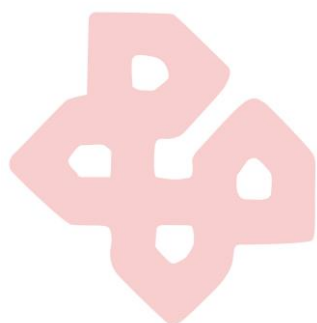




TEACHER BUREAUCRACY IN PORTUGAL: KNOWING TO ACT

Burocracia docente en Portugal: conocer para actuar



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Abstract:

Excessive bureaucracy in schools is a recurring theme in conversations between teachers and recent research confirms that, from the perspective of Portuguese teachers, it is the main constraint for the development of better quality in education and a healthy work environment.

In view of the diagnosis, a nationwide study was designed, aiming to collect the perceptions and expectations of change regarding the bureaucratic procedures of the profession. Questionnaire surveys were applied, collecting responses from statistically representative samples of 2434 teachers, 107 Principals and 49 presidents of the General Council. After categorization and analysis, a set of results was found with implications for practice.

Teachers detect bureaucratic dysfunctions, point out the waste of time with useless and redundant processes, failures in the communication channels and understand that their professional time should be refocused in class instead of filling in documents. The Principals and the Presidents of the General

Council understand that bureaucratic administration is important, but it must be adapted to the specificities of school organizations.

This investigation points out ways to change procedures that simplify and streamline processes, overcoming the detected dysfunctions, while continuing to comply with legal requirements.

Keywords: bureaucratic dysfunctions; school administration; teacher bureaucracy

Resumen:

La burocracia excesiva en las escuelas es un tema recurrente en las conversaciones entre profesores e investigación reciente confirma que, desde la perspectiva de los profesores portugueses, es el principal obstáculo para el desarrollo de una educación de mejor calidad y un entorno laboral saludable.

Ante el diagnóstico, se diseñó un estudio a nivel nacional, con el objetivo de recoger las percepciones y expectativas de cambio en relación a los trámites burocráticos de la profesión. Se aplicaron cuestionarios, recogiendo respuestas de muestras estadísticamente representativas de 2434 docentes, 107 Principales y 49 presidentes del Consejo General. Después de la categorización y el análisis, se encontró un conjunto de resultados con implicaciones para la práctica.

Los docentes detectan disfunciones burocráticas, señalan la pérdida de tiempo con procesos inútiles y redundantes, fallas en los canales de comunicación y entienden que su tiempo profesional debe reenfocarse en las clases a expensas de la cumplimentación de documentos. Los directores y los presidentes del Consejo General entienden que la administración burocrática es importante, pero debe adaptarse a las especificidades de las organizaciones escolares.

Esta investigación señala formas de cambiar procedimientos que simplifiquen y agilicen los procesos, superando las disfuncionalidades detectadas, sin dejar de cumplir con los requisitos legales.

Palabras clave: administración escolar; burocracia docente; disfunciones burocráticas

1. Introduction

It is common to find experienced public education teachers questioning the relevance of many bureaucratic procedures they have to carry out as part of their profession. They mention that the installed bureaucratic machine seems to increase every day and that each new procedure needed is only added to the existing ones, with no simplification or integration of the old ones.

Faced with the obligation to obey the legal requirements resulting from the norms that regulate the processes carried out at school, teachers comply with them, but they assume that in some schools the operationalisation of these processes is more difficult than in others.

In a study by Azevedo et al. (2016), with regard to the reasons for choosing this profession, 91.9% of the respondents chose it for vocational reasons, 58.3% of whom for liking to teach, and only 7.7% said that they chose the profession for purely instrumental reasons. Despite the evidence that the choice of profession is due to personal taste and vocation, the same study shows that 68.1% are less satisfied than at the beginning of their career, with 41% of respondents being very dissatisfied, 14.8% of whom feel tired and frustrated. Looking for the roots of dissatisfaction, one of the main reasons is the increasing bureaucratic work, since, in a unanimous position, 98.2% considered that bureaucratic and administrative tasks have become more complex and

time-consuming over time. Since bureaucratic work is seen by many teachers as useless, it is possible to assume that this is one of the factors that explain part of the growing dissatisfaction and demotivation of the class.

This demotivation causes serious consequences, including on teachers' health, as perceived in the study by Varela et al. (2018), where about 86% of teachers evaluate bureaucracy as a negative or very negative factor in their profession. By comparison, these values exceeded concerns about indiscipline by about 23%, assuming it as the problem that most concerns teachers. This professional state has caused many teachers to enter or be in a situation of pre-burnout or Job Burnout Syndrome, to such an extent that the coordinator of the study even states that teachers are victims of a work organisation that makes them ill (Varela, 2018). The feeling that, little by little, the bureaucratic load had become the first task that needed to be responded to effectively: reports, grids, plans, inconsequential papers, is common among teachers who have entered burnout. They also complain of having increased their time at school, without the seclusion of a space to think and reflect on the planning of their pedagogical activities.

2. The concept, practices and challenges of bureaucratic administration

The word bureaucracy is a hybrid term, etymologically composed from the French word bureau, meaning office, and the Greek *krátos* meaning power or rule. It was a French businessman and government official, Jacques Vincent, who coined the term *bureaucratie* around 1740 (Anter, 2010). The word emerged with an ironic sense, applied to all public offices and referred to as a kind of autonomous form of government, meaning an administration with many divisions, rules, controls and procedures redundant and unnecessary to the functioning of the system, in short, a form of domination exercised by office workers.

The understanding of bureaucracy was scientifically advanced by the works of Max Weber, which influenced the appearance of the Bureaucratic Theory of Administration around 1940. This theory, with its emphasis on the structure of the organization, advocates a system of administration based on rationality, that is, on the adaptation of the means to the intended objectives in order to guarantee maximum possible efficiency. Efficiency implies that the means should be analyzed and established in a totally formal and impersonal manner. Max Weber believed that bureaucracy was the organization par excellence, whose desired consequences boil down to the predictability of the functioning to obtain the greatest efficiency of the organization (Chiavenato, 2014).

Weber et al. (1947), without defining the term, brought together elements that he called bureaucracy, explaining it through an extensive enumeration of its characteristics. The attributes of modern bureaucracy include impersonality, concentration of the means of administration, a levelling effect between social and economic differences, and the execution of a system of authority that is practically

indestructible (Motta & Vasconcelos, 2002). For Weber (1991), bureaucratic administration is superior to other types of administration because precision, speed, certainty, knowledge of files, continuity, discretion, subordination of positions, and reduction of disagreements and costs are qualities that in the ideal bureaucracy achieve an optimal level of efficiency.

Despite the expected advantages, its practical application revealed some unforeseen consequences with failures, resistance, anomalies and imperfections that compromise efficiency and gave the motto for this research. In his 'ideal type', Weber studied bureaucracy in its abstract and static form, he did not study it in process, modified by the men who are part of it, with their values, beliefs, feelings and needs. Who takes away the perfect character of the ideal bureaucracy is the man himself (Estrada & Viriato, 2012).

Robert Merton (1970) observed that the implementation of a bureaucratic system undergoes alterations with human participation, because the predictability of behavior, which should be the greatest consequence of the organization, escapes the pre-established model, due to the existence of internal tensions, with the appearance of unforeseen and undesired consequences that lead to inefficiency. Merton systematized and designated these consequences, deviations, and exaggerations, not foreseen by the Weberian model, as 'dysfunctions of bureaucracy'.

These inefficiencies explain how a system that was intended to be purely rational and efficient can turn into something difficult to manage and generate conflicts, derived from the personal characteristics of the organization's employees.

Thus, it is understandable that even today, the Weberian concept of bureaucracy has become vulgarized in the collective imagination, emphasizing its character of dysfunctionality. It is commonly used in a pejorative formulation to represent situations of confused inefficiency and dehumanized inoperativeness (Olsen, 2005). The focus on the negative aspects of the bureaucratic organization has become commonplace, confusing dysfunctions with its process.

The reform movements promoted a discussion on the role of bureaucracy, which evolved into a redefinition of the state's functions from executor to regulator, increasing the autonomy of institutions, and this trend has been dubbed New Public Management (Lane, 2000). This has become one of the structuring pillars of the global agenda for education (Verger & Curran, 2014).

According to Barroso (2011), educational decentralization is promoted by governments in several countries, with the expectation that policies to strengthen the autonomy of schools generate less bureaucratic procedures in their management. Centralized systems tend to be bureaucratic, allowing schools little maneuver. However, research on the implementation of Contracts of Autonomy in Portugal (Carvalho & Machado, 2011; Falcão, 2013; Romão, 2016), does not show a reduction in the bureaucratic burden in schools where they are in force. On the contrary, Lima (2012) noted the growing bureaucracy in the field of school administration, with the

need to quantify all data for regulatory assessment, giving rise to what can be called hyperbureaucracy (Lima, 2015). The computer platforms for information collection and subsequent assessment, foster the dehumanization of education, creating hyperbureaucratic and utilitarian assessment (Lima 2017). Meira (2019) and Catalão and Pires (2020) conclude that the use that is being given to electronic platforms fosters impersonality and removes autonomy from schools, through new processes of bureaucratic control, with reinforcement of centralism. Lima (2021) talks about digital domination and increased bureaucracy.

The inability to completely overcome the Weberian model is global, as stated by Medeiros (2006) who, in an international analysis, found that despite the flexibilization that occurred, there was no rupture with the bureaucratic model and the action of organizations continues to focus on formal-legal rationality.

Bureaucratic dysfunctions in educational organizations occur in countries of all political spectrums, even in the cradle countries of post-bureaucratic trends, the United Kingdom (Farrel & Morris, 2003) and the United States (Spector, 2018), or, for antagonism, in Russia (Osipov, 2020). These authors have even coined the terms bureaucrapathology and buropathology.

Humes (2021) summarizes that currently teachers in many countries complain that their pedagogical work is impeded by excessive bureaucratic demands by government agencies and concludes that excessive bureaucracy is anti-educational, undermines ethical awareness and causes psychological damage, ultimately having unintended consequences that even subvert the stated objectives.

Afonso and Mendes (2018) find that some educational forms and practices that can be referred to post-bureaucracy, have not replaced the practices characteristic of bureaucracy, as a traditional model of rational-legal organization, but rather have added to and coexist with them.

One of the ways to help overcome the problem will be through knowledge of the reality, giving a voice to the actors who on a daily basis live with bureaucracy in schools.

3. Methodology

This research adopts an essentially quantitative approach. Data were collected through the application of questionnaire surveys (QS) and were subjected to an objective mathematical and statistical analysis. The generalization of results was ensured.

The complexity of the theme under analysis demands explanations, views and perspectives from different subjects (Ardoino, 1998), in this case: teachers, Principals and Presidents of the General Council (PGC) of public Schools in mainland Portugal.

4. Objectives

The study sought to analyze the perceptions and expectations regarding teaching bureaucracy. In particular it sought to know: the relationship between bureaucracy and school management and administration; the importance of bureaucracy in schools; the types of procedural tasks useful and of questionable usefulness; the influence of bureaucratic procedures implemented in schools on teachers' motivation; the expectations of changing procedures; the correlation of bureaucracy with technological modernization.

5. Data collection instruments

Three specific QSs were built, aimed at teachers (TQS), Principals (PQS) and PGC (PGCQS), in the form of online digital forms. The choice was based on the way the Portuguese education system is organized through Decree-Law No. 75/2008, in its current wording amended and republished in the annex of Decree-Law No. 137/2012, which approved the regime of autonomy, administration and management of public establishments of non-higher education. Within each school/grouping: the Principal (unipersonal body) is the guarantor that the directives of the tutelage are fulfilled and manages the human resources, finances and assets of the institution; the teachers are the executors of the outlined; the General Council, through its president (PGC) is the body that chooses and gives office to the Principal from his intervention plan and has the duty to internally supervise his performance.

The construction of the QSs, specifically designed for this study, was based on the legislation in force, the most relevant literature and the professional experience of the researchers. Subsequently, the QSs were analyzed by a group of experts and applied to pilot groups, with the purpose of improving the formulation of the questions and producing reliable instruments.

Table 1
Typology of QSs itens

QS	No. of socio-professional characterization items	No. of items with Likert scale (1 a 4)	Nº of multiple-answer items	No. of open response items
Teachers	6	47	11	1
Principals	2	20	6	1
PGC	2	18	5	1

Source: Elaborated by the author

The TQS has questions related to the perception of the relevance of bureaucratic procedures in general, procedural reality in the respondent's school, detection of dysfunctionalities, implications and expectations of change. The PQS and PGCQS ask about the bureaucratic characteristics of schools, the possibility of reducing the bureaucratic burden, the management tasks performed, computerization and the relevance of educational bureaucracy.

Cronbach's alpha (1951) coefficient of internal consistency was used to test the reliability of the constructs, by assessing whether the items created effectively correspond to the objectives or concepts that the instrument intends to measure (Coutinho, 2018). When applying the method, full scores were given to the response options, from 1, which showed a very bureaucratic response attitude or acceptance of procedures, to 4, for the option averse to bureaucracy or rejection of procedures.

6. Sample

A nationwide study was carried out, with the 811 public non-higher education school groupings/ungrouped schools of mainland Portugal as target population where, for a population of 116386 teachers, 811 Principals and 811 PGC (DGEEC, 2018), 2434 teachers, 107 Principals and 49 PGC responded.

For convenience of language, the word school also designates a non-grouped school and a grouping of schools managed by the same Principal.

In a first act, emails were sent to school Principals explaining the purpose of the study so that, in a second act, with no degree of compulsion, they would forward the Qs to their teachers and PGCs.

It was decided to leave pre-school and island teachers out of the study due to their functional and legislative specificities.

Confidentiality and anonymity of data were respected in accordance with the Law. Collaboration was voluntary and it is not possible to associate the respondent to the answer.

7. Presentation and discussion of results

7.1. Reliability of the data collected

After the Qs were collected, an analysis was made of the number of responses and the reliability of the data, recorded in Table 2.

Table 2
Number of responses and data confidence

QS	No. of responses	Average % of responses per item	Cronbach's alpha	Confidence level	Sampling error
Teachers	2434	99.5%	0.91	99%	2.60%
Principals	107	99.4%	0.76	95%	9.0%
PGC	49	98.5%	0.89	90%	11.5%

Source: Elaborated by the author

The answers allowed for high levels of confidence. Cronbach's alpha values are well above 0.7, the minimum limit for admitting construct internal consistency (Maroco

& Garcia-Marques, 2006), showing a good correlation of the data among themselves and with the overall result of the survey, representing a measurement of its reliability.

7.2. Representativeness of answers

In geographical terms, responses were collected from teachers from 114 municipalities, Principals from 66 municipalities and PGCs from 40 municipalities, in a fairly comprehensive territorial representation (Figure 1).

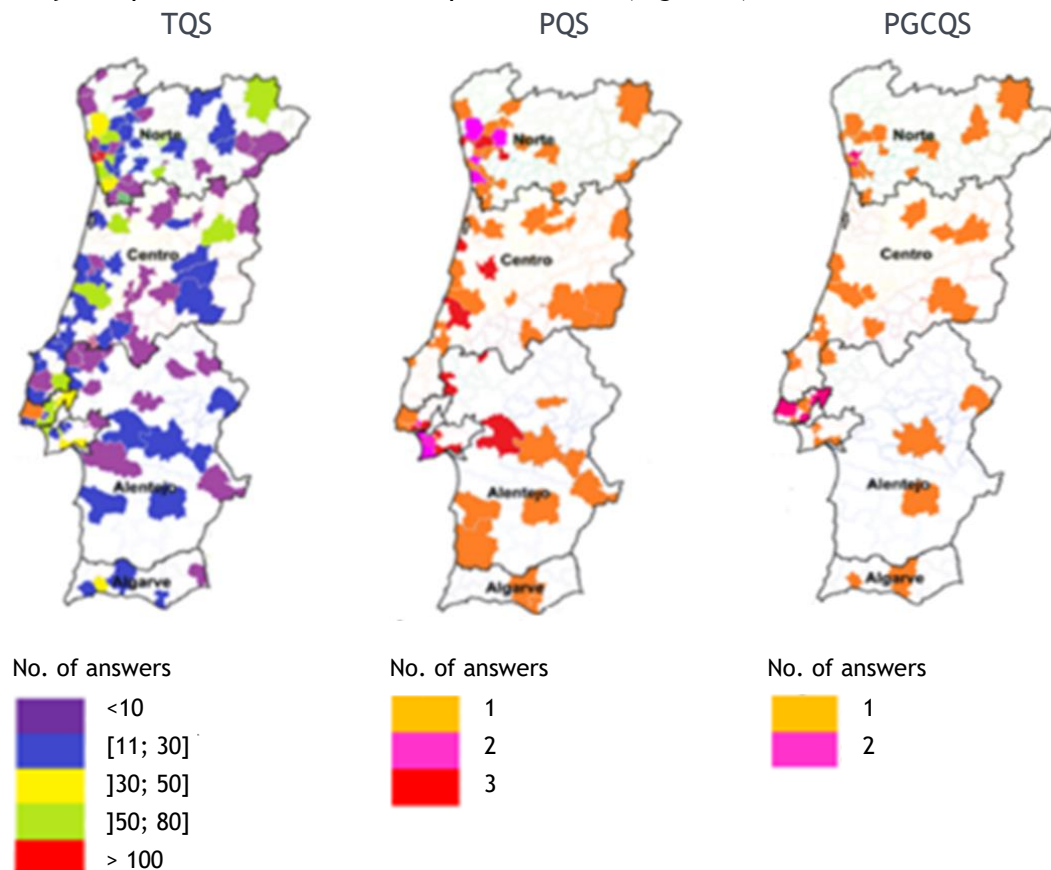


Figure 1. Geographical dispersion of the responses
Source: Elaborated by the author

Comparing the sample data of the socio-professional characterization of the teacher respondents with the official values of the teaching population in mainland Portugal (DGEEC, 2018), there is a coincidence of representativeness of value ranges regarding all the variables studied: region, gender, teaching cycle and length of service.

Given the values of reliability, confidence level and representativeness of the samples, we consider it safe to extrapolate the conclusions obtained in the data analysis to the target populations of each QS.

7.3. Categories of analysis

Data were grouped into categories and some variables were crossed in order to meet the research objectives. The following observations were derived from the process of data organization and treatment by category:

7.3.1. Perception of the relevance of bureaucracy in schools

Almost 80% of teachers are skeptical about the importance of bureaucracy for the functioning of a school, with 32.2% disagreeing completely about its importance.

Teachers of both genders are very critical of bureaucracy, but it can be seen that women adopt more formal attitudes and accept the imposition of bureaucratic procedures more easily, since 30.0% of them completely disagree with the importance of bureaucracy in the functioning of the school, while in men it is 39.2%. This has implications given that the absolute number of women is three times greater.

However, when faced with the possibility of schools living without bureaucratic procedures, the percentage of teachers who agrees, falls to 37.0%. In addition, the percentage of teachers who fully believe that schools can live without bureaucracy compared to those who fully agree that it is of no importance drops from 32.2% to 3.7%. This cross data shows that although teachers agree with the need for bureaucratic procedures, they are averse to the degree of formality that is present in schools today.

It can be seen that Principals and PGCs disagree much more than teachers about the possibility of schools being able to live without bureaucracy. Even so, 12.2% of headteachers and 17.4% of PGC chose hypotheses in which they agree that this is possible.

Compared to the teachers, 6.9%, many more Principals and PGC consider bureaucracy to be absolutely essential to the functioning of schools, although only 24.5% and 15.2% respectively are fully in favor of its importance.

7.3.2. Perception of the degree of bureaucracy in your school compared to others

An analysis of Table 3 shows that the number of teachers who think their school is more bureaucratic than the average exceeds the number who think it is less bureaucratic. But in these two poles, the number of those who completely agree that their school is more bureaucratic than the others, 13.8%, is much higher than those who say their school is much less bureaucratic than the average, 5.4%, revealing the idea of dissatisfaction of teachers with the bureaucratic procedures in their school, perceiving them as exaggerated and thinking that in others they may be less.

Table 3
Degree of bureaucracy in the school where the teacher teaches compared to others

		Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree	No opinion
Your school, compared to other schools you have taught in or know, is very bureaucratic	Teachers	5.4%	32.6%	34.2%	13.8%	14.0%
	Principals	17.0%	59.4%	17.9%	0.0%	5.7%
	PGC	2.3%	47.7%	36.4%	2.3%	11.4%

Source: Elaborated by the author

A relevant parameter is that 14.1% of teachers have no opinion on the comparison of the degree of bureaucracy in their school with others, being the highest rate of lack of opinion on a question in the entire TQS. Cross-referencing exclusively the teachers' data, within the universe of responses of those who have no opinion with their professional category, only 7.4% of them are contract teachers compared to 77.2% who work in the schools to which they are officially attached. The average length of stay in their school for this latter group is a very significant 19.6 years, which makes it difficult for them to get to know different ways of making procedures operational in other establishments. As it is these teachers who occupy management and middle management positions, this may be an explanation for the crystallization of many procedures, albeit not very efficient, in many schools, by mere routine.

As for the head teachers, 17.9% admit that their school may be more bureaucratic than average, and the percentage of those who say their school is less bureaucratic than average is similar. But 5.7% have no notion of how bureaucratic their school is compared to others, thus denoting an isolation that could be a handicap in their position.

The opinion of the PGC is less pessimistic than that of the teachers but less optimistic than that of the Principals, since 38.7% believe that their school is more bureaucratic than average. A percentage of 11.4% who have no opinion about the comparison with other schools is especially high, taking into account that the PGC chairs the highest body of the school and has a role in which he/she should evaluate the decisions taken by the Principal.

7.3.3. Perception of those responsible for excessive bureaucracy in schools

Teachers do not only blame the Ministry for the high degree of bureaucracy they feel in schools, as 33.8% believe that most schools do not limit themselves to obeying the legislation and even go beyond it, introducing the control of more variables, further bureaucratizing an already bureaucratic system.

There is a suspicion of 7.5% of teachers that the documentation produced in schools does not respect the legislation, due to lack of updating. On the other hand, 22.0% exonerate schools from the bureaucratization detected, believing that they limit themselves to scrupulously complying with the legislation and 22.8% value the work of the structures in their schools, believing that they are concerned with the simplification of procedures and their redundancy. A percentage of 13.9% is not quite

sure whether the bureaucratic documents produced in their schools are in line with the legislation or not. This last figure may indicate a high degree of demotivation with the inevitable suppression of their capacity for critical opinion in a still significant percentage of teachers.

Teachers indicate that they feel overwhelmed by bureaucratic procedures that take up their time, tire them out and are perceived as useless. But there is some hope that this state of affairs can improve, since a very significant majority of Principals agree, 57.5%, and totally agree, 26.4%, that it is possible to reduce bureaucracy in their schools. However, since, on average, headteachers have been in office for so long ($\frac{3}{4}$ of them for more than two terms) and if, by such a wide margin, they believe that it is possible to reduce the bureaucratic burden and simplify processes, one would expect them to have already implemented some bureaucratic streamlining processes. On the other hand, 21.3% of the Principals did not agree that they could reduce bureaucracy in their school, with only a minority of them explaining their choice, pointing out that the obstacle to simplification is the fear of being able to fail in the face of external evaluations and inspections, and that they over-bureaucratize processes for fear of having failures pointed out to them.

7.3.4. Evolution of bureaucratic requests

Focusing only on the amount of bureaucratic procedures required, 93.0% of the teachers believe that this has clearly increased since they started teaching, and 82.2% have no doubt in categorically stating their certainty about the continuous increase over time. This is in line with the literature consulted, where it was found that post-bureaucratic perspectives and political discourses have not reduced bureaucratic demands, quite the contrary.

A significant 93.0% of teachers believe that the bureaucratic procedures demanded of them interfere negatively in the preparation time of classroom activities, with 76.9% agreeing completely with the view of their toxicity due to their excess.

7.3.5. Communication

According to 54.7% of the teaching staff, there is little clarity in the communication by the hierarchically superior supervisory and intermediary structures about the relevance of the bureaucratic documents they have to fill in. They also believe that the bureaucratic documents they have to fill in do not focus on the essential. 13.9% of the teachers have no hesitation in criticizing their quality in a very negative manner. Only 5.6% are very satisfied with their quality. One way to improve these aspects would be to change the internal communication of the school as 32.6% think. Even though this does not seem to be the most relevant aspect, since 65.5% of the students say that the communication of information between the different intermediate structures and between these and the teachers is good or very good.

However, more attention should be paid to communication issues in many schools, as 39.1% of teachers feel that schools/intermediate structures do not explain the intention of the documents they ask to be filled in, and a significant majority of

teachers, 65.9%, state that there is no care for them to explain how their operationalization could be beneficial for the students' school success.

Downstream of data collection, one would expect to mobilize the extracted results for the improvement of education, however, 63.6% of the respondents believe that the collected and stored data is not mobilized and therefore has no impact.

Still on the communication channels used in schools, it was possible to verify that the use of e-mail is well rooted in the teaching community, as 57.3% believe that it is an excellent means because it is fast and effective. Despite recognizing the speed of communication, 11.9% questioned its effectiveness because they are inundated with too many e-mails, which are sent without criteria and become 'background noise'. It should be noted that 28.2% of teachers would prefer to exchange e-mail for other more evolved platforms, collaborative and with different levels of access, adapted to the user's profile and with real-time updates. Although an insignificant minority of only 1.1% were concerned about the issues of confidentiality in the use of e-mail, a large majority of 80.2% of teachers showed the need for some restraint in its use outside school hours to avoid dysfunctional interference with their personal lives.

7.3.6. Process redundancy

The fact that there are data collected that are not mobilized to create knowledge in the organization and to increase students' academic success is further amplified by the perception/confirmation that, despite this, there is a redundancy in their collection through multiple overlapping instruments and communication channels.

This redundancy introduces irrationality into the system, takes up resources, is time consuming and causes dissatisfaction; this is confirmed by 74.6% of teachers, which contrasts with only 21.5% of teachers who are satisfied with the data collection instruments in their schools, see table 4.

Table 4
Redundancy in information collection - TQS

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree	No opinion
In your school there are redundant bureaucratic procedures which, as a consequence, result in the same information having to be provided and recorded several times	3.9%	17.6%	36.7%	37.9%	3.9%

Source: Elaborated by the author

In this respect teachers were directly questioned on the importance of minutes, still considered the means of recording and transmitting information par excellence. Despite a wide dispersion of responses, a majority, 56.8%, do not believe that minutes are essential to ensure the communication of important information or the effectiveness of the information recorded in them. Only 8.6 % of teachers believe that

they are absolutely essential. This finding shows that schools have created alternative means of recording, not by replacing the old ones, but by adding them to those that already existed.

In the case of Principals and PGC, respectively 33.7% and 53.2% consider that there is redundancy of information collection in several different documents, but that it will not be possible to end this redundancy, despite the rationalization attempts that are undertaken in their schools. Only 15.4% of the Principals' state that there is no redundancy of information collection in their schools because there are formal rules for the creation of documents and these are subject to analysis by management to ensure optimization. The picture drawn by PGCs is slightly less optimistic, with only 12.8% confirming good practices in their schools to eliminate these problems. No Principal chose the option that they have implemented a computer platform with automatic auto-filling of fields from a database, so it is clear that this is an area that can be explored and developed.

7.3.7. Meetings

Teachers are mostly in favor, 80.0%, of the importance of having meetings, as they do not agree with Peter Drucker's (2001, p.237) somewhat ironic statement that "one either meets or one works".

There is no doubt about the need for meetings and their importance for joint reflection and procedural and pedagogical decision-making. There is, however, a rather contested attitude to the number and importance of meetings held in schools, as 86.9% of teachers believe that there should be more moderation in scheduling them. In many cases they could be replaced by alternative instruments for sharing information and ideas, with 42.7% of the teachers believing that this is imperative for the smooth running of the school, inferring that the current functioning is bad.

When asked about the number of meetings each teacher attended per term, 63.1% attended more than 10, and a significant 10.9% said they attended more than 30, more than 10 per month.

The teaching staff shows great rejection to the number of meetings to which they are summoned, 83% think that the number of meetings should be reduced, being that 43.1% believe that they should be greatly reduced.

7.3.8. Degree of importance attached to different activities

Focusing on the students' school success, the table 5 shows that 95.8% of the teachers attribute a high degree of importance to the preparation and implementation of activities with students, development of projects and individualized support. The meetings of a more restricted and targeted nature, such as the assessment meetings, the disciplinary group meetings and individualized meetings with parents, generate a high degree of agreement on their importance for the academic success of students for 87.6% of the teachers.

Table 5
Importance given to different activities implemented at school - TQS

	Nothing important	Not very important	Moderately important	Very important	No opinion/ not relevant
Activities with students and their preparation	0.5%	3.1%	22.1%	73.7%	0.6%
Filling in documents	20.0%	37.2%	30.3%	11.8%	0.7%
Small group meetings	1.9%	9.9%	44.8%	42.8%	0.6%
Large group meetings	20.5%	46.0%	23.6%	9.5%	0.5%

Source: Elaborated by the author

On the other hand, less importance is given to the documents and monitoring reports they have to fill in, as well as the existence of large group meetings, including departmental, interim and parents' meetings, with rejection rates of their importance for student success respectively of 57.2% and 66.5%. Once again, in line with previous analyses, teachers advocate refocusing their professional time on activities with students and their preparation and less on unhelpful and dispensable meetings and paperwork. They are also very critical of filling in evaluation reports for all types of activities they have to develop.

7.3.9. Documentation and records

Teachers attribute low importance to documentary record keeping. A majority of 69.7% disagrees with the importance/obligation/necessity of formal recording of all tasks performed.

Focusing on the students' effective academic success, a relevant majority of 93.6% believes that these procedures are not important, and 42.8% strongly disagrees with this statement, see table 6.

Table 6
Perception of the impact of bureaucratic procedures on student success- TQS

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree	No opinion
The different bureaucratic procedures that teachers have to comply with improve students' academic success	42.8%	50.8%	4.6%	1.3%	0.5%

Source: Elaborated by the author

The completion of most documents is compulsory, but the Decrees and Ordinances do not prescribe a standardized model to be filled in. The majority of teachers agree with the standardization of the documentation they are asked to fill in, with only 7.1% preferring to make their own templates after reading the legislation. However, most of them, in line with the perception already evidenced in this work, do not attach importance to these documents for the effective academic success of their students and, in an attempt to spend as little time as possible with them to have more time to prepare the activities with the students, they like to be told exactly what to

do, with 47.3% of them appreciating very prescriptive documentation where they only have to fill in previously defined spaces.

Particularizing the question of preference for open or prescriptive/normalized documents, teachers were asked about the type of minutes they would prefer to have. The answers are in agreement with the question of documents in general, as 72.8% reinforce the idea of some benefits of standardization, reducing the loss of time and easier monitoring afterwards. Around 50% of the teachers added that in addition to standardization with spaces to fill in and a body that is the same for all similar meetings, there should cumulatively be spaces that allow the insertion of additional specific information, without giving up their margin of autonomy and critical spirit.

This eagerness for documentary recording is often fostered and amplified in schools for fear of having shortcomings pointed out to them during external evaluation and inspections, as is evident from some observations.

7.3.10. The use of paper

The increase of technological tools in schools, used also in bureaucratic tasks, is undeniable. The digitalization of documentation does not seem, however, to have had an impact on the decrease in the use of paper, as 53.0% of teachers believe that this has not happened. And while 17.7% believe it has decreased a lot, 22.2% believe it has increased a lot. These discrepancies may show very different ways of operating among some schools, with a small number of them having modernized and dematerialized their documentation, while the majority continues to print excessive documents that could exist only in digital version. There are several respondents clarifying that instruments have been duplicated with archiving of the digital versions and mandatory printing to archive those same paper versions.

7.3.11. Digital platforms

The Information Technology (IT) resources allow to replicate and treat a lot of documentation in a short period of time. However, 75.1% of lecturers believe that this has not served to reduce their bureaucratic load, and 31.0% strongly disagree with this hypothesis, as shown in the table 7. It can be inferred that we have moved from a more 'analogue' pen and paper platform to replicate it in a very similar way on the computer screen, only exchanging the pen for the keyboard and mouse.

Table 7
Impact of IT resources on cutting red tape - TQS

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree	No opinion
The IT resources, in addition to reducing the time needed to complete procedures, have also reduced their bureaucratic burden	31.0%	44.1%	17.0%	7.0%	0.8%

Source: Elaborated by the author

Teachers believe that not all the functionalities of IT resources are being fully exploited, and that the desirable paradigm shift has not occurred. Instead, they tried to replicate the traditional model in the computerized model.

Despite being in favor of simple platforms for the automatic collection and processing of data in order to have up-to-date information in real time, only 21.0% of the principals stated that they had such systems implemented in their schools. Even so, this figure is almost three times higher than that of the PGC, 7.5%, who say that there are such platforms in their schools. On the other hand, 1/3 of the Principals admit not having statistics updated in real time in their schools, with 4.8% considering this possibility utopian given the material and human resources available to them.

Despite the enormous effort and resources devoted to gathering information, there do not seem to be digital resources, or they are not being used in a way that allows this information to be processed efficiently and provides feed-back to act quickly.

Principals have to fill in data in computer platforms of various Ministry of Education substructures and this is the task most mentioned, with a total of 81.3% of all respondents. There is a tie between those who have a positive and those who have a negative idea of the quality of these platforms, but at the extremes of these opinions, the 9.5% who think they are very bad are more than three times as many as those who think they are very good, with no Principal considering them excellent.

The Ministry itself should invest in improving its platforms, making them less redundant and more rational, thus reducing the time spent on them.

7.3.12. Motivation

The overwhelming majority of the respondents, 91.5%, in line with their critical attitude towards bureaucracy, believe that it is clearly responsible for much of the demotivation of teachers, since they think that reducing the degree of bureaucracy in schools would lead to an increase in motivation. Two thirds totally agree with this position. Conversely, only 5.3% of teachers disagree with the negative impact on professional motivation.

7.3.13. Ideal bureaucracy vs bureaucratic dysfunctions

Principals and PGCs were consulted about the applicability to a school of various characteristics that define a bureaucratized organization from a classical management perspective. These included items with an emphasis on structure and others, more operational with an emphasis on tasks. Both headteachers and PGC clearly agree on the applicability to the school of all the characteristics of a rational bureaucratic organization, with the exception of a fully standardized functioning and no job rotation. Principals and PGCs thus showed great reservations that a totally standardized functioning, where everything is foreseen and there is no room for improvisation, is appropriate in an educational organization and that the rotation of teachers in posts should be promoted rather than avoided. As the school is a sui generis

organization in which the qualifications of its members are very homogeneous, this will imply the assumption of attitudinal characteristics and personal relationships very different from those of other types of organizations.

Despite the perception of Principals and PGC that the characteristics of a bureaucratic organization generally fit schools, the majority opinion of teachers is that all of Merton's bureaucratic dysfunctions (Chiavenato, 2014) eventually occur, as shown in the table 8. In the QSs, an explanation of the meaning of each item was presented.

Table 8
Bureaucratic dysfunctions in schools - TQS

	Totally disagree	Disagree	Agree	Totally agree	No opinion
Internalization of rules and regulations	0.5%	10.6%	51.9%	34.5%	2.5%
Excessive formality and paperwork	0.4%	2.4%	42.3%	54.6%	0.3%
Resistance to change	1.8%	12.0%	47.4%	37.7%	1.1%
Depersonalization of the relationship	4.8%	38.9%	38.8%	13.8%	3.7%
Categorization as the basis of the decision-making process	3.7%	26.1%	42.0%	25.1%	3.1%
Display of authority signs	4.6%	22.9%	40.3%	28.4%	3.7%
Generation of internal and external conflicts	2.9%	24.8%	45.2%	18.1%	8.9%

Source: Elaborated by the author

There was a maximum of 96.9% agreement regarding excessive formality and documentation. The increasing need to fill in all kinds of 'paperwork' with evidence and evaluation records is strongly rejected by teachers.

All the remaining dysfunctions were identified by a large majority, with the exception of the decrease in personalized relations between the members of the organization, with the privilege of totally institutional communication, which obtained a minimum, of agreement of 52.6%.

Dysfunctions will thus corrupt the virtues that could come from an ideal bureaucratic process, which would be efficient and rational.

7.3.14. Administration and Management tasks

A set of 13 tasks (table 9) was provided which are performed by the directorates and the Principals were asked to indicate the five tasks on which they effectively have to spend most of their time. On the other hand, the PGC were asked which ones they felt Principals should ideally spend more time on. From the replies, it was found that Principals spend most of their time on operational tasks of current management, with very little time left for tasks related to planning, evaluation and self-evaluation and those of a pedagogical nature. On the other hand, the PGCs believe that the main focus and time spent by the headteachers should be precisely on the short and long term planning of the school and on circulating around the school, getting to know its operation directly. The only feature that coincides in the top five surveyed by

headteachers and PGC is the issue of service to members of the school community, further indicating that interpersonal relationships are seen as very important in school organizations by all interlocutors.

Table 9
Principals' tasks- PQS and PGCQS

	Principals (what they do)	PGC (what Principals should do)
Institutional meetings (internal and external)	14.3%	4.8%
Completion of data requested by the guardianship in documents and platforms.	16.1%	1.0%
Service to members of the school community.	14.3%	11.4%
Financial management of the grouping.	9.6%	7.1%
Managing conflicts of different community members	11.7%	9.0%
Discussion and implementation of strictly pedagogical projects	5.8%	11.0%
Move around the school observing spaces and behavior	3.5%	11.4%
Moments of individual or collective reflection to "think school".	2.8%	11.4%
Self-assessment	2.2%	4.3%
Internal / external evaluation processes	5.4%	5.7%
Training of teaching and non-teaching staff	1.1%	3.3%
Institutional communication	7.8%	3.3%
Medium/long term strategic thinking and planning	5.4%	16.2%

Source: Elaborated by the author

From the results obtained, it can be observed that there will be the need to change many procedural processes, as Principals are faced with the need to prioritize administrative and operational tasks, having to leave strategic planning and pedagogical tasks in second place. Considering the expectations of the PGC, Principals are probably confronted with the fact that they cannot respect the intervention project that was approved by the General Council at the time of their election.

The prioritization of administrative processes over pedagogical ones is confirmed when 48.1% of the Principals understand that the insertion of data in digital platforms of the guardianship is important because the specific feedback information that is returned, can be used to improve administrative processes, but only 31.5% understand that they help to improve pedagogical processes.

8. Final considerations

The teachers detected various bureaucratic dysfunctions, of which we highlight the waste of time with useless and redundant processes, failures in communication channels and the need to refocus their professional time on teaching activities rather than on filling out useless documents and meetings. Teachers point to a problem of efficiency and use of resources, as they feel that bureaucracy is unimportant, yet the

school mobilizes its resources by organizing itself in an excessively bureaucratic way, with a very significant absolute majority of more than 90% of the teachers fully agreeing with this finding.

Principals and PGCs believe that the bureaucratic model is important, but it must be adapted to the specificities of school organizations. In the case of headteachers, the little time they devote to discussing and implementing projects of a pedagogical nature hints that the school Principal is less and less a teacher and more a manager.

With these premises it is objectively proven that there is a problem installed in schools with the spread of non-effective bureaucratic tasks, which are impediments to a rational use of resources. They also foster psychological and physical problems in Portuguese teachers.

From the study the urgency of change stands out. The challenge of changing an organization is not solved only with the perception of the need to change, but involves the challenge of careful and thoughtful choice of the model of change to be adopted (Fisher & Fisher 2002). Cultural change is the most difficult part of an organizational transformation and many managers underestimate it, not only with respect to time, but also with respect to the costs involved (Oliveira, 2006). On the other hand, it is essential to collect the opinions of the people involved in the changes, in order to enable and enhance the ongoing change process. The implemented bureaucratic procedures should facilitate the necessary accountability of the decisions taken, the so-called accountability (Cardoso, 2016), which translates into the consequent need for continuous improvement in their performance and the obligation to give feedback on the results to society, but in a rational and simple process.

School Principals will need to be aware of these old problems and take advantage of technologies to overcome them, as there is a compelling need for a change in procedures. It will be important to have a serious and informed debate on how the non-negotiated, not well-informed implementation of certain procedures, with their proliferation, produces a system that becomes inefficient and generates useless administrative procedures and documents. This makes the system completely inefficient, demotivating and uncooperative. If people are forced into something they do not believe in, they will perform the work by pressure, they act because they think they have to, on the contrary if they are committed and believe in the usefulness of the acts they perform, they will make the right choice to perform the work in the right way because it will mean something to them (Oliveira, 2002).

The Ministry of Education should look this problem in the face and implement measures. Additionally, in each school, intervention plans should be created to address the difficulties, where questions are asked about what each task requested is aimed at, how many have the intention of improvement at its genesis and how many are merely for filing. Based on the responses and on its particular resources and extending the plan over time, the school should simplify and streamline the required procedures, taking into account the specificities of its context.

The role that inspection and external evaluation teams have in schools should also be rethought. There were several statements found in the QS that schools work according to possible inspections, trying to archive the maximum number of documents instead of thinking collaboratively, simplifying and focusing energies on the direct educational process. The Ministry of Education will have to investigate whether inspections are truly promoting greater success for students, or instead are mainly promoting the need to fill in bureaucratic documents of questionable importance.

Chiavenato (2014, p.15) points out that "the basic task of administration is to do things through people efficiently and effectively", highlighting the importance of human beings in the administrative process. Thus, a modern administration cannot forget the particularities, wills and desires of the people who work in the organization, something overlooked both by the Bureaucratic Theory in its more traditional formulation, and by the operationalization of the post-bureaucratic perspectives of monitoring results. An efficient and effective functioning of the school organization will only be achieved if people are taken into account.

No data was collected to allow differentiation between the 37% of schools in the country with autonomy contracts and those that did not. However, there is evidence in the literature that these contracts have not reduced the amount and complexity of bureaucratic procedures (Carvalho & Machado, 2011; Lima, 2012; Falcão, 2013; Romão, 2016).

The findings of this research confirm and deepen the knowledge of what has been published, nationally and internationally, on educational bureaucracy. The present work legitimizes a more detailed approach to this problematic, within the scope of future research, namely analysis of the specific bureaucracy associated with pre-school level, schools with differentiated autonomy contracts, recent legislative changes related to curriculum flexibility, inclusive school and municipalization of education. It is also possible to continue the theme by correlating the perception of the Ministry of Education with the perceptions of school Principals and teachers. The use of a more qualitative methodology, through semi-structured interviews would allow to verify to what extent the "legislated" bureaucracy conditions the full exercise of the role of school Principals and, inherently, the exercise of the teaching function, or whether it is itself conditioned by the "overzealousness" of those who run the schools, hiding a bureaucracy perceived, but not necessary.

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