

'I Don't Feel Like an Education Professional'. Teacher Autonomy and Professional Identity Under the Logic of Quantification and Accountability

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Abstract: New Public Management practices in education promote systems of standardisation and datification of student and teacher performance. These dynamics intensify teacher accountability for academic performance in contexts of competitive schooling. Such mechanisms can affect professional autonomy and influence teachers' perceptions of identity. This paper aims to understand the impact of quantification and accountability policies on teachers' professional identity. To do so, the inductive method is used from a hermeneutic perspective. A theoretical sampling is delimited that reaches saturation with the participation of 30 informants and the semi-structured in-depth interview strategy is employed to access data of interest. For the analysis of the data, the qualitative design defined in Grounded Theory is followed. The results indicate that teachers perceive a limitation in their professional autonomy. The intensification of the elements of quantification and the dynamics of control confront a teaching practice that differs from the professional judgements and motivations claimed. This generates ruptures between the claimed professional identity and the impositions of the neoliberal agenda. As a result, teachers end up implementing a practice they do not believe in, which deteriorates their experience, restricts their work and conditions their satisfaction.

Keywords: Identity, Teacher, Autonomy, Accountability, Commodification, Bureaucratisation.

1. Introduction

Neoliberalisation policies are in their third decade, transforming education systems in different geographical latitudes. In the contemporary model of governmentality, policies are configured through "global assemblages", processes of "policy mobility" and reconfigurations of "fast policies" (Peck & Theodore, 2015) that "mutate" through different spaces. For this reason, the analysis of educational privatisation continues to be a prolific field of research. On the one hand, the participation of private actors in public education under for-profit logics is advancing in the era of digital capitalism, opening new privatisation frameworks (Saura, Cancela & Parcerisa, 2023). On the other hand, the functional proposals introduced by the New Public Management (NPM) on education systems modify the organisational dynamics, management and work of education professionals as a whole (Nilsen & Skarpenes, 2022). In education, these practices implement a business philosophy in the public system by increasing competition between schools as a basis for improving results; the intensification of

standardised elements that favour the quantification and comparability of student learning; the emulation of school management models based on private sector methodologies; and the development of accountability mechanisms (Pagès & Prieto, 2020).

This research is based on NPM practices identified in the Spanish context. The extension of quasi-market models is a policy observed in the different autonomous regions of the State¹. The literature points to new logics of competition and marketing promoted by the extension of schooling areas. This makes it possible to increase competition between the centres that share the geographical space delimited for schooling, while enhancing the margin of choice for families. At the same time, different regional legislations introduce criteria associated with 'social demand' to expand the network of subsidised schools that compete with the public education network² (Murillo, Almazán & Martínez-Garrido, 2021). In this sense, different autonomous communities develop standardised evaluations, generally called *Diagnostic Assessments*, under the justification of detecting and informing about the weaknesses of the system. However, the academic literature reports on their use as a marketing element and a lure in the competitive schooling space (Luengo Navas & Molina Pérez, 2018).

Consequently, standardised assessment systems have been presented as linked to accountability mechanisms that combine bureaucratic control logics with 'market accountability' systems for family choice (Pagès, 2021). Market orientation is expressed through the provision of reports, scores, statistics and other data to favour school choice in contexts of school competition. The administrative and bureaucratic orientation responds to the task of monitoring teaching practice by means of elements that ensure that the work is in line with the guidelines issued at different levels of Administration. Although this policy shares features at global and national level, it is indeed adapted to each autonomous community according to cultural and institutional variables or political and economic conditioning factors (Pulido-Montes & Martínez-Usarralde, 2022). As a general characteristic, the Spanish accountability model responds to a low-risk approach (Pagès, 2021). However, in the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, pioneering programmes have been developed in Spain that introduce financial incentive mechanisms for teachers associated with the improvement of school performance that can be demonstrated in accountability systems. In this framework, data, statistics and percentages become elements that guide teachers' professional actions (Piattoeva, 2021) and accountability mechanisms act by intensifying teachers' individual responsibility for student performance. It is an 'augmented bureaucracy' that urges teachers to achieve performance and manage their own effectiveness (Lima, 2021).

The fact is that educational performance on standardised assessment tests has become the primary consideration of good teaching in the public sphere. This has profound implications for teachers' professional practice, as teacher quality is aligned with student performance in monitoring systems characterised by extensive data, statistics and comparisons (Sullivan et al., 2021). Thus, in environments of measurement and accountability, teaching practices are subject to ongoing audit

1. The Spanish State is organised into seventeen autonomous communities and two autonomous cities. In Spanish education policy, competences are distributed between the General State Administration and the autonomous communities.

2. In addition to the public and private network, in Spain there are state-subsidised centres: institutions whose management belongs to a private organisation and whose funding is public.

systems. For this reason, teachers' professional experience takes on a central role in research that seeks to understand the impact of corporate management of public education on the professional body. In this vein, the academic literature points out that accountability systems can influence the perceptions that professionals develop about their autonomy, the focus of their classes, their teaching programmes or the way they think of themselves as education professionals (Duarte & Brewer, 2022).

This research studies the eventual transformations from the analytical lens provided by the study of teacher professional identity. Practice with students and professional autonomy are the main dimensions that shape teacher identity. The extensive review by Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop (2004) points to the obvious difficulty in providing a widely shared concept of teacher professional identity. Nevertheless, an approach to understanding the notion is presented through four characteristics that are shared in this research. The first understands professional identity as a construct determined by a continuous, dynamic and constantly reconstructing process. The second refers to teaching identity as involving both the person and the context in which teachers uniquely learn the professional characteristics of teaching. The third states that professional identity is made up of elements or dimensions that tend to balance with the aim of avoiding conflicts or tensions. The fourth states that teacher identity is made up of professional influence, or agency, and the active pursuit of teacher professional development.

Practices of standardisation, quantification and accountability can exert a strong impact on how teachers perceive themselves as educational professionals (Connolly et al., 2018). NPM dynamics require a neoliberalised interpretation of the 'professional self' linked to performance targets, meeting standards and responding to accountability mechanisms (Singh, 2018). These accountability procedures entail the development of a professional identity that may be subject to perceptions of competence in datified and controlled educational environments. Various studies have analysed the construction of performative subjectivity in recent decades. Performativity is understood as a political technology that acts through the active and free disposition of the teacher with a commitment to quantification and performance (Ball, 2003). Being ineffective in productivity environments can produce fears that undermine the teacher's professional identity and sense of self-worth. Even today, the transition to neoperformative teachers who, rather than resisting the terror of quantification and control, learn to manage it in order to avoid situations of professional burnout (Wilkins, Gobby & Keddie, 2021), is being advocated.

Therefore, the academic community requires contextually situated studies that allow us to delve into the meanings, experiences and subjective aspects that shape a particular view of being perceived as a professional. The aim of this paper is to *understand the impact of quantification and accountability policies on teachers' professional identity*. To this end, two research questions are established to guide the epistemic-methodological procedure followed:

- How do accountability mechanisms based on market and bureaucratic logics affect teachers' professional practices?
- What impact do the dynamics of quantification and standardisation exert on the reconstruction of teacher professional identity?

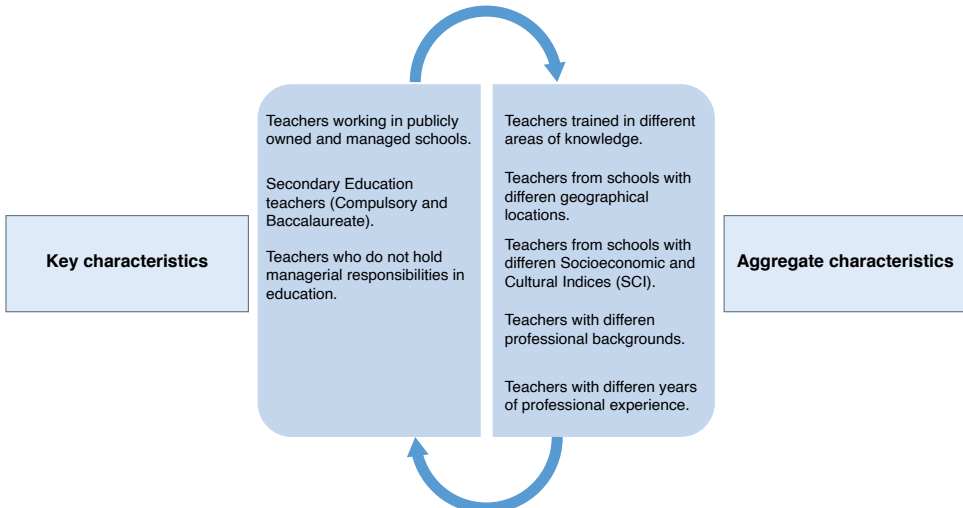
2. Method

In order to respond to the objective of the study, a phenomenological approach is followed, employing an inductive method. This allows us to delve deeper into teachers' experiences for understanding the impact of quantification and accountability practices. Delving into professional identity involves making sense of and understanding cognitive, emotional and action dimensions, which is an arduous challenge for educational research in contexts of neoliberalisation (Courtney & Gunter, 2019). In line with authorship, the methodological challenge is met by adopting a narrative approach that enables us to project meanings, motivations, desires and purposes that shape teachers' identities. Contrasting the identities claimed and the imputations that connect the working biography with the political agenda can account for the continuity or rupture of the 'professional self', in line with contrasted methodological approaches in this field (Bolívar Botia & Domingo Segovia, 2019). Consequently, an inductive analysis is proposed that favours a task of contextual interpretation of the narratives. In this way, 'emerging theories' are formed from which to understand the teachers' experience and the reconstruction of their professional identity as a consequence of the political practices of quantification and accountability (Maxwell, 2021).

2.1. Participants

Thirty participants were selected by the definition of 'cases of interest' to respond to key characteristics, which determine the participation of teachers in the research process, and aggregate characteristics (Figure 1), with the purpose of differentiating the profiles of participation.

Figure 1: Key Characteristics and Aggregate Characteristics for Participant Selection.



Note. Prepared by the authors.

A 'theoretical sampling' is defined to broaden the complexity of the information,

its interactivity and its diversity. The aim is to look for 'discrepant cases' among the 'cases of interest', to 'integrate only a few cases but those that are as different as possible' (Flick, 2012, p. 82). This does not respond to criteria of randomisation or representativeness for external generalisation of results but focuses on seeking diversity and heterogeneity of teachers' experiences and perspectives.

Access to the set of participants is initiated by means of an institutional e-mail to educational centres informing them of the purpose of the research and requesting the voluntary collaboration of the teaching staff. The key informants begin their participation once they have consulted and signed the informed consent and data processing, following the ethical standards defined by the Institutional Review Boards (IRB). Subsequently, the *snowball sampling* technique is developed, and it is the informants who propose new participant profiles that are considered or discarded following a record of the contextual characteristics of the previous profiles to differentiate the cases (Obilor, 2023). Theoretical sampling ends when the 'theoretical saturation' of the emerging categories is reached and the collection of new information does not add elements of interest to the analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

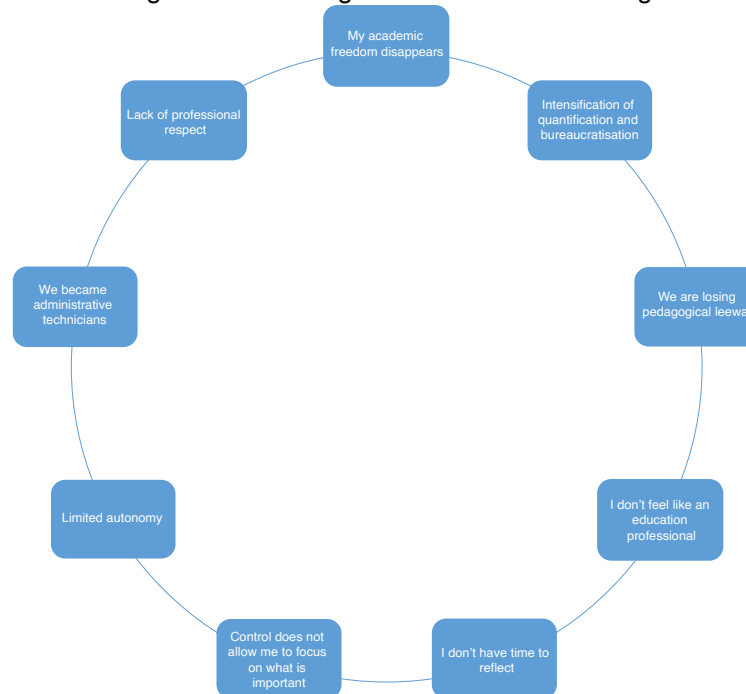
2.2. Strategies and Procedure

Among the different narrative strategies for obtaining information, this research uses the semi-structured in-depth interview. It is considered that this technique allows for the compilation of broad narrative accounts limited to specific research objectives; it makes it possible to be dynamic in blocks of interest; and it enhances complicity between the participants in the dialogic process (Ibarra-Sáiz, González-Elorza & Rodríguez Gómez, 2023). The interview is organised according to a script composed of three blocks of interest for the research previously defined within the framework of the R&D&I project 'Teacher professionalisation: Discourses, policies and practices. New approaches and proposals': the perception of professional autonomy, satisfaction with professional practice and the possible discrepancy between the current perception and the divided perception. The blocks are presented for guidance only, and the dialogue space is characterised by the laxity of the structured elements to favour narrative accounts of interest to the participants.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis is carried out simultaneously with data collection. The QSR NVivo software is used to systematise this process. The course of the analysis follows the phases defined in «Grounded Theory», which comprises a systematic process of information analysis based on strategies of comparison and saturation of information to form emerging theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, an 'in vivo coding' of the information is carried out. This is an inductive coding that locates the set of narratives, or units of meaning, that are of interest to the research questions. These units of meaning are coded using terminology that synthesises the participant's main idea. The coding of data and the connections made between different units of meaning intersect to reconstruct an in-depth understanding of teachers' professional experience in quantification and accountability settings (Figure 2).

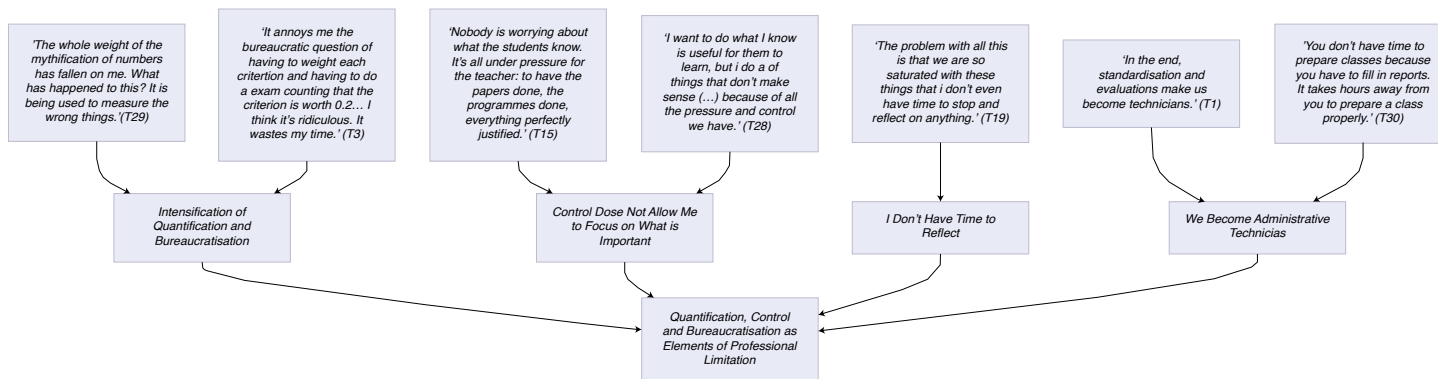
Figure 2: Pre-categories after in Vivo Coding.



Note. Prepared by the authors.

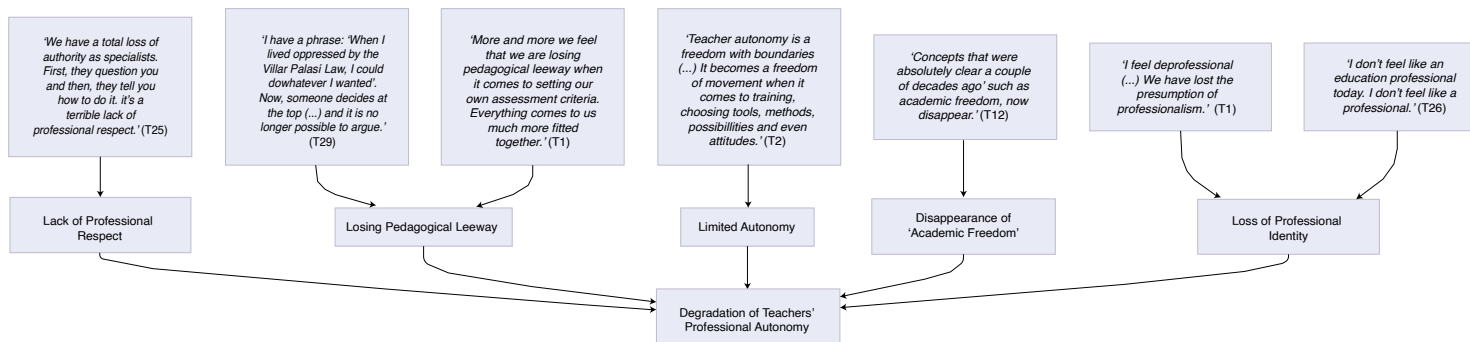
The next phase of the analysis is based on finding similarities and relationships between pre-categories to group, link and saturate topics that can form emerging categories. An axial coding is carried out which defines two nodal categories on which to build the emerging theory: '*Quantification, control and bureaucratisation as elements of professional limitation*' (Figure 3) and '*degradation of teachers' professional autonomy*' (Figure 4). The last phase of the analysis corresponds to the elaboration of a research report. For the triangulation, the study participants had access to the data and were invited to make corrections if necessary.

Figure 3: Coding Process of the Category 'Quantification, Control and Bureaucratization as Elements of Professional Limitation'.



Note. Prepared by the authors.

Figure 4: Coding Process of the Category 'Degradation of Teacher's Professional Autonomy'.



Note. Prepared by the authors.

3. Results

3.1. Quantification, Control and Bureaucratisation as Elements of Professional Limitation

The teachers' accounts express that the education system is permeated by mechanisms of quantification, indicators, percentages, tables and standards. The professional identity of teachers is reconstructed by considering the dynamics of quantification, standardisation and evaluation. Along these lines, teacher 29 criticises what he considers to be a 'mythification of figures', a consequence of the instrumental logic of education in the context of neoliberalisation. He points out the tension that this generates and the pressure that schools are under. At the same time, it is noted that administrations are intensifying accountability mechanisms, which serve to control teaching practices and promote comparability mechanisms. This is expressed by teacher 3 in a vehement criticism of the excessive task of quantifying learning and the pressure to achieve certain percentages of passes. Added to this is the bureaucratic burden, which is perceived as a task that limits their professional experience in that it prevents them from organising complementary activities or focusing on didactic and pedagogical issues. As a result, emotions linked to professional weariness are generated which negatively affect the perception of teaching performance.

I was trained intellectually in a field that respected the Social Sciences, and I respect the role of statistics. But I understand that the whole process of quantification is an auxiliary. So, the whole weight of the mythification of figures has fallen on me. What has happened to this? It is being used to measure the wrong things. For example, today in a departmental meeting it was said that the problem was that if we don't exceed a certain percentage of passes, we are automatically on the pillory. TEACHER 29

I get annoyed by the question of having to weight each criterion and having to do an exam counting that the criterion is worth 0.2... I think it's ridiculous, honestly. It wastes my time, which annoys me on a human level. Now we've been using the Seneca programme for a good part of the course³ to see how much weighting we give to each criterion. What has that done? Well, we're busy with that instead of organising complementary activities, classroom libraries, oral presentations... It annoys me that all the conversations at school are not about didactic or pedagogical questions... TEACHER 3

Most teachers express deep frustration with the bureaucratic burden associated with standardised assessment models, which are seen as disconnected from the educational reality or the real learning needs of their students. They point out that administrative pressure and the need to comply with a number of formal requirements, such as reporting or meeting indicators, divert their attention from teaching that is considered meaningful for their students. This task not only makes it difficult to focus on lesson preparation, but also introduces teachers into a 'dynamic of inertia', a mismatch between their professional judgements and the tasks they are forced to perform. Some teachers feel that they are being charged with a practice they do not believe in but must carry out in order to comply with legal provisions. Consequently, teachers express that they have to prioritise administrative accountability tasks over teaching. This is perceived to result in a detriment to the quality of education and a

3. Seneca is a software that automates the management and control tasks carried out in publicly owned educational centres of the Regional Government of Andalusia and in the educational support services.

highly stressful and unconstructive working environment.

We are subjected to a series of assessments, papers and absurd questions that are totally disconnected from what they are supposed to be assessing. Nobody is worrying about what the students know. It's all pressure for the teacher: to have the papers done, the programmes done, everything perfectly justified. In other words, you can sit in the classroom and not teach, as long as you have your papers done, which is the only thing that matters to the inspector. For children to learn, the first thing they should do is let us teachers work, but they don't let us. TEACHER 15

The control and bureaucracy are spectacular. There are many times when I have to sacrifice my work or prepare material to do paperwork, because of this eagerness to cover our backs. We are no longer teachers; we have to be aware of a thousand things and, in the end, you have to protect yourself just in case. I often see myself as being caught in a loop of inertia, of things that have to be done but which I don't think serve any purpose. I want to do what is useful for what I want to transmit, but I do a lot of things that don't make sense, that are useless, but because of all the pressure and all the control we have. TEACHER 28

Often you don't have time to prepare your classes because you have to fill in fifteen hundred reports. So, you spend more time on reports, which sometimes serve some purpose and sometimes serve no purpose at all, and you can't spend that time on your classes. Apart from that, there's your family, your life... I think that so much bureaucracy is reducing the quality of education. Whoever you talk to, most of them are: 'Numbers, reports, lots of reports...'. It takes hours out of your day so that you can prepare a proper class. TEACHER 30

The extracts from the teaching staff express the tension involved in operating in institutional environments where the professional logics defended by a majority of them are hybridised: bureaucratic logics – of administrative control of practice – and mercantile logics – oriented towards the business dynamics of competition and efficiency –. Consequently, ambivalence and the management of contradictory logics lead the majority of teachers to experience tensions and imbalances in their professional identity. In this regard, teacher 19 complains that 'there is no time to reflect', there is no space for a critical conception of teaching or an intellectual dimension of professional development. Nor are collective frameworks favoured in which to share judgements or project alternative scenarios that mitigate a widely shared unease.

The problem with all this is that we are so saturated with things that you don't even have time to stop and think about anything. In other words, you go to the dynamic and you don't have the time to stop, to read about it, to reflect on what it could mean. You move in such a dynamic of stress that I don't really talk to my colleagues about it. So, we are in the maelstrom and things are coming at us, and I also have the feeling that we are swallowing everything and there is no limit. And why is that? Well, either because people are burnt out and can't, or because you don't have time, because you also have to balance work and life too. TEACHER 19

Therefore, standardisation proposals aimed at compiling data that favour comparability, and their use in competitive dynamics disconnect teachers from a professional sense. Their practice is then conceived as a 'technical' task, following the reflection of teacher 1, detached from any pedagogical philosophy and position. Here we can see the rupture that occurs in part of the teaching staff, as expressed in the account of teacher 17, motivated by a 'pragmatic' and 'bureaucratic' task in the face of the accountability

systems implemented that limit the professional meaning of teaching.

More and more we feel that we are losing pedagogical leeway when it comes to setting our own assessment criteria. Everything is becoming much more rigid. They are specifying a series of criteria that do not represent the reality of the students. On the one hand, they tell us that we have to take into account attention to diversity, but, on the other hand, we have to apply 'criterion 1.3.2'. So, we often feel that they are meddling in our own evaluation processes at the legislative level. In the end, standardisation and evaluations make us become technicians. It's real, is that we stop creating to apply things that others create. Our task is simply to apply what they say from the Inspectorate or from legislation. TEACHER 1

The departments are like bureaucratic entities where the administration asks the centres for something, the centres ask you for something, and we have to fill in papers. So, as we are merely administrators who fill in papers, we have to fill in the papers to go along with the guidelines that are set. You have to fill in things, even if they are absurd. TEACHER 17

3.2. Degradation of Professional Teacher Autonomy

Teachers complain that more and more professional areas are affected by repeated accountability tasks. The bureaucratisation of teaching is presented as an element that restricts the sense of professional autonomy. Along these lines, as teacher 15 points out, some teachers interpret this reality as a questioning of their work, a lack of recognition of their occupation and mistrust in their professional role. Consequently, most of the participants focus on vindicating their 'professionalism', which they link to their training and professional competence, in the face of the judgements that emanate from their relationship with the administration and the educational community.

I ask for respect for the voice of the expert, respect for the teacher in the classroom, not the pedagogue or the politician. Here, the one who gets their hands dirty and faces challenges every day is the one who knows what methodology works, what can be done with 25 students and how to put theory into practice. Truly, this society is really sick when it is capable of disrespecting a profession that is completely unknown to them. TEACHER 15

The loss of authority of teachers is not only at the level of discipline, but we have a total loss of authority as specialists. The word I have started to use the most when I talk to a staff meeting or a parent is 'professional'. 'I am a professional'. The most serious problem is the loss of professional authority because your approaches, your dynamics, your criteria, any aspect is questioned by the administration, and even by parents. First, they question you and then, they tell you how to do it right. It's a terrible lack of professional respect. TEACHER 25

In most cases, the teaching staff feel excluded from the debate on content, knowledge or philosophies of educational curricula. It comes to be seen as a space and a task that is not within their competence. The account introduced by teacher 29 in this section is interesting. Ironically, he complains that, even in the democratic period, when the regulatory framework of a law enacted during the Franco dictatorship was still in force in Spain, he felt more able to participate in the pedagogical debate than he does today.

I have a phrase that I often say in jest: 'When I lived oppressed by the Villar Palasí

Law⁴ I could do whatever I wanted'. In other words, with the Villar Palasí Law in the midst of democracy, we had a law that had been watered down without any problem. At that time, teachers could participate more, things could be changed, they were open to experimenting with designs, guidelines... Now, for example, someone at the top decides that language and literature have to be mixed, and it has not been possible to discuss it since then. TEACHER 29

In general terms, it is argued that there is a loss of professional autonomy in any aspect related to the pedagogical dimension. Although this is a fundamental dimension in the sense of professional identity, it is interesting to delve deeper into the conception of autonomy that teachers end up constructing in frameworks governed by accountability tasks. For teacher 2, the construct of *autonomy* ends up being configured as a range of alternative methodologies and tools that are valid depending on the school results obtained. This position poses a challenge when it comes to interpreting the meaning that teachers give to teacher autonomy or professional competence. On the other hand, it is interesting to appreciate the 'defensive character' that the teacher gives to her perception of autonomy. This is an account that connects with the judgement and questioning that, as mentioned above, is perceived by a majority of the participating teachers. In this case, professional autonomy lies in finding a space of protection against any external interference, which is interpreted as a threat, questioning or judgement of their occupation.

Teacher autonomy, metaphorically speaking, is a freedom with boundaries: we live in freedom within a country. Freedom, in this sense, becomes a freedom of movement when it comes to training, choosing tools, methods, possibilities and even attitudes. So, we have freedom of movement within the country, but we have that boundary. Therefore, this freedom is conditioned because they can say: 'What have you done with your freedom, if the results are not what you expected?'. So, here we have to combine freedom with responsibility, obviously. TEACHER 2

My feeling is that I have less and less professional autonomy, considering that even parents can see how you teach your class. I feel I have autonomy as long as they don't enter my class or film me. I try to do what I consider appropriate in my classes. My only moment of autonomy is when I'm with my students in the classroom. What's the problem? What happens in the classroom goes outside. So, you have to be very careful. TEACHER 31

In other cases, teachers openly denounce the fact that their academic freedom and pedagogical autonomy are not recognised. These are expressions that project a construction of professional identity that is highly limited by the intensity with which the logics operating in their context are negotiated. In this section we can observe accounts that show the double particularity of the sense of accountability in the Spanish context. On the one hand, teacher 17 refers to the pressure experienced in the national university entrance exams due to their standardised configuration and their use as a classified record of the quality of the centres. Here, a logic linked to competition, the quasi-market scenario, and quantification as a certification of quality is at work, which makes teachers focus on measurable aspects. On the other hand, teacher 12 denounces, through the idea of the 'disappearance of academic freedom', the bureaucratic control to which teachers are subjected, and which degrades their 4. General Education Law of 1970, which structures the education system and was in force in Spain until the approval of the Organic Law on the General Organisation of the Education System in 1990.

professional status. Accountability operating under a bureaucratic logic is conceived as a device that relegates teachers in any dimension of the educational process and erodes their identity as educational professionals.

I feel neither free nor autonomous. The university entrance exams condition me a lot. Sometimes I don't even want to teach in the baccalaureate because I don't want that pressure and conditioning. It's an enormous stress. In my department it's just: 'What lesson are you going for?'. Following a textbook, the curricula that appear in the legislation are absurd. TEACHER 17

The policies are geared towards asking us for explanations for any action we take, towards having to take minutes of any slightest movement. Concepts that were absolutely clear a couple of decades ago, such as "academic freedom", now disappear. I remember I had a discussion with a headteacher where I said: 'Hey, what about academic freedom?', and he said to me: 'It has disappeared'. He told me so calmly: 'It no longer exists; you no longer have academic freedom'. But what is going on here? Where is our protagonism in the educational process? It's something very perverse. TEACHER 12

The truth is that the daily work in secondary schools is becoming more and more complex. According to the teachers, educational purposes are weakening, pedagogical philosophies or positions are fading away, and the days go by without a clear and shared purpose. Practice becomes contingent, mechanised and standardised. Thus, teacher 16 outlines an idea widely shared by the participating teachers: the primacy of standardised procedures detaches teachers from a perception of autonomy and professionalism. 'I don't feel like a professional' is a narrative node that expresses an unsatisfactory conception of their teaching identity.

I don't feel like an education professional today. We teachers are very measured in all aspects. Even in terms of methodology, you can choose one exercise or another, but it doesn't give you much leeway. And no, it's not positive that we all do the same thing, nor is it coordination, or anything else. We are doing things like robots. We are losing the art of the spontaneous, of the individualised, of the relationship with the student... TEACHER 26

The teachers interviewed even use the notion of 'deprofessionalisation', a recurrent theme in some analyses of the sociology of the professions. Teachers' professional judgement and their beliefs based on theoretical principles and educational conceptions become secondary to the priority of performance and compliance with accountability mechanisms. In this context, teaching is reduced to a technical practice, leaving aside its ethical, critical and creative dimension. These dynamics question the very foundations of teaching work, generating a perception of loss of control and experiences of professional vulnerability.

I feel deprofessionalised. The other day, in a conversation, I was using an expression with my colleagues talking about how we have lost the presumption of professionalism. We are not supposed to be professionals because we are already being treated like fools. We don't need them to come and evaluate for us or to teach a machine for us, no way. We feel relegated to a second position. TEACHER 1

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The research findings indicate that accountability mechanisms based on mercantile and bureaucratic logics, as well as the dynamics of educational quantification and

standardisation, have weakened the sense of professional autonomy that shapes teacher identity (Browes & Altinyelken, 2022). As a result, most teachers see their professional autonomy and pedagogical judgement as secondary, and these devices move their practice away from an ethical, critical and deliberative professional task, in line with other findings (Molina-Pérez & Pulido-Montes, 2024). In general terms, it is argued that there is a loss of professional autonomy in any aspect related to the pedagogical, political and social dimension of the education system, results that are in line with the evidence gathered in other research frameworks (Skerritt, 2023).

One part of the narratives shows the incidence of the devices of quantification, standardisation and datification that favour competitive environments in the neoliberalised educational context. These extracts are interpreted in the framework of performative contexts and allow us to understand how standardised assessment systems and elements of educational measurement and comparison impact on teachers. The research allows us to conclude that this practice deteriorates teachers' professional identity and affects the meaning that teachers give to their work, the commitment they develop to their profession and their emotional stability in the workplace (Martín-Alonso, Guzmán-Calle & Rodríguez-Martínez, 2024; Molina-Pérez, 2024). This refutes the analysis carried out by Frostenson and Englund (2020), who understand that performative dynamics and professional values are not incompatible elements in teaching identities, but rather that they reinforce each other and coexist, favouring reconstructions of professional principles. This research argues that performative logic is configured as a culture that limits teachers' professional practice and generates tensions among teachers, in line with other research (Sullivan et al., 2021).

The participating teachers point out contradictions and mismatches between their professional judgements, pedagogical philosophies or occupational projections and the tasks they are forced to carry out. This allows us to interpret that there are discrepant logics that operate in their professional development and produce a rupture between their self-image and their performance (Hendrikx, 2020). This is an imbalance in their teacher professional identity that facilitates the development of erratic and contingent identities (Skinner, Leavey & Rothi, 2021). In this section, we see how teachers enter an 'uncomfortable zone of responsibility'. A space characterised by a critical interpretation of accountability devices and elements of quantification oriented towards competition but executed by teachers with a high degree of administrative compliance (Abarca Millán et al., 2024).

In this sense, teachers frequently refer to accountability mechanisms. The analysis in this section must consider that, in the Spanish context, accountability is not exclusively oriented towards the promotion of competitive quasi-market dynamics, but rather hybridises this logic with a high degree of bureaucratic control of teaching practice, as has been pointed out in other research (Fernandez Gonzalez & Monarca, 2017; Pagès, 2021). Thus, all the participants repeatedly allude to the bureaucratisation of their professional task. This aspect restricts their professionalism and standardises procedural models that do not fit the contextual needs perceived by teachers, as indicated in other analyses (Browes & Altinyelken, 2022). Consequently, bureaucratisation, as a dynamic of teacher control, entrenches a general perception characterised by mistrust of teachers' ability, questioning of their work and judgement of their actions. This, moreover, is interpreted as a clear lack of recognition, since teachers perceive

themselves as being scrutinised in the task of achieving the educational performance projected by the administration rather than feeling supported by it.

Hence, perceptions of professional ‘vulnerability’ are triggered, as stable frameworks are lacking. Work becomes a private, bureaucratic task, disconnected from the collegial relationship with peers and focused on responses to accountability tasks (Thompson, Mockler & Hogan, 2022). Leonard and Roberts (2016), under the title ‘*No time to think*’, discuss a narrative repeatedly expressed by teachers in this research. The authors conclude that the mechanisms of performance pressure and the dynamics of quantification and accountability leave teachers with no time to reflect and engage in deliberate practice. As a result, teachers’ professional identity is reconstructed under the logic of quantification, standardisation and accountability, aspects in which most teachers do not recognise themselves and which foster an imbalance in their professional identity, in line with similar studies (Braun & Maguire, 2020).

To conclude, it is highlighted that a strength of this research lies in the academic demand to contribute to the study of the political agenda and the spaces of teacher professionalisation that are frequently called for by researchers and *policy makers* (Duarte & Brewer, 2022). It is also noted as a weakness of this research that the hermeneutic approach does not allow for ‘external generalisations’ of the data, but it does contribute to a contextually situated discussion and ‘internal generalisation’ of the findings for the research context (Maxwell, 2021). As future lines of study, the deepening of this line of research could contribute to the consideration of techniques and strategies that facilitate delving into more complex subjective aspects. Thus, analysing the life histories of discrepant cases, carrying out biograms of cases of interest or incorporating group instruments could favour the interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon under study. Likewise, this line should incorporate ethnographic procedures that make it possible to understand the narrative from its contrast with practical everyday life. This will be key for educational policy makers and discussion forums on the professionalisation of teachers.

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