

Avaliação educacional no Amazonas: O SADEAM nos distritos de Manaus¹

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Resumo

O artigo toma à análise o Sistema de Avaliação do Desempenho Educacional do Amazonas (SADEAM). Com o objetivo central de compreender a constituição histórica e política do SADEAM e seus principais impactos para os distritos de Manaus, este artigo situa-se na Sociologia Política da Educação e, com uma abordagem quanti-qualitativa, faz uso de revisão de literatura e dos dados secundários dos resultados do SADEAM entre 2011 e 2015. O estudo acabou por apontar uma interdependência entre sistemas de avaliação educacional nas ordens internacional, nacional, estaduais e municipais; além disso foi possível situar o SADEAM no macrossistema de avaliação da educação brasileira, bem como compreender seus sustentáculos e refletir, a partir dos resultados dos distritos manauaras, sobre os desdobramentos das avaliações externas para o cotidiano escolar.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação Educacional. Avaliação de Larga Escala. Sistema de Avaliação. SADEAM.

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Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts

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Abstract

The article analyses the Educational Performance Assessment System of Amazonas (SADEAM). With the central objective of understanding the historical and political constitution of SADEAM and its main impacts on Manaus districts, this article is located in the Political Sociology of Education and makes use of literature review as well as secondary data from the results of SADEAM between 2011 and 2015 through a quantitative-qualitative approach. The study ended up pointing out an interdependence between educational assessment systems in international, national, state and municipal levels. In addition, it was possible to situate SADEAM in the Brazilian education assessment macrosystem, as well as to understand its underpinnings and reflect on the unfolding of external assessments for everyday school life from the results of the manauaras districts.

Keywords: Educational Assessment. Large-Scale Assessments. Assessments System. SADEAM.

Evaluación educativa en Amazonas: SADEAM en distritos de Manaus

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Resumen

El artículo analiza el Sistema de Evaluación del Desempeño Educativo de Amazonas (SADEAM). Con el objetivo central de comprender la constitución histórica y política de SADEAM y sus principales impactos en los distritos de Manaus, este artículo se encuentra en la Sociología Política de la Educación y, con un enfoque cuanti-cualitativo, hace uso de la revisión de la literatura y datos secundarios de los resultados de SADEAM entre 2011 y 2015. El estudio terminó señalando una interdependencia entre los sistemas de evaluación educativa en los órdenes internacionales, nacionales, estatales y municipales. Además, fue posible ubicar la SADEAM en el macrosistema de evaluación educativa brasileña, así como comprender sus fundamentos y reflexionar, a partir de los resultados de los distritos de Manaus, sobre el desarrollo de evaluaciones externas para la vida escolar cotidiana.

Palabras clave: Evaluación Educativa. Evaluación a gran escala. Sistema de evaluación. SADEAM.

Introduction

Assessment has become an omnipresent element in contemporary educational systems: from daily classroom activities to national public policies, the practice of assessment plays a decisive role in decision-making related to didactic-pedagogical approaches (in the case of learning assessments conducted by teachers) and in determining the direction of educational policies (in the case of state actions). Educational data now permeate society's daily life, spanning various scales schools, systems, municipal, state, and federal governments, as well as international agencies bringing the concept of educational quality to the forefront (Sellar, 2015). External or large-scale assessments are, therefore, the most current expression of this movement, linking assessment results to the evaluation of educational institutions.

Drawing on specialized literature that addresses public policies for educational assessment in the Brazilian context (e.g., Vianna, 2003; Coelho, 2008; Machado, 2010; Vidal & Vieira, 2011), several key issues emerge for understanding the focus placed on large-scale external assessment of educational systems: a) In Brazil, given the numerous educational assessment initiatives developed over the past decades and the consolidation of evaluation systems resulting from these experiences, it can be stated that a macro-system of educational quality assessment exists in the country (Castro, 2009); b) This extensive system, encompassing various evaluation fronts at both levels of national education, is the result of the institutionalization of assessment as a mechanism to support the formulation and monitoring of public educational policies (Souza, 2011; Fontanive, 2011); c) While it is undeniable that Brazilian educational assessment systems have advanced over time, there is a consensus in the literature that the results of these assessments are underutilized by schools, teachers, and, naturally, students (CASTRO, 2009; GATTI, 2014).

It is based on the assumption that large-scale external assessment has become a globalized trend and that, in Brazil, the state has developed its own assessment systems for each level of national education over the past decades (examples include the *Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Básica* [National Basic Education Assessment System], the *Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior* [National Higher Education Assessment System], and the Postgraduate Assessment by CAPES). Within this movement of external assessment dissemination, state and municipal governments within the federation have also begun to establish their own systems for evaluating education. This is the context in which our object of study emerges: The *Sistema de Avaliação do Desempenho Educacional do Amazonas* (SADEAM, Amazonas Educational

Performance Assessment System).

With the central objective of understanding the historical and political constitution of SADEAM and its main impacts on the districts of Manaus, this article is situated within the field of Political Sociology of Education. Through a quantitative and qualitative approach, it utilizes secondary data related to the results of SADEAM assessments conducted between 2011 and 2015. From an argumentative standpoint, the text follows this structure: first, we provide a brief overview of the study's methodological approach; next, we present the historical and political foundations underlying the development of SADEAM; subsequently, we analyze data related to the districts of Manaus to characterize the capital of Amazonas based on the results of assessments included in the state system. Finally, the last section of the text reflects on the impacts of this type of assessment on educational institutions and their stakeholders.

1. Methodological Approach of the Study

We conducted a combined analysis of the processes involved in the development of SADEAM and its impacts on schools in Manaus within a recent context, drawing on Carlos Alberto Torres's (2011) *Political Sociology of Education*. This approach integrates the Sociology of Education with the Politics of Education, aiming to investigate the structural dimensions necessary for understanding educational institutions and actors. By applying this perspective to the analysis of an educational assessment policy, we established a methodological pathway that emphasized the relationships between the state, the department of education, the school community, and society as crucial elements in the Amazonian experience of developing its own assessment policy.

The quantitative-qualitative approach served as the foundation for conducting the research (Del-Farra & Lopes, 2013). This was due to the necessity of overcoming the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methods, as they “[...] complement each other and can be used together in research, providing better contributions to understanding the educational phenomena investigated, which increasingly present themselves with multiple facets” (Souza & Kerbaux, 2017, p. 21). The materialization of the study demonstrated the potential of combining quantitative and qualitative analysis through the ability to articulate data from SADEAM results obtained by schools in Manaus between 2011 and 2015 (a period for which the results are available on the SADEAM website) with well-established discussions in the specialized literature in the field of Education on the topic of educational assessment policies.

In this sense, a fusion was achieved between statistical analysis techniques of secondary data

Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts regarding the performance of elementary schools under the jurisdiction of Manaus's *Coordenadorias Distritais de Educação* (District Education Coordinators - CDEs) and a literature review. Articles were selected using Google Scholar to reconstruct the historical-political development of SADEAM and to analyze the main national and international debates surrounding this type of policy. Therefore, the data used in this study [secondary data and the literature review corpus] enabled us to advance in the historical reconstruction of SADEAM and to deepen our understanding of its impact on the educational sector in Manaus.

2. Understanding SADEAM: Historical Threads and Political Connections

In the mid-1990s, governments worldwide began to recognize that continuous investment in education was essential for their countries' development. They understood the importance of education's contribution, particularly to the economy, as a population with access to quality education would, within this framework of thought, translate to greater efficiency for the nation. In general, the preceding decades were tumultuous, with signs of regression in education. In poorer countries, adult illiteracy rates reached significant portions of the population, resulting in lost investments and further entrenching debt and poverty. For this reason, conferences and meetings were organized, often by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to discuss possibilities for reforming formal education

[...] Starting in the early 1990s, certain aspects of these reforms and restructurings were systematized within a cycle of World Conferences and Meetings organized by the United Nations. The goals of these conferences and meetings were to establish consensus and to promote activities that served as instruments of pressure on governments to implement the commitments they had made (JACOMELI; BARÃO; GONÇALVES, 2018, p. 34).

Among these events, the "World Conference on Education for All," held in Jomtien, Thailand⁵ stood out. It developed initiatives aimed at addressing basic learning needs in countries committed to improving education. This conference sparked debates that brought the issue of illiteracy to the forefront of discussions on what is known in Brazil as Basic Education, resulting in significant documents such as the "*World Declaration on Education for All*" and the "*Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*." These documents aimed to promote the universalization of

⁵ This conference was organized by the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and included educators from many countries (Mendes, 2006). For a more in-depth analysis of this conference which falls outside the scope of this article see Jacomeli, Barão, and Gonçalves (2018).

education, meet basic educational needs, foster equity, among other objectives.

According to Rabelo, Segundo, and Jimenez (2009, p. 7), another significant achievement from an NGO-sponsored meeting was the signing of the *"New Delhi Declaration on Education for All"* in December 1993. Its objective was to discuss "[...] goals for achieving the universalization of basic education by expanding access to elementary schools and adult literacy programs." This conference also sought to alert countries to the need for improving the quality of education within their territories to achieve better global performance.

Arising from the movements initiated by these conferences and meetings, the construction of various assessment mechanisms became necessary to provide a preliminary diagnosis of educational conditions, enabling monitoring and ensuring the quality of education worldwide. Consequently, the trend of evaluating educational systems gradually became global. Many countries developed their own large-scale assessment systems, as well as international initiatives to measure educational performance across continents and countries. An example is the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA), conducted every three years. Its first edition took place in 2000, and it continues to compare the knowledge of students representing their respective countries.

PISA was created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and evaluates 15-year-old students with the goal of shaping policies relevant to current living conditions, encompassing areas such as the economy, research, and society. The OECD began its activities in 1961 and currently comprises 31 countries; however, Brazil is not a member of this organization (Dickel, 2010). In Brazil, the program's implementation is managed by the *Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Anísio Teixeira* (INEP).

Another example of an international large-scale assessment is the *"Tercer Estudio Regional Comparativo y Explicativo"* (TERCE), conducted in 2013, as part of the third edition of studies carried out by the *Laboratorio Latinoamericano de Evaluación de la Calidad de la Educación* (LLECE). The primary objective of this study was to assess the quality of education in Latin America, thereby generating information that could be useful for making decisions regarding public educational policies (Medeiros; Jaloto; Santos, 2017).

Following this global premise of the centrality of assessment, Brazil was no exception. To meet the goals established in these conferences, the Federal Government introduced the *"Decennial Education Plan for All"* in 1993, which aimed primarily at improving the quality of basic education in Brazilian schools (Oliveira, 2015). At this point, the government began employing large-scale assessments, also known as external assessments, to monitor the process of improving educational

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quality.

Large-scale assessments are understood as evaluations that lack direct interaction between teacher and student, as they are uniformly conducted by the state, municipality, and/or federation. These assessments involve a larger number of participants from the school community and are designed to serve both diagnostic and comparative purposes across schools, districts, regions, and countries.

However, it is worth noting that even before the New Delhi Meeting in 1993, Brazil established, in 1990, the National Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB), which to this day:

[...] provides concrete support for the formulation, reformulation, and monitoring of public policies aimed at Basic Education, through data and indicators that enable a better understanding of the factors influencing student performance in the evaluated areas and grades (OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 14).

SAEB is, therefore, a tool that evaluates students from both public and private schools through exams, which, until 2018, were limited to the curricular components of Portuguese and Mathematics. According to Oliveira (2015), before its most recent reformulation, SAEB was divided into three large-scale external assessments. The first was the *National Basic Education Assessment* (ANEB), which aimed to evaluate the quality, equity, and efficiency of education among students in the 5th and 9th grades of elementary school and the 3rd year of high school in public and private schools. The second was the *National School Performance Assessment* (ANRESC), also known as *Prova Brasil*, which aimed to evaluate the quality of education in public schools for students in the 5th and 9th grades. These two assessments were integrated into SAEB in 2005 through Ministerial Ordinance No. 931, dated March 21, 2005. The third assessment was called the *National Literacy Assessment* (ANA), which focused on analyzing 3rd-grade students in public elementary schools to measure literacy levels. Regulated in June 2013 by MEC Ordinance No. 482, ANA originated from the measures of the *National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age* (PNAIC) (Rocha, 2019). This assessment was created specifically as a consequence of large-scale external evaluations, establishing connections at international, national, state, and municipal levels.

In 2019, SAEB underwent a reformulation to align with the requirements of the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (BNCC). This reform expanded its scope to evaluate, in addition to Portuguese and Mathematics, the curricular components of the Natural Sciences and Humanities areas in the 9th grade. As part of this restructuring, the three aforementioned assessments were discontinued, allowing SAEB to evolve into a set of evaluations that comprise the *Basic Education Development Index* (IDEB). From that same year onward, SAEB began to include early childhood education, elementary

education, and high school education within the framework of basic education.

The analyses by Lima and Gandin (2019) on large-scale assessments in the Brazilian context help us understand the development and strengthening of SAEB within the broader scenario of consolidating a hegemonic discourse and practice in favor of global-scale assessments. In this context, the process of international influence on public educational policies, as exemplified here in the case of assessments, highlights issues such as: a commitment to internationally established educational standards; the influence of international organizations (Coelho, 2008); and economic and educational model transnational dependency.

It is important to note that, as a result of this influence, Brazilian governments, oscillating over the past four decades with greater or lesser openness to these organizations, have ultimately ratified the culture of assessment within public education policy. This has led to the creation of Brazil's own system, as demonstrated here, and the consolidation of its reach through the complementarity provided by new state- and municipal-level education assessment systems.

As a result of SAEB and in an effort to achieve the objectives of the Plano de Metas Compromisso Todos pela Educação⁶, (All for Education Commitment Goals Plan), the state government of Amazonas recognized the need to develop its own large-scale educational assessment tool. In 2008, it created the *Sistema de Avaliação do Desempenho Educacional do Amazonas* (SADEAM) with the aim of conducting an annual diagnostic assessment of state schools:

SADEAM aims to measure the educational performance of students in the State Public Education Network. These results enable administrators, teachers, and educators to discuss and develop actions and intervention policies to provide quality education to the state's students (OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 25).

This highlights a confirmation of the trend toward expanding educational assessment systems and tools to more decentralized levels of the federation, with SADEAM representing an expression of this movement of hegemonic discourses and evaluative practices within educational systems. The concept of the "evaluating state" (Coelho, 2008) has spread to Brazilian states and municipalities, which have systematically begun to develop processes to assess the progress of their school institutions and, consequently, the performance of the individuals within these institutions.

⁶ The *Plano de Metas Compromisso Todos Pela Educação* (All for Education Commitment Goals Plan) is a public policy established by Federal Decree No. 6,094, dated April 24, 2007. It was created as a strategy to complement the *Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação* (Education Development Plan), aiming to foster collaboration among municipalities, states, the Federal District, and the community in mobilizing improvements in basic education. Camini (2010) highlights that the development process of this plan prioritized the participation of actors such as UNESCO, UNICEF, and representatives of private educational institutions, to the detriment of collective groups that have historically discussed education in Brazil, such as scientific and union organizations within the educational field.

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This correlation between international, national, and, more recently, state and municipal assessments in education reveals a complex web of parameters, tools, and results that inevitably impact the daily lives of teachers, children, youth, adults, administrators, and staff across all areas of the school. Above all, these assessments influence the pedagogical relationship within the classroom.

According to the official SADEAM website, in its first year of assessment in 2008, the Amazonas State Department of Education (SEDUC-AM) administered Portuguese and Mathematics tests to students in elementary, high school, and adult education. This assessment framework has been modified over the years, as shown in the table below:

Table 1 – Summary of Assessments Conducted under SADEAM/2008-2015

Year	Scope of SADEAM Assessment	Assessed Components
2008	Elementary Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese and Mathematics
	High School (3rd year)	Portuguese, Mathematics, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, History, and English Language
	Adult Education (3rd year – High School)	
2009	High School (3rd year)	Languages, Mathematics, Human Sciences, and Natural Sciences
	Adult Education (3rd year – High School)	
2010	Elementary Education (5th and 9th grades)	No Information
	Adult Education (5th and 9th grades)	
	High School (3rd year)	Languages, Mathematics, Human Sciences, and Natural Sciences
	Adult Education (3rd year – High School)	
2011	Elementary Education (3rd and 7th grades)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics
	Adult Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and Writing; Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, and History
	High School (3rd year)	
	Adult Education (3rd year – High School)	
2012	Elementary Education (3rd, 5th, 7th, and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics
	Adult Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and Writing; Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, and History
	High School (1st and 3rd years)	
	Adult Education (1st and 3rd years)	
2013	Elementary Education (7th grade)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics
	Adult Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and Writing; Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, and History
	High School (1st and 3rd years)	
	Adult Education (1st and 3rd years)	
2014	Elementary Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language and Mathematics
	Adult Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and Writing; Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, and History
	High School (3rd year)	
	Adult Education (3rd year – High School)	
2015	Elementary Education (3rd and 7th grades)	

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	Adult Education (5th and 9th grades)	Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and Writing (writing only for 7th grade)
	High School (1st and 3rd years)	Portuguese Language, Mathematics, and Writing; Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Geography, and History
	Adult Education (1st and 3rd years)	

Source: Own elaboration, based on CAED/UFJF (ca 2016).

In 2011, the *Sistema de Avaliação do Desempenho Educacional do Amazonas* (SADEAM) established a partnership with the *Centro de Políticas e Avaliação da Educação* (CAEd), an institution affiliated with the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF). CAEd's mission is to develop programs for states and municipalities aimed at determining the proficiency levels of public school students. This partnership may explain the availability of data related to SADEAM which we will analyze in the next section of this article since only data from the years 2011 to 2015 are widely accessible. It is not possible to access assessments conducted by SEDUC-AM prior to this partnership with CAEd/UFJF.

It is also worth noting that after 2015, SADEAM assessments were no longer conducted, and no explanation was provided by the Government of Amazonas regarding the discontinuation of the tests. SADEAM was only resumed in 2019, but to date, no new results have been published in the system. Considering that this assessment—following the tradition of earlier international and national educational assessments—was created with the objective of constructing a situational diagnosis to encourage quality work in schools and foster better performance, we will now focus on analyzing the results of SADEAM assessments in Manaus and their outcomes or consequences

3. The Case of Manaus Districts: Assessment in the Early Years of Elementary Education

As previously noted, SADEAM has assessed elementary and high school education as well as adult education. In this article, we will focus on elementary education as an example of the types of results generated and what they reveal about education in the capital of Amazonas. It is essential to first provide some explanatory elements regarding SADEAM assessments and the organizational structure of SEDUC-AM, which shaped the type of data collection and interpretations possible in this research: i) Since 2007, in SEDUC-AM's administrative structure, schools in Manaus have been organized into *Coordenadorias Distritais da Educação* (District Education Coordinators - CDEs),

Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts which are responsible for coordinating, implementing, advising, and monitoring administrative and pedagogical actions in schools. There are currently seven CDEs in the capital (Borges, 2015); ii) SADEAM assessments began in 2008. However, the official website of this assessment system provides data and results only for the years 2011, 2012, and 2015. This dataset constitutes the focus of our analysis moving forward.

The seven *Coordenadorias Distritais da Educação* (District Education Coordinators - CDEs) are organized according to the geographical location of schools. In Manaus, there are six administrative zones based on the neighborhoods that make up the city South, North, East, West, Central-South, and Central-West Zones and the CDEs structure their educational management as follows: CDE 01 consists exclusively of schools located in the South Zone; CDE 02 is composed mostly of schools in the South Zone and one school in the East Zone; meanwhile, CDE 03 includes schools in the Central-South and Central-West Zones, as well as one school in the North Zone; CDE 04 is made up of schools in the West and Central-West Zones; CDE 05 encompasses schools in the East and West Zones; finally, CDEs 06 and 07 are primarily composed of schools in the North Zone of Manaus, with CDE 06 including one school in the East Zone and CDE 07 including three schools in the Central-West Zone (SEDUC-AM, 2016).

This geographical and administrative portrait of Manaus state schools helps us interpret the performance assessments conducted by SADEAM, as it provides insight into the conditions of each coordinator and the schools within their jurisdiction. To illustrate SADEAM's reach between 2011 and 2015 concerning the early years of elementary education, we have prepared the following systematization:

Table 2 – Elementary Schools (Early Years) Assessed by SADEAM in Manaus by CDE/2011-2015

District Education Coordination (CDE)	Total Number of Schools in the CDE	Schools in the Capital with Early Years of Elementary Education Assessed by SADEAM 2011-2015
CDE 01	36	15
CDE 02	36	23
CDE 03	37	16
CDE 04	34	17
CDE 05	33	7
CDE 06	27	11
CDE 07	28	17

Source: Own elaboration, based on CAED/UFJF (ca 2016) and SEDUC-AM (2016).

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Considering the universe of institutions and students enrolled in state schools, between 2011 and 2015, SADEAM consistently analyzed more than 66% of students, indicating significant participation from the state's school community. In our analytical focus, we will examine the results of the 106 schools represented in Table 2, which had their elementary school classes evaluated during this period. In the context of the early years of elementary education, the schools were assessed in the areas of Mathematics and Portuguese Language (Writing and Reading), with the results highlighting the evolution of the percentage of students within each developmental standard in these areas. The official SADEAM website provides access to the results of each evaluated school, allowing for an analysis of their performance over the years. Regarding the performance standards and levels, the following can be observed:

The Proficiency Scale, Reference Matrices, Performance Standards, and Performance Levels are some of the tools that make up SADEAM. After the test is administered, the results are analyzed and made available to the entire network. Among these data is a numerical value associated with each subject, reflecting the complexity of the skills and competencies developed by students, referred to as proficiency. Technically, proficiency is a measure that represents a specific latent trait of a student. In large-scale educational assessment, this latent trait refers to the aptitude or knowledge that a student demonstrates in relation to specific content in an evaluated subject area. These varying proficiencies form a numerical continuum, or scale. This scale links proficiency to performance (skills and competencies) achieved by each student or group (classes, schools, etc.) in the test. In external assessments, this scale is referred to as the Proficiency Scale. The proficiencies students achieve in large-scale assessment tests can then be grouped into Performance Standards, which allow for a pedagogical interpretation of the skills developed by students, enabling their placement into Performance Levels. In SADEAM, as in most customized assessment systems, Performance Standards are divided into four groups (CAED/UFJF, ca 2016, para 1).

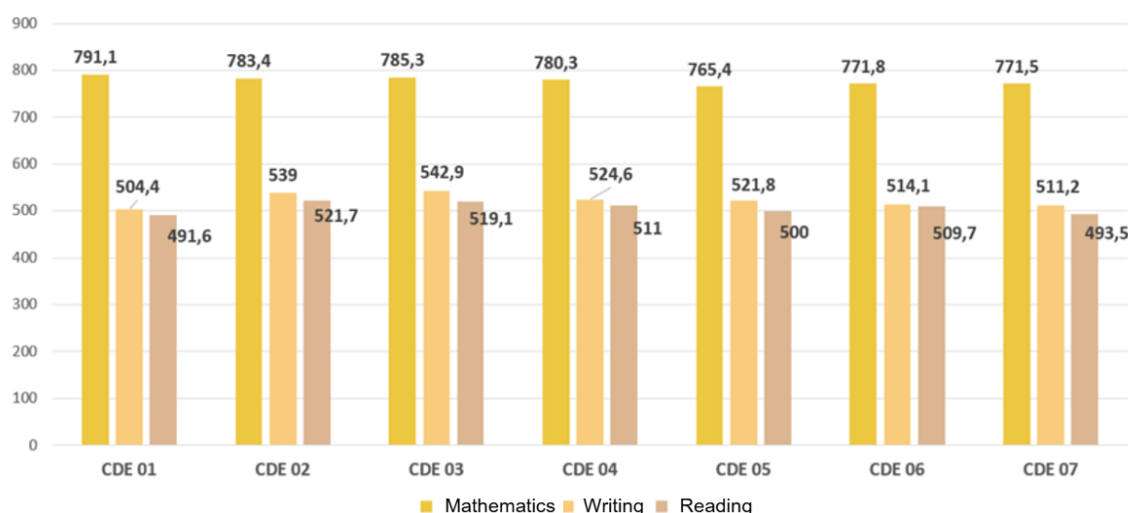
These standards range from "below basic" to "advanced" and are developed based on the SADEAM⁷ Reference Matrix. According to CAED/UFJF (circa 2016), this matrix is responsible for correlating the skills assessed in SADEAM tests with the curricular guidelines of the Amazonas state education network and the political and pedagogical projects of the schools. As expected, there are specificities in the matrices for each subject and educational stage assessed. However, the presentation of the tools that make up this evaluation system does not clarify how this correlation is effectively established, nor does it indicate the participation of teachers in the development of these tools. The only indication provided is the occurrence of training sessions for administrators and teachers to implement the stages of the SADEAM evaluation process. This suggests a perspective of separation

⁷ Which can be accessed at the following web address: <http://www.sadeam.caedufjf.net/matrizes-de-referencia/>.

Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts between those who conceptualize, design, and prescribe the state's evaluation policy and those who execute it and are directly involved in the pedagogical relationship (LIMA et al., 2018).

Given the scope of SADEAM from 2011 to 2015 and the way its tools and parameters are designed and operate, it becomes clear that the results for the early years of elementary education in schools across the capital of Amazonas are embedded within this framework and are, therefore, the product of a highly specific objective condition. Let us now analyze the SADEAM results for the early years of elementary education in relation to the *Coordenadorias Distritais da Educação* (District Education Coordinators) of Manaus. It is important to note that the analysis presented here does not aim to focus solely on quantitative data, nor to rank schools or CDEs. The purpose of our interpretation of the data is to reflect on what lies behind the scores and what they can reveal.

Grpf 1 - SADEAM 2011 Results: Early Years of Elementary Education in Schools of the CDEs in Manaus



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CAED/UFJF (ca 2016).

The results of SADEAM are referenced against the goals set for each year, knowledge area assessed, and each school. In this sense, the data we present here, which we seek to associate with the CDEs and not with the schools themselves reflect the performance of a relatively close group [geographically, socially, and educationally] of school institutions that underwent assessments during the period studied. Therefore, when analyzing Graph 1, several factors stand out: i) the closeness of the scores from the different Educational District Coordinatorships of Manaus in 2011, with this continuity in the scores achieved across the various assessed areas being a constant in subsequent years; ii) the prominence of the scores in Mathematics, as opposed to those in Writing and Reading,

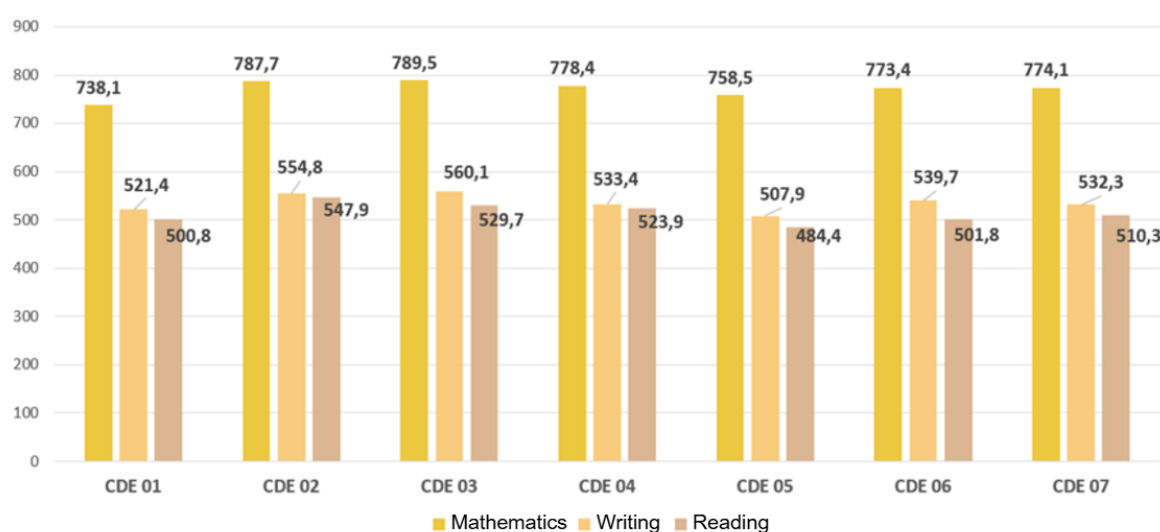
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which also appears as a constant in later years, highlighting both the goals set for each of these assessed areas and the challenges related to proficiency in Portuguese Language in the state of Amazonas (OLIVEIRA, 2015).

Specifically in 2011, the average scores in Mathematics show a variation of 26 points across the seven CDEs of Manaus, while in Writing the variation reaches 38 points, and in Reading it hits 30 points. In the narrow space of results between these CDEs, we observe that these scores reflect greater or lesser differences between the distinct schools within the respective coordinatorships, and it is often noticeable that both the schools and the CDEs may show advanced performance in one subject while not performing as well in another: this is the case, for example, of CDE 1, in Graph 1, which shows the highest performance in Mathematics but the lowest in Writing and Reading. These differences in results are expressions of the schools' conditions to develop work in specific areas and also highlight what should be the focus of school management and teachers' actions. This is not limited to efforts aimed at improving student performance for future evaluations, but rather to understanding from this objective data that the assessment can offer, which aspects need to be improved to ensure the learning and development of students.

In the following, we have the data for the year 2012:

Graph 2 – SADEAM 2012 Results: Early Years of Elementary Education in the Schools of the CDEs
 Manaus



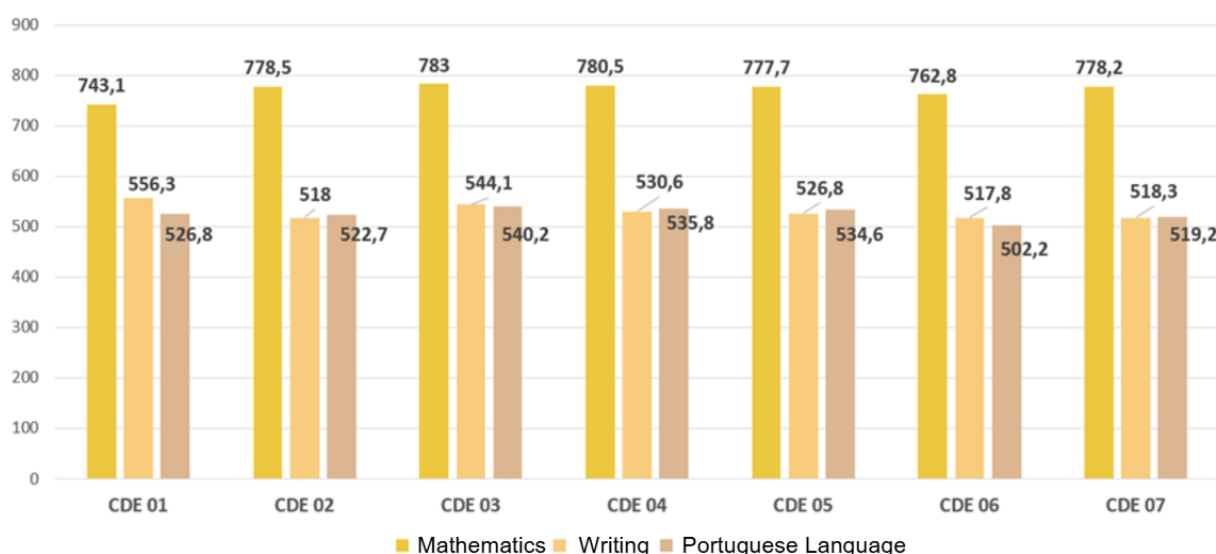
Source: Prepared by the author, based on CAED/UFJF (ca 2016).

One year later, the results of the SADEAM reveal a variation, both upward and downward, in

Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts the percentages achieved by each CDE compared to the previous assessment. Therefore, Graph 2 presents the dynamic nature that characterizes both education and large-scale assessments. Maintaining, decreasing, or increasing the average are numerical movements that depend on a multitude of factors that schools and their individuals experience throughout the academic year. In this way, one issue stands out when specifically considering the year 2012: it is the difficulty in achieving the goals set for each assessed subject, exemplified by the fact that, among the seven CDEs, CDE 3 exceeded the goals set for Mathematics (by 3 points) and Writing (by 2 points), and CDE 6 exceeded the goal for Writing (by 9 points).

Three years later, in 2015, the configuration presented by a new SADEAM assessment is summarized by the graph below:

Graph 3 – SADEAM Results 2015: Early Years of Elementary Education in Schools of the CDEs of Manaus



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CAED/UFJF (ca 2016).

The ability to meet or exceed the previously set goals for each subject and CDE evaluated increased in 2015, which may indicate either the adjustment of schools, teachers, and students to the evaluative logic of SADEAM, or a reevaluation of the goals by the responsible bodies considering the previous results. Also, this year reaffirms the ongoing problem related to proficiency in reading and writing at the elementary school level in the capital of Amazonas, as it is widely used by the media at the national and state levels to describe the educational conditions in this state and to position its standing in relation to other states in the federation. Despite significant progress in overcoming

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illiteracy among youth and adults in recent decades, Amazonas still faces the current issues that are imperative concerning the development of literacy skills at the elementary school level.

This and other issues have sparked public debates that should be translated into public policies aimed at addressing the educational problems that define the daily reality of teaching work in Manaus and Amazonas. The perspective of a rational use of large-scale evaluation results for improving students' learning is gradually being overshadowed by a socially widespread judgment about institutions, individuals, and the work done within schools.

Despite the criticisms already established in the specialized literature on large-scale educational assessments, we agree with the perspective that understands that “[...] external evaluation, despite providing relevant information about education, cannot be the primary way of understanding the reality of schools in Manaus, as numbers do not reflect the reality experienced by basic education students” (LIMA et al., 2018, p. 183). The limitations of instruments that are sometimes not built by education professionals who work daily with students in their teaching, learning, and development processes; the biased and hierarchical readings that are often made based on the numerical data from these evaluations, which shape public opinion about schools and education in the country; and the ineffective actions that have marked the use of educational evaluation results across the country constitute issues that need to be more deeply addressed within the context of education in Amazonas, and also on the national and international stage our next section focuses on these reflections.

4. Reflections on the Implications of Educational Assessment Policies and Systems: The School and Its Stakeholders

Based on the historical analyses and the data from the SADEAM evaluations, it was possible to identify several consequences of this process regarding the development and implementation of public educational assessment policies. These consequences are the focus of this section, which aims to reflect on the relationship between the progress of large-scale assessment discourses and practices and their impact on basic education schools. These schools have been striving to achieve pre-established goals and improve their standings in various rankings, often at the expense of the pedagogical work that is inherently committed to the learning and development of students.

According to Luckesi (2000, p. 2), “Assessment will only provide us with the conditions to achieve a better quality of life if it is based on a willingness to embrace, for it is from there that we can build anything meaningful.” In light of this, those who view assessment as a means to think and rethink improvements have a better chance of making significant use of it. In an educational context,

Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts assessment is part of the daily life of those associated with educational institutions. The act of evaluating has become increasingly common in schools, both due to its significance in decision-making regarding teaching and because of the evaluative culture that has been naturalized within the educational institution (BOURDIEU; SAINT-MARTIN, 2015).

Buchmann and Hannum (2001), when discussing educational inequality in developing regions, point out that education is divided into two factors: the first is the educational provision available, expressed by the structures guaranteed by the state and schools; the second concerns the conditions, social context, and demands that each family faces when choosing a school for their children. In other words, the entire process of formal schooling is determined by the relationship between the educational offerings and the demands of families, which can result in either good performance and even social mobility through qualification, or the deepening of social and educational inequalities. Where and how does assessment play a role in this process of distinguishing and reinforcing inequalities among students? With Bourdieu and Saint-Martin (2015), we understand that the “school forms of classification,” similar to the primitive forms of classification discussed by Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, are reproduced in daily school life, based on a practical sense that conceals the classification mechanisms and, by promoting such concealment, prevents us from realizing that the practice of classifying students is outside the realm of any true pedagogical intention.

Beyond the widely recognized assessments of learning – through exams, which primarily serve as the basis for approval – large-scale assessments have come to occupy a central place both within and outside of schools. The scores of these evaluations are widely publicized by the media when their results are released, creating a hierarchy that extends from educational institutions to cities and regions across Brazil. It becomes evident in this process that such assessments reinforce the “classification culture” and have a significant impact within schools. It is through these assessments that schools are “judged” positively or negatively. However, more interesting than the beginning, with the tests, or the end, with the results, of these evaluative processes are their underlying messages, which speak to us about the individuals involved.

The school classifications we discussed earlier were limited to the internal dynamics of schools, as they were carried out through relationships among the school subjects – such as in the classroom and school councils in the Brazilian context (EARP, 2014; OLIVEIRA; MEDEIROS, 2018). However, with the consolidation and expansion of large-scale assessments, this classificatory process has spread. Municipal, state, federal, and international agencies now systematically develop performance evaluations for Brazilian students, from basic education to higher education. In the case

of basic education schools, one of the main consequences of these assessments is the socially legitimized distinction between "good" and "bad" schools, based on the results achieved.

The issues arising from this scenario, however, pertain to the notion of quality behind these evaluative processes on one hand, and on the other hand, the overemphasis on preparing students exclusively for the tests designed for large-scale assessments, at the expense of meaningful learning.

Historically, as we mentioned in a previous section, large-scale assessments began to gain prominence in the 1990s as a benchmark to measure the educational situation of each country and determine which education models "worked" best. Gradually, countries turned large-scale assessments into an essential tool for monitoring their education systems, and schools tacitly assumed another role: preparing students for these assessments, which are usually developed by specialists external to the schools. These assessments consist of standardized questions and answers that fail to capture the local specificities of educational processes in different contexts. At the end of the evaluation, the judgment falls on these schools, taking into account not only the low performance of students but also the teachers and the institution itself.

Dale (2004) reflects that the idea of globalized assessments, where education and globalization walk hand in hand, reformulates the word "quality" into quantifiable results. In other words, the relentless pursuit of results, indexes, and approvals reveals an unfair competition between countries, regions, states, municipalities, and schools, ultimately subverting the true goal of education. Thus, it becomes clear that existing classifications and comparisons between countries with extremely different social contexts end up showing, as Ghisleni and Luce (2018, p. 6) put it, that these evaluations have been sought "[...] as a model to solve a crisis situation. A crisis, by the way, which, according to statements, would simply belong to the schools, teachers, and the historical situations inherent to the schools, without linking to municipal government issues or the broader context." The accountability of institutions and school subjects for the results in large-scale assessments has become a constant in this process, and in the case of the city of Manaus, as examined in this article, this tone is confirmed in the everyday life of schools.

National assessments and the SADEAM often run counter to what the word "learning" truly means, since when students are trained to answer questions they have likely spent the entire school year memorizing and practicing, education and the pedagogical relationship are emptied of their true purpose. In this context, it is necessary to reflect on how these evaluations interfere with the teaching and learning process and, above all, with the students' right to education. We must raise the following question: to what extent have large-scale assessments, which were initially created to address

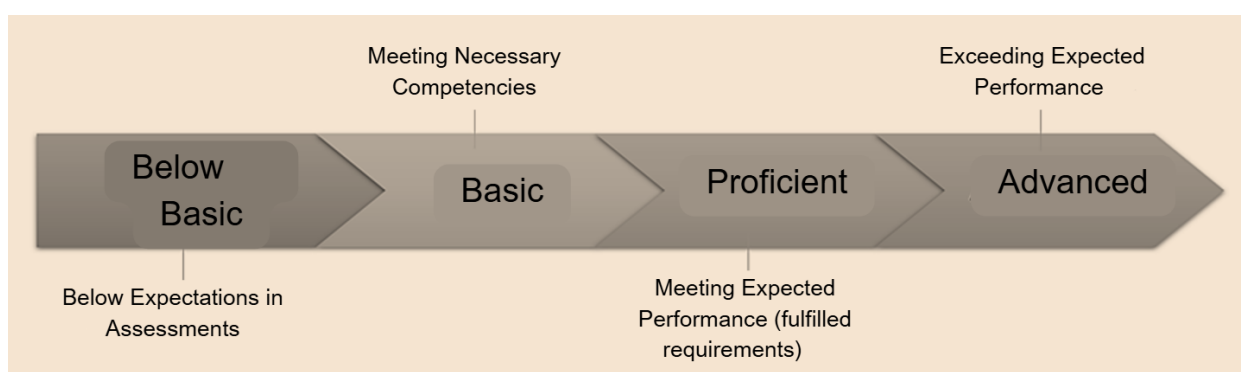
Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts educational difficulties and improve performance and the educational level of the population, resulted in the opposite effects? The specialized literature has already built a consensus regarding the role of the school in terms of its scope, which should be based on educating individuals who think beyond the pre-formatted content that is prioritized in these evaluations, as once stated by

The effectiveness of learning is conditioned by the existence of problems that arise in the student's life, which give them the impression of failure and compel them to resolve them. In the search for and attainment of these solutions, the student truly learns, rather than merely memorizing formulas that have no effect on the adjustment of their personality (CAMPOS, 2010, p. 33).

Students demonstrate learning capacity in the face of their educational difficulties, which allows us to understand that the teaching and learning process goes beyond the objective answers that external assessments claim to determine the degree of student performance or even the quality of education provided by a particular school. The objective and subjective conditions, the affective relationships, and the developmental processes of each individual are examples of elements that are sidelined when quantitative indices take precedence. Therefore, a significant change occurs with the consolidation of large-scale assessments: the discourse surrounding the improvement of education, student performance, and indices as parameters to track the "evolution" of national education has gradually removed from official discourse and consequently from pedagogical practices the focus on the learning and development of children, young people, and adults enrolled in schools.

The school grades in the state of Amazonas, assessed in the case of SADEAM, are responsible for socially legitimizing the separation between desirable and undesirable schools, good and bad schools, and the consequences of this distinction are experienced by school managers, teachers, and, as expected, by students and their families. SADEAM classifies the evaluated students in the following manner:

Figure 1 – SADEAM: Student Classification Scale



Source: Prepared by the author, based on CAED/UFJF (ca 2016).

This gap between the "advanced" and "below basic" levels, as well as the use of the term "below," whose synonyms are: inferior to, less than, fewer than, beneath, far from, or worse than, was responsible for the genesis of this section of the article and the reflection it engenders. When such terms are used in assessments that address the performance of individuals, it becomes necessary to rethink for what and for whom these evaluations are serving: the classification system is expressed, therefore, in the classification scale represented by Figure 1. Grouping students into these parameters means exercising a symbolic power of social and educational naming of the individuals in question; it also means judging students solely based on a specific test relative to their entire educational life. "It is, therefore, a measure of the final result, interpreted from an individualized perspective, disregarding the conditions of the education system that undoubtedly induce the production of 'competencies' or 'incompetencies' in students" (SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2003, p.12).

Ultimately, the goal is not to end large-scale educational assessments since we have already pointed out their value in the diagnostic-decision-making relation for public policies but rather to raise the debate about the ratification of the classification system that these evaluations have, at times tacitly, promoted. What is done with the evaluations? This is a question that brings us to the imperative of thinking about the potentialities and limits of the act of evaluating on a large scale. Two elements deserve to be highlighted in this debate, namely: i) the relational factors from which the results emerge, because when analyzing the results of educational evaluations, it is important to consider that the indices are multifactorial. This should imply interpretations by official bodies, the media, families, and society at large that are not reduced to a single grade; many other issues should be considered alongside numerical indices, such as the specifics of the social context, the material conditions of schools, and the scenarios of abandonment, dropout, and failure; and ii) the symbolic violence behind the hierarchical classification of institutions and educational subjects, as labels gain social strength and ultimately devalue a historical asset called "school".

What generally happens in schools is the publication of the results of these assessments without taking into account the elements that compose them, focusing only on the proficiency achieved and the indices, disregarding performance standards, participation, and discussions on what to do with the results obtained. It is worth emphasizing, however, that when the results of the assessments begin to gain prominence, schools typically experience more financial gains (SILVA, 2015, p.15).

The distinction between better and worse schools and the determination of the public funding they receive is another complex aspect of the educational assessment process in the country, which

Educational assessment in Amazonas: SADEAM in Manaus districts takes on its own characteristics in the case of Amazonas and the SADEAM. Oliveira (2015) demonstrates that, among the measures of the Amazonas government to meet the goals of the *Compromisso Todos pela Educação*, the State Fund for Incentive to the Fulfillment of Basic Education Goals was created in August 2008. In addition to SADEAM, it aims to reward participants in the state's educational evaluation processes. The Fund is financed by government revenue and resources from the *Fundo de Manutenção e Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica e de Valorização dos Profissionais da Educação* (FUNDEB). The prizes offered – the Prêmio do Cumprimento de Metas da Educação Básica and the Prêmio Escola de Valor – are equivalent to a 14th and 15th salary for those who meet or exceed national and state goals⁸, as well as for those who, even if they do not reach the goals, show significant absolute growth⁹ (OLIVEIRA, 2015).

Institutions that do not meet the goals, or at least significantly improve their scores, are left out of the awards and are considered backward or schools that do not strive to reach higher levels, often blaming a chain of educational actors: the managers, the teachers, and even the “below – worse than” students. The protagonists of the teaching and learning process are subjected to a label socially imposed by an external evaluation that disregards their realities, devaluing the entire social context of inequality in which they are inserted. In this scenario, it is essential to recognize the limitations of the large-scale educational assessment model and the serious gaps in the use of conclusions drawn from the evaluation processes in Amazonas – and certainly across the country.

Final considerations

Despite the reach of municipal, state, and federal evaluations in Brazil, “[...] large-scale assessments have been 'naturalized' and established, in the Brazilian context, as a necessary practice. It is evident [...] that the use of large-scale assessments is taken as a given, with no consideration that they might not exist” (LIMA; GANDIN, 2019, p. 3). This naturalization, related to the omnipresence of these evaluations in the daily routines of various educational bodies – from the classroom to the ministry – often prevents a reflective exercise to question the processes involved in the constitution of educational assessment systems and their effects.

This article aimed to present the historical trajectory and political connections of SADEAM, with a focus on the districts in the city of Manaus, and, based on data collected from the Caed/UFJF

⁸ In these cases, in 2011, the prizes had their values changed from R\$ 30,000.00 to R\$ 50,000.00 per education modality (OLIVEIRA, 2015).

⁹ And, in these cases, the prizes can reach R\$ 20,000.00 (OLIVEIRA, 2015).

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website, sought to analyze the effects of large-scale assessments on the early years of elementary education. It delved into the contradictions inherent in the implementation of such evaluations, which often lie on the fine line between building a data repertoire that strengthens decision-making in the education sector and reinforcing a system of classifications and hierarchies of schools and educational subjects.

Thus, it was evident that SADEAM is an important diagnostic tool for education in the state of Amazonas, aimed at elucidating the realities of schools in Amazonas and, from that, promoting quality work in the education provided by the government. However, the limitations of the results generated in this evaluation and, above all, the way they have been used, are clear: the limited consideration of the social conditions of schools and students in the composition of the indices stands out, especially when we consider that we are talking about the Amazon region and its entire cultural specificity.

Another point of emphasis is the observation that a hierarchical distinction has been promoted among the evaluated institutions, with its maximum expression in symbolic and monetary rewards based on what is considered "best performances," reducing the entire evaluation process to goal achievement and, consequently, the idea of rewards. This process, based on a direct correlation between performance, grades, and rewards, ends up neglecting schools that, for some reason, failed to meet the goals established by the education departments, and these are exactly the schools that require greater attention from the government and SADEAM, especially so that their limitations can be identified and addressed, aiming to improve the quality of education in the state of Amazonas.

Furthermore, considering that, in general, large-scale evaluations have had a harmful effect within schools putting aside the learning, development, and emotional needs of students we reaffirm the urgency of new investigations in the field of school and educational evaluation that focus on the impact of large-scale assessments on the individuals involved in the educational process.

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