

# IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS: HOW TO RESPOND TO TRAINING NEEDS?

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## Abstract

Teachers' training has a long tradition in Portugal, since the creation of the Normal Schools until the publication of the Basic Education Law, which received a broad consensus in Portuguese society [1], namely in Article 35. In the context of in-service teacher training, some changes took place, being relevant what occurred with Decree-Law no. 127/2015 [2], for the present work, which establishes the Legal Regime of Schools Association Training Centers (SATC), within which the Training and Monitoring Section (TMS) was created.

With the publication of [2], namely in articles 11 and 12, which defines the SATC direction and management structures, the TMS assumes an essential role in the coordination, pedagogical supervision and follow-up of the training plan and activities of the SATC. Reflecting this structure, the training plans of each of the associated schools, represented by the school grouping head for the training plan.

According to Barroso and Canário [3], SATC plays a fundamental role in the contextualization of in-service teacher training, constituting a "school-centred" training mechanism and assuming as relevant the teaching establishment as a founder of needs and professional contexts as a privileged field of professional development.

In this research, we aim to understand the role of TMS and its contributions to the development of educational projects of the school grouping and the monitoring of training plans. Thus, we opted by a quantitative approach, supported by a questionnaire survey (n = 170), structured in a set of open and closed questions in *google forms*, sent to the elements of the monitoring and evaluation section, for further statistical treatment with SPSS and content analysis.

Keywords: in-service teacher training, training needs, continuing professional development.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The exercise of the teaching profession currently faces considerable uncertainty. Current times derive from significant, fast and discontinuous transformations, emerging in a complex and global plan dominated by trans-nationalization, linked to the international organizations' builders of destabilizing regulatory standards of the national states.

When Harari [4] refers to this society, he raises the question of the contents that children should or could be taught to face future complexity. For the author, the solution is not the elaboration of programs that are quite well prepared at the scientific, educational and technological level, but according to Harari, based on experts, the school must change its model and start teaching "the four Cs":

*"...critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. From a broader perspective, schools should pay less attention to technical skills and emphasize multipurpose life skills. Above all, it will be the ability to cope with change, to learn new things and to preserve mental balance in new situations. To keep pace with the world in 2050, we will need, not only to invent new ideas and new products but above all reinvent ourselves over and over again [4] (p. 262).*

This seems to be the scenario of the teaching profession: finding a line that can lead to firmer and promoting land; because the problematic situations that pervade schools and that condition the exercise of the job is varied and sometimes not recognized, although the media relays the amount of success - accountability - rather than the quality of the practice and addresses the issue from a holistic perspective.

In this context, teacher training, and in particular in-service teacher training, plays a crucial strategic role in responding to emerging global changes and the specific needs arising in each local context. Nowadays, in-service teacher training must be strictly linked to learning contexts, assuming itself as a centre of change for school and, especially, at school [3].

However, the analysis of training needs is not an isolated process, but a structured process to decide which the objectives, modalities of training and programs are. We must note that the choice of instruments and the processing of information are crucial to obtain valid information to supply the needs - individual, group and organizational.

In Portugal, with the publication of Decree-Law No. 249/92 [5], which approves the first In-Service Teacher Training Legal Regime, the institutionalization of a continuous training system at national level begins [6], with strong local roots, based on the networking of public schools, supported by state financial programs. After these years, the 21st century comes with the publication of Decree-Law No. 22/2014 [7], which empowers School Association Training Centers (SATC) [2], looking forward to a new paradigm of in-service teacher training.

In this regard, it is essential to study the ability of the SATC to react, and in particular their Training and Monitoring Section (TMS), as a scientific - pedagogical body of strategic direction, coordination, supervision and monitoring of the Training Plan and the activity plan of the SATC, in a time of professional demotivation, of national and international requests, of new ways of learning and teaching, of the absence of the family in the construction of the formative paths of their children.

TMS represents a privileged "locus" in the dissemination and implementation of training appropriate to the territory and focused on individual and organizational needs. The training section is, therefore, one of the innovations in the new legal framework by setting up a coordinating, supervising and monitoring body, where the heads of the training plans of each school are represented.

One of TMS's prerogatives and objectives is the articulation between schools and CFAE through the cluster formation plan, a document issued by the Pedagogical Council, intending to update and train teaching staff. The permeability between the cluster training plan and the SATC training plan allocates to the latter the ability to adjust the defined priorities, constituting a training network and experiences due to their connectivity.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

This paper presents the results of a study that aimed to investigate and find possible answers to the following problem:

*What is the role of the TMS in constructing the training plan of the SATC training plans and the articulation between these and the training plans of the school clusters, asking the role that this new structure plays in the development of in-service teacher training?*

To answer this problem, we developed a quantitative methodology in which a questionnaire survey was used. To operationalize the questionnaire application, we sent a link from the questionnaire made in Google Forms, requesting to be forwarded to TMS members. Confidentiality of data and anonymity of responses was ensured using a coding process.

The population for application of the questionnaire was constituted by TMS members of each Portuguese school (N = 982). Concerning the sample, 170 questionnaires were returned (n = 170), which corresponds to a return rate of 17.3%.

It turns out 67.5% of respondents are female. In terms of professional experience, most have between 26-30 and 31-35 years, respectively, 25.3% and 25.9%. In terms of age, mostly between the age group 51-55 and 56-60, totalling these ranges 57.6%. The graduate degree is the most representative in the TMS members - 57.6%, followed by a master degree with 40%, denoting a substantial investment in training. Respondents assume that they have an active role in middle management school positions, 34.7% are members of the pedagogical council; 33.5% are department coordinators. 51.8% are accredited trainers. In the last five years, 50.6% completed more than three actions as

trainers and, as a trainee, 57.1% attended 61 hours of training in the same period, being this training participated in the course modality 86.5%.

For statistical analysis of the data, they were exported to an Excel database and then transported to a statistical program database Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 24.0 for Windows. Descriptive analysis was performed to characterize the sample (frequencies and relative frequencies). To verify the existence of relationships between variables, we used the calculation of the correlation coefficient Spearman's Rho. As an appropriate coefficient one intends to measure the intensity of the relationship between ordinal variables, and its value varies between -1 and 1, and, the closer to these extremes, the higher the linear association between the variables.

### 3 RESULTS

Concerning the participation level in the training needs assessment, it turns out that the majority of surveyed TMS members had active participation (66.5%), and only one element had no participation (1.8%).

*Table 1. Degree of participation in training needs assessment*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
I had no participation.	3	1,8
I had a punctual participation.	27	15,9
I had an active participation.	113	66,5
I had full responsibility.	27	15,9
Total	170	100,0

*Table 2. Type (s) of instrument (s) used for training needs assessment*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Document Analysis	66	38,8
Interview	22	12,9
Focusing group	17	10,0
Questionnaire survey	102	60,0
None	6	3,5
Other	30	17,6

The training actions contained in the Training Plan were mainly prepared by the responsible of the Training Plan of each school (60.6%), by the director of SATC (58.8%), by TMS (49.4 %) and by the trainer (s) (47.1%).

*Table 3. Responsible for preparing the training actions contained in the Training Plan.*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Action assigned by another SATC	39	22,9
SATC's Director	100	58,8
Trainer (s)	80	47,1
Other	13	7,6
Teachers	44	25,9
Responsible for the Training Plan of each cluster or non-clustered school	103	60,6
Training and Monitoring Section	84	49,4

When asked if the training plan of school responds to the identified training needs, about half of respondents say that this plan "responds" (51.2%) and 31.8% "partially responds". Note that only three respondents (1.8%) consider that the Training Plan "does not respond" to identified needs.

Table 4. Response of training plan of cluster or non-clustered school.

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Does not respond	3	1,8
Responds	87	51,2
Partially responds	54	31,8
Fully responds	26	15,3
Total	170	100,0

Regarding the response of the SATC Training Plan to the training needs of the school, the majority say they answer (61.2%) and about a quarter of respondents report that they respond partially. Responses to the "Responding" and "Partially Responding" sections concentrate the highest adherence; 1.8% even say that the SATC Training Plan "Does Not Respond" to cluster needs.

Table 5. Response of SATC training plan to training needs of cluster or non-clustered school.

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Does not respond	3	1,8
Responding	104	61,2
Partially responding	43	25,3
Fully responding	20	11,8
Total	170	100,0

Regarding the contribution of TMS to the contextualization of training, there is a clear tendency towards territorialization, with 59.4% of participants showing this contribution and only 1.2% say that there is no contribution of the training to the contextualization.

Table 6. Contribution to training contextualization

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Actively Contributed	101	59,4
Partially Contributed	50	29,4
Total Contribution	17	10,0
No contribution	2	1,2
Total	170	100,0

A high number of respondents corroborate that TMS "actively contributed" and "partially contributed" to the articulation between the SATC and the schools, totalling 82.4%, keeping up the 1.2% that say "Not Contributed". 64.7% of participants consider that TMS is responsible for the articulation of schools with SATC and 17.6% understand that this articulation happens only partially.

Table 7. TMS contribution to better articulation between SATC and clustered schools and non-clustered schools in the articulation and development of Educational Projects

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Actively Contributed	89	52,4
Partially Contributed	51	30,0
Total Contribution	28	16,5
No contribution	2	1,2
Total	170	100,0

Overall, respondents accept that they had a high degree of participation in the impact assessment of training, respectively, 50.0% consider that they had active participation. On the other hand, 10.6% had no intervention or participation.

*Table 8. Degree of participation in training impact assessment*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
I had no participation	18	10,6
I had full responsibility	6	3,5
I had an active participation	85	50,0
I had a punctual participation	61	35,9
Total	170	100,0

On the other hand, respondents highlight diversity in the collection tools to evaluate the impact of training, but the questionnaire survey unambiguously emerges as the most widely used tool (63.5%). Even so, 12.9% say they do not use any instrument.

*Table 9. Type of tools used in training impact assessment*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Document Analysis	69	40,6
Interview	13	7,6
Focusing group	15	8,8
Questionnaire survey	108	63,5
None	22	12,9
Other	5	2,9

Concerning participation in the definition of guidelines for recruitment and selection of trainers, respondents state that they had one-off participation (40.6%) and those who had no participation (30.6%).

*Table 10. Participation in trainer's recruitment and selection*

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
I had no participation	52	30,6
I had an active participation	49	28,8
I had a punctual participation	69	40,6
Total	170	100,0

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

On this paradigm of school-centred training, TMS reflects the ambition to refocus on the needs of the professionals and the organization, making it a permanent process in constant questioning, aiming student success. Its main objective is, on the one hand, to increase the responsiveness of training plans to the real needs of teachers and schools and, on the other hand, to reinforce the impact of continuing education in the schools themselves, focusing on the work teachers do in the classroom.

Anchoring the needs assessment and extrapolating it to the SATC training plans seems to be the strong points of TMS, which plays an important role from conception to the training impact assessment, either individually or collectively. The results of our study reveal greater participation of schools and teachers and a more exceptional ability to respond to the real and specific needs felt in each school.

In this sense, TMS's contribution to school autonomy seems to be evidenced by the level of participation of the representative of the Training Plan of each associated school, taking into account their professional experience and academic skills. TMS thus increases the degree of territorialisation and contextualization of training, allowing continuing education to focus on practical classroom problems.

Their willingness to put themselves in the role of trainer and trainee reveals that TMS members, despite the problem of teacher ageing, are relevant to the dynamics of the schools and configures a change in the relationship with SATC. Similarly, it is essential to note that TMS members are academically qualified professionals and with a remarkable experience, which enhances their ability to respond to the needs of schools.

However, the results show that it is necessary to bet on the scientific qualification of TMS members. Notwithstanding the above-mentioned academic qualifications and experience, TMS has to face relatively specific problems and some degree of technical demand, such as the construction of training monitoring and evaluation processes.

Therefore, TMS brings together a set of potentials that should be exploited, which will depend on how the schools themselves value the role of their representative, not as a mere agent of communication, but as an active, critical and facilitative actor in the construction of training plans based on the problems, ambitions and needs of the teaching profession in this 21st century.

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