

## Bonus and accountability policies in the context of Brazilian Education

*Políticas de bonificação e responsabilização no contexto da educação brasileira*

*Políticas de bonificación y rendición de cuentas en el contexto de la educación brasileña*

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**Abstract:** In the set of educational policies that were developed through State reform in the 1990s, the culture of evaluation is present as a pedagogical and political dimension that resizes practices, curricula and training in the context of public schools. The Educational Bonus Policy is the object of analysis in this research, with the objective of analyzing the Educational Performance Bonus, established in 2008, in the state of Pernambuco. For the work methodology, we opted for a qualitative approach and as a technique, we used multiple case studies, with teachers as research participants. The research results demonstrated that the Educational Performance Bonus is a strategy of the political and social system to condition education professionals to internalize responsibility for achieving goals and results and, thus, feel motivated, through the bonus, to enable the conception of education aligned with the dictates of capital.

**Keywords:** Bonus policy; Accountability policy; Teaching work.

**Resumo:** No conjunto das políticas educacionais que foram desenvolvidas por meio da reforma do Estado na década de 1990, a cultura da avaliação está presente como dimensão pedagógica e política que redimensiona práticas, currículos e formação no contexto da escola pública. A Política de Bonificação Educacional é objeto de análise na presente pesquisa, tendo como objetivo analisar o Bônus de Desempenho Educacional, instituído em 2008, no estado de Pernambuco. Para a metodologia do trabalho, optou-se por uma abordagem qualitativa e como técnica, utilizamos o estudo de caso múltiplos, tendo docentes como participantes da pesquisa. Os resultados da pesquisa demonstraram que o Bônus de Desempenho Educacional é uma estratégia do sistema político e social para condicionar os profissionais da educação a internalizarem a responsabilidade pelo alcance de metas e resultados e, assim se sentirem motivados, por meio da bonificação, para viabilizar a concepção de educação alinhada aos ditames do capital.

**Palavras-chave:** Política de bonificação; Política de responsabilização; Trabalho docente.

**Resumen:** En el conjunto de políticas educativas que se desarrollaron a través de la reforma del Estado en la década de 1990, la cultura de la evaluación está presente como una dimensión

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pedagógica y política que redimensiona las prácticas, los currículos y la formación en el contexto de las escuelas públicas. La Política de Bono Educativo es objeto de análisis en esta investigación, con el objetivo de analizar el Bono por Desempeño Educativo, establecido en 2008, en el estado de Pernambuco. Para la metodología del trabajo se optó por un enfoque cualitativo y como técnica utilizamos estudios de caso múltiples, con los docentes como participantes de la investigación. Los resultados de la investigación demostraron que el Bono por Desempeño Educativo es una estrategia del sistema político y social para condicionar a los profesionales de la educación a interiorizar la responsabilidad por el logro de metas y resultados y, así, sentirse motivados, a través del bono, a posibilitar una concepción de la educación alineada con los objetivos dictados del capital.

**Palabras clave:** Política de bonificación; Política de rendición de cuentas; Trabajo docente.

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## Introduction

The 1990s were the epicenter of political and social transformations in Brazil. This was due to the reform of the state during President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's first term in office (1995-1998), which organically implemented the Master Plan for Reforming the State Apparatus. In terms of political guidelines, the changes were developed by means of international and global indications, particularly international organizations.

Latin America was a favorable field for the influence of different reforms, since international organizations had the principles of disseminating actions and strategies to be carried out, sharing different dimensions in society – education, labor market, social security, social assistance, health, etc. – with the minimum state as a starting point, giving rise to neoliberal principles.

The premises of the neoliberal state are in line with the logic of the market and an evaluating state whose role is to delegate functions and demand results through a culture of evaluation. According to Afonso (2013, p. 44), “one of the expressions of neoliberalism in education is the attempt to transplant forms of business management or those that are more appropriate for profit-oriented organizations into public schools”.

In line with the Evaluation State model resulting from the state reform of the 1990s, the Brazilian education system began to be driven by the results of external evaluations applied throughout the country. As a result, states and municipalities began to develop strategies to guarantee better results in educational indices through the application of standardized tests. These include their own evaluation systems and the Bonus Policy, which seek to ensure that the goals set by the governments are met, while

at the same time holding education professionals responsible for student performance in external exams, with the justification of guaranteeing improvements in the quality of public education in the country.

The states that adopt financial incentive policies, such as the Bonus Policy, seek to motivate education professionals, making them believe that achieving results in educational indices is the way to present a quality education, based on business and managerial molds, with a view to satisfying them through a false discourse of appreciation.

In view of this, as a way of understanding the effects of this policy, the aim of the research was to analyze the Educational Performance Bonus, instituted in 2008 in the state of Pernambuco as part of the Public Management Modernization Program – Goals for Education (PMGP-ME), launched as an educational policy, presenting a set of actions to improve educational indices through the Policy of Accountability of education professionals.

The methodological approach adopted was based on the qualitative approach, in which Lüdke and André (1986) emphasize the need for a careful analysis of the participants' perceptions as a way of understanding what they think. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt procedures that favor understanding the informant's point of view (BOGDAN; BIKLEN, 1994).

In order to obtain further clarification on the subject of this study, we opted for the multiple case study as a research technique, which aims to analyze a given phenomenon in more than one field of research in order to obtain more information to help the researcher understand it. According to Yin (2001, p. 33), this technique “is based on various sources of evidence, with the data needing to converge in a triangle format and, as another result, benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to conduct data collection and analysis”.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 9 (nine) teachers from two state schools in Garanhuns, in the state of Pernambuco. Chart 1 systematizes the main characteristics of the research participants:

Chart 1: research participants

Teacher/School	Course they teach	Degree	Graduate studies	Length of service in the state education system	Sex
A – School 1	History and Philosophy	History	History teaching	2 years and a half	Female
B – Escola 1	Portuguese	Letters in Portuguese/English And psychology	Master in Letters	13 years	Female
C – Escola 1	Mathematics, Nature Revealed, Citizenship in the Digital Age, Art and Mathematics	Science – Mathematics	Mathematics teaching	30 years	Female
D – Escola 1	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics teaching	15 years	Male
A – Escola 2	Geography	Geography	Geography teaching	13 years	Female
B - Escola 2	Science and Biology	Biology Sciences	Biology teaching planning	4 years	Male
C – Escola 2	Biology	Biology Sciences	Biology teaching	6 years	Male
D - Escola 2	Libras interpreter	Pedagogy/ Letters in Libras	Inclusive Education and Psycopedagogy in Inclusive Education	7 years	Female
E - Escola 2	Portuguese and English	Letters	Letters	6 years	Female

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

For the purposes of organizing this paper, after the introduction, the text is divided into two complementary sections. The first deals with aspects of the bonus culture in Brazilian education. In the second, we present the results of the research, based on the participants' statements about the bonus policy in the state of Pernambuco, known as the Educational Performance Bonus.

### **Bonus culture in Brazilian education**

The state reforms in the Brazilian education system since the 1990s and the creation of state and municipal evaluation systems that came into existence due to the intensification of the Evaluation State, are contributing to the increase of accountability (Afonso, 2012) in Brazilian education throughout the country. These educational policies

were developed by bureaucrats seeking to change Brazilian education on the basis of managerial principles based on the business model. As a result, the culture of large-scale assessments was implemented in the country as a way of holding education professionals accountable, with the justification of guaranteeing improvements in the quality of teaching offered in public schools.

As a result of those reforms, strategies were developed to guarantee good student results in the assessments, providing a discourse of educational quality arising from the neoliberal and managerial context. Among the means sought to make the best results possible, we highlight the creation of their own assessment systems and provisional financial incentives in the salaries of teaching professionals, such as the Educational Bonus Policy for public education workers.

The Educational Bonus Policy is established by state and municipal governments with the aim of encouraging education professionals to achieve the goals set by the system – usually the federal system – based on the performance achieved by students in external assessments. The bonus is the receipt of a salary bonus once the results of the assessments have been published.

Ball (2002) points out that the culture of competitive performativity linked to targets and incentives requires professionals, individually and collectively, to recognize their responsibilities in relation to the service they produce. Thus, the work of managers, teachers, coordinators and educational technicians involves a commitment linked to the performance of schools in the rankings, as a way of guaranteeing supposed valorization through annual bonuses.

Adopted by some Brazilian states (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, Acre, Minas Gerais and Paraíba), the Bonus Policy is an attempt to financially stimulate education professionals to achieve goals and results in external evaluations. However, it must be emphasized that the payment of bonuses cannot be considered synonymous with salary appreciation, as the policies of Brazilian states have been trying to demonstrate, especially Pernambuco, whose Bonus Policies link bonuses as a means of giving prestige to the profession. Professional valorization requires adequate working conditions, recognition through a salary floor, professional qualification, among other aspects that involve the dignity of the different education professionals.

Based on this, Oliveira (2013) reminds us that a teacher professional development policy is not represented by a Bonus Policy, since this has aspects of an educational accountability policy and only professionals who have been successful in the results of their students' teaching and learning process will receive bonuses.

For this reason, there are education professionals who do not approve of this policy, such as those from the state of Goiás, who appear in the research data by Freitas, Libâneo and Silva (2018). The professionals interviewed in the survey indicated that the bonus system penalizes teachers in a homogeneous way, regardless of their performance in the classroom, since the worker is penalized even if they are absent for health reasons. Therefore, in order to receive the bonus, teachers must attend work even if they are ill, putting the health of both professionals and students at risk.

In this sense, the bonus system is seen by the interviewees as an unfair system, which punishes and removes the appreciation for the tenure of professionals, replacing it with bonus payments (FREITAS; LIBÂNEO; SILVA, 2018). Within this context, many institutions and professionals are concerned about school results, since they are considered to be the main responsible for student performance.

As a result, they tend to look for ways to achieve their goals, as shown by Medeiros' research (2014), when she analyzed the monetary incentive in the state of Rio de Janeiro. She identified how the bonus influenced changes in the practices of managers in the municipality of Valença, generating a concern with strategies to achieve the goals set by the education system. Parents, students and teachers were made aware of the importance of achieving results, linking them to improved learning.

Considering it, the Bonus Policy for education has been damaging teachers' work and the teaching and learning process, since professionals have been losing their autonomy in the classroom and are forced to follow a standardized curriculum that prioritizes reading, writing and calculation skills in external tests, forcing greater visibility for the Portuguese Language and Mathematics curricular components. Therefore, there will be greater responsibility for the teachers who teach these subjects in relation to other professionals. As well as creating an unfair environment for some professionals, this type of policy leads to a narrowing of the curriculum, in which Freitas (2012, p. 389) states that

When they include certain subjects and leave others out, teachers tend to teach the content covered in the tests (...). Assessments generate traditions. They direct the gaze of teachers, administrators and students. If what is valued in an exam is reading and mathematics, they will devote their privileged attention to this, leaving the other formative aspects out.

By narrowing down the components of the school curriculum, a lot of knowledge is restricted and skills are ignored, preventing other knowledge that is important for students' development from being worked on class. Believing that only what is required in tests is

equivalent to a good education corrupts what should in fact be valued in schools in order to guarantee the breadth of students as social subjects.

The Bonus Policy, because it is linked to the Accountability Policy, has had consequences for education, specifically for teaching work, the curriculum and assessment, because it maximizes the pressures and demands on professionals, while making them responsible for the entire educational process, disregarding extra- and intra-school factors that can affect teaching and learning in the school environment. From the perspective of Ferreira and Silva (2023, p. 424), “the policy of accountability, in this scenario, states that education professionals will be responsible for educational quality, based on results, distorting the meaning and role of education”.

Evaluating educational quality by means of indices disregards processes and encourages competition between school networks, schools and subjects, as well as increasing the competition for schools and students, which makes it easier to earn bonuses and the view that the school and its professionals have done quality educational work.

Based on this, we can see that this policy has been promoting competition between school networks, schools, professionals and students, so that the aim among institutions and subjects is to achieve objectives without showing concern for processes. Competition to achieve results in public schools has had side effects on education, causing feelings of stress, fatigue and demotivation when those involved fail to achieve the results set.

Setubal (2010) warns that one of the problems related to competitiveness in schools is the competition among professionals to choose the schools where they will work. Thus, schools that have already achieved good results in previous years will be targeted by teachers as a way of increasing their chances of receiving prizes or bonuses. Schools that tend to have greater difficulties in meeting goals are often not the teachers' first choice, as they understand that there is a greater risk of not achieving the results desired by the government and, in turn, professional recognition and awards.

The bonus policy tends to promote rivalry between teachers, increase inequality between schools and school networks, encourage cheating and exclude students who have more difficulties because they don't perform well on standardized tests. Ferraz and Bruns (2010) show that schools that come close to achieving their results have a greater incentive to improve their results in subsequent years, compared to schools that are far from achieving their targets. Furthermore, we can see that competitiveness in education is appreciated as a strategy for achieving the desired numbers, just as it is in the market sector.

However, it is necessary to reflect on the role of the state in guaranteeing the quality of public education, which needs to go beyond the implementation of accountability policies



that target educational results through the work of professionals who are held accountable. These workers seek to ensure results through pressures and demands promoted in a competitive environment, which in turn allow school workers to face the stress of competition between schools and professional colleagues.

We also believe that, to be successful in education, we need to follow a different approach to teaching. Appropriate working conditions that facilitate the work of these professionals in order to achieve quality in education, as opposed to a bonus that does not value the professional and does not help the practice of teaching professionals.

We also understand that bonuses are a policy that has repercussions on teachers' work and does not guarantee educational quality. Research (Cardoso, Melo, 2022; COSTA, 2016; Oliveira, Carvalho, Tavares, 2020; Passone, 2014; Freitas, Libâneo, Silva, 2018) shows that this model of incentive policy does not contribute to improving education and is not in line with the defense of a teaching profession whose principle is professional appreciation. Therefore, this incentive alone does not guarantee improvements in teaching in public schools.

### **The Bonus Policy in the reality of Pernambuco: views of education professionals**

Since the 1990s, educational discourse has pointed to accountability actions, which regulate professionals based on student performance, increasingly showing traces of the market logic present in the neoliberal model. Based on this, the state of Pernambuco has also developed policies in the context of educational reforms, through the Public Management Modernization Program – Goals for Education (PMGP/ME), implemented in 2007, during the government of Eduardo Campos, which has remained in place until now.

Aligned with neoliberal principles, the Modernization of Public Management Program – Goals for Education carries a strong discourse of modernization, accompanied by improvements in education. In it, the school is seen as a business and must provide effective practices to achieve the desired results, as in the market sector. Professionals therefore take on the role of being responsible for meeting the goals set by the government. For Shiroma and Evangelista (2011, p. 135), “in recent times, the reification of quality, taken as an absolute value in the debates on evaluation, seems to have become the main point that generates animosity in the field of public policies and in the relationship with teachers”.

To encourage these professionals to achieve the desired results, the state government implemented a Bonus Policy, known as the Educational Performance Bonus,



which is a financial incentive for all school workers (PERNAMBUCO, 2008a). The adoption of this policy has led to competition between schools and professionals as a way of ensuring that students perform better so that they can appear efficient to the school community and the government.

In this way, teachers in the Pernambuco State Education Network live under pressure and demands from the Department of Education to present favorable results that can be converted into quantitative data. From this perspective, Ball (2002, p. 9) argues that “the act of teaching and the subjectivity of the teacher are both profoundly altered within this new vision of management (of quality and excellence) and the new forms of business control (through marketing and competition)”.

In a previous survey, Ferreira (2023) pointed out that out of a group of 15 teachers included in the context of the Bonus Policy, 47% of the participants believe that the Educational Performance Bonus is a policy that stimulates teachers' work, while 33% do not agree that the bonus is beneficial for teachers' work. Only 20% of those interviewed partially consider the financial incentive to be beneficial to their work. In other words, the majority believe that the Bonus Policy encourages professionals to carry out their activities.

However, if we see the Educational Performance Bonus as a way of stimulating teachers' work, we need to consider that salary appreciation is not a reality for all teachers. Therefore, the Educational Performance Bonus can be seen as a favorable incentive for public school teachers to achieve their goals. In the words of Teacher D-School 2, we can confirm this concept when she points out that:

So, when there are bonuses in a capitalist country, every result, every contribution, every bonus that comes will also make a difference at the end of the month because teachers' salaries, here in Brazil compared to other countries... Many countries pay their teachers very well because they value the profession. So teachers here in Brazil are paid less than they deserve to be paid, for how hard they work, for how hard they study, for how much they do for education, which is one of the arteries of the country, if not the most important. So bonuses are also important in this respect for all areas.

In view of the teacher's statement, we believe that the Educational Performance Bonus is seen as a way of increasing salaries, since many teachers are still not valued in their salaries, as Teacher C-School 1 points out, when she confirms that the bonus is important, but that she would like “greater salary appreciation, because many states and municipalities keep delaying the payment of the floor and don't want to respect the positions and careers plan”.

Faced with this situation, we can see that the bonus policy uses this salary context to put pressure on professionals to meet goals. However, problems related to teachers' work tend to be frequent, such as

the increase in the pace and intensification of work, to aspects that cause changes in social relations, such as greater competition between teachers and between sectors, a reduction in sociability in school life, more individualized professional actions, distancing from communities and an increase in bureaucratic workload (production of reports and their use for comparisons that contribute to an increase in terror) (HYPÓLITO, 2010, p. 1341).

That said, it's not new that performance policies reinforce school competition and maximize the increase in demands on education professionals. In this respect, we think that the Educational Performance Bonus is a program that is in line with neoliberal principles, linked to the logic of the market, when it seeks the effectiveness of school practices in order to achieve the results desired by the Department of Education, through the work of teachers, without considering their difficulties in achieving these goals.

For this reason, the Educational Performance Bonus is not seen by all professionals as something that stimulates their teaching work, since they suffer from the demands imposed by the Pernambuco State Department of Education, especially those who teach Portuguese Language and Mathematics, which are required in standardized tests, including the Pernambuco Educational Assessment System.

In this context, we would like to highlight the testimony of Teacher E-School 2, who analyzes the Educational Performance Bonus

[...] as an incentive, it is weak, you know. Weak! Because I believe that the best incentive would be a fair salary for teachers so that they didn't have to work in two or three schools to be able to have good living. Is it good to receive the BDE? Yes, but at what cost? At what cost? What psychological pressure a Portuguese and math teacher suffers in the final years, right, ninth years and third years. It's a war, everyone wants to run, no one wants to teach these grades, these classes, because it's a lot of pressure, it's a lot of pressure and, at the end of the day, who gets the BDE? Everyone in the school, right? Geography teachers, history teachers, English teachers, art teachers, but they don't get charged, they don't get crucified. As for the Portuguese and math teachers. So if we were to give them a gift, it would only be fair to give it to them for Portuguese and mathematics in the final years, right? And so, there are teachers who would rather lose this BDE and not go through the pressure they're under. So, in my view, it's a minimum incentive. A decent salary and better classroom conditions so that the teacher can work. I think there could be a difference, but imagine a classroom with 54, 55, 57 students. There's no such thing! How can we have a decent job? So, in my opinion, the BDE isn't a big thing, it only serves to increase the pressure on the Portuguese and math teacher in these classes, that's all!

The clash over valuing teachers lies precisely in favorable working conditions and salary recognition which, according to the teacher's testimony, are not factors that are part of her work experience. On the contrary, professional prestige has been linked to bonuses, which are calculated based on the teacher's efforts to guarantee results and targets which, in turn, do not depend solely on the teacher's efforts. Based on this, Libâneo (2018, p. 49) argues that

These policies also affect teachers in terms of their working conditions: the precariousness and intensification of their work, the pressure to comply with externally pre-defined content, the loss of autonomy and the devaluation of their work, which is reduced to training students for standardized tests.

We note from Teacher E-School 2 that, in addition to stress, feelings of injustice are present in the routine of teaching professionals, especially those who teach the curricular components required in standardized tests. This brings us to another problem caused by these policies, the narrowing of the curriculum, which, in addition to reducing the curricular components in external assessments, tends to place the greatest demands on Portuguese language and mathematics teachers.

The Teacher B-School 2 states that

When the SAEPE/SAEB assessments are close, there's a lot of pressure, especially on Portuguese and math teachers. For the other subjects, the pressure is a little less, but I see that Portuguese and math teachers are under a lot of pressure, they do a lot of mock exams, there's a lot of pressure on them because of these results, but in my case, which is biology or science, it's more relaxed, there's not so much pressure in relation to these results.

Based on the testimony, it is clear that “pressured to ensure learning in a part-time school and without adequate support, the teacher advances the time that should be occupied to teach other subjects that do not fall in the exam, in order to be able to deal with those that fall in the exam” (FREITAS, 2014, p. 1100). Thus, we believe that this is another reason why most of the participants see the Educational Performance Bonus as a stimulating policy for their work, given that most of them do not receive the same demands and pressures to achieve results in large-scale assessments.

When we consider teachers' working conditions and issues of salary appreciation, the Educational Performance Bonus is not the best way to make professionals more stimulated in their work environment. Teacher B-School 1 says that the Educational Performance Bonus

“doesn't see the human being in its process, it's an extremely competitive and sensationalist policy” and adds that “the policy it implements is not a healthy policy for education, because it doesn't think about the chronicity of these problems that we experience on a daily basis and, in fact, the problems are still there, as I said, they persist”.

Due to behaviors conditioned by the practice of raising students' scores in external assessments, many teachers come to believe that their attitudes will be recognized and valued through the bonus. We identified this in the voice of Teacher D-School 1, who believes that the Educational Performance Bonus is a way of professionally valuing teachers who achieve the goals.

We all know that the BDE is an extra bonus that the government gives out. I think nothing could be fairer for the learning targets achieved by the school. This is important because there's the issue of valuing, valuing the teacher, I think that a teacher shouldn't be valued just for their pay, no, it shouldn't just be for a decent salary, but for listening to their opinions, recognizing when they do a good job, or achieving the goals set by the school, so I think this has to do with the issue of “valuing”. The result, we know, the result of all this, will be an educator who is better prepared, more motivated and who will look for ways to innovate and transmit this knowledge in the best possible way. So, from my point of view, it's nothing more than valuing this professional who today we see so much neglect on the part of the governments that are there.

In fact, we shouldn't think that valuing teachers only happens with a decent salary. It is necessary to provide better working conditions and recognize the difficulties present in public schools, especially when we are aiming for improvements in education. However, we do not agree that the Educational Performance Bonus values teaching professionals, when in fact it is linked to an Accountability Policy, which tends to reward only those professionals who manage to meet the criteria for receiving the bonus.

Oliveira (2013) points out that the working conditions that education professionals in the country's different school networks have suffered for decades demonstrate a process of devaluation. She points out that low salaries, lack of career prospects, workload and infrastructure problems directly affect teaching practice and are worrying factors highlighted in academic research, unions, the press and society in general.

Teacher C-School 2's speech reflects this thought when he argues that “[...] there's no point in the government giving a teacher a BDE as a development bonus and then not paying the salary floor, for example. That's not valuing teachers, that's the media, it's something else”.

The manipulation of political power in schools has devalued educational professionals in order to strengthen the fulfillment of goals that are often out of touch with the real needs of educational institutions and the people who make them up. Following this logic, Setubal (2010, s/p) believes that

the emphasis on the low educational results measured in national assessments has taken up more space in the media, bringing to the center of the discussion the accountability of schools and teachers for the results of student learning and, as a consequence, the implementation of incentive and reward policies for results and for meeting goals – the so-called meritocracy.

Stimulating professionals with an annual bonus is far away from valuing them and if we consider that not everyone receives the same amount, this policy tends to increase stress due to the emotional pressure caused by accountability. In light of this, Ravitch (2011) highlights the possibility of teachers manipulating students' grades in order to secure recognition from the government and society. For this reason, Teacher A-School 1 partly believes in the bonus system in Pernambuco, because, for her, the bonus even serves as a motivation for teaching professionals, but she believes that “there is a make-up in the numbers of students passing”. She claims that “students who often have a very big deficiency in their learning, but who end up being approved to show that the school has guaranteed efficient learning” (Teacher A-School 1).

Through questions like these, we argue that the Educational Bonus Policy has collateral effects on education, and not just on teachers' work. Teacher A-School 1's reflection is an example of these implications of the bonus program, highlighting that teachers look for ways to ensure they receive the Educational Performance Bonus without actually worrying about student learning.

Teacher A-School 2 also showed this concern related to the bonus based on student results. She mentioned:

I'll be honest... from what I've seen, the BDE makes the teachers, most of them, always want positive results from the students and the school. I often see teachers, not all of them obviously, but some who think that the student always has to get positive grades and that the students always have to get ... obviously this varies from teacher to teacher, it's not in general, but I've seen teachers say “hey, but if the students' grades drop we won't get the bonus, so let's go, let's approve, let's go, let's fix these students' grades and, like, impose that all the teachers have to fix the grades so that all the students achieve 'positive results'. So, I think that the BDE would be an incentive for teachers to work better, but there are professionals of all kinds, in all areas and places, and some professionals actually see it only as an advantage, not for the teaching and learning process, but rather to give positive grades and positive results so that they can get the bonus that if we fall down we don't get the bonus. It's all about the financial side of things.

It can be seen from the participant's statement that the financial incentive conditions professionals not only to achieve the goals, but also to manipulate the students' results in order to benefit from the Educational Performance Bonus. Concern is shown about the achievement of goals and results, and not just on the part of the government and the secretariat, but on the part of the professionals, as Teacher D-School 2 thinks. Although she thinks the bonus program is interesting, she confirms that it “is a sign that there are professionals there who are committed to achieving the goals that are set for them”.

However, we can see that there is no real concern for the teaching and learning processes, since the professionals, in order to achieve these objectives, look for strategies to guarantee recognition of their “effectiveness” in the service they provide to education. In light of this, Chirinéa and Brandão (2015, p. 477) emphasize that

it is understood that schools and education systems, especially municipal ones, feeling the pressure to comply with the requirements imposed by the tests or, on the verge of a “strategic” solution to circumvent the IDEB, train their students to take the tests or use other, more creative and less orthodox means, such as inducing students with greater learning difficulties to miss the day the assessments are administered or failing them so that they don't reach the 5th and 9th grades of elementary school during the period in which the tests are administered.

The presence of the technicist trend and behaviorism in this field tends to condition everyone involved in the educational process to achieve goals as a way of demonstrating educational quality. However, Silva and Carvalho (2021) point out that “the reality of public schools is dense and permeates the structural and dynamic conditions that its participants experience, signaling the complexity of the professionals' work”.

Thus, we believe that the Educational Performance Bonus is a government tool that contributes to educational exclusion, through its connection to a professional accountability program, which implies demands for the desired results every year in public schools. In general, we see the neoliberal influence present in the school environment as a means of meeting the goals stipulated by the system, while at the same time directly affecting teachers' vision of the social role of public schools.

## Conclusions

This research sought to present data on the Bonus Policy of the state of Pernambuco. This policy, known as the Educational Performance Bonus, was introduced through the Public Management Modernization Program – Goals for Education (PMGP-ME), which aims to raise Pernambuco's educational results.

As a result, the Educational Performance Bonus acts as a way of encouraging education professionals to develop strategies to meet targets and achieve results. As a result, professionals tend to understand that the bonus is a form of professional appreciation, because they internalize the responsibility for student performance in large-scale assessments.

This was confirmed by the survey participants who, for the most part, see the Educational Performance Bonus as an advantageous policy for teaching and, consequently, for achieving targets. However, this view comes from those professionals who do not teach Portuguese and Mathematics, which are required in external assessments. As a result, they don't usually suffer the pressures and demands of the Education Department to meet goals, and even so, they receive the bonus.

However, we have seen in this research that a variety of factors can interfere with school results and that holding professionals accountable is unfair, because we need to consider the role of the state in education, which since the reform of the state in the 1990s has shirked responsibility for social sectors, including education.

In addition, the accountability directed at teachers conditions them to manipulate the results in order to guarantee recognition of productivity and the receipt of bonuses. This means that, like the state, professionals become concerned with educational results and not necessarily with the educational process. In this way, the formation of subjects for a just society is left aside, giving way to an education focused on the results of external evaluations and the job market.

As a result, merit replaces the context of public school students' lives as a space for performative competitiveness in the school field that seeks to improve educational results, without worrying about how they are achieved and what the real needs of educational institutions, professionals and students are. The culture of evaluation is embedded in Brazilian public schools and is the horizon for education professionals, since they feel charged and held responsible for the results of external evaluations, through educational policies.

We advocate that educational policies take into account the local reality of each municipality and school. In addition, the quality of education needs to be made possible by



listening to the local and school communities, connected to the dimensions that contribute to the work of teachers and students, highlighting the structure of schools, working conditions, the consolidation of a professional development policy, the implementation of democratic management and a culture of participation, among other issues. In this way, qualitative and quantitative aspects can provide a summary of the experiences in each location.

The experiences of school actions, collectively planned proposals and the daily lives that are lived and built show the social function of the school and the repercussions that come from the local school culture. Thus, public schools are alive, dynamic and complex, so they cannot be standardized to a prescriptive curriculum, with the aim of preparing students to take a standardized test. In order to recognize the quality of the school, it is necessary to be in it, to feel it, to live it and to understand the political and social significance that its experiences have for its participants.

From this perspective, redirecting the meaning of educational policies to improve learning based on the meaning that education has for its public is the social function of the school, which is alive, dynamic, inclusive and reflective. The education system, through the agents who construct the policies, needs to reorganize the training path of future generations through a multidimensional curriculum, broad, political, technical and critical training of education professionals, reshaping attitudes, actions and policies. This, then, is the challenge!

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