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POSTGRADUATE EVALUATION POLICY: PERCEPTIONS OF POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM COORDINATORS AT A BRAZILIAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY

*POLÍTICA DE AVALIAÇÃO DA PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO: PERCEPÇÕES
DOS COORDENADORES DOS PROGRAMAS DE PÓS-
GRADUAÇÃO EM UMA UNIVERSIDADE PÚBLICA BRASILEIRA*

*POLÍTICA DE EVALUACIÓN DE POSGRADO: PERCEPCIONES DE
COORDINADORES DE PROGRAMAS DE POSGRADO EN UNA
UNIVERSIDAD PÚBLICA BRASILEÑA*

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ABSTRACT: The Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) is the Brazilian agency responsible for guidelines and evaluation of graduate programs. The evaluation policy emphasizes the competitiveness and performance of institutions and researchers, as it conditions financial resources for obtained results. Professors and teaching institutions assume responsibility for the success or failure of their programs. Considering the importance of program coordinators in implementing the graduate evaluation policy, this article analyzes the dynamic and the practices and strategies adopted by these agents at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP). Data come from interviews with five program coordinators in five areas: 1- Human Sciences, Letters and Arts; 2 - Exact and Earth Sciences; 3 – Engineering; 4 – Life Sciences and 5 – Applied Social Sciences. The interviews covered three dimensions: (1) Perceptions of Graduate Studies in Brazil; (2) Perceptions of Graduate Studies at UFOP and (3) Perceptions of Graduate Studies in its Program and strategies for action. The analysis reinforces the thesis that there is a process of reconfiguring public higher education. The interviews reveal that conditioning

financing to obtain results aggravates competition, the commodification of knowledge, and the precariousness of teaching, bringing illness to the subjects involved. The recessive fiscal policy has reinforced the primacy of the budget over the social function of postgraduate studies and the University.

KEYWORDS: Implementing agents. Evaluation. College education. University education. Postgraduate studies. Implementation of educational policies.

RESUMO: No Brasil, a Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Capes) é a agência federal responsável pelas diretrizes associadas à pós-graduação e à avaliação dos programas. A política de avaliação enfatiza a competitividade e a performance das instituições e dos pesquisadores, na medida em que condiciona o recurso financeiro aos resultados obtidos. Os professores e as instituições de ensino assumem a responsabilidade pelo sucesso ou fracasso de seus programas. Considerando a importância dos coordenadores dos programas para a implementação da política de avaliação da pós-graduação, este artigo analisa essa dinâmica e as práticas e estratégias adotadas por esses atores na Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto (UFOP). Os dados advêm de entrevistas realizadas com cinco coordenadores de programas de cinco áreas: (1) Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes; (2) Ciências Exatas e da Terra; (3) Engenharias; (4) Ciências da Vida e (5) Ciências Sociais Aplicadas. As entrevistas abrangem três dimensões: (i) Percepções sobre a Pós-Graduação no Brasil; (ii) Percepções sobre a Pós-Graduação na UFOP e (iii) Percepções sobre a Pós-Graduação no seu Programa e estratégias de atuação como Coordenador. As análises reforçam a tese de que há um processo de reconfiguração da educação superior pública. As entrevistas revelam que o condicionamento do financiamento à obtenção de resultados agrava a competição, a mercantilização do conhecimento, a precarização do trabalho docente e o adoecimento dos sujeitos envolvidos. A política fiscal recessiva tem reforçado o primado do orçamento sobre a função social da pós-graduação e da Universidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Agentes implementadores. Avaliação. Educação superior. Implementação de políticas educacionais. Pós-graduação.

RESUMEN: En Brasil, la Coordinación para el Perfeccionamiento del Personal de Educación Superior (Capes) es la agencia federal responsable de las directrices asociadas a los estudios de posgrado y evaluación de programas. La política de evaluación enfatiza la competitividad y desempeño de las instituciones e investigadores, pues condiciona los recursos financieros a los resultados obtenidos y los profesores e instituciones de enseñanza asumen la responsabilidad por el éxito o fracaso de sus programas. Considerando la importancia de los coordinadores de programas para la implementación de la política de evaluación de egresados, este artículo analiza esa dinámica y las prácticas y estrategias adoptadas por estos actores en la Universidad Federal de Ouro Preto (UFOP). Los datos provienen de entrevistas con cinco coordinadores de programas en cinco áreas: 1- Ciencias Humanas, Letras y Artes; 2 - Ciencias Exactas y de la Tierra; 3 – Ingeniería; 4 – Ciencias de la Vida y 5 – Ciencias Sociales Aplicadas. Las entrevistas abarcaron tres dimensiones: (1) Percepciones

sobre el Posgrado en Brasil; (2) Percepciones sobre el Posgrado en la UFOP y (3) Percepciones sobre el Posgrado en su Programa y estrategias de acción. Los análisis refuerzan la tesis de que hay un proceso de reconfiguración de la educación superior pública. Las entrevistas revelan que condicionar el financiamiento a la obtención de resultados agrava la competencia, la mercantilización del conocimiento, la precariedad del trabajo docente y la enfermedad de los sujetos involucrados. La política fiscal recesiva ha reforzado la primacía del presupuesto sobre la función social de los estudios de posgrado y la Universidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Agentes ejecutores. Evaluación. Educación universitaria. Posgraduación. Implementación de políticas educativas.

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INTRODUCTION

This article analyzes the dynamics, practices, and strategies adopted by coordinators of postgraduate programs at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP) associated with the evaluation policy formulated by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes). Capes is the federal agency responsible for postgraduate guidelines and program evaluation. The evaluation takes place through a comparative system of performance within the same area of knowledge, every four years. Each period, a ranking is drawn up, ranking the programs considered to be excellent (grades six and seven) to those considered to be below the minimum required (concepts one and two).

According to Afonso (2014) and Hostins (2017), the performative and performance culture, the induction strategy adopted by Capes, derives from the liberal agenda associated with the New Public Management, implemented in Brazil and several countries since the reform of the state in the 1990s. The evaluation policy emphasizes the competitiveness and performance of institutions and researchers, to the extent that it makes financial resources conditional on the results obtained. According to Ball (2010), teachers and educational institutions operate under a quasi-market regime, taking responsibility for their assessment and the success or failure of their programs.

There is then a chain of implementation: the agency defines the guidelines, and the institutions, coordinators, and teachers implement them. This dynamic changes the work of these actors, especially the coordinators, who are responsible for mediating between the teachers, their institutions, and Capes. It is up to the program coordinators to implement the guidelines defined by the system and, together with the agency, to induce the evaluation policy so that the teaching and student bodies adhere to this model. The Coordinator is a manager who applies rules and sanctions and, according to Oliveira (2019), a street-level bureaucrat. This model has verticalized the teaching-research-extension tripod, governed by postgraduate studies.

By delving into the subject of postgraduate evaluation from the perceptions of postgraduate program coordinators, this article is anchored in the conceptions of Lipsky (1980) and Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016) on the processes of implementing public policies. These authors emphasize the importance of the subjectivities of those involved in implementation processes and state that the actions of these bureaucrats, especially those working at the local level, open up winding paths in the spaces left by regulatory gaps, the lack of state support and the scarcity of resources in the face of huge demands for public services.

The data in the article comes from interviews with five program coordinators at UFOP. As the institution has five of the nine assessment areas defined by Capes, each Coordinator represented a program from each area: (1) Human Sciences, Letters, and Arts; (2) Exact and Ear-

th Sciences; (3) Engineering; (4) Life Sciences and (5) Applied Social Sciences. The criteria for defining the programs were: representativeness of the area; offering master's and doctoral courses; and having fluctuated in their concepts in the quadrennial evaluation (2013-2016). For the latter, two zones were demarcated: (i) the expansion zone, which refers to the moment when a program with a score of three obtains a concept of four and (ii) the risk zone, when a program with a concept of four is downgraded to three. The interviews covered three dimensions: (i) Perceptions of Graduate Studies in Brazil; (ii) Perceptions of Graduate Studies at UFOP and (iii) Perceptions of Graduate Studies in your Program and strategies for acting as Coordinator.

In addition to the introduction and concluding remarks, the article is organized into four sections. The first describes, in general terms, the evaluation policy for postgraduate programs in Brazil. The second discusses the concept of implementation and the importance of the role of implementing agents. The third section presents the methodology behind this article. Finally, the fourth section presents the analysis based on the dimensions presented.

The Evaluation Policy for Postgraduate Programs in Brazil

The first records of postgraduate studies in Brazil appeared in the 1930s, when Decree No. 19,851 of April 1931 gave universities the task of carrying out scientific research and training researchers and doctors of science (Almeida, 2017). In 1951, according to Neuenfeldt and Isaia (2008), the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Capes) was founded, which today is responsible for evaluating and regulating postgraduate programs, and the National Research Council (CNPq) which, together with that agency, became one of the main bodies responsible for funding postgraduate programs in Brazil.

The postgraduate course was officially recognized in 1965, following Opinion No. 977 CES/CFE, of December 3 of that year, which became known as the Newton Sucupira Opinion, in honor of its rapporteur. This document was a fundamental milestone in the history of postgraduate education in the country, and its justifications included the imposition and dissemination of postgraduate education already observed in several countries at the time (Brasil, 1965).

The absence of a consolidated postgraduate program was seen by the proposers of Opinion No. 977 as an impossibility for the country to provide complete and adequate training for many careers. For this reason, 1965 became a milestone for postgraduate studies, when 27 master's and 11 doctoral courses were created, totaling 38 *stricto sensu* postgraduate courses in the country (Capes, 2019).

The university reform instituted by Law No. 5,540 of November 28, 1968, implemented legal and administrative changes within higher education institutions, such as the unification

of academic units, the institutionalization of the teaching career, with the requirement of a degree, and the granting of autonomy from a budgetary and didactic-scientific point of view. The law's enactment demonstrated the link, strongly promoted by the state, between educational policies and science and technology policies. According to Bianchetti (2011), in 1974, with the founding of the National Postgraduate Council, the formulation of what would become the first National Postgraduate Plan (PNPG) began, covering the years 1975 to 1979, with the aim of contributing to the state planning of postgraduate activities in order to train specialists for the university, public and industrial systems. The objectives of the I PNPG emphasized the need for a diagnosis of postgraduate education and indicators that could support the desired expansion of the system.

In 1981, Capes was officially recognized as the body responsible for drawing up the National Postgraduate Plans (PNPG) (Decree 86.79/81) and was transformed into an Executive Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture within the National Science and Technology System. From then on, it became its responsibility to develop, evaluate, monitor, and coordinate activities related to higher education. According to the agency, the emergence of the Monitoring and Evaluation Program, in addition to contributing to the creation of effective quality control mechanisms, has deepened its relationship with the scientific and academic community (Capes, 2008).

Thus, Capes, which had already been playing an important role in postgraduate education since its creation in 1951, with direct funding for Brazilian researchers both at home and abroad, took the lead in regulating this level of education in Brazil. It became the institution responsible for accrediting and monitoring Brazil's *stricto sensu* postgraduate courses, through an elaborate evaluation system (Capes, 2018).

Hostins (2017) states that the national postgraduate policy focused on training teachers to work in universities, developing scientific activity, and progressively increasing its strategic importance in higher education and science and technology. In the following years, with the consolidation of postgraduate studies, especially from the 1980s onwards, performance evaluation became the center of concern, and, finally, the emphasis fell on the development of research at the university and closer relations between science, technology, and the productive sector.

In this scenario, the II PNPG (1982-1985), although it continued the consolidation and expansion of postgraduate programs, took a closer look at the qualitative aspect, thus expressing concern about the performance of the programs. The III PNPG, for the period 1986-1989, emphasized the integration of postgraduate studies with the productive sector as an important condition for economic and social development, having already been able to point out factors such as the high dropout rate and the heterogeneity between programs as problems that seriously affect the functioning of the system. The IV PNPG (1998-2002) brought discus-

sions related to making the postgraduate model more flexible, improving the evaluation system, and emphasizing internationalization. The V PNPG, which covers the period 2005-2010, established the objectives of strengthening the scientific, technological, and innovation bases of postgraduate education and training teachers for all levels of education.

The plan proposed promoting the growth of the system as a whole and suggested alternative models and actions that would meet regional needs, taking into account the country's strategic planning. This plan also discussed new models and policies for international cooperation, aimed at improving the system (Hostins, 2006; Rossi, 2020). The 6th National Postgraduate Plan (2011-2020) contains a series of contextual information linked to the economy, government policy, science and technology, and the education system on a national and global scale. For Barreto and Domingues (2012), the document presented the challenges and perspectives of both the Brazilian postgraduate system and the globalized world in which it was inserted.

Regarding the origin of the Capes evaluation system, according to Castro and Soares (1983), the attempt was to allocate more scholarships to the best programs. What those responsible for development policy at the time did in defining which programs would be eligible for government assistance converges with the theory developed by Jilke and Tummers (2018). According to the authors, investment is prioritized for certain customer groups. In this case, the programs were the clients who demanded government assistance, and the criterion that came to be defined by the development policy from that period onwards was the choice of the best or most promising ones since it was clear that funding was restricted and it was impossible to monitor quality in all of them.

Once the evaluation system had been created and the merit criteria for distributing funding to postgraduate programs had been defined, the next step would be to establish (and constantly improve) which criteria should be used to define the concept of a deserving program. In view of this demand, Balbachevsky (2005) states that Capes began to focus its evaluation on the scientific production of researchers linked to postgraduate programs, in other words, productivity became the thermometer that measured, from that moment on, the performance of postgraduate programs, and consequently of the professors who were part of them.

The evaluation process has become the most important quality benchmark for postgraduate programs in Brazil. According to Balbachevsky (2005), evaluation has made it possible to create a link between performance and success: the better the evaluation of programs, the greater the chances of them and their researchers obtaining financial support, both in the form of scholarships and resources for research and infrastructure. As a result, the least productive programs would be given less and less funding and support from the National Postgraduate System (SNPG) until they were de-accredited and their activities terminated.

In this context, in which evaluation is gaining greater importance in the SNPG, whose

grades awarded to programs have a direct impact on obtaining financial resources and, ultimately, on their very continuity, programs are witnessing the emergence of a set of implications arising from this situation. In this way, professors working in postgraduate programs, especially when they are coordinators, become an active part of this mechanism that produces and feeds back into a climate of competition between programs and institutions. In this sense, as discussed by Bianchetti and Valle (2014), academic production, the aspect that has the greatest impact on evaluation, becomes the main target of teachers' concerns and efforts, to the detriment of other important tasks, such as teaching, extension activities and program management itself.

As a result of the demands made by the evaluation, the professors involved in postgraduate studies, especially the coordinators, mostly associate the very idea of good performance with intellectual production, which ends up fostering competitiveness between the programs and between their colleagues, resulting in the researchers' actions in the phenomenon of academic productivism. Thus, as Bianchetti (2011) points out, program coordinators, teachers, and students are forced, according to their role in the system, to worry about indicators, classifications, impact factors, and rankings, having to deal with situations that involve a high degree of competition between programs.

This need for competition, which arises as a logical consequence of complying with the dictates of evaluation, has led programs to adhere to what Ball (2005; 2010) has defined as the culture of performativity. In this sense, measurable performance, whether of individuals or organizations, comes to be taken as a measure of productivity or results, representing, in itself, the quality or value of that individual or organization within a field of judgment. This dynamic, therefore, reshapes the social identities of those involved, who are burdened with the task of complying with the new modes of regulation, which have not only imposed, for example, greater time limitations on the development of research, in parallel with the requirement to increase the number of publications, but have also included the factor of exposure, judgments, and comparisons, as forms of control, friction, and change, aspects which modify the researchers' own perception of themselves and the meanings of the work they do, as defined by Ball (2005; 2010) defined regarding the characterization of subjects immersed in this culture.

It is important to note that the criteria used in the evaluation system have been constantly improved over the years. In particular, between 2007 and 2019, the evaluation format used by the agency to monitor the productivity of postgraduate programs was based on five main questions included in an evaluation form: (1) Program proposal; (2) Teaching staff; (3) Student body, preparation of theses and dissertations; (4) Intellectual production and (5) Social insertion.

These five questions were broken down into twenty-one items, with the question "Program Proposal" not being given any weight because it was felt that it should be used to con-

textualize the program and to provide guidance, suggestions, or warnings about how it should work. The item "Social integration" received a weight of 10%. The other questions, 2 to 4, were given a weight of 30% each. Each area of knowledge, in accordance with understandings within its Major Area, could change these weights, respecting the limit of variation of up to five percentage points, more or less, in the proposed weight of 30%, as long as the sum of them was 90% (Capes, 2019). After the 2007 triennial evaluation, a committee was set up to evaluate the application of the evaluation form. The aim was to propose new process changes, reinforcing the idea of constant monitoring and intervention in the evaluation instrument.

Among these changes, it is worth noting that, in 2013, the evaluation became quadrennial. It also began to analyze data on graduates from master's and doctoral courses. The justification for incorporating this information was the need to monitor postgraduates' academic and professional trajectories. As a result of these changes, Capes, for the first time, had reliable data on 75% of masters and 85% of doctors per program, in order to assess the impact of postgraduate studies on the Brazilian reality.

Since then, another gain in the evaluation process has been using the Sucupira Platform. This new data collection system began to be used in 2014, and its main purpose is to make it easier to obtain information on the academic performance of postgraduate programs. The new data collection tool now allows data to be sent directly by the programs, allowing information to be updated throughout the reference year. After an evaluation period of four years, the programs were assigned grades: 3 (regular), 4 (good), 5 (very good), 6, and 7, programs of excellence.

In the middle of the 2017-2020 quadrennium, changes were made to the evaluation form. Among the justifications for the changes made by the agency was the need to act in line with the Sixth National Postgraduate Plan (PNPG/2011-2020). This very changeability is provided for in the VI PNPG in its chapter on the evaluation system for Brazilian postgraduate courses, which includes diversity and the search for continuous improvement of the evaluation system as factors to be constantly observed by the Committees and higher authorities.

There was also a need to emphasize training and evaluating results. In addition, the evaluation process would be less rigid and would have greater participation from the area committees, which would have a greater say in defining the aspects and indicators, as well as in defining the weights of the items (Capes, 2019). In August 2019, Capes announced the new structure of the evaluation form, which was reorganized into three evaluation questions: 1- Program proposal, 2- Training activities, and 3- Academic and social impacts.

According to Barata (2019), the need to revise the assessment assumptions and instruments used up until then arose from the observation by area coordinators, assessment consultants, and Capes managers of various undesirable effects. Among them, the author cites the artificial multiplication of programs in the same institution, denoting great fragmentation of

academic groups, which tends to weaken and compromise the predominant focus on scientific production to the detriment of training aspects.

In addition, the author highlights the increasingly uncritical use of quantitative indicators and the tendency to evaluate program performance through the performance of individual teachers rather than taking the program itself as the unit of analysis. Lastly, it is pointed out that programs have become rigid and are guided more by the achievement of criteria than by the permanent pursuit of quality.

According to Barata (2019), when this revision of the principles related to evaluation instruments is noted, there can be a feeling that the problems of the evaluation system have been corrected and, with this, the process will be coherent and, in fact, will measure the performance of the programs. However, since this is the implementation of an evaluation policy, as in any implementation process, the results are not always achieved according to the pre-defined objectives. Various factors influence the process of implementing this policy, forcing the implementers to adopt new measures and the evaluation system to react to them. It is, therefore, necessary to discuss the implementation process and the role of the implementing agents, which are discussed in the next section.

Implementing public policies: the role of the implementing agents

This section discusses the literature on implementing public policies, following the discussion on how coordinators act in the face of the demands and processes associated with postgraduate assessment and how these issues affect the programs.

Oliveira (2019) and Lotta (2019) state that implementation corresponds to a stage where the plans formulated are put into practice by the actions of different actors. On the international scene, the first studies to emphasize the implementation phase, back in the 1970s, attributed the failures of public policies to inflections between the intended objectives and the results achieved, seen as errors or distortions. Thus, policies would produce results that are all the more misguided, the more divergent their implementation and formulation are. The contributions of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) stand out in this respect, as they considered such gaps to be foolhardy and already highlighted the complexity of implementation due to the multiplicity of agents involved.

The authors who belonged to this current conceived of the so-called top-down vision, which emphasized the legitimacy of decisions in the agenda and formulation phases and advocated that mistakes along the way would be remedied through stricter control of implementation. According to Oliveira (2019), from this perspective, implementation is reduced to a simple fulfillment of tasks in order to ensure that goals are achieved. The public agents linked

to this process are, consequently, seen as fulfilling what has been defined, acting as executors or operators of the policies, with little or no relevance in the decision-making process.

In the 1980s, a theoretical current emerged that broadened the view of public policies by adopting a bottom-up view, that is, from the bottom up, recognizing that policies are made up of multiple and complex processes, with the implementation itself being a process that requires decisions. Studies are now looking at the implementation process by admitting that the ability to solve problems at the top of the public service belongs to the people located there. In addition, according to Lima and D'ascenzi (2018), power and authority are now considered to be dispersed characteristics and no longer centralized in a group of formulators who draw up guidelines in contexts far removed from the reality observed in the implementation arena.

From this perspective, Lipsky (1980) states that implementation is a process full of interpretations and subjectivities based on how the implementers understand the situations or demands they deal with on a daily basis, which led the author to pay closer attention to street-level bureaucracies. For Lipsky (1980), the street-level bureaucrat is the public agent who interacts with the recipient of the service provided, i.e. the citizen. In this way, the bureaucrat, as the agent who gives concrete form to public policies, has the power to interfere in their outcome, largely due to the discretion he has at his disposal.

In this sense, as Lotta (2019) observes, its action takes place in the existing space within the body of rules that regulates the provision of public services, taking into account aspects such as gaps, ambiguities, and conflicts between rules. However, the normative sphere is not the only one that helps to understand the discretionary actions of bureaucrats, since actions are carried out by individuals, who imprint individual and social values on these actions. To this extent, according to Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003), as cited in Lotta and Santiago (2017), another important bias that concerns the space of action of these agents is that which places the action of bureaucrats in the midst of a complex set of factors with legal and cultural dimensions, which operate simultaneously, influencing their action and producing tensions and disputes.

Based on this concept formulated by Lipsky (1980) and as pointed out by Oliveira (2019), it can be considered that the coordinators of postgraduate programs, in addition to being managers who apply norms and sanctions, are also street-level bureaucrats, as they are in direct contact with the citizens/users/recipients of policies. These are bureaucrats who not only carry out the instructions given in the legal texts but also interact directly with the citizens, interpreting and adapting the policy to the needs perceived at the time of implementation, which were often not foreseen by the rules. Furthermore, although the coordinators remain bound by the system's rules, since they continue to be "counted" as permanent professors, once they take on the role of manager, they acquire different visions with regard to

administrative and regulatory issues and the fulfillment of goals, given the proximity they have to the guidelines established by the evaluation system.

In addition to Lipsky's (1980) assumptions about the implementation process, it is worth highlighting Stephen Ball's contributions to the field of education, which, in our view, are in dialogue with Lipsky's theory. When reflecting on schools, Ball, in partnership with Maguire and Braun (2016), developed the Theory of Performance, which addresses the importance of the performance of the agents responsible for materializing educational policy in school contexts. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016), when discussing educational policies, start from the assumption that agents are more than implementers since they materialize policies in different ways, given that each context demands different ways of acting. Through this vision, the agents - in this case, managers, teachers, and other school staff - stop being mere implementers and start taking on much more important roles, such as acting, reinterpreting, and reconfiguring educational policies.

Taking Ball, Maguire, and Braun's (2016) perspective on the materialization of public policies as a reference, it is understood that the actors involved in this process act on the policy texts (guidelines), which can be presented or represented in different ways. For this reason, while texts are important, they only represent part of the output, since policies are constantly subject to processes of interpretation and translation in the context of practice (Ball; Maguire; Braun, 2016). Interpretation is understood to be when the policy is decoded, i.e. when there is a process of explanation and clarification about it. Conversely, translation is an interactive process in which institutional texts are put into action to literally "act" on policies. This phase includes the implementation practices used by grassroots agents to put public policies into practice.

Although Lipsky (1980) and Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2016) use different theoretical constructs to analyze the role played by those who materialize policies, the empirical evidence they reveal is convergent. Both understand the implementation of public policies as something dynamic, complex, and linked to daily life, as well as the interpretation that the actors give to the norms. Autonomy over the process means that policies achieve different results from those envisaged in their initial design. In other words, the authors understand that the implementer linked to this process is not a mere executor of routines or a neutral actor.

In this sense, and in line with the considerations of Oliveira (2014; 2019) and Oliveira, Oliveira, Jorge, and Coelho (2021), we can affirm that the professionals who work in the implementation spaces, including the coordinators of postgraduate programs, are political actors. Implementation, therefore, is not reduced to a succession of operational actions but constitutes a set of political actions that have a close connection with values, beliefs, and attitudes, elements that shape the behavior and decisions that are made by these subjects.

METHODOLOGY

The research was qualitative in nature, using interviews at UFOP as the data collection technique. The choice of how many and which of the university's programs would make up the sample field was based on the university's five areas of knowledge: (1) Human Sciences, Letters, and Arts; (2) Exact and Earth Sciences; (3) Engineering; (4) Life Sciences and (5) Applied Social Sciences. A total of five programs were chosen from each of these areas: Graduate Program in Education, Graduate Program in Crustal Evolution and Natural Resources, Graduate Program in Geotechnics, Graduate Program in Health and Nutrition, and Graduate Program in Applied Economics.

We chose the following criteria to prioritize the programs: representativeness of the area, programs with master's degrees and academic doctorates, and programs that obtained fluctuations in concepts in the last quadrennial evaluation (2013-2016). In particular, among the programs whose scores fluctuated, two important transition zones were identified: the first, referred to in the research as the expansion zone, reflects the moment when a program with a score of 3 obtains a score of 4. The second, called the risk zone, is related to the downgrading of programs from 4 to 3.

Considering these two particularities, it was decided to prioritize, whenever possible, upward movements over downgrades, based on the understanding that programs that move upward tend to align more closely with the direction indicated by postgraduate education policies. If more than one program experienced upward movement within a field, the tiebreaker criterion adopted was the program's location in an expansion zone. In cases where no upward movements were observed, the "concept fluctuation" criterion was applied, focusing on downgrades. When multiple programs experienced downgrades, priority was given to those entering the risk zone. Finally, in the event of ties, the following criteria were applied sequentially: the seniority of the postgraduate program and agreement to participate in the study.

After these criteria were established, interviews were conducted with each of the selected coordinators, totaling five interviews. The interviews addressed three dimensions: (1) Perceptions of Postgraduate Education in Brazil; (2) Perceptions of Postgraduate Education at UFOP; and (3) Perceptions of Postgraduate Education within their program and their strategies as coordinators. The following themes were outlined: evaluation system, funding, and working conditions for faculty. The next section analyzes and integrates each of these dimensions.

Coordinators perceptions about post-graduation: from national to local level

Perceptions of Postgraduate Studies in Brazil

The coordinators interviewed revealed the meaning and social function attributed to postgraduate studies, which are perceived as being of vital importance for the country's social and economic development: postgraduate studies are at the same time responsible for validating scientific research, improving teacher training and the symbiosis between teaching and research, this relationship being inseparable from the point of view of these implementers. The interviewees emphasized that postgraduate studies give visibility to the university and help to consolidate the field of research, and are therefore fundamental to the institution's expansion and social recognition, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

The postgraduate course is extremely important because it will give visibility to what exists, how things work, how what is sometimes a legal determination is being conducted, how to evaluate a program such as a master's research, and how to evaluate performance within specific legislation. The postgraduate course gives visibility to this and helps consolidate a field of research (Coordinator 1, our translation).

In addition to visibility, recognition, and prominence in the consolidation of research at the institution, the interviewees highlighted the importance of postgraduate education in national economic development and growth. One of the coordinators interviewed highlighted the fact that the technologies developed through research are significant variables in explaining why one country is called poor and the other rich. From this implementer's point of view, postgraduate education does more than train qualified citizens, it enables them to contribute more effectively and efficiently to the nation:

So, from my point of view, postgraduate studies are not just about training a more qualified citizen, but allowing that citizen to contribute more effectively and efficiently to that nation and allowing research of all kinds to take place (Coordinator 5, our translation).

In addition to these aspects, the work in postgraduate studies described by the coordinators was seen as rewarding and influential in their professional career, given that the training of other researchers contributes significantly to their professional growth, which is reflected in both research and teaching.

If, on the one hand, an appreciation of postgraduate education was perceived, on the other hand, the coordinators reinforced the dismantling of postgraduate education in Brazil, highlighting the severe contingency policy imposed by the Federal Government since 2016, under the management of Michel Temer (2016-2018), with Constitutional Amendment No. 95. Ferri, Marques and Melo (2017) state that this amendment establishes the ceiling for the primary expenses of each power, which will now have their bases set at the amount of expen-

ses paid in the 2016 financial year. From the first financial year onwards, this ceiling may only be adjusted by inflation indices, as indicated by the Broad Consumer Price Index (IPCA) for the previous year. The amendment is expected to last for twenty years, with the possibility of an amendment, which can only take place after the tenth year of its validity, by means of a bill initiated by the President of the Republic.

According to Amaral (2017), the recessionary fiscal policy has reinforced the primacy of the budget over the social function of postgraduate education and the university. It should be noted that this contingency policy can still be seen in the government of Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019-2022), which blocks resources for various areas, including education. One of the coordinators says

The postgraduate policy has been undergoing interventions since the end of Dilma's term and throughout Temer's term, and now with Bolsonaro, we are seeing a dismantling of this policy with no other policy in place (Coordinator 1, our translation).

From this perspective, this austerity in the granting of resources was seen by the coordinators as a sign of political disinterest in postgraduate studies, given that the cuts in funding are severely damaging the programs and dismantling what was once built, at the same time as the situation imposes ever greater demands for good indicators and high productivity. These agents said that in recent decades, with greater intensification in recent years, there have been governmental actions to discourage postgraduate studies, which, as Azevedo *et al.* (2016) discussed, took the form of cuts and changes in guidelines that had a negative impact on the programs' ability to obtain funding.

It was also found that the coordinators showed negative perceptions of the political and economic context in which postgraduate studies find themselves, due to the fact that the restrictive fiscal policy profoundly hampers the activities of the programs, such as the maintenance of laboratories, grants to fund researchers on an exclusive dedication basis, internationalization and exchange activities aimed at cooperation between universities, among many others.

In addition to these aspects, some coordinators showed anguish, insecurity, and even pessimism with regard to the paths postgraduate studies have been taking. It is clear from the interviewees' speeches that the lack of funding has a strong influence on teachers' demotivation:

The lack of resources, the lack of funding, it demotivates people, because we have a group here that's very high up, there's a group working on a teacher support program now, another group on the student support program, they're doing a thousand things, it's happening... I don't know where we get our energy from, because... there comes a piece of news that I look at and say I'm not even going to read it, I'm not going to read it because today I don't want to be sad, you know? Let me stay here with my illusion that everything is fine (Coordinator 1, our translation).

In this scenario, we can say that the scarcity of funding has led to increased pressure for

the compulsive need to produce in order to raise the program's rating, in an attempt to secure more resources. These findings are in line with research by Chaui-Berlinck (2004), who calls this form of production academic productivism and says that it is a complete distortion of the purpose of scientific research. In the same direction, the data converge with the formulations of Sguissardi and Júnior (2009), who state that the productivist ideology produced by the state bureaucracy represents one of the central pillars of the culture of the university institution.

In theory, the demand for a high level of publications would be related to the excessive weight given in the standard Capes evaluation form to item 4, Intellectual Production. At least until the middle of 2019, this item accounted for 35% to 40% of each program's concept. Thus, all the remaining items, 1- Program Proposal; 2-Faculty; 3- Student body, theses, and dissertations, and 5- Social Insertion, competed together for the missing 60% or 65%. This means that around 70% of the evaluation of a postgraduate program has remained for a long time (from 2007 to 2019) around the results obtained by scientific publications and defenses carried out. Although they appear to be two separate issues, the relationship between defense and publication was observed to be directly linked, and in some cases, such as in the programs representing Engineering I and Exact and Earth Sciences, the publication is mandatory for the student to be eligible for defense.

Studies on academic productivism show that the prioritization of quantitative results over qualitative ones, mainly due to the short time that research needs to be carried out in the productivist culture, can deprive the scientific community of access to certain knowledge that requires a longer period of study (Chaui-Berlinck, 2004; Sguissardi, & Júnior, 2009).

From this assumption, the following contradiction emerges: even though they are often financed with public funds, it is possible that research is maximizing the time it takes to obtain data and publish results rather than optimizing its depth and social contribution. For this reason, most of the coordinators questioned the efficiency of the postgraduate evaluation policy with regard to the quality of the research produced and stressed the need for the evaluation to have a more qualitative bias, unlike what has been practiced, as can be seen in the following interview excerpt:

The [evaluation] policy has placed too much value on quantity rather than quality, and that's something I feel... Today, our postgraduate assessment indicators are in terms of the number of articles published, especially in our area, and their classification, which is what we call journal qualis, and this has led to a much greater appreciation of numerical scientific production than production with a regional impact (Coordinator 4, our translation).

The data also revealed an increasing tendency for postgraduate programs to seek partnerships with funding sources other than the government. It is important to emphasize that the postgraduate development policy had already been making this recommendation through

the National Plans, as can be seen in the VI PNPG (2011-2020), which establishes it as part of the planning:

Stimulate partnerships between programs and companies, seeking financial support to increase the number of scholarships, [...] especially in areas that are part of production chains, with the aim of training human resources capable of leveraging economic and social development (VI PNPG (2011-2020), v. 1, p. 33, our translation).

In one of the programs analyzed, funding from private companies is even used to pay for the publication of scientific articles. In other words, companies invest money in research that is of interest to them and take responsibility for the publications that result from it. In other words, the company needs the work developed by the university, which needs funding to develop it:

It has to be published and we're going to publish it, and there's no such limitation. And you will also help with this publication. Where it has to be paid, the company will pay. This is part of the agreement and they accepted it calmly (Coordinator 3, our translation).

One of the coordinators expressed relief at having the support of companies in his program, which gives him "a bit of a break" in the midst of public funding cuts. In another program, the coordinator had the support of private companies, including expenses related to scientific publications made through partnerships.

It is important to note that financial support from private sources was only identified in two of the five programs analyzed. The programs in question work in areas directly related to mining activities, which are the main source of income in the region where the university in question is located. In this context, it is pertinent to imagine what the scenario would be like if the research were carried out in a region where these activities were not present. It can be inferred that the two programs that received financial support from private sources (Engineering I and Exact and Earth Sciences) would probably not stand out from the rest in terms of attracting external funding.

In addition, it is worth reflecting on what kind of economic structure would be necessary in a society for areas such as Humanities, Letters and Arts, or Applied Social Sciences to occupy a prominent position in relation to the others. These circumstances raise concerns and questions about the future of areas that are not economically attractive to the market, considering that the government support they receive is in the same situation of scarcity as other areas of knowledge.

Perceptions of Postgraduate Studies at UFOP

The coordinators highlighted the support of UFOP's Pro-Rector for Research, Postgraduate Studies and Innovation (PROPPI). The Dean's Office plays an important role in postgraduate studies at the university, monitoring and supporting the programs, periodically collecting suggestions for improvement through meetings with the coordinators' chamber, and establishing the rules to be submitted to the institution's Teaching, Research, and Extension Council (CEPE).

At PROPPI's initiative, all programs were obliged to revise their regulations. Some coordinators reported that, while carrying out this activity, they realized that some conduct was being carried out in disagreement with institutional norms. One example is the way the coordinators were chosen: one of the interviewees said that at least the last three coordinators were selected at the General Assembly, from among all the teachers in the Department, including those who were not yet part of the program. The implementers perceived the inclusion of a member from outside the program in such an important role as coordinator as problematic. Understanding is justified by the need for the coordinator to already know the program and be familiar with the administration and routine procedures.

In this way, it can be seen from the data that the discussions held between the coordinators and the Dean's Office have helped to clarify the rules and reinforce the importance of dialogue and proximity between these sectors. According to one of the coordinators,

PROPPI has been a great partner, especially for programs that want to grow. I take a very positive view of PROPPI, both in this administration and the previous one... Proppi has taken a very active view of postgraduate studies at UFOP (Coordinator 5, our translation).

However, the coordinators pointed out that PROPPI is only one of the sectors of UFOP, and not all the problems affecting postgraduate studies depend on this sphere alone. In addition, according to the interviewees, the Dean's Office has also suffered from a lack of institutional and governmental support:

Today we have a pro-rector who understands what he's doing within the pro-rectory, he may not have a lot of power, he may not be able to change much, because not everything depends on him, he's stuck in a system too, but he knows what he's doing, he takes my program, he shows me the weak point of my program, which no pro-rector has ever done, he discusses my program with me, because he's read it, he knows what the requirements are, he listens to me, he understands... (Coordinator 1, our translation).

The interviewees also expressed frustration, both at the fact that the institution did not recognize the workload taught in another postgraduate program as part of their duties, and at the lack of recognition for networking. These situations are considered contradictions in a

university that has established the expansion of postgraduate studies as one of its strategic goals for the last ten years.

At the institutional level, there were also a number of axes brought up as a reflection of the lack of funding, such as the lack of resources to carry out research, the lack of laboratory supplies, the lack of resources for machine maintenance, as well as the lack of budget availability to hire support staff for secretariats and laboratories, for example. This type of setback directly influences the results of the programs, since, as one of the coordinators reinforces, the teachers "need to be on top of their game" (Coordinator 1, our translation) in order to carry out their work. In this context, the coordinators stressed the need for the institution to legislate more in favor of postgraduate studies.

Perceptions about Graduate Studies in their Program and strategies for acting as Coordinators

The coordinators highlighted the recognition of intellectual production as the main product of their respective programs, with most of them attributing to it the meaning of a rule to be followed. This understanding affects the rules governing the admission of professors to the Program, who are now accredited based on intellectual production indexes. Thus, we observed that the programs analyzed began to adopt strategies for admitting permanent professors, such as stipulating minimum values for accreditation and selecting professors in descending order of intellectual production, with the most productive being accredited within the number of vacancies available. As can be seen in the following excerpt, this same criterion is used for teacher re-accreditation, which suggests that monitoring is carried out on an ongoing basis: "We have done periodic re-accreditations, today it's every three years... we have to follow the rules of the game... see which teachers are the most productive" (Coordinator 2, our translation). This has changed the strategies for selecting teachers and, consequently, students, which are increasingly dependent on intellectual production.

The interviewees also said that they monitor their colleagues' production. Teachers are monitored during the evaluation cycle - carried out every four years - and the results obtained from this monitoring determine whether they remain in the Program through re-accreditation or are excluded from the team through de-accreditation. One of the programs' main strategies for monitoring teachers was to monitor their Lattes CVs. One of the coordinators appointed a monitoring committee made up of three professors from the Program itself, and one representative from each line of research, with the aim of analyzing the Lattes and collecting data on each person's intellectual output.

According to Mancebo (2017), this strategy aggravates the already precarious working and teaching relationships in higher education. The evaluation system leads professors who

don't publish to be considered unproductive, even though most of the time they are in the busiest phase of their professional careers, by carrying out other duties that don't involve publishing. One of the coordinators associated his time in management with a deficit in his career. He refers to publishing at the same time as coordinating as one of the biggest challenges he has to deal with: "It's my biggest challenge today, right, because I supervise almost 10 students, I'm in graduate school, and I have two children, right?...I don't intend to stay much longer, because of the deficit this generates in my academic career, in my productivity" (Coordinator 4, our translation).

Thus, it can be said that one of the consequences of the evaluation format is a change in the perception of what it means to be productive, with the concept of productivity now being linked to the number of publications made by professors. From then on, the stigma carried by the concept "those who don't publish are unproductive" has been observed, including in the conception of the implementers themselves.

Another strategy adopted by the coordinators, with the aim of motivating teachers to produce, was to keep them informed about total production rates and the targets to be achieved, the latter being carried out mainly on the basis of comparative analyses of programs of excellence:

We're having meetings, presentations... I systematically send emails to update the teachers. I'm currently working on a comparative study of the program with other Brazilian programs. This study I'm doing is based on a program that PROPPI developed to analyze postgraduate programs and at the moment we can see that our program has high impact student and teacher production... higher than some grade six programs (Coordinator 2, our translation).

Thus, the interviews revealed that the role of postgraduate program coordinator proved to be particularly valuable for observing the mercantilist format that postgraduate education has taken on. Because they play the role of teacher, advisor and manager, the coordinators are closer to the impact of budget restrictions on the program's activities, as well as observing, as a result of their position, the strain this imposes on the professionals who need to keep the program's activities running at any cost.

Furthermore, all the interviewees stressed that being the manager of a postgraduate program is a highly stressful job, especially in the financial context in which the country finds itself. The linking of productivity indexes to obtaining funding has meant that coordinators are not motivated to stay in the job. This was observed mainly in the case of female coordinators, since women show a greater overload when it comes to coordination. All of them showed fatigue, caused by the need to work during rest hours, as well as the need to reconcile their professional lives with their home tasks, including raising children.

Finally, the work overload and the association with unproductivity caused by the role of program coordinator result in a lack of interest in the position. Most of the coordinators didn't want to take on the job or didn't intend to stay in it. Two of them said they took on the job because of a lack of interested people and the importance they attach to the need to contribute to the program. Added to this is the deficit in teacher productivity, since the overload caused by coordination makes it difficult to carry out research and publish; and the workload imposed on these subjects. These professionals, who were already working exclusively dedicatedly, claim to have worked an extra 15 to 20 hours a week.

The coordinators reported that they accepted the administrative role because they saw it as a (temporary) obligation to which everyone will be subject at some point in their careers, even if it results in productivity deficits, unease among colleagues (who, in a way, are subordinate to the coordinator), work overload and even health problems, due to the intensity of their daily routine. Thus, it can be inferred that the lack of public resources is a triggering factor for most of these problems: competitiveness, the need to produce, the exclusion of colleagues from postgraduate courses because they don't meet productivity demands, unease in everyday relationships, all of which can contribute to physical and mental illness.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The article analyzes the dynamics, practices, and strategies adopted by coordinators of postgraduate programs at the Federal University of Ouro Preto (UFOP) in relation to the postgraduate evaluation policy of these programs. A total of five coordinators were interviewed. The data shows that the evaluation policy adopted by Capes emphasizes the productivity, competitiveness, and performance of institutions and researchers to the extent that it conditions financial resources on the results obtained through a comparative system of performance within the same area of knowledge. In this scenario, the pressure for the compulsive need to produce and get the program's score up in order to secure more resources increases.

If, on the one hand, the indicator of productivity and merit of programs defined by Capes (number of scientific publications) is an objective metric, since the agency needs to monitor and evaluate postgraduate programs in the country; on the other hand, it reveals a growing side effect that makes it challenging to recognize various other activities that are just as relevant as publishing, such as teaching and coordination or involvement in extension activities.

The interviews highlighted the recognition of intellectual production as the main product of the programs. This has changed the selection strategies for students and teachers, which are increasingly dependent on intellectual production. The coordinator's role is dependent on translating the norms, establishing guidelines, establishing the discourse of the evaluation

system in the programs and creating means to monitor the academic output of teachers and students so that both categories act in line with the system's objectives, demonstrating results that prove the quality of the program. As they work to meet these demands, these professionals have often experienced a state of physical and mental exhaustion.

In addition, the fact that coordinators have to pass on the demands of productivity to other teachers has often led them to get into unpleasant situations with other colleagues in their work environment. The coordinators even said that they monitor their colleagues' production. As Mancebo (2017) rightly states, these aspects aggravate the precariousness of working and teaching relationships in higher education. In addition, they hierarchize knowledge and subjects, since, in practice, postgraduate studies are configured as the most "relevant" element of the tripod, which ensures more visibility and, therefore, more status within the university. This logic weakens teaching and extension, the other two components of academic activity.

Finally, it is clear that they reinforce the thesis, denounced by Ball (2010), Sguissardi and Silva Júnior (2009), and Mancebo (2017), that there is a process of reconfiguration of public higher education. This process is aggravated by the dismantling of postgraduate education in Brazil, due to the severe contingency policy imposed by the federal government since 2016, which will be exacerbated by Jair Bolsonaro's government from 2019. Thus, the conditioning of funding on the achievement of results exacerbates competition, the commodification of knowledge, the precariousness of teaching work, and the illness of those involved in this process.

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