

The teaching workforce and the variable and/or flexible remuneration¹

A força de trabalho docente frente à remuneração variável e/ou flexível

La fuerza de trabajo docente frente a la remuneración variable y/o flexible

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Abstract: The paper addresses, from the perception of state public school teachers in Brazil and teachers from public, subsidized, and private schools in the Maule region in Chile, variable and/or flexible remuneration as part of their salaries. Variable and/or flexible remuneration is present in the salary composition of all the teachers who participated in the research, both in the Maule region and in the Brazilian states. The data were collected in WhatsApp groups, with the application of a technique similar to focus group, whenever the theme of teachers' career and valorization generated interactions between the participants. The speeches that emerged from the interactions were organized and treated with the use of the Atlas.ti software and grouped into different codes that condensed concepts on the themes of teachers' career and valorization. The perceptions described were compared to the education legislation, the Career, Positions and Remuneration Plans from both countries, and the current management models in the Brazilian states and in the Maule region. Although teachers only earn variable and/or flexible remuneration while they are effectively working, it is important to guarantee their material conditions of existence, given the salary losses. Some of the teachers have a critical view on this component of their remuneration, as they understand it as a restriction of rights.

Keywords: Education Policy; Teacher remuneration; Variable and/or flexible remuneration; Brazil; Chile.

Resumo: A partir da percepção de professoras de redes públicas estaduais de ensino no Brasil e de professoras de escolas públicas, subvencionadas e privadas na região de Maule, no Chile, o texto discute a remuneração variável e/ou flexível como parte que integra o vencimento. A remuneração variável e/ou flexível está presente na composição do vencimento de todas as

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professoras participantes da pesquisa, de todos os estados verificados no Brasil e no Chile. A coleta de dados foi realizada por grupos no aplicativo WhatsApp, com técnica similar de grupo focal, quando a temática da carreira e valorização docente gerou interações entre as participantes. As falas emergidas das interações foram organizadas e tratadas com o uso do software Atlas.ti e agrupadas em diferentes códigos que condensavam conceitos sobre os temas da carreira e da valorização docente. As percepções descritas foram cotejadas à legislação educacional, aos Planos de Carreira, Cargos e Remuneração de ambos os países e aos modelos de gestão em curso nos estados brasileiros e na região do Maule. Constatou-se que, ainda que a remuneração variável e/ou flexível seja um valor que só recebem enquanto estão em efetivo exercício do magistério, dadas as perdas salariais, é importante para garantir suas condições materiais de existência. Há professoras que têm uma visão crítica sobre esse componente de sua remuneração, pois o entendem como uma restrição de direitos.

Palavras-chave: Política Educacional; Remuneração docente; Remuneração variável e/ou flexível; Brasil; Chile.

Resumen: A partir de la percepción de profesoras de redes públicas estatales de enseñanza del Brasil y de profesoras de escuelas públicas, subvencionadas y privadas en la región de Maule, de Chile, el texto discute la remuneración variable y/o flexible como parte que integra el vencimiento. La remuneración variable y/o flexible está presente en la composición del vencimiento de todas las profesoras participantes de la investigación, de todas las provincias verificadas en el Brasil y en Chile. El levantamiento de datos fue realizado por grupos en el aplicativo WhatsApp, con técnica similar de grupo focal, cuando la temática de la carrera y valorización docente generó interacciones entre las participantes. Las conversaciones emergidas de las interacciones fueron organizadas y tratadas con el uso del software Atlas.ti y agrupadas en diferentes códigos que condensaban conceptos sobre los temas de la carrera y de la valorización docente. Las percepciones descritas fueron cotejadas con la legislación educacional, con los Planes de Carrera, Cargos y Remuneración de ambos países y con los modelos de gestión en curso en los estados brasileiros y en la región de Maule. Se constató que, aún que la remuneración variable y/o flexible sea un valor que solo reciben en cuanto están en efectivo ejercicio del magisterio, dadas las pérdidas salariales, es importante para garantizar sus condiciones materiales de existencia. Hay profesoras que tienen una visión crítica sobre ese componente de su remuneración, pues lo entienden como una restricción de derechos.

Palabras clave: Política Educacional; Remuneración docente; Remuneración variable y/o flexible; Brasil; Chile.

Received on: June 18, 2025

Accepted on: November 13, 2025

Introduction

This article aims to discuss teachers' perceptions of the non-fixed portion of their remuneration. When earned, this portion is added to their base salary, amounting to what is referred to as total remuneration. This component may appear under different labels, such as bonus, allowance, incentive, award, stipend, among others. In this article, due to the

methodological procedures adopted, the non-fixed portion of remuneration is defined as variable and/or flexible pay.

The teachers interviewed for this study work in elementary education in State school systems in the Brazilian States of Mato Grosso do Sul, Paraná, Pará, and Paraíba, as well as in elementary education in Chile, in the Maule region, across private, subsidized, and public schools. The interviews were conducted in 2023, and all teachers, without exception, reported that their remuneration includes a variable and/or flexible component.

The teachers' accounts—both in Brazil and in Chile—reveal that this component of their remuneration cannot be dissociated from other processes present in their respective contexts, which, while sharing certain similarities, are also marked by important differences. Thus, the management models currently in place in each of the selected settings emerge as prominent elements in their narrative.

Remuneration in the Teaching Workforce in Brazil and Chile

In the case of the Brazilian elementary education teaching workforce, remuneration is paid through the public budgets available in States and municipalities, since education policies are enacted in a decentralized manner and these federal entities are responsible for its execution. Although the budget available to pay teachers in each jurisdiction must follow constitutional and infra-constitutional rules, earmarks, and provisions—such as the minimum annual budget allocations for the maintenance and development of education (MDE) and for the payment of teaching personnel (Brazil, 1988, 1996a, 2007)—it is observed that “the legislation has not been adequately enforced, which consequently hinders the real recognition of education professionals” (Barbosa; Jacomini; Minto, 2024, p. 17).

Within this scenario of obstacles to real recognition, in many local contexts—as pointed out by Gouveia and Ferraz (2013) and by Camargo (2010)—the portion of teachers' remuneration that is variable and/or flexible becomes part of the negotiation agenda between Union and local Governments, with the objective of incorporating it permanently to the base salary as a means of increasing pay. This phenomenon is present across States and municipalities in the country. Even so, variable and/or flexible remuneration, under its various labels, has not been eliminated from teachers' everyday reality.

Brazil and Chile organize their States under different governmental regimes: Brazil is a Federal Republic, whereas Chile is a Unitary State. This structural distinction means that, while Brazil decentralizes the payment of the elementary education teaching workforce to its

federal entities, Chile does so in a centralized manner, with the Ministry of Education serving as the regulatory authority for this process.

This difference is naturally reflected in the policies aimed at reproducing the teaching workforce in both countries⁵, and, as reported by the teachers, variable and/or flexible remuneration takes part in teachers' earnings in both contexts.

In Chile's case, Donoso-Díaz, Arias-Rojas, and Reyes-Araya (2021) identify the legacy that neoliberalism has left in education—strongly characterized by reduced public spending and growing privatization. The authors outline the challenges faced by the current Administration in implementing meaningful changes.

In Chilean democracy, from 1990 to the present (2021), the State has taken on, in the educational field, a set of both new and inherited demands. These emerged initially as a result of the significant reduction in public spend on education during the 1980s, which led to wage and labor erosion among teachers, the deterioration of their professional training, and severe impacts on the quality of education. This occurred within a context of explicit State encouragement of educational privatization at all levels, strongly promoted between 1981 and 1990 and supported by mechanisms such as the 1980 Political Constitution. These mechanisms constituted major obstacles to regulating the market and reversing some of its central operational instruments. Subsequently, Concertación governments—first through a center-left alliance (1990–2009) and later through a broader coalition that included the Communist Party (2014–2017)—implemented policy changes in crucial dimensions related to the expansion of schooling and the improvement of educational quality, most of which were reflected in the national budget. These reforms made it possible for the country to achieve gradual and positive progress in the sector. (Donoso-Díaz; Arias-Rojas; Reyes-Araya, 2021, p. 3).

The authors, drawing on macroeconomic data, observe that Chile's public budget for education increased between 1999 and 2018 and that, although the resources allocated to school subsidies—the largest expenditure item of the Ministry of Education—decreased, overall budget expansion still occurred “because in these two decades other policies were implemented, such as free higher education, which requires substantial resources” (Donoso-Díaz; Arias-Rojas; Reyes-Araya, 2021, p. 8).

⁵ The furthering of the teaching workforce is conceptualized on the basis of its material conditions of subsistence, with the *value of the labor force* playing a central role. This value “is related to the amount of labor necessary for its production and is comprised of two fundamental parts: subsistence and education. Subsistence encompasses both basic goods required for the worker's existence and those necessary for their offspring, who, in turn, require training and the acquisition of certain ‘qualifications.’ If wages cover only the cost of the worker's physical subsistence and their furthering as a class, there will be no means to provide the future labor force—that is, their children—with the education demanded by socio-historical conditions. This is where the role of the State and public schooling becomes functional, as it relieves labor, and consequently the capitalist, of the cost involved in the formation and reproduction of the working class and, as a result, of the metabolism of capital.” (Benini et al., 2020, p. 6).

So, in Chile, even with budget expansion regulated by the State, education remains subject to market rules, which is reflected in all dimensions of teacher recognition. It is worth noting that, in 2016, Law No. 20.903 was passed, establishing the Chilean system of professional teacher development (Chile, 2016). This law stipulates that the agenda for the teaching profession is guided by recognition and career progressions, which may be paid through bonuses and incentives that complement the remuneration teachers earn at their different career levels.

Therefore, career progression—which directly affects remuneration—is tied to comprehensive evaluation systems that take into account, among other elements, the existence of a continuous training structure, with the State participating in teachers' professional development and career trajectories. It is important to note, however, that progression is linked to a logic of individual incentives (Alarcón-Leiva; Carrisimi; Cardoso, 2022).

In the Brazilian case, since earnings must ensure both the production and furthering of the elementary education teaching workforce—thus securing its material conditions of existence—they must be formally established in the Career, Position, and Remuneration Plans (PCCR) of the 27 States, the Federal District, and the more than five thousand municipalities in the country (Brazil, 1996).

Within the material basis of production, as both public and private institutions coexist as buyers of the labor force, the legal and regulatory framework seek to guarantee—in ways that can be simultaneously similar and differentiated—the rights of both those who purchase and those who sell the labor commodity.

It is from this broader premise that a certain polysemic imprecision arises between the terms *salary*, *base pay*, and *remuneration*, since, in everyday language, these concepts are often treated as synonymous. According to Camargo (2010), however, each of these terms corresponds to its own specific legal definition.

In the case of teaching labor in basic education, which is ruled by PCCR legislation, the legal instrument itself includes remuneration, understood as “the remuneration comprised of the base pay for the position plus permanent pecuniary benefits established by law—in other words, the basic salary plus seniority-related advantages, bonuses, transportation allowance, and so forth” (Camargo, 2010, p. 3).

The author further notes that:

Therefore, what the expression ‘*teacher salary*’ ostensibly attempts to present as something simple in fact represents a complex set of relationships, concepts, legislation, definitions, school cultures, political-administrative management practices, and professional struggles around specific interests. It reveals the correlation of forces at play (broadly speaking, employer and

employee) in both the private and public sectors, aimed at determining the economic dimensions of teachers' working conditions so that they may carry out work that is dignified, of quality, and of profound social relevance" (Camargo, 2010, p. 6).

Thus, it is within this logic that we can understand that variable and/or flexible pay, in the case of teachers, is part of their overall remuneration. Variable and/or flexible remuneration, specifically within the teaching workforce, is semantically⁶ reframed and appears under labels such as bonus, allowance, stipend, or grant, among others, as previously mentioned. The rise of platform capitalism in education—which has generated shifts in both teachers' and students' work—has further diversified the semantic repertoire surrounding variable and/or flexible remuneration, as revealed in the teachers' accounts collected in this study.

In the Brazilian context, although Career, Position, and Remuneration Plans (PCCR) are nationally mandated and Law No. 11.738/2008 established the National Professional Minimum Salary for Teachers (PSPN) (Brazil, 2008), the funding source for this right is the public budget, which is collected and executed in a decentralized manner.

Therefore, the public budget available in each federal entity varies significantly, and it can be considered the most accurate expression of regional inequalities and asymmetries. This reality becomes evident in local legislation and administrative practices, in teachers' everyday lives, and in the agendas and demands of teachers' unions.

In this context, variable and/or flexible⁷ remuneration persists—whether to address local teachers' demands or due to administrative management choices that seek to govern the public sector according to private-sector concepts, a process understood as part of the modernization of the public sphere and State apparatus.

The idea that a National Professional Minimum Salary for Teachers (PSPN) could correct the historical depreciation of the teaching workforce through base pay remains under debate, given that the instituted minimum salary had to take into account the regional inequalities reflected in public budget capacities.

⁶ Semantic shifts in the capital–labor relationship can be understood as operations that occur within the political-ideological sphere, meant to produce and/or intensify alienation in the working class. A typical—and contentious—example of this process is the recurrent use of the term *collaborator* as a substitute for the term *worker*.

⁷ It is well known that variable and/or flexible remuneration is not a new element within teachers' pay structures; rather, it has been virtually permanent throughout their professional history (Camargo, 2010). What is at stake here is updating this discussion in light of current legislation, the trajectory of educational policy in motion since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the struggles of the teaching class, and the ways in which teachers in active duty perceive this phenomenon.

Therefore, the PSPN, as a policy of federative coordination aimed at mitigating regional asymmetries and addressing the teaching profession's long-standing demands, must contend with economic cycles, political dynamics, and correlations of social forces⁸ that may either strengthen or weaken it. Within the broader context of regional inequalities reflected in the public budgets available to finance the PSPN, it is evident that its implementation has affected teachers in markedly different ways.

Gouveia and Souza (2011), noting that the public sector is the largest employer in education, also emphasize that elementary education is in continuous expansion, which underscores the ongoing need to recruit professionals. In this context, when analyzing the behavior of average salaries in the public sector, the authors identified an increase in the average salary following the approval of the PSPN, which could create challenges for its implementation. At the same time, they draw attention to local cases that may fall either above or below the national minimum average (Gouveia; Souza, 2011).

Given this broader dynamic, the *2024 Report of the 5th Monitoring Cycle of the National Education Plan Goals* records that:

The results of the indicator for Goal 17—which seeks to equalize the average earnings of public elementary education teaching professionals with those of other professionals with equivalent levels of schooling—increased over the period analyzed, rising from 65.2% in 2012 to 86.9% in 2023. Despite a gain of 21.7 p.p. during the period, Indicator 17A would still need to advance an additional 13.1 p.p. to reach the target” (Brazil, 2024, p. 389).

Although the reported data shows a concrete increase in the earnings of teaching professionals in public elementary education, what becomes evident is that the reduction in disparity occurred largely due to a decrease in the average earnings of other professionals with equivalent schooling. In other words, the 21.7 p.p. increase over the period resulted much more from the decline in earnings among other professionals than from efforts to increase the remuneration of teaching professionals.

It is therefore within this context that variable and/or flexible remuneration—regardless of its format or terminology—holds a central place in the buildup of teacher pay both in Brazil and in Chile, manifesting itself forcefully in teachers' everyday professional lives.

⁸ Attention is drawn here to the litigation that Law No. 11.738/2008 underwent through a Direct Motion of Unconstitutionality (ADIN No. 4167), filed by the governors of the States of Mato Grosso do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, and Ceará, with support from the governors of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Tocantins, and the Federal District (Autoria, 2011).

Methodological Contributions: The Emergence of Variable/Flexible Compensation in Teacher Pay Structures

The study was conducted with the aim of understanding the perceptions of female teachers from the Brazilian States of Mato Grosso do Sul, Pará, Paraíba, and Paraná, as well as from the Maule region in Chile, regarding their remuneration. Data collection was carried out through the creation of WhatsApp groups comprised of teachers from the State public school systems in the four Brazilian cases and teachers working in elementary education⁹ schools in the Chilean region. In total, 198 teachers participated in the groups: 46 in the Maule region, 47 in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul, 42 in the State of Pará, 23 in the State of Paraíba, and 25 in the State of Paraná. It is important to note that one group was created for each location, resulting in five WhatsApp groups for the interactions.

The selection of the teachers who participated in the study was performed through a convenience sample defined by the researchers. Some teachers were initially invited and subsequently extended the invitation to other colleagues within their networks. Once the groups were formed, data was collected during the months of September and October 2023 based on questions related to teacher career paths and professional recognition, which led to interactions among the participants.

The interactions were extracted from the groups for analysis using Grounded Theory (Prigol; Behrens, 2019), through which theoretical discussion emerges from the empirical data, allowing theoretical constructions to be generated from concepts derived from the field based on the relationships established among them (Cassiani; Caliri; Pelá, 1996).

To do so, the statements collected from the interactions were organized and processed using the Atlas.ti software and grouped into different codes that consolidated concepts related to teacher career paths and professional recognition. These codes were then grouped into subcategories and, subsequently, into categories that enable theoretical constructions based on the analyzed data. One of the categories developed was Remuneration, comprised of three subcategories: access, career progression, and initial pay.

Among the codes included in these three subcategories is that of variable and/or flexible remuneration, which contains statements detailing types of bonuses, allowances, rewards, and additional payments that generate differences in teachers' final remuneration

⁹ Since Chile is a unitary State, it has no federative divisions and, consequently, no locally governed educational networks within its administrative regions. The Chilean educational system is comprised of municipal (public) schools, subsidized private schools, and fully private schools, with a large share of enrollments concentrated in state-subsidized and fully private institutions—around 37% of total enrollments (Chile, 2023). Thus, the sample also included teachers from schools that are not fully public.

across school networks. Several accounts associated this payment form with the management models currently adopted by the States. It is important to clarify that the teachers' perceptions relate to multiple dimensions of teaching work; however, for the purposes of this article, the analysis focuses specifically on statements concerning variable and/or flexible remuneration.

It is important to note that the expression *variable and/or flexible remuneration* is an analytical category constructed from the codes identified by the researchers during the data processing carried out in the Atlas.ti software, and it reflects the insights and reflections expressed by the teachers during their interactions via WhatsApp.

It should also be emphasized that the statements selected sometimes express subjective judgments and, at other times, simply describe how variable and/or flexible remuneration appears or is configured in each teacher's specific case, according to the perceptions of those who composed the study sample through the selected application.

Teachers' Perspectives on Variable and Flexible Remuneration: Texts and Contexts

In this section, we present teacher perceptions regarding the issue of variable and/or flexible remuneration, which is present in teacher pay both in the Brazilian States examined here and in the Maule region of Chile.

The discussion begins with the account of a teacher from the state of Paraíba. According to Araújo, Lima and Sousa Júnior (2020), beginning in 2011 the State adopted a public administration model aligned with the principles of New Public Management and has embraced public-private partnerships—represented in this case by Social Enterprises (OS)—as a governance strategy, transferring public budget resources to the private sphere. As one teacher notes: “The biggest problem in the State is precisely the non-incorporation of the stipends into the salary and retirement benefits” (Paraíba, citation 46).

Although these partnerships are limited to auxiliary (non-instructional) activities within schools and do not encompass their core pedagogical activities—which characterize teaching work—it is important to note that the concept of teaching work has been narrowed in local legislation. Through the OS, personnel were hired to provide “security, cleaning, front-desk services, special education, inspection, oversight, counseling, and psychology” (Araújo; Lima; Sousa Júnior, 2020, p. 15).

Between 2017 and 2018, the state of Paraíba transferred R\$ 235,038,932.12 (two hundred thirty-five million, thirty-eight thousand, nine hundred thirty-two reais and twelve cents) from its public budget to two OS. “The average monthly amount was, therefore, R\$ 9,793,289.84 (nine million, seven hundred ninety-three thousand, two hundred eighty-nine

reais and eighty-four cents) over the 24 months of the contract” (Araújo; Lima; Sousa Júnior, 2020, p. 20). This model of transferring public funds to private entities—while not reducing the public budget in absolute terms—does restrict the State’s capacity to plan for the furthering of the teaching workforce.

Even though teacher remuneration itself is not included in this amount of transferred resources, the chosen model of public administration is undoubtedly influenced by the logic of applying private-sector criteria to the public sector. Such logic allows for situations in which teachers’ pay while in active service has one magnitude, and their pay upon retirement has another—amounting to a loss of rights, since salary adjustments granted to active teachers have been higher than those granted to inactive (retired) teachers. Moreover, variable and/or flexible remuneration is not incorporated into final retirement earnings.

In addition, other implications arise from the privatizing logic that dictates the framework of the public sector:

[...] with regard to the presence of Social Enterprises (OS) in the management of State schools, the issue lies in the fact that the remuneration of their administrative staff—as previously explained—includes a variable component tied to school performance, or more precisely, to students’ results on standardized tests. This will inevitably lead to greater interference by the OS in the schools’ pedagogical work, potentially resulting in conflicts between the objectives of the schools’ Political-Pedagogical Projects and the immediate interests of the OS and its leadership (Araújo; Lima; Sousa Júnior, 2020, p. 21).

With regards to the State of Pará, which has also been governed according to the principles of New Public Management, the overall teacher perception of variable and/or flexible remuneration reveals another dimension of this model, manifesting itself through large-scale assessment, as illustrated below:

“I have not received any type of allowance or bonus recently. However, regarding the rise in the IDEB score, the State Government promised that an improvement in school results would bring about bonuses for all staff. It is clear that this measure does not intend to offer conditions that would encourage professionals to improve their training processes, but rather rests on the principle of merit, production, and results, which would supposedly help remove the State of Pará from the lowest positions in large-scale assessments” (Pará, citation 3).

This statement illustrates how the large-scale assessment model—specifically the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB)—and its results may influence the structure of remuneration identified as variable and/or flexible. Another relevant point highlighted by the teacher is the emphasis on merit and outcome-oriented performance

as a means of improving the State's standing in educational rankings. It is as if the teacher herself was solely responsible for either the success or the failure of the policy being enacted.

It is worth noting that, at present, public-private partnerships operate alongside the Pará State Department of Education, notably Fundação Vale and Fundação Getúlio Vargas—through the Center for the Development of Public Management and Educational Policies (FGV DGPE)—in the development of the State's Strategic Plan (Pará, 2023).

Another teacher makes explicit the reactions observed among educators regarding the policy governing this variable and/or flexible component of remuneration:

“Regarding the importance of bonuses in personal financial planning, without a doubt, any amount added to one's monthly income brings some benefit to the worker's life. One only needs to observe people's reactions when they learn that some bonus will be granted—the feeling is one of joy and satisfaction. And, quite often, it is accompanied by some form of complaint as well, whether about the amount or the reasons that led to the payment of such a bonus” (Pará, citation 6).

In the State of Paraná, perceptions reflect concerns about the restriction of legally guaranteed labor rights, such as the thirteenth salary and retirement benefits, as illustrated by the following testimony: “It is harmful; it reduces purchasing power in the thirteenth salary; it does not motivate teachers, and removes rights, such as incorporating it into retirement pay” (Paraná, citation 16).

In this State, the teaching workforce carries a recent collective memory of the events of 2015, when the Government's counter-reform removed career rights, with strong impacts on retirement. As recorded:

“Teachers and school staff [...] held an Act in Memory of April 29, 2015. On that date, then-Governor Beto Richa authorized the police to fire tear gas and rubber bullets at demonstrators who were protesting against the Pension Restructuring project” (Carriconde, 2021, p. 1).

The teachers' statements also reveal profound changes in the world of work resulting from technological innovations—intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic—as well as from the controversial management model adopted by the State's Department of Education¹⁰.

¹⁰ This refers to Renato Feder, who headed the Department of Education of the State of Paraná from January 2019 to November 2022 and is currently the Secretary of Education of the State of São Paulo under Governor Tarcísio de Freitas, elected in 2022 for the Republicanos (PR) party. For discussions surrounding the controversies related to the use—and overuse—of technological applications in State school systems in both States during his term, see: Bimbati (2023).

“We are paid two salary supplements, GTE and transportation allowance. As for bonuses for work or anything else—we have never received those. I believe that this type of incentive should not be part of one’s financial planning because it is not an amount one can count on for fixed daily expenses” (Paraná, citation 14).

The tendency to increase labor productivity by incorporating machines—or even by having machines replace human labor—is a long-standing feature of the capitalist mode of production. The technological innovations that emerged toward the end of the 1970s, and which have since exhibited remarkable development, reorganized the world of labor and capital to a new level. Along these lines, “perhaps for this reason, one can also label the current state of affairs in which the economy is boosted and energized by digital platforms that generate new cycles of capital accumulation as a form of ‘digital capitalism’” (Afonso, 2021, p. 5). In this context:

“Currently, as we know, despite the inequalities and deficits that persist at various levels of the educational system, digital technologies are no longer a novelty in the daily life at schools. Increasingly used as resources in didactic-pedagogical work and in other educational activities, as well as in supporting networks of interaction with other schools and with society at large, they have become especially indispensable in administrative and management tasks” (Afonso, 2021, p. 4).

Certainly, in the Brazilian context, the pandemic that started in 2020 accelerated the use of digital technologies across multiple school systems and institutions through capital-driven platforms. The teacher’s account reflects her perception of this reality—one that was already present but became considerably intensified—and how, as teachers interact within these virtual environments, these actions become grounds for forms of complementary remuneration within the teacher recognition policy in the state of Paraná.

For the Chilean teacher, complementary remuneration is understood from the perspective of increased earnings, since in her case this is directly related to the number of working hours: “For me, these bonuses are significant, because having few hours increases my income, which in my case is not high” (Chile, citation 48).

Complementary pay may also be affected when, depending on career conditions, teachers take leave to exercise another right—such as maternity leave—where the variable and/or flexible component is withdrawn. It is, in effect, as if the exercise of one right resulted in the denial of another:

“For six years I was the coordinator of a school integration program, and three years ago I began earning a responsibility bonus, which was non-taxable. The bonus was a great help, but once I went on leave for pre- and postnatal maternity, my income was considerably affected because I no longer earned it.” (Chile, citation 27)

The perceptions of teachers in the State of Mato Grosso do Sul bring to the forefront the issue of increased purchasing power and how this relates to the fact that the act of teaching is often financed by the teachers themselves. Although it is not new that teachers privately fund their own work processes, during the COVID-19 pandemic—with the rise of remote instruction and in light of the federal Government’s decision at the time not to provide free technological resources, such as internet access—the deterioration of the teaching craft became more visible. The statement below may reflect this dynamic. According to Rebelo (2024), only 4.8% of State schools in Brazil offered free or subsidized home internet access in 2021. “When bonuses are planned, like the ones I earn now, they are incorporated into my personal budget; however, I am aware that they are temporary” (Mato Grosso do Sul, citation 67).

“A bonus would be important to be able to do something different with my family or even to invest a bit more in preparing lessons, such as purchasing personal equipment that improves the teaching and learning process.” (Mato Grosso do Sul, citation 73)

The perceptions of teachers in Mato Grosso do Sul may also be mediated by the fiscal adjustment implemented by the local administration in conjunction with the enactment of Constitutional Amendment No. 95/2016—known as the “Spending Cap” (Brazil, 2016). State Constitutional Amendment No. 77/2017 introduced austerity measures that broke salary parity between permanent and temporary teachers, resulting in a 34% reduction in pay for the latter, and increased the pension contribution rate for public servants (Mato Grosso do Sul, 2017).

Therefore, although teachers acknowledge the temporary nature—and, in some cases, the negligible value—of flexible remuneration, many report that these payments are absorbed into the family budget and become indispensable to subsistence, which causes fear regarding their possible discontinuation. Paradoxically, the statements also highlight the importance of these payments and the degree of satisfaction they generate, identifying them as a form of recognition and as necessary for improving living conditions. In the Chilean case, perceptions of variable and/or flexible remuneration appear to be more closely associated with purchasing power than with the loss of labor rights.

The last two accounts point to a sense of teacher dissatisfaction—both regarding what is counted as salary while simultaneously not being recognized as such, given the temporary nature of variable and/or flexible remuneration, which fluctuates according to the political

environment. They also reveal discomfort with the hegemony of large-scale assessment, expressed in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB): “What bothers me about these bonuses we receive from the State is that our actual salary is outdated, and the only reason we have a reasonable amount is because of the bonuses.” (Paraná, citation 15)

“As always, this type of remuneration is used for day-to-day expenses and for different needs; it is part of the SALARY, but it is not salary. We have another one: three thousand reais for those who meet the SAEB targets and, therefore, raise the IDEB, but that should only be for next year” (Paraná, citation 24).

Pessin and Dets (2020), in analyzing teacher behavior regarding IDEB as a self-regulation policy within schools, argue that such processes carry, among other aspects, a motivational component and that, therefore:

In the context of education, although official documents mention the importance of active teacher participation in the development of public policies, many objectives were formulated without the participation of the professionals working at schools, and this was the case with the Ministry of Education’s assessment proposal that led to the creation of IDEB (Pessin & Dets, 2020, p. 11).

The situation presented invites reflection on one of the constitutional principles of Brazilian education: democratic management. This principle has traditionally been associated with school units and their surrounding communities as a way of broadening democratic ties as a pedagogical process. Until now, the multiple educational systems have been only minimally questioned with regards to the actual exercise of this principle.

When analyzing the teachers’ perceptions and seeking to compare the narratives present in both Brazil and Chile, the salary differences between the two countries become evident. Even though flexible remuneration is present in the professional lives of teachers in both contexts, the *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators* report, compiled by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), shows the annual salaries of elementary education teachers in public institutions, in U.S. dollars converted using purchasing power parity (PPP) for private consumption. On this scale, while Brazilian teachers earned USD 13,983, Chilean teachers earned USD 25,147 in 2019, both at the beginning of their careers (OECD, 2021).

In the Brazilian case, the federal entities, by choosing administrative models aimed at the modernization of the State, have increasingly adopted variable and/or flexible remuneration as a means of freeing up public budget resources, on the one hand, and, on the other, applying neoliberal precepts that weaken labor protections—even when such rights are guaranteed by constitutional and infra-constitutional instruments. All Brazilian States represented in this study are currently run within the framework of New Public Management

(NPM), a management model of the State introduced by neoliberalism that “has become hegemonic in the Western world, taking on different contours in the various contexts where it has been implemented, with the objective of managing public services according to private-sector principles” (Marques, 2022, p. 2). Nonetheless, NPM is not “a monolithic model of educational reform, nor does it take the same shape everywhere, as remarkably different designs of educational policy can be observed” (Marques, 2022, p. 2).

In the Chilean case, private-sector logic shapes educational policy; however:

Funding for compulsory schooling (early childhood, elementary, middle and high-school education) is a substantial financial obligation of the State, highlighted as the policy area receiving the greatest attention, given that directly and indirectly the State finances 90% of the school population in the country, although most of these resources are transferred to private players responsible for this task. The previously cited Inclusion Law introduces significant transformations in this framework, namely: it prohibits institutional profit and family co-payment, and prevents the selection of students, thereby reconfiguring the subsidized private education sector as it had been known until then—now a non-profit sector supported by public resources—and distinguishing it from those institutions that receive no public funding and operate under market laws. Although the law is applied gradually, it entails a substantial transformation in this area (Donoso-Díaz; Arias-Rojas; Reyes-Araya, 2021, p. 19).

Certainly, Chile’s budgetary capacity for teacher remuneration—while responding to challenges that may differ significantly from those faced in Brazil—may also speak to issues that are similar in terms of the furthering of this workforce.

Conclusions

This article highlights the perceptions of female elementary education teachers in four Brazilian States and one Chilean region regarding variable and/or flexible remuneration, which is part of teacher compensation, based on interactions held in WhatsApp groups.

As evidenced in the teachers’ accounts, variable and/or flexible remuneration represents an increment in the pay of teachers who are actively working and is, therefore, temporary. Hence, while it raises earnings during the period when teachers are part of the labor force, these same teachers will receive lower remuneration upon retirement, as the earnings derived from variable and/or flexible pay will be discontinued. In the Chilean case, such payments are also withdrawn during maternity leave.

The statements also show that not all teachers are aware that the future holds retirement as a labor right to which they are entitled. Those who understand the existence and protective nature of this right actively claim it.

Moreover, the statements reveal that the very existence of variable and/or flexible remuneration indicates that current earnings are insufficient to guarantee the material means for teachers to survive. As a result, this particular form of complementary pay becomes essential. Teachers acknowledge that the presence of such supplements generates a sense of discomfort in the exercise of the profession and in their daily lives, both for permanent and temporary teachers.

A comparative analysis of the Brazilian and Chilean cases shows that the Brazilian States examined are governed by New Public Management (NPM), demonstrating the advance of neoliberalism—already consolidated in Chile. The presence of variable and/or flexible remuneration in teacher compensation in both countries may serve as an indicator of convergences in the nature of the furthering of the teaching workforce within contexts marked by the restriction of labor rights.

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