

**ACCOUNTABILITY IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY IN MOSSORÓ (RN)**

**RESPONSABILIZAÇÃO NA POLÍTICA EDUCACIONAL DO MUNICÍPIO DE MOSSORÓ (RN)**

**RENDICIÓN DE CUENTAS EN LA POLÍTICA EDUCATIVA DEL MUNICIPIO DE MOSSORÓ (RN)**

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper aims to analyze the educational accountability policy in the municipality of Mossoró (RN), observing the effects on the relation between management and education quality. For this purpose, the concept of quality outlined in the legislation and the nature of the instruments used are intended. With a qualitative approach, it analyzes the normative documents that guide the implementation of the policy and the performance indicators in national assessment, as well as revising relevant literature on the subject. It appears that, in this municipal network, the official discourse legitimizes the quality of education as one of the dimensions of the school manager's work, but associated with a model of material accountability that attributes monetary incentives and exempts the municipal government from responsibilities.

**KEYWORDS:** Educational accountability. Educational management. Municipal assessment. Mossoró.

**RESUMO:** O artigo objetiva analisar a política de responsabilização educacional do município de Mossoró (RN), observando os reflexos sobre a relação gestão e qualidade na educação. Para tanto, problematiza-se a concepção de qualidade esboçada na legislação e a natureza dos instrumentos utilizados. Trata-se de um estudo de abordagem qualitativa, a qual analisa os documentos normativos que orientam a implementação da política e os indicadores de desempenho em avaliação nacional no município de Mossoró (RN), bem como revisita a literatura pertinente ao tema. Consta-se que na rede municipal investigada o discurso oficial legitima a qualidade do ensino como uma das dimensões do trabalho do gestor escolar, mas associada a um modelo de responsabilização material que atribui incentivos monetários e exime o governo municipal de responsabilidades.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Responsabilidade educacional. Gestão educacional. Avaliação municipal. Mossoró.

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**RESUMEN:** *El artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la política de rendición de cuentas educativa en el municipio de Mossoró (RN), observando los efectos sobre la relación entre gestión y calidad en la educación. Con este fin, se problematiza el concepto de calidad esbozado en la legislación y la naturaleza de los instrumentos utilizados. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, que analiza los documentos normativos que guían la implementación de la política y los indicadores de desempeño en la evaluación nacional en el municipio de Mossoró (RN), así como revisa la literatura pertinente al tema. Se observa que en la red municipal investigada el discurso oficial legitima la calidad de la enseñanza como una de las dimensiones del trabajo del director escolar, pero asociado a un modelo de rendición de cuentas material que atribuye incentivos monetarios y excluye al gobierno municipal de responsabilidades.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Responsabilidad educativa. Gestión educativa. Evaluación municipal. Mossoró.*

## Introduction

Research on educational accountability policies in municipalities has revealed the dynamics adopted by these entities, many of which adapt the criteria that guide the large-scale evaluation policies of the federal and state governments to the local reality. One step forward in these strategies has been to create their own evaluation mechanisms and link criteria for awards and bonuses involving the distribution of financial resources. Studies by Carvalho, Oliveira, and Lima (2014) in the municipality of Rio de Janeiro; Cerdeira, Almeida, and Costa (2014) in Duque de Caxias and Rio de Janeiro; Silva (2016) in Campina Grande; Costa *et al.* (2019); and Oliveira, Costa, and Vidal (2021) in networks in Ceará, show that accountability initiatives are adopted by municipalities in order to improve learning outcomes.

By linking criteria that imply the use of financial resources for awards and bonuses, municipalities build legal-legal frameworks, which can be done through laws or decrees approved within the legislative or executive branch, regulations or ordinances issued by the education secretariats themselves and, in some situations, they do so with less legal certainty, as Monte (2020) observed.

This article aims to analyze the Law of Educational Responsibility (LRE in the Portuguese acronym), No. 2.717, of December 27, 2010 (MOSSORÓ, 2010), of the municipality of Mossoró, in Rio Grande do Norte (RN), highlighting reflections on the relationship between management and quality in education. The ideas that gave rise to the LRE arise in 2008 from the Strategic Planning held in the municipal education network and that, according to Souza and Cabral Neto (2017), assumes the new strands of managerialism, with propositions that point to the improvement of national indicators, implementation of

municipal evaluation system and the creation of mechanisms that involve educational accountability.

One of the instruments announced in the LRE is the Educational Map (EM), a management tool for schools to improve the educational quality of the municipality. In addition to this, other actions have been implemented by the Municipal Education Secretary (SME in the Portuguese acronym), such as the Quality School Award, the creation of the Municipal Education Network Evaluation System (SIAVE), and the 14th salary for teachers in the Child Education Units (CEI) and Elementary Schools, associated with the learning results.

Throughout the article, some points of the educational policy in the municipality of Mossoró will be tensioned, observing: a) the conception of quality outlined in the policy and b) because of its nature, if the instrument adopted advances in the materialization of democratic tools of accountability or if, in the wake of state changes in recent years, crystallizes a governance by numbers, reduced to unilateral accountability.

The concern about these dimensions is justified by the advance of educational accountability policies that disregard the principle of democratic management established in the 1988 Constitution (BRAZIL, 1988) and in the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education - Law No. 9.394/1996 (BRAZIL, 1996), with symbolic and material implications on education professionals. Such instruments take refuge in themes such as transparency, accountability and efficiency, using standards to effect institutional regulation and consolidate the assumptions of the evaluating State. The investigation of the accountability policy in Mossoró sheds light on an issue already presented in the literature, namely that the pactuation of results takes on different nuances depending on the local conditions of each federative entity, which incorporate policies with material impacts given the prominent management over the education networks (COSTA; VIDAL; VIEIRA, 2019).

The study has a qualitative approach, of bibliographic and documentary nature. To meet the objective, we analyzed the Law of Educational Responsibility and the Regulation of the Quality School Award, as well as other regulations that guide the municipal education system, published in the Official Journal of Mossoró (JOM, in the Portuguese acronym). In order to characterize the municipality of Mossoró, we used quantitative information from the databases of the National Institute for Studies and Research in Education Anísio Teixeira (INEP) and the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). It was also sought to revisit the productions on the theme of management and quality in education, as well as research already developed on the accountability policy of Mossoró (RN).

The article is organized in three sections, besides this introduction and the final considerations. The first section discusses the relationship between management, quality and educational accountability by analyzing the national legislation and studies in the area. The second presents the characterization of the municipality of Mossoró (RN) and the third is dedicated to the study on the Educational Map as an instrument that helps the implementation of the accountability policy in the municipal education network, observing its reflections and developments in schools.

### **Educational management, quality and accountability**

The accountability of schools for quality standards is nothing new, and evaluation policies have taken on a guiding role in defining the desired quality. With the creation of the National System for Evaluation of Basic Education (SAEB in the Portuguese acronym) in the early 1990s, the federal government brought to the fore the concern to diagnose and monitor student learning in basic education. In 2007, with the creation of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB in the Portuguese acronym), this monitoring intensified, mobilizing managers and teachers around the issue of quality of education. Such mobilization has occurred in different ways, provoking various effects on the educational networks.

Reflecting on the relationship between school management and the quality of education requires highlighting the political elements underlying this theme. Changes in the educational policy scenario have converged in efforts directed toward standardizing the quality of services provided by schools to ensure this subjective public right (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO, 2005). The management of schools and education systems have been mobilized to develop strategies that seek to ensure the provision of quality education for all. Therefore, it is appropriate to dimension how school management is presented in the normative discourses and in the processes of accountability of schools to ensure educational quality.

Educational quality is a theme present both in constitutional provisions and in infra-constitutional production. The Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRAZIL, 1988), in its art. 206, advocated the guarantee of quality standards as a principle of basic education, reinforced in art. 214, when it refers to the quality of public education as one of the goals of the National Education Plan. This principle is also present in LDB nº 9.394/1996 (BRAZIL, 1996), reinforcing the guarantee of quality standards (art. 3, III) as a State duty (art. 4, IX) and as the purpose of school performance evaluation (art. 9, VI).

The General National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education (BRAZIL, 2013) also announce that the social quality school adopts as centrality the student and the learning, which will be corroborated by the National Education Plan (BRAZIL, 2014). Such purpose raises the interrelation between the school's global goals and student learning. While presenting quality as a principle and purpose of education, these regulations shed light on educational evaluation, making it, according to Freitas (2007), a public task.

The relationship between educational quality and evaluation of basic education was materialized when searching for conditions for the implementation of democracy in schools in the National Education Plan (2014 - 2024), which, in its goals 7 and 19, deals with the link between democratic school management and the quality of education associated with managerial criteria. Goal 7 aims to "promote the quality of basic education in all stages and modalities, with improvement of school flow and learning [...]" (BRAZIL, 2014, n.p.) and proposes technical and financial support for "school management through direct transfer of financial resources to the school, ensuring the participation of the school community in the planning and application of resources, aiming at the expansion of transparency and the effective development of democratic management" (BRAZIL, 2014, n.p.). Goal 19 presents the need to "ensure conditions within two years for the implementation of democratic management of education, associated with technical criteria of merit and performance and public consultation with the school community in public schools, providing resources and technical support from the Union for this purpose" (BRAZIL, 2014, n.p.).

These goals of the PNE have as a reference the conception that the quality of education is a dimension of the work of school managers. In this sense, they highlight the understanding of the concept of quality associated with the results of educational performance measured by external evaluations. The democratic management of schools, as a Brazilian constitutional principle, is now mediated, in the goals of the PNE, by strategies associated with ensuring the quality of public schools, expressed by measurable indexes such as the IDEB. Thus, it is possible to realize that the educational policy has strengthened the mechanisms of external evaluation, reaffirming the perspective of the Evaluating State and accountability processes, as a policy guided by the results of schools and that places teachers as protagonists in student learning (OLIVEIRA; FRANÇA-CARVALHO; TAVARES, 2020), using mechanisms with symbolic and material implications.

Afonso (2013), when discussing the evolution of the Evaluating State, observed that evaluation policies have been implemented despite the ideological and political conceptions of national governments, which contributes to the immunity of these instruments in the face

of local realities. For the author, the consensus around the theme contributes to the hegemonic discourse that the evaluation instruments are effective. The supra-partisan condition of the evaluation and accountability policies in Brazil, as a pretext for the efficiency of school management, was analyzed by Oliveira (2015), revealing a contradictory condition between popular-democratic governments and the educational policy agenda at national and subnational levels.

The quality standard based on the results of external evaluations is widened in its propositions and, currently, a range of own evaluation systems has proliferated in states and municipalities. The immunity and indifference to the subject tend to provoke new developments in the field, strengthening a reduced understanding of reality, that evaluation and its indicators are the only means of measuring or referencing the desirable improvements in Brazilian education. It is true that the use of the results of external evaluations are important means of interpreting the reality of schools and educational systems. However, these results have limits that must be considered.

To the demand for information on educational quality, accountability policies have been added (BROOKE, 2006). Therefore, the expansion of evaluation systems in the country, as well as the public exposure of results by school, municipality and state, has made the issue of quality a debate that goes beyond the limits of public power, enabling the knowledge of society about the schools and the production of studies and research on the data disclosed.

Studies on accountability policies in Brazil indicate that there is no consensus on the use of these initiatives to improve the quality of education. The proposals for teacher bonuses and awards aimed at schools and municipalities encounter resistance among critics of this policy model (AMARO, 2016; CHIRINÉA, 2017; ESQUINSANI, 2016; OLIVEIRA; FRANÇA-CARVALHO; SOARES, 2020), who indicate that they tend to hide the real problems of education, driving competition between schools and education networks and operating under strategies that tend to narrow the school curriculum, in addition to reducing educational quality to synthetic indicators (COSTA; VIDAL, 2020).

At the other extreme, those who advocate adherence to accountability mechanisms demand more information from schools in the name of improving educational quality, which necessarily involves the accountability of education professionals. Passone (2014), analyzing these positions, recalls that teacher performance is considered the most important aspect for the results achieved by students, but warns that it is necessary to investigate to what extent the speeches that emphasize the centrality of the teacher for educational quality do not disregard the structural conditions of implementation of educational policy. This is why critics of

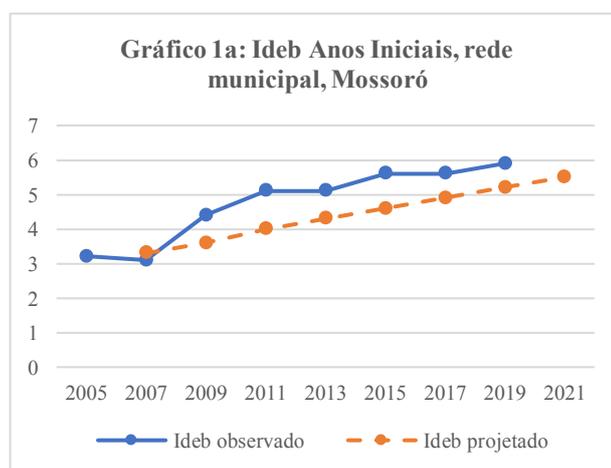
accountability policies associate them with managerialism, far from democratic management practices, and negative social representations prevail.

### Educational characterization of the municipality of Mossoró

Mossoró is a municipality in the interior of the state of Rio Grande do Norte. According to the IBGE (2021), it has a territorial extension of 2,099.334 km<sup>2</sup>, an estimated population of 303,792 inhabitants and a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.720. Its economy is based on oil production, sea salt and irrigated fruit farming, which directly affects its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, which is R\$ 22,185.02 (2018), being considered one of the largest in the region.

According to data from the 2020 School Census, released by the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), Mossoró has 211 schools among kindergarten, elementary and high school units. In 2020, it registered 62,083 enrollments in all stages of basic education and its modalities. As for the IDEB (INEP, 2021) in primary education, the municipal network has behaved as shown in Charts 1a and 1b.

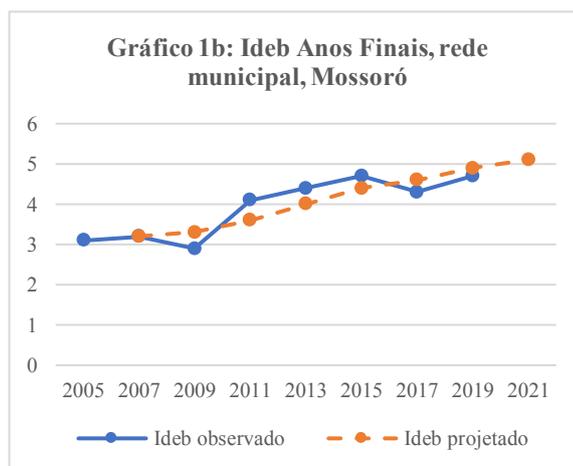
**Graph 1a – Ideb early years, municipal network, Mossoró<sup>4</sup>**



Source: Inep (2021)

<sup>4</sup> Ideb observado = Observed Ideb; Ideb projetado= Projected Ideb

**Graph 1b** – Ideb final years, municipal network, Mossoró



Source: Inep (2021)

The IDEB data show that in the early years (Chart 1a), since 2007, the municipality has been able to exceed the goals projected by INEP for the school network, a fact that does not happen with the final years of elementary school, as shown in Graph 1b, whose results for 2009, 2017 and 2019 are below the projected goals.

### **The Educational Map: between official and hidden policy discourse**

One of the instruments created with the LRE, the Educational Map (EM), is a tool present in the educational policy of the municipality of Mossoró, considered as a model of high stakes, because it includes the salary bonus and other measures such as maintenance and purchase of materials or improvement of infrastructure of municipal schools associated with increased learning outcomes.

In this section, we present the legal bases that guide the implementation of the ME and its developments in the municipality. For this, we used the Law of Educational Responsibility and other documents that detail it, published in the Official Journal of the Municipality of Mossoró (JOM), including the Regulation of the School Quality Award.

The EM is part of a set of policy and evaluation initiatives implemented in the period 2009 to 2012 by the SME of Mossoró, and its actions in schools are monitored by the Executive Management of Education and Sports, a sector created specifically for this purpose. The EM is incorporated as a planning and management tool for elementary schools and early childhood education units and, in the absence of a proper evaluation system, its indicators become the network's evaluation criteria, making school managers and other school players

responsible for not complying with what is established and defining penalties for those involved.

The use of the award in the municipality predates the approval of the LRE, as since 2009 it has adopted the award with a bonus corresponding to a 14th salary to teachers, based on the evaluation of the Educational Map in units of early childhood education and elementary schools, whose results are published in the Official Municipal Journal (JOM). The evaluation of the schools is done by reading and assessing the goals of the ME by a team formed by the SME, called the Quality School Award Committee. After the publication of the winning schools, all receive the quality seal and their respective bonuses in a public ceremony.

The Law of Educational Responsibility of Mossoró establishes the policy of accountability in order to promote the improvement of the quality of the municipal education system, through planned actions, educational goals, investment, financing, and performance evaluation. According to art. 5 of that law, two initiatives should have been implemented in 2011 - the Evaluation System of the Municipal Education Network (I) and the Training Plan for Education Professionals (II); one in 2013 - the installation of computer labs in 100% of schools in the municipal education network (III) and one in 2014, the expansion of the school day from part-time to 7 hours (full-time) in 100% of schools in the municipal education network, located in urban areas, and in 50% of schools in rural areas, by the year 2014 (IV) (MOSSORÓ, 2010). It is important to note that since 2010, when the law was enacted, none of the actions have been fully implemented in the municipality.

The Municipal Education Evaluation System (SIAVE) is currently characterized by the application of the indicators of the Educational Map. Cognitive and performance tests have been produced by the schools as a way of measuring learning and are supervised by SME technicians. SIAVE is an institutional evaluation system, producing results of educational units, involving performance of students, teachers, supervisors, managers and support staff of the municipal education network of Mossoró (RN). Cabral Neto, Castro and Garcia (2016, p. 60) observed that the results of this evaluation guide the functional progression, the granting of awards and the release for professional training of the teaching staff, guided by the managerialist model of uses of the results as a means of control, "putting into practice the principles of accountability of the subjects for their actions, instituting competition between subjects and the rewarding of performance as a means of stimulating educational improvement".

In 2019, the SIAVE underwent changes, removing from its text the mention of the School Quality Award. In the case of school unit evaluations, it began to consider the dimensions according to the Educational Map, namely: pedagogical management, people management, planning and management, and evaluation and results.

Lobo (2013) points out that the educational policy of Mossoró reflects the neoliberal policy, based on the rationalist discourse, and echoes the discourses of excellence, effectiveness, quality, control and accountability, expressed both in official documents and in the speeches of the SME managers. Duarte (2015) also shares the understanding that the municipal accountability policy meets the principles exhorted to the public sector, assuming the evaluation and its quantifiable results as a guiding axis. These surveys point out that managers characterize as positive the use of the Education Map and observe important changes in the municipal scenario from its implementation.

According to Brooke (2006), accountability systems have common ingredients, such as *authority*, evaluation, standardization criteria, incentives or sanctions. Adopting these categories for the analysis of the educational policy of Mossoró, we see that the authority is given by the hierarchical relationship established between the SME that proposes and the schools, who have no option but to adhere to what 'comes from above', and by the monocratic decision of the central body to publish the results of school performance in the JOM, which highlights the supervisory and monitoring character of the municipality, enhancing competition between institutions. The *evaluation* is carried out by the EM, obeying strict standardization criteria, following the Regulation of the School Quality Prize and the application of cognitive and performance tests based on SIAVE.

The EM is defined in art. 9 of the LRE (MOSSORÓ, 2010), which determines the evaluation indicators that educational institutions must achieve annually, evidenced from dossiers developed from 13 targets: enrollment and school dropout, infrastructure, school performance, student performance, educational programs to support the school curriculum, educational programs to support teachers and technical staff, pedagogical, scientific and cultural production, promotion of social responsibility activities, support programs for families, teaching staff, education employees, functioning of school councils, and pedagogical and administrative modernization. It then determines that, each year, the indicators must surpass values from previous years.

The incentives and sanctions are specified in the Quality School Award and imply a 14th salary for teachers (monetary) and the quality seal (symbolic) for schools. To this end, the LRE (MOSSORÓ, 2010), in its article 6, assigns school managers the task of foreseeing

the problems to be faced in the implementation of the EM goals and establishes that all deadlines stipulated by the System must be met. In the same article, it emphasizes that the indexes of the EM can be "expanded" with public/private partnerships, already anticipating such relationships and how important they will be for the development of the policy (MOSSORÓ, 2010). It then highlights that "annually the priorities will be established and the respective percentages of investments calculated on the total resources will be defined" (MOSSORÓ, 2010, n.p.), reinforcing the inductive characteristic of the System in the ways of managing the school and its resources.

The School Quality Award has a Regulation published in JOM nº 381/2016 (MOSSORÓ, 2016), implemented from Decree nº 3.546, of November 15, 2009 (MOSSORÓ, 2009), and Law nº 3001, of December 20, 2012 (MOSSORÓ, 2012). In the Regulations are the objectives of the Award and its purposes, which are: a) to encourage municipal schools to develop innovative experiences in school management and show improvement in the results of education; b) to recognize and reward schools in the municipal network through their teams of professionals and students, according to the innovative initiatives developed and the improvement of education results (art. 3 § 1 and 2) (MOSSORÓ, 2016). The analysis of the document shows the expectation associated with the quality of education as a dimension of the manager's work.

Article 7 of the Award Regulations (MOSSORÓ, 2016) establishes who will be the members of the Award Committee, responsible for the visits and the evaluation of school units in the municipality, consisting of three representatives of the SME, one from the Municipal Education Council and one from the Municipal Planning Secretariat (SEPLAN in the Portuguese acronym), with no representatives of the school community or any other component external to the school, such as parents, members of civil society or representatives of class entities in the area of education. In this sense, it is appropriate to point out the limitations of the democratic exercise of the administrators, when they must anchor their work in the expectations of the SME. Such measures, in addition to resizing the work of principals and school coordinators, also restrict the autonomy of teachers and other actors in making decisions about schools.

Article 11 of the LRE (MOSSORÓ, 2010) determines the honors and awards offered to professionals who are in charge of schools with the highest scores. Item five of the same article states that in addition to teachers, management and school technicians, two students will also be awarded: "one in the 5th grade and the other in the 9th grade, who obtain the best performance, considering grades (school performance) and attendance (above 85%), as well

as good behavior and participation in cultural and sporting events held by the educational unit" (MOSSORÓ, 2010, n.p.). For students, the municipality's investment can only be made for educational purposes. The private companies that help the winning schools will receive a Merit Diploma, for actions taken on behalf of the educational quality of the municipality, as well as parents and other representatives who were active in this process.

Observing the data published in the JOM regarding the payments of the Award, it is found that in the years 2016 and 2017 it was published and paid; in 2018 it was published, but not paid; in 2019 and 2020, it was neither published nor paid (MOSSORÓ, 2017, 2018, 2019). In 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the evaluation from the EM did not happen. In addition, a reduction in the number of schools awarded over the past few years has been observed, which may be associated with the municipality's lack of financial capacity to meet the payment of the Award or even to expand its coverage.

According to the LRE (MOSSORÓ, 2010), the municipality must seek resources to expand its incentives and financing of accountability programs with private entities and companies with social responsibility, which represents financial uncertainties and possible demands for counterparts from values granted. In both cases, educational policy is seriously compromised. In the first case, because the government is being relapse by establishing a law without a specific budget allocation; the second case concerns the favoring of privatization mechanisms in the public sector.

Article 11 of the LRE (MOSSORÓ, 2010) involves the entire school community (principals, pedagogical supervisors, teachers, technical and administrative staff, parents or guardians, and the school council) in meeting the goals and indicators determined in the EM. The article also establishes penalties for managers who do not meet the targets or do not collaborate with their implementation, and may be removed or dismissed from their positions.

Another aspect addressed in the LRE (MOSSORÓ, 2010) is the relationship between public and private. In its article 7, it brings proposals indicating the importance of encouraging private investment in public schools in the form of social responsibility programs. It is possible to observe that the municipality provides the opening of conditions for other actors outside the educational process to contribute technically and financially to municipal public schools.

The analysis highlights how "legislation constitutes the instrument through which the state regulates, accentuating or softening the trends in motion" (SAVIANI, 2015, p. 25). The official discourse legitimizes a concept of quality as a dimension of the managerial work of

the school, presenting constraints for the implementation of the EM and exempting itself from responsibility for these processes.

### **Final remarks**

This article made it possible to shed light on the policy of educational accountability of the municipality of Mossoró, as well as to understand the concept of quality expressed in the guiding documents. It was noticed that the concept of quality becomes one of the dimensions of the work of the manager, and the accountability for educational results is the responsibility of the school, denoting a model of high impact accountability, adding monetary incentives, such as the School Quality Award.

In the initial period of implementation of these policies (2009-2012), an improvement in educational results was observed, which translated into the evolution of the IDEB of the municipal network. However, over the years, there has been a reduction of up to 50% in the number of schools awarded by the municipality, as well as a lack of compliance with the payment of the award. The municipal policy still legitimizes a collective responsibility of external and internal actors to the school, exempting the local government from ensuring the objective conditions for changes to occur in favor of quality education. The transfer of responsibilities creates a false atmosphere that any school can obtain good results, even under adverse conditions.

It is necessary to inform, also, the difficulty of access to the SME data, since the forms of publication occur only via the Official Journal of the Municipality or in spreadsheets and documents of internal circulation of the SME, which requires a request through the right assured by the Access to Information Law (LAI) (BRAZIL, 2011) for access. This demonstrates the lack of transparency of these processes, which should be available to all, including parents and members of the school community and its surroundings. It is considered that the data presented here can serve as a basis for future research on the educational policy of the municipality of Mossoró, deepening the discussion about the improvement of educational quality.

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