

Teachers' Perceptions on a New Policy on Teacher Performance Appraisal in Portugal

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Abstract

This paper draws upon a broader piece of research aiming at investigating the implications of a recent policy on teacher performance appraisal in Portugal for teachers and schools. It focuses mainly upon teachers' perceptions in regard to its implementation during the first two years (2008 and 2009). Two case studies were carried out and a combination of methods for data collection was used. Findings suggested that teachers' perceptions are marked by uncertainty and skepticism. Amongst the most critical issues are the existence of a quota system, the lack of recognition (and adequate training) of the appraisers, the bureaucratic and summative dimension, and the lack of necessary conditions (including time) to put it into practice. In general, teachers are sceptical in regard to the effects of the new policy on their professional development and on school improvement. However, some positive aspects were also identified by some teachers, namely the emergence of debates and discussion within the teaching profession, the opportunity to reflect upon teachers' practice and to change and challenge the previous system which was mainly based on self-evaluation.

Keywords: Teacher evaluation, professional development, policy implementation, teachers' perceptions

1. Introduction

Teacher evaluation has been considered as a key element in reforms worldwide in order to improve the quality of education. However, the ways in which it has been implemented in different countries vary in terms of its main purposes, processes and effects (see Flores, 2010a). By and large, the literature draws attention to the tensions between formative (oriented towards professional development) and summative purposes (linked to accountability and managerial decisions) (Chow *et al.* 2002; Avalos & Assael 2006; Stronge 2006a). Whereas some authors state that these are incompatible purposes, others advocate the possibility and the need to incorporate them into the

same system of teacher evaluation (see, for instance, Simões 2000; Chow *et al.* 2002; Avalos & Assael 2006; Stronge, 2010). As Stronge & Tucker (1999, 356) arguably suggest, “Evaluation can be an important tool for supporting and improving the quality of teaching. Unfortunately, teacher evaluation too frequently has been viewed not as vehicle for growth and improvement, but rather as a formality that must be endured.” At times of increased accountability, public scrutiny and surveillance mechanisms in regard to schools and teachers’ work, teacher evaluation is sometimes seen as a threat to teachers’ autonomy. For others, however, it is an important mean for improving teacher quality and student attainment. Existing literature also recognises the key importance of self-evaluation and critical reflection to teacher professional development and improvement through, for instance, reflection in, on and about practice and action research (Day, 2010).

Thus, evaluating is about documenting the quality of teachers’ performance, helping them improve and hold them accountable for their work (Stronge, 2006b). However, for this to happen, a number of key elements need to be taken into account. In a recent review of different systems for teacher certification and evaluation, Vaillant (2008) identified political, conceptual and operational factors which may facilitate or hinder the appraisal process. She highlights the importance of taking into account the contextual variables in the implementation of a teacher evaluation system as well as the adequacy of the instruments, the need of the appraisers to be recognised and the importance of feedback, amongst others. Similarly, Stronge (2010) discusses the essential components for a quality teacher evaluation system which he terms the three C’s - Communication, Commitment and Collaboration – in order to create “the synergy that can elevate evaluation to a meaningful dialogue about quality instruction for students”. In other words, if a quality system is to be developed, it is important to look at the ways in which both appraisers and appraisees see the appraisal process and the relationship between them (Chow *et al.*, 2002), the ways in which schools and headteachers put a given policy into practice as well as the nature and the purposes of the appraisal system itself (Flores, 2009; 2010a). As Nevo noted (1994, 109-110), “teachers who understand how teaching is being evaluated could not only improve their self-evaluation; they could also benefit in preparing themselves for being evaluated by others or demonstrating the quality of their skills and performance to designated audiences.” Thus, a crucial element in teacher evaluation systems is its link to teacher professional development and school improvement. Moreover, the existence of clear criteria and standards of performance are seen as a key factor for quality teacher evaluation systems (Wheeler & Scriven, 2006).

Furthermore, due to the complexity of the implementation process of a given policy, it is important to consider the perceptions of the stakeholders, namely teachers, in regard to such a complex issue especially when what is at stake is a new policy on teacher evaluation. In this regard, Fullan (2001, 71) draws attention to the dynamics of the factors of change and he states that “intrinsic dilemmas in the change process, coupled with the intractability of some factors and the uniqueness of individual settings, make successful change a highly complex and subtle process”. Thus, both the content of the evaluation system and the context in which the system will be used have to be taken into account if it is to be effective and successful (Peterson & Comeaux 1990). Recent empirical work has found that teachers’ perceptions of the teacher evaluation system influence the ways in which it is put into practice (Assael & Pavez, 2008; Flores, 2009; Tuytens & Devos, 2009) with a particular emphasis on the influence of school leadership in shaping the ways teachers understand and look at the new policy (Tuytens & Devos, 2010) which is in line with previous empirical work (Retallick & Fink 2002; Kertsen & Israel 2005). It is within this framework that the study reported in this paper was carried out. As recent literature has pointed out, there is a need for further research on the process of implementation of teacher evaluation policy including the analysis of teachers’ perceptions in this regard (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007; Tuytens & Devos, 2010). This study aimed at looking at teachers’ perceptions of the new policy on teacher performance appraisal in Portugal, after the publication of the new Teacher Career Statute, in January 2007 and subsequent legal texts. In the next section, an overview of the new policy is given by highlighting its main features and adjustments (and drawbacks) over the last few years.

2. The New Policy on Teacher Performance Appraisal in Portugal

In the Portuguese context, over the last decades there has been a bulk of reforms in order to raise teaching standards and pupil attainment. Of particular relevance within the context of this paper are recent changes related to the teaching career and teacher evaluation.

The Portuguese Education System is marked traditionally by centralisation and bureaucracy which is visible in the amount of legal texts, an example of which is the new policy on teacher performance appraisal. In 2007, a new Teacher Career Statute was issued (Decree-Law number 15/2007, 19th

January). Amongst other features, it has introduced a “more demanding system for teacher performance appraisal with effects on the development of teachers’ career” in order to “identify, promote and reward the merit and to value the teaching activity” (see preamble of the same Decree-Law). The new Teacher Career Statute also stipulated the existence of two teacher categories (senior teachers, i.e. *professores titulares* and classroom teachers, i.e., *professores*) – the former, apart from teaching, are responsible for coordinating roles at school and supervision and evaluation of other teachers. This, however, was to be abandoned by the government three years later, after a difficult negotiation process with teachers’ unions and after some years of resistance and demonstrations from the part of the teachers¹. Another initiative relates to the conditions for accessing the teaching career. An “exam” on “knowledge and competencies” is now required for all those entering the teaching profession in order to “demonstrate the mastery of knowledge and competencies required to teach” in a given area/field of knowledge (article 22nd Decree-Law 15/2007). A “probationary year” (in order to verify the abilities of the new teacher regarding the requirements of the profession) was also introduced during which the new entrant is accompanied by a senior teacher with specialised training in educational organisation and curriculum development, pedagogical supervision and teacher training (see article 31st Decree-Law 15/2007). This new initiative was in place for the first time during the academic year 2009/2010 (cf. Despacho number 21666/2009, 26th August). Teacher performance appraisal is applied according to the duties and roles of teachers in the light of the four main dimensions which are considered to be the key elements in the depiction of the professional profile of teachers: i) professional, social and ethical dimension; ii) development of teaching and learning; iii) participation in school activities and relationship with the community; iv) training and professional development within a lifelong perspective. By and large, the key features of the new system for teacher performance appraisal include a diversity of appraisers and instruments, the consideration of a number of dimensions in the appraisal process (including classroom observation), the setting up of targets regarding a number of issues including student achievement, and the existence of a quota system (one of the most critical issues). However, two processes of “simplification” of the model were introduced in 2008 and 2009 in order to respond to the resistance (from the part of teachers and teachers’ unions) and turbulence in schools (see

¹ For further details on the teacher performance appraisal and on its process of implementation, see Flores (2010b)

Decree number 11/2008, 23rd May and Decree number 1-A/2009, 5th January). By and large, three main problems were then identified: i) the existence of appraisers from different areas of knowledge of those to be assessed; ii) bureaucracy, and iii) the heavy workload inherent to the process of teacher performance appraisal. Thus, the government has introduced simplified versions to be put into place in schools in the first cycle of the appraisal process (which ended in December 2009). It included the need: i) to guarantee that appraisers are from the same field of knowledge of those to be assessed; ii) to exclude from the appraisal process the criteria regarding student achievement and dropout rates (taking into consideration the difficulties of these issues identified by the national Scientific Council for Teacher Appraisal); iii) in the case of tacit agreement, meetings between appraisers and appraisees are not necessary; iv) the process of appraisal carried out by the heads of department is to occur only when appraisees require so (including classroom observation), but it is a necessary condition to get the final evaluation of Excellent and Very Good; v) to reduce to two (instead of three) the number of lessons to be observed, although the appraisees may require a third classroom observation; vi) teachers who may retire until 2010/2011 (or those who want to apply for early retirement) are excused from the appraisal process; vii) to excuse teachers teaching professional and vocational areas from the appraisal process unless they want to do so; viii) to simplify the appraisal process of the appraisers and to compensate for their workload (they are only assessed by the Executive Council of the school).

Moreover, more changes of the model have been made recently following a controversial process of negotiation and a long period of resistance from the part of teachers and teacher unions (the Ministry of Education and teacher unions reached an agreement on January 8th 2010). This has led to changes in the Teacher Career Statute, namely in regard to the articulation between teacher performance appraisal (with simplified procedures) and career progression and the abolition of the distinction between senior teachers and teachers (Decree-Law n° 75/2010, 23rd June). As for the teacher appraisal system itself, the main changes include the clarification of the articulation between teacher performance appraisal and career progression and professional development, the valorisation of the formative dimension of the appraisal process, the existence of a collegial body which is from now on responsible for the decision about the outcome of the appraisee performance and the need to increase the involvement of teachers both in the process and the outcomes of the appraisal process (see preamble of the Decreto Regulamentar n° 2/2010, 23rd June).

Also recently, national teacher performance standards have been issued (Despacho nº 16034/2010, 22nd October), following the recommendations of the national Scientific Council for Teacher Appraisal, which is responsible for giving recommendations and monitoring the implementation of the appraisal process at a national level. The national standards include five levels of performance (excellent, very good, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory) and they are based upon the four dimensions mentioned above. These include different domains and indicators (for example, in the dimension development of teaching and learning, three domains are identified: preparation and organisation of teaching activities, implementation of the teaching activities, pedagogical relationship with the pupils and the process of assessing pupil learning. The indicators aim at making the different domains more concrete an example of which is implementing adequate instruments to monitor teaching). Overall, the intention is to have more simplified procedures for teacher appraisal with self-evaluation as a key element within the view of a professional development perspective. Classroom observation is, nevertheless, not compulsory, neither is the setting up on individual objectives. The quota system is, however, kept for the levels of excellent and very good. For these, classroom observation is compulsory as well as for teachers aiming at career progression at stages 3 and 5. In each school or cluster of schools, a committee for coordinating teacher performance appraisal (CCTPA) is created which aims at coordinating the whole appraisal process. The committee include the president of the Pedagogical Council, which is also the president of the CCTPA and three other teachers, elected amongst the members of the pedagogical council in each school or cluster of schools. As far as the appraisal process is concerned, it is developed by the CCTPA and the appraiser, which is designated by the curricular department to which the appraisee belongs. The Coordinator of the department is responsible for the coordination and supervision of the appraisers' work in his/her department. The appraiser is responsible for the development and monitoring of the appraisal process and he/she has to be in "permanent interaction" with the appraisee in order to enhance the formative dimension of the appraisal process. As for the instruments, they include a self-evaluation report and the global form of teacher performance appraisal. Other instruments for data collection throughout the appraisal process are used. Overall, it seems to reinforce the internal dimension of the appraisal process, the supervision and monitoring and the formative dimension.

3. Methods

This paper draws upon a broader piece of research aiming at looking at the implications of the new policy on teacher performance appraisal for teachers and schools. It includes two case studies carried out in one elementary and one secondary school in northern Portugal. The research questions are:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers about the new policy on teacher performance appraisal?
2. How do they rate different aspects of its implementation?
3. What do they see as the positive and negative aspects of the system?
4. Do they perceive that the policy has affected them and their school? If so, how?

Data were collected through questionnaires (n=150), semi-structured interviews (n=45) and focus group (=10) in 2009. Seventy-five percent of the participants are female. The vast majority of the teachers held a degree (Licenciatura – 74%) and their years of experience ranged from 0 to 36. The main themes in both the questionnaires and interviews included teacher motivation, job satisfaction and change; purposes for teacher performance appraisal; the process of implementation of the new system (criteria and instruments, procedures, etc.); the positive and negative aspects of the system; the perceptions in regard to its effects upon teacher and school development, amongst others.

Quantitative data were analysed through the use of SPSS (15.0). In the process of analysis of qualitative data, an inductive approach was used, and substantive themes were defined as they emerged from the data. The process of data analysis was undertaken according to two phases: a vertical analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) according to which each of the respondents' interviews was analysed separately. A second phase was then carried out according to a comparative or horizontal analysis (cross-case analysis) (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this phase, the method of 'constant comparative analysis' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used to look for common patterns as well as differences. In this paper, four main dimensions arising from both quantitative and qualitative data will be presented and discussed: i) teachers' views on the purposes and focus of teacher appraisal process; ii) teachers' perspectives on different aspects of the new system of teacher

performance appraisal; iii) teachers' experience of the process of implementation in their own school; iv) perceived effects of the appraisal process for teachers and schools.

4. Findings

4.1. Teachers' Views on the Purposes and Focus of Teacher Appraisal

In general, teachers participating in this study tend to value more formative purposes for teacher performance appraisal in detriment to summative ones. Table 1 summarises teachers' views on the main purposes of teacher evaluation. When asked about the main purposes for teacher evaluation, they agree that it should primarily focus on the identification of professional development needs (item 2) and that it should aim at providing useful information for teachers to improve their performance (item 4). They also stress that teacher evaluation should aim at enhancing teachers' reflection on their practice (item 8). Although they recognise that teachers are entitled to have their performance appraised (item 6), they disagree that teacher evaluation should aim primarily at making managerial decisions (item 7) and that it should be both for professional development and accountability purposes (item 9). Interestingly, teachers' responses in regard to the main focus of teacher evaluation vary from agree, disagree and do not agree nor disagree. They do not reveal a clear position in regard to teacher evaluation associated with the need to raising the standards of teaching and learning (item 1), to meeting the minimum standards (item3) and to be based upon a list of professional competencies or behaviours (item 5).

Table 1- Views of teachers on Purposes and Focus for Teacher Appraisal

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Teacher evaluation is essential to raise the standards of teaching and learning	16,7%	28,6%	9,5%	35,7%	9,5%
2. Teacher evaluation should primarily focus on the identification of my professional development needs.	5,9%	11,9%	14,3%	50%	17,9%
3. Teacher evaluation aims at meeting the minimum standards.	7,8%	26,3%	29,8%	32,3%	3,8%
4. Teacher evaluation aims at providing useful information for teachers to improve their performance.	2,4%	2,4%	8,3%	66,7%	20,2%
5. Teacher evaluation should be based upon a list of professional competences or behaviours.	11,2%	29,8%	23,3%	34,5%	1,2%
6. As a professional, I am entitled to have my performance appraised.	3,6%	6,5%	10,7%	65,9%	13,3%

7. Teacher evaluation should aim primarily at making managerial decisions.	21,6%	45,7%	22,2%	8,3%	2,2%
8. Teacher evaluation aims at enhance teachers' reflection on their practice.	3,6%	4,8%	1,2%	67,9%	22,5%
9. Teacher evaluation should be both for professional development and accountability purposes.	10,7%	42,9%	19%	26,2%	1,2%

4.2. Teachers' Perspectives on Different Aspects of the New System of Teacher Performance Appraisal

However, their views of the new policy on teacher performance appraisal and the ways it has been implement in schools is rather different to the views they held about teacher evaluation in general. A sceptical and negative perspective emerges from both quantitative and qualitative data. Table 2 summarises teachers' perspectives about different aspects of the new policy.

Table 2- Views of teachers on different aspects of the new teacher performance appraisal system

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
10. The number of classroom observations is adequate.	16,7%	27,8%	45%	9,3%	1,2%
11. Existing procedures are threatening for teachers.	5,8%	18,9%	22,4%	38,3%	14,6%
12. In general, I think that the existing system for teacher performance appraisal is reliable and valid.	40,4%	47,4%	10,2%	2%	0%
13. In general, I think that the existing system for teacher performance appraisal is fair.	41,5%	43,9%	11,9%	2,8%	0%
14. I think that the existing system for teacher performance appraisal has a clear purpose.	13,6%	28%	49,5%	8,9%	0%
15. I think that with the existing system for teacher performance appraisal teachers know what they are supposed to do.	11,9%	40,1%	28,8%	15,5%	3,7%
16. In general, the existing teacher performance appraisal is useful for improving teachers' performance.	23,9%	49,8%	16,7%	9,6%	0%
17. In general, the existing teacher performance appraisal is useful for school improvement.	22,8%	52,5%	17,7%	7%	0%
18. In general, the existing teacher performance appraisal is useful as it implies the setting up of a number of objectives to be met in a given period of time.	17,9%	39,4%	21,5%	12,9%	8,3%
19. In general, my evaluation will be useful to					

direct my professional development.	14,8%	39,7%	31,3%	14,3%	0%
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Teachers are rather negative in regard to the new system. To a vast majority of them it is neither reliable nor valid (item 12). Also the large majority of the teachers think that the system is not fair (item 13) and they are very sceptical about its usefulness in improving both teacher performance (item 16) and school development (item 17). A negative view is also associated with the clarification of teachers' job through the appraisal process (item 15) and the usefulness of the setting up of objectives to be met in a given period of time (item 18) and its implications for teacher professional development (item 19). As far as the purpose of the teacher performance appraisal, teachers do not reveal a clear view: the majority of them do not agree nor disagree with the contention according to which existing system for teacher performance appraisal has a clear purpose (item 14). The same uncertainty is also present when teachers are asked about the number of classroom observations (item 10). Interestingly, overall they tend not to consider the existing procedures threatening for them (item 11).

Qualitative data corroborate this scepticism and general lack of reliability in regard to the new system of teacher performance appraisal which teachers relate to the ways in which it was implemented in schools at a national level. They would have appreciated a more gradual and experimental process accompanied by an adequate training of appraisers.

"I have this idea that it started wrong from the very beginning... it should have been a gradual process. People should have been trained in an adequate manner, including how to deal with target setting, and so on... People at school don't know how to handle this situation. People are confused, there is a lot of instability at school and I feel very sceptical about the outcomes of this process."
(Teacher, 20 years of experience)

"I think that there is no model at all...It is all about managerial decisions!" (Teacher, 14 years of experience)

Other teachers spoke of the lack of negotiation from the part of the Ministry of Education and they refer to the imposition of the model at a national level which has led to teacher lack of motivation and low morale:

“I think the most negative aspect was the imposition of the model and the lack of negotiation... the whole process was imposed in an authoritarian way.” (Teacher, 25 years of experience)

“Teachers are unmotivated and discontent. I also feel unmotivated and sad with recent government initiatives like teacher performance appraisal policy and the way it was implemented.” (Teacher, 10 years of experience)

4.3. Teachers’ experience of the process of implementation at their own school

Not surprisingly when asked about their own experience of performance appraisal in their schools, teachers revealed again a negative picture in regard to many aspects. In general, the most negative issues related to the implementation of the teacher performance appraisal are associated with procedures and appraisers. The vast majority of the participants state that existing instruments for teacher appraisal are not clear enough (item 21) and that existing criteria do not take into account the context of teaching (item 22). The large majority of teachers also stress that rating scales are not appropriate (item 24) and they are also uncertain about the appropriateness of criteria and indicators (item 20). Table 3 shows teachers’ views of performance appraisal at their own school.

Table 3- Teachers’ experience of performance appraisal in their school

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
20.In my school criteria and indicators are appropriate.	11,9%	21,3%	41,5%	25,3%	0%
21.Existing instruments for teacher performance appraisal are clear.	11,7%	43,9%	26%	18,4%	0%
22.Existing appraisal criteria take into account the context of teaching.	14,4%	36,8%	23,9%	24,9%	0%
23.The appraisal process at my school allows teachers to explain decisions and actions.	8,6%	20,6%	40,8%	27,8%	2,2%
24.Rating scales used to evaluate my performance are appropriate.	15,5%	42,9%	35,7%	5,9%	0%
25.I am given useful feedback by the appraiser.	11,8%	34,5 %	34,5%	17,7%	1,5%
26.I feel that in my school teachers’ work and their achievements are recognised.	14,2%	16,6%	22,4%	37%	9,8%
27.I feel that the appraisers in my school have the required knowledge and competencies to appraise teachers.	23,8%	33,4%	35,8%	7%	0%

28.I feel that the appraisers in my school have received adequate training to perform their job.	23,8%	35,6%	35,7%	4,9%	0%
29.In general, I think that the feedback that I am given focuses upon suggestions for improvement.	11,7%	33,8%	41,2%	13,3 %	0%

The lack of required knowledge and competencies from the part of the appraisers (item 27) is also referred to by the large majority of the participants in the study as a negative aspect associated with the implementation of the new system. The vast majority of them also claim that appraisers do lack adequate training to perform their job adequately (item 28). This relates to issues of recognition and legitimacy of the appraisers which, of course, undermine the process of appraisal from the very beginning, as many interviewed teachers have highlighted:

“The most controversial aspect for me is the recruitment of the appraisers... they are peers, but to be honest with you, I have doubts about the training they’ve got to do this kind of job!” (Teacher, 19 years of experience)

“I think the appraisers do not have the required training to do their job. I think this is a big problem...” (Teacher, 15 years of experience).

Interestingly, the appraisers themselves corroborate this view, even though they have undergone a training course which they do not find enough to perform the appraisal process.

“I think that the training we’ve got as appraisers – I am not saying that we have learned anything – but it wasn’t enough. I feel that we should have had more time. To be honest with you, both appraisers and appraisees should have had training about the new policy of teacher performance appraisal and only after that the system could start to be put into place. But it went the other way round... so you start thinking: assessing what and how? It is hard to be objective and there is a conflicting climate at school because you don’t know what and how to assess...” (Teacher appraiser, 19 years of experience)

“It is all very confusing... the legal texts, the timing of its implementation. This doesn’t make any sense. And on the top of that I have to assess my colleagues. I had a short period of training last July. I was exhausted and it was all very complicated...” (Teacher appraiser, 20 years of experience)

Data also showed a lack of clear views about the feedback provided under the appraisal process varying from strongly disagree to agree. Most of the teachers pointed to uncertainty about the usefulness of feedback for their improvement (item 29 and 25), even though many revealed a negative view. It is noteworthy that in regard to many items related to the implementation of the appraisal process at school none of the teachers have chosen the “strongly agree” option and only few have pointed out “agree” (see Table 3). The aspect that has received the most positive view relates to the recognition of teachers’ work and achievement at school (item 26) even though many teachers disagree with that. Uncertainty is also the key word when teachers revealed their view on the possibilities they have in the appraisal process to explain their decisions and actions (item 23).

4.4. Perceived Effects of the Appraisal Process for Teachers and Schools

As far as the effects of the implementation of teacher performance appraisal are concerned, teachers’ responses revealed, again, a rather negative picture (see Table 4). The large majority of them stated that existing teacher performance appraisal has led to the intensification of their work (item 32) and to tensions amongst staff (item 34). They also agreed that the implementation of the appraisal process has led to an increase of bureaucratic work (item 33). Qualitative data corroborate these findings. Teachers spoke of the grids and other paper work they have to comply with under the implementation of the new system and its competitive and summative nature which has led to conflicts and tensions amongst teachers:

“I think it is a rather summative model and it is leading to competition amongst teachers” (Teacher, 19 years of experience)

“It is a very subjective and bureaucratic model...” (Teacher, 12 years of teaching)

“With this system there is no real change. It is too bureaucratic and it has led to tensions and conflicts among teachers instead of collaboration. Actually this is happening in my school...” (Teacher 18 years of experience)

“As a teacher you have to do loads of other kinds of things such as paperwork and other admin tasks and all this prevents you from helping and supporting your pupils. You spend much of your time filling in forms rather than focusing on your teaching... I think that reforms have undermined your main role

as a teacher... and with teacher performance appraisal it is even worse.” (Teacher 15 years of experience, Portugal)

For this teacher, like others, the increase in bureaucracy and the intensification of teachers’ work has prevented them to focus on teaching and learning, as the following quote also highlights:

“With all these changes we are forgetting about the important things at school. I am talking about the relationship with pupils and I think their behaviour is getting worse and worse... At school, all we think of is meetings ...” (Teacher, 19 years of experience)

Table 4- Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of performance appraisal

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
30. Existing system of teacher performance appraisal in my school encourages me to reflect on my teaching.	15,3%	30,2%	36,8%	16,4%	1,3%
31.Existing appraisal process at my school has made me more aware of my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher.	16,2%	39,8%	22,6%	19,6%	1,8%
32.In general, the existing teacher performance appraisal has led to intensification of teachers’ work.	1,9%	4,2%	12,5%	32%	49,4%
33.In general, the existing teacher performance appraisal has increased the bureaucratic work at school.	6,2%	0%	6,2%	38,4%	49,2%
34.In general, the existing teacher performance appraisal has led to tensions amongst staff.	4,6%	5,9%	8%	42,9%	38,6%

Table 4 also reveals that teachers are sceptical and negative in regard to reflection and improvement as a result of the teacher appraisal process (items 30 and 31). They disagreed that existing teacher performance appraisal has made them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses as teachers. This was corroborated by other questions included in the questionnaire. When asked about the effects of the appraisal process on their professional development and on their schools, the majority of them referred to no effects (54,8%) and negative effects (52,5%), respectively. One interviewee was clear about this:

“I think this is a poor system... it turns assessment into a measurable process... it is all about quantifiable indicators. It is very poor. I still think that I teach things that do not count in a measurable perspective but they are really important...” (Teacher , 25 years of experience)

Table 4- Effects of teacher performance appraisal on teacher and school development

	Positive	Negative	No effect	No answer
on your professional development	6%	35,6 %	54,8%	3,6%
on your school	7%	52,5%	34,5%	6%

The large majority of the teachers feel that working relationships amongst staff are different as a result of teacher performance appraisal (72,6%), but they do not feel that working relationships between staff and students and between staff and school leadership and management have changed (65,5% and 54,8%, respectively). In general, lack of motivation, disappointment, low morale and feelings of tiredness emerged from teachers’ accounts as a result of the bulk of reforms and particularly of the implementation of teacher performance appraisal:

“I feel that people at school are more tired. In the past you could tell that people were happy in coming to school, even when you didn’t have teaching to do. It was not an imposition. Today it is like an imposition and you think that if I have work to do I go to school, otherwise I stay at home, because you are under so much pressure and you feel so tired...” (Teacher, 10 years of experience)

One teacher stated that teachers’ sense of vocation has been affected by recent policy changes, especially the implementation of teacher performance appraisal. He is strong about this and talked about the “soul of teaching” that, in his opinion, is hurt. He also referred to the ways in which the new policy has impacted upon teachers’ lives and the ways they feel like teachers:

“There is a soul in some professions and teaching is one of them. There is something that you cannot explain, that you don’t know exactly what it is... I guess you need a sense of vocation. You feel that beyond the mastery of a set of competencies that you acquire at university and in INSET courses, there is something else.... All this last change has affected the soul of teaching. It has affected the most beautiful side of teaching that makes a teacher smile to his/her pupils and having that energy

that you don't know where it comes from... and this has been lost. I feel that teaching is all about this soul, this something else that in my view is hurt right now..." (Teacher, 22 years of experience)

As a result, some feel like leaving teaching in order to avoid the bureaucratic assessment mechanisms and greater pressure on outcomes leaving, in some cases, to early retirements:

"If I could I would go away from teaching tomorrow... two years ago I wouldn't think like this. I've always wanted to be a teacher and I felt always motivated in teaching, I've always enjoyed being with the kids. And I think that I work hard to get them to have better results... but now I feel completely unmotivated... (Teacher, 20 years of experience)

"I feel disappointed with recent government initiatives. If I could I would leave teaching even with a reduction in my salary as has happened with other colleagues who decided to go away and to retire" (Teacher, 28 years of experience)

Despite this, some teachers seem to resist and keep on fighting and want to remain in teaching and "doing their job" which they associate mainly with their sense of vocation and commitment.

"I think you can feel teachers' lack of motivation at school. But we don't give up; we keep on trying and fighting despite the difficulties... I see myself as a person with courage, and someone who wants to keep going, but I think that I am not getting there, it is so hard..." (Teacher, 20 years of experience)

Overall, the most negative aspects associated with the new policy on teacher performance appraisal are clearly its bureaucratic dimension, the competition and tension amongst teachers, the existing quota system, the lack of adequate training (especially for appraisers), the unfairness as an outcome of the appraisal process and the lack of time for students. Some of the teachers' comments are eloquent in this regard: "It's useless..."; "it doesn't promote teacher competence and quality. It doesn't improve teaching..."; "It implies filling in of loads of documents, it's all about paperwork! It prevents teachers from focusing on teaching and on their students. They are too concerned about themselves..."; "To be honest with you I don't see any positive aspect due to my disappointment and lack of motivation", "It promotes staff lack of motivation and conflict..." And "the quota system is nonsense".

On the other hand, when asked about the positives of the new policy, the most recurrent response was "none". However, some teachers do identify some positive elements, such as: change and

questioning of the previous system (which was based upon self-evaluation), the opportunity to reflect on teachers' practice, the awakening of some teachers who had left behind the investment in their professional development and teachers' movement against the policy.

Conclusions

Concerns about student achievement in national and international assessments and the need to raise the standards of teaching and to improve the quality of pupil learning have led the governments to reforms, in many cases, according to a standard-based and accountability model. Portugal is no exception. A new policy on teacher performance appraisal was issued along with many debates and a great controversy both in the teaching profession and in the media.

Findings from this study point to a rather negative picture of the implementation process in schools. Feelings of unhappiness, lack of motivation and sense of job satisfaction along with, in some cases, conflict and tension amongst teachers emerged from the data. These are mainly associated with issues of purpose and process of implementation of the new policy (which many teachers considered to be too summative and unfair), lack of recognition of the appraisers, lack of information and training about the teacher performance appraisal, bureaucracy, the existence of a quota system, the lack of necessary time and conditions to undertake such a complex system, etc. Teachers were also sceptical in regard to the effects of the new policy on their continuing professional development and on school improvement. By and large, the new system is considered to be summative and bureaucratic which can be seen in the amount of regulations, grids, and documents and the ways in which the outcomes of the appraisal system are to be achieved and used.

This has implications for the culture of the schools and for the professional relationships amongst teachers. Some teachers did recognize some positive aspects which they associated with the emergence of debates and discussion within the profession. Issues such as the role and scope of teachers' work, their image as professionals within the profession and in the media, the reflection of the key elements in teaching as a profession, the opportunity to awakening of some elements of the profession were some of the aspects identified by the participants in the research project. However, the majority of the teachers were rather negative and sceptical in regard to the ways in which they see the development of this policy especially in regard to working relationships in the workplace.

They spoke of no impact upon changing or challenging existing teacher professional cultures (and teacher socialisation) with issues such as individualism and competition undermining the creation and development of communities of practice in schools. These were also felt as real concerns for teachers and school leaders who participated in this research project. Issues such as the nature of communication (a key element for effective and successful teacher appraisal), the quality of feedback, the relationship between appraisers and appraisees, the necessary time for carrying out the appraisal process, the existence of relevant support and follow-up opportunities for the continuing professional development of teachers, etc. are some of the critical areas. These issues will be explored further in the next phases of the research project.

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