# Curricular justice: Influences of TEIP program and schools' external evaluation process

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In Portugal, the policy measures which followed the April 1974 democratic revolution attributed to education the "mission" of guaranteeing the right to a fair and effective equality of opportunity in school access and success (Portuguese Educational System Law, 1986). As examples of these measures, the TEIP program (in English ETPI - Educational Territories of Priority Intervention) was created in the 90's involving schools linked to social inequality 'problems,' dropout and school failure (Leite, Fernandes & Silva, 2013) with the main aim to support schools in dealing with these situations. Firstly, a diagnosis of the problems is made and, afterwards, the aspects that need improvement are selected and it is developed an appropriate intervention project. This policy measure, which may be considered as "compensatory education", has emerged associated to other international movements such as the "Head Start" and "Follow-Through" projects (United States); the "Priority Education Zones" (France); and "Educational Priority Areas" and "Education Action Zones" (England). Another policy measure initiated more recently, in 2006, is the schools external evaluation (SEE) process. Also influenced by international policies (Dale, 2007) and associating the evaluation of educational institutions to accountability (Afonso, 2009; Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo & Hargreaves, 2015), this measure is related to decentralization processes and the intention of improving education quality (Pacheco, 2000; OECD, 2012). Assuming that is a political responsibility to promote an educational improvement (Bolívar, 2003; Coe, 2009), it is important to analyse whether the SEE process and TEIP program follow-driven by democratic and egalitarian principles, i.e., if these political measures contribute to the achievement of social and curricular justice, essential in building a democratic school (Apple & Beane, 1995; Leite, 2002). Consequently, the study aims to understand how the objectives of these two policy measures are being implemented and how schools seek educational improvement based on curricular and social justice (Connell, 1995; Crahay, 2000; Rawls, 2003; Dubet, 2008; Santomé, 2013). To achieve these goals, we did 5 semi directive interviews (Hopf, 2004) to the National Education Council President; the person responsible for TEIP program at national level; and three exploratory interviews in a TEIP school to the headmaster, the TEIP program coordinator and the self-assessment team coordinator. The interviews discourses were subject to analysis and reflection through a process of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012), using the NVivo software (v. 10) and with them it was possible to understand how, locally, the SEE process and TEIP program are experienced and interpreted at a curricular level. The study allowed understand that these policies - schools evaluation and TEIP program - even constituting two separate measures, are interconnected in order to promote school success and educational improvement. Having moderately positive effects on school everyday life, it is possible to recognize attention to social and cultural diversity of students and the use of strategies that seek to ensure the success and educational improvement of all, even though in some schools this situation is not yet an institutionalized practice.

## 1. Introduction

According to the Portuguese Educational System Law (1986), school education must ensure the right to a fair and effective equality of opportunity in school access and in school success. The schools' external evaluation process (SEE) and the TEIP program (in English ETPI - Educational Territories of Priority Intervention) are two different measures that nowadays influence schools' at organizational, pedagogical and curricular levels. This study has as

general aim to understand the impact/effect of policy measures implementation that promote school success and educational improvement, particularly in what is concerned to SEE and TEIP program.

The SEE process happens in all public schools including those that are integrated in TEIP program. This means that TEIP schools live with SEE process plus the process of establishing educational targets which are inherent to this program. It is with these two ideas by reference that this study is developed to understand how the objectives of these two policy measures are being implemented, in particular regarding to the conditions that contribute to the respect of the needs and characteristics of the different social groups present in different school contexts. In this way, we want to understand how schools develop processes searching educational improvement based on curricular and social justice (Connell, 1995; Apple, 2013; Santomé, 2013). In this context, for this study, we carried out 5 semi directive interviews to the National Education Council President; the person responsible for TEIP program at national level; and three exploratory interviews in a TEIP school to the headmaster, the TEIP program coordinator and the self-assessment team coordinator.

In the first part of this paper we develop a theoretical framework focused on issues already mentioned. Subsequently, the methodological procedures and the data collected are presented. Finally, and taking into account the data collected, some conclusions are elaborated.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In Portugal, policies measures associated to the promotion of school success and educational improvement were implemented and justified on aspects related to equal opportunities and social justice principles. Thus, it is relevant to understand the influence of policy measures that have been implemented to accomplish these objectives and to promote educational improvement. Two of these measures are the TEIP program (in English Educational Territories of Priority Intervention) and Schools' External Evaluation Process (SEE). In this sense, we consider that is important to know what influences and what effects have these policy measures justified with the intention of promoting school success and educational improvement in schools daily life.

The first educational policy in Portugal, related to issues of equity and equality, focused primarily on the most disadvantaged social groups (Lemos, 2013). These educational policies become known as "*compensatory education*" or "*priority education*", as took place, for example, with the ZEP - "Zones d'education Prioritaire" (France), the "Head Start" and "Follow-Through" projects (USA) and the "Education Action Zones" (England). Under the influence of these policies, in 1996, the TEIP program was created. This program was presented as a public policy focused on solving problems related to social inequality, dropout and school failure (Leite, Fernandes & Silva, 2013). It was a political measure that recognized the importance of local intervention, representing principles of decentralization, participation and autonomy through *accountability* practices related to the reconfiguration of State regulatory function (Afonso & Costa, 2011). In this same line of thought, and taking into account European guidelines in terms of evaluation policies (Wood *et al*, 2011; OECD, 2012), the *accountability* demands of each institution to improve their performance has been increasing in addition to the need to promote school success. In this regard, the schools' evaluation is officially presented with the objective of contributing to educational improvement (Law n. º 31/2002). Thus, since 2006, all Portuguese public schools are subject to the school external evaluation process (SEE) justified in order to 'promote the progress of learning and student

outcomes'. In conjunction with this goal of overall school and student learning improvement, there is an external *accountability* process (Afonso, 2009) that cannot be ignored. To accomplish its goals, the SEE process follows a framework structured around three areas: (1) results, (2) educational service provision and (3) leadership and management.

Nowadays, TEIP schools are subject to a monitoring and evaluation process and that's within this relationship that we consider that is important to understand how schools' deal with these processes in line with processes that contribute to social and curricular justice.

## 3. Methodological Procedures

Taking into account this theoretical framework, the study was developed with the general aim of understanding the impact/effect of policy measures implementation to the promotion of school success and educational improvement, particularly concerning schools' external evaluation and TEIP program. Therefore, our intention is to answer the following questions: *What actions are taken by schools to achieve social justice principle, taking into account these two policy measures? What influence does the SEE process and TEIP program have in the different dimensions of daily school life and in what way they contribute to the promotion of participatory and inclusive education?*.

To achieve these goals, we carried out 5 semi directive interviews (Hopf, 2004; Bogdan & Biklen, 1994; Goodson, 2013; Seidman, 2013): to the president of the national educational council (PNEC); to the responsible for the TEIP program at a national level (RTP); and three interviews in a TEIP school in the North of Portugal to the Headmaster, self-evaluation Coordinator and the TEIP program coordinator from a TEIP school.  These interviews were analyzed through a process of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2012), using the N.Vivo software (v. 10) (Bardin, 2011; Krippendorff, 2004).

## 4. Data Presentation

Concerning the PNEC and RTP interviews, although the discourses of these interviewees are very different they are connected in several aspects. First of all, there is a focus on students' academic success and they are most of all worried about the learning quality developed by students. So, for them, it is very important the existence of learning regulation and monitoring instruments that allows schools to be aware of the actions that they take and to empower them to define the goals to be achieved. As it was said:

> «I think that the existence of a schools external evaluation system is always a regulatory tool of learning and school performance that is effective (...) what we've come to realize is that there has been an improvement in instruments that are used for this evaluation» (PNEC)

> «We cannot assess the impact of this if we do not realize what is an evaluation process. That is, we have to have some references» (PNEC)

> «In this evaluation model, I have to realize that there are elements that are quantifiable, there are other elements that are not quantifiable but are measurable, and there are other elements that are not explicit. It's what I think often, the most important thing is what we designate as school culture» (PNEC)

«We have to have monitoring mechanisms that allows us some sustainability to evaluate (...) I cannot make an assessment on an impressionist remark» (PNEC)

«As time goes by we have been increasingly focused on students issues» (RTEIP)

«Nowadays the number of teachers integrated in TEIP program is much higher than the number of technicians, there was here a complete reversal (...) Nowadays, more and more, we are concerned with the success promotion. There is also here an image inversion, always pasted a picture of failure, are territories with a high failure rate, with a lot of indiscipline and this was systematically set to the brand TEIP» (RTEIP)

«A basic principle of operation of any model is that external evaluation should not be dissociated from the internal evaluation (...) any assessment, internal or external, have to be compared and cannot be done in a closed vessel» (PNEC)

In the other hand, there is a focus on the importance of efficiency and effectiveness and, in the opinion of these interviewees, to achieve that, is essential that schools develop an integrated and articulated work and define the aims and the results to accomplish in order to know what are the steps that they have to follow to succeed the desired improvement.

«Does not interest me to know what are the good schools or the bad schools, I want to know those who have culture to innovate, improve, rectify, that's what is important (...) I believe that schools can do many things but if they don't have good learning and good results its mission fails (...) and so, I have to have good results with good processes and above all, results that are contextualized, that is, I know that students are not equal. As I know that students are not equal my gain is to know that, despite the limitations they have, they can achieve a higher level than it would be estimable taking into account the social status and cultural capital they have. And so if I set that the evaluation objective is to trigger sustainable processes learning qualification (...) I think this is the most important. » (PNEC)

«That is, its effectiveness is reduced. I think that schools today are more concerned with academic results. Schools today have realized that is not enough to have good intentions, they want to have good results. I think this is positive. » (PNEC)

«There are many projects in schools (...) instead of having an integrated strategic vision of educational action, we have  corseted interventions, not necessarily interconnected and articulated, which in turn contribute to a very large inefficiency and questionable effectiveness» (RTEIP)

«Any plan assumes that there is a preliminary assessment, making a diagnosis to know what are our starting problems, prioritize them, and from there define a action plan. In this sense we have here a key role for evaluation: I call it internal evaluation. Of course as the plan is developed, it is necessary to monitor and then be assessed the results of implementing this plan. And so we have here an improvement cycle» (RTEIP)

«In terms of TEIP program, one of the developments that I think that is very significant was the targets question (...) know where to go, in other words, set goals» (RTEIP)

Consequently, to achieve educational improvement, is fundamental the existence of good leaderships that know how to correctly mobilize the resources. In the same way, the actions must be focused in the decrease of school retention and to fight the stigmatized vision about TEIP program.

«There is a fundamental key: good leaders. And most of all have good leadership focused in the pedagogical area, that is, how am I going to improve learning, that is the great challenge (...) a leader is this, is the ability to mobilize the resources you have, to qualify the processes that have to better achieve the goals, he can set himself or the community to define, and so this is what leadership is» (PCNE)

«You can have external evaluation and have the principle of inclusion, have the principle of inclusion assured. Let's see one thing, schools ... I don't like the concept of inclusive education. Why? Because I think school is inclusive by nature (...) the school is the main powerful mechanism, if properly used, to face the social determinism» (PCNE)

«I consider that the emblem "TEIP schools" is stigmatizing. I ended up with it immediately. Kept the support measures, but ended with this emblem of "TEIP School." It is stigmatizing, teachers flee them, parents flee them, and even the poor people fleeing them. No poor like walking a poor little school, as they say» (PCNE)

«The evaluation, in its various forms, is always present, and should always be present, and we always advocate that. In fact, and this is reflected even in their own improvement plans, schools are defining their actions, however there is one that all schools should to have: an action on monitoring and evaluation of the plan itself. It is a matter of consistency. For example, one of the tools that is driven to support schools is the possibility they hire an outside expert» (RTEIP)

«At the TEIP program level, I think it is precisely a measure of social justice because it is not giving the same to everyone that we will be fairer because they are not all on the same starting point. Looking at the education system, for all of its organizational units, if I give the same to all organizational units I'm not promoting social justice because they are not all on the same starting point, do not deal all with the same kind of problems and challenge (...) TEIP program, as a measure of positive discrimination, helps to increase social justice» (RTEIP)

Finally, by these discourses it is possible to understand that to achieve quality educational policy schools must differentiate educational interventions and focus their actions on the prevention and collaborative work among teachers and school community.

«There is one thing that is important: we have to try to overcome this problem of retention. Retention is the main mechanism of social exclusion, it is not school exclusion is the exclusion from school leading to social exclusion» (PNEC)

«The whole external evaluation process is a process of induction over internal evaluation, you must adjust the internal evaluation to what is the assessment process, ie, it is the same thing as studying for an exam, schools also studying for an exam» (PNEC)

«Define clearly what the objectives (...) because you have to clearly define what are the priorities (...) Equity is allow everyone to have access to learning and if they are different allow that there are different

learning. This means what? I have to pick on the weakest students but have to also take on the strongest students. It is not? That's fair, is be able to give different solutions for different problems, that's my concern» (PNEC)

«A quality educational policy is outlines goals, or rather, sets goals, outline the goals and define appropriate strategies. And are those that as much as possible should be reported and discussed» (PNEC)

«In practice, sometimes the solution is very simple: to differentiate the type of interventions» (RTEIP)

«(…) when we were in an improvement plan, a report, ask you to do the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities for improvement identification , when we do that, deep down, we are making a parallel with what are the aim of the external evaluation. All school, when they are doing this exercise and who had the external evaluation recently, go there to seek information. One feeds the other» (RTEIP)

«In the SEE process schools have to make a development plan, an improvement plan. In TEIP program schools have an improvement plan. And then we have the educational project. And some schools, often refer to this ... this is a bit schizophrenic. But there is, this is the difficulty of seeing an integrated point of view, (…) schools should have the ability to integrate this» (RTEIP)

«The biggest challenge that these policies faced is to integrate the various measures and give them this approach to prevention. We cannot forget our responsibilities internationally assumed» (RTEIP)

Summing up, it appears that these speeches are focused on academic success and on learning qualification, where there is a central focus in the definition of results and goals to be achieved. Both interviewees mentioned that it is necessary to incorporate these aspects in their school culture and for that the leadership role is crucial. These speeches are centered on the need for efficiency and effectiveness of schools associated with principles of fairness and justice because, for them, these policies are compatible with equal opportunities being essential to fight school retention that is perceived as a form of school exclusion which consequently leads to social exclusion. There is too the recognition of parallelisms between the TEIP program and SEE program, given that the monitoring and evaluation processes are combined in many aspects.

The following image (figure 3) shows a scheme which sums the speeches collected:
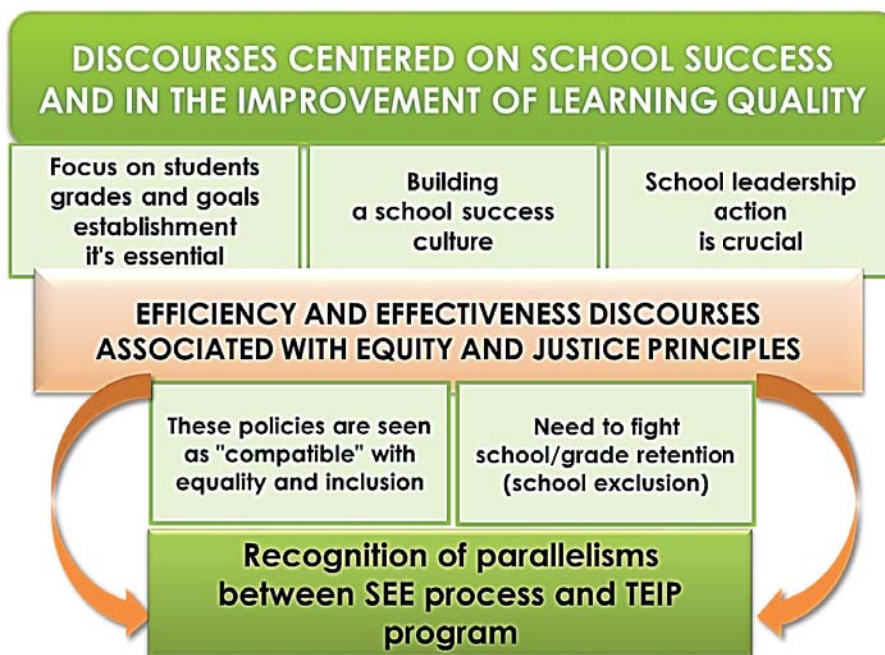
Figure 3: Summary of the speeches collected

Regarding the interviews collected on a TEIP school to the Headmaster, self-evaluation Coordinator and the TEIP program coordinator, through the definition of goals to be achieved, TEIP program implies a co-responsabilization of school community inducing improvement processes. Due to that, these interviewees feel the need for a more continuous SEE process and the support of an external element to facilitate the construction and execution of improvement plans.

«The self-evaluation process only began to have some consistency with the entry in TEIP program. We have to be accountable and as such we have to do self-evaluation (...) It's like see ourselves in the mirror, usually we never have time to see ourselves in the mirror» (Schools headmaster interview).

«The main reasons [for integrating TEIP program] are related to advantages we have in terms of resources and also in terms of some guidance concerning what could be done here» (SE team coordinator).

«I think we are developing such a flexible curriculum that responds to all. I think it might be the best opinion, I do not see another way» (TEIP team coordinator).

«For me a fair curriculum is a curriculum that suits abilities and skills for all students» (Schools headmaster interview).

In this sense, and according to the headmasters and the coordinators, principles of justice and equity are associated with curriculum adaptation to students' needs and that's a reason that also justify TEIP program.

**5. Some Conclusions**

Concerning the data collected we tried to answer the starting research questions. In this way, it is possible to conclude that there is still work to do to achieve the full inclusion of students. However, it seems to be a greater awareness and critical reflection about the actions that are required to implement student's inclusion, in particular the need of schools integrated and coordinated work.

To the interviewees these measures are perceived with positive effects for the promotion of social justice, either for combating school/grade retention or as positive discrimination. To the schools headmasters, it is recognized the positive effects on the performance of schools leaders actions and in the promotion of equity and curricular justice. Nevertheless, there is a need to strengthen the leaderships training, in order to implement a culture of formative evaluation as an instrument for change and maximize the relationships between SEE, self-evaluation and internal evaluation.

In sum, these policy measures have an impact and moderately positive effects on school everyday life and although constituted as two separate policies, they are interconnected in different aspects. It seems to be a strengthening of the idea of evaluation as a monitoring mechanism of educational and improvement plans and, for that, it is essential the support of an external element, a "critical friend", in the organizational and curricular development of schools.

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