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PERCEÇÃO DOS PROFESSORES SOBRE O DESEMPENHO DO COORDENADOR DE DEPARTAMENTO CURRICULAR E SUPERVISÃO PEDAGÓGICA
TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT'S PERFORMANCE AND OF PEDAGOGICAL SUPERVISION
PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS PROFESORES SOBRE EL DESEMPEÑO DEL COORDINADOR DE DEPARTAMENTO CURRICULAR Y SUPERVISIÓN PEDAGÓGICA

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RESUMO

Introdução: Nas escolas portuguesas, o Coordenador de Departamento Curricular é um gestor intermédio, supervisor e líder, que deve assumir o exercício da liderança e demonstrar capacidade comunicativa para poder mobilizar os docentes que coordena na prossecução dos ideais educativos. Por isso, a supervisão pedagógica assume um papel de relevo nas atividades por ele desenvolvidas.

Objetivos: Conhecer a perceção dos professores dos vários níveis de ensino não superior acerca do desempenho do Coordenador de Departamento Curricular na atual organização escolar portuguesa e de alguns fatores que podem influenciar esse mesmo desempenho, nomeadamente a formação especializada em supervisão pedagógica.

Métodos: Foi utilizada uma metodologia de caráter descritivo e transversal, com recurso a um inquérito por questionário. A amostra totalizou 106 professores de todos os departamentos curriculares, de um agrupamento de escolas do concelho de Viseu. Os dados recolhidos foram sujeitos a uma análise estatística descritiva e inferencial.

Resultados: Os docentes valorizam a promoção da articulação entre os professores do próprio departamento curricular e com outros departamentos, o incentivo à reflexão sobre as práticas docentes e a abertura à mudança e à inovação. Consideram também que o Coordenador deve promover o trabalho colaborativo, bem como gerar e partilhar conhecimentos. Contudo, relevam que a carga letiva atribuída ao coordenador e a conseqüente falta de tempo para responder a todas as solicitações que o cargo exige podem influenciar negativamente o seu desempenho.

Conclusões: Os Coordenadores de Departamento Curricular deverão assumir a necessidade de formação na sua atividade, enquanto supervisores, para garantir legitimidade e credibilidade nas mais variadas vertentes e dimensões, quer a nível pessoal/relacional, quer a nível profissional.

Palavras-chave: Professores; Formação especializada; Supervisão pedagógica; Coordenador de Departamento.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Within Portuguese schools the Head of Department is an intermediate manager, a supervisor and a leader who must be capable of playing a leading role and demonstrating the appropriate communicative skills so that he can mobilize the teachers who are part of his team to fulfill their educational ideals. For this reason, pedagogical supervision takes on a prominent role in the activities he has to develop.

Objectives: To know how teachers at the several levels of education, other than that of Higher Education, perceive head of department's performance within the current Portuguese school organization and of some factors that can influence that performance, notably the specialized training in pedagogical/instructional supervision.

Methods: A descriptive and cross-sectional methodology was used using a survey carried out through the application of a questionnaire. The sample was composed of 106 teachers from all academic departments who were working in a school grouping located in the Viseu district. The data collected were subject to a descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

Results: The teachers seem to value the promotion of an articulated work between the different teachers of the academic department to which they belong and between teachers from different departments, the creation of encouragement actions that would foster a reflection on their teaching practices and an openness to change and innovation. They also consider that the Head of Department should promote collaborative work, as well as generate and share knowledge. However, they state that the Head of Department's workload and the consequent lack of time to respond to all requests that his position requires may have a negative influence on his performance.

Conclusions: The Heads of Academic Department should assume the need for training in their activity to ensure legitimacy and credibility in the most wide-ranging aspects and dimensions, both at a personal/relational level, and at a professional level.

Key words: Teachers; Specialized training; Pedagogical supervision; Head of Department.

RESUMEN

Introducción: En las escuelas portuguesas, el Coordinador de Departamento Curricular es un gestor intermedio, supervisor y líder, que debe asumir el ejercicio del liderazgo y demostrar capacidad comunicativa para poder movilizar a los docentes que coordina en la prosecución de los ideales educativos. Por eso, la supervisión pedagógica asume un papel de relieve en las actividades que él desarrolla.

Objetivos: Conocer la percepción de los profesores de los distintos niveles de enseñanza no superior sobre el desempeño del Coordinador del Departamento Curricular en la organización de la escuela portuguesa actual y algunos de los factores que pueden influir en este mismo desempeño, incluida la formación especializada en la supervisión pedagógica.

Métodos: Se utilizó una metodología de carácter descriptivo y transversal, con el recurso a una encuesta por cuestionario. La muestra totalizó 106 profesores de todos los departamentos curriculares, de una agrupación de escuelas del municipio de Viseu. Los datos recogidos fueron sujetos a un análisis estadístico descriptivo e inferencial.

Resultados: Los docentes valoran la promoción de la articulación entre los profesores del propio departamento curricular y con otros departamentos, el incentivo a la reflexión sobre las prácticas docentes y la apertura al cambio ya la innovación. Consideran también que el Coordinador debe promover el trabajo colaborativo, así como generar y compartir conocimientos. Sin embargo, la carga lectiva asignada al coordinador y la consiguiente falta de tiempo para responder a todas las solicitudes que el cargo exige pueden influenciar negativamente su desempeño.

Conclusiones: Los Coordinadores de Departamento Curricular deberán asumir la necesidad de formación en su actividad, como supervisores, para garantizar legitimidad y credibilidad en las más variadas vertientes y dimensiones, tanto a nivel personal/relacional, tanto a nivel profesional.

Palabras clave: Profesores; Formación especializada; Supervisión pedagógica; Coordinador de Departamento.

INTRODUCTION

For about two decades, the Portuguese education system has been undergoing successive and profound changes recommended by a central educational authority and implemented locally at each of the schools, both at pedagogical and curricular level, and in terms of organization, administration and management.

The changes that have been occurring within the school organisation over the past few years and the studies that have been conducted (Costa, 2000; Diogo, 2004; Pires, 2012) reveal that, in any school environment, middle management and senior management bodies alike are expected to act as a source of collective mobilization, encouraging collaborative work, fostering organizational development and encouraging the teachers' professional and personal growth.

Taking into account the different functions assigned to the Head of Department, both by legal requirements (Decree-Law n.º 75/2008, of April, 22nd as amended by Decree-Law n.º 224/2009, of September 11 and by Decree-Law n.º 137/2012, of July 2), and locally, according to the regulations of each of the schools in the current educational system (middle manager, supervisor and leader), it is clear that he has to take on that responsibility and has to master a wide range of communicative skills, always using a reflective and collaborative strategy, if he wants to inspire the teachers who belong to his academic department to achieve common educational ideals.

Pedagogical supervision, always bearing in mind the teachers' human and professional development and the school's organizational improvement, will play a prominent role in the activities that will be developed by the Head of Department, as advocated by Alarcão (2003). This development, according to Vieira and Moreira (2011), imposes a critical attitude, in which supervision must "have a transformative and emancipatory orientation, potentially transgressive and subversive, based on the values of freedom and social responsibility" (p. 12).

With this research we wish, therefore, to achieve the following fundamental objectives: to understand the teachers' perception of the Head of Department's performance and, then, to find out their perception of the kind of factors that can influence this performance, mainly those which are related to specialized training in Pedagogical supervision.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Decree-Law n.º 75/2008 of 22 April brought a greater school autonomy. This Decree also gave birth to the current school grouping: from then on any individual school will become part of larger groups of schools with "specific purposes that will have to do with the organization of curricula and syllabus management, the assessment of the students' learning, students' guidance and monitoring, the teaching staff's evaluation, training and professional development" (article 7).

With the increasing autonomy granted to schools by those recent legal diplomas and the growing expansion it has been facing lately, the quality of leadership becomes more relevant and particularly when it comes to middle management leaders, since they are responsible for the work group dynamics and for the kind of relationship that will exist between those groups and the school's management body.

The quality of the work carried out by these institutions, one of the assumptions that are required by the government to allow this autonomy to continue, is increasingly dependent on the way in which intermediate management structures, and particularly the Heads of Department are concerned about the quality of their performance in the work assigned to them.

Faced with a school context that requires a democratic, open and flexible leadership based on new organizational principles that value participation, collegiality and collaboration, the Heads of Department feel an increasing need to acquire new competencies that will meet the real and current needs of school organizations and of their members, given the new challenges as well as the legal obligation which the educational system has to face. According to Costa (2000), "school leadership should be carried out in a way that would help revitalize the participation of all parties involved in the educational processes, assuming an emancipatory and facilitating impact on these parties' capacity for collective decision-making" (p. 29).

Given that the Head of Department is assigned the role of supervisor and leader (Decree-Law n.º 137/2012, of 2 July), he can help teachers reflect on their practices and analyze, together, their teaching methods. According to Sequeira (2012), a Head of Department must take on the responsibility and be the leader people expect him to be and show the right communicative capacity, in its reflexive and collaborative dimension. Without this crucial feature, it will be difficult for him to mobilize the teachers who are part of his department to do their best to achieve common educational ideals.

Pedagogical supervision plays a prominent role in the activities that will be developed by the Head of Department, as it will provide teachers with the working tools that will help to solve some of the problems they will have to deal with and minimize other issues (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1986). According to Rocha (2016), it should assume a fundamental role as a communicative interface of learning, by avoiding the isolation of the trainee teacher who also needs to share her/his queries within a team, his/her dilemmas and achievements as a form of self-knowledge, self-evaluation, self-fulfilment and, lastly, he/she needs to reposition him/herself as regards teaching and learning, innovating and renewing his/her practices.

Pedagogical supervision takes on the role of promoting reflection, training and qualification practices that will have a relevant impact on its members and on their interactions. This is in line with Harris' s (2002) way of reasoning, which rests upon north American research studies, when he argues that the development function in the supervisory process has specific objectives: to promote effective teaching practices, to provide continuous personal and professional growth, and to change the nature of school and teaching. It will also support the implementation of projects, of teachers' formative assessment and promote change within school organizations. According to Roldão (2012), the concept of supervision is well expressed in the current educational policy agenda. In the author's perspective, the analysis of the steps that have to be taken to fill the gap between the need to provide quality education and the new realities that are constantly emerging should be a priority.

We understand that mastering knowledge about leadership and supervision and the way they have to be implemented is fundamental. Only then can the Head of Department move from a passive agent position to a new position in which he will actually coordinate a pedagogical team and be able to promote educational success (Alarcão, 2002). However, this transformation implies specialized training, both for the Heads of Department and for the groups that they will lead and for the school itself, in order for the school board to be ready to carry out such a relevant function.

Continuing training has been regarded as "a nuclear component for professional development and for the change and/or innovation in curricular practices" (Morgado, 2007, p. 48). According to Estrela and Estrela (2006), continuing training is "the set of institutionally framed activities that, after the teacher's initial training, aims at his professional and personal improvement" (p. 75).

The "Teaching Career Statute" (the Portuguese code of professional practice for childhood educators and teachers) requires that the teachers' continuing training has to be planned in order to promote the development of the teacher's professional skills (Decree-Law n.º 41/2012, of 21 February, article 15). Therefore, it is crucial, on the one hand, to understand that teachers are professionals who are shaped by a collaborative effort that leads to an understanding of their working processes and, on the other hand, to understand and accept that schools are places where teachers learn (Ingvarson, 1990).

Taking all this into account, training must be regarded as a driving factor for change and teachers are expected to be motivated to invest in specialized training. Those who have chosen to become teachers and want to be outstanding professionals will surely understand that this is a pressing need that has to be addressed in the current Portuguese educational context.

Based on this general framework, we felt the need to understand the perception that early childhood educators and teachers have of the Head of the Department's performance and of the factors encompassed, as understanding these perceptions may help to improve the school environment and quality of learning. This is the central issue of this study.

2. METHODS

A descriptive and cross-sectional investigation was chosen. We used a questionnaire to conduct our survey. According to Fortin (2009), it is a study that aims at "describing a phenomenon or a concept related to a certain population (...) or to a sample of that population" (p. 163) and that requires the "elaboration of a conceptual framework which, in addition to defining the conceptual perspective of the study, will represent a link between the concepts and their description" (p. 164).

This research falls within the scope of the quantitative paradigm (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010), as it focuses on the measurable data obtained from observed phenomena in order to describe and establish relationships between variables, using statistical analysis.

2.1. Hypotheses

Taking into account the importance attached to the teachers' training, especially the specialized training in pedagogical/instructional supervision, to provide the Head of Department with the suitable ~~right~~ competencies to fulfill his functions and that is legally laid down in the Portuguese current legislation (Joint Order n.º. 198/99, of 15 February; Decree-Law n.º 137/2012, of 2 July and Decree-Law n.º 22/2014, of 11 February), three hypotheses have been formulated:



H1 – There are significant differences in the teachers' perception of the specialized training in pedagogical supervision that a teachers needs to act as Head of Department. Those differences depend on the level they teach.

H2 – There are significant differences in the teachers' perception of the kind of specialized training in pedagogical supervision that a teachers needs to be able to act as Head of Department depending on whether or not they had had management positions before.

H3 – There are significant differences in the teachers' perception of the supervising performance of the Head of Department depending on their academic qualifications.

2.2. Sample

To conduct the empirical study, we selected a large school grouping from the municipality of Viseu. When we chose this school grouping, we took into account different factors: its size and the fact that this group of schools is well positioned in the national ranking of schools issued by the "General Inspection of Education and Science" IGEC (the Portuguese Inspection Commission for Education and Science) thanks to the results it had obtained in different dimensions: its students' academic performance, the provision of educational service, its leadership and management.

In 2013/2014, this grouping of schools was formed by nineteen educational establishments: seven kindergartens, ten primary schools [years 1-4 of schooling], an elementary school [years 5-6 of schooling] and a middle school [years 7-9 of schooling], managed by the board.

It is therefore a non-probabilistic sample for convenience (Borg & Gall, 2003), whose choice followed some criteria, like the geographical proximity of the schools, the easy access and the fact that we were familiar with those schools' reality.

Our intention was to cover the 252 teachers of the school grouping and all academic departments. To achieve that goal, we handed out the questionnaires to all the teachers who were working in each school of the grouping. We delivered, through the Pedagogical Board, the questionnaires to each one of the Department Directors, to be distributed to each one of the teachers, who would return them back to him/her afterwards. However, the final sample was based on 106 teachers only (42.06% of the participants). That percentage corresponds to the number of questionnaires returned and correctly completed.

The sample is composed mainly of female elements (78.3%) and most of the participants were between 30 and 50 years old (54.7%). This sample is formed by teachers who have a considerable professional experience, since $\frac{3}{4}$ of them have more than twenty years of teaching experience, and have a stable professional situation, since 74.5% of them have a permanent contract with the school grouping where they were teaching.

As for the teachers' academic qualifications, 78.3% of them have the bachelor's degree, 14.2% have a master's degree and a much smaller percentage has a doctorate (2.8%). There are five teachers (4.7%) who don't have the bachelor's degree, despite having professional training.

The vast majority of the teachers have already held management positions (68.9%). The majority of the 73 teachers who have already held management positions in the school had already been the head teacher (60.3%), the school position that needs the largest amount of teachers (at least one per class). Then, the following positions were held by teachers who had already been Head of Department (28.8%) and by those who had already been members of the school Pedagogical Council (23.3%).

2.3. Data collection tool

The questionnaire was the data collection instrument that we chose to conduct this investigation with. This choice was influenced by some essential requirements: its anonymous character, the possibility of inquiring a large number of people, lower expenses and the possibility for respondents to complete the questionnaire at a more convenient time (Hill & Hill, 2005).

The questionnaire was designed based on the information gathered during the review of the literature on the subject and on the legal documents that cover the competencies of the academic departments and their respective head members. The questionnaire consists of two parts: the first one, covers the teachers' demographic characterization and allowed for the collection of personal and professional data relevant to define their profile, using questions about their age, gender, period of employment, academic qualifications (Bachelor, Licentiate, Master's degree and Doctorate/PhD), the school level they teach (Preschool Education, Primary, Elementary or Middle school), their professional situation and whether or not they had held any management position before.

The second part, also based on literature review, made it possible to know the teachers' perceptions regarding several parameters: the methods which should be taken into account when choosing the Heads of Department; the importance given to each one of the criteria during the election for that position; the specific competences that candidates to that position should demonstrate; the kind of attributes they think are essential for the Head of Department's performance; the Head of Department's expected practices; the main obstacles and facilitating factors that can influence this performance (this part of the questionnaire includes a specific paragraph where respondents will give their opinion on the importance of attending specific training in supervision); the functions they consider to be the most important in the Head of Department's action; and finally, their opinion on the supervising performance of their Head of Department whit open and ended questions.

A pre-test was carried out: we asked ten teachers from different departments (Early Childhood Education, Primary School, Social and Human Sciences, Maths and Experimental Sciences, and Drama and Arts), and who were teaching at a school that is not part of the selected school grouping, to fill in the questionnaire and to report any inaccuracies or any difficulties experienced during the process, so we could restructure any ambiguous or vague item. This procedure's aim was to test the research instrument and was quite useful to ensure that the questions were well understood and that the answers corresponded to the information intended (Ghiglione & Matalon, 2001).

As a result of that pre-test some adjustments had to be introduced. The final version of the questionnaire that followed those adjustments was monitored and endorsed by the General Directorate of Education - Monitoring surveys in school environment.

2.4. Procedure

The data collected were processed and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program (version 20.0).

During the descriptive analysis, we calculated the absolute frequencies (N) and relative frequencies (%) for variables which have a nominal measurement and mean and standard deviations for variables which have, at least, an interval measurement level (Reis, 2008) (only for age and period of employment variables).

Whenever we wanted to verify the existence of statistically significant differences between variables inferential statistics were used, and the differences were accepted as significant if they had value of $p < .05$; this means that the probability of this difference being due to chance is less than 5% (Tuckman, 2000).

To check the hypothesis formulated, the Chi Square test statistic (χ^2) was applied, a non-parametric statistical test, since the variables we were comparing were both nominal (Pestana & Gageiro, 2014). We decided there was no need to carry out the calculation whenever the contingency table presented a large number of cells with expected values under 5 (Howell, 2010).

3. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive statistic

The results of the study proved that teachers attach different degrees of importance (not important at all, of little importance, no opinion, important, very important) to each of the criteria that must be taken into account during the election of the Head of Department and that are defined in the current legal documents and laid down in the specialized literature we have reviewed. The criteria to which teachers attach greater importance when they have to choose their Head of Department are, in descending order: to be able to easily build friendly relationships with others (99.1%), to be dynamic and entrepreneurial (97.2%), to have a strong leadership capacity (97.2%), to have good communication skills (96.2%), to have a thorough knowledge of the school reality (96.2%), to have a good conflict management capacity (94.3%) and to show interest in school management (81.1%).

The fact that the candidates had already held the position of Head of Department before (65.1%), that they have the right specialized training for the position (59.4%) and that they have a longer or shorter teaching career (27.4%) seems to be less relevant for teachers.

Table 1 reveals the teachers' perceptions of the specific skills that the Head of Department must have to hold that position. At this level, the contribution that he can bring to the effectiveness of his peers' teaching practice (97.2%), his ability to be a spokesperson between the different bodies of the school (94.3%) and the fact that he is able to manage a department in pedagogical terms (92.5%) are the teachers' favorite skills.

His ability to exercise leadership before the department (72.6%) and his capacity to monitor and guide the pedagogical practice of his peers (61.3%) are competencies that are also significant to a large number of teachers. It should be stressed that his capacity to evaluate his peers' performance (33%) is a competence that teachers do not consider relevant when they have to hold their Head of Department.

Table 1 - Teachers' perception of the specific skills that the Head of Department must have to hold that position

Specific skills for the position	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
To contribute to the effectiveness of his peers' teaching practice	103	97.2	3	2.8
To exercise leadership before the department	77	72.6	29	27.4
To be able to manage a department in pedagogical terms	98	92.5	8	7.5
To act as a spokesperson who promotes communication between the different school bodies	100	94.3	6	5.7
To be capable of assessing the teachers' performance	35	33.0	71	67.0
To show the capacity to monitor and guide the pedagogical practice of his peers	65	61.3	41	38.7

In Table 2, we can observe the main obstacles that may hamper and undermine the Head of Department's performance. The teacher could choose more than one option. The excessive number of classes he has to teach (80.2%), the lack of time that makes it difficult for him to answer properly to the teachers' requests (76.4%), the high number of teachers in the department (68.9%) and the excessive number of competencies that are assigned to the Head of Department (56.6%) are, in the teacher's opinion, the main obstacles that can make the Head of Department's performance much more difficult to carry out.

The lack of specialized training is considered an obstacle for only 27.4% of the teachers, followed by the poor sense of union that may exist among the department's teachers (22.6%), the fact that the Head of Department has limited authority (17%), the absence of accountability mechanisms for teachers (11.3%) and the lack of means that could favor a fast communication within the department (5.7%).

Table 2 - Obstacles that can hamper a proper exercise of the Head of Department's position

Obstacles in the exercise of the position	N	%
The lack of specific training for the post	29	27.4
A heavy workload (the large amount of classes he has to teach)	85	80.2
The lack of time that prevent him from answering properly to all the teachers' requests	81	76.4
The poor sense of union among the teachers of the department	24	22.6
The excessive amount of competencies assigned to the Head of Department	60	56.6
The high number of teachers in the department	73	68.9
The lack of means that would allow for a swift communication within the department	6	5.7
The lack of effective accountability mechanisms for teachers	12	11.3
The Head of Department's limited authority	18	17.0

Table 3 presents the results regarding the teachers' perceptions of the factors that may contribute to the improvement of the Head of Departments' performance. A large percentage of teachers (68.9%) consider that the Head of Department should have less classes to teach, and would therefore have more time to fulfill his coordination duties. This is the factor that teachers consider to be more the most important to improve the Head of Department's performance. A clear knowledge of his functions (41.5%) and the presence of an assistant who will help him in the exercise of his functions (40.6%) are also factors that teachers consider important. The following factors are whether or not he enjoys the support and the trust of the School Board (37.7%), has specific training in the field of pedagogical/instructional supervision (34.9%) and the kind of autonomy he is allowed in the exercise of his functions (31.1%).

Table 3 - Teachers' perception of the factors that can improve the Head of Department's performance

Contributions to the improvement of the Head of Departments' performance	N	%
To have less classes to teach	73	68.9
To be assisted in his functions	43	40.6
To have specific and specialized training in pedagogical supervision	37	34.9
To have a clear understanding of what is expected from him	44	41.5
To be supported and trusted by the School Board	40	37.7
To have a greater autonomy to fulfil his functions	33	31.1

As can be seen in Table 4, the options that are more insistently referred by teachers when they analyze the kind of supervisory performance they expect from their Head of Department's are his capacity to generate, manage and share knowledge (82.1%), his openness to change and innovation (68.9%), his ability to encourage reflection on the teaching practices of the teachers who belong to his department (67%) and his capacity to promote collaborative learning (Supervisor/supervisee) (59.4%).

Other forms of supervisory performance, such as the Head of Department's role in regulating the teaching and learning processes (31.1%), his capacity to help the teachers' to professional development (28.3%) and to guide the teacher in his pedagogical practice (23.6%) seem to be less relevant for teachers.

Table 4- The teachers' perception of how the Head of Department should carry out his supervisory action

The Head of Departments' supervisory actions	N	%
To guide the teachers in their pedagogical practice	25	23.6
To encourage the teachers' reflection on their teaching practices	71	67.0
To help the teachers' professional development	30	28.3
To show openness to change and innovation	73	68.9
To help the teachers' personal development	9	8.5
To regulate the teaching and learning processes	33	31.1
To promote collaborative learning (supervisor/supervisee)	63	59.4
To develop self-assessment and individual learning mechanisms	6	5.7
To generate, manage and share knowledge	87	82.1
To control, manage, coordinate and inspect	6	5.7

3.2 Inferential statistics

Based on the inferential statistical analysis conducted, we could verify the validity of the hypothesis formulated. It should be noted that the decision criteria for the hypothesis testing are based on the study of probabilities. The hypothesis will be considered valid if the p-value is less than 0.05 and ruled out if higher than that value.

Table 5 - The need for specialized training to carry out the position of Head of Department depending on the different school levels

School level	The need for specialized training in pedagogical supervision								χ^2	p
	Yes		No		Total		Residual			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	Yes	No		
Preschool	10	9.4	6	5.7	16	15.1	2.5	-2.5	12.577	0.006
1.º CEB (Primary school)	14	13.2	17	16.0	31	29.2	1.4	-1.4		
2.º CEB (Elementary School)	7	6.6	15	14.2	22	20.8	-0.3	0.3		
3.º CEB (Middle School)	6	5.7	31	29.2	37	34.9	-3.0	3.0		

In Table 5, we can see that 10 of the 16 preschool teachers who constitute the sample of this empirical study value the contribution that a specialized training in pedagogical supervision might bring for the exercise of the Head of Department's position. On the other hand, it can be observed that most of Primary School teachers (17 of the 31 teachers), Elementary School teachers (15 of 22) and Middle School teachers (31 of 37) do not consider specialized training in pedagogical supervision to be important for the exercise of that position.

The differences found in the different school levels are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 12.577$; $p = .006$). That way, the first hypothesis that we had formulated (H1) can be confirmed.

The analysis of the residuals (or residual values) reveals that preschool teachers tend to value this specialized training in pedagogical supervision (2.5), while Middle School teachers tend to attach less importance to the role that this specific factor can play in the improvement of the Head of Department performance (3.0).

Table 6 - Contribution of specialized training in pedagogical supervision to improve the Head of Department's performance depending on whether or not the teachers had held a management position

Management Position	The need for Specialized training in pedagogical supervision								χ^2	p
	Yes		No		Total		Residual			
	n	%	n	%	n	%	Yes	No		
Have already held a management position	22	20.8	51	48.1	73	68.9	-1.5	1.5	2.347	0.126
Have never held a management position	15	14.2	18	17.0	33	31.1	1.5	-1.5		

As shown in Table 6, most of the teachers who have already held management positions (51 of the 73 teachers) do not value the importance of specialized training in pedagogical/instructional supervision. It can also be observed that a greater number of teachers who had never held any management position (18 of 33) do not consider specialized training in pedagogical supervision

to be important for the exercise of that position either. We have to stress that the differences found are not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2,397$; $p = .126$). The residual values were all below 2.0. Therefore, the second hypothesis (H2) could not be confirmed.

As for the third hypothesis (H3), the only statistically significant differences are found in the "to help the teacher's personal development" indicator ($\chi^2 = 5,262$; $p = .022$). The analysis of the residuals reveals that teachers who hold a licentiate degree tend to underestimate the Head of Department's supervisory performance (2.3) while teachers who have masters or doctorates tend to attach a higher importance to this specific aspect of the Head of Department's performance (2.3).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Teachers' perception of the criteria that have to be taken into account for the Head of Department's election

The analysis of the results obtained reveals that, for the teachers, the criteria that may influence the most the Head of Department's election, clearly because of the importance they convey, have to do with how easy it is for him to establish interpersonal relationships (his capacity to build relationships with others, his communication skills and the way he deals with and manages possible conflict situations), as well as with the type of leadership he exercises (whether or not he exhibits leadership skills, is dynamic and entrepreneurial and shows interest in school management), all of which characteristics were listed among the items presented to the subjects. All those criteria are related to professional characteristics which are fundamental for the Head of Department to achieve a good performance and are in accordance with the competencies required by the legal documents.

As referred by Alarcão (2003, p. 151), the supervisor shall master "civic, technical and human competencies (...) that can be grouped according to their type: a) interpretative skills; b) analysis and evaluation capacity; c) capacity to stimulate training; d) ability to promote communication and professional relationship". This observation in itself represents an obstacle to the implementation of pedagogical supervision in Portuguese schools, since it is obviously very difficult to find a supervisor, with the right kind of training, who would master all these domains (Ricardo, 2010), once this is a growing field of knowledge/expertise.

For this reason, emphasis is given to specialized training when the time comes to elect a Head of Department. The importance given to that training is evident both in the literature available on the subject and in the Decree-Law n.º 75/2008, of 22 April in which specialized training in pedagogical or instructional supervision is seen as the first criterion to be taken into account when schools choose the Head of Department.

According to this Decree-law, "the Head of Department must be a permanent teacher who has attended specialized training in pedagogical supervision, in teaching performance evaluation or in educational administration and management" (article 43, paragraph 5). However, when teachers are asked to state their opinion on the types of factors that may help improve the Head of Department's performance, they tend not to value this kind of training and give greater importance to other aspects, like for example the importance of lightening the Head of Department's workload, by reducing the number of classes he has to teach, or the importance of providing him with an assistant. This position may be a consequence of the type of training that is currently offered, a training seen as conservative and that has little to do with the real problems that school and teachers have to face and to deal with (Cardoso, 2000; Estrela & Estrela, 2006).

Costa (2000) and Marques (2002) refer that in order to have active, critical and creative teachers we need to implement alternative training models. Teachers should be ready and eager to exercise their professional activity and to obtain the appropriate theoretical and instrumental knowledge that will enable them to develop communication and leadership mechanisms.

As we analyzed the existence of statistically significant differences regarding the importance that specialized training in pedagogical supervision may have in the Head of Department's performance (according to teachers who had or hadn't held management positions), we could conclude that the differences found are not statistically significant, since both teachers who had already held a management position and those who hadn't claimed that a specialized training in pedagogical supervision is not relevant for a good performance of the Head of Department.

The data collected in this study did not confirm those collected by Cabral (2009) in the investigation that he conducted and in which evidence showed that, when we compare the opinions of the teachers who had already been Heads of Department with those of the teachers who had never held such position, significant differences were evident in the case of those who had already exercised that supervisory position.

However, when we analysed whether or not there were statistically significant differences in the teachers' perception of the importance that specialized training in pedagogical supervision has in the Head of Department's performance, according to the school level taught by the respondents, we could see there are differences statistically significant.

Most preschool teachers agree that the contribution of specialized training in pedagogical supervision for the exercise of this position is important. On the other hand, Primary, Elementary and Middle School teachers, for the most part, consider that this specialized training in pedagogical supervision is not important for a good performance of the Heads of Department.

4.2 Competencies for the exercise of the position of Head of Department

The competencies that were found to be the most important for the position, in the respondents' opinion, are: the Head of Department's ability to contribute to the effectiveness of his peers' teaching practice, to act as a spokesperson who will promote the communication between the different school bodies and his capacity to manage a department in pedagogical terms.

These competencies are in accordance with the requirements that can be found in the recent legal documents on the matter and that specifically state that the competencies that are expected of educational coordination and pedagogical supervision structures are, among others, "to cooperate with the Pedagogical Council and with the Headmaster in order to ensure the coordination, supervision and monitoring of school activities, to promote collaborative work and to carry out the teachers' performance assessment" (Decree-Law n.º 137/2012, of 2 July, article 42, paragraph 1).

Even though the teachers' performance evaluation is, according to the legal documents that govern the Portuguese educational system, one of the roles assigned to the Head of Department, this competency is, nonetheless, the one that the teachers consider less relevant in his performance. These results may have a lot to do with all the controversy that this issue has been generating ever since it was implemented (Ramalho, 2012).

4.3 Possible obstacles perceived by teachers that can hamper the Head of Department's performance

The results of this research show that, for teachers, the main obstacles that can affect the Head of Department's performance are his heavy workload, since he still has a lot of classes to teach, the lack of time that prevents him from answering properly the teachers' requirements and needs, the high number of teachers in the department and the excessive amount of competencies assigned to the position.

These results are in accordance with those presented by Pires (2012) in his study on intermediate school leadership. According to that study, one of the greatest obstacles is the fact that the teachers who hold this kind of position still have to teach their classes. The Head of Department's performance would surely be more rewarding and less stressful if the teachers were allowed to teach fewer classes. However, the current legislation does not take this into account.

It is clear that teachers don't think that the lack of specialized training in pedagogical supervision is a relevant factor that can affect the Head of Department's performance. However, this position isn't in accordance with what has been advocated by Alarcão (2002), Oliveira (2000), Sánchez (1997, quoted by Marques, 2002) and Zenhas (2006) who claim that the specialized training in supervision is quite relevant and is a kind of qualification that is required or at least recommended for the exercise of any intermediate management position.

Cabral (2009) also concluded in his study that specialized training in such fields as leadership, supervision and assessment can be important to achieve a better performance. This kind of training is also relevant to grant the Head of Department the proper authority to conduct classroom observation, to reflect on the teaching performance and to be responsible for the assessment of that performance.

4.4 Factors that can contribute to the improvement of the Head of Department's performance

The results obtained also reveal that, for the teachers, the Head of Department should have fewer classes to teach, since the heavy workload is, in their opinion, the factor that has the most negative impact on the Head of Department's performance. These results are in accordance with the perception that teachers have of the obstacles that can affect the exercise of such position, when they consider that the Head of Department's heavy workload was the biggest obstacle to a performance.

We can agree with this perception, because that position has been affected by constant changes and a reduction of two to eight teaching hours seems to be not enough to conduct all the competencies and functions assigned to the Head of Department.

The results also show that teachers in general consider that specialized training in pedagogical supervision is not a factor that can contribute to the improvement of the Head of Department's performance. This was also the teachers' perception in relation to the obstacles. They agreed that the lack of training is not one of the most important obstacles that can hamper his proper performance.

This point of view can be explained because some teachers still connect pedagogical supervision with control and authoritarianism (Alarcão & Tavares, 2003; Vieira, 1993). According to these authors, this perspective is one of the main barriers to the implementation of pedagogical supervision in the educational system in Portugal. This position is clearly in disagreement with what is advocated by most of the experts who claim that this kind of training can contribute to the deepening of the Head of Department's knowledge and performance.

4.5 Head of Department's supervisory performance

Most of the teachers chose four forms of performance they expect their Heads of Department to follow and that also represent some of their most valued competencies: the Head of Department's capacity to generate, manage and share knowledge; his ability to show openness to change and innovation; his capacity to encourage the teachers' reflection on their teaching practices and to promote a collaborative learning. This choice reveals that there are already a large number of teachers who recognize the

need for change, for a reflection on their practices and for collaborative work and who understand how important sharing knowledge is.

CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we sought to analyse and to understand what should be the Head of Department's performance and the different types of factors which are associated with this position. This study was based on the perception revealed by teachers of different school levels who were teaching in a school grouping of the municipality of Viseu.

This issue, and the kind of approach chosen, is quite relevant due to the importance assigned to the role played by the Head of Department, an element who possesses wide-ranging coordination and supervisory skills and competencies and who acts as an intermediate school leader in a school context in which autonomy becomes increasingly important. As a matter of fact, one of the objectives of the Decree-Law n.º 75/2008, of 22 April, was the strengthening of schools leadership, specially the intermediate school leaderships, to ensure this autonomy.

The criteria to which teachers attach more relevance when the time comes to elect this intermediate manager (his capacity to build relationships, his dynamism, his leadership and communication capacity, etc.), are all related to professional characteristics that are fundamental to allow for a good performance and are in accordance with the competencies that are assigned to the Head of Department and to the pedagogical supervisor by the current legal documents.

The surveyed teachers consider that the Head of Department should have several competencies that will enable him to have a proper performance. For them, the most important competencies should be the Head of Department's contribution to the effectiveness of his peers' teaching practice, his capacity to be a spokesman who promotes communication between the different school bodies and his ability to manage a department in pedagogical terms.

The teachers' performance assessment is one of the competencies that legal documents assign to the Head Department, but this is the competency that the teachers consider less relevant.

The results of this study show that, in the teachers' opinion, the heavy workload, the lack of time that prevent him from answering properly to the teachers' needs, the high number of teachers in each department and the excessive amount of competencies assigned to the position are the factors that present obstacles that can influence the Head of Department's performance.

The results also show that teachers in general don't think that specialized training in pedagogical supervision plays a relevant factor in the Head of Department's performance. This position is at odds with the opinion of different authors (Alarcão 2002; Oliveira, 2000; Zenhas, 2006) who consider specialized training in supervision a crucial qualification, in particular, for intermediate management positions.

Inferential statistical analysis has made it possible to verify that there are no statistically significant differences regarding the impact that specialized training in pedagogical supervision has on the Head of Department's performance taking into account the teachers who had already held any management position and of those who had never held any management position.

There are however significant differences, if we take into account the school levels of the teachers. Most preschool teachers value the contribution that specialized training in pedagogical supervision can bring to the Head of Department's position; on the other hand, the teachers of the other school levels, for the most part, do not seem to attach importance to the influence that specialized training in pedagogical supervision might have on the exercise of the position.

The deep changes that have been taking place in the current education system explain the need to implement and update the teachers' continuing training, so we can improve the teachers' educational practices and their personal and professional development and improvement of school itself.

As Barroso (2001) states, it is necessary to strengthen school management policies, using proper planning, organization and coordination techniques, the right resources and implementing control of results. The training and the proper qualification of the different educational players are other serious concerns.

For this reason, we consider it very important to follow what is expressed in the law (Decree-Law n.º 137/2012, of 2 July, article 43, paragraph 5) when it refers to the criteria for the designation of candidates for Heads of Department. There, priority is given to candidates who have attended specialized training in pedagogical supervision, teaching performance assessment or educational administration, so that they may meet the expectations that come with that important position.

We can therefore conclude that both continuing and specialized training are not only a teachers' right but are also a duty and a responsibility that the Heads of Department will have to take in their supervisory activity and that will grant them the legitimacy and the credibility to perform their expected function, in all its different aspects and dimensions, both at an organizational and professional level and according to the diversity and the complexity of their functions. All these aspects are supported by the current legislation and by the literature available on the matter (Costa, 2000; Alarcão, 2002).

Pedagogical supervision can help overcome many of the difficulties felt both by the teachers and by schools management bodies. Therefore, and since there are not enough teachers who had attended the type of training that is required by law, more

training courses should be made available from newly created academic pathways whose aim would be to respond to this very specific need.

Another practical implication would be to offer the teachers who are currently acting as Heads of Department a specialized training in pedagogical supervision, since it is a need revealed by the results obtained. It would also be a great contribution if this possibility would be granted to a greater number of teachers.

As a suggestion, we also highlight the importance of the role to be played by the different training institutions in the dissemination of the existing courses in this field. They have to provide that information in the most instructive and complete manner so that all the objectives and professional outputs are evident for those who might come to attend their training courses.

Even though our research might be regarded as a contribution to an understanding of the Head of the Departments' performance within school organizations, the sample approached is composed of teachers who belong to a single group of schools located in the municipality of Viseu, one school grouping among a whole universe of other groupings in the region. It is clear that this situation does not allow us to generalize the conclusions to other contexts and realities. That way, it would be important to broaden the field of study to other groups of schools, taking into account the objectives that had been outlined and the need for new research hypothesis.

It would also be important to understand, through a qualitative study, how the performance of intermediate management positions can influence the operation of an entire department and even of a school, in aspects that have to do with both the students' school performance, the provision of educational service, and with the school's leadership and management.

Realizing the added value that specialized training in pedagogical supervision may bring to the performance of the management positions that are found in Portuguese schools will also be a challenge not to be taken lightly. It would be interesting to conduct a comparative study, at different levels, between schools that have already implemented and regulated pedagogical supervision and others that haven't implemented these practices yet to discover the main differences in the kind of operation and development of those spaces whose common aim is providing youngsters with the better kind of education.

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