

## **Teachers' working conditions: a rural school in the semi-arid region of Piauí**

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**ABSTRACT – Teachers' working conditions: a rural school in the semi-arid region of Piauí.** Teaching working conditions are the set of resources and circumstances necessary for teachers to carry out their work and have an impact on the teaching-learning process. The objective of the research presented in this article was to investigate the conditions of teaching work in a rural high school located in a semi-arid in Piauí, Brazil. The qualitative approach was conducted through interviews with seven teachers who work night shifts in an annex of school, which serves young people from different rural communities. It was found that the working conditions offered to teachers are unsatisfactory in terms of the functions they perform, the employment relationship, the workload, transport conditions, infrastructure and the environmental conditions of the school space. The results made visible working conditions and how they impacted teachers' practice, reflecting on the teaching-learning process.

**Keywords: Rural Education. Precariousness. Teaching Work.**

**RESUMO – Condições de Trabalho Docente: uma escola do campo no semiárido piauiense.** As condições de trabalho docente, que têm reflexos no processo de ensino-aprendizagem, são o conjunto de recursos e circunstâncias necessários para que os professores realizem o seu trabalho. O objetivo da pesquisa apresentada neste artigo foi investigar as condições do trabalho docente em uma escola do campo localizada em um município do semiárido piauiense. A abordagem qualitativa foi conduzida através de entrevistas realizadas com sete professores que trabalham no turno noturno em um anexo da escola, a qual oferece o ensino médio e atende jovens de diversas comunidades da zona rural. Constatou-se que as condições de trabalho oferecidas aos professores são insatisfatórias quanto às funções que exercem, o vínculo empregatício, a carga de trabalho, as condições de transporte, a infraestrutura e as condições ambientais do espaço escolar. Os resultados constatarem sobre as condições de trabalho, como elas impactam na prática dos professores e como refletem no processo de ensino-aprendizagem.

**Palavras-chave: Educação no Campo. Precarização. Docência.**

## Introduction

The improvement of education quality in Brazil's schools is paramount to the country's overall development. To achieve this, improvements should be made to the teacher's working conditions, since the teacher is essential to the development of the teaching-learning process and to school education (Libâneo, 2011). These conditions are among the most discussed factors where improvements on teaching are concerned (Silva; Rosso, 2008). For this reason it is important to acknowledge the conditions in which this work happens and discuss them: how is the infrastructure of the workplace? Does the school have a structure that enables teachers to work? Is the teacher receiving enough support in order to develop his work? Does the school provide the necessary resources for teachers to work in the best way possible according to the pedagogical project?

The teaching profession in Brazil has been facing instabilities due to a lack of funding, human resources and materials, resulting in the health decline of professionals and their subsequent distancing from school institutions (Castro Neta; Cardoso; Nunes, 2021). This job instability can be considered a consequence of the restructuring of capitalism, which leaves it in poor conditions, rendering it unstable, uncertain, insecure, without guarantees, unsafe and underpaid. This situation can lead to impoverishment, dissatisfaction and health issues for workers (Araújo; Morais, 2017). The impact is even greater in rural schools (Oliveira; Montenegro, 2010) where similar challenges have been reported:

[...] lack and fragility of physical facilities in most schools; difficulties for teachers and students in getting to school due to the lack of an adequate transportation system; shortage of qualified and tenured teachers leading to constant turnover; lack of specialized knowledge about basic education policies for rural areas, with inadequate curricula that prioritize an urban view of education and economic development; absence of pedagogical assistance and school supervision in rural schools; prevalence of composite classes with low-quality education; lack of updates to pedagogical proposals in rural schools; low academic performance of students and high rates of age-grade distortion; low salaries and work overload compared to teachers in urban areas; a need for a reevaluation of the schools' nucleation policies and implementation of a school calendar tailored to rural needs (Brasil, 2007, p. 18).

Schools located in rural areas have historically been victims of underinvestment (Santos et al., 2020). This explains the fragility of their infrastructure and suboptimal operating conditions, which directly impact teaching staff.

Literature has highlighted the important role of teachers in the progression and learning process of students. However, the working conditions for these professionals have been deteriorating over time. In the specific context of rural areas, teachers not only have to cope with low qualification and lower salaries compared to their urban counterparts but they also have to deal with

other issues, such as work overload, high turnover rates and difficulties in getting to school, due to poor road conditions and lack of commuting financial aid (Brasil, 2004, p. 23).

This reality should be subject to study, because the State's lack of funding and attention coupled with the social standing of the rural student also contribute to a failure in education. Moreover, it is fitting to mention some prior studies which alluded to the poor state of rural schools in areas such as transportation system and infrastructure (Ferreira, 2019; Andrade; Rodrigues, 2020; Fartes; Sousa, 2020; Souza et al., 2020; Marinho; Schmidt; Vasconcelos, 2021). Some studies have mentioned other issues faced by rural teachers, such as accumulation of responsibilities or job function deviations, short-term employment and work overload (Bitencourt; Zart, 2017; Siade; Ximenes-Rocha, 2018; Ferreira, 2019; Souza et al., 2020; Marinho; Schmidt; Vasconcelos, 2021). This neglect is deliberate: first the school is abandoned, then it is closed down. Thus, for the most part, the State intentionally fails to look after the infrastructure of rural schools.

Hence, this article intends to discuss the results of a research aimed to investigate the working conditions of teachers in a school of Piauí's semi-arid region. The following problems were selected for this research: what are the working conditions of rural teachers and how do they reflect on their performance?

### **Teachers' Working Conditions**

Teachers' working conditions can be defined as a set of resources and circumstances that enable teachers to perform their duties (Johnson, 2006; Barros, 2013). This conditions can be summarized in the following components: environmental conditions, infrastructure, equipments and teaching-learning materials; interpersonal relationships; school climate; workload; wage and career plan; time management; institutional support, and so on. Next are the definitions of those components (Pereira Júnior, 2017):

- a) the environmental conditions comprehend the "feels like" temperature and the presence of din or noise. It includes variables such as acoustics; dins; heat; temperature; noise pollution; ventilation and humidity;
- b) the infrastructure concerns the conditions of the physical space and essential services of the schools. It is comprised of things such as libraries; school conditions; classroom conditions; structural conditions; physical space; laboratories; staffroom, physical installations; physical characteristics of the environment; furniture;
- c) the equipments and teaching-learning materials correspond to the supplies teachers need to develop their activities, such as resources; internet; textbooks; teaching-learning materials; material conditions; computers; whiteboards etc.;
- d) interpersonal relationships refers to a set of teachers interactions, such as those with coworkers, students, parents or school management;

- e) the school climate pertains to the individual's perceptions of the ambiance and behavior witnessed in schools, including variables such as violence; school image; students combativeness; school environment etc;
- f) the workload applies to elements that define the intensity of the work carried out by teachers, such as how many classes they teach; in how many schools they work; how many classes are there in school; how many shifts they work; how many teachers there are in school; existence of another paid occupation; work in other schools; work overload; size of classes; presence of special needs students; working hours; time spent working outside of school;
- g) wage and career plan refers to formal aspects of the teaching career, such as employment relationship. It includes: career plan; work regime; employment contract; labor issues; employment relationship; remuneration; salaries;
- h) the time management relates to time allocation during working hours. It includes classroom teaching, preparation of activities, rest periods; work and time management; breaktime;
- i) institutional support comprehends actions and instruments provided by institutions in order to aid and improve the work of teachers by offering support service; human resources; curricular planning; qualification; improvement and development; coordinators; specialists and institutional logic.

There are other components to working conditions, such as tension; commuting; qualification; age; insalubrity; teaching modality; level of education; education policy; global quality of life; residing in the work area; work time; work shift etc. (Pereira Júnior, 2017).

## Methodology

On this section, we present the methodological choices that make up this investigation. Aspects such research context, participant individuals and the process of gathering and analyzing data.

### *Research context*

The research took place in a Public State School Unit – headquartered in the urban region – located in a municipality of the micro-region of Picos, in the state of Piauí. This institution was chosen due to it functioning as a rural school, since most of their students come from rural areas, and also because they accepted to be part of the research (Brasil, 2010).

The institution, with students from rural and neighboring communities, have an annex in the rural area – 15 miles from headquarters –, where this research was conducted. In the annex, the school has secondary school classes in the night period and, at the time of the research, it had three classes – for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd year – with an average of 15 students each. For ethical reasons, the municipality and the name of the institution will remain anonymous.

### *Subjects and research ethic*

Seven teachers were invited to take part in the research, most of them female with a median age of 37. Working time in the institution's annex varies from one to ten years and the total workload is from 40 to 60 hours a week, considering the time spent working in the annex and in other roles. Chart 1 synthesizes some information about the invited teachers.

**Chart 1 – Information about the teachers participating in the research**

TEACHER	PLACE OF RESIDENCE	AGE (IN YEARS)	GENDER	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	SUBJECTS TAUGHT IN THE ANNEX
Teacher 01	Urban	48	Female	Licentiate in Mathematics and Licentiate in Pedagogy	Mathematics and History
Teacher 02	Urban	30	Female	Licentiate in Letters (Portuguese), Licentiate in History, Licentiate in Letters (Spanish) (Incomplete)	Spanish
Teacher 03	Rural	36	Male	Licentiate in Physical Education and Licentiate in Pedagogy	Sociology, Philosophy and History
Teacher 04	Urban	35	Male	Licentiate in Theology and Philosophy and Bachelor in Agronomic Engineering	Philosophy and Geography
Teacher 05	Urban	32	Female	Licentiate in Letters (Portuguese) and Licentiate in Pedagogy	Portuguese
Teacher 06	Rural	42	Male	Licentiate in Mathematics and Licentiate in Natural Science and Mathematics	Chemistry and History
Teacher 07	Urban	39	Female	Licentiate in Letters (Portuguese) and Licentiate in Letters (Spanish) (Incomplete)	English

Source: Research data (2023).

The subjects of the research were not identified to ensure anonymity, being instead referred to by the term teacher followed by a

number – Teacher 01, Teacher 02, Teacher 03 etc. Furthermore, research ethical matters and ethical reflexivity were considered, as appointed by Mainardes e Carvalho (2019)<sup>1</sup>.

### *Data gathering*

The developed research had a qualitative method and was carried out through interviews (Severino, 2013). This method was chosen to give space for the subjects to talk freely, sharing their experiences, ideas and feelings.

The interview was semi-structured following a preestablished script. It had the objective of gathering the point of view of each teacher about their working conditions. During interviews, other topics came up, such as disparity between educational background and current job, workload and school activity, as well as infrastructure, teaching-learning materials and school organization.

The main topics that anchored the script were: What is your educational background? What subjects do you currently teach in school? Have you faced any challenges while teaching the subjects assigned to you? How were you tasked with them? What is your formal employment relationship with the school: tenure or hired under the CLT regime? How long have you been working for the school? Does your employment relationship affect your work? How and why? What activities do you develop as a teacher? While generally teaching, what is your weekly workload? And while in this school? How long do you spend, in average, in each one of the activities developed in school? What is the average number of students by class in this school? Describe, generally, how are the students of this school – social and economic background, development in classroom and family presence in school life. Do you live in the same community where you work or do you have to commute to work? What is the distance between where you live and where you work? How long do you spend in average from your home to school? How do you commute to school: by school transport or with your own vehicle? If you commute by school transport, what are its conditions? What are the implications of these conditions and travel time? Rate the physical condition of the school from 0 to 10. Explain your grade. How does the physical structure of the school impact your work?

The interviews were scheduled to take place in the school ground at the participants' convenience. The answers were registered by a tape recorder for future transcription, reviewing and analysis.

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis were conducted by means of Thematic Analysis (Braun; Clarke, 2006) and followed the familiarization steps with the data, codification, identification of the emerging themes, checking and determination of thematic core. The presentation and discussion of the results were made in consonance with the emerging themes.

## Results and Discussion

The analysis made it possible to select a few themes about the working conditions which are subject to discussion and ponderation, such as: job function; employment relationship; workload; conditions of transportation and infrastructure; and environmental conditions of the school.

### *Job function*

Teaching working conditions includes several roles performed by teachers, which illustrates the multiplicity of their work:

[...] besides the duties to keep the class in check, it includes other attributions linked to the routine in educational units. So is the case with activities related to the administration or pedagogy in school and attention and care of students. These activities consist of the teachers interacting with the students, their parents, coworkers, school staff, pedagogical coordinators, and management (Pereira Júnior, 2017, p. 102).

The investigation on the working conditions of teachers turned up a possible job function deviation and accumulation of responsibilities. The deviation and accumulation of responsibilities are irregular since the employment contract did not establish any more functions besides teaching. While in the job function deviation the worker is obligated to assume a more complex position, which would require better compensation, in the accumulation of responsibilities the worker is required to work more than previously established. In that regard, the research reveals an irregularity in the performance of the teachers' duties in two ways: when the teacher is assigned a class outside of their field while they still teach, and when they perform duties unrelated to teaching, such as cleaning, maintenance, kitchen, security, management etc.

Another sign of this negligence is related to the subjects the teachers are assigned to teach. All the participants of the interview have a college degree. An interesting fact is that all of them have at least two college degrees. Only one of them is still working on their second degree, while the others already finished both degrees. Another point worth emphasizing is that these two degrees are not always of the same area of knowledge. For example, Teacher 02 have a degree in Letters – Portuguese, in the field of Linguistics, Letter and Arts, and also have a degree in History, in the field of Human Science.

Despite all of them having a college degree, the subject they were assigned to teach not always align with their area of expertise. As another study about the rural context concluded: “[...] in order to cater to the needs of the community and/or increase their work overload, teachers end up teaching classes on subjects which do not align with their area of expertise” (Siade; Ximenes-Rocha, 2018, p. 118). Thus, the interview revealed that four of the seven teachers teach more than one subject in the classroom. Only Teacher 05 gives class exclusively on her area of expertise. Another three teachers give clas-

ses both in and out of their fields (Teacher 01, Teacher 04 and Teacher 06). The rest teach other subjects different from what they graduated from (Teacher 02, Teacher 03 and Teacher 07). There are also those who teach class on subjects which they are still studying (Teacher 02). The same situation was observed in another research.

Another dream presented revolved around the 'appreciation and education of teachers'. For them (teachers), a school would be 'very good' if all teachers had a degree on the subject they teach, since it is very common for teachers to teach class on subjects unrelated to their formal education. Sometimes, a licentiate in mathematics will complement his workload teaching physics, chemistry etc. (Ferreira, 2019, p. 20).

The interview with the subjects of this research revealed that they share the same dream. Working in an area unrelated to their formal education results in negative consequences to their teaching career, including difficulties in teaching unfamiliar subjects. This can jeopardize the teachers' confidence before the classroom. This fact is evidenced by the account of one of the teachers who has a degree in both Natural Science and Mathematics: "[...] about teaching history, I have some difficulties since it's not my field, isn't it? So it can be bothersome, but if I study for a bit, I'm able to manage pretty well. Chemistry, since it's my field, I find it much more simple to teach" (Teacher 06)

Still, there are those who feel comfortable teaching subjects outside of their fields of expertise due to their work experience. This became evident by the following excerpt: "[...] I've been teaching history for many years now, so I'm pretty much used to the subject and its contents, because of this I don't find it difficult to teach history" (Teacher 01).

Similar to Teacher 01, teachers who work outside of their field for so long already feel qualified to teach those subjects. Meanwhile, those who lack this experience feel frustrated, because teaching a subject outside of their field means investing more time in studying, planning and preparing their classes. Although the know-how of their profession helps teachers to learn, the limitations on the knowledge of different subjects can affect negatively the teaching-learning process. The educational background of the teacher is paramount to their professional success, so that they can build a foundation strong enough to effectively apply the pedagogical practice (Contreras, 2013).

In addition to being assigned subjects outside of their fields of expertise, the interviewed subjects also revealed the issue of taking on duties unrelated to teaching. It so happens that the lack of human resources in school force teachers to take on other roles on top of teaching: "In here, my friend, we do a bit of everything [...] we play the part of teacher, coordinator, principal, supervisor, janitor and much more" (Teacher 01). Like Teacher 01, rural teachers take on several roles, including janitorial ones.

Another teacher said: "It's complicated since everything is left for the teachers to deal with, the work that should be done by the principal

is done by us, like grades, transfers and so on. It's us who have to pick up the slack" (Teacher 02). By saying "pick up the slack", we can presume that Teacher 02 is referring to the overload that this adds to the teachers' work routine. Like Teacher 03 who admits to do "a bit of everything": "Here I do a bit of everything [...] I teach class, help other teachers with projects, plan activities with everyone, I even help the cafeteria staff in the kitchen when needed". These extra tasks also include administrative and pedagogical help to coworkers: "As well as being a teacher, we have to be the principal and coordinator of this school. This ends up burning us out, preventing us from doing any job right" (Teacher 06).

Therefore, the lack of employees pressure teachers to take on other duties, which ends up wearing them out and interfering with their job in the classroom.

In many of these [rural schools], teachers are the only employees, having no backup whatsoever from other professionals to deal with the guidance of pedagogical work. There is no cafeteria or janitorial staff. Teachers are responsible for different duties (Ferreira, 2019, p. 12).

What seems like a "little help" from the teachers is in fact a consequence of a crisis in capitalism which leads to new ways of exploring workers. Consequently, work overload contributes to the decline of teachers' work, creates many uncomfortable situations arising from structural pressures that affect the quality of their work (Siade; Ximenes-Rocha, 2018).

### *Employment relationship*

All interviewed teachers were hired under the CLT regime, in which the contract lasts up to a year, with the possibility of renewal for one more year. Three out of four teachers said that this type of contract impacts their work. The main complain about this contract is the salary, which is inferior to that of a tenured teacher, and the subjects they are made to teach, which are different from the ones of the selection process. About this issue, Teacher 01 had to say: "It really does have an impact, because our salary under the CLT contract is very inferior to that of a tenured teacher; and to make matters worse they still take advantage of us. Do you see? They make a teacher who was hired to teach mathematics give history lessons, like the subjects had anything in common".

The discontentment and life conditions brought on by the low salaries contribute to the depreciation of rural teachers and are a reflection of the lack of appreciation they have to endure from society (Siade; Ximenes-Rocha, 2018). This discredit is even greater for those under temporary contracts (Araújo; Morais, 2017).

A major part of this historic movement of deterioration aimed towards the teaching profession is the existence of temporary teachers. Its tragedy is paved with an excess or shortage of classes; salaries lower than that of tenured teachers; having to give classes in many schools; different subjects assigned to one teacher; amalgamation of temporary and continuous work; hav-

ing to take on other jobs to increase income, besides multiple pedagogical and political ramifications (Seki et al., 2017, p. 945).

Besides the unsatisfactory salary, this frail employment relationship is also a source of insecurity, leaving employees vulnerable, susceptible to being pushed around and turned into “a jack-of-all-trades”, as one of the subjects said:

Let's say it affect us because the salary is a bit lower than it should be and I have no stability. Every year I have to find out where I should go next and whether or not I could pass another civil service exam so I can continue teaching, in a way this affects me a lot. It would be better if I could be tenured, because then I wouldn't have to worry about these things (Teacher 02).

Teachers with temporary contracts suffer more than tenured ones and have trouble finding stability in their career and in teaching practice (Tardif, 2012). Therefore, a poor employee relationship can have a negative effect on the quality of teaching.

We should mention that although the interviews highlight the importance of teaching, the policy we see at play is the deregulation of work and dismissal of rights, evidenced by the number of temporary teachers, hired and designated. A public school of quality requires, besides enough resources, well paid, qualified professionals, with adequate working conditions. Hence, those results point to a necessity of changing career plans and wages in order for teachers to start getting the praise and acknowledgment they deserve, among other factors (Barros, 2013, p. 91, 92).

The interviews confirmed what prior researches had revealed: temporary teachers have a greater workload, have to teach subjects outside of their field of expertise; face higher turnover rates etc. (Seki et al., 2017; Ferreira, 2019).

### *Workload*

Brazilian law allows teachers to take on duties beyond their contractual scope. But these duties, depending on their demand, can lead to work overload, in other words, when the employee's working hours begin to have a negative effect on their productivity and health. Work overload is closely related to the deterioration of working conditions and the acceleration and dilapidation of work (Pereira Júnior, 2017).

The increase in both government and society's demands can also dampen education's quality if it doesn't take into consideration proper working conditions for teachers, given the constant requests, overload and increasing demands they are routinely subjected to. This reality contradicts Article 67 of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB), which asserts that adequate working conditions should be guaranteed by law as part of policies to ensure the “valuing of the teaching profession”. However, devising strategies to improve primary education doesn't solve the problem if it's not accompanied by changes in the working conditions of teachers (Barros, 2013, p. 17).

In regards to aligning multiple duties, all the interviewed teachers work for other schools besides the one mentioned in the study, in-

cluding municipal, state and private schools. One of the teachers talked about how working in multiple places impacts their routine: “Besides this job, I have another in the municipality, as a principal [...] and I leave there in a hurry so that I can teach here. Sometimes I don’t eat and there isn’t even time to get home, I go straight to the vehicle that gets us here” (Teacher 01).

The number of classes they teach, on top of the work outside the classroom – homework correction, planning etc. – points to a work overload, which was already evidenced by other researches. This issue is even greater for female teachers, such as Teacher 01.

Working for an extended period of time, beyond the established agreement, became the standard for teachers. Therefore, many activities, such as preparation and correction of class material and exams, end up having to be done at home. For female teachers who are married – a group that heads this study’s demographic – this situation can be even worse, since they have more difficulty making time for those tasks than their male counterparts. Furthermore, women have to deal with a continuity of domestic demands and/or child care, increasing health risks (Marinho; Schmidt; Vasconcelos, 2021, p. 17).

Taking responsibility for extra duties steals time that could otherwise be used for planning class material (Silva; Rosso, 2008). This harms the teachers’ work, since working in multiple places prevents the teacher from really applying to any of their jobs.

Teaching not only requires lots of mental efforts from the teachers, but also a considerable physical effort, considering that teachers have to be able to stand for long hours while also doing a lot of repeated movements throughout the day. These efforts require that teachers stay fit, which is not always possible given the long and tiring working hours they are subjected to, that prevents them from taking care of themselves. Consequently, teachers working under such conditions are more prone to develop health problems, what can not only hinder their work but also make them take an indefinite leave from work.

### *Transport conditions*

In addition to having to juggle between different jobs, teachers that live outside the school’s community – as is the case for the better part of the participants – struggle to commute to the state school’s annex, located in a rural area, a fact that interferes with their work. Only two teachers live in the community where the school is located. The other five live in the municipal seat and have to commute to work. They claimed it takes them approximately 20 to 30 minutes, or 16 miles, to get to work. All of the teachers who commute to work do so by car, which is provided by the municipality – supplied by a partnership between the city council and the state government. The car takes the state teachers of the school annex to work – i.e., the subjects of this study – as well as teachers from another municipal school.

When asked about the transport conditions available to them, teachers said it could be better. It was also noted that the car is not exclusive to teachers, and when it is used for other purposes, teachers have to take whatever other cars are available from the city council, despite their conditions. Teacher 04 said: "I go to work with the car that the city council provides for state and municipal teachers, a van of average conditions, which is better than nothing. Sometimes, when the van isn't available or is in repair, we go with other cars".

Nevertheless, it seems that commuting to work with the car provided by the public authority is better than paying for it:

Nowadays the city council provides a car that also takes teachers from municipal schools to work, and we that teach in state schools go with them, making our lives easier, because that way we don't have to pay for gas and neither endanger ourselves driving in the road. One day we take a car, the other day we take another one. So there are days when the car they provide is in top shape, and then on the next day they try to fit us all in a rundown van [...] But it's okay, we had worse days when we had to walk all the way to work (Teacher 01).

The transport conditions concern not only expenses but also safety. According to Teacher 02: "The car provided by the municipality isn't in the best condition. Some days they send a certain car, on the next day they send another, and we just go along with it, you know? Like they say: 'don't look a gift horse in the mouth'. I believe it's better than going to work with a motorcycle or our own cars, risking our lives in those roads".

Although there is danger in rural roads, the conditions of public transportation do not offer much assurance: "I go to work with the car provided by the city council. The cars are 'okay'. The main car that takes us to work is actually a van, but sometimes they have to use it for other things, so they send another car to pick us up, and that car is not always in mint conditions" (Teacher 05).

When asked how the transport conditions influence their ability to work, some teachers said that they suffer from body ache and fatigue from having to commute to work in less than ideal conditions, a fact that hinders their work performance:

Speaking for me, there are days when I get home absolutely wrecked. I'm not that young anymore and there are days when commuting to work mess up our bodies, and we come to work with head or body aches that inevitably impair our work. Some days we don't even feel like teaching because of this (Teacher 01).

Teacher 05 adds: "Sometimes I come to work truly beaten, because one of those cars are in no conditions to run, and this ends up affecting my disposition to teach".

These excerpts resonate with other studies from other corners of the country that also have linked transport conditions, which "harms" teachers, to the deterioration of the teaching profession (Barros, 2013; Marinho; Schmidt; Vasconcelos, 2021).

This research, made in the state of Piauí, also shows that poor transport conditions can interfere with the quality of teachers' work, as Teacher 01 and 02 previously hinted at when saying that the dis-

comfort brought on by transport condition made available to them caused a soreness that “hindered” their ability to work. According to Ferreira (2019, p. 13): “In this context, teachers are considered ‘warriors’, ‘heroes’, for leaving their family in the city, for spending hours in a poor maintained car to get to the community”.

### *Infrastructure and school environment conditions*

The infrastructure and school environment conditions are factors that influence the work of teachers. They comprehend

[...] the set of school elements that enable the teacher to work with students. Including building and operation structure (electrical and hydraulic installation, room availability, labs and libraries), the availability of material and pedagogical resources and the suitability of the work environment (the school's state of conservation, safe noise and lighting levels, air quality) (Pereira Júnior, 2017, p. 87).

In this regard, the evaluation of the teachers who participated in this research was negative. Amid the reasons, the presence of burned out light bulbs and other devices without maintenance were mentioned: “We see that nobody cares with the school, it's dilapidated, missing a lot of things, broken fans, burned out light bulbs, like the third year class where the kids in the back seat in darkness” (Teacher 03). About this matter, Teacher 06 had to say:

It's pretty bad in here, my friend. We don't have clean water for the kids, nor a room for the teachers, we have nothing. We were left behind a long time ago. You can see how it is, can't you? Everything's broken, burned out light bulbs and nobody moves a muscle to fix any of this. Now you can start to picture how bad things are here.

The lack of a staffroom where teachers can rest, pass the time before the next class or work on other activities.

The school is kind of ‘rundown’, it hasn't much in the way of structure, you know? There are only classrooms and a cafeteria. When we arrive there, we wait on the sidewalk until the kids get to class. When classes are canceled, we stay in the cafeteria chatting with the staff, because there's simply no other place for teachers to be (Teacher 02).

The environment is rather small, only classrooms and a cafeteria. That's rather unfortunate, because when class is canceled I like to plan other activities and the only place I can do that is in the school yard. We don't have a room with a computer. The bathrooms here are terrible (Teacher 04).

On top of that, the school lacks basic sanitation, as mentioned by Teacher 01: “We have poor structure. This building's never been renovated. Look, the kitchen has caught on fire a while ago and they never fixed the ceiling. The bathrooms don't even have running water”. On the same topic, Teacher 07 said: “Son, it's rather troublesome in there because of the poor structure. There are only a small number of classrooms and the cafeteria with bathrooms without running water. I don't even know how we get by”.

All things considered, we can pose the following questions: how is it possible to teach class at night in rooms with burned out light bulbs? How can teachers, students and general staff use a bathroom without running water for sanitation? These questions make us reflect on how this school is able to function despite all of these problems and how teachers are able to work under such poor conditions.

When the subjects were asked if the school's physical structure hampered their work, they unanimously replied with a yes. Teacher 01 talked about an instance when it was impossible to work:

There was a day when I couldn't teach my class, because there were dead birds in the classroom and the smell was unbearable, there wasn't even a fan and the classroom was all closed up. There was another day when I had to let the children go home, because the light bulb burned out and there was no way to continue with class. Sadly, son, it's bothersome to work here.

The hardships were also mentioned by another teacher:

[...] when my class is canceled I like to plan other activities and I have to do this in the school yard [...] Sometimes, when a light bulb burns out or some bird dies in the classroom during the weekend, coming Monday we have to send the students home because nobody can teach in the dark nor stand the foul smell, and this interferes with our work (Teacher 04).

Teacher 04 mentioned that the school's structure not only hinders his work in the classroom, but also his planning and preparation of classes and activities, what was confirmed by Teacher 02:

I believe it leaves a lot to be desired in terms of comfort, because there's not even a place for us to rest or study when classes are canceled [...] the classrooms aren't in good conditions either. The kids' desks aren't comfortable, and some of them are broken or just too old, and so on. In the third year class, out of the three light bulbs, two of them are burned out, how can you teach under such conditions? We make do with what we have, but things would be a lot better if everything was up to code.

Thus, in the school's current state, teachers cannot even rest between classes, taking into account the lack of space and the thermal discomfort brought on by the high temperatures, common to the region of Piauí, as revealed by these next claims: "A lot of times, yes, due to the lack of adequate space, or a fan to help cope with the heat, among other things that can help us work better. Not even the water we drink here is safe" (Teacher 05) and also:

In this school we have to go to the streets if we want to print an activity. There's not a single room for teachers to rest between classes, making our job more difficult and preventing us from doing more in the classroom, isn't it? (Teacher 06).

It is possible to infer, from these claims, that the school's poor environment and structural conditions hamper the teacher's abilities to "teach a good class", resulting in a "lesser" performance. According to Siade e Ximenes-Rocha (2018, p. 121), who found a similar problem on their research, "[...] the school's physical space and infrastructure are factors that hinder the job of rural teachers".

Due to all the problems mentioned, it is safe to assume that the school's infrastructure and environment conditions have a negative

effect on the teaching-learning process. It is nigh impossible for teachers to properly develop their work without adequate conditions. Space, lighting, ventilation, among other factors, can help or hinder the teachers' work. In the context of this research's subjects, it is impossible to teach a night class without proper lighting and expect it to work well, not to mention the health issues that can arise from such conditions and harm teachers and students alike.

The school's infrastructural conditions have an immediate effect on the quality and productivity of the teachers' job. As indicated by the data this research have gathered, in many schools these conditions are compromised, what can lead to an increase in exhaustion levels among teachers, according to studies on the subject (Barros, 2013, p. 91).

Besides the obvious impact on the teacher's performance, the poor conditions of the school directly impair the learning process of rural students (Fartes; Sousa, 2020). The poor infrastructure of rural schools demonstrates the State's "intentional" disregard for the rural community.

This research's empirical elements demonstrate that the rural schools' poor infrastructure is the result of a weak physical structure, a lack of basic services and school transport as well as limited internet access. Thence, the research reveals that the rural schools' poor infrastructure is due to the State's intentional incompetence and disregard for the success of policies concerning Rural Education (Andrade; Rodrigues, 2020, p. 15).

This disregard, also evidenced by this research, contradicts the law, like the Decree no. 7.352, of November 4th, 2010, which says "rural education will materialize by way of [...] the guarantee of infrastructure conditions and school transport, as well as textbooks and teaching-learning materials, equipments, laboratories, library and adequate leisure and sports facilities" (Brasil, 2010, art. 1.º, § 4.º).

## Final Considerations

The present study aimed to investigate the working conditions of teachers from a public school in a municipality of Piauí's semi-arid rural region. With this research, we can conclude that rural teachers have to work under rather poor conditions. It is essential to bring such conditions to light and drawn attention to the matter, since this situation is perceived mostly by teachers, students and other school staff, while the rest of society either denies and ignores these problems or simply is not made aware of them.

It has been proven that rural teachers work under harsh and intense conditions. Their working conditions require more effort on their part in order to fulfill their duties. Due to a shortage of specialized staff in the school's annex, teachers have to take on other roles, such as pedagogic coordinator, principal, cafeteria worker and janitor. This research laid bare a series of inadequacies surrounding teachers' working conditions, for instance, long shifts, working for multiple institutions, development of activities in other fields unrelated to the

teacher's background, the poor transport conditions, the limitation of the physical space and unsatisfactory environment conditions. All of these problems take a toll on the teacher's productivity, and therefore, on the teaching-learning process as well.

Through the information gathered by this research, the importance of being more aware and attentive to the working conditions of rural teachers becomes more evident. With hopes of a higher esteem for the teaching profession, rural teachers should enjoy better working conditions, for the sake of their humanity and the respect that they deserve, and also for the improvement of the teaching-learning process.

Historically, rural schools are considered inferior and therefore are treated with contempt. If schools located in urban areas already suffer from lack of funding and other problems, rural schools receive even less attention and amass even more problems because of it.

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## Note

<sup>1</sup> All participants voluntarily consented to participate in the research and signed an Informed Consent Form (ICF).

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