

**TRACKING GRADUATES IN THE CONTEXT OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM IFES CAMPUS
GUARAPARI**

***ACOMPANHAMENTO DE EGRESSOS À LUZ DA ACCOUNTABILITY NA GESTÃO
EDUCACIONAL: EVIDÊNCIAS DO IFES CAMPUS GUARAPARI***

***SEGUIMIENTO DE LOS EGRESADOS EN EL MARCO DE ACCOUNTABILITY EN
LA GESTIÓN EDUCATIVA: DATOS DEL IFES CAMPUS GUARAPARI***



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ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to characterize the management of graduates by the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo (IFES) – Guarapari Campus in light of the objectives of federal public policies on vocational education and accountability in contemporary public management. This is a qualitative and exploratory study employing a single-case study and semi-structured interviews with three campus administrators, supplemented by Content Analysis. The results suggest that, although managers recognize the importance of graduate follow-up as a tool for accountability and social effectiveness, it is not permanently in place and is not institutionalized as a strategic dimension. Barriers include staff shortages, the absence of computerized systems, and low managerial priority (organizational, cultural, and political barriers). It is concluded that Campus management is in transition, requiring the incorporation of graduate tracking as a strategic pillar to transform formal accountability into an effective mechanism for measuring social effectiveness.

KEYWORDS: School management. Federal Institute. Students. Accountability. Public administration.

RESUMO: O objetivo deste artigo é caracterizar a gestão de egressos pelo Instituto Federal do Espírito Santo (IFES) – Campus Guarapari à luz dos propósitos das políticas públicas federais de educação profissional e de accountability na gestão pública contemporânea. A pesquisa é qualitativa e exploratória, utilizando um estudo de caso único e a técnica de entrevista semiestruturada com três gestores do Campus, com Análise de Conteúdo. Os resultados sugerem que, embora os gestores reconheçam a importância do acompanhamento de egressos como ferramenta de accountability e eficácia social, ele é inexistente de forma permanente e não institucionalizado como dimensão estratégica. As barreiras incluem falta de pessoal, ausência de sistemas informatizados e baixa prioridade gerencial (barreiras organizacional, cultural e política). Conclui-se que a gestão do Campus está em transição, requerendo a incorporação do acompanhamento de egressos como eixo estratégico para transformar a accountability formal em um mecanismo efetivo de aferição da eficácia social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gestão escolar. Instituto Federal. Estudantes. Accountability. Gestão pública.

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este artículo es caracterizar la gestión de los egresados por parte del Instituto Federal de Espírito Santo (IFES) – Campus de Guarapari, a la luz de los objetivos de las políticas públicas federales de formación profesional y de la accountability en la gestión pública contemporánea. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa y exploratoria, que utiliza un estudio de caso único y la técnica de la entrevista semiestructurada con tres responsables del Campus, junto con un Análisis de Contenido. Los resultados sugieren que, aunque los gestores reconocen la importancia del seguimiento de los egresados como herramienta de accountability y eficacia social, este es inexistente de forma permanente y no está institucionalizado como dimensión estratégica. Entre las barreras se incluyen la falta de personal, la ausencia de sistemas informatizados y la baja prioridad por parte de la dirección (barreras organizativas, culturales y políticas). Se concluye que la gestión del Campus se encuentra en transición, lo que requiere la incorporación del seguimiento de los egresados como eje estratégico para transformar la rendición de cuentas formal en un mecanismo efectivo de evaluación de la eficacia social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gestión escolar. Instituto Federal. Estudiantes. Accountability. Gestión pública.

INTRODUCTION

The enactment of Law No. 11,892, dated December 29, 2008, which established the Federal Network for Professional, Scientific, and Technological Education (EPT) (Brasil, 2008), set a new paradigm for the role of the State in technical and technological education in Brazil. This law not only created the Federal Institutes (IF) as educational institutions but also conceived them as entities with a complex and ambitious mandate that transcends the mere function of a classroom. The IFs bear the legal and moral responsibility of promoting the socioeconomic and cultural development of their regions, ensuring the inseparable integration of teaching, research, and extension aimed at strengthening local productive, social, and cultural arrangements.

This alignment is not an option but a condition intrinsic to the very *raison d'être* of the IFs. Fulfilling this mission requires that educational administration at IFs operate according to principles that seek to overcome the rigidity and inefficiency of bureaucratic administration (Bresser-Pereira, 1998). The focus of contemporary public management lies in delivering results and, fundamentally, in social effectiveness—which is the capacity of public policy to achieve its ultimate goal. Social effectiveness, in the context of EPT, goes beyond internal indicators, such as enrollment numbers or course completion rates. True effectiveness is manifested in the actual impact of graduates on the external environment—that is, on the labor market and society (Deluiz, 2003).

To this end, tracking graduates emerges, in this context, not as a mere auxiliary activity, but as a vital administrative tool for school management and contemporary public administration within the Federal Institutes. It serves as the mechanism for assessing impact and the primary source of feedback that allows the institution to revise its Course Pedagogical Project (PPC) and justify the use of substantial public investment. The absence of systematic monitoring, therefore, may represent a managerial oversight that results in a lack of accountability. Without this information, the governance of Federal Institutes (IFs) can become a blind process, disconnected from its primary purpose.

However, previous evidence suggests precisely a lack of management and follow-up of graduates by Federal Institutes in general (Monte & Marinho, 2025; Silva et al., 2020), and by the Federal Institute of Espírito Santo (IFES) in particular (Carvalho Junior & Coelho Junior, 2022). Such evidence supports the view that failing to follow up with graduates after they complete their programs is a cultural norm in Brazilian educational institutions, even though

graduates are the primary source of information on the returns provided by education (Paul, 2015).

Faced with this problem and in light of what it means for accountability in educational management, we ask: How is graduate management characterized at a Federal Institute campus, considering the objectives of federal public policies on vocational education and accountability in contemporary public management? To answer this question, the objective of this article is to characterize graduate management at the IFES Guarapari Campus in light of the objectives of federal public policies on vocational education and accountability in contemporary public management.

A previous study investigated and found low labor market integration among graduates of the IFES Guarapari Campus in the local job market (Carvalho Junior & Coelho Junior, 2022). Although relevant, this previous study considered only graduates as its unit of analysis, not IFES administrators. Thus, the institution's educational management practices focused on graduates have yet to be systematically analyzed in the literature. Consequently, IFES Campus Guarapari presents itself as a critical case that allows for an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the legal mandate of EPT and the implementation of managerial accountability. We therefore conducted a case study of this educational institution to produce in-depth analyses of its educational management with a focus on its graduates. It should be noted, however, that the findings pertain solely to the unit of analysis under consideration, which naturally precludes generalizations to other IFES campuses and/or other Federal Institutes in the country. This, therefore, is the theoretical, practical, and social contribution we offer to the body of knowledge in this field. Our article is part of a growing and recent body of literature dedicated to analyzing the management of Federal Institutes in general (Pereira Filho & Ribeiro, 2025) and that of their graduates in particular (Rocha & Oliveira, 2024).

SCHOOL MANAGEMENT AND CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

The study of management at IFES should take into account the evolution of school management in Brazil, which has historically shifted from a strictly administrative and bureaucratic perspective to a more pedagogical and political concept (Carvalho, 2011; Oliveira & Vasques-Menezes, 2018). This shift reflects the quest to replace a centralized model with democratic, decentralized, and participatory practices, often inspired by changes in the world of work and production (Carvalho, 2011). Decentralized management aims to delegate authority

and promote the empowerment of the school community (Borges, 2004), with participatory management being crucial for the consolidation of democracy, despite the challenges to its effective implementation (Beraldo & Pelozo, 2007).

This transition is part of the public administration debate and aligns, in part, with New Public Management (NPM), which emphasizes efficiency, the measurement of results, and accountability through metrics. However, the field is evolving toward the Post-New Public Management (Post-NPM) paradigm, which seeks to move beyond NPM by recognizing the need to create public value, acting with legitimacy and efficiency, and focusing on the co-production of services (Cavalcante, 2018). From this perspective, education—including professional education—must demonstrate its value and social relevance, requiring strategic planning aligned with this purpose (Carvalho Junior & Ferreira, 2021).

The managerial competencies of school administrators—which encompass factors such as contributing to strategy, delivering public services, and managing teams (Paz & Odelius, 2021)—are essential in this post-NPM environment, which demands accountability, transparency, efficiency, and results-oriented action (Bovens, 2007). As Ribczuk and Nascimento (2015) point out, accountability refers to transparent public administration, in which the government has an obligation to account for its actions and results. This allows society to monitor and engage in the administrative decisions that affect it. Abrucio (2007) points out that the weakness in the ability to justify the results achieved is one of the greatest challenges of Brazilian managerial reform. For the Federal Institutes, one of the indicators of EPT's effectiveness lies in the tracking of graduates, which demonstrates whether the public funds invested have generated the professional qualifications necessary for local productive arrangements, as well as the humanistic education of their students and the resulting local socioeconomic development.

IFES, as part of the Federal EPT Network, plays a key role in combating the structural duality of Brazilian education by promoting the inclusion of young people and the democratization of access to cultural, social, and economic capital through the expansion of education into the interior and affirmative action policies (Martins, 2024). The analysis of graduate management is closely linked to the history of public policies for the sector. Corsetti and Vieira (2016), in analyzing policies for upper-secondary EPT between 1996 and 2013, identified the clash between different initiatives and the processes of decentralization and recentralization of control, highlighting the political and controversial nature of this type of education. This fluctuation reinforces the need for EPT to engage in the debate on value creation

and social impact, in line with the principles of the Post-NPM. Furthermore, the quality of education provided, as measured by indicators such as the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb), is a factor correlated with the economic development of municipalities (Gomes et al., 2016), directly linking school management to social policy and economic returns.

Graduate management is part of the broader framework of institutional evaluation and accountability, defined as the duty to be transparent, to render accounts, and to be subject to accountability (Oliveira et al., 2022). In education, accountability is structured around evaluation, answerability, and enforcement (Leite, 2022), oscillating between the managerial/neoliberal perspective, focused on metrics, and the critical/democratic perspective, which values social engagement and pedagogical work (Oliveira et al., 2022). In this context of regulation and evaluation, there is a risk of ‘performativity’—that is, pressure for quantifiable results—which can lead to a distortion of pedagogical priorities and an emphasis on social distinction and meritocracy, to the detriment of excellence in its broadest and most inclusive sense (Mazoni & Oliveira, 2023).

Graduate follow-up is the mechanism that ensures accountability in EPT, providing crucial data for evaluating outcomes and enhancing the system’s visibility (Paul, 2015). It requires a systematic and participatory institutional approach and is essential for verifying the extent to which curricular objectives are met and whether education aligns with the needs of the labor market (Paul, 2015; Silva, 2025). Santos and Souza (2015) emphasize that graduate follow-up contributes to improving the quality of programs. From the Post-NPM perspective, the graduate is not merely an outcome to be measured, but a key stakeholder. Balestra and Castro (2024) define stakeholder management as a factor that enhances public governance by ensuring the involvement of interested parties in the decision-making process, thereby improving value creation. Graduates, as key stakeholders, become agents in the co-production of public value.

Field research on graduates’ entry into the labor market confirms this importance. For example, Davidis et al. (2020), studying graduates of the Federal Institute of Brasília (IFB), found evidence that technical-level qualifications increase the likelihood of entering the workforce and earning higher incomes. Other studies, such as that by Monte and Marinho (2025) at the Federal Institute of Piauí (IFPI) and Silva et al. (2020) at the Federal Institute of Northern Minas Gerais (IFNMG), investigated whether graduates were working in their field of study, raising questions about the alignment of the curriculum with market demands. Graduate tracking at IFES Campus Guarapari, therefore, needs to assess the extent to which

this process serves as an accountability mechanism that supports institutional evaluation and aligns with the principles of democratic management at EPT, especially in light of previous evidence indicating challenges related to graduates' integration into the labor market and the post-graduation follow-up process (Carvalho Junior & Coelho Junior, 2022).

The effective management of an institution such as the Federal Institutes—with its three pillars of Teaching, Research, and Extension—requires clarity in processes and the coordination of resources (Libâneo, 2005; Lück, 2009). The lack of systematic monitoring of graduates, as noted in the literature, is therefore a serious shortcoming in accountability within the management of Brazilian federal vocational education. Without this information, the administration of the Federal Institutes may be unable to fully demonstrate the relevance of its educational policy and the benefits provided to society through the use of its resources. Managers who fail to monitor may be operating outside the criteria of evidence-based management, compromising the transparency of public policy and institutional governance (Secchi, 2014)—both of which are vital to contemporary public management.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative and exploratory research project that aims to analyze the perceptions, practices, and challenges of management at the Federal Institute of Education, Science, and Technology of Espírito Santo (IFES)—Guarapari Campus, specifically with regard to the follow-up of graduates and accountability in vocational education. Case studies, such as the one we conducted, are useful and recommended for qualitative research that seeks to explain the processes and reasons behind specific phenomena (Godoy, 1995), standing out as the ideal tool for researchers seeking to deepen their understanding of a specific event within an organizational setting (Freitas & Jabbour, 2011), in our case, graduate management at IFES Campus Guarapari.

The IFES Guarapari Campus is located in the municipality of Guarapari, in the state of Espírito Santo, in southeastern Brazil. IFES Guarapari was selected as the research site based on a previous study that indicated low employment rates among its graduates in the local job market and that, according to the graduates themselves, the institution in question did not follow up with them after they completed their programs nor provide them with support for their professional integration (Carvalho Junior & Coelho Junior, 2022). Thus, this preliminary research serves as an indirect tool for data triangulation in the study we are conducting here,

since Carvalho Junior and Coelho Junior (2022) quantitatively analyzed data based on the graduates' own accounts, whereas we are qualitatively analyzing data based on the accounts of the educational institution's administrators.

Furthermore, by focusing the research on a single Federal Institute campus, we were able to conduct an in-depth collection of primary data from its managers. This approach allowed us to understand managerial perceptions, internal challenges, and the culture of accountability at the tactical-operational level—aspects that would have been diluted in a multiple-case study. Therefore, the IFES Guarapari Campus serves as a magnifying glass for the management problems faced by the Federal Network in relation to its ultimate mission. It is important to note that the research began only after review and approval by the IFES Human Research Ethics Committee (CEP), in accordance with administrative proceeding 23183.001044/2017-16.

The study's population consisted of administrators at the IFES Guarapari Campus. This group was selected because they are directly responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing institutional policies aimed at linking EPT with local socioeconomic development. The purposive sample consisted of three staff members who held the positions of Director-General, Director of Academic Affairs, and Director of Research, Graduate Studies, and Extension at the campus during the data collection period. Participants were selected intentionally using a conceptual approach, which, according to Patias and von Hohendorff (2019), stipulates that the size of the sample group in qualitative research is determined by the specific characteristics of the study, such as the research problem and its objective. Since these administrators are the ones most directly linked to the objective of our study, we deemed it prudent and sufficient to limit our sample to them. To ensure their anonymity, we have designated these directors as Participant 1 (P1), Participant 2 (P2), and Participant 3 (P3), respectively. Table 1 presents the participants' academic profiles and the positions they held at the time of the study.

Table 1.
Profile of the interview participants

Participant	Position	Form of occupation of the position	Time spent in the position	Participant's academic background
P1	Director-General	Election	Eight months	Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering, Specialization in Occupational Safety Engineering, and Specialization in Materials Engineering
P2	Director of Academic Affairs	Appointment	Seven months	Bachelor's degree in History, Master's degree in History, and Doctorate in History
P3	Director of Research, Graduate Studies, and Continuing Education	Appointment	Seven months	Bachelor's degree in Chemistry, Master's degree in Natural Sciences, and Doctorate in Natural Sciences

Note. The Authors.

To collect primary data from administrators, we used a semi-structured interview technique with a predefined script. This instrument was developed based on a literature review on accountability, educational management, and the role of Federal Institutes. Table 2 lists the topics of interest identified in the literature review, along with examples of questions asked by the interviewer based on the interview script:

Table 2.
Correlation between the research topics of interest and the questions in the interview guide

Topic of interest	Sample questions from the interview guide	Literature supporting the topic of interest
Identifying management's perception of the importance of tracking program graduates as a tool for accountability and social effectiveness of public policy	<i>In your opinion, what is the main contribution that the IFES in Guarapari makes to the surrounding community?</i> <i>Do you believe that the IFES fulfills its social role as a contributor to local and regional socioeconomic development? Why?</i>	(Abrucio, 2007; Bovens, 2007; Deluiz, 2003; Paul, 2015; Ribczuk & Nascimento, 2015)
Identification of the formal and informal mechanisms currently used by the institution to track its graduates who are currently employed	<i>Are you aware of the current employment status of IFES graduates?</i> <i>Does the IFES track the professional status of its graduates? How is this done? How often?</i> <i>Is there any partnership between the IFES and the municipal government regarding policies for the professional integration of IFES graduates? And between the IFES and the local business community? Please explain.</i> <i>Are there any events on campus, such as lectures or seminars, aimed at strengthening ties between the IFES academic community, the government, the business community, and graduates? If so, what are these events like?</i>	(Balestra & Castro, 2024; Paul, 2015; Santos & Souza, 2015; Silva, 2025)

Understanding the main challenges and limitations faced by administrators in promoting the effective and monitored entry of graduates into the local job market	<i>Do you believe that the job market in Guarapari absorbs technical professionals with a high school diploma, who have graduated from the Business Administration and Electrotechnics courses offered by IFES, so they can work in their respective fields of study?</i>	(Carvalho Junior & Coelho Junior, 2022; Monte & Marinho, 2025; Secchi, 2014; Silva et al., 2020)
	<i>What about the job market in the neighboring municipalities: Anchieta, Alfredo Chaves, Marechal Floriano, Viana, and Vila Velha?</i>	
	<i>Does IFES take any steps to help graduates secure their first job in their field of study? How is this done?</i>	
	<i>Is IFES aware of job openings for technical professionals? Are these openings communicated to graduates or students? How?</i>	
	<i>What are the biggest challenges IFES technical program graduates face in entering the local job market?</i>	

Note. The Authors.

The interviews with IFES Guarapari administrators were conducted in person in April 2018 on the campus, following prior scheduling. In addition to taking written notes, the researcher recorded the interviews using a cell phone to avoid the risk of losing any information relevant to the purposes of this study. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. After the recording, the researcher listened to and transcribed the audio directly into Microsoft Word. The data collected from the managers' responses were subjected to Bardin's (2011) Content Analysis, following the stages of pre-analysis, exploration of the material, processing of results, inference, and interpretation. The objective was to identify central thematic categories related to management, accountability, and the follow-up of graduates, triangulating managerial perceptions with the theoretical assumptions addressed in the literature review. Table 3 presents the results of the content analysis conducted here, including the categories of analysis, examples of data coding, and their analytical breakdown.

Table 3.
Content Analysis process for the research data

Analysis category	Example of data coding	Analytical breakdown
Social importance and effectiveness	<i>"First, without a doubt, social inclusion... 70% of our students come from the public school system." (P1)</i> <i>"I see that they really need quality public education... the community is becoming increasingly integrated." (P3)</i>	The perception of institutional success is linked to the democratization of student access to education; however, there is a lack of outcome data to confirm post-graduation social mobility.
Monitoring mechanisms	<i>"It hasn't been done here yet. (The previous administration) didn't carry it out, even though it would be vital." (P1)</i>	The tracking of graduates appears to be haphazard, indicating no continuous data collection process, which hinders the management feedback loop and impedes effective accountability.

	<i>"We don't have a clear, permanent policy... We're falling short."</i> (P2)	
Management challenges and barriers	<i>"Companies don't reach out; they don't build that connection with the institution. And the institution doesn't build one with them either."</i> (P2) <i>"The leadership transition left these initiatives up in the air."</i> (P3)	There appears to be a failure in collaborative governance with the local business sector, and internal policy changes are disrupting graduate follow-up projects.
Career placement and the job market	<i>"40 Mechanics, 40 Electrotechnicians every year... the local market isn't going to absorb them [...]. Many of the graduates I encounter work in different fields, such as toll booths or supermarkets."</i> (P1) <i>"We don't necessarily assist people who are looking for a job."</i> (P2)	Management is aware that graduates—technical professionals—work in fields unrelated to their training. There appears to be regional saturation of the local labor market, a situation in which the campus trains professionals at a rate exceeding the local labor market's capacity to absorb them.

Note. The Authors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The administrators interviewed (P1, P2, and P3) represent different levels and roles within the context of IFES Campus Guarapari—general administration, academic affairs, research, graduate studies, and continuing education—which allows for an understanding of graduate management from complementary perspectives on institutional operations. Their statements reveal that the managers' professional training—which is predominantly technical and pedagogical in nature—strongly influences how they perceive educational management and its public purpose. For example, Manager P1 emphasizes the educational nature of management, stating that *"the role of a manager at IFES is not merely to administer resources, but to ensure that the educational process serves society and brings about social transformation."* This statement aligns with the concept of educational management oriented toward a public mission, discussed by Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), according to which the public manager acts as a facilitator of collective values, rather than as a mere executor of goals.

P2, in turn, presents a perspective more focused on administrative efficiency, emphasizing that *"we must prioritize objective processes and institutional goals; bureaucracy, when well-organized, lends credibility to the institution."* This conception is close to the logic of Post-New Public Management, which values efficiency and results-based accountability (Bovens, 2007). However, as Secchi (2014) observes, the pursuit of efficiency must be balanced by participatory and organizational learning dimensions. P3 presents a discourse that moves between both approaches, recognizing that *"educational management must balance pedagogical and administrative aspects; it cannot be purely idealistic, but neither can it lose*

its social focus.” This statement summarizes what is referred to as “management in tension” post-New Public Management, characterized by a hybrid approach combining managerial and pedagogical rationalities.

The coexistence of these paradigms suggests that IFES Campus Guarapari appears to operate under a management model that is still in transition, in which graduate management is not yet fully institutionalized as a strategic dimension. In summary, the perceptions of administrators reflect three coexisting rationalities—administrative, pedagogical, and public—that shape how graduate management is conceived and implemented. This plurality reflects the very institutional ambiguity of the Federal Institutes, situated between the Weberian bureaucratic model, post-NPM practices, and contemporary demands for governance and public value. When asked about graduate tracking, the three administrators acknowledge its importance but report the absence of permanent processes. P1 states: *“We’ve made some attempts at conducting research with graduates, but nothing on an ongoing basis. We lack someone to coordinate it and who has the time for it.”* This observation highlights what Bovens (2007) defines as latent accountability—that is, an awareness of responsibility for results, but without the effective creation of institutional mechanisms to make it feasible.

P2 adds to this observation by stating that *“we do talk about alumni feedback, but there is no systematic data. Each program does it its own way, when it sees fit.”* This statement reflects the intersectoral fragmentation described by Secchi (2014), in which the lack of coordination between areas prevents the consolidation of informational governance. This situation appears to run counter to the principles of Post-New Public Management, which considers governance to be one of its most distinctive characteristics (Carvalho Junior & Ferreira, 2021). This lack of institutionalization may stem from a still-narrow conception of accountability, understood solely as ‘administrative accountability’ rather than as public accountability oriented toward social outcomes. If properly structured, graduate management could enhance transparency and provide input for institutional evaluation, bringing IFES Campus Guarapari closer to an evidence-based management approach.

P3 reinforces this perspective by stating that *“knowing where graduates are is essential to demonstrating the impact of IFES, but we end up lacking both the infrastructure and the staff to do so.”* P3’s statement refers to the concept of state capacity (Pires & Gomide, 2016), which involves the human, technological, and institutional resources necessary for the development of effective public policies. The absence of a formal structure for tracking graduates therefore reduces the accountability capacity of the campus under analysis. As Peters and Pierre (2016)

point out, there can be no meaningful accountability without systematic and reliable information. This gap can compromise not only transparency but also organizational learning and pedagogical feedback. P2 believes that the greatest barrier to conducting graduate follow-up may lie in operational limitations, which prevent effective accountability:

Feedback from graduates should be the primary input for refining Course Pedagogical Projects and improving quality, a true form of organizational learning. Unfortunately, due to a lack of dedicated human resources and clear internal guidelines, graduate tracking is limited to one-off initiatives and infrequent surveys. Human resources management fails to support this core activity. (P2)

P2's statement aligns with the theory of managerial competencies (Paz & Odelius, 2021), indicating that, although the institution possesses the technical and pedagogical competencies to train students, it lacks the managerial competency focused on the external assessment process. This lack of systematization puts the institution at risk of 'performativity' (Mazoni & Oliveira, 2023)—that is, prioritizing internal performance indicators (number of graduates) at the expense of external effectiveness (labor market integration and professional suitability). Thus, the results indicate that IFES Campus Guarapari appears to operate with a reactive and limited form of accountability, geared more toward compliance with bureaucratic norms than toward demonstrating social and educational outcomes. The institutionalization of graduate management could, in this sense, serve as a mechanism for expanded accountability, strengthening public legitimacy and aligning vocational training with the demands of local productive arrangements.

As for the challenges and gaps in the institutionalization of graduate management, the interviewees were unanimous in stating that graduate follow-up is not among management's priorities. For example, P2 mentions that *"there are so many operational demands that this issue ends up being put off."* This observation aligns with the concept of managerial myopia (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015), according to which public managers tend to focus their efforts on immediate demands, to the detriment of long-term strategic actions. The problem appears to be exacerbated by structural factors, such as an overload of responsibilities and a lack of specialized technical staff, as P1 observes: *"often, the same staff member who handles enrollment, extension programs, and internships would also have to manage graduates; it's unfeasible."* This situation illustrates an aspect that once again points to the concept of state

capacity (Pires & Gomide, 2016), which, when limited, reduces administrative efficiency and hinders the creation of permanent processes.

Another recurring challenge appears to be the lack of computerized systems and indicators. In this regard, P3 emphasizes: “*We don’t have a database of graduates, nor an institutional system. Everything is done on an ad hoc basis.*” This scenario diverges from digital governance and knowledge management practices, which are considered essential for contemporary public administration (Secchi, 2014). At the political-institutional level, there also appears to be a lack of incentives for collecting and using graduate data. This gap may stem from the prevalence of a performance-oriented culture, in which institutional performance is evaluated based on formal quantitative indicators—such as enrollment and graduation numbers—rather than on social outcomes or graduates’ professional integration. Such a focus on performance, however, can create a disconnect between the discourse of social transformation and management practices geared toward bureaucratic efficiency.

In summary, the results suggest that graduate management at IFES Campus Guarapari faces obstacles of an organizational nature (lack of staff and systems), cultural nature (low priority), and political nature (lack of incentives and appropriate metrics) that mutually and negatively affect its effective institutionalization, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

Barriers to the institutionalization of graduate management at IFES Campus Guarapari



Note. The Authors.

Taken together, these factors constitute what might be called an ‘institutionalization vacuum,’ in which awareness of the issue’s importance does not translate into structured organizational action aimed at effective graduate management. As a result, decision-making in

educational management as a whole—including both academic management and graduate management—may prove inefficient and/or ineffective, since the institution's knowledge of the outcomes achieved by former students after completing their studies at IFES is limited.

The testimonies also reveal a broader understanding of IFES's social role. On this point, P1 emphasizes that “the Institute's mission is to educate critical citizens and professionals capable of transforming the local reality.” This statement aligns with the concept of Professional and Technological Education (EPT) as a driver of social transformation, linking it to the creation of public value and the reduction of regional inequalities. P3 reinforces this perspective by stating that “*we need to understand graduates not only as workers, but as individuals who can transform the community.*” This idea aligns with the views of authors such as Frigotto et al. (2005) and Ramos (2006), who advocate for the integration of work, education, and citizenship as the foundation of holistic human development.

From the perspective of Post-New Public Management, according to Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), public managers should act not only as implementers of goals, but also as agents who promote democratic values and social learning. In this sense, graduate management can serve as a tool for providing feedback on public value, as it allows the institution to understand the impact of its actions and realign its educational policies. P2, although more focused on managerial rationality, also recognizes the importance of this process: “*If we had reliable data on our graduates, we could show society that IFES transforms lives. This would strengthen the institution's image.*” This statement expresses the symbolic dimension of accountability, which, according to Bovens (2007), is related to the public legitimization of institutions through the transparent communication of results.

Thus, the results suggest that the institutionalization of graduate management can serve as a link between governance and the social mission of EPT, consolidating IFES as a public institution dedicated to organizational learning and the generation of public value. In this sense, the Federal Institutes have a legal and moral obligation to promote socioeconomic and cultural development, which requires constant alignment with Local Productive Arrangements (LPA). P3 demonstrates an awareness of this objective by stating that:

Our challenge is operational, but it has a significant impact on our mission of regional development. We have a mandate to serve as a driving force for Guarapari's Local Productive Arrangement, but how can we do that if we are unable to continuously and reliably track where our graduates are and whether they are contributing to the local economy? Without a formalized

department and without specific resources, this function becomes a secondary management activity rather than a strategic priority. (P3)

This insight reinforces the need for graduate tracking to serve as an evaluation tool (Paul, 2015) to inform educational management (Lück, 2009). Graduate follow-up is, therefore, the central mechanism for verifying the social effectiveness of educational policy, going beyond internal indicators (Deluiz, 2003). The administrators interviewed demonstrate full awareness of this mandate but reveal the structural inability of school administration to implement it systematically. P1's statement is emblematic of this process:

We know that tracking graduates is the backbone of our assessment of social impact. It is through this process that we can verify whether we are combating structural duality, as required by the Network's vision. However, at the institutional level, there is still a lack of strong systemic guidelines to transform this knowledge into ongoing action. (P1)

This statement, in line with Martins (2024), who discusses the struggle of IFs against structural duality, illustrates management's perception that the problem lies not in the vision but in managerial practice. Although school management should be democratic and participatory (Beraldo & Pelozo, 2007; Oliveira & Vasques-Menezes, 2018), including graduates as key stakeholders (Balestra & Castro, 2024), the absence of a formal and systematic process can undermine the principle of co-production in public education.

In short, it can be said that the findings suggest that IFES Campus Guarapari is at an intermediate stage of managerial maturity, in which traditional bureaucratic practices coexist with discourses of innovation linked to governance and public value. Graduate management emerges as a potential catalyst for this transition, capable of transforming formal accountability into substantive accountability. The absence of structured policies, however, points to the need to revise the institutional management model, incorporating graduate tracking as a strategic pillar of planning. This change requires institutional leadership, integrated systems, and a learning-oriented organizational culture, as suggested by Secchi (2014) and Argyris and Schön (1996). By recognizing its graduates as agents of change and living evidence of the institution's impact, the institution can transform data collection into a process of critical reflection, collective learning, and social legitimization—core values of the Post-NPM and EPT committed to human development.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The objective of this article was to characterize the management of graduates by the IFES Guarapari Campus in light of the goals of federal public policies on vocational education and accountability in contemporary public management. We have advanced our understanding by identifying important findings regarding educational management focused on the tracking of graduates from a Federal Institute campus, which complement a previous study conducted exclusively with former students (Carvalho Junior & Coelho Junior, 2022). In summary, the results suggest that the management of IFES Campus Guarapari—which is still in transition between bureaucratic and public-value-oriented models—requires the urgent incorporation of graduate follow-up as a strategic pillar to transform merely formal accountability into an effective mechanism for assessing social effectiveness.

As a limitation, we note that the choice of a single-case study, although justified by the depth of the managerial analysis and its local relevance, limits the generalizability of the results. Therefore, the conclusions reflect the specific reality of IFES Campus Guarapari and cannot be directly extrapolated to the entire Federal Network. Thus, it is essential that future research analyze graduate management at other IFES campuses or at other institutions within the EPT Federal Network.

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