

Contradictions and Challenges: University Teachers' Views on Performance Evaluation Models in Portugal and Spain

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Teacher performance evaluation is a key component of high performing quality assurance education systems. The main focus of the present paper is to examine how international trends in teacher evaluation policies determine teachers' working conditions in different higher education contexts. A comparative study was implemented at two public universities of Southern Europe (Portugal and Spain), with the aim of elucidating university teachers' perceptions regarding the current teacher evaluation model. To achieve this, we conducted 28 semi-structured interviews, employing a comparative approach in their design. The findings suggest that participants encounter discrepancies within the stated objectives of teacher performance evaluation in higher education. Such evaluation is perceived as an external imposition with a very poor democratic process, focusing mostly on the quantitative perspective and with uncertain consequences.

Keywords: accountability, teacher performance evaluation, views and perceptions, higher education

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Protislovja in izzivi: stališča univerzitetnih učiteljev do modelov ocenjevanja uspešnosti na Portugalskem in v Španiji

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☞ Ocenjevanje uspešnosti učiteljev je ključni element visokoučinkovitih izobraževalnih sistemov za zagotavljanje kakovosti. Glavni cilj tega prispevka je preučiti, kako mednarodni trendi v politikah ocenjevanja učiteljev določajo delovne pogoje učiteljev v različnih visokošolskih kontekstih. Primerjalna študija je bila izvedena na dveh javnih univerzah v južni Evropi (na Portugalskem in v Španiji) z namenom razjasniti, kako univerzitetni učitelji zaznavajo trenutni model ocenjevanja učiteljev. V ta namen smo izvedli 28 polstrukturiranih intervjujev, pri katerih smo uporabili primerjalni pristop. Ugotovitve kažejo, da se udeleženci srečujejo z neskladji v okviru zastavljenih ciljev ocenjevanja uspešnosti učiteljev v visokošolskem izobraževanju. Takšno ocenjevanje zaznavajo kot zunanjo prisilo z zelo slabim demokratičnim procesom, ki se osredinja predvsem na kvantitativni vidik in ima negotove posledice.

Ključne besede: odgovornost, ocenjevanje uspešnosti učiteljev, stališča in zaznave, visokošolsko izobraževanje

Introduction

Global patterns about what 'schooling, people and society should be' have been adopted and naturalised, assumed across different countries, with varying effects and implications that impact the functioning of education systems and society at large (Popkewitz, 2020, p. 162). On the other hand, the field of evaluation and assessment constitutes a powerful tool of a conservative and neoliberal agenda that has become hegemonic, set by transnational organisations like the OECD (Afonso, 2016; Torres Santomé, 2017). These transnational trends, present in current teacher performance evaluation (TPE) discourse and practice, combine to form the perfect storm. Policies for evaluating teacher performance in higher education have an international scope, with a real impact on the quality of teaching and the professional development of teachers (Ball, 2012). Moreover, as higher education institutions are relocating campuses all over the world, their policies acquire a supranational dimension in this global scenario.

Several transnational movements and reforms are at the root of the emergence of new tendencies and reforms oriented towards transferability, mobility and comparability in education, and the teaching profession is a central axis within these tendencies and reforms (Holloway et al., 2017; Smith, 2014). As a main goal of the reforms in education systems and the transformations required of teachers across all schooling levels, we find the enhancement of their quality equated with accountability (Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2017; Hursh & Wall, 2011; Lawrence, 2015; Meyer, 2012).

As a result, national procedures for quality assurance in higher education have functioned as TPE mechanisms, in line with a series of national regulations that promote accountability processes, albeit subjected to interpretation by each university within the scope of its autonomy. This scenario can favour the instrumentalisation of teaching, so that it can better respond to economic and productivity needs (Sugrue & Solbrekke, 2017; Fueyo, 2004; Gutmann, 1999; Simbürger & Neary, 2016).

Specifically, in the present higher education model in Europe, which promotes the standardisation of educational processes (Brøgger, 2016, 2018, 2019), several international organisations have signalled the importance of teacher performance evaluation for quality education. The European Commission (2012) evidences the need for a well-trained teaching force for dealing with the professional challenges faced in increasingly complex and uncertain contexts. The Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD, 2013, 2018) has developed a narrative of the quality of education systems that is intrinsically interweaved with the quality of their teaching force, and that draws its argumentative strength in the assumption that teaching quality strongly affects learning quality.

This correlation implicitly presupposes a need for the assessment of teacher performance, resulting in a worldwide increase in testing and the standardisation of accountability measures (Álvarez-López, 2019; Ball, 2003; Dorn & Ydesen, 2015; Smith, 2014). In this way, the objective of quality assurance through teacher accountability has been established, infusing teacher effectiveness with a neoliberal perspective (Ball, 2012, 2016; Saura & Bolívar, 2019; Saunders, 2010; Tight, 2019) that impacts the development of teachers' identity and working conditions (Fox, 2021; Gu & Levin, 2021; Hayes & Cheng, 2020; Shahjahan, 2020). Hence, initiatives have been set in motion to evaluate teaching through, for instance, student opinion surveys, whose outcomes may be questionable and have a less-than-expected impact on enhancing university quality (Osorio, 2020; Eisler, 2002).

TPE lacks a clear answer to the question of whose interests are being served in higher education. Increasingly, university teachers feel a sense of loss of autonomy and control over their teaching and research practices, particularly when evaluations are linked to remuneration and academic promotion effects (Van Patten, 1995) that are overly dependent on quantification and datafication.

Authors like McCarty et al. (2016) and Poutanen (2023) use the term 'alienation' to describe how quantification is affecting the academic community. Academic alienation is a process that evokes feelings of frustration, fear, anxiety and cynicism among academics. How it is experienced differs between individuals, based on their position on the academic ladder and their approach to academic work.

Academia is influenced by intense competition and the internalisation of a neoliberal logic. This has impacted working conditions and can lead to a skewed perception of freedom and a strong affiliation with higher education institutions to access resources and legitimacy (McCarty et al., 2016; Poutanen, 2023). Quantification and impact metrics become instruments to assess productivity, leading to a constant pressure that compels academics to create a future academic identity (Arboledas-Lérida, 2022; Black et al., 2023). This process, referred to as 'becoming calculable', transforms academics into measurable and auditable resource units, with little consideration for long-term effects. Emotional pressures such as guilt and 'shame logics' are consequences of various types of limitations, such as bureaucracy, hiring procedures and time constraints, which determine and condition the autonomy of faculty in higher education (Shahjahan, 2020).

If evaluation is understood as a systematic process of collecting and analysing information to make a value judgment aimed at optimising a process (Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995), its effectiveness must be accompanied by institutional improvement measures involving all stakeholders, as well as the resources and working conditions under which the institution operates (Stake et al., 2011). In the 1990s, some countries, such as Spain, initiated more comprehensive evaluative

systems, impacting not only faculty, but also research and service management. These systems had a dual purpose. On the one hand, they aimed to link the evaluation to concepts like autonomy in the internal management of each university; on the other, they were linked to accountability to society in line with the prevailing idea of accountability characterising current systems (Fernández & Orbe, 2021).

The new millennium began with the Bologna Declaration, which was pivotal for the European university (Symeonidis, 2018). Since then, stability or promotion in an academic career involves a dual selection filter: an external one through external accreditation agendas and an internal one set by each university. The intent behind the creation of evaluation and accreditation agendas is to enhance the quality of the higher education system by evaluating, certifying and accrediting qualifications, faculty and institutions, thus establishing an unprecedented bureaucratic framework (Fernández & Orbe, 2021; Van Patten, 1995).

In Portugal, the academic professional development and accountability of university teachers are distinguished by a specific teaching career status approved in 1979 and modified in 2009. In public institutions, there are teaching categories such as full professor, associate professor and assistant professor, while in private institutions, teaching staff must have qualifications equivalent to those in public universities. The evaluation of teaching performance in Portugal is regulated by a triennial system, covering research, teaching, management and university outreach, based on the principles of universality, flexibility, transparency and objectivity. All teachers must be assessed in this period of time, regardless of their professional category. Only 'Excellent' mentions in three consecutive assessment periods (nine years in total) result in progression in the remunerative category, and only full professors can evaluate others.

Regarding university teachers in Spain, there are distinctions between public and private contracts. In public institutions, there are two profiles: labour staff and civil servants. TPE is linked to incentives, which can involve remuneration, time compensation or both. It is conducted through various mechanisms encompassing different dimensions and aspects: 1) research: evaluation for 'sexenios' (six-year periods) can be requested by tenured and non-tenured university teaching staff. If the outcome is negative, it cannot be requested again within the same period. Although one can compete in subsequent years, negatively evaluated years are lost, unless one opts for a comprehensive assessment of the entire career trajectory; 2) teaching: assessment within the DOCENTIA programme⁴

4 The DOCENTIA programme was introduced with the aim of facilitating the evaluation of teaching in close coordination between the national agency, ANECA, and regional evaluation agencies. Its purpose is to support universities in designing their own mechanisms to manage the quality of university teaching activities and promote their development and recognition (ANECA, 2021).

applies to all teaching and research staff with teaching assignments in programme degrees, with specific teaching hour requirements for academic courses; 3) 'quinquennios' (five-year periods): requested by university teachers meeting specific conditions, such as years of service and maximum evaluation limits. Evaluation takes place over five academic years, with the possibility of a new evaluation two academic years after a negative assessment.

Additionally, it is possible to apply for regional supplements based on teaching, management and research work, with varying requirements including seniority and previous recognitions.

In Spain, the assessment process is conducted by distinct evaluators assigned for research, teaching and university management roles, respectively. Presently, the National Agency for Quality Assessment functions is the primary entity for conducting evaluations. This differs from Portugal, where the evaluating faculty is designated at the commencement of the assessment period, which extends from January to June in each new triennium. It is important to highlight the involvement of a commission and a coordination council in this procedure.

The present paper undertakes an analysis of TPE systems in Southern Europe, specifically in Portugal and Spain. The assumption is that a wider and holistic analysis of education policies of national systems requires the examination of the transnational and global spaces that impinge on them (Matarranz & Pérez, 2016; Valle, 2011; Kehm, 2010). In line with the work carried out by Holloway (2019), the main concern of this paper is to answer the following question: *How do supranational policies determine teachers' working conditions in different higher education contexts?*

The study presented in this paper focuses on the impact of TPE, as perceived by the subjects who experience this process, as well as its consequences, in order to determine the extent to which these processes are hindering the creation of fairer and more equitable evaluation scenarios in higher education. The objective was to comprehend the way in which university teachers perceive performativity and to explore its potential impact on their professional identity within distinct national contexts.

The specific research questions are as follows:

1. *How do university teachers perceive the TPE model (principles, assumptions, procedures etc.) in place?*
2. *What attributes define an optimal TPE model as perceived by university teachers in both countries?*
3. *What similarities can be observed in the university teachers' perceptions of TPE?*

Method

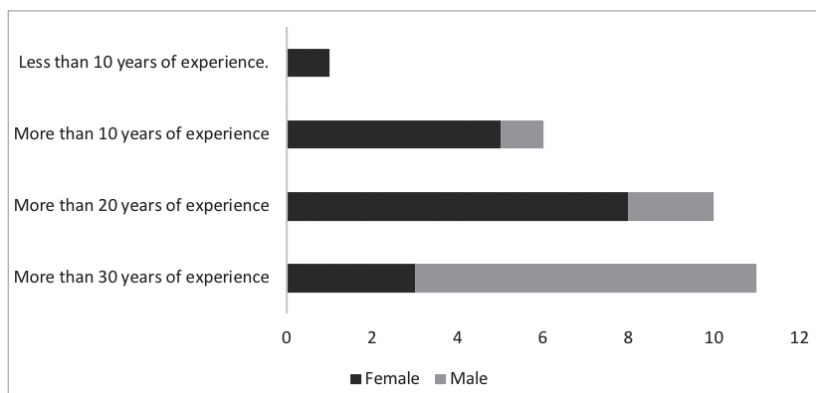
Participants

A convenience sampling method was employed, augmented by a snowballing approach (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A total of 41 teachers, specialised in the field of education and affiliated with two universities in northern Spain and Portugal, were contacted, and 28 agreed to participate in the study: 17 from Portugal and 11 from Spain. Of these teachers, 18 were women and 11 were men. Their areas of expertise pertained to eight different knowledge areas in the field of education: Developmental and Educational Psychology; Pedagogy and School Administration; Research and Diagnosis Methods in Education; Sociology; Specific Didactics: Language and Literacy, Maths, Science; Teacher Training and Supervision; and the Theory and History of Education.

The teachers had different levels of teaching experience and were in different phases of their career: the experience of the Portuguese participants ranged from 18 to 37 years, while the Spanish participants had between 8 and 40 years of experience (Graph 1).

Graph 1

Profile of the teaching faculty research participants by gender and university work experience



Instrument

The main data source was a semi-structured interview, the topics of which were sent to the participants beforehand: career path, knowledge area and pedagogical or administrative management responsibilities; initial questions about the participants' perspective on higher education policies and

practices; development questions on the process and outcomes of TPE; and a concluding question on doubts and observations the participants would like to put forward during the interview.

The interview process was complemented with an analysis of primary sources derived from the legislation governing university education, specifically concerning the regulation of TPE conducted within public universities, as well as European documents from Eurydice.

All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. They were then subjected to thematic analysis and categorised using qualitative data analysis software (MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Structural coding was applied in order to index major themes (Saldaña, 2016). From an ontological perspective, the data analysis was aligned with the nature of the research questions. Due to the exploratory character of the research, this analysis highlights the vision of the participants.

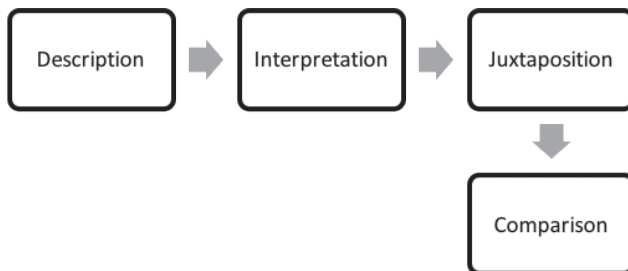
The presentation of the results, which focuses on the narratives of the participants, is accompanied by direct quotations extracted from the interviews. The aim is to exemplify their experiences and the meanings they attribute to them.

Research Design

The study builds on earlier work carried out in one national context (Gómez Sánchez & Moreira, 2020) and on a comparison of national policies regarding TPE (Gómez Sánchez et al., 2023). The present paper moves the conversation forward by examining teacher perceptions and experiences in both contexts, with reference to the comparative method, following its phases or steps (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Comparative approach steps



Source: Adick (2018)

The study is oriented towards describing, interpreting, juxtaposing and comparing education policies designed in global spaces and intended for all countries, without taking into account contextual cultural and policy factors. These policies are supported by international organisations, but are reconfigured and recomposed in particular settings. Southern Europe was chosen for this research due to the scarcity of studies focusing on this construct, in contrast to those using Northern Europe as a reference, or conducting North-South comparisons rather than South-South (Nóvoa, 2018). Southern Europe, configured by Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, has its own distinct character (Palomba & Cappa, 2018). Even though we locate our unit of analysis in a particular and idiosyncratic location in Europe, we attempt to understand how supranational policies impact locally.

Following Absor and Hairunas (2022), only a few studies have investigated faculty perceptions regarding the objectives and procedures of accreditation in higher education systems, particularly in the Anglophone world (US, UK, Australia and New Zealand) (Campillay, 2022; Poutanen, 2023). It is evident that the viewpoints of faculty members regarding accreditation are crucial, as they are closely involved in the execution of education policies (Tully, 2015).

Results

Perceptions of the Teacher Performance Evaluation Process

Regarding the first research question (*How do university teachers perceive the teacher performance evaluation model (principles, assumptions, procedures, etc.) in place?*), the teachers surveyed noted the high number of quantitative indicators that are collected regarding teaching and research. They stress the prevalence of a TPE model focused on outcomes that are mostly quantitative, bureaucratic and focused on measurable results, which leads to greater competitiveness among teachers, rather than collaboration. These results apply to both countries⁵.

- *Yes, if there wasn't a culture of collaboration before, today there is even less collaboration. In the neoliberal system, where everyone looks out for themselves, it's about individualism, competition, survival of the fittest, supposedly of the most capable, etcetera, etcetera. It's a total war, isn't it? It's a soft war. No one gouges out eyes or cuts off noses or anything, no one physically harms each other, but it's a war that divides colleagues.* (Portugal-Interview 6).

⁵ All testimonials are translated by the authors from either the Portuguese or the Spanish language.

- *We're going backwards, into forms of teacher performance evaluation that respond to national agencies... all they want is to quantify things, in order to justify an increasing bureaucratisation of the teacher performance evaluation process (Spain-Interview 9).*

In Portugal, TPE is obligatory for all higher education teaching roles, which results in teachers viewing it as an excessively formal procedure. It is seen as a mandated legal requirement lacking credibility and ultimately resulting in disillusionment and demotivation among teachers.

- *I see it more as an attempt to respond to a legal requirement, rather than as an assessment of the quality of the actions taken. Quality that is measured with less than objective factors. Today we often fall into a bureaucratic process in response to a legal requirement, don't we? (Portugal-Interview 2).*
- *It's a legally imposed evaluation (...) the public university introduced this, we didn't have a say in whether we want it or not, nor did we have an evaluation according to our possibilities (...) I'm not against the evaluation, I'm against the criteria, as well as the objectives of a certain evaluation model. I'm not arguing that it's not important to evaluate; I'm saying that it's important to evaluate, but to do it more seriously (Portugal-Interview 6).*

In Spanish teachers' discourse, the quality assurance agencies have an overwhelming negative presence. They impose highly bureaucratic processes on institutions and people, and apply models with which teachers do not agree. The perception of the TPE process lacks significance for professional development and cannot be considered a procedure to enhance the overall quality of the university, as it fails to encourage cooperation and reflection. Despite being a voluntary process, it lacks credibility and leads to disillusionment and demotivation. Nonetheless, abstaining from it may hinder staff from assuming roles in research, supervision and examinations.

- *There's no conceptualisation of the meaning of teacher evaluation. In other words, teacher evaluation has remained a procedure that all universities have to do because there is an agency that asks for it (Spain-Interview 3).*
- *Well, the same thing, paperwork, that is, if the national agency is going to evaluate me or the regional agency is going to evaluate me, it's the same for both. Then there is the evaluation from the university through the DO-CENTIA programme, which has a more or less similar format. Everyone asks me the same thing but in different ways, which in the end means doing the same thing three or four times, wasting time to state the same thing (Spain-Interview 4).*

The Attributes of an Optimal Teacher Performance Evaluation Model

Regarding their proposals for the prospective and orientation of TPE (the second research question), the participants in both countries advocate for a more comprehensive and collaborative evaluation model, mainly of a qualitative nature and with developmental purposes.

- *There has to be more than one way to do it, right? Egalitarian (...) For us to have a good teacher evaluation model it's also necessary to let the teacher reflect on his or her own practice. A teacher can't reflect on his or her own practice if he or she has 500 students, teaches eight different classes and well, I'm exaggerating, but he or she has a lot of classes and mentors 90 final undergraduate degree projects... that doesn't work (Spain-Interview 2).*
- *If it stimulates anything, it encourages the proliferation of products, whether they're written, events or other forms, including project coordination, recruitment and funding. I perceive a certain fragmentation, an attempt to cast the net as widely as possible, a certain productivity (Portugal-Interview 11).*

In this sense, one of the issues that seems to be more dubious is the nature of the attributions or competencies of academics. It is worth noting a comment made by a participant in the Spanish context:

- *One of the key issues we should reconsider and analyse is what teachers are today, what it means to be a teacher in today's world, and from there, look at how other types of training could be carried out, etc., without being conditioned by whether that forces hiring more or fewer faculty in this way or another (...) what they are measuring at the university is how many patents you have, how many products in the market, and then we go to a type of knowledge that values that (Spain-Interview 9).*

Similarities in Teacher Performance Evaluation

The results reveal a coinciding impact of performativity processes concerning teaching identity in both contexts (research question three). There are commonalities in its aims, ascribed meanings and impact, as demonstrated in an earlier study on Portugal (Gómez Sánchez & Moreira, 2020): *teacher assessment performance policies are associated with neoliberal and performative purposes, instead of developmental ones.*

The TPE process is not regarded as an evaluation aimed at improving teaching. Nor does it allow – based on the perspective of the participants in both Spain and Portugal – reflection on teaching practice. The markedly quantitative measurement and quantification processes are accompanied by

significant pressure and a strong sense of demand or loneliness that negatively impact working conditions.

- *I believe it is recognised that we have a competitive career, and there's a lot of competition from peers, which is very significant because, let's say, it doesn't stop affecting us. I have little doubt that the performance evaluation affects research centres, because it puts a lot of pressure on the people who assume the coordination – the research group's coordination, project coordination – and they end up putting a lot of pressure on their colleagues, because we know that if the centre is not doing well, that is very negative for us, it has tremendously negative consequences (Portugal-Interview 11).*
- *The negative part is that perhaps it can't be any better due to the circumstances. The high demand could also be seen as positive; the demand, but above all, I think it's the negative part that bothers people, the demand that could be a stimulus, it's the loneliness. I believe it's a job that, well, depending on the times when it affects you, can precisely be characterised by a bit of isolation if you're not part of groups, of research, or if you're not integrated into many groups. What could be a stimulus can turn into, well, a barrier (Spain-Interview 5).*

This is highly limited by the evaluation procedures themselves, such as completing an assessment form in Portugal. The procedures stand out as being very similar in both contexts. All of the surveyed teachers, whether espousing an evaluation paradigm in which excellence is prioritised or whether against evaluation altogether, consider that the procedures are inadequate, that they are time consuming and inaccurate:

- *The way I see the performance evaluation process at this university is as a more bureaucratic process of filling out documents. Very exhausting, very tiring. It's not very efficient (Portugal-Interview 17).*
- *I know that DOCENTIA exists, but I've never participated in it. Why? Well, because, in the end, it seems like a lot of time investment, perhaps in a very bureaucratic way, and I prefer to dedicate that time to teaching (Spain-Interview 6).*

In this regard, it is worth noting a lack of consensus among the teachers in Portugal and a lack of clarity regarding the purpose and goals of the performance evaluation process:

- *However, we also cannot overlook the fact that our Education Sciences community is built on the assertion of differences and similarities, with similarities being emphasised internally and differences externally. This*

dialectical affirmation entails an important dynamic that must be understood (Portugal-Interview 6).

- *Evaluation policies are also complex because there is a varied understanding of these policies. I'm in favour of an evaluation process, but the challenge lies in finding a process that's both comprehensive and suitable for the different professors working at the university (Portugal-Interview 9).*
- *(...) this is a process that began relatively recently at the university; we've only had two evaluation cycles so far, and we concluded the third evaluation cycle in 2018. When we question the purpose of this process, there's some difficulty in understanding its significance, and many teachers are asking themselves about it, because an evaluation process should be seen as an opportunity for professional development. The truth is, I don't have much faith in this process (Portugal-Interview 10).*

Ultimately, the participants in both countries reveal a distortion of university evaluation policies with the current measurement parameters and indicators, affecting their identity as university educators and, consequently, their professional development.

- *What happens is that, as it's currently formulated, there's a link between the evaluation and additional payment. Faculty tend to devalue the evaluation goals as all they want is the monetary bonus (Spain-Interview 3).*
- *And then, supposedly, the departments have to follow up on that (...) I don't know if the follow-up is actually done or not. What happens is, isn't it mandatory for those who undergo it? Consequently, in the end, I don't know the percentage, but only a few teachers undergo it, and the rest don't evaluate themselves either, which I think affects its quality (Spain-Interview 4).*
- *This isn't legally recognised, but everyday practices are creating a gap between research and teaching, and I don't know what the consequences of this will be, but it'll have a significant impact, because we'll mainly have a university divided between those who attract money because of research, where the money is, and teaching, which is undervalued. In the performance evaluation, there's a part that asks students what they think of our work, but from my point of view, that's not very reliable (Portugal-Interview 7).*

Discussion

This section facilitates a comparison between the two countries. The primary contribution of this work is to serve as a tool to reconsider teacher evaluation procedures, within the scope of university autonomy, as one of the cornerstones of the university's development, alongside the student body and the administrative support staff. It is worth reflecting on whether such developments are facilitating institutional improvement or, conversely, negatively impacting teachers' professional performance. Based on the results, it is evident that, in both countries, the accountability measures are negatively affecting the professional performance of teachers. This influence is particularly notable in the engineering of their curriculum, where efforts are made to align the presented merits with the requirements of evaluation.

With these results, we can affirm that there is a clear similarity in the perception of teachers in the area of education with regard to the processes of TPE and their influence on the professional identity of teachers. The regulatory tools to explicitly commodify academic work have been established based on measurement criteria and research productivity. This issue has been addressed in various studies conducted across geographically diverse locations at different times and stages of development, with all of these studies yielding similar conclusions (Black et al., 2023; Brøgger 2016; Campillay, 2022; Martin-Sardesai et al., 2016; Poutanen, 2023). Following Poutanen (2023) and McCarty et al. (2016), the logic of quantification is affecting the academic community and its labour conditions. Despite differences in the nature and process of TPE, an ideal evaluation model would be one that is more democratic and qualitative, that provides a genuine professional development model, that is more comprehensive, and that promotes collaboration among peers (Gómez & Moreira, 2020; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, in both Spain and Portugal, teachers also find it very difficult to propose an alternative model; they advance proposals, but are sceptical about their practical applicability.

Teachers do not feel that they are participating, or that they are part of a process geared towards enhancing the professional capital of the organisation in both countries (Ball, 2012, 2016; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), as most teachers experience tensions between their beliefs and representations (Ball, 2003). As shown by the interviews from both countries, it is clear that teachers do not believe in the evaluation model. They express concerns about the transparency and justice of the procedures and how they will impact their career. Moreover, teachers clearly express their disagreement with the neoliberal agenda of this model and the way its dynamics have affected their professional development.

We have evidence of how TPE mechanisms may hinder teacher professional development in the higher education institutions studied, but there is also evidence regarding the convergence of assessment policies that fuel a global, performative teacher evaluation model as a result of the presence of benchmarking mechanisms in the public sector (Hayes & Cheng, 2020; Williamson et al., 2020).

The policies for evaluating teacher performance in higher education have an impact on the quality of teaching and on teachers' professional development. There is therefore a need to analyse how the institutionalisation and professionalisation of academic research materialised in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and how the new forms of public management have determined the professionalisation and evaluation of teaching performance from the perspective of academics (Martin-Sardesai et al., 2016).

As described by Shinkfield and Stufflebeam (1995), the collection and analysis of information is needed to render a value judgment geared towards process optimisation. Since university teachers do not perceive the TPE as contributing to optimisation, it is essential to question whether it is a genuinely systematic process. If it is to be understood as such, its effectiveness should be complemented by institutional improvement measures involving all stakeholders within the academic community and focusing on the resources and working conditions in which the community operates (Stake et al., 2011).

The present study focused on the real consequences of TPE in teachers' subjectivities, showing how they perceive the aims and processes of the TPE models in place in national systems. The results show that these processes are hindering the creation of fairer and more equitable evaluation scenarios in higher education, as TPE is established as a quantifiable and accountability process, rather than as an instrument to improve higher education staff as teachers, or to improve the organisation as a whole.

Conclusion

The comparative approach serves to analyse the incidence of supranational policies in Southern Europe, following research that shows a lack of comparative studies of these countries (Nóvoa, 2018). It provides a first approximation to the impact of TPE and seeks alternatives based on the teachers' perceptions, as the hegemonic power of the supranational reforms carried out within the framework of the EHEA has been implanted invisibly (Brøgger, 2019). Working from the perspectives of teachers themselves and their perceptions opens up alternative possibilities to academic capitalism.

The present study highlights differences and similarities in the way teacher performance evaluation is perceived by teachers in two universities, despite their differing contexts and teaching experience. Although different teacher evaluation frameworks exist, the participants highlight the prevalence of a neoliberal, market-centric model (Ball, 2003, 2012) that prioritises economic and accountability objectives, sidelining professional growth. There is evidence of the presence of a supranational perspective that impacts the national TPE models in place. Notwithstanding the different national procedures for and outcomes of TPE, there is evidence of a trend of deskilling and deprofessionalisation of the teaching profession (Smith, 2014), which seems to match a trend in the domestication of the academic workforce that conforms to the status quo (Brøgger, 2019; Giroux, 2014).

Returning to our main research question (*How do supranational policies determine teachers' working conditions in different higher education contexts?*), examining the way teachers' work is evaluated provides clues to what really matters: teachers' teaching performance is aligned with neoliberal, market-oriented European educational and economic strategies. The present study evidences the fact that supranational policies have been accompanied by individualism and isolation of the academic community within the new managerialism agenda. In this context, irreconcilable thoughts and logics based on competitiveness – emphasising individualism, rivalry and fragmentation instead of solidarity, humanity and unity – have become ingrained. This facilitates the reinforcement of neoliberal ideologies and the principles of new public management. In Shah-jahan's words (2020): "shame logics find fertile ground and manifest precisely because academics individualize 'struggles' and 'drowning' in light of temporal norms enforced by neoliberal performativity" (p. 790).

A system that generates this agenda and its operating logics encourages competitiveness within artificial collaboration cultures that do not allow for the generation of alternatives to existing imbalances and inequalities in the education system (Ball, 2012, 2016). In order to be truly democratic, the evaluation process must take into account teachers' voices and its impact on their professional identity (Fox, 2021), rather than fuelling feelings of alienation (McCarty et al., 2016; Poutanen, 2023).

More is needed to question the spaces for knowledge creation in this context. With these TPE models in place, to what extent does the academy have the freedom to generate knowledge in connection with the social reality (Martin-Sardesai, 2016)? To what extent are higher education teachers building their identity away from the boundaries established by their evaluation? Or are they subordinated to the neoliberal demands of a scientific publication

market? Following Santos (2014), it is necessary for science to have a global vision, based on epistemological diversity, heterogeneity and the free construction of knowledge in order to develop inclusive frameworks that are oriented towards the fight against social inequalities, which is a critical endeavour in the education field.

To conclude, recognising the limitations of the study associated with the sole focus of the analysis on the viewpoints of experts from specific knowledge domains within higher education institutions, it is vital to broaden the involvement of scholars from diverse fields. Moreover, it is crucial to integrate a gender perspective and consider how variations may emerge due to structural aspects in TPE, as well as through cultural and social class influences.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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