based on the responses to each question, we calculated the Dimension Agreement Index (DAI), stratified by gender and subject area.

Table 4 – Professional Beliefs and Perceptions by subject area

Variable	Category	% CONC S.1	% CONC S.2	% CONC S.14	DAI
Gender	Men	55.61%	74.61%	31.38%	55.49%
	Women	69.71%	70.14%	36.81%	54.18%
Subject area	Languages	67.5%	81.25%	38.75%	62.5%
	Natural Sciences	44.83%	62.07%	39.66%	48.85%
	Humanities	84.07%	98.91%	22.87%	68.61%
	Mathematics	41.51%	50.94%	41.02%	44.65%
	Optional Courses	36.11%	58.78%	11.11%	35.33%

Source: the authors, field research.

The data indicate that most teachers agree, fully or partially, with the importance of including political education content and themes in the curriculum, especially in high school. The differences observed between men and women are relatively slight, suggesting that recognition of the topic's relevance is shared by the entire teaching profession, regardless of gender. On the other hand, stratification by subject area reveals more consistent divisions.

Humanities teachers show the highest levels of agreement regarding the curricular relevance of political education, followed by teachers in the Languages area. In contrast, mathematics and elective/optional subject teachers register the lowest levels of agreement. These results suggest that disciplinary proximity to political, social, and historical content influences how political education is perceived in the curriculum, indicating the presence of distinct disciplinary cultures that shape teachers' beliefs about what should or should not be prioritized in schoolwork. At the same time, even among the groups with the lowest

levels of agreement, there is no absolute rejection of political education. Disagreement appears in a more nuanced way, expressing caution, reservation, or conditioning, and not a denial of the school's role in the political formation of students.

The recognition of curricular relevance does not automatically translate into a feeling of capability or willingness to act. This gap becomes evident when analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding professional preparation and institutional support, summarized in Table 5. The operationalization of this dimension was carried out based on four statements from the research instrument: S.9: "I feel that I am prepared with the didactic tools to work with the contents and themes of political education with my students"; S.10. "I feel that I am prepared to deal with the conflicts and questions from the students' families if I choose to work with the contents and themes of political education"; S.11. "I feel that the management team of my school would support any teacher in working with the contents and themes of political education"; and S.12 "I feel that the Department of Education supports teachers in working with the contents and themes of political education".

Table 5 – Professional beliefs and perceptions by subject area

Variable	Category	% CONC S.9	% CONC S.10	% CONC S.11	% CONC. S.12	DAI
Gender	Men	36.81%	28.75%	46.67%	34.72%	36.74%
	Women	30.28%	28.86%	48.34%	41.14%	37.16%
Subject area taught	Languages	67.50%	62.00%	40.06%	38.66%	52.06%
	Natural Sciences	44.83%	38.52%	51.45%	32.76%	41.89%
	Humanities	84.78%	77.34%	38.52%	54.35%	63.75%
	Mathematics	41.51%	39.88%	62.30%	18.86%	40.64%
	Optional Courses	36.11%	32.64%	48.32%	30.55%	36.91%

Source: the authors, field research

The percentages of agreement with statements regarding mastery of teaching tools, the ability to handle conflicts, and institutional support are at moderate or low levels, indicating that job insecurity is a structuring element

of teachers' beliefs in this area. The differences observed between men and women are slight, with DAI values quite similar, suggesting that the perception of weak implementation conditions permeates the entire teaching profession, regardless of gender.

In contrast, stratification by subject area reveals more significant differences. Humanities teachers show the highest agreement rates in almost all statements, resulting in the highest DAI (Dimension Agreement Index) among the areas analyzed, while teachers of Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and elective/optional subjects register the lowest levels of perceived preparedness and institutional support. This pattern indicates that teachers' beliefs about the feasibility of working with political education are strongly associated with disciplinary cultures and the specific formative repertoires of each area, contributing to an unequal distribution of perceived working conditions and to the reduction of pedagogical work with this theme in certain curricular fields.

Taken together, the results of sections 3.2 and 3.3 suggest that political education occupies a simultaneously legitimate and fragile curricular place in schools: it is recognized as relevant by a large portion of the teaching staff, but faces restrictive conditions for institutionalization and implementation. This fragility is expressed in three converging movements: (i) the low incidence of continuing education and institutional projects, which signals a field poorly supported by professional development policies; (ii) the high frequency of conflicts and prohibitions—experienced in the classroom, in relationships with families, and due to external pressures—which increase the symbolic and operational costs of pedagogical work; and (iii) the widespread perception of insufficient didactic preparation and institutional support, especially when the topic becomes controversial or conflictual. The combination of these factors helps explain why political education, although prescribed and recognized as part of the curriculum, tends to appear irregularly and discontinuously in daily school life.

Stratified analysis helps refine this interpretation. Gender differences are generally subtle, suggesting that the teaching profession as a whole shares, with occasional variations, the same horizon of constraints and insecurities. Differences by subject area, however, are more systematic and indicate that the implementation of political education is unevenly distributed across disciplinary cultures. On the one hand, teachers of Humanities—and, to a lesser extent, Languages—show higher levels of agreement regarding the relevance of the topic and a greater perception of preparedness and support, as well as a higher incidence of pedagogical initiatives; on the other hand, teachers of Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and elective/optional subjects reveal less engagement and a lower sense of viability, even when they recognize the general importance of the topic. This asymmetry suggests that political education tends to rely, in practice, on areas closer to their content and repertoires, which can generate a “disciplinary concentration” effect on the topic and, consequently, limit its transversality.

From the perspective of curriculum implementation, the data suggest that the realization of political education depends less on the normative presence of the topic and more on institutional conditions and the practical calculations that teachers make in the face of the risks and possibilities of the context. In scenarios marked by low training opportunities, uncertain support, and high exposure to conflict, teacher discretion can operate as a strategy of containment and self-protection: teachers select content, modulate approaches, avoid potentially conflictive situations, and, in some cases, refrain from carrying out activities before even starting them. Thus, the gap between prescribed curriculum and lived curriculum does not appear here as a mere mismatch, but as a product of concrete working conditions and an institutional environment that does not offer sufficient support to sustain the teaching of politically sensitive topics. These findings reinforce the need for policies that articulate continuing education, the production of

materials, and institutional support for schools and teachers, otherwise political education will remain a formally recognized but pragmatically vulnerable curricular component.

Final considerations

This study sought to understand how teachers in lower and upper secondary schools perceive political education and what professional and lived experiences they accumulate in their pedagogical work with this field of teaching. By combining empirical data produced through a survey with an analytical approach focused on curriculum implementation, the results illuminate the ways in which political education is realized—or fails to be realized—in the daily life of the school, beyond its formal presence in normative documents.

The findings show that political education occupies a paradoxical place in the lived curriculum. On the one hand, it is widely recognized by teachers as relevant to student development, especially in high school, indicating the symbolic legitimacy of this field of study within the school. On the other hand, this recognition does not automatically translate into systematic pedagogical practices, largely due to the fragility of the institutional conditions that would support its implementation. The low incidence of continuing education, the recurrence of conflicts and prohibitions, and the perception of limited institutional support create a scenario that is not very favorable to working with politically sensitive topics.

Stratified analysis helps refine this interpretation. The differences observed according to gender are generally subtle, suggesting that the restrictions and insecurities associated with working with political education permeate the entire teaching profession. In contrast, variations by subject area are more structural. Teachers of Humanities—and, to a lesser extent, Languages—show greater engagement and a greater perception of preparedness and support, while teachers of Mathematics, Natural Sciences,

and elective or optional subjects reveal greater caution and a lower sense of feasibility. These results indicate that the implementation of political education tends to rely unevenly on specific disciplinary cultures, which may limit its transversality in the school curriculum.

From a theoretical standpoint, the results reinforce the importance of understanding political education through the lens of curriculum implementation and the actions of teachers as agents exercising discretion in contexts marked by ambiguity and conflict. The observed gap between the prescribed curriculum and the lived curriculum is not explained by teacher resistance or a lack of normative recognition, but by a set of institutional and symbolic conditions that shape teachers' practical calculations in the face of the risks involved. From this perspective, teacher discretion appears less as a space for free choice and more as a strategy for adaptation, containment, and, in some cases, self-protection.

This study has limitations that should be considered. The convenience sampling and the territorial scope limited to public schools in a large city require caution regarding the generalization of the results. Even so, the rigor in the construction of the instrument, the high response rate, and the internal consistency of the scales lend analytical robustness to the findings and allow for relevant inferences about broader processes of implementing political education in the school context.

As an implication, the results suggest that strengthening political education in schools requires policies that go beyond mere curricular prescription, involving investment in continuing education and clear institutional support for schools and teachers. In the absence of these conditions, political education tends to remain a formally recognized but pragmatically vulnerable curricular field, dependent on the individual initiative and subjective dispositions of a limited number of teachers.

References

- AMADÉO, J. et al. Civic knowledge and engagement: an IEA study of upper secondary students in sixteen countries. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2002.
- ANDREOTTI, V. O. de. Soft versus critical global citizenship education. In: MCCLOSKEY, S. (org.). Development education in policy and practice. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. p. 21-31.
- APPLE, M. W. Educating the “right” way: markets, standards, God, and inequality. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- BABBIE, E. Métodos de pesquisas de survey. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2001.
- BOBBIO, N. O futuro da democracia: uma defesa das regras do jogo. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1986.
- BROWN, W. Undoing the demos: neoliberalism’s stealth revolution. New York: Zone Books, 2015.
- CHARLOT, B. Da relação com o saber: elementos para uma teoria. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2000.
- DAHL, R. A. Sobre a democracia. Brasília: Editora UnB, 2001.
- DANTAS, H. Educação política: sugestões de ação a partir de nossa atuação. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Konrad Adenauer, 2017.
- DANTAS, H. A importância da conscientização política e a democracia. In: NASCIMENTO, P. (org.). Educação política: conhecer para participar. Campina Grande: Editora Leve, 2019. p. 19-31.
- DANTAS, H. A educação política: um caminho menos radical? Cadernos Adenauer, São Paulo, v. 24, p. 43-56, 2019.
- DANTAS, H. Democracia, cidadania e educação. In: DANTAS, H.; LUZ, J. (org.). Ciência política e políticas de educação. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Konrad Adenauer, 2021. p. 16-34.
- DANTAS, H. Educação política no Brasil: um panorama. Cadernos Adenauer, São Paulo, v. 26, n. 1, p. 9-38, 2025.
- DEWEY, J. Experiência e educação. São Paulo: Nacional, 1938.
- DIAMOND, L. O espírito da democracia: a luta pela construção de sociedades livres em todo o mundo. Curitiba: Atuação, 2015.

- FIVES, H.; BUEHL, M. M. Teachers' beliefs. In: HARRIS, K. R. et al. (eds.). APA educational psychology handbook. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012. v. 2, p. 471-499.
- JACKSON, P. W. Life in classrooms. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.
- JARDIM, L. B. S. O que se entende por educação política no Brasil. Revista Parlamento e Sociedade, São Paulo, v. 6, n. 11, p. 1-12, jul./dez. 2018.
- LEVITSKY, S.; ZIBLATT, D. Como as democracias morrem. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2018.
- LIPSKY, M. Burocracia de nível de rua: dilemas do indivíduo nos serviços públicos. Brasília: ENAP, 2019.
- MARSHALL, T. H. Cidadania e classe social. 2. ed. Brasília: Senado Federal, 2002.
- MAYNARD-MOODY, S.; MUSHENO, M. Cops, teachers, counselors: stories from the front lines of public service. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- MOUNK, Y. O povo contra a democracia: por que nossa liberdade corre perigo e como salvá-la. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2019.
- PAJARES, M. F. Teachers' beliefs and educational research: cleaning up a messy construct. Review of Educational Research, v. 62, n. 3, p. 307-332, 1992.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543062003307>
- PENNA, F. de A. O discurso reacionário de defesa do projeto "Escola sem Partido". Quaestio – Revista de Estudos em Educação, Sorocaba, v. 20, n. 3, p. 567-581, 2018.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22483/2177-5796.2018v20n3p567-581>
- PINAR, W. F. What is curriculum theory? 2. ed. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- PRINT, M.; MILNER, H. (org.). Civic education and youth political participation. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009.
- SACRISTÁN, J. G. O currículo: uma reflexão sobre a prática. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2000.
- SACRISTÁN, J. G. Saberes e incertezas sobre o currículo. Porto Alegre: Penso, 2013.
- SANTOS, A. do N. A escola básica e a educação política para a cidadania. Revista Parlamento e Sociedade, São Paulo, v. 6, n. 11, p. 17-31, jul./dez. 2018.
- SANTOS, A. do N. Uma promessa não cumprida da democracia. In: DANTAS, H. (org.). Ciência política e políticas de educação: conceitos e referências. Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Konrad Adenauer, 2021. p. 169-184.

SANTOS, A. do N. Políticas públicas de educação política na escola básica. Cadernos Adenauer, São Paulo, v. 26, n. 1, p. 39-56, 2025.

SCHÖN, D. A. The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action. London: Routledge, 1991.

SEN, A. Development as freedom. New York: Anchor Books, 1999.

TARDIF, M. Saberes docentes e formação profissional. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002.

TORRES, C. A. Fundamentos teóricos e empíricos da educação para a cidadania global crítica. Caxias do Sul: Educ, 2023.

WESTHEIMER, J.; KAHNE, J. What kind of citizen? American Educational Research Journal, v. 41, n. 2, p. 237-269, 2004. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312041002237>

Received in April 2026.

Approved in June 2026.