

The Prêmio Escola Nota Dez (PENDez)¹ – an instrument to reduce educational inequalities in child literacy

O Prêmio Escola Nota Dez (PENDez) – um instrumento de combate às desigualdades educacionais na alfabetização infantil

Maria Océlia Mota*

Diego Mota**

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the role of the *Programa de Aprendizagem na Idade Certa* [Program for Appropriate Age Learning] (Paic) in relation to educational inequalities in elementary schools in Ceará State, Brazil, since 2007, when its implementation began. The focus of this study is the *Prêmio Escola Nota Dez* (PENDez) [Grade A school prize], an instrument to induce public action used to reward and to allocate financial support to public schools based in cut-off points established by the state's assessment system. This study is based on a qualitative approach, with the analysis of interviews, visits to schools, documentary research and data from national and state educational assessments. The theoretical foundation is based on the instrumentation of public action and bureaucratic agencies. The data analyzed indicate that all 184 municipalities of Ceará reached the ideal level of literacy in state assessments in 2019. According to the most recent indicators, Ceará's educational policies to combat child illiteracy are promising. The results of

1 Translation by Thayna Pinheiro Ferreira. E-mail: thaynapf@outlook.com

Research financed by the *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* [Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel] (CAPES) and the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* [National Council for Scientific and Technological Development] (CNPq).

* Secretaria Municipal da Educação de Duque de Caxias. Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. E-mail: oceliamota@gmail.com - <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3927-6261>

** Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil. E-mail: diegomota@cp2.g12.br - <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5279-8630>

these policies have been effective in reducing educational inequalities in elementary schools in Ceará, which stands out among Brazilian states with successful experiences in public education.

Keywords: Educational inequality. Policy implementation. *Prêmio Escola Nota Dez*. Public action instrumentation.

RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar o papel do Programa de Aprendizagem na Idade Certa (Paic), em relação às desigualdades educacionais nos anos iniciais do ensino fundamental no estado do Ceará, desde o início de sua realização em 2007. O foco da pesquisa é direcionado ao Prêmio Escola Nota Dez (PENDez), um instrumento de indução da ação pública usado para premiar as escolas que alcançam os melhores resultados, ao mesmo tempo que bonifica as escolas com os menores resultados na avaliação externa estadual do segundo, quinto e nono anos do ensino fundamental. O estudo fundamenta-se numa abordagem qualitativa, com o uso de entrevistas, visitação às escolas, pesquisa documental e dados de avaliações educacionais nacionais e estaduais. O referencial teórico tem como base a instrumentação da ação pública e as agências burocráticas. Os dados analisados indicam que todos os 184 municípios do estado alcançaram o nível desejável de alfabetização nas avaliações de monitoramento em 2019. De acordo com os mais recentes indicadores educacionais, o Ceará tem alcançado uma posição de destaque no país, o que evidencia o sucesso de suas políticas no combate às desigualdades educacionais dos anos iniciais do ensino fundamental, colocando-se na vanguarda entre os estados com experiências exitosas na educação pública.

Palavras-chave: Desigualdades educacionais. Implementação de políticas. Prêmio Escola Nota Dez. Instrumentação da ação pública.

Introduction

When I lived in São Paulo and mentioned this little town in the hinterland, people thought I was joking:

“Is it on the map?”

Now it is! Ceará municipalities have started to exist in Brazil, despite the area's deficits and poverty. Owing to the educational results at state and national levels, we started to be seen because our Ideb has grown.

I remember that in 2007 we were among the thirty worst, with all Crede² above us [...]. Then, I went to Fortaleza for a training program. Paic's General Coordination called me, she got the total number of second grade students in our town and compared to other cities with similar number of habitants and students.

She looked at me and said:

“Antonina do Norte with 130 second grade students? What are you and your team doing there?”

I wanted to cry! But I thought “it's not only up to me! We were in 158th place.”

In 2014, we were among the top 10 in the state and the first from Crede.

Usually, the towns with more resources get first place. We were at the end of the tunnel. When the Paic's General Coordinator saw me, she said:

“Now it's raining in Inhamuns!”

“See? The hinterland has become the sea!”

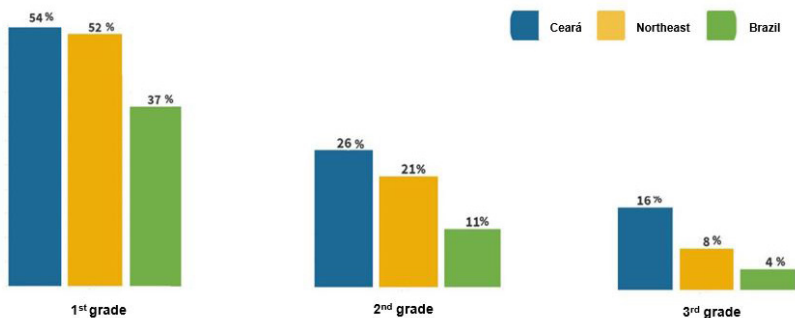
(statement from the First Paic Manager from Antonina do Norte – research data, our translation)

The manager's statement depicts the harsh educational reality of a small town in Ceará during the initial implementation years of the *Programa Aprendizagem na Idade Certa* [Program for Appropriate Age Learning] (Paic). The report describes the educational situation of Antonina do Norte, which was similar to dozens of towns in Ceará in 2007, a benchmark of Paic's actions in this state. In this context, small and medium towns in Ceará have begun to take over Paic's instruments of implementation to tackle illiteracy and limitations regarding children's learning process in the first years of elementary school.

In order to achieve the intended goals, the formulators of the educational policy have adopted two fundamental instruments as mechanisms for financial induction: the *Prêmio Escola Nota Dez* [Grade A school prize] (PENDez) and tax incentives to the town. These tools reflect how governments control the actions of their implementing officials in its several levels and tiers. Therefore, these tools direct the interaction of different actors involved in the policy implementation and induce their behavior.

It is worth mentioning that Ceará was one of the first states to encourage the municipalization of elementary school as an immediate and expedite measure as of 1998. This initiative entailed a “significant rise in municipal enrollment associated with two variables: the addition of new students to the school system and the transfer of students from state to municipal schools” (NASPOLINI, 2011, p. 422, our translation). Thus, three years later the municipalities accounted for 92.1% of elementary school demand while the state only accounted for 7.9%, being responsible mostly for the high school demand. In spite of that, the state had one the highest illiteracy rates in the country in the first years of elementary school in 2007 according to Graph 1.

GRAPH 1 – RATES OF ILLITERACY IN SCHOOLS IN THE FIRST YEARS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN BRAZIL, IN THE NORTHEAST REGION AND IN THE STATE OF CEARÁ IN 2007.



SOURCE: Produced by the authors based on data from Pnad 2007 (BRASIL, 2007).

In 2007 those rates were 54%, 26% e 16% for the first, second and third years of elementary school, respectively. The data from the *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílios* [National Household Sample Survey] (Pnad) should be highlighted as it indicates that 16% of state students got to the third year of the cycle without being properly literate (BRASIL, 2009).

PENDez was created in 2009 aiming at boosting Paic’s actions in literacy and fostering adherence of municipal managers and schools to the policy. The program proposes to award the schools with the best results in a state wide-scale evaluation, the *Sistema Permanente de Avaliação da Educação Básica do Ceará* [Permanent System of Evaluation of Basic Education from Ceará] (Spaee). At the same time, PENDez also aids schools with inferior performances through a pedagogical and financial support system striving for the improvement of their

results. Besides, the project outlines partnerships between award-winning and supported schools, resulting in an efficient tool to induce public action.

Although it is a meritocratic policy, PENDez is also an initiative with potential to promote equality among schools. For over ten years, external national evaluations have highlighted how the ongoing policy has been an important action aimed at reducing educational inequalities in the state (CALDERÓN; RAQUEL; CABRAL, 2015). Considering these observations, this study aims to describe and analyze these results based on the references from the *Índice do Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* [The Basic Education Development Index] (Ideb), from the *Avaliação Nacional da Alfabetização* [National Assessment of Alphabetization] (ANA), state assessments and interviews with officials who are implementing this policy. Through that data, we hope to argue how a public action instrument – PENDez – has been used to fight child illiteracy in Ceará.

Besides this introduction, the paper is organized in five sections. The next one details the background of educational policies in Ceará: Paic and PENDez, specifically. After that, the third and fourth sections introduce the theoretical and methodological references which underline this research, focusing on the literature about public action instrumentation. The fifth section analyses the results from Spaece-Alfa and Ideb about the first years of elementary school over the last decade. It is argued how PENDez has been used by the government to encourage municipalities and its schools to join Paic and address strategies for their dedication in order to achieve better results, which led to significant developments in the state's fight against illiteracy in a bit less than a decade. Finally, in the sixth section we bring forward our final remarks on the analysis.

The *Prêmio Escola Nota Dez* in the scope of Paic

Known for elaborating public policies with positive results, Ceará oversees the development of external educational assessment since its first experiences in the country. The state was one of the pioneers in the field when it developed its own assessment system, Spaece, two years after the creation of *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica* [The National Education Assessment System] (Saeb), in 1990.

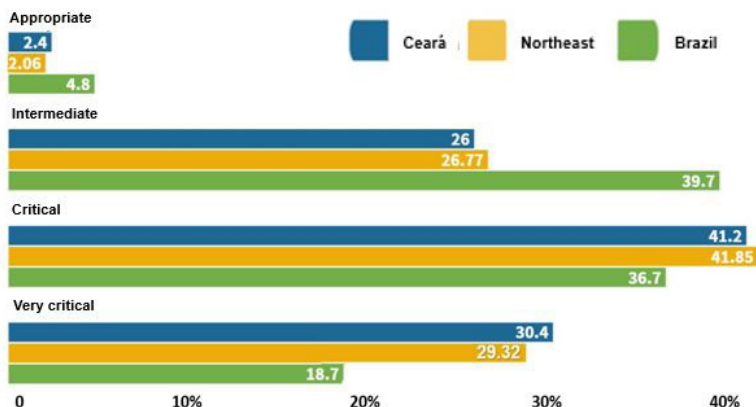
Founded experimentally in 1992, Spaece is similar to Saeb in structure, according to Lima (2007). That layout allowed a comparative reading of its

results and relevant aspects in evaluations of this nature. For Vieira (2007), it is about an innovation with great potential to reverse the current culture of school failure. In that sense, it was an important step towards its improvement as “for the first time in the state, tools were used to help the school see its own performance, identifying weaknesses and strengths” (VIEIRA, 2007, p. 51, our translation).

The first Portuguese language evaluations done by Saeb and Spacee highlighted that state students got to the fourth grade of elementary school (currently fifth grade) with severe literacy issues, leading to consequences in the following stages of education. These negative results denounced limitations in public education from Ceará and raised awareness of authorities and the civil society in order to create policies aiming at improving the quality of students’ learning.

In 2003, results from Saeb indicated the degree of the state’s school failure as it identified that more than 70% of students assessed in Portuguese in the fourth grade (currently fifth grade) showed competences lower than expected. This data demonstrates that 26% of these students were at an intermediate level and only 2,4% at an appropriate level (BRASIL, 2006a). Analyzing graph 2, it is possible to see that Ceará presented similar results compared to other states in the Northeast region and it was bellow Brazil’s average in that year’s Saeb.

GRAPH 2 – PERCENTAGE OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (CURRENTLY FIFTH GRADE) IN THE DEVELOPING STAGES OF COMPETENCES IN PORTUGUESE FROM SAEB (2003).

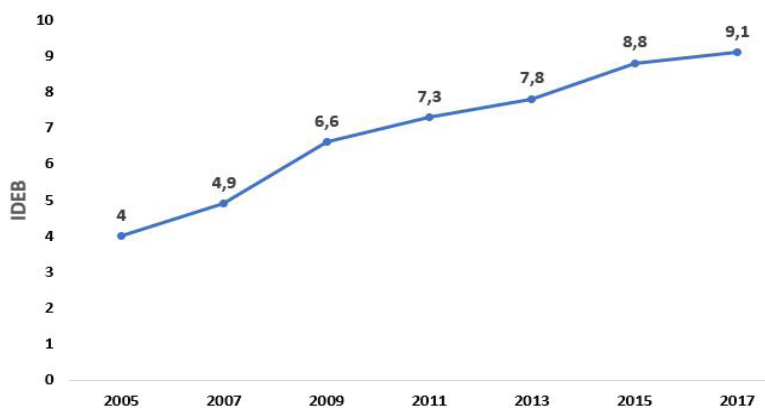


SOURCE: Produced by the authors based on data from Saeb 2003 (BRASIL, 2016a).

It is worth remarking the municipality of Sobral, which started some experiments in 2000 implementing educational policies focusing on literacy

when 3.8% of their children and teenagers were illiterate. According to the Demographic Census and School Census (BRASIL, 2000), functional illiterate students were a total of 39.6% of the population. In 2001, the age/grade distortion rates in initial years were 32% and dropout was 6.74% in this town. The initiatives developed to improve these indices were elaborated based on three pillars: the shifts in pedagogical practice, the strengthening of school's autonomy and monitoring of learning results. The data of Ideb's evolution in this town, described in graph 3, shows how the results of the educational policy were promising between the years 2005 and 2017.

GRAPH 3 – EVOLUTION OF IDEB IN THE TOWN OF SOBRAL BETWEEN 2005 AND 2017



SOURCE: Produced by the authors based on data from Saeb (BRASIL, 2021).

Due to these positive results, the successful experience in Sobral was the reference for the state to develop educational policies to fight school failure (CEARÁ, 2012). In that context, child illiteracy was a problem to be overcome in all municipalities of the state.

Analyzing Sobral's educational policy, the researcher Orosinda Goulart³ came to the following conclusion:

³ Orosinda Maria Taranto Goulart was the Director of *Tratamento e Disseminação de Informações Educacionais Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira* [Treatment and Spreading of Educational Information in the Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Research] (2004-2007).

It is necessary to pay attention and follow the progress of what is happening there. And, at the same time, it is paramount that we identify other innovations, which are certainly changing the face of education in this unknown part of Brazil (BRASIL, 2005, p. 12, our translation).

The positive results of Sobral in literacy have caught the attention of the state public management and its efficacy was selected as a goal to be achieved in the state and it inspired the creation of the *Programa de Alfabetização na Idade Certa*. This model was proposed to the municipalities which were interested in joining the project (CEARÁ, 2012).

As a consequence of that action and the union with different society organizations, public managers assembled the *Comitê Cearense para a Eliminação do Analfabetismo Escolar* [Cearence Committe for the Eradication of School Illiteracy] (CCEAE) in 2004. The goal of this organization was to run a learning diagnosis exam among students, look for joint solutions to face the causes of the problem and overcome the educational limitations in the state.

In that sense, the Committee has developed three lines of research, which have resulted in a document called “*Relatório Final do Comitê Cearense para a Eliminação do Analfabetismo Escolar*” [Final Report of the Cearence Committee for the Eradication of School Illiteracy]. The research’s results were broadly published and debated. As a consequence, they have furthered great social mobilization aimed at solving the issue. In this context, Paic was created, through law number 14.026 of December 17th in 2007 (CEARÁ, 2007), in order to support the municipalities from Ceará in improving the quality of education, reading and writing in initial series of elementary school.

The program was planned with participation of different actors and institutions having the principle of collaboration as one of its pillars. The regime of collaboration adopted between state and municipalities was fundamental for a successful experience in elaborating the policy.

Monitoring the trajectory of collaboration policies from Ceará, Vieira e Vidal stress out that

although it has grown strong from the Maintenance and Development fund for Elementary School and Appreciation of Teaching, the sharing of responsibilities in the education offer in Ceará is far prior to the Constitution to 1988 (VIEIRA; VIDAL, 2013, p. 1082, our translation).

In that sense, with an educational proposal based on social mobilization and in previous experiences, agents involved had a path to “increase efforts to build a collaboration regime through the founding of a pact that guarantees the development of converging policies around a democratic, high quality, sustainable public school” (NASPOLINI, 2001, p. 85, our translation).

Paic was projected to guarantee students’ learning at an appropriate age. Therefore, one of the reasons for the program is to fight educational inequality brought out by the School Census of 2006: one in four students enrolled in the initial years of elementary school (1st to 5th year) from public schools in Ceará was late at school by two years or more (BRASIL, 2006b).

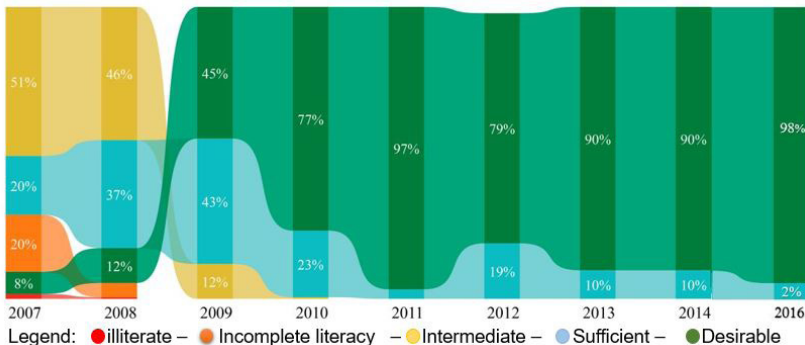
Still according to the School Census (BRASIL, 2006b), failure rates for initial grades of elementary schools were 14.7%; the dropout rate was 8.8% and the approval rate was 76.5%. These results highlight the transparency of educational inequalities in the state and reveal the precariousness of a school system which needed to be reverted by efficient measures.

Aiming at solving the illiteracy issue through the actions of Paic, Ceará has become a pioneer in implementing educational policies locally. To achieve that goal technical support was offered to municipalities with a set of actions structured into five axes: Literacy; Municipal educational management; Primary school; Children’s literature and Reader formation; and External evaluation. Afterwards, in 2015, the axes were modified and amplified to six, including Elementary School, besides Primary School and Integral Education. Therefore, the program’s organization in axes was developed in order to integrate the essential pillars of basic education and reach its goals.

Two years after the program’s implementation, state government has added two financial incentive tools with the intention to encourage, even more, the adherence of municipal and school managers to the policy: one of them is shares of the *Imposto sobre Circulação de Mercadorias e Serviços* [Tax on the Circulation of Merchandise and Services] (ICMS), law number 29,306 from June 05th 2008 (CEARÁ, 2008) and the next is *Prêmio Escola Nota Dez (PENDez)*, the focus of the in this study.

The results of the assessment which monitored students learning through the implementation of the policy are promising, as it can be observed in Graph 4. Its effects indicate there has been an expressive growth in the percentage of municipalities presenting improvement in students’ proficiency in reading and writing at Spaaece-Alfa (assessment performed in the 2nd year of the cycle) between 2007 and 2016.

GRAPH 4 – EVOLUTIONARY PERCENTAGE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN THE STATE OF CEARÁ FOR THE PROFICIENCY LEVELS ASSESSED BY SPAECE-ALFA FOR SECOND GRADE STUDENTS OF ELEMENTAR SCHOOL BETWEEN 2007 AND 2016



SOURCE: Elaborated by the authors based on data from Spaece-Alfa/Seduc-Ce (CEARÁ, 2020b).

According to the data, only 7% of municipalities (14 out of 184) were at the desirable rate in the Spaece-Alfa assessment in 2007. However, when PENDez was implemented, in 2009, there was a great shift in the performance board of the municipalities. In that year, none of them were at the inferior levels (Incomplete Literacy and Illiterate) and almost 90% reached the levels Sufficient and Desirable. In 2011, the state no longer had any municipalities below the Sufficient level and 97% had already reached the Desirable level. Between 2015 and 2016, the state had 98% (180 out of 184) of the municipalities at the Sufficient level (CEARÁ, 2020a).

A uniqueness of the Prize is the fact that it is a collaboration policy developed through a partnership system between award-winning and supported schools. 150 schools that reached the best positions of IDE-Alfa⁴ adopt 150 schools which occupy the last positions. For two years, these institutions must establish a partnership, carrying out actions promoting technical and pedagogical cooperation aiming at maintaining or improving results in students' learning.

⁴ The School Performance Index in the 2nd grade of elementary school considers, besides the standard average of proficiency at schools, the students' participation rates in the assessment and the percentage of students in each proficiency level.

The prize consists of 2 thousand reais multiplied by the number of students assessed in the awarded school year (2nd, 5th and 9th grades). Aided schools also receive financial support of 50% of the prize money per student given to awarded schools. Therefore, there is financial aid for the implementation of the plan to improve students' literacy results.

According to some studies' results (BROKE; CUNHA, 2011; COELHO, 2013; CALDERÓN; RAQUEL; CABRAL, 2015; MOTA, 2018), the regional and local particularities of PENDez stand out because of: a) the conditions involved in the policy's outline; b) the institutional conditions and relationship established between schools and secretariats of education; c) tools to control and hold accountability for decisions taken by schools; d) influence of other bureaucratic levels, such as the role of Paic managers – agents from municipal secretariats of education, who affect the actions of principals and teachers during the implementation process; e) the results of incentives to the actions of different school agents involved in the implementation and possible changes to the exercise of discretion of principals and teachers or even the answer of those agents to the pressure from the state and from beneficiaries of the policy.

Methodology

The qualitative methodology proposed for this study is based on bibliographical, documental and analytical research based on data from Spacee and the School Census. The research also conducted semi structured interviews with agents in different levels of educational politics, besides visits to four pairs of partner schools which participated in the award in 2014 and 2016, located in three municipalities from the 18th *Coordenadoria Regional de Educação* [Regional Education Coordination] (CRE)⁵ in the region of Cariri.

The production of data happened during visits to the eight schools, between 2016 and 2017 and had the participation of principals, coordinators and teachers of the 2nd grade in award-winning and supported schools, besides the Municipal Managers of Paic and Municipal Secretaries of Education.

The criteria used for selecting schools was based on their results in PENDez and took into consideration geographical proximity between award-winning and supported schools in order to make it financially and logistically viable to make

5 Antonina do Norte, Juazeiro do Norte and Assaré.

visits and conduct the research. There are four pairs of schools: the supported ones are all located in the municipality called Crato and their respective award-winning schools are located in Assaré (64km away) and Antonina do Norte (79km away).

Different strategies to investigate the policy proposed for this research have the potential to contribute to the description of PENDez's characteristics and analysis of attitudes present in the implementation stages at partner schools. For that matter, the qualitative approach of this study considers that the trajectory and conformation of the implementation process are influenced by policy's characteristics. In turn, it is also affected by the structures and dynamics of organizational spaces, ideas, values and world views of the agents involved (BARROSO, 2006).

Thus, it is important to distinguish the role of implementing agents who act on the different levels and tiers of the policy of the award and Paic, when it comes to the literature of bureaucracies (LIPSKY, 2019): the principals, coordinators and Paic managers are responsible for intermediating the formulating phase and the implementing of policies; while teachers are the agents dealing directly with front line users, the students and their families.

Therefore, Paic managers, school principals and pedagogical coordinators are agents with a multitask profile – or hybrid agents. In Lotta and Pavez's (2009) perspective, those agents play the role of middleranking bureaucrats, mediators and policy implementing agents, but also of street bureaucrats, because they are also directly responsible for the delivery of the policy to its beneficiaries.

The regulation of education through the instrumentation of public action

The means of regulation in an educational system are “the set of mechanisms developed by educational authorities for orienting, coordinating and controlling the actions of the institutions, the professionals or the families” (MAROY, 2011, p. 19, our translation). According to Barroso (2005, p. 12, our translation), institutional regulation involves “two distinct, but interdependent, phenomena: the way rules are produced and applied to guide the agents' actions and the way those same agents take ownership of the rules and transform them”.

In the first case, it is about institutional, normative and controlling regulation related to the “set of actions decided and executed by an instance – government or hierarchy of an organization” (BARROSO, 2005, p. 13, our translation).

In the second case, when it refers to the ways agents take ownership of policies and transform them, Barroso describes a situational and autonomous regulation which is seen as an active production process of “game rules”. This regulation comprises the definition of guiding principles for the system to function and its adjustments caused by strategies and actions developed by agents because of these rules.

The diverse institutional arrangements defined, promoted or authorized by the State are also part of the regulation. For this reason, rules and laws proclaimed by public authorities, discretionary power given to local authorities and the devices for fixing, coordinating and controlling are some ways of regulation which contribute to coordinate and guide the actions of agencies and their agents through their limitations and distribution of resources (BARROSO, 2005).

Such perspectives are pointed out by literature as new approaches to public management which not only improve the social contract. For Oliveira (2011, p. 83, our translation), “they also embody a set of relationships which vest in the individual particular capacities and abilities”. It’s about creating a new form of relationship between

State and civil society, called partnership, in which the involvement and engagement of social agents, in the individual and collective levels, are sought after, aiming at finding local solutions for problems which are, mostly, a general issue (OLIVEIRA, 2011, p. 83, our translation).

In this context, the concept of public action may indicate the multitude and diversity of agents who take part in the process, as it explores the composite character of agents involved in the implementing of public policies. Therefore, through the hierarchy of these agents, it is possible to highlight the relativity of the impact in the moment of political decision making, then non-linearity of execution of processes and the fragmented and flexible character of public action (OLIVEIRA, 2011).

In this theoretical field, Barroso (2011, p. 104, our translation) considers that the analysis of “*instrumentos de ação pública*” [public action tools] (IAPs) is essential in order to describe “how change in public policies is developed and the roles which are played by new regulation tools in the reorganization of the State and its forms of government”. Among the different types of instruments in public action, the author emphasizes the “good practices” as one of the strongest expressions of policies based on evidence. Because of that,

an instrument of public action constitutes a device which is both technical and social and organizes the specific social relationships between public power and its receivers due to the representation and meaning it carries (BARROSO, 2011, p. 200, our translation).

Depending on the chosen instruments, then, the social and political agents develop capacities and actions in different ways.

The concept of IAP, supported by Lascoumés and Le Galès, “allows us to move beyond functionalist approaches, to see public policy from the angle of the instruments that structure policies” (LASCOURMÉS; LE GALÈS, 2007, p. 21, our translation). For that reasons, conducting an investigative approach supported by IAP might be an advisable path for the analysis of public policy as it takes into consideration multiple dimensions which would otherwise be overlooked.

The prize as an instrument for public action

Born in Paic’s scope under the Law number 14,371 from June 19th 2009 (CEARÁ, 2009), PENDez has as one of its main goals the exchange of “good practices” among partner schools, as they are evidence based instruments. The recourse to practices based on evidence as instruments of regulation seeks to introduce a new type of knowledge to the policy and to teachers’ work. This path “is considered by its promoters as more scientific than state-owned; more pragmatic than ideological; more technical than political; more practical than theoretical; closer to teachers and schools than bureaucrats and administrations” (BARROSO, 2011, p. 108, our translation).

Aiming at analyzing the uses of assessment policies in large scale in Brazil, Brooke and Cunha (2011) characterize PENDez as a policy which can be fit in three fundamental categories as instruments of public action: a) as a tool for control and management, because the award is linked to the results of the Portuguese exam from Spaece-Alfa aiming at strengthening, valuing and amplifying the work done by schools in the literacy area; b) to allocate resources, one of the aspects which most expresses the relationship between assessment and educational management in the *Prêmio Escola Nota Dez*; and c) as a policy of incentive for salaries which can encourage teachers to be more concerned about students’ results and also reduce the risk of schools focusing on award-winning grades and overlooking the others.

That way, the search for good performances in Spaece-Alfa (2nd grade) and Spaece (5th and 9th grades) exams and the consequent award have become one of the main goals for schools and Secretariats of Education. According to the research done by Calderón, Raquel and Cabral (2015), these actions occurred to promote students' leveling in terms of learning (academic support), use of mock tests, use of descriptors and methodologies and active pedagogical practices in the classroom. These results have also been identified in the current analysis of interviews with educational agents. Converging in that sense, the use of descriptors, academic support after school hours, the shift in pedagogical methodologies and the use of mock tests are central ideas revealed in the highlighted interviews:

During visits, they [Paic's team] ran diagnostics with students, watched our classes, saw how we were using the descriptors in the classroom. You have the descriptors in mind, making the classroom an environment for literacy, always developing the descriptors so that students know how to answer when Paic's team arrive (Coordinator at Award-winning School 2, our translation).

First, we change our work methodology a lot. When we see students are not learning, we change activities. I think we have been changing them a lot. When we know the group will be assessed that year, we try to work better and research new things in order to improve (Teacher 1 at Award-winning School 1, our translation).

We develop several actions as means to that end. First, there is the focus: elevate the level of students' learning, make them learn and become literate at the appropriate age. So, there is academic support after school hours. There is a daily routine which is followed by the coordination. Besides support, there is the matter of planning, which is really focused and happens weekly (Principal at Award-winning School 3, our translation).

With resources from the award, the school can give a better support to students through academic support and can buy paper, which is essential for work. With paper we can do mock tests monthly for all grades, even the first one, starting at the second semester. We get the easiest questions from the test and we put together a mock test first. So when they get to the second semester, and the teacher gives them the mock test, they are used to it – they say: I already know this question (Principal at Support School 2, our translation).

According to the interviews, school agents describe the use of PENDez in setting the direction for pedagogical actions aimed at elevating results in large scale assessments. Besides the improvement in the performance of supported schools in educational indexes, the set of reports from principals, coordinators and teachers interviewed show the prize as an instrument which enables public action with the intention to improve the quality of education in the state.

In this context, supported schools develop strategies trying to reach the policy's goals according to the analysis of the set of interviews scrutinized in this study. Among many innovations, these schools have started to guide their teachers more attentively when it comes to pedagogical matters. Therefore, teachers were encourage to elaborate projects and support classes for students who needed more help, such as the case of "Adopt a child", described in the interview bellow and developed in one of the schools in the study⁶.

From the moment onwards [the News of the school being supported], we, the management core, have started to carry out a closer monitoring. We took teachers out of their studying moment and started academic support with students who needed it more. We have created a project called "Adopt a child" and each teacher was responsible for two or three students in their classroom. And the studying moment was used to help those kids. We planned everything on planning day. Then, in everywhere there was a teacher with a student, in the library and etc (Coordinator from Supported School 4, our translation).

Considering the award as a tool for control and management, principals, coordinators and Paic agents act on that policy as mediators of the implementation process. To certify that norms are being followed, those agents play the role of following the implementation carried out by the front line agents.

In Assaré, developers have a monthly moment for training with teachers, after that they carry out a school monitoring to know how the routine is being followed. Visits to the school happen in turns because, since the routine is unified, it is believed that the work will be carried out similarly in the other schools and that supports the teachers when preparing for next month. Every couple months, the staff carries out a follow-up with students (Manager from Paic in Assaré, our translation).

⁶ At schools in Crato, teachers have the right to work outside of the classroom for one third of their hours, this can be used for planning or professional development at the school.

Therefore, when a teacher evades the established rule, those agents intervene among the teachers, through conversations and guidance in order ensure the fulfillment of the directions. These actions are the reason why PENDez is considered a top-down policy approach, which retrieve the State's role in the decision making process or public policy (LACOUSMES; LE GALÉS, 2012).

The partnerships in favor of equity proposed by this educational policy establish collaborative communication among schools selected by their merit and those classified by their low results. The exchange that occurs through asymmetrical relationships between award-winning and supported schools happen “in a mutual process of resignification [...], through the circulation of different agents in the diverse scenes that composed a determined public action” (BARROSO, 2011, p. 92, our translation).

The first thing we have to understand is that nobody knows it all. We always have something to learn and we need to be ready for innovations and to look for partnerships. [...] The partnership breaks that, because it is the first preconception that comes when we compare our city with the city who is supporting us, but when it comes to practice, we realize this wall doesn't exist. Education is education, in any part of Brazil. We have to be open to anything that is helpful and good (Principal at Supported School 3, our translation).

Tangibly, the circulation of good practices among educational institutions is what school managements claim to look for in the partnership. As expected, those actions are gaining new meanings in each school context through the action of their agents. According to the reports from interviewed coordinators, the planning of cooperative technical-pedagogical actions is built little by little based on the visits to the partner school. Through observation and talks with teachers, students, coordinators and principals, agents hope to get to know the reality of the partner schools and find practices and pedagogical experiences that may collaborate with their students' learning.

The theme of good practices, present in reports in many different categories of the school bureaucracy involved in the implementation of Paic and PENDez may be more easily understood in the light of Barroso's definition. According to the author, the “good practices” constitute a “regulation instrument”, which allows us “to introduce at the same time: a way of government; a pattern for investigation; a reference for teaching; a program for improvement; a device for assessment and a system for

provision of accounts” (BARROSO, 2011, p. 108, our translation). The set of dimensions involved in this regulation instrument enables the consolidation of “goals for the program for improvement of schools and for teachers’ development, whose priority is to identify what works and learn how to put it to practice” (BARROSO, 2011, p. 108-109, our translation).

To promote equity among partner schools, PENDez aims at reducing inequalities. To that end, the exchange of experiences and knowledge between schools becomes an instrument capable of mobilizing school agents through their collaborative actions with their partner.

Usually, “good practices” or “successful practices”, as the locals say it, are associate with “what Works”. In Barroso’s view (2011, p. 106, our translation), they anchor “a type of explicit knowledge (professional and organizational) and promote its circulation through ground agentes”. These exchanges of knowledge and professional practices are objective and stand out in the set of interviews carried out with agents from partner schools, as it is the case reported by the coordinator of one awarded school, who claimed to have contributed with ideas to improve students’ learning at the supported school.

When we go to the schools, following the visit schedule, we are planning. [...] The first visit is observation. In the following ones, we see material we can take for an exchange of experiences. One year we went to Acopiara and we had, for instance, developed some projects for the school throughout the year. I had a copy of the projects and I took all the suggestions from the projects we had carried out here. When they returned, they brought some really nice and well-structured material they had there. So, the plan is constructed little by little through those actions. Following each visit, we see what we can take to collaborate to the children’s learning (Coordinator at Award-winning School 1, our translation).

To that end, the award-winning school shared successful projects, with the intention that the partner school receives those ideas as a suggestion to be possibly developed. This qualitative cutout describes strategies outlined by the four pairs of schools to achieve the goals of the educational policy. The data translates into local actions and good practices resonating with positive evidence of the results from the monitoring assessment of students’ learning throughout the state.

Conclusions

Converging in the same direction to support with research data, the results from the *Avaliação Nacional de Alfabetização* [National Assessment of Literacy] (ANA – 2016) indicate that the average proficiency of cearense students in the 2nd grade in Reading (532.7) was higher than the regional (470.9) and national (507.5) averages (BRASIL, 2018a). This monitoring assessment highlighted that 35.5% of students were at the Desirable Reading level (3) and 19.3% were at the highest level (5) (BRASIL, 2018a). In the writing test, 61.6% of students were at level 4 (BRASIL, 2018a). About that, it is worth pointing out that the average proficiency in the state (511.6) was higher than the regional (471.3) and national (500) averages in the reading assessment (BRASIL, 2018a).

The data from the School Census also shows growth in the approval rates (from 90.6% to 97.3%) and reduction in the failure rates (from 7.9% to 2.4%) and dropout rates (from 1.6% to 0.3%) and age/grade disparity (from 21% to 8%) between 2010 and 2018 (BRASIL, 2018b). According to this data, there was significant improvement in external assessment results and school performance rates after the implementation of those policies in Ceará. To that extent, the frameworks may reflect actions from Paic and PENDez, which encourage investments to fosters students' attendance.

Besides that, according to indications from the documental research that was carried out, from the interviews with different agents and observations at selected schools for this study, there is evidence that regulations from Paic and PENDez influence the direction of actions from the implementing agents. The qualitative analysis of the research has shown that laws from this policy also motivate the effective participation of these agents in decision making at school and follow-up of planned actions.

Through its goals to value educational management focusing on students' learning, PENDez contributed to Paic reaching its goal of supporting municipalities to alphabetize students in the public school system by the end of the 2nd grade of elementary school and to efficiently fight the educational inequalities in literacy.

The implementation of Paic and creation of PENDez have promoted prosperous transformation in the development of cearense municipalities in large scale educational assessments in under a decade. Created in 2009 and as an incentive policy for Paic, PENDez awarded, initially, only schools with the best performances in the 2nd grade of elementary school and helped financially and pedagogically the schools with lower results. In 2011, the support and award

were extended to the 5th grade of elementary school. The same has happened with Paic's actions.

This program is now called Paic +5, extending the benefits of PENDez to six hundred schools annually. Due to this improvement and maintenance of good results of schools supported in alphabetization, only the award-winning schools continued to be contemplated by the 2nd grade policy, starting in 2015. That year, the state government also expanded the award and the support to the 9th grade, alongside Paic's actions, which was called Paic Mais.

In 2019, the results from Spaece-Alfa assessment showed that 184 municipalities in the state had reached the Desirable level in literacy. This transformation, throughout the years, in the municipalities' results also justify the interest in analyzing how the inclusion of PENDez in Paic's scope might have contributed for that.

The results from Ideb show the state has been gradually fighting school inequality. In the beginning of its measures, Ceará was in 21st place in the national scenario for the initial grades, with an Ideb of 2.8. Currently, the state stands out among the five best positions in the whole country for the initial grades in elementary school, with an Ideb of 6.1 in 2019.

Therefore, the interview analysis with implementing agents at different levels express local aspects and how they appropriate and transform the regulation means of the policy. In this specific study, reports highlight that instruments of public action adopted have positive inducing effects in the implementation process. Because of that, agents make decisions aiming at reaching positive results and contributing to the partner school in its challenges in the front line. Considering the positive results of the educational policy and the qualitative evidence of this study, it is possible to relate the improvement of educational indicators from Ceará to the instruments of public action used to that end.

Acknowledgements

To the first Paic manager from Antonina do Norte, Maria da Penha de Moraes, for the great contribution in the interviews. To the researcher, Maria Elizabete Ramos for the encouragement and theoretical support. To the researcher José Maurício Avilla Carvalho for the graphic contribution and theoretical review.

REFERENCES

- BARROSO, João. O estado, a educação e a regulação de políticas públicas. *Educação e Sociedade*, Campinas, v. 26, n. 92, p. 725-751, 2005. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/es/a/TVLjsSNcwYChwwYkxtGX7YD/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Accessed on: Apr. 14, 2020.
- BARROSO, João. *A Regulação das Políticas Públicas de Educação*. Espaços, dinâmicas e actores. Lisboa: EDUCA, Unidade de I&D de Ciências da Educação, 2006.
- BARROSO, João. Da política baseada no conhecimento às práticas baseadas em evidências. In: OLIVEIRA, Dalila; DUARTE, Adriana (org.). *Políticas públicas e educação: regulação e conhecimento*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2011. p. 91-116 .
- BRASIL. *Censo Escolar: Sinopse Estatística da Educação Básica*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2000.
- BRASIL. *Vencendo o desafio da aprendizagem nas séries iniciais: a experiência de Sobral/CE*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2005. (Série Projeto Boas Práticas na Educação, n. 1).
- BRASIL. *Relatório Nacional do SAEB 2003*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2006a.
- BRASIL. *Censo Escolar: Sinopse Estatística da Educação Básica*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2006b.
- BRASIL. *Censo Escolar: Sinopse Estatística da Educação Básica*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2007.
- BRASIL. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE). *Pesquisa nacional por amostra de domicílios*. Rio de Janeiro: IBGE, 2009.
- BRASIL. *Relatório Saeb/ANA 2016: panorama do Brasil e dos estados*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2018a.
- BRASIL. *Censo Escolar*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2018b.
- BRASIL. *Relatório de amostragem do Saeb 2019*. Brasília, DF: INEP, 2021.
- BROOKE, Nigel; CUNHA, Maria Amália. A avaliação externa como Instrumento da gestão educacional nos Estados. *Estudos & Pesquisas Educacionais*, São Paulo, v. 1, p. 17-79, 2011. Available at: http://www.educadores.diaadia.pr.gov.br/arquivos/File/pdf/avaliacao_externa_fvc.pdf. Accessed on: Apr. 21, 2020.
- CALDERÓN, Adolfo Ignacio; RAQUEL, Betânia; CABRAL, Eliane. O Prêmio Escola nota 10: meritocracia e cooperação para a melhoria do desempenho escolar. *Ensaio: avaliação e políticas públicas educacionais*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 23, n. 87, p. 517-540, 2015. Available at: <https://www.scielo.br/j/ensaio/a/DPjxq4D5TsyHknsygdLsNNS/abstract/?lang=pt#>. Accessed on: Apr. 21, 2020.
- CEARÁ. *Lei nº 14.026, de 17 de dezembro de 2007*. Cria o Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa – PAIC, de cooperação técnica e incentivo para melhoria dos indicadores de aprendizagem nos municípios cearenses e dá outras providências. Fortaleza: Governo

do Estado do Ceará, 2007. Available at: <https://leisestaduais.com.br/ce/lei-ordinaria-n-14026-2007-ceara-cria-o-programa-alfabetizacao-na-idade-certa-paic-de-cooperacao-tecnica-e-incentivo-para-melhoria-dos-indicadores-de-aprendizagem-nos-municipios-cearenses-e-da-outras-providencias>. Accessed on: Apr. 21, 2021.

CEARÁ. Decreto nº 29.306, de 05 de junho de 2008. Dispõe sobre os critérios de apuração dos índices percentuais destinados à entrega de 25% (vinte e cinco por cento) do icms pertencente aos municípios, [...], e dá outras providências. Fortaleza: Governo do Estado do Ceará, 2008. Available at: <https://www.legisweb.com.br/legislacao/?id=122804>. Accessed on: Oct. 19, 2021.

CEARÁ. Decreto nº 29.896, de 16 de setembro de 2009. Regulamenta a lei nº 14.371, de 19 de junho de 2009, que cria o Prêmio Escola Nota Dez e dá outras providências. *Diário Oficial do Estado*: Fortaleza, CE, ano I, n. 174, p. 7, 17 set. 2009.

CEARÁ. Secretaria de Educação. *Regime de colaboração para a garantia do direito à aprendizagem*: O Programa Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PAIC) no Ceará. Fortaleza: Secretaria da Educação; Fundo das Nações Unidas para a Infância, 2012.

CEARÁ. Bases de Dados das Avaliações do Spaece. *Resultado Spaece Alfa 2007-2016 (Ceade/Seduc)*. Fortaleza: SEDUC, 2020a. Available at: <https://www.seduc.ce.gov.br/resultado-spaeece-alfa/>. Accessed on: Feb. 15, 2020.

CEARÁ. Bases de Dados das Avaliações do Spaece. *Célula de Avaliação do Desempenho Acadêmico 2007-2019 (Ceade/Seduc)*. Fortaleza: SEDUC, 2020b. Available at: <https://www.seduc.ce.gov.br/resultado-spaeece-alfa/>. Accessed on: Jan. 18, 2020.

COELHO, Maria Izolda Cela de Arruda. *Rede de cooperação entre escolas*: uma ação no âmbito do Pacto de Avaliação na Idade Certa – PAIC. 2013. Dissertação (Mestrado Profissional em Gestão e Avaliação da Educação Pública) – Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Juiz de Fora, 2013.

LASCOUMÉS, Pierre; Patrick, LE GALÈS. A ação pública abordada pelos seus instrumentos. *Revista Pós Ciências Sociais*, São Luís, v. 9, n. 18, p. 19-44, 2012.

LIMA, Alessio Costa. *O Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica do Ceará (SPAECE) como expressão da política pública de avaliação educacional do estado*. 2007. Dissertação (Mestrado em Políticas Públicas e Sociedade) – Centro de Estudos Sociais Aplicados, Universidade Estadual do Ceará, Fortaleza, 2007.

LIPSKY, Michael. *Burocracia em nível de rua*: dilemas do indivíduo nos serviços públicos. Brasília: Enap, 2019.

LOTTA, Gabriela Spanghero Lotta; PAVEZ, Thais Regina. Agentes de implementação: mediação, dinâmicas e estruturas relacionais. *Cadernos Gestão Pública e Cidadania*, São Paulo, v. 15, n. 56, p. 109-125, 2009. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.12660/cgpc.v15n56.3205>. Accessed on: Apr. 21, 2020.

MAROY, Christian. Em direção a uma regulação pós-burocrática dos sistemas de ensino da Europa. In: OLIVEIRA, Dalila; DUARTE, Adriana (org.). *Políticas públicas e educação: regulação e conhecimento*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2011. p.19-46.

MOTA, Maria Océlia. *Entre a meritocracia e a equidade: O Prêmio Escola Nota Dez na percepção e atuação dos agentes implementadores*. 2018. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2018.

NASPOLINI, Antenor. A reforma da educação básica no Ceará. *Estudos Avançados*, São Paulo, v. 15, n. 42, p. 169-186, 2001. Available at: <https://www.revistas.usp.br/eav/article/view/9798>. Accessed on: May 2, 2020.

OLIVEIRA, Dalila Andrade. As políticas públicas em educação e a pesquisa acadêmica. In: OLIVEIRA, Dalila; DUARTE, Adriana (org.). *Políticas públicas e educação: regulação e conhecimento*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2011. p. 71-89.

VIEIRA, Sofia Lerche. Gestão, avaliação e sucesso escolar: recortes da trajetória cearense. *Estudos Avançados*, São Paulo, v. 21, n. 60, p. 45-60, 2007. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-40142007000200004>. Accessed on: May 21, 2020.

VIEIRA, Sofia Lerche; VIDAL, Eloísa Maia. Construindo uma história de colaboração na educação: a experiência do Ceará. *Educação e Sociedade*, Campinas, v. 34, n. 125, p. 1075-1093, out./dez. 2013. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0101-73302013000400004>. Accessed on: June, 12 2020.

Text received on 12/04/2020.

Text approved on 05/03/2021.