

Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Utilization of External Literacy Assessment Results in Schools¹

Percepções docentes sobre usos de resultados de avaliações da alfabetização externas à escola

Percepciones docentes sobre el uso de resultados de evaluaciones de alfabetización externas a la escuela

Gladys Rocha²
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

Mariza Schneider³
Rede Municipal de Sabará

Raquel Martins⁴
Universidade Federal de Lavras

Abstract: This paper discusses teachers' perceptions regarding the use of external literacy assessment results in two public schools of the municipality of Sabará, Minas Gerais. The theoretical background supporting the study is composed of works which investigate assessment and alphabetization, such as Luckesi (2018), Bonamino; Souza (2012), Soares (2018) and Rocha; Martins; Miranda (2020). The selection of these institutions for interviews was based on the integration of data on average proficiency in Portuguese obtained through the State of Minas Gerais Literacy Assessment Program (Proalfa) and the Socioeconomic Status Indexes (SES, known as Índice Socioeconômico [INSE] in Portuguese) provided by the Anísio Teixeira National Institute on Educational Study and Research (Inep). This enabled us to identify these two schools with high proficiencies and distinct socioeconomic levels among the initially 27 schools analyzed. Despite expressing different perspectives, the majority of teachers believe that external assessments can inform teaching. These perceptions are also influenced by expectations and a certain level of frustration when results do not align with anticipated outcomes. Furthermore, there was observed difficulty in understanding assessment tools, the information provided, and its application.

Keywords: Literacy assessment; External assessment; Use of results; Teachers' perceptions.

Resumo: Este artigo discute percepções de professoras sobre usos de resultados de avaliações da alfabetização em duas escolas públicas da rede municipal de Sabará, Minas Gerais. O suporte teórico aqui adotado abarca estudos que tratam da avaliação e da alfabetização, como Luckesi (2018),

¹ Tradutor: Lydsson Agostinho Gonçalves. E-mail: lydsson.goncalves@gmail.com.

² PhD in Education from the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (FaE-UFMG). Professor at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (FaE-UFMG), Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (MG), Brazil. E-mail: gladysrocha1@ufmg.br; Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/8528115195453580>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6126-067X>.

³ Master's degree in education from the Didactics and Teaching Line of the Professional Master's degree at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (FaE-UFMG). Pedagogue at the Municipal Department of Education of the Municipality of Sabará (SEMED), Sabará, Minas Gerais, (MG) Brazil. E-mail: marizaschneider@gmail.com; Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/6877994308626191>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1727-356X>.

⁴ PhD in Linguistic Studies from the Linguistic Studies Program of the Faculty of Letters of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (Poslin-Fale-UFMG). Professor at the Department of Language Studies (Del) and the Postgraduate Program in Letters (PPGL) at the Federal University of Lavras (UFLA), Lavras, Minas Gerais, (MG) Brazil. E-mail: raquelmartins@ufla.br; Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/3971924930410275>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0321-3848>.

Bonamino; Souza (2012) e Soares (2018). A definição das instituições em que faríamos as entrevistas deu-se a partir da articulação dos dados de proficiências médias em Língua Portuguesa, obtidos através do Programa de Avaliação da Alfabetização do Estado Minas Gerais (Proalfa), e os Índices de Nível Socioeconômico (INSE) disponibilizados pelo Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira (Inep). Isso nos permitiu identificar duas escolas com altas proficiências e níveis socioeconômicos distintos, dentre 27 escolas analisadas. Embora expressem diferentes “modos de ver”, a maioria das professoras entende que as avaliações externas podem informar ao ensino. Percepções que são também permeadas por cobranças em relação aos resultados obtidos e certa frustração quando eles não convergem com os esperados. Observou-se, também, certa dificuldade em relação à compreensão dos instrumentos de avaliação, das informações disponibilizadas e sua apropriação.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação da alfabetização; Avaliação externa; Uso de resultados; Percepções de docentes.

Resumen: Este artículo analiza las percepciones de los docentes con respecto al uso de los resultados de evaluaciones externas de alfabetización en dos escuelas públicas dentro de la red municipal de escuelas de Sabará, Minas Gerais. El soporte teórico adoptado aquí incluye estudios que abordan la evaluación y la alfabetización, como Luckesi (2018), Bonamino; Souza (2012), Soares (2018) y Rocha; Martins; Miranda (2020). La selección de estas instituciones para las entrevistas se basó en la integración de datos sobre la competencia promedio en portugués obtenida a través del Programa de Evaluación de Alfabetización del Estado de Minas Gerais (Proalfa) y los Índices Socioeconómico (SES, conocido como Índice Socioeconômico, INSE, en portugués) proporcionado por el Instituto Nacional de Estudios e Investigaciones Educativas Anísio Teixeira (Inep). Esto nos permitió identificar estas dos escuelas con altos niveles de competencia y niveles socioeconómicos distintos entre las 27 escuelas inicialmente analizadas. A pesar de expresar perspectivas diferentes, la mayoría de los docentes cree que las evaluaciones externas pueden proporcionar información para la enseñanza. Estas percepciones también están influenciadas por expectativas y cierto nivel de frustración cuando los resultados no coinciden con los resultados anticipados. Además, se observó dificultad en la comprensión de las herramientas de evaluación, la información proporcionada y su aplicación.

Palabras clave: Evaluación de la alfabetización; Evaluación externa; Uso de resultados; Percepciones de los docentes.

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Introduction

This paper⁵ discusses teachers' perceptions regarding the use of external⁵ literacy assessment results in two public schools of the municipality of Sabará, Minas Gerais. As the expectation was to carry out the study in schools where there was a greater chance of finding teachers working in

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⁵ As the external assessment we are working with is applied on a large scale, in this paper we use the terms "external assessment" and "large-scale assessment" synonymously.

institutional contexts that encourage or induce the use of data from assessments, we considered the hypothesis that schools with higher performance would tend to pay more attention to analyzing results and appropriating them. From this perspective, in order to define the schools where we would carry out field activities, we analyzed the average literacy proficiencies of the schools in the Sabará Municipal Education Network obtained through the Minas Gerais State Literacy Assessment Program (Proalfa), linking them to the Socioeconomic Level Indexes (INSE) made available by Anísio Teixeira National Institute on Educational Study and Research (Inep). The intersection of this information led us to select, among the 27 municipal institutions that offered education to the early years, two with high proficiency levels and very different socioeconomic levels. In both schools, we interviewed 11 teachers, from the 2nd and 3rd grades, whose contact with literacy assessment results was more significant.

In the scenario investigated, the focus on Proalfa was natural, since this is the only standardized, census-based literacy assessment program external to the school which has annual applications, is consolidated in the municipality of Sabará, and does not have a focus on strong accountability policies, based on bonuses (Schneider, 2021). Proalfa is part of the Minas Gerais State Public Education Assessment and Equity System (SIMAVE), and encompasses two types of assessment: one internal to the school, called the School Learning Assessment Program (PAAE); and one external, the assessment conducted by the public education system through two complementary programs: Proalfa and the Public Basic Education Network Assessment Program (PROEB). Proalfa was the first standardized, census-based assessment implemented on a large scale in the field of literacy, and since 2006 it has sought to measure literacy levels in Portuguese for students in the 3rd grade of primary education (Rocha; Martins; Miranda, 2020). As of 2017, the Program also began to apply tests in the area of Mathematics and, in 2019, as a result of the new guidelines of the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC)⁶, the assessment started to be applied to students in the 2nd grade of primary school.

This article is guided by the understanding that external assessment is something which "[...] is conceived, planned, elaborated, corrected and has its results analyzed outside the school [...]"⁷ (Rocha, 2014). Assessment as such ends with the release of information on the quality of the investigated reality. As Luckesi (2018) states,

Assessing does not act *in itself* on the production of the results of action. As an investigation, the act of assessment simply reveals the quality of the reality. The uses of its revelations, as a basis for decisions, are the responsibility of the manager of the evaluated action, who, using the knowledge obtained, makes

⁶ Available on the official website: basenacionalcomum.mec.gov.br. Access on January 12, 2024.

⁷ In the Portuguese original, "é concebida, planejada, elaborada, corrigida e tem seus resultados analisados fora da escola." All translations provided are by the authors.

choices and decisions. This teaches us that "decision-making", based on the results of evaluative research, does not belong to the realm of evaluation, [...] but rather to the realm of those who decide on what to do and how to do it⁸ (LUCKESI, 2018, p. 58-59; author's emphasis).

The use of assessment results is therefore related to the management of actions, whether within an educational system, a school or a classroom. It should be noted, however, that when we distinguish between assessment as information about a reality and the use of results, we are not disregarding the symbolic consequences of the so-called "[...] *high stakes* or *strong accountability* policies implemented by various education systems whose consequences are more serious, with sanctions or rewards for schools and/or teachers due to their results"⁹ (BONAMINO; SOUZA, 2012, p. 375, emphasis added). The aim is to distinguish between the use that some systems make of the information obtained from external assessments, with strong accountability policies, and the assessment itself and the diversity of uses that arise from the information. This leads us to reflect on external assessment as something that is necessarily negative, disregarding the fact that its results are appropriated (or not) by concrete subjects. The data made available does not in itself have a negative or positive connotation when it comes to discussing the curriculum. The use of the results is influenced by the ways in which policies are implemented, but the ways in which they are appropriated are dynamic, complex and delineated by the different perspectives of the subjects who interact with the results in different contexts and institutional spaces.

Specifically in regards to literacy, Soares (2018) draws attention to the fact that the relationship between assessment and literacy in Brazil is not a recent one; it was initially established in the country at the time of the serial education system¹⁰, and remained until its organization in cycles. According to the author, this scenario did not change in the 1980s, when the organization of the system in cycles began to be introduced in Brazilian education. According to Soares,

it could be said that, at the beginning of the 21st century, the problem remains; the difference is that today, students do not break through the barrier of the 1st cycle, which replaced the 1st grade as the literacy stage, or,

⁸ "O ato de avaliar não atua, *por si mesmo*, na produção dos resultados da ação. Como investigação, o ato de avaliar simplesmente revela a qualidade da realidade. Os usos de suas revelações, como base para decisões, são de responsabilidade do gestor da ação avaliada, que, tomando em mãos o conhecimento obtido, faz escolhas e toma decisões. Isso nos ensina que a "tomada de decisão", com base nos resultados da investigação avaliativa, não pertence ao âmbito da avaliação, [...] mas sim ao âmbito de quem decide sobre o agir e sobre o modo de agir."

⁹ "[...] *high stakes* ou políticas de responsabilização forte implementadas por diversos sistemas de ensino cujas consequências são mais graves, com sanções ou recompensas para escolas e/ou professores, em decorrência dos resultados."

¹⁰ "The 1st grade was the literacy grade - only the student which was considered 'literate' was promoted to the 2nd grade" ("A 1ª série correspondia à série de alfabetização - só o aluno considerado 'alfabetizado' era promovido à 2ª série"; Soares, 2018, p. 14).

in the case of systems that opted for continued progression, they advance to the next cycle even if they are still illiterate¹¹ (SOARES, 2018, p. 14).

Having outlined the more general context from which the data on the use of assessment results was collected, and having the addressed theoretical points that are fundamental to this study (such as the relationship between literacy and assessment), we will now deal with aspects related to the methodology used to conduct the interviews. We will then present the analysis of these interviews and move on to the final thoughts of the study.

Methodological approach

In order to define the schools with which we would conduct the interviews, we were guided by the hypothesis that schools with higher performance rates were more likely to have moments in their practices for discussing and analyzing data, with the prospective goal of using them. However, we are aware that, as Soares and Alves (2013) point out, although the production and dissemination of student learning measures as part of school monitoring is important, it is essential that the conditions of inequality between these measures are discussed.

Among the different categories that are fundamental for analyzing these results, given their relationship with the students' background, we associate performance measures with students' socioeconomic level (Soares; Alves, 2013). Thus, the criteria for selecting the schools were based on the articulation of two sets of data: 1) the analysis of Proalfa proficiencies in the area of Portuguese Language in the 3rd grade in the 2015 to 2018 editions, in which the data from each school was compared with each other, without a previous definition of whether or not proficiency indicated a school with high or low performance; and 2) socioeconomic level indicators (INSE) provided by Inep for the 5th grade onwards.

We were unable, however, to obtain INSE data for the 27 schools in Sabará's municipal education network¹² that offer education for the early years. Eight of them (EM03, EM06, EM11, EM12, EM13, EM16, EM19 and EM27) were not considered in the analysis because they did not have INSE data. This lack of information was due to different variables: EM03 and EM16 had fewer than 20 students in 2017. EM06 and EM19, on the other hand, had an attendance rate of less than 80% in 2017, when the Brazil Test was administered. As a

¹¹ "Pode-se dizer que, neste início do século XXI, o problema permanece; a diferença é apenas que, hoje, os alunos não rompem a barreira do 1º ciclo, que substituiu a 1ª série como etapa de alfabetização, ou, no caso de sistemas que optaram pela progressão continuada, passam o ciclo seguinte ainda não alfabetizados."

¹² In order to preserve the anonymity of the schools, we chose to refer to them by using numbers, which is not the official way of identifying them. It should be noted that, later on, fictitious names will also be used to refer to the teachers interviewed. These names were chosen from the interviewees themselves.

minimum enrollment of 20 students per class and a minimum attendance of 80% are criteria established by Inep for the calculation, these institutions had no information. EM12, on the other hand, was gradually implementing the early years and, in 2017, did not yet offer the 5th grade. For the EM11, EM13 and EM27 schools, we could not find precise justification for the lack of data, either on the website or from the municipal office.

The socioeconomic indicators were compared with the average performance of the 27 schools in the 3rd grade Portuguese Language assessment between 2015 and 2018, as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Average LP Proalfa scores between 2015-2018 and INSE Inep of the 27 schools

Schools	2015	2016	2017	2018	INSE Number	INSE Class
EM01	562,3	569	567,5	584,4	5,3	Medium
EM02	563,3	574	577,6	582,6	4,92	Medium
EM03	537,9	558,3	571	539,8		
EM04	527,7	538,3	561,9	558,8	4,77	Medium
EM05	576,5	561	599,1	571,5	4,8	Medium
EM06	558,2	548,2	541,3	512,6		
EM07	545,2	555,6	551,5	542,5	4,95	Medium
EM08	541,9	605,1	574,8	560	4,85	Medium
EM09	568,9	560,1	582,2	569,1	5,14	Medium
EM10	572,1	575,2	606	618	6,37	High
EM11	533	572,9	603,7	568,8	No data*	No data*
EM12	-	568,4	570,2	605,9		
EM13	572,9	548,2	580	581,6	No data*	No data*
EM14	593	580,3	574,4	558,3	4,92	Medium
EM15	541,7	604,2	595,1	561,7	4,7	Medium -low
EM16	633,9	598,4	600,8	638,9		
EM17	569,2	568,8	581,2	576,6	4,94	Medium
EM18	569,1	555,3	600,6	587,1	5,46	Medium -high
EM19	532,1	547,9	583	569,8		
EM20	561,5	569,1	569,5	582	5,02	Medium
EM21	565,5	570,7	590,4	571,7	5,29	Medium
EM22	542,5	538,4	568,7	565,3	4,97	Medium
EM23	560,6	564,2	582,9	551,5	4,98	Medium
EM24	578,8	584,4	598,6	601,3	5,11	Medium
EM25	519,9	558,7	604,4	608,2	5,79	Medium -high
EM26	621,6	624,8	625,7	604	4,67	Medium -low
EM27	660,5	623,3	632	629,6	No data*	No data*

Source: Inep; Simave/Proalfa, Nov. /2019.

As it can be seen in the table, some schools do not show regularity or a certain "consistency" in their average performance indexes. There are also some schools that, specifically in 2018, had a decrease in average proficiency, a phenomenon for which we were unable to obtain further clarification. However, we consider the hypothesis that the additional preoccupation with assessment in the field of Mathematics, due to its implementation in Proalfa in 2017, may have interfered in the results of the Portuguese Language assessment. Based on the global analysis of the data, we chose the two schools where we would carry out the fieldwork: EM10 (high INSE) and EM26 (medium-low INSE), both of which had consistent performance data throughout the four Proalfa applications and were also among the highest in the municipality.

Once the schools had been identified, we made the first on-site contacts and preliminary records and scheduled the interviews. However, along the way, we were faced with the Covid-2019 pandemic, and the interviews, which were scheduled for March 2020, were suspended indefinitely. As a result of the long period of social distancing, we opted to conduct the interviews remotely and contacted the teachers through the mediation of the schools' principals and specialists, via WhatsApp. Based on these mediations, we gradually and carefully (re)established contacts and got closer to the teachers. Initially, the proposal was to interview only those teachers who worked in the 3rd grade, since it is the grade in which Proalfa was being applied in this specific situation. However, virtual interactions led us to expand our network of contacts and, in the end, we interviewed all 11 teachers of the 2nd and 3rd grades from the two schools. In addition to the difficulties which are inherent to the research itself, this process required facing the challenges of social isolation, the lack of specific times and spaces for work and the new demands imposed by the pandemic context.

As for their profiles, six of the interviewees had a degree in Pedagogy, and five in Higher Normal Education. One of them also had a degree in History. As for postgraduate studies, four had two or more specializations in different areas, two had one specialization, and three were studying for a specialization. Only three did not have or were not studying for a postgraduate degree.

With the exception of one teacher, who at the time of data collection was just starting her teaching experience at EM26, where she had been working for a year and six months, all of them had been working at the school for many years, with periods ranging from five to 21 years, which can also be observed in relation to the length of time they had been working in the Sabará municipal network. This characteristic refers to school teams that have been effectively involved with the institution for a long time and have low turnover, which is typical of institutions with management policies that are committed to teaching and learning processes.

Throughout the conversations, we tried to reiterate that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions asked and that the statements and perceptions presented during the

interviews would be kept confidential and anonymous, in accordance with the Informed Consent Form they had all received. The teachers chose how they would answer the questions: through virtual interaction with meeting apps or by audio recording (sent-in by email or WhatsApp). The answers given by the collaborators were transcribed and sent individually to each one, so that they could check if they considered it necessary to modify or exclude any statement. In addition, during the transcriptions, there were situations in which, based on Bourdieu (2011), out of respect for the interviewees, we made small edits, excluding repetitions or redundancies which are typical of orality. As Bourdieu (2011) explains,

it is therefore in the name of the due respect for the author that, paradoxically, it was sometimes necessary to decide to relieve the text of certain parasitic developments, of certain confusing phrases, of verbal redundancies or tics of language (the "well's" and the "you know's") which, even without them, give their particular color to oral discourse and fulfill an eminent function in communication, making it possible to sustain a breathless conversation or to take the interlocutor as a witness, muddling and confusing the transcript to the point, in certain cases, of making it completely legible to those who did not hear the original discourse¹³ (BOURDIEU, 2011, p. 710).

It should be noted that, in the specific case of our recordings, there were some interruptions related to the nature of remote work, for example, its co-occurrence with domestic routines, among other factors. In order to analyze the content of the interviews, we were guided by Bardin (2009), who emphasizes the importance of interpretation being built on the basis of dialogue with the obtained data, from the perspective of the universe of the interviewed subjects. After reading the collected material, we analyzed the content using the coding technique for organization and interpretation which, according to the author (2009),

[...] corresponds to a transformation - carried out according to precise rules - of the raw data of the text, a transformation which, by cutting out, aggregating and enumerating, makes it possible to achieve a representation of the content, or of its expression, susceptible to enlightening the analyst about the characteristics of the text, which can serve as indexes [...] (BARDIN, 2009, p. 129).

¹³ “É, portanto, em nome do respeito devido ao autor que, paradoxalmente, foi preciso às vezes decidir por aliviar o texto de certos desdobramentos parasitas, de certas frases confusas, de redundâncias verbais ou de tiques de linguagem (os ‘bom’ e os ‘né’) que, mesmo sem eles dão seu colorido particular ao discurso oral e preenchem uma função eminente na comunicação, permitindo sustentar uma conversas esbaforida ou tomar o interlocutor como testemunha, baralhando e confundindo a transcrição ao ponto, em certos casos, de torná-la completamente legível para que não ouvia o discurso original.”

¹⁴ “[...] corresponde a uma transformação – efectuada segundo regras precisas – dos dados em bruto do texto, transformação esta que, por recorte, agregação e enumeração, permite atingir uma representação do conteúdo, ou da sua expressão, susceptível de esclarecer o analista acerca das características do texto, que podem servir de índices [...]”

Based on this interpretative effort, we were able to draw inferences based on the planned objectives and also on unexpected discoveries. Thus, the interview excerpts that make up this article have in common the discussion of assessment results.

Teachers' perceptions about the use of Proalfa assessment results

The comments from teachers at EM10 and EM26 reiterated our initial hypothesis that there was greater potential for discussion around assessment results in order to allow their use in institutions that aim to achieve "good results" in performance: "We have already held pedagogical meetings to analyze the results with discussions on the subject"¹⁵ (teacher Gláucia, EM10); "When discussing modules, we also use this time to make action plans looking at external assessments, in which we make the specific intervention plan"¹⁶ (teacher Simone, EM10); "Whenever we receive the results of external assessments, we get together, pedagogical team, management and teaching staff, to make an analysis of the results"¹⁷ (teacher Rosângela, EM10). As exemplified by teacher Miramir's report,

[...] in my school we have moments to discuss the results achieved in the assessments, which are presented by the pedagogue in graphs for each class so that we can see what we have achieved and what we still have to work on to achieve our goals, what we need to do to improve our performance in each class¹⁸ (teacher Miramir, EM10).

According to Simone (EM10), there are many uses for the results that help management to train staff and reinforce educational objectives: "With the results of the assessments, management uses all available resources to train its staff and keep the educational objectives it wants to achieve clear as a starting point and as a resource for making decisions about pedagogical practices" (teacher Simone, EM10). In her words,

regardless of whether the result is satisfactory or not, we always try to do our best. We want to improve the quality of teaching more and more. We are always trying to achieve the best grade by using new strategies, always

¹⁵ "Já fizemos reuniões pedagógicas para análise dos resultados com discussões acerca do assunto."

¹⁶ "No horário de módulo, dedicamos também para fazer o plano de ação olhando sobre as avaliações externas, em que fazemos o plano de intervenção específico."

¹⁷ "Sempre que recebemos os resultados das avaliações externas, nos reunimos, equipe pedagógica, direção e corpo docente para fazermos uma análise dos resultados."

¹⁸ "[...] na minha escola temos momentos para discutir sobre os resultados alcançados nas avaliações, que são apresentados pela pedagoga em gráficos de acordo com as turmas, para que possamos perceber o que alcançamos e o que ainda temos que trabalhar para alcançar nossos objetivos; o que precisamos fazer para melhorar o nosso desempenho em cada turma."

focused on learning new methods with the desire to improve the educational practice more and more¹⁹ (teacher Simone, EM10).

At EM26, similarly to what was observed at EM10, there were practices of socialization and discussion of results between management and teachers. Here are the excerpts that exemplify this:

Every time there's an external assessment, when the results come in, I see the school concerned about having a meeting with us. Even if we don't meet, they [the school's management and coordinators] already comment beforehand on how it went, what happened during those tests, what the positive and negative points were. And when the results come in, they are always there calling us for a chat, to see what can be changed, what was good, what was positive, the class that excelled, the class that didn't, "let's help, let's do something, let's find tools to help"²⁰ (teacher Patrícia, EM26).

When the school receives the results, it organizes discussions and conversations about them. And when an intervention is needed, it offers to help. It tries to do as much as possible, because we don't have a lot of resources, so we do our best. And the city office also holds meetings *from time to time* to present the compilation²¹ (teacher Mariângela, EM26; emphasis added).

This meeting takes place so that we can always analyze the obtained results, because, as I said before, it is based on the results that we're going to find a strategy, and there's not much to talk about. Because in my experience with the school's management team, there is always this meeting to find out what we need to work on, to exchange experiences between the 2nd grade teachers... Because what works in one classroom doesn't work in another. [...] we get together and we're always looking for these results, and seeing what we have to do, what we have to change, what they [students] have to improve, so that we can always focus on our students and on learning²² (teacher Fernanda, EM26).

Teachers' statements indicate that the teams at the two schools make similar efforts to discuss and use the results. Teachers' perceptions also refer to the importance of the manager's

¹⁹ "Independentemente de o resultado ser satisfatório, procuramos sempre fazer o melhor. Queremos mais e mais melhorar a qualidade do ensino. Procurando sempre atingir a melhor nota, usando novas estratégias, sempre focada para o conhecimento de novos métodos com o desejo de melhorar cada vez mais a prática educativa."

²⁰ "Toda vez que tem uma prova externa, quando chegam os resultados, eu vejo a escola preocupada em se reunir conosco. Mesmo não reunindo, antes disso, já vem comentando como que foi, o que aconteceu durante essas provas, quais foram os pontos positivos e negativos. E quando vem o resultado, eles (a gestão e as coordenadoras) sempre estão ali nos chamando para uma conversa, para ver o que pode ser mudado, o que foi bom, o que foi positivo, a turma que sobressaiu, a turma que não, 'vamos ajudar, vamos fazer, vamos arrumar ferramentas para ajudar.'"

²¹ "A escola, quando recebe o resultado, organiza as discussões e fala sobre. E, quando necessita de uma intervenção, propõe-se a ajudar. Tenta fazer na medida do possível, porque recursos a gente não tem muito, então, fazemos o melhor. E a secretaria municipal também faz umas reuniões de vez em quando para poder apresentar o compilado."

²² "Esse encontro ocorre para analisarmos sempre os resultados obtidos, porque através dos resultados, como eu disse anteriormente, que vamos buscar a estratégia, que não tem muita coisa para falar. Porque na experiência que sempre tenho com a equipe gestora da escola, é que sempre há essa reunião para buscarmos o que temos que trabalhar, a troca de experiência entre as professoras do segundo ano... Porque o que dá para uma sala, não dá para outra. [...] nos reunimos e sempre estamos buscando esses resultados obtidos, e vendo o que temos que fazer, o que tem que mudar, o que ele [o aluno] tem que melhorar, para focarmos sempre no nosso aluno e na aprendizagem."

role in discussing and using data from external assessments for teaching planning. Most of the excerpts from the statements point to a positive perception of the role of managers in inducing the discussion and use of results, which, in the field of school management studies, is a major convergence when referring to intra-school factors that intervene in the school's success in promoting learning (OLIVEIRA; CARVALHO, 2018).

With that said, it is worth pointing out that although they converge in terms of the use of Proalfa assessment results in the two intra-school contexts and in terms of teachers' perceptions of school management, the reports are not linear and the ways of conceiving assessment seem to have different focuses and do not seem to be appropriated uncritically. Although manager's role is a convergent variable, the testimonies indicate the need to expand the possibilities for measuring teachers' view of the results. As Machado and Alavarse (2014, p. 429) point out,

the concept of assessment as a broad process to support decision-making within educational systems is somewhat recent in Brazil, and should be understood as a process that aims to consider competencies and skills, the curriculum itself, students' study habits, teachers' teaching strategies, the type of management of principals and the resources offered to them to better carry out their work²³ (MACHADO; ALAVARSE, 2014, p. 429).

This wide-ranging process brings with it different ways of understanding external assessment and even of taking a critical look at it. Let's take a look at teacher Ana Maria's speech below, which refers to a very specific conception of assessment:

I know it's a *tool used to measure and evaluate schools' teaching practices* and student *learning*. I just don't know if it helps at all, because no improvement ever reaches the schools. And if that school does badly... is it the teacher's fault? Then they'll [the teachers] be under pressure to make a miracle happen and show that the rabbit can come out of the hat? (laughs). Then *teachers and students are coerced* into achieving good results, and all of this creates a lot of inequality²⁴ (teacher Ana Maria, EM10; emphases added).

One should note the conceptions underlying the terms we have highlighted in this discursive excerpt: "measure and evaluate school's teaching practices"; "teachers and students are coerced into achieving good results". In these excerpts in particular, we can see the the notion that the search for good results is synonymous with coercion and that this search,

²³ "a concepção de avaliação como um processo amplo de subsídio para tomada de decisões no âmbito dos sistemas de ensino é algo recente no Brasil, e deve ser entendido como um processo que vise contemplar competências e habilidades, o próprio currículo, os hábitos de estudo dos alunos, as estratégias de ensino dos professores, o tipo de gestão dos diretores e os recursos a eles oferecidos para melhor realizar o seu trabalho."

²⁴ "Sei que é uma ferramenta usada para medir e avaliar as práticas pedagógicas das escolas e também o aprendizado dos alunos. Só não sei se ajuda em algo, pois melhoria alguma chega às escolas. E se aquela escola se sai mal... a culpa é do professor? Daí, ele será pressionado para fazer o milagre acontecer e mostrar que o coelho poderá sair da cartola? (risos). Daí, professor e aluno são coagidos a alcançarem bons resultados e tudo isto gera muita desigualdade."

which in theory should be oriented towards a certain notion of "equity" around a minimum curriculum, is seen as a factor of "inequality". The way the discourse is constructed seems to be guided by an understanding of assessment as a problem and associates assessment, pedagogical practices and inequality indistinctly.

Although she is opposed to external assessments, Ana Maria (EM10) seems to be trying to modulate her discourse, probably due to the context of the interview and the construction of certain inferences about her expectations from the interviews. Below is another segment of this teacher's statement:

At my school, the principal passes on the graph showing the results obtained in each class, and also the schools that have improved on this or not. We talk about teaching and learning processes and *discuss very little* the new practices to be adopted later. But everything is positive if it's for the good of education and our practice... I think it's time to reflect on the inequality of teaching in Brazil²⁵ (teacher Ana Maria, EM10, interviewee's emphasis).

Although there is an apparent argumentative self-regulation, the verb "discuss", associated with the adverb of intensity "little", followed by the notion that "everything is positive if it's for the good of education and our practice", as well as the resumption of an exercise to correlate "assessment and inequality", lead us to consider the hypothesis that Ana Maria is against external assessments. This perception, in a context that seeks to induce the use of results, probably represents, for this professional, an element that harms the interactions she establishes with the information that comes from assessments, which aims at a broader understanding or even its use. What seems to underlie these statements is the understanding that the school (EM10) imposes an insufficiently in-depth discussion, the origin of which (the assessment results) she questions.

On a different note, the following excerpt from teacher Maria's speech, EM26, is also critical of the ways in which results are appropriated when the school's data does not correspond to what was expected:

[...] after the external assessments are carried out, the department brings [the results] to us so that we can analyze them... They pass them on to the principal, the pedagogues and then they pass them on to us. And if the results are good, fine! We keep working and pushing the kids to do better. But if the results are poor, then the teacher is under more pressure, and they [the teachers] certainly have to work twice as hard to improve the results, looking for different strategies. Because, especially in our school, which has excellent results, we can't let the results drop. If they drop, then something is wrong and they [the management staff] get to the bottom of it to find out what's going on. So the

²⁵ "Na minha escola, é repassado o gráfico demonstrando o resultado obtido em cada turma pela diretora, escolas que melhoraram ou não. Conversamos sobre os processos de ensino e aprendizagem e *discutimos pouco* sobre as novas práticas a serem adotadas a posterior. Mas, tudo é positivo em prol da educação e da nossa prática... Acredito que é o momento de refletir sobre a desigualdade no ensino no Brasil."

teacher does have to ensure positive results in these external assessments. That's what I'm worried about when it comes to external assessments: the good performance of the students²⁶ (teacher Maria, EM26).

According to this excerpt, efforts are made to ensure that students learn, and there is concern on the part of the teaching teams, who feel co-responsible for students' performance, albeit on a symbolic level, since there are no bonification policies.

In a different view, Fernanda (EM26) states that she uses the results of the external assessment as "a reference point" for her pedagogical work:

I see the external assessment as a very important guide because, through the external assessment, we can see, observe what the student has learned, what they [students] still need to consolidate and take up again. Together with the pedagogical team, we discuss the issue so that we can get back on track, so that the student can truly learn. I don't see it as a punishment for the teacher or a punishment for the student; there's no such thing. I think this is very important and has to be done. If we want to improve education, we need to assess how it is going, what path it needs to take, and if that path isn't good, we need to look for new ways, new strategies, and through external assessment this will be of great value²⁷ (teacher Fernanda, EM26).

Two other teachers, Caroline and Maria, also from EM26, directly associating external assignment with the items that make up the tests:

I've had little contact with external assessment, because [most] of the years I taught five-year-olds and [because I worked] some time as a substitute teacher. In the short time I've had contact with external assessments, my perception has been [focused] on the way the questions were written: a vocabulary that is unknown by students and difficult questions for the reality of our students. These tests should be more elaborate, paying more attention to vocabulary and [presenting] questions geared towards their reality²⁸ (teacher Caroline, EM26).

²⁶ "após a realização das avaliações externas, a secretaria leva [os resultados] para que possamos analisar... Eles passam para a direção, pedagogos e depois eles passam para a gente. E se o resultado está bom, beleza! Continua trabalhando e puxando mais para que os meninos consigam trabalhar melhor. Mas se o resultado é baixo, aí o professor é mais cobrado, com certeza, ele tem que trabalhar dobrado para esse resultado melhorar buscando estratégias diferenciadas. Porque, principalmente em nossa escola que tem resultados excelentes, não podemos deixar que o resultado abaixe. Se baixar, alguma coisa está errada e eles vão em cima para saber o que está acontecendo. Então, o professor tem sim que dar resultado positivo nessas avaliações externas. A minha preocupação quanto à avaliação externa é essa, é o bom desempenho dos alunos."

²⁷ "Então, vejo a avaliação externa como um norte muito importante porque, através da avaliação externa podemos ver, observar o que o aluno aprendeu, o que ele ainda está necessitando de ser consolidado e retomar, fazer uma retomada. Juntamente com a equipe pedagógica, discutirmos sobre o assunto para retomarmos, para que esse aluno aprenda verdadeiramente. Não a vejo como uma punição do professor ou como punição para aluno, isso aí não existe não, isso em meu pensamento é muito significativo e precisa ter. Se queremos melhorar a educação, precisamos avaliar como que ela está, de que caminho tem que partir, e se esse caminho não está bom, procurar buscar novos meios, novas estratégias e através da avaliação externa que isso será de grande valia."

²⁸ "Em relação às provas externas, tive pouco contato. Até mesmo devido aos anos que lecionei para alunos com cinco anos e um tempo como professora eventual. Nesse pouco tempo que tive contato com as provas externas, a minha percepção foi em relação à elaboração das questões. Vocabulário desconhecido pelos alunos e questões difíceis para a realidade dos nossos alunos. Essas provas deveriam ser mais elaboradas, tendo mais cuidado com o vocabulário e as questões voltadas para a realidade deles."

These assessments are good, but our students come from a very vulnerable region, so many of them are not fully literate, and there are parts of this test that students have to read on their own. So it's very complicated. At the beginning of the test, it's very easy, the kids can do it... we read it... they can do it. But as the test goes on, it gets harder and often students don't think before answering. [...] there are those huge Portuguese texts, [...] Proalfa measures the level of students in our state, making it possible to intervene where necessary, but in my opinion, with that same level of difficulty [which is] outside the reality of our students, the huge texts that the student doesn't read, just marks an x, [...] but also, in a way, this manages to point out the inefficiencies of each student, which makes it possible to provide individual help, if necessary²⁹ (teacher Maria, EM26).

Teachers Gláucia and Rosângela (EM10) have similar perceptions to those of Maria and Caroline (EM26):

From my point of view, external assessments are often based solely on numbers and don't take into account the entire process that each student goes through during their long period of literacy and educational training. I'm not against their existence, but I don't like taking the results as the only guide for my work in the classroom. [...] Based on the questions that had few correct answers and analyzing the reason for the low number of correct answers, we try to come up with strategies to improve the work on the theme/content of the question³⁰ (teacher Gláucia, EM10).

Given the results we receive, regardless of whether they are positive or negative, we come up with new strategies to further improve our work and our students' teaching and learning processes³¹ (teacher Rosângela, EM10).

These fragments seem to present some contradictions which, although subtle, are in line with the findings of recent studies, which indicate that most teachers know little about assessment, or do not understand its origin, methodology, function and objectives. This lack of knowledge, due to a gap in training, seems to be a hindering element in the use of results (Ruiz, 2016; Monte, 2018; Cerdeira, 2018; Siqueira; Freitas; Alavarse, 2021). As Cerdeira (2018, p. 630) explains, "lack of knowledge" is one of the aspects that can make it difficult to understand the pedagogical potential

²⁹ "Essas avaliações são boas, porém, os nossos alunos são de uma região muito carente. Então, muitos deles não estão totalmente alfabetizados e tem partes desta prova que os alunos têm que ler sozinhos. Então, é muito complicado. No início da prova, é muito fácil, os meninos vão... conseguem fazer... lemos... eles conseguem fazer. Mas no decorrer da prova vai ficando mais difícil e muitas vezes os alunos não pensam para responder. [...] tem aqueles textos enormes de Português, [...] O Proalfa mede o nível dos alunos do nosso estado, possibilitando a intervenção onde for necessário, porém, na minha opinião, com o mesmo nível de dificuldades fora da realidade dos nossos alunos, textos enormes que o aluno não lê, apenas marca o x, [...] mas também, de certa forma consegue apontar as ineficiências de cada aluno, possibilitando uma ajuda individual, se for o caso."

³⁰ "As avaliações externas, no meu ponto de vista, em muitos casos, se baseiam apenas em números e não levam em consideração todo o processo pelo qual cada aluno passa em seu longo período de alfabetização e formação educacional. Não sou contra a existência delas, mas não gosto de levar os resultados como único norteador do meu trabalho em sala de aula. [...] Baseando-se nas questões que tiveram poucos acertos e analisando o porquê do número baixo de acertos, buscamos traçar estratégias para melhorar o trabalho acerca do tema/conteúdo da questão."

³¹ "Diante dos resultados recebidos, independente se for positivo ou negativo, montamos novas estratégias para melhorar mais o nosso trabalho e os processos ensino e aprendizagem dos nossos alunos."

of the data produced by external assessment. This, according to the author, is due to factors such as "a previous negative and even reductionist view"³² of assessments and their objectives, a fact that occurs in relation to both external and internal assessment.

This "lack of knowledge" points to the need, on the one hand, to check whether the models adopted are, in fact, pedagogically appropriate for measuring literacy levels. On the other hand, it points to the need to create mechanisms so that teachers have more access to information about external assessments, their specificities and ways of organizing them, especially in the field of literacy, which has specificities that need to be observed (Rocha; Martins; Miranda, 2020, p. 74).

Teacher Miranir (EM10) says that the external assessment is used in her teaching work, helping her to develop interventions for her classes.

[...] the results of external assessments end up interfering positively in my work. We can use the results to design interventions for the classes. The external assessment is another tool we can use in our work³³ (teacher Miranir, EM10).

This teacher considers the relationship between assessment results and her teaching work to be positive. For her, the results contribute to the development of interventions.

In a similar light, Patrícia (EM26) says that she uses the results to identify the source of the problem:

[...] The results of these evaluations, when they arrive for us, are one more tool we have in order to see where the problems are, to target that problem to be solved. [...] I see a great deal of commitment on the part of the school when these results come in, to come up with some methods. For example, in a class that is lagging behind in interpretation, they get someone, they [the management staff] direct someone to the classroom, to help the teacher with this issue. They [the people which are sent to help] ask the students to read and take notes. They take a look, direct them, depending on the situation of what happened in those tests, where there was a gap, then they send people who have a schedule there and who can advise the classrooms that need it. And even the others [students], [the ones] who did well, what do they do? This person who is being made available, in their spare time, who is with this class that is having the most difficulty helping, they also interfere, they help in the other classes... [...] even when there's no assessment, they always ask us to do what, always doing a parallel catch-up for that student. The student has to be caught up all the time [...] ³⁴ (teacher Patrícia, EM26).

³² "uma visão prévia negativa e até reducionista."

³³ "[...] os resultados das avaliações externas acabam interferindo positivamente no meu trabalho. Através dos resultados podemos elaborar as intervenções nas turmas. A avaliação externa é mais um instrumento que podemos utilizar no nosso trabalho."

³⁴ [...] O resultado dessas avaliações, quando chega para nós, é mais uma ferramenta que temos para poder ver onde que estão os problemas, direcionar naquele problema para ser resolvido. [...] Eu vejo um empenho muito grande da escola quando chegam esses resultados, de arrumar alguns métodos, por exemplo, uma turma que está com defasagem na interpretação, eles conseguem que uma pessoa, direcionam uma pessoa para que vá à sala, para que ajude a professora nessa questão. Chama os alunos para fazer leitura e para tomar fatos. Eles olham, direcionam, dependendo da situação do que aconteceu nessas provas, onde foi a defasagem, então eles direcionam pessoas que tem aquele horário disponível ali e que possa estar assessorando as salas que precisam. E mesmo as

For teacher Patrícia, the results of the assessments help the school identify where there was a gap and direct professionals to help teachers in the classroom, both in the classes that "did well" in the assessments and in those in which gaps were identified. This helps to monitor the school's actions geared towards students in the areas of reading and mathematics.

In addition to some internal contradictions, these discursive fragments show perceptions of the use of results that refer to the role that the use of results can play in the presentation of the curriculum, either by means of inducing work on certain skills and competences, or due to promoting a certain "reductionism" of the curriculum, a role that does not derive from the external assessment itself, but from the ways in which it is appropriated. Bonamino and Sousa (2012, p. 384), when dealing with the use of results, warn about the risk of "curricular narrowing", characterized when "[...] there is a distorted interpretation of the pedagogical meaning of the assessment results"³⁵. This occurs when the school starts teaching for the test, disregarding the other curricular fields. This possible "reductionism" may, according to some authors, be related to the absence of the subject in teacher training, as pointed out by Silva et al. (2016), whose study concludes that there is little discussion of this subject in undergraduate courses in Pedagogy.

Another statement, by Fernanda (EM26), seems to reiterate the hypothesis of a pendulum movement in regards to the importance of evaluation. It also shows a not-so-clear understanding of evaluation and/or of the uses that can be made of its results.

No, *for me, it doesn't interfere*, because I always try to work on activities that encourage meaningful learning, as I said before, always evaluating the questions and carrying out mock tests, diagnostic assessments, so as not to miss any learning stages. If I see that students haven't learned, then I go back to the subject and repeat it for the whole class. [...]. Literacy is a back and forth, it always goes back and forth; that's why, for me, *it doesn't get in the way at all*. I think we really need to work on this assessment [...]³⁶ (teacher Fernanda, EM26; emphasis added).

It's noteworthy that Fernanda says that the data produced by the assessments "doesn't get in the way at all", while at the same time stating that she uses the results of the assessments as a

outras também, que foram bem, o que eles fazem? Essa pessoa que está sendo disponibilizada, no tempo livre dela, que está com essa turma com mais dificuldade ajudando, ela interfere também, ajuda nas outras turmas... [...]. mesmo quando não tem avaliação, eles pedem sempre para a gente estar fazendo o que? Sempre fazendo uma recuperação paralela desse aluno, o aluno tem que estar sendo recuperado o tempo todo [...]."

³⁵ "há uma interpretação distorcida do significado pedagógico dos resultados da avaliação."

³⁶ "Não, pra mim, não interfere, porque eu sempre procuro trabalhar atividades que favoreçam a aprendizagem significativa, como eu falei antes, avaliando sempre as questões e realizando simulados, avaliações diagnósticas, com o intuito de não queimar nenhuma etapa de aprendizagem. Se eu vejo que nesse simulado os alunos não aprenderam, então eu volto novamente o conteúdo e retomo para toda a turma. [...]. Alfabetização é uma ida e volta, ela vai e volta, sempre assim, por isso que para mim, não atrapalha em nada não. Eu acho que tem que ter mesmo e a gente trabalhar em cima dessa avaliação aí [...]."

strategy to work on activities with students, evaluating the questions and applying mock tests and diagnostic assessments. This statement leads us to consider the hypothesis that in this case, mock tests are the tool she uses to identify information, but she does not seem to do it very consciously.

Maria's statement (EM26), which refers to pressure for results, especially when it is negative, also indicates contradictions in the ways assessment is viewed, and refers to "mock exams" in a negative or essential sense. But at the same time, it tries to establish a relationship between the use of results and planning:

I don't think it interferes. My job in the classroom is to ensure the student's learning is meaningful, with differentiated activities, mock exams and tests. If the results are good, you keep working and work better. If the results are bad, if the student hasn't consolidated that content, I go back and work in a different way. External assessments only "point out" what has been done in the classroom. However, if the results are negative, you'll be under more pressure, the pedagogue will want to know what you're doing, giving you different activities, wanting you to work differently. And there will be demands all the time. The pressure is much greater when the result is negative. So, it's what I said, I worry a lot and I worry about the level of the tests, because it's not compatible with our students in the region³⁷ (teacher Maria, EM26; emphasis added).

On the other hand, Rosângela's speech (EM10) indicates a slightly clearer perception of the relationship between planning and the use of assessment results:

Absolutely! It greatly interferes with our work. Because the results make it clearer where we really need to focus our planning [elaboration of action Plans], of course, without neglecting all the [already prepared] annual planning that we have to carry out throughout the school year³⁸ (teacher Rosângela, EM10; emphasis added).

It should be noted that, on the one hand, Rosângela considers that the external results help to identify the focus of her planning more clearly, but on the other hand, she stresses that planning is not reduced to what is evaluated and expressed in the matrix of the external assessments.

The analysis conducted here on teachers' perceptions of the use of the results of a specific assessment, Proalfa, ends up revealing more general perceptions of the assessment process, which

³⁷ "Eu acho que não interfere. O meu trabalho na sala de aula é a aprendizagem significativa do aluno, com atividades diferenciadas, simulados, Provinhas. Se o resultado está bom, você vai continuar trabalhando e trabalhando melhor. Se o resultado está ruim, se o aluno não consolidou aquele conteúdo, volto atrás e trabalho de maneira diferenciada. As avaliações externas só "apontam" aquilo que foi feito em sala. Porém, se o resultado é negativo você é mais cobrado, a pedagoga vai querer saber o que você está fazendo, te dando atividades diferenciadas, querendo que você trabalhe diferenciado. E toda hora vai vir cobrança. A cobrança é muito maior quando o resultado é negativo. Então, é o que eu falei, eu me preocupo muito e me preocupo com o nível das provas, porque não é compatível com os nossos alunos lá da região."

³⁸ "Com certeza! Interfere em muito o nosso trabalho. Pois diante dos resultados fica mais claro onde realmente devemos focar o nosso planejamento. Lógico, não deixando de trabalhar todo o planejamento anual que devemos executar durante todo o ano letivo."

are varied, even when considering the discursive fragments of a single teacher. This study points to the importance of reflecting on the causes of this diversity of perceptions (Alves; Soares, 2007).

Final thoughts

Teachers' statements about the use of assessment results seem to support our hypothesis that this can be an intervening factor in school proficiency levels in the context of a municipality, even when the socioeconomic levels of their students are significantly different.

Although they are not generalizable, the data obtained are in line with studies that have been pointing out a certain "invisibility" of assessment in teacher training courses (Ruiz, 2016; Monte, 2018; Cerdeira, 2018; Siqueira; Freitas; Alavarse, 2021), which causes perceptions on the subject to be diverse. In some situations, this is expressed in teachers' discourses, not only in the different ways they deal with the matter, but also in the contradictions in the understanding of the concept by same teacher. The convergence with research that points to "gaps" in teacher training indicates the important role of continuous training on assessment, the interpretation of the information it provides and the use of its results.

Finally, our study points to the importance of developing research aimed at analyzing the practices developed within classrooms in conjunction with the use of assessment results, in order to understand strategies inherent to the management of schools, teaching and classrooms. This can make schools with different socioeconomic indicators obtain learning results that are considered good in the context of a municipality network.

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