

Educational evaluation and teachers' perceptions in Ecuador

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Abstract

Educational assessment and teachers' perceptions are intrinsically intertwined in the educational environment. In this framework, teachers' beliefs and opinions about teaching and learning shape both their approach to student assessment and their interpretation of the results obtained. The article analyzes teachers' perceptions of the evaluative culture in relation to their beliefs, attitudes and ethical values. The present study, of an interpretivist nature, assumes a mixed methodological route, with a sequential exploratory design, supported by field techniques such as the survey and the interview. The teachers' results show a positive self-perception of their student-centered assessment skills and ethical values; however, variability is observed in the use of traditional assessment strategies and in attitudes towards summative assessment, which denotes a diversity of approaches and opinions regarding educational assessment in this context.

Keywords: *Culture, Educational Assessment, Learning, Perceptions Teachers.*

Introduction

Every educational system is embedded in an institutional culture, which reflects the conception of the human being that it aspires to form. This culture plays an important role in the creation of public education policies and in the way educational practices are developed in different learning contexts (Eugenio-Gozalbo et al., 2020).

One of the fundamental moments of the educational act without a doubt is that of evaluation (Naidu & Karunanayaka, 2024), which is present before and after the teaching-learning process, which determines not only the level of achievement reached, but also forms reflective people committed to a more just and equitable society, capable of questioning and transforming the structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. For Leyva and Espinoza Freire (2021), educational evaluation is conceived as an integral process, composed of teacher evaluation, curricular evaluation, institutional evaluation and learning evaluation.

One of the problems currently faced by the Ecuadorian educational system and specifically by teachers, is that they perceive evaluation as a threat and a means of control of their performance (Andrade, 2016), that is, as a process with an educational system that must assume new approaches. Any educational evaluation requires epistemological delimitation that allows conceptual understanding and analysis of its object of study, prioritizing the analytical delimitation that underlies its definition in the educational framework (Jiménez Moreno, 2019).

Teachers have a perception marked by the prevalence of the examination system in the evaluation of learning (Gavin, 2017). For such reason, teachers focus on covering the assessed curriculum and providing accurate feedback on student performance in relation to the requirements of these assessments (Zhang et al., 2023; Mikser et al., 2023). This situation leads to greater caution in interpreting grades and results, allowing the assessment system to influence teaching methods and educational perspectives.

UNESCO (1996), suggests a complete renovation of the educational system, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, so that educational centers become true niches of knowledge and help to face the social and economic problems that affect our region. Faced with this reality, Granda Merchan (2018), mentions that the Ecuadorian educational system demands an urgent transformation of the evaluative culture that is

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based on the precepts of critical pedagogy, to overcome the practice focused on a control paradigm addressing itself by a contextualized and emancipatory evaluative praxis.

As Freire (1970) points out, it is necessary to support the formative and integral process of students through a participatory and critical evaluation as a tool for empowerment and liberation. Recognizing then the importance of the evaluative culture in the teaching-learning process implies to deepen the tension between evaluation focused on accountability and evaluation focused on improvement for educational and social transformation (Reymert et al., 2021).

Evaluation in The Educational Context

The educational system has been configured for the achievement of study objectives that are only evidenced through the development of the evaluation process, in this regard, Sanmartí (2007) conceives evaluation “as the engine of learning, since what and how is taught and what and how is learned depend on it” (p.51). In the educational context, assessment is a key and integrative piece of the educational process, shaping not only what and how it is taught, and what and how it is learned (Safargaliev & Nikolaeva, 2019) but also has a moral component, and therefore, it is crucial to understand the values that underlie it and who it benefits (Guerra, 2016). From this perspective, the multidimensional complexity of assessment involves some aspects, such as vision values and social context, and assumes an integral approach, characterized as a participatory process that seeks to empower students and promote critical thinking (Freire, 1970).

The historical development of assessment is an intriguing topic. It began with the assessment of psychological traits and was influenced by positivism, which was used in the physical sciences to scientifically consolidate its work in the social and human sciences (Wu et al., 2018; Wildbrett et al., 2022). Its theoretical foundations remain fragmented, even though its development has led to methodological strengthening over the decades (Lee & Lu, 2020). Its evolution has been significant as shown in Table 1, from the generation of the measure to the generation of the sensible. This development has been fundamental to the scientific consolidation of work in the human social sciences, while allowing for greater understanding and application of more complex and nuanced evaluative methods. However, challenges remain in articulating a comprehensive theory to guide evaluative practice in a coherent, effective and meaningful way.

Table 1. Evolution of the Generations in Educational Assessment

First generation	1920 - 1930
	Generation of the measure
	Pletylerian Epoch
Second generation	1990 - 1957
	Evaluation comes to the forefront
	Ralph Tyler, father of educational assessment
Third generation	Descriptive generation
	1957 – 1972
	Judgment generation
	All elements of the educational process are evaluated
	Teacher responsibility for the achievement of objectives
Fourth generation	Interest in accountability
	1970 - 1980
	Conceptual plurality
	Hatching of quantitative and qualitative models
	Sensitive generation
	1980-2000

Fifth generation	Social research process
	Organizational learning-shared vision
	Team learning-individual and collective skills development
	Mental models
	Self-assessment-continuous improvement
	Evaluation for quality

Preparation: Own.

The historical trajectory of educational evaluation reveals a significant evolution in the evaluative approach and practice. From the generation of measurement to evaluation for quality (Muñoz Cuenca, 2007), there has been remarkable progress in the understanding and application of evaluation as an integral tool for improving educational quality. Each generation has brought new concepts and approaches, from an emphasis on measurement to the recognition of organizational learning, shared vision and self-assessment as key components for continuous improvement. This historical evolution underscores the importance of adapting evaluative practices to changing educational needs and contexts.

In this sense, concepts such as liberating, transformative, emancipatory evaluation, pedagogy and critical reflection, democratic dialogue, co-construction of knowledge, diversity, contextualization, integral development, social justice, empowerment and solidarity have emerged as fundamental elements. Recognizing the plurality of perspectives and experiences enriches the evaluation process and ensures that it is relevant and meaningful for all involved. In addition, continuous and formative evaluation focuses on the integral development of individuals, not only in the acquisition of knowledge, but also in the strengthening of skills, attitudes and values that promote empowerment and solidarity in the educational community.

According to authors such as Ahmad et al. (2020) and Birenbaum (2016), there are two approaches in the culture of educational assessment currently observed: traditional assessment and assessment focused on learning and educational improvement. From these postulates, several authors refer to the following paradigms: positivist or behaviorist, participatory, utilitarian, constructivist, ecological, critical or transformative, etc.

- **Positivist Or Conductivist Paradigm:** considers assessment as normative or traditional, whose main objective is to see the measured position of students in comparison with others, identify students' talents in order to establish comparisons and then make a selection among them. Authors such as Ríos-Muñoz et al. (2022), highlight in this framework that the findings point to the conflict felt by teachers about the contrast between standardized methods and the true purposes of such evaluations.
- **Constructivist Paradigm:** emphasizes the active process of the student in the construction of his or her own learning, that is, assessment aims to lead to learning instead of simply measuring it. In this definition, Safari and Pourhashemi (2017) agree, stating that the constructivist paradigm presents a focus on the situationality of learning and teaching as social processes of sharing and (re)constructing meanings, understandings, and personal skills.
- **Critical Or Transformative Paradigm:** implies a conscious and responsible reflection that triggers an action aimed at rebelling against the causes that generate a situation considered lacking the expected benefit. Kitts (2022), argues that critical pedagogy, as an alternative paradigm, offers concrete steps that teacher education programs and teachers can potentially take to act as critically transformative agents in education.

Assessment in the educational context is a dynamic field that requires a reflective and contextualized approach. By adopting a comprehensive and critical view of assessment, we can move towards more

inclusive, fair and effective evaluative practices that contribute to the full and equitable development of all students.

The Evaluative Culture in The Teaching-Learning Process

Evaluation culture refers to those values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors that reflect a shared appreciation of the practice of evaluation as an institutional value. Academic fields have different evaluative cultures; thus, researchers from different fields prefer specific criteria when evaluating (Reymert et al., 2021); these specific preferences are to some extent mediated by national frameworks.

Improving quality is the focus of education reform, and building a quality evaluation system that suits its needs is an important task of vocational education reform; however, international research on vocational education quality evaluation models has not yet been explored in depth (Lu & Wang, 2023). Program evaluation studies provide the development of dynamic, contemporary and qualified educational programs and the improvement of current educational programs (Çonoglu et al., 2022), which further implies:

- The understanding of the evaluation by the different educational actors.
- The skills possessed by certain key people in each institution to carry out the evaluation processes, as well as the training they should receive for the evaluation to be carried out properly.
- The fundamental principles that establish how evaluation results are used.

In this sense, it is considered difficult to find a coherent definition of evaluation culture, since social, institutional and personal frameworks have a significant impact on how evaluation is configured and understood. The following figure shows the concept of evaluation culture related to educational contexts.

Table 2. Dimensions and Perspectives of Educational Evaluation in a Social Context

Social framework: Identify the purpose of evaluation and the role of this process in society.	Values Way of thinking and feeling Relationships between people Behavior Identity Agreements	Evaluation Culture
Institutional Framework: Refers to the culture and meaning that each educational center brings to the evaluation.		
Individual framework: Recognizes the individual perception of each educational actor regarding the evaluation process.		

Preparation: Own.

Thus, the evaluative activity of teachers is justified not only in the context of compliance with normative documents and criteria, but also in the context of personally predetermined parameters whose textual production is the object of evaluation (motivation for speech development, axiological register, emotional intelligence, reflective competence, etc.) (Dobrevă, 2020) (Dobrevă, 2020). It becomes necessary to institute a series of transformations in the educational context, that is, to make decisions that start from inquiring into the relevance of educational assessment as a historical social process and its daily impact on the improvement of the quality of educational systems (Gil Alvarez et al., 2017).

It should be considered that, although there are currently a variety of assessment models and instruments, these do not always allow for a comprehensive assessment nor can they be used with sufficient ease and clarity (Montero-Rodríguez et al., 2022). In this context, Diaz et al. (2020), remarks that overlapping competencies between assessment and specific contexts or content will always be a reality because assessors may need unique competencies to answer assessment questions for particular contexts or content areas.

Existe un interés creciente por parte de los diferentes sistemas educativos por implementar la evaluación como elemento para lograr la eficacia educativa. De los modelos estudiados, los mejores resultados son los sistemas con cultura evaluativa (Herradas Martin, 2021). Los resultados indican que aún queda un largo camino por recorrer para lograr aprendizajes significativos a través del proceso de evaluación, en este marco, se entiende que este proceso implica la mirada atenta del educador hacia y con el alumno, es profundo y necesita de una reflexión constante, consolidándose como la base para que el educador pueda reinventar sus prácticas y el estudiante se comprenda a sí mismo como un individuo crítico-reflexivo en su contexto (Pinto et al., 2022).

Methodology

The present research starts from the following research question: What are the perceptions that teachers have about the evaluative culture considering the underlying values? The study in question, with an interpretivist nature, adopts a mixed methodological approach, combining a sequential exploratory design and making use of field techniques such as survey and interview.

- **Online Survey Applied During the Month of May 2023:** divided into three sections to explore objectively the beliefs, attitudes and values that teachers have regarding the evaluation of learning in the classroom; these data are analyzed with the SPSS statistical software. The evaluative principles of critical pedagogy are taken as a base reference: the questionnaire to explore the learning assessment culture of university teachers (Roldán & Macías, 2022) and the questionnaire Qualification for Equity (Feldaman, 2019). Finally, a questionnaire on “Evaluative culture from the perception of teachers” is implemented, composed of three sections: (1) beliefs about learning assessment, (2) attitudes towards learning assessment and (3) ethical values about learning assessment.
- **Semi-Structured Face-To-Face Interview, During the Month of June 2023:** To explore qualitatively the same sections used in the survey and to interpret the evaluation culture of the population under study from a quantitative and qualitative approach. This interview explores the assessment culture of teachers in the southern region of Ecuador, in 3 dimensions: 1) beliefs about learning assessment, 2) attitudes towards learning assessment and 3) ethical values that teachers have regarding learning assessment.

The population under study in the present research were teachers belonging to the educational district 11D01 Loja during the 2022/2023 school year, which are located in different educational institutions in the canton of Loja, Ecuador.

According to the statistics issued by the Ministry of Education of Ecuador for the month of April 2023, there are 3746 registered teachers distributed in the urban and rural sector and in fiscal, fiscal-commissioned, municipal and private educational institutions, who constitute the population under study. A simple random probabilistic sampling was determined, in this sense, the sample size is composed of 162 teachers of which 100 belong to Hispanic public schools, 24 public schools, 20 private schools, 5 municipal schools and 13 intercultural bilingual schools.

Con respecto a las características de la muestra: 86.4% son mujeres y el 13.6% varones. La especialidad de los docentes presenta la siguiente segmentación: inicial (23.5%), básico (66.7%) y bachillerato (9.9%). La mayor parte de docentes encuestados pertenece al sistema fiscal con un (69.8%), fiscomisional (14.8%), particular (12.3%). El tipo de Institución al que la mayoría pertenecen es educación hispana (75.3%) y de

educación intercultural (24.7%). El sector de la institución educativa en la que laboran el 93.2% es urbano y 6.8% es rural.

Results

Teachers' Self-Perception of Learning Assessment

Teachers' self-perception of mastery of learning assessment refers to how teachers view themselves in terms of their ability and competence to assess their students' progress and achievement. The value of 70.71 suggests that, on average, teachers have a moderate self-perception with a positive approach to their mastery in this domain, although the standard deviation of 11.86 reflects that there is some variability in these perceptions.

Table 3. Teacher self-perception - learning assessment

Evaluation culture sub-indexes	Min.	Max.	M	SD	Asymmetry	Kurtosis
Subindex of self-perceived mastery of learning assessment	25,00	100,00	70,71	11,86	-0,15	1,43
Subindex of use of constructivist and student-centered assessment strategies	47,50	100,00	82,52	14,18	-0,65	-0,35
Subindex of use of traditional and teacher-centered evaluation strategies	35,00	100,00	62,04	13,96	1,04	1,05

Preparation: Own.

The teachers interviewed self-evaluate themselves favorably with respect to the mastery to develop the evaluation that is present in all moments of the teaching-learning process. Self-perception or self-assessment varies widely among teachers, being influenced by their training, experience, pedagogical knowledge, models and feedback from their students. Some teachers feel confident and competent in their ability to design and implement effective assessments that help assess their students' learning, while others have doubts or insecurities about it; self-perception also influences how teachers approach the assessment of learning in the classroom and affects the quality of the assessments they use.

Beliefs About Learning Assessment

Teachers have a fairly wide range in their beliefs, from a minimum of 50 to a maximum of 100. These vary according to paradigms and theories of assessment, in some cases oriented to behaviorist, cognitivist and constructivist principles; very few from a critical-transformative approach.

The mean of 71.75 suggests that, on average, teachers have moderate beliefs toward classroom learning assessment, i.e., they do not have extremely positive or negative beliefs. On the other hand, the standard deviation of 9.55 indicates that beliefs vary markedly among teachers, with considerable diversity in how they perceive and believe in the assessment of learning. Under this perspective, their evaluative practices do not assume a single approach and, therefore, their beliefs vary according to the pedagogical approaches, educational contexts and individual experiences in which the teaching-learning process takes place.

Table 4. Beliefs about learning assessment

Descriptive statistics

Perceptions about:	Min.	Max.	Average	SD	Asymmetry	Curtosis
Beliefs about classroom learning assessment.	50,00	100,00	71,75	9,55	0,37	0,30

Preparation: Own.

As for the perception of teachers, the evaluation they apply in their classrooms is aligned with the behaviorist and constructivist paradigm, since in their evaluation instruments and in the evaluative practices they perform daily, traditional and memoristic aspects are assumed as well as elements that allow them to generate reflection processes in their students. They also consider that the results obtained in the evaluation process allow them to adjust their work methodology according to the needs and interests of their students.

Teachers' Ideas and Preconceptions on The Formative Use of Evaluation

When analyzing the data referring to the ideas and preconceptions that teachers have about the formative use of evaluation, an average value of 76.20 is obtained, an index that reflects a positive understanding and approach of teachers towards the formative use of evaluation. Educators recognize that providing efficient and timely feedback during the teaching-learning process helps students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and, above all, to activate timely measures focused on improving individual and collective performance, as well as regulating the teaching-learning process to adapt it to their needs.

Regarding the ideas and preconceptions that teachers have about the summative use of evaluation, it has a mean of 55.99 which suggests that teachers have a less favorable understanding and approach towards the summative use of evaluation under the current approach. According to the results obtained, the teachers' aspiration towards a new model that evaluates not only what was learned, but also how that learning was achieved and how it can be applied in real world situations, therefore, evaluation should not be a unilateral act of the teacher, it should involve the students' self-reflection, i.e. self-evaluation and co-evaluation with an assigned score.

The favorable feelings that teachers have towards the practice and uses of evaluation present the mean value of 83.52, which leads to infer that teachers have positive feelings towards evaluation and its application in the classroom, in this sense, the standard deviation of 11.06 shows some variability in these feelings. On the other hand, when analyzing unfavorable feelings about these variables, the results show a mean of 55.09, evidence that teachers have less favorable feelings towards evaluation and its application in the classroom, with a standard deviation of 13.33, which shows some variability in these feelings.

Table 5. Teachers' ideas and preconceptions about the formative use of evaluation

Evaluation culture sub-indexes	Mín.	Máx.	M	SD	Asymmetry	Curtosis
Subindex of ideas and preconceptions of formative use of evaluation	44,44	100,00	76,20	9,09	0,51	1,35
Subindex of ideas and preconceptions of summative use of evaluation	25,00	100,00	55,99	14,58	0,71	1,16

Subindex of favorable feelings towards the practice and uses of evaluation	25,00	100,00	83,52	11,06	-0,62	3,49
Subindex of unfavorable feelings towards the practice and uses of evaluation.	25,00	100,00	55,09	13,33	1,29	2,60

Preparation: Own.

Teachers agree that in their educational practices greater importance is given to the use of formative evaluation, because it is present throughout the entire teaching-learning process. Even the Ministry of Education of Ecuador gives a rating of 80% for the accreditation of students, in this framework, the summative evaluation is applied to comprehensively measure learning at the end of the educational process.

Attitudes Towards Learning Evaluation

Like the case of beliefs, teachers' attitudes show a considerable range of values, from 48.44 to 100. The mean of 67.70 shows that, on average, the attitudes are rather positive, but not extremely high. The standard deviation of 8.24 suggests that although attitudes are generally positive, there is still some variability in teachers' opinions.

Table 6. Attitudes Towards Learning Evaluation

Descriptive statistics						
Perceptions about:	Min.	Max.	Average	SD	Asymmetry	Curtosis
Attitudes towards the evaluation of learning in the classroom	48,44	100,00	67,70	8,24	1,66	4,89

Preparation: Own.

The teachers demonstrate a favorable attitude towards the evaluation process, considering that evaluation must be overcome with fear and not seen as a punishment, but as a process to enhance student learning and teachers' performance; this positive attitude has a direct influence on the teaching-learning process.

Importance of Teachers' Ethical Values Vis-À-Vis Learning Assessment

In relation to the importance of the ethical-technical values of the evaluations, we have a mean of 88.37. Teachers consider these aspects as highly important in the context of evaluations, with a standard deviation of 12.26, which also shows some variability in these perceptions. It should be added that these ethical values promote honesty and academic integrity and avoid any form of plagiarism when executing evaluative processes.

Thus, the objectivity of learning assessment in the classroom presents an average value of 86.06, that is, teachers perceive a high level of objectivity in learning assessment, with a standard deviation of 11.92, which also shows some variability in these perceptions.

Now, in the data on equity in grading, the average value of 70.43 is presented. Teachers perceive that a certain degree of equity in grading is applied, and the standard deviation of 10.24 shows that, in order to apply criteria of equity in evaluation, individual differences must be considered and equal opportunities must be provided for all students to demonstrate their learning regardless of their abilities or particular circumstances. By integrating these ethical values into the evaluation process, a positive learning environment is promoted and integral development is fostered.

Table 7. Ethical values of teachers in relation to learning assessment

Subindex of importance of ethical-technical values of the evaluations	50,00	100,00	88,37	12,26	-0,44	-1,12
Sub-index of objectivity of classroom learning assessment.	50,00	100,00	86,06	11,92	-0,13	-1,22
Subindex of equity in qualification	45,00	100,00	70,43	10,24	1,03	1,87

Preparation: Own.

Los docentes tienen en cuenta que las diferencias individuales y el proporcionar igualdad de oportunidades para que todos los estudiantes demuestren su aprendizaje independientemente de sus capacidades o circunstancias individuales. Al integrar estos valores éticos en el proceso de evaluación, se promueve un ambiente de aprendizaje positivo y se fomenta el desarrollo integral.

Perceptions of Ethical Values on The Assessment of Classroom Learning

Ethical values show the narrowest range among the three dimensions, with a minimum of 51.67 and a maximum of 100. The mean of 81.62 suggests that, on average, teachers have fairly high ethical values with respect to the assessment of classroom learning. The standard deviation of 9.12 indicates that, although on average the values are high, there is still some variability in the intensity of these ethical values among teachers.

Table 8. Perceptions of ethical values on the assessment of learning in the classroom.

Descriptive statistics						
Perceptions about:	Min.	Max.	Average	SD	Asymmetry	Curtosis
Ethical values on the assessment of learning in the classroom	51,67	100,00	81,62	9,12	-0,05	-0,52

Preparation: Own.

The teaching staff agrees that, for the correct application of the evaluation process, the teacher has to include ethical values, considering aspects of fairness and transparency at the time of recording grades. The context and the particularities of each student are taken into account, therefore, the evaluation must be fair, in order to extract reliable results from the teaching-learning process.

Evaluative Culture as Perceived by Teachers

Table 9 presents the data explaining that in education district 11D01 Loja teachers have a constructivist evaluation culture with a minimum of 55 and a maximum of 100. The mean of 79.36 suggests that teachers have a constructivist tendency to evaluate learning in the classroom.

The standard deviation of 9.36 indicates that this tendency varies markedly among teachers, suggesting diversity in how they perceive assessment. This is consistent with the statement that the culture of evaluation is dynamic, that is, it evolves and with the progress of educational research it transforms and adapts to the characteristics of educational processes. In a school there is not a single type of evaluative culture; on the contrary, several subcultures converge with different conceptions regarding evaluation; when

they come together they create an autonomous school culture, different from the rest of the cultures that are lived in other educational institutions.

Table 9. Evaluative culture from the perception of teachers

Descriptive indexes on types of evaluative culture						
Descriptive statistics						
	Min.	Max.	Average	SD	Asymmetry	Curtosis
Evaluative Culture for Learning Index	55,69	100,00	79,36	9,36	-0,02	-0,23
Traditional Evaluation Culture Index	32,50	100,00	59,01	12,77	1,06	1,48

Preparation: Own.

Discussion And Conclusions

Currently, it is essential to redefine assessment as a practice not only concerned with the evaluation of learning, but also oriented to the formation of value, attitudinal, ethical and democratic aspects, in order to contribute to the construction of a student body aware of itself, of other people and of its role in society. It is necessary then, as proposed by Li and Zhang (2024), to improve assessment methodologies and improve learning outcomes in congruence with the changing requirements of the knowledge economy.

In terms of assessment strategies, there is a positive trend towards the use of constructivist (Ríos-Muñoz et al. 2022) and student-centered approaches compared to traditional and teacher-centered strategies, which encourages student participation and the development of meaningful learning (Nguyen et al., 2021). However, a significant percentage of teachers still employ traditional strategies, which limits the active participation of students as they continue to employ techniques and strategies that are not in line with the development and innovation in the educational field.

Teachers show a positive self-perception about their mastery of learning assessment and have a favorable tendency towards the application of constructivist assessment. Likewise, they also value the importance of including ethical-technical values when applying the evaluation process and perceive a high level of objectivity in the evaluation of learning in the classroom. This reality is congruent with Melasalmi et al. (2022), which proposes making ethical aspects visible in educational assessment.

Certain variability is evident in the perceptions and practices related to the application of traditional assessment, as well as in the ideas and preconceptions about the summative use of assessment. Faced with this, Gordeeva et al. (2021), put forward the idea of organizing school assessments in the logic of developmental education, which is more differentiated, mastery-oriented and objective.

In addition, feelings towards the practice and uses of evaluation show certain variability, both in favorable and unfavorable aspects. According to Brinia et al. (2023), this reality responds to the fact that evaluation, despite contributing to academic development and improving the quality of educational institutions, is subject to different factors that directly influence the feelings and perceptions of teachers, even causing pressure, stress, fear, nervousness and insecurity.

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