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Teacher Training and Professionalization: A Comparative Analysis of Portuguese policies within the European Context

Formación y Profesionalización Docente: Un Análisis Comparativo de las Políticas Portuguesas en el Contexto Europeo

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Resumen

Este estudio investiga la evolución de las políticas de formación docente y el acceso a la profesión en Portugal, dentro del marco europeo más amplio, destacando la influencia de procesos regulatorios transnacionales como el Proceso de Bolonia. Basado en la sociología política de la acción pública, la investigación conceptualiza la política como una forma de acción pública moldeada por la multirregulación, que abarca dinámicas regulatorias transnacionales y su interacción con contextos nacionales. Utilizando un enfoque fenomenológico-interpretativo y un análisis documental, explora cómo los marcos nacionales y supranacionales interactúan y se reflejan en las políticas que regulan la certificación docente y la formación inicial. El estudio examina los procesos de recontextualización de políticas, incluida la adaptación de Portugal a las directrices europeas, como la transición hacia la exigencia de un título de máster para la docencia y la creación de nuevos perfiles profesionales. También destaca las tensiones entre las tradiciones nacionales y los objetivos de convergencia europea, mostrando cómo estas dinámicas generan traducciones políticas híbridas. Al abordar la interacción entre fuerzas locales y transnacionales, el estudio resalta las complejidades de la regulación transnacional y su influencia en la alineación de las políticas nacionales con las directrices europeas, así como las implicaciones más amplias para la profesionalización en el ámbito docente.

Palabras clave: Políticas de formación docente; regulación transnacional; sociología política de la acción pública; Portugal; Europeización de la educación.

Abstract

This study investigates the evolution of teacher training policies and entry into the teaching profession in Portugal within the broader European framework, emphasizing the influence of transnational regulatory processes such as the Bologna Process. Grounded in the political sociology of public action, the research conceptualizes policy as a form of public action shaped by multiregulation, encompassing transnational regulatory dynamics and their interaction with national contexts. Using a phenomenological-interpretative approach and documentary analysis, it explores how national and supranational frameworks interact and manifest in policies governing teacher certification and initial training. The study examines processes of policy recontextualization, including Portugal's adaptation to European guidelines, such as the transition to a master's degree requirement for teaching and the creation of new professional profiles. It also highlights the tensions between national traditions and European convergence objectives, showing how these dynamics result in hybrid policy translations. By addressing the interplay between local and transnational forces, the study underscores the complexities of transnational regulation and its influence on aligning national policies with European directives, as well as the broader implications for professionalization in the teaching field.

Keywords: Teacher education policies; transnational regulation; political sociology of public action; Portugal; Europeanisation of education.

1.Introduction

The Europeanisation of education constitutes a major force in the reconfiguration of public policy across Europe, particularly within higher education and the teaching profession. Policy frameworks governing access to the teaching profession have been influenced by the European Commission, in accordance with the broader objective of advancing the Europeanisation of education. The focus on teachers' careers and training remains one of Europe's key priorities, driven by the widespread teacher shortages affecting the continent (Alan *et al.*, 2013). Far from being a linear or universally agreed-upon process, it involves a complex interplay of actors, instruments, and political rationalities that have collectively redefined governance structures, institutional autonomy, and the roles of education itself.

This is a process through which European elements are incorporated into national policies via forms of *soft governance*, such as the Open Method of Coordination. This governance model does not impose binding rules, but instead operates through the establishment of common goals, the use of indicators, and the dissemination of best practices, gradually influencing the behavior of member states (Radaelli, 2000). Some authors highlight the centrality of a data-driven coordination logic, which fosters international comparisons that directly shape national education agendas. Through instruments such as PISA and other educational benchmarking instruments, a culture of quantification and performativity is consolidated, wherein education systems are continuously evaluated, compared, and adjusted based on the results obtained (Grek & Lawn, 2009).

This rationality extends to the technical instruments of the Bologna Process, which function as tools of governance. Instruments like the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) and the Diploma Supplement cease to be merely administrative mechanisms and instead take on regulatory roles, shaping educational subjects through the standardization of curricula, assessment systems, and learning outcomes (Fejes, 2008).

The reforms resulting from this process are also reflected in the transformation of university governance, characterized by the adoption of models aligned with corporate logic. This shift leads to centralized decision-making, the professionalization of academic management, and the redefinition of the role of faculty members, who increasingly operate under institutional targets and external policy frameworks (Kim, 2009).

The article explores the evolution of policies regarding teacher training and entry into the teaching profession in Portugal and the broader European context, during a period marked by increasing openness of national policies to transnational regulatory processes (Barroso, 2005; Djelic & Shalin-Andersson, 2006). This phenomenon became particularly pronounced in the final decades of the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, especially within the context of constructing a European identity and the Europeanization of public policy (Radaelli, 2000; Grek & Lawn, 2009). The process of building a European power bloc has fostered the emergence of new dynamics between state and non-state actors, resulting in notable repercussions for the redefinition of the state's role (Barroso, 2005; Antunes, 2005).

The study investigates the new modes of educational regulation that have emerged, specifically examining how European and national frameworks interact and manifest in policies governing access to the teaching profession and initial teacher training. These dynamics illustrate phenomena of policy recontextualisation (Ball, 1994).

Therefore, the research examines how the teacher training guidelines produced and disseminated by the intergovernmental platform (CI) coordinating the Bologna Process are reflected in national policies regulating teacher preparation and professional access. Specifically, it aims to: (i) characterise the regulatory framework in place prior to Portugal's adherence to the Bologna Process; and (ii) analyse the guidelines issued under the Bologna Process regarding initial teacher training and certification across Europe, as well as their implications for national policy.

Adopting a phenomenological-interpretative approach (Smith *et al.*, 2009), the study employed documentary analysis. The documentary corpus encompassed both national and supranational sources. The national corpus comprised documents on the design and implementation of policies regulating access to the teaching profession and teacher training, as well as records contextualising the sociopolitical landscape and the circulation of ideas surrounding teaching professionalisation across different periods. The supranational corpus included documents produced by transnational entities, particularly those related to the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and teacher training.

The text is organized into four sections, in addition to the introduction. The first section situates the study within the sociology of public action, clarifying the key concepts that underpin the discussion of the findings. The second section outlines the methodology adopted. The third section presents and discusses the results, covering: (i) teacher training policies in the context of the state's reconfigured role and new modes of educational regulation; (ii) the Bologna Process's recommendations, particularly regarding teacher certification and the design of initial teacher training; and (iii) the principal transformations observed in Portugal in pursuit of European convergence, including a comparative analysis of how these guidelines have been implemented in Portugal and other EHEA countries. The article concludes with succinct final remarks.

2. Transnational Regulation: The Role of Knowledge in Shaping Public Action

The article builds on the concept of policy as a form of public action (Commaille, 2004). We examine public education policies – "understood as communicational and social spaces in which different modes of relation with the educational world are expressed and interact" (Carvalho, 2006, p. 38) – as products shaped by the contributions of a constellation of actors, both state and non-state, throughout their formulation (Fontdevila, Verger & Avelar 2022).

This perspective challenges a linear, hierarchical view of governance processes in public policy analysis, enabling the observation of the multiple contexts involved and the relationships established among them. To this end, we adopt the concept of regulation, which encompasses both "the way in which the rules guiding actors' actions are produced and applied" (control) and "the way in which those same actors appropriate and transform those rules" (autonomy) (Barroso, 2006, p. 12). Particularly relevant is Barroso's (2006) concept of multiregulation, which highlights the multiplicity of regulatory dynamics at play, along with the adjustment and readjustment processes driven by the diverse logics of various actors operating across different scales and pursuing distinct interests (Barroso, 2006, p. 64). The generation and translation of knowledge, along

with the formulation and policy, enactments are deeply interconnected. Thus, our perspective involves examining the interplay between transnational regulatory processes in rule-setting and their reception within national contexts (Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006), highlighting the importance of contextual specificities, which must be analyzed in light of their unique characteristics and practices.

The activity of translation becomes central to the 'reading' and adaptation of scripts developed at the supranational level (see Callon, 1986; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996, 2005). Translation serves as a mediating process through which global ideas are interpreted, recontextualized, and reshaped to align with national and local contexts. It plays a central role in mediating the interplay between global policy frameworks and their enactment in national or organizational contexts, revealing how meaning, agency, and structure are co-constructed in the movement of ideas.

Therefore, translation is a dynamic and strategic process through which actors define roles, align interests, and build networks (Callon, 1986). It goes beyond adapting knowledge or practices, involving the mobilisation of actors, construction of legitimacy, and negotiation of meaning. Czarniawska and Sevón (1996, 2005) complement this by framing translation as the adaptation of practices, ideas, or knowledge between organisations or contexts. Rather than a literal transfer, it entails a transformation shaped by cultural, organisational, and situational factors, privileging contextual specificities in the reinterpretation of supranational scripts at the local level. By understanding knowledge as contextually situated, regardless of its origin or modes of circulation, we argue that its transfer entails continuous processes of reinterpretation and adaptation to specific sociopolitical and cultural settings (Nassehi, 2008; Sturdy, 2008). This perspective resonates with Steiner-Khamsi (2004, 2012), who asserts that policy borrowing is neither neutral nor linear but is instead shaped by selective appropriation and the strategic mobilisation of external references. In this view, knowledge does not circulate in a fixed or unaltered form; rather, it is continually reshaped through its interaction with local discourses, interests, and power dynamics, as also highlighted by Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) in their examination of the global flow of educational models.

Therefore, external models are not simply transplanted into national public policies but are instead reappropriated, reinterpreted, and adapted. In the sociological sense, these models are 'translated' (see Czarniawska & Sevon,1996, 2005), resulting in hybrid reconstructions that integrate both internal and external elements (see Hassenteufel, 2004).

Portugal's participation in the development of a European higher education policy in the field of teacher training serves as an illustration of the phenomena of policy transfer and translation. This takes place within the broader context of intensifying transnational regulatory processes and the emergence of a new global political arena (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004), characterised by the growing permeability of national contexts to external directives (Barroso, 2005; Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006) and the identification of 'cross-effects' between contexts (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a phenomenological-interpretative approach (Smith *et al.*, 2009), employing documentary analysis techniques (Asdal & Reinertsen, 2021) suitable for examining the content of documentary sources. The analysis covers the period from 1986, marked by the publication of Portugal's Basic Law on Education, which shaped

policies on teaching access and training before the Bologna Process, to the present day (2023), encompassing the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). To align with the study's objectives, the documents included in the sample were selected based on the following criteria: relevance to the research, public availability, credibility of the source (official or otherwise reliable), and temporal relevance.

The choice of the Basic Law of the Education System (Law No. 46/86, of 14 October) as the key temporal marker is methodologically justified by its role as a turning point in Portuguese educational policy, namely regarding the qualifications required for teaching. Before it was implemented, teaching qualifications ranged from a bachelor's degree to a licentiate degree, resulting in disparities among professionals across different levels of the non-higher education system.

The assembled corpus (Appendix 1) comprises a diverse range of materials, including national documents concerning the organisation of initial teacher education both before and after Portugal's adherence to the Bologna Process. These include legislative texts that are essential for analysing the impact of Portugal's integration into the Bolonha Process and for contextualising the temporal and social settings of the two periods under study. The corpus also contains press clippings and records of interventions by trade unions and professional associations. In addition, it includes international documents, such as guidelines from the Council of Europe (CE) for the education sector —including declarations issued by European intergovernmental platforms, recommendations on teacher education, and reports on the implementation of these guidelines in regions affected by the Bolonha Process —alongside other international texts deemed relevant to the study's objectives.

This methodological framework allows a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between national and transnational influences in the policies surrounding teacher training and access to the profession.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. European Higher Education Governance: Policy Convergence and Transnational Regulation

The late 20th century saw a growing influence of transnational regulatory processes on national policies, marked by increased openness to external participation. This shift drove significant reforms in the education sector, with policy-borrowing mechanisms (Ball, 2004) playing a central role in shaping national agendas. Key decisions increasingly occurred in supranational forums, where models, guidelines, and programmes were developed, fostering collective action through collaborations among diverse actors in movements, alliances, and campaigns (Antunes, 2007).

The Europeanisation of education, particularly higher education, is most prominently reflected in the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), within the framework of the European Education Area (EEA). This initiative was first articulated in the European Commission's 1995 White Paper on Education and Training, which called for policy convergence to address the challenges of globalisation (Ceia, 2015).

While reforms in European higher education were already underway during the 1990s, the Bologna Process accelerated these efforts, formalising the creation of the EHEA (Enders *et al.*, 2011; Keeling, 2006). The EHEA embodies a strategic vision for Europe

built on three key dimensions: fostering a shared European cultural identity, establishing mechanisms for supranational governance and geopolitical influence (Dale, 2009), and advancing the economic capitalisation of knowledge (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2001).

The creation of the EHEA led to the establishment of new transnational governance structures, including the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), an intergovernmental platform uniting education ministers from across Europe and the European Commission. Operating under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)[1], the BFUG is characterised by non-hierarchical relationships among its members, exemplifying the evolution of governance processes in Europe (Borrás & Jacobsson, 2004). An analysis of the documents issued by the intergovernmental platform highlights the expanded participation of other actors in the processes of reflection on higher education (Almeida & Costa, 2020). The achievement of ambitious goals in higher education requires coordinated efforts among different levels of governance and responsible entities. While higher education institutions play a central role, the structural and financial challenges they face go beyond their ability to resolve them independently. In this context, the ministers responsible for the sector recognize the need for comprehensive support and strategic decisions from national governments and European bodies, as emphasized in the following statement:

> "Ministers understand that there are obstacles inhibiting the achievement of these goals and these cannot be resolved by Higher Education Institutions alone. It requires strong support, including financial, and appropriate decisions from national Governments and European Bodies" (BD, 2003).

Currently, the EHEA provides for the involvement of diverse actors, classified into three categories: member, consultative member, and partner.

It is also evident that the guidelines produced by BFUG have been translated into various convergence strategies. These include the harmonisation of higher education cycles (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Dublin Descriptors, 2000; Prague Declaration, 2001; Berlin Declaration, 2003), the establishment of an equivalent degree system within the EHEA (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Prague Declaration, 2001; Berlin Declaration, 2007), the flexibilisation of academic pathways and training profiles (Bologna Declaration, 1999; Prague Declaration, 2001; Berlin Declaration, 2003; Leuven Declaration, 2009), and the facilitation of European mobility across countries and institutions (Prague Declaration, 2001; Berlin Declaration, 2003; ECTS, 2004; ERASMUS, European Parliament, and European Council, 2003).

In Portugal, the guidelines were incorporated into the legal framework governing higher education degrees and diplomas (Decree-Law No. 74/2006, of 24 March). This involved restructuring the previous four-degree system (bachelor's, licentiate, master's, and doctoral degrees) into a three-cycle system with shorter, standardised durations, requiring the elimination of the bachelor's degree:

> "The adoption of the three-cycle model for the organisation of higher education; the transition from an education system based on the transmission of knowledge to one based on competencies; the adoption of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), based on student workload" (Decree-Law No. 74/2006, of 24 March).

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1   Open Method of Coordination: "In the fields of Education and Training, Member States have agreed to work together through the 'open method of coordination' (OMC), whereby they fix common policy objectives and work to meet them by creating national plans, sharing good practices, setting benchmarks and monitoring progress statistical indicators. In this process, the European Commission plays the role of facilitator" (CE, 2007).

Regarding the new training pathways and profiles, it has been regulated through measures such as the diploma supplement and the recognition of prior learning (Decree-Law No. 42/2005, of 22 February; Ordinance No. 30/2008, of 10 January). In terms of mobility, initiatives like the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS, 2003) were reinforced, coordinated by a central agency with national branches, including Portugal's Erasmus+ Youth in Action National Agency (Council of Ministers Resolution No. 15/2014).

Similarly, the European convergence challenge is underpinned by a system of shared responsibility and "mutual oversight" (Carvalho, 2013; Carvalho & Costa, 2017), embodied in the creation of European and national agencies and the use of evaluation and accreditation as regulatory instruments. For instance, at the supranational level, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established, while in Portugal, a counterpart agency, the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES), was created (Decree-Law No. 369/2007, of 5 November):

> "The mission of A3ES is to ensure the quality of higher education in Portugal through the evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions and their study cycles, as well as through the performance of functions inherent to Portugal's integration into the European system of quality assurance in higher education.". (A3ES, nd).

Therefore, both the establishment of rules and the creation of mechanisms to verify their application within the context of the Bologna Process (e.g., A3ES, Decree-Law No. 369/2007, of 5 November) illustrate transnational governance mechanisms (Djelic & Sahlin-Anderson, 2006).

4.2. European Frameworks for Teacher Certification and Professional Entry

Teacher training has been recognised as a priority in European policies, highlighting teachers as "key actors in the way education systems evolve" (EC, 2005, p. 1). Thus, within the European framework, particular attention was given to policies regarding the teaching profession, emphasising the need to develop guidelines for European teachers. This is reflected in the progress report jointly produced by the European Council and the European Commission (EC, 2004).

In this context, the creation of common reference frameworks for professional qualifications, such as the European Qualifications Framework, was recommended, including a specific framework dedicated to teacher training:

> "This report recommended that European common references and principles in a few areas, including the competences and qualifications of teachers and trainers, should be developed 'as a matter of priority" (EC, p. 28).

Similarly, the implementation report of the Lisbon Strategy (EC, 2005) reiterated the need for standards in initial teacher education to address the contemporary educational challenges of modern societies. This was materialised in 2005 with the introduction of the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications (CEPTCQ, 2005, 2007) and the announcement of recommendations to improve teacher education (EC, 2007). Some view this focus on teacher training as an effort to standardise teacher education across Europe (Beijaard *et al.*, 2005).

It is worth noting that the CETCQ (2005) is structured around four key pillars: raising the qualification level required to enter the profession, embedding the profession within a lifelong learning framework, incorporating opportunities for professional mobility, and emphasising professional training based on partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) and educational settings. It also stipulates that access to the teaching profession requires certification at the higher education level through multidisciplinary courses. These courses encompass:

> "Extensive subject knowledge, a good knowledge of pedagogy, the skills and competences required to guide and support learners, and an understanding of the social and cultural dimension of education" (CEPTCQ, 2005, p. 2).

4.3. Portuguese Policies on Teacher Training Before Bologna

In Portugal, the Basic Law of the Education System (Law No. 46/86, of 14 October) was the first to formally stipulate that teaching qualifications could range from a bachelor's degree to a licentiate degree. This legal framework marked an important step in the regulation of teacher education. During the 1990s, there was a clear move towards raising academic standards for entry into the teaching profession that culminated in the approval of Law No. 115/97, of 19 September. This Law established the licentiate degree as the minimum academic qualification required to teach at all levels of non-higher education. This shift reflected broader efforts to professionalise teaching and align teaching with evolving European standards[2] (see Appendix 1). This represented a pivotal moment, as it standardised qualifications for educators across all levels of non-higher education and contributed to the enhanced social recognition of the teaching profession, regardless of the level at which teachers operated.

Initial teacher training was provided by polytechnic and university subsystems. Polytechnic institutions trained educators for early childhood and basic education (up to the sixth year), while universities trained teachers for grades 7 through 12. Both systems included a pedagogical-didactic component combined with real-world practice, enhancing the technical and pedagogical preparation of future teachers.

Although the licentiate degree requirement represented a significant milestone in professionalising the teaching career, "contradictory processes of deprofessionalisation (or proletarisation)" (Nóvoa, 1992, p. 18) persisted. For example, the strong intervention of the state in regulating initial teacher education, career paths, and professional standards limited the autonomy and self-governance of the teaching profession. By reducing teachers to the status of state-employed technicians, this dynamic hindered their professional autonomy and capacity for self-management.

4.4. Discursive Convergence, Practical divergence: Translation of Policies on the Teaching Profession

As previously argued, the challenge of European convergence lies in translating the supranational policies of Bolonha Process into national contexts. In Portugal, the alignment with common European standards is demonstrated by Decree-Law No. 42/2005, of 22 February, and subsequent regulations, including Ordinance No. 30/2008, of 10 January.

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2   Appendix 1 presents several documents including, in chronological order, the main legal instruments related to access to the teaching career and professional qualifications, approved in Portugal between 1986 and 2023.

In Portugal, alignment with common European standards is evidenced by Decree-Law No. 42/2005, of 22 February, and subsequent regulations, including Ordinance No. 30/2008, of 10 January. In the field of teacher training, particular emphasis has been placed on adapting European guidelines to the national context. This is illustrated in Appendix 1, which presents the key legislative measures that have shaped the teaching profession in the post-Bologna Process period.

This alignment is reflected in efforts to adapt to existing professional profiles, such as the General Profiles for all teaching cycles, and the Specific Performance Profiles for Early Childhood Educators and Primary School Teachers (Articles 8 and 9 of Decree-Laws No. 240/2001 and No. 241/2001, both of 30 August).

The changes introduced have given rise to a variety of effects, sparking debate and generating tensions. Compliance with the Bologna Process is embedded in the Legal Framework for Professional Qualification for Teaching (Decree-Law No. 43/2007, of 22 February), which introduced four significant changes. Firstly, it raised the minimum qualification required for entry into the teaching profession, establishing the universal requirement of a master's degree and replacing the previous possibility of entry with only a bachelor's degree. Secondly, it introduced new professional profiles, thereby broadening the pedagogical competencies expected of teachers. Thirdly, it outlined the curricular structures of Initial Teacher Training programmes, ensuring closer alignment with European guidelines. Lastly, it defined the core training components and allocated time to each, based on four key curricular elements: subject knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, learner guidance skills, and an understanding of social and cultural dimensions (Council of Europe, 2007).

Moreover, although the elevation of the required academic degree enhanced professional qualifications, it did not bring about significant changes to the overall duration of professional training or the length of initial teacher education programmes. Previously, teacher education led to a licentiate degree, typically completed over four to five years. In aligning national policy with European guidelines, the total duration of training remained essentially unchanged, with the qualification requirement shifting from a licentiate to a master's degree (Decree-Law No. 43/2007, of 22 February).

One of the main benefits of this measure for the teaching profession was the standardisation of the academic qualification required for educators and teachers across all levels of non-tertiary education in Portugal. This reform contributed to enhancing the professional status and social recognition of teachers, particularly those working in early childhood and primary education.

Likewise, the teacher training model was also impacted, shifting from an integrated structure to a sequential model organised into two distinct cycles. An important feature of this reform was the introduction of the bachelor's degree in Basic Education, which became a prerequisite for admission to master's programmes in teacher qualification. Characterised by a generalist orientation and the absence of a clearly defined professional profile, this model gave rise to tensions, particularly due to the separation between theoretical and practical components of training. This approach illustrates a hybrid adaptation of European directives to the national context, blending both internal and external elements in the reconfiguration of teacher education (Hassenteufel, 2004).

Also significant was the creation of new professional profiles. For the first time, it became possible to obtain simultaneous qualifications for teaching at multiple educational levels, such as early childhood education and the 1st cycle of Basic Education, or

teaching in the 1st and 2nd cycles across five subject areas (Decree-Law No. 43/2007). Decree-Law No. 43/2007 introduced significant changes to the Portuguese educational system, particularly regarding teaching qualifications. This legislation prioritizes a broader approach to educational levels and cycles, promoting greater mobility between them. As stated in the legal text:

> "In defining the domains of qualification for teaching, this new system prioritizes a broader scope of educational levels and cycles to enable greater mobility for teachers between them. This mobility allows teachers to accompany students for a longer period, facilitates the flexibility of human resource management within the education system, and enhances professional career trajectories" (Decree-Law No. 43/2007).

This perspective reflects an effort to align the needs of the education system with the dynamics of teachers' professional development, while promoting pedagogical continuity and more efficient human resource management. The reconfiguration is understood as a strategy to meet systemic needs by enabling teacher mobility and enhancing versatility. However, the introduction of the "super-teacher" role—qualified to teach multiple subject areas in the 2nd cycle—proved unsustainable and was repealed in 2014 (Decree-Law No. 79/2014, of 14 May).

These developments illustrate processes of policy translation and recontextualisation, characterised by both continuity and disruption.

Furthermore, the regulation of the Bologna Process also served as a pretext for reinforcing state intervention in the governance of the teaching profession. This is exemplified by the introduction of knowledge assessment exams as a prerequisite for entry into the profession (Regulatory Decree No. 3/2008, of 21 January). Despite the absence of explicit EU guidelines regarding qualification validation, the Portuguese government justified these measures as necessary for raising professional standards, as emphasised in the decree:

> "The changes introduced by this decree-law […] ensure that those obtaining permanent positions meet, beyond any doubt, all the requirements for the teaching profession, introducing a knowledge evaluation test as a prerequisite for applying to recruitment processes" (Decree-Law No. 15/2007, of January 19).

The implementation of the exam faced strong opposition from the teaching community. The Largest National Trade Union Federation highlighted:

> "Teachers made it clear, through protests, strikes, and petitions, that they wished to eliminate the career division, revoke the entrance exam, and reconsider the assessment model. […] The imposition of the exam exacerbates inequalities, discrimination, and injustices, as well as raising questions about its legality" (FENPROF, 2009).

The controversy persisted for years, as reported in the press:

> "The Knowledge and Skills Assessment Test (KSAT) sparked strong opposition: teachers organised protests, strikes, and boycotts, and the unions filed 20 precautionary measures against the test." (Newspaper Jornal de Notícias, 2014).

> "The administrative and tax courts (TAF) of Lisbon, Beja, Coimbra, and Ponta Delgada, on Tuesday, the day before the exams were due to begin, summoned the Ministry of Education and Science (MEC) following the interim measures filed by the unions (...) in an attempt to halt their implementation" (Newspaper Diário de Notícias, 2015).

The KSAT was perceived as a setback, subjecting teachers to state oversight, their primary employer, for the revalidation of their professional qualifications. This measure weakened teacher autonomy and undermined the reputation of training institutions. It was only in 2016 that the state reversed its position, repealing the KSAT (Law No. 16/2016, of 17 June).

In the context of discussions about the evaluation of qualified professionals, understanding the impact and justification of public policies becomes crucial. Specifically, the debate surrounding the implementation of KSAT to validate the competencies of already certified professionals raises questions about the effectiveness and legitimacy of such measures. In this regard, the National Federation of Teachers (FENPROF), in 2013, emphasized the importance of thoroughly understanding the profile of the professionals affected by these proposals, arguing that such analysis highlights the inconsistencies and potential harm of this approach:

> "It is essential for the deputies to truly understand who the professionals are that the government wants to subject to an "exam" to allegedly verify whether they meet the "minimum requirements" for practicing the profession for which they are qualified. A concrete understanding of these professionals' "profiles" is a strong argument to demonstrate the absurdity of this test" (FENPROF, 2013).

Having completed the description of Portugal's path in aligning with European standards, we now move on to analyse the effects of the Bolonha Process on the harmonisation of Higher Education in Europe.

4.5. Portugal in Europe: Harmonizing Policies on the Teaching Profession

The strategies adopted by Portugal in aligning with supranational guidelines for the EHEA and Initial Teacher Training highlight the delicate balance between adhering to common operational standards and preserving national traditions and unique characteristics. Recognizing that similar challenges have likely been faced by other EHEA member states, this section examines the impacts of transferring and adapting European directives within the Portuguese context, focusing on the realization of the overarching goal of harmonizing higher education across Europe.

This analysis unfolds in two key phases: first, by identifying trends in the approaches adopted by European countries to achieve the Bologna objectives; second, by positioning Portugal within these broader European trends. To guide the analysis, the following dimensions were established: recruitment processes, professional qualification requirements, duration of training, training models, and the supervised teaching practice component (Table 1)

Table 1.

European Trends in Initial Teacher Training vs. Portugal's Adaptations

Dimensions	European Trends	Portugal
Recruitment	• Open, decentralized recruitment at the local or school level.	Divergence Centralized recruitment. Open recruitment only available after the closure of national recruitment.
Professional Qualification	• General access requirements to higher education.	Divergence Specific requirements for access to the Mastr's degree for teacher qualification, with the minimum number of ECTS credits for each training component. Evaluation of written and oral proficiency in Portuguese language by the institutions. State regulation.
Training Duration	• Highly variable duration (between 2 and 5 years). • Typically requires a bachelor's degree for the first education levels (3 or 4 years), and between 4 and 5 years for the equivalent of the 2nd and 3rd cycles. • Typically requires a master's degree, with a 5-year duration for secondary education.	Divergence Duration between 4 and 5 years for all education levels. Master's degree required for all levels (France, Iceland, and Italy).
Initial Training Models	• Initial training organized into a general and a professional component.	Convergence Integrated model for Early Childhood Educators and Primary and Secondary Education.
	• Integrated model for Early Childhood Educators and Primary and Secondary Cycles.	Divergence Exclusively sequential model.
	• Variability in the model adopted for training teachers for the 3rd cycle.	Divergence Exclusively sequential model.
	• Sequential model (specialization in disciplinary areas).	Convergence
Supervised Teaching Practice Component	• Early Childhood Educators and Primary and Secondary Cycles – 1/3 practical component.	Convergence
	• 3rd cycle – Practical component lower than the previous cycles.	Convergence
	• Mandatory practical training component.	Convergence

Sources: CNE[3], 2016; Eurydice, 2013, 2014, legislation

The data support the idea that, despite many similarities in teacher training policies at both European and global levels, significant variation in their implementation persists, as previously noted by Schwille and Dembélé in 2007.

3   National Educational Council

As shown in Table 1, the European Commission's guidelines are interpreted in in varied ways, leading to a range of national solutions. This reflects the non-linear translation of European directives and highlights ongoing processes of reinterpretation and adaptation within specific national contexts (Nassehi, 2008; Sturdy, 2008). Moreover, the analysis reveals international trends that align with the Portuguese case, indicating progress towards greater harmonisation of higher education training in Europe, particularly in relation to teacher education policies.

In addition, international trends can be identified that align with the Portuguese case, signaling progress towards the harmonisation of higher education training across Europe, particularly in the field of teacher education policy. Firstly, convergence is evident in the structuring of courses into two components: general and professional training. Secondly, these convergence trends encounter challenges during adaptation, shaped by established national and institutional conceptions and practices regarding teaching and the teaching profession (Caena & Margiota, 2010).

Likewise, in line with European guidelines, all national contexts emphasize the requirement to include a real-world training component. The adoption of the sequential model for training non-generalist teachers, with a five-year duration for more advanced education levels, is also a common feature in initial teacher training policies across different European countries, including Portugal. Yet, despite efforts to promote alignment with common standards, full convergence has not been achieved. Divergences remain visible in access conditions and in Portugal's discontinuation of the integrated model for early childhood and primary teacher education. According to the National Education Council (CNE, 2016), the structure of initial teacher education across Europe in 2016 remained highly diverse, reflecting a range of national approaches to preparing future educators. Typically, teacher education programmes comprised two main components: a general academic component, focused on subject knowledge, and a professional component, which included practical training in schools.

For early childhood and primary education, the integrated model was the most prevalent across Europe. However, France and Portugal stood out for adopting exclusively a sequential model. In countries such as Ireland and Poland, both models were available, although the integrated approach was generally preferred. In England, by contrast, the sequential model was more commonly used (CNE, 2016).

At the lower secondary level, a more mixed picture emerged. In countries like Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Slovakia, and Turkey, only the integrated model was offered. Conversely, France, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Estonia, Cyprus, and Luxembourg provided only sequential programmes. In countries where both models coexisted, the integrated model tended to predominate (idem).

For upper secondary education, many countries offered both models. Some systems, such as those in Germany and Slovakia, relied exclusively on the integrated model across all education levels. In contrast, France and Portugal were among the few that maintained a fully sequential approach throughout the teacher education continuum (idem).

In Portugal, the departure from broader European trends is particularly evident in the adoption of a sequential training model across all levels of education. This marks a significant shift from the pre-Bologna Process tradition, which employed an integrated model for the training of early childhood educators and teachers of the 1st and 2nd cycles of Basic Education (CNE, 2016).

A critical issue in the context of teacher education for the early years is the separation between theoretical instruction and professional practice. While in most European countries a bachelor's degree constitutes the minimum qualification for entering the profession, Portugal mandates a master's degree as a universal requirement for early childhood educators and primary teachers, as stipulated in Decree-Law No. 43/2007:

> "The definition of professional qualification in the teaching domains covered by this decree-law continues to encompass the same level of professional qualification for all teachers, thereby maintaining the principle already adopted in the 1997 amendment to the Basic Law of the Educational System. With the restructuring of higher education study cycles in the context of the Bologna Process, this level will now correspond to a master's degree, demonstrating the effort to raise the qualification level of the teaching" (Decree-Law No. 43/2007, of February 22).

This option is adopted by only three other countries: France, Iceland, and Italy (CNE, 2016).

As of 2016, the duration and academic level of initial teacher education in Europe continued to vary significantly across countries. For early childhood education, most countries required a bachelor's degree, typically lasting three to four years. However, in Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Malta, and the Czech Republic, the required qualification could be at the upper-secondary or post-secondary level, with programme lengths ranging from two years in Malta to five years in Austria. By contrast, countries such as Portugal, France, Iceland, and Italy continued to require a master's degree, thus aligning the qualification level for early childhood education with that demanded for teaching at higher educational levels.

Significant differences in access to the profession also persist. In most European countries, teacher recruitment follows an open and decentralised model, typically managed at the local or institutional level (CNE, 2016; Rodrigues *et al.*, 2019), characterized by open recruitment as the predominant method for teacher hiring, with responsibility for filling vacancies delegated to local authorities or individual schools. Countries such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Hungary, Iceland, the Czech Republic, and Sweden use this decentralised approach. In contrast, in countries like Germany, Austria, Spain, France, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, and Portugal, schools have a more limited role in the teacher selection process. For example, in Denmark, recruitment is managed by local authorities who delegate the task to schools, while in Ireland, teachers apply directly to advertised vacancies within schools (CNE, 2016).

In contrast, Portugal continues to rely on the national recruitment system that existed prior to the Bologna Process. Only in specific cases, when the needs of certain schools are not met through national competition, can locally hiring mechanisms be activated, though these still adhere to state-determined rules. This divergence highlights the centrality of the Portuguese state in regulating the teaching profession, maintaining substantial control over both training and access to the profession, in contrast to other countries in the EHEA.

5. Final Remarks

Between the late 20th and early 21st centuries, teacher education policy in Portugal underwent profound transformations in regulatory approaches, marked by an intensification of transnational influences and characterised by processes of multiregulation (Barroso, 2005). Within the broader context of the Europeanisation of education (Radaelli, 2000; Grek & Lawn, 2009), sustained efforts have been made to develop common guidelines not only for the teaching profession but also across various sectors of education and training. These initiatives aim to harmonise educational standards and practices across Europe, fostering greater coherence and collaboration within the European Education Area. Such efforts include the establishment of frameworks like the European Qualifications Framework, which facilitates the comparability of qualifications across national systems, as well as the promotion of shared standards in teacher education and professional development.

The Bologna Process had a significant impact on teacher education policy in Portugal (Almeida, 2015), generating both convergence and divergences with European standards. Its implementation brought substantial changes to the structure, content, and regulation of initial teacher education. One of the most relevant outcomes was the elevation of the minimum academic qualification required to enter the teaching profession across all levels of non-tertiary education. This measure aimed to enhance the professional status and social recognition of teachers.

Structurally, the Bologna Process introduced a shift from an integrated to a sequential model of teacher education. While intended to align with European norms, this restructuring led to a fragmentation between theory and practice, as well as tensions surrounding unclear professional identities, namely in the first cycle of Basic Education. The Bologna Process also encouraged the development of broader teaching profiles and facilitated cross-level qualifications, increasing teacher mobility across educational stages. Additionally, it provided a pretext for expanded state regulation. This included the controversial introduction of the Knowledge and Skills Assessment Test (KSAT) as a requirement for entering the profession, measure that faced widespread opposition and was eventually repealed.

Despite efforts to converge with European trends, such as the inclusion of practical components and the adoption of broader curricular frameworks, Portugal diverged in the decision to require a master's degree for all levels of teaching, including early childhood education, a stance shared with only three other countries (France, Iceland, and Italy).

Another lasting consequence of the reform wave triggered by the Bologna Process has been the maintenance of a fully centralised teacher recruitment system. Unlike the decentralised models adopted in many European countries, Portugal continues to rely on a national competition-based approach, reinforcing the central role of the state in regulating both access to the profession and teacher education itself.

Moreover, there were processes of redefinition of the State's role, and changes in the involvement of various actors, both state and non-state, national and international, in the formulation of policies for the sector, which were characterised by the intensification of transnational regulation phenomena and the embodiment of multiregulation processes (Barroso, 2006).

The national response to the Bologna Process reflects the influence of discourse generated by supranational bodies. Nevertheless, given the diversity of sources, forms, and

contents of knowledge at hand, the process of selecting which information to use (or not) is subordinated to political logics, interests, and power dynamics (Barroso, 2006, p. 989). Thus, we observed processes of recontextualization of European guidelines through reinterpretation (Nassehi, 2008; Sturdy, 2008), which serve to preserve national and institutional traditions and achievements (Neave, 2003), as well as professional legacies.

As demonstrated, the Bologna Process marks a transformation in the regulation of teacher profession-related policies, not only in Portugal but across member countries. Transnational regulation has been intensified in support of a unified Europe. The voluntary nature of national participation in the Bologna Process, along with the use of soft regulatory mechanisms and instruments (Jacobsson& Sahlin-Andersson, 2006) by European agencies, ultimately becomes an inevitability or 'compulsory option' (Nóvoa, 2010), driven by the commitment to a European identity space.

Phenomena of discursive convergence can be observed due to membership in a European identity space. However, the findings reveal the presence of national identity markers in the processes of translating external guidelines, processes that are historically contingent (Popkewitz, 2000). Differences emerge in the interplay between the transnational, collective dimension and national contexts. Tensions between commitments made at the supranational level and national heritage and legacy become apparent, resulting in the incorporation of knowledge that is "more symbolic than real" (Barroso, 2006).

Seizing the momentum of change brought by the Bologna Process, the incorporation of the State's reformist agendas (along with those of other actors) is clear in the translation and contextualisation of policies. Thus, ongoing movements, characterised by continuities and discontinuities, translation and retranslation, contextualisation and recontextualisation of knowledge, are observed in the dialectical processes and adjustments between the actors.

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Appendix 1

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Legal Framework for Teacher Training and Recruitment in Portugal (1986–2023)

Year	Legal Document	Summary
1986	Law No. 46/86, of October 14	Basic Law of the Education System – establishes, among its principles, initial higher education teacher training.
1989	Decree-Law No. 344/89, of October 11	Legal framework for initial and continuous training of early childhood educators and basic and secondary education teachers. Defines professional qualification for entering the teaching profession: bachelor's for early childhood and 1st cycle teachers; licentiate for 2nd, 3rd cycles and secondary education teachers.
1990	Decree-Law No. 139-A/90, of April 28	Career Statute for Early Childhood Educators and Basic and Secondary Education Teachers (ECD) – establishes the rule of competitive examination as the standard and mandatory recruitment method.
1997	Law No. 115/97, of September 19	Establishes the licentiate degree as the minimum qualification for professional certification for all teachers.
AFTER BOLONHA PROCESS		
2001	Decree-Law No. 240/2001, of August 30	Approves the professional performance profile of early childhood educators and basic and secondary school teachers.
2001	Decree-Law No. 241/2001, of August 30	Approves specific professional performance profiles for early childhood educators and 1st cycle teachers.
2007	Decree-Law No. 15/2007, of January 19	Amends and republishes the Teacher Career Statute. Introduces an evaluation exam as a requirement for candidates applying for permanent teaching positions.
2007	Decree-Law No. 43/2007, of February 22	Legal regime for professional qualification for teaching in pre-school and basic and secondary education. Introduces a sequential model of study cycles and requires a master's degree for qualification.
2012	Decree-Law No. 132/2012, of June 27	Establishes the recruitment and mobility system for basic and secondary school teachers and specialized technicians, using professional graduation (classification and service time) as the ranking criterion.
2014	Decree-Law No. 79/2014, of May 14	Approves the legal regime for professional qualification for teaching in pre-school and basic and secondary education.
2014	Decree-Law No. 176/2014	Introduces English as a mandatory subject from the 3rd year of schooling. Defines qualifications to teach English in the 1st cycle and creates a new recruitment group.
2016	Law No. 16/2016, of June 17	Repeals the knowledge and skills assessment exam.
2018	Law No. 16/2018, of March 7	Creates the Portuguese Sign Language recruitment group.
2023	Decree-Law No. 32A/2023, of May 8	Regulates teacher recruitment and selection procedures for pre-school and basic and secondary education. Also addresses internal mobility, annual teacher management in public schools, and hiring of specialized training technicians.
2023	Decree-Law No. 80A/2023, of September 6	Establishes minimum scientific training requirements for disciplinary areas of recruitment groups and selection of post-Bologna teachers in school recruitment procedures.
2023	Decree-Law No. 112/2023, of November 29	Amends the legal regime for professional teaching qualifications. Updates Decree-Law No. 79/2014, Decree-Laws No. 176/2014, 16/2016, and 16/2018.
2023	Decree-Law No. 139-B/2023, of December 29	Regulates recruitment for pre-school, basic, and secondary education teachers in Portuguese schools abroad, managed by the Ministry of Education and respective centers.

(adp, CNE, 2024)