

CHOOSING SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN TOCANTINS: clientelism as opposed to democratic education management

Escolha de diretores (as) escolares no Tocantins: clientelismo em contraposição à gestão democrática da educação

Elección de los directores de escuela en Tocantins: clientelismo frente a gestión democrática de la educaci3n

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this work is to correlate the democratic management of education with the choice of principals in the state of Tocantins in the period from 2015 to 2023, with regard to the implementation and fulfillment of goal 19 of the PNE, notably strategy 19.1, which deals with the approval of specific legislation that regulates the democratic management of education, guaranteeing the election of school principals. The research is based on a critical perspective, carried out by means of an empirical documentary survey and a bibliographical review. The results show that in the state of Tocantins, there are still challenges for the democratization of educational management, as advocated by the critical and progressive field of education, when it comes to the choice of school principals, since political appointments to the positions of principals of school units in the state education network still predominate.

KEYWORDS Democratic management; Choice of school principals; Clientelism.

Introduction

The work in question is part of the results of the research for the Course Conclusion Work (TCC¹), which deals with the materialization of goal 19 of the National Education Plan (PNE), specifically strategy 19.1, which prioritizes the transfer of financial

resources from the union to the federated entities,¹ subject to the approval of specific legislation that regulates the democratic management of education and guarantees the choice of school principals.

In this essay, we present the results of the research into the actions of the state of Tocantins with regard to the implementation and fulfillment of goal 19 of the PNE, particularly strategy 19.1, which consists of the approval of specific legislation regulating the democratic management of education and guaranteeing the choice of school principals within the school units of the state education network.

School principals play a very important role in the school community and in the collective organization of the environment, since one of their tasks at the head of the school is to achieve the objectives so sought after by educators in Brazil who are looking for a quality, dialectical and democratic education, facing up to the major challenges it has brought us in recent years in the country.

However, in order for school principals to exercise their roles and make a significant contribution to the school community and the education of students, public managers need to act between the lines of the federal constitution, education norms and guidelines, which emphasize democratic management, and not through appointments by the executive branch.

According to (Dourado, 1990), these appointments are characterized as a form of clientelism and "one of the most widely adopted by the authorities, the product of which is the transformation of the school into what in everyday political language can be called an 'electoral corral' crystallized by the politics of favouritism and the marginalization of opposition".

In this case, the principal's role is that of a legitimate representative of the executive in schools, which immobilizes the opening of legitimate channels of participation, as the principal does not need the support of the school community, thus working in a situation that in itself instrumentalizes authoritarian practices. (Dourado, 1990 p.104).

The laws and guidelines for Brazilian education emphasize the choice of school principals as one of the mechanisms for the democratic management of education, and the PNE, specifically its goal 19 and strategy 19.1, corroborates this:

19.1 prioritize the transfer of voluntary transfers from the Union in the area of education to the federated entities that have approved specific legislation regulating the matter in the area of their scope, respecting national legislation, and that jointly consider, for the appointment of

¹ Capstone presented by Ronaldo Muniz Silva on 22/12/2023 to obtain the degree in Pedagogy. Pedagogy course offered by the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT), Palmas Campus. Palmas, TO, Brazil.

school principals, technical criteria of merit and performance, as well as the participation of the school community. (Brazil, 2014).

We became interested in the subject because we are members of the Program for the Institutionalization and Management of Municipal Teaching/Education Systems (PRISME²), in the Tocantins Collaboration Network (RCT). We also participated in and discussed meetings as members of the Municipal Education Study, Research and Extension Group (GepeEM) and the Observatory of Education Systems and Plans in Tocantins (ObsPE), both linked to the Federal University of Tocantins (UFT).

The research is based on a critical perspective (Triviños, 1987), carried out through an empirical documentary survey and bibliographic review, using for this purpose the approach of theorists such as Lagares et. al (2020) Lagares and Coutinho (2017), Marx (2005), Gramsci (2020), Dourado (1990), Paro (1996), Luce (2006).

The research sought to answer the question of how the state of Tocantins acts with regard to target 19, specifically strategy 19.1, which is the approval of specific legislation regulating the democratic management of education and guaranteeing the choice of school principals. The aim of this research was to correlate the democratic management of education with the choice of principals in the state of Tocantins.

In this article, in addition to the introduction, we have organized the results of the research into two sections; the first discusses management in education from a democratic perspective; and the second section, the understandings regarding the choice of school principals and clientelist practices in education based on the results of the research in relation to the actions of the executive branch of the state of Tocantins when it comes to choosing school principals.

Education management from a democratic perspective

Since the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, in its art. 206 and contemplated in LDB 9.394/96, which advocate the principle of Democratic Management of Education, this concept has become a much-discussed topic among educators and researchers in the country, especially when it comes to overcoming historical, conservative issues that are culturally entrenched in Brazilian society.

² PRISME is a program developed in the municipalities of Tocantins, by adhesion. It plays an extremely important role in provoking the participating municipalities to look at their realities from a different perspective, and also to understand and critically analyze the weaknesses, challenges and achievements in the municipality, engaging in a more participatory dialogue with regard to the autonomy of management and education systems.

According to the subjects' theoretical and political backgrounds, democratic management is seen as both liberal and popular. (Coutinho and Lagares, 2017) point out that "democratic management is full of dilemmas, where we find oppositions and glimpse possibilities. These are conflicting forces that coexist and tension the democratic process".

The founding principles of democratic management are the participation of the entire community, transparency and autonomy for its materialization in municipal education systems, pluralism of ideas and decentralization of actions in the educational environment such as equal access, permanence and appreciation of education professionals and financial management concerning education/schools.

'Democratic management' is an expression that can be understood from various angles, because from the Manifesto of the Pioneers of New Education to the current context, it has become broader in terms of its historical dimension in relation to Brazilian education. However, it was from the 1970s onwards that a large number of workers fought to demand social improvements in order to guarantee their children the right to quality public education, due to high dropout rates, failure rates, the structural inadequacies of institutions for this public, poor training and a lack of appreciation for education professionals.

However, around the 1980s, these professionals spearheaded nationwide movements with the aim of gaining rights regarding the valorization and career plans of the category. Because of all these tensions between workers and the Brazilian elite, during this process the concepts understood as public (social field) are debated, focusing on the struggles of the lower classes from a socialist or Marxist perspective, and the liberal side with a private bias linked to the ruling class.

We understand that these disputes between the working classes and the bourgeoisie gave rise to a form of government known as Liberal Democracy³, whose characteristics are the representation of the population through the vote. According to Luce (2006), in liberal democracy, the electorate is homogenized and the center of debate is the norms of the democratic process, reduced to the elections of political elites.

From a critical perspective, Marx (2005) emphasizes that all of history has been about struggles between "[...] the oppressed/exploited classes, i.e., the workers, who demand radical transformations from the ruling class that exploits and oppresses them

³ This type of "democracy" is defined as a dominant democracy, considered to be one that defends the predominantly elitist interests enabling them to govern, based on the social contexts and vulnerability of the dominated classes, who are the vast majority.

in order to free themselves from their oppressor". Although Marx in the Communist Manifesto, as a historical document, proposed the disappearance of modern bourgeois property, what we have seen in the Brazilian context in recent years has been a regression and weakening by a large part of the working class towards the bourgeoisie, these stimulated by neoliberal governments that have become presidents, resembling the defeat of the proletariat in France in 1848.

Gramsci (2020) points out that it is through the struggles of the two classes in the capitalist world (dominated and dominant) that history is produced in the world. In other words, the working class feels helpless in terms of what is basic for its subsistence in the capitalist world in which we live, which is why there is tension against the bourgeoisie in order to improve conditions and guarantee rights.

The struggle forces the bourgeoisie to improve production techniques, to make production more useful so that their most urgent needs can be met. It's a relentless race towards the best, which accelerates the pace of production and continually increases the sum of goods that serve the community. In this race, many fall, making the impetus of the survivors more poignant, and the mass always living on edge, the people-chaos becomes more and more the ordered thought, ever more aware of its own power, its own capacity to assume social responsibility, and become the arbiter of its own destiny (Gramsci, 2020, p.89).

In contrast to the model of liberal democracy (Luce, 2006), the concept of participatory and popular democracy emerged, which demands action from social groups that are culturally and historically excluded from Brazilian society. This type of democracy is aimed at human relations with participation in a dialogical and democratic way in order to resolve the social, cultural and economic problems that exist in the country.

As such, participatory democracy is defined as the breaking of paradigms and ideological ruptures that are eminently conservative and authoritarian and that have lasted for generations on Brazilian soil. With this, we understand democracy as social participation in a dialogical and democratic way, enabling the population to feel a sense of belonging, of living together in society, agreeing and disagreeing, but also understood as a space for struggle.

Historically, Brazilian education has been marked by countless disputes between the subjects involved, revealing the challenges of materializing the founding principles of democratic management in the educational space, (Lagares et al, 2020) "emphasize that democratic management is the tension between different conceptions and the dispute in the construction of another reality".

As (Coutinho and Lagares, 2017) point out, democratic management is the mediation of conflicts, listening to opposing projects, a tensioning effort to formulate antithesis and synthesis:

the possibility of dealing with mistaken choices, even if they are collective, in order to learn from one's own mistakes. On a daily basis, it means confronting the dilemmas arising from a process that takes place in the midst of diverse conceptions and societal projects, sensitized to the idea that the chances are constitutive of the dilemmas themselves (Coutinho and Lagares, 2017, p.845).

Paraphrasing Luce (2006), as was previously understood about democracy and participation, we continue with these concepts for the educational sphere, since this field is essential in the citizenship formation of subjects both in the philosophical, political, socio-cultural, ideological sense, as well as in making decisions about the interests of education as a universal common good and school as a social space for transformation through human relations in which various types of participation can occur.

However, some subjects are excluded from the democratic process, refuting art. 1, sole paragraph of the Federal Constitution (Brazil, 1988), which states that all power emanates from the people, who exercise it through elected representatives or directly, thus, the democratic field as well as other strands have their contradictions and dilemmas about their principles.

Choosing principals: clientelist practices in education in Tocantins

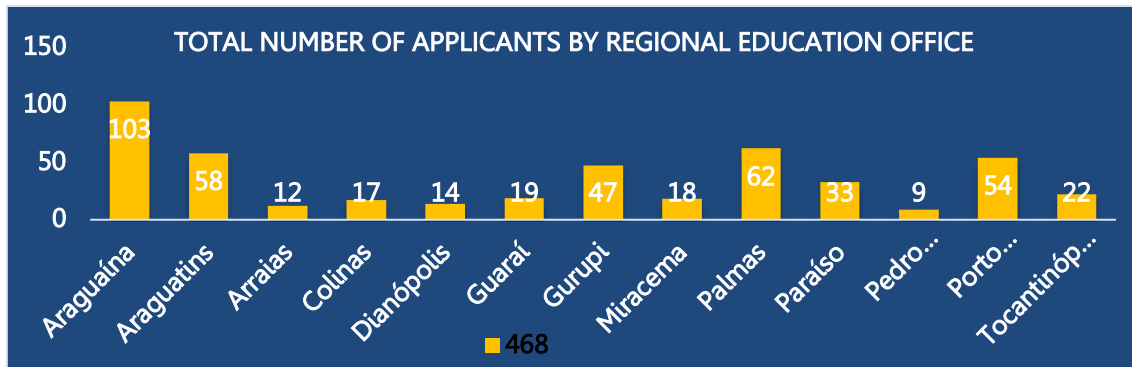
With regard to the choice of school principals in the state of Tocantins, we searched for concrete elements in relation to the behavior of managers in terms of compliance with legislation concerning state education, from the beginning of the PNE period (2014-2024), with a time frame of 2014 to 2023.

In the meantime, we found documents from 2017 in which the State Department of Education (SEDUC) made public the opening of the Selection Process to subsidize the choice of school principals for the Tocantins State Education Network, through Notice 001/2017 (SEDUC, 2017) and Decree 5.645, of May 30, 2017, published in the Official State Gazette No. 4.883, of June 7, 2017.

The announcement included the following stages as requirements for the position: Stage I - Technical Competence Assessment / Objective Test; Stage II - School Management Plan (delivery and evaluation); Stage III - Presentation of

Titles and Stage IV - Interview with candidates. Below we have systematized the information relating to the above-mentioned selection process.

Graph 1 - Applications for the Selective Process for Choosing Principals in Tocantins in 2017



Source: Tocantins State Government/SEDUC (2017)

Table 1 - Results of the Selection Process - SEDUC/2017

Total number of applicants - 468	Qualified	Disqualified
Stage I - Competency Assessment and Objective Test	200	268
Stage II - School Management Plan	174	26
Stage III - Presentation of Titles	158	16
Stage IV - Interview		
Results of the selection process	158 successful candidates	

Source: Tocantins State Government/SEDUC (2017)

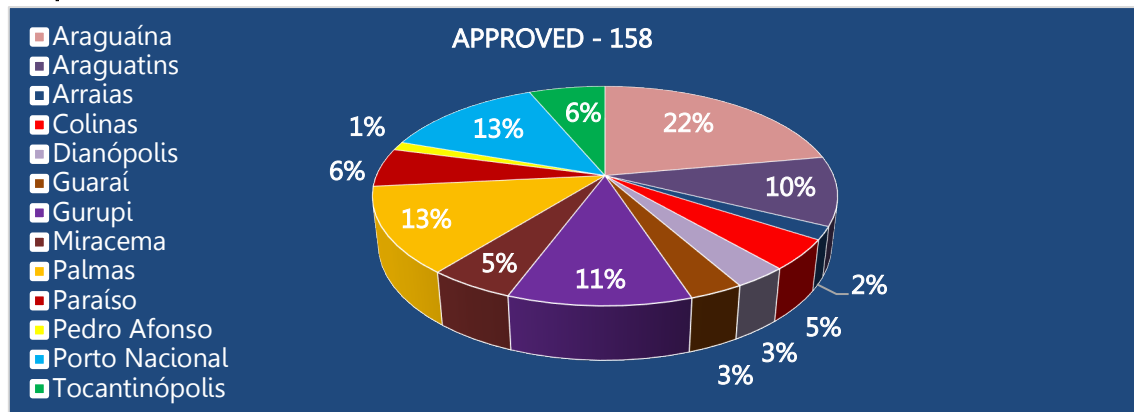
After analyzing the notices and annexes referring to the selection process for choosing school principals in 2017 in the state of Tocantins, we learned that there were 468 applicants for the position. Of these, we listed the number of registrations by regional school boards, in which the regional board with the largest number of state school units had the most registrants, the Araguaína regional board with 103, followed by the Palmas regional board with 62 registrants, as shown in Graph 1.

We can see that of the 468 applicants, only 200 managed to advance to Stage II. Consequently, in Stage II, only 174 advanced to Stages III and IV, which involve the presentation of qualifications and interviews. The data also shows that of the 174 candidates, only 158 managed to pass the Selection Process, the 16 disqualified did not comply with item 12.7 of Notice 001/2017 - SEDUC, which provides for the elimination from the selection process of candidates who do not attend the interview or who score

less than 70 (seventy) points in the Interview. Of those approved, we found average scores of between (53.76) points and (71.58) points.

We also listed the number of people approved by the state's 13 regional schools, with Araguaína (22%), Palmas and Porto Nacional (13%) standing out from the others, as the following graph shows.

Graph 2 - Successful candidates in the Selection Process - SEDUC/2017



Source: Tocantins State Government/SEDUC (2017)

In this first selection process for principals, held after the beginning of the current PNE, the state of Tocantins disregards strategy 19.1 of the plan, when it does not include the participation of the school community in the process. Also noteworthy is the low number of candidates approved, only 158 out of more than 400 school units. As a result, the state continues with undemocratic practices in choosing principals, perpetuating the old culture of political appointment.

Then, only in 2023, did the state of Tocantins carry out the second process of choosing principals in the time frame of the research, by means of Decree No. 6.644 of July 4, 2023, published in the Official State Gazette (DOE) No. 3.6364, in which Governor Wanderlei Barbosa Castro instituted the technical criteria to support the choice of principals for the state school system, once again without contemplating community participation.

Still not observing the educational legislation in force, on June 7, 2024, two ordinances were instituted by SEDUC-TO that created commissions and subcommittees to deal with matters related to the choice of school principals at the state level - SEDUC ORDINANCES No. 804 and 805, that is, fostering clientelist practices in the state with objectives contrary to what we advocate:

Art. 1 - TO CONSTITUTE the State Commission made up of civil servants assigned to the Education Secretariat and will have the following attributions:

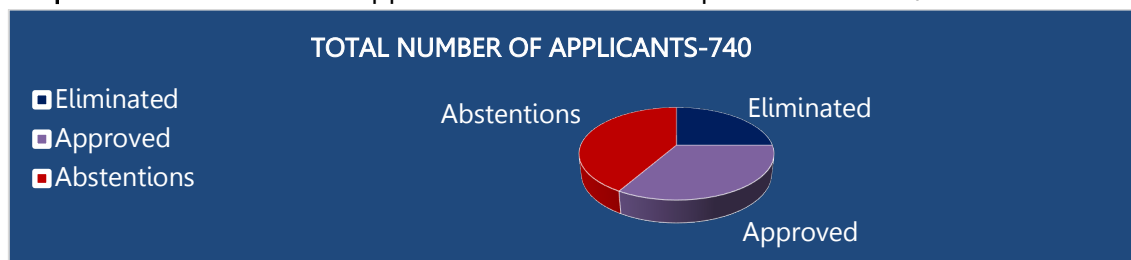
- a) To guide, coordinate, analyze and evaluate the procedures in the course of the stages of the Selection Process for the Public Function of School Unit Director;
- b) Organize the logistics from the beginning to the end of the Selection Process for the Public Function of School Unit Director;
- c) Preparing the necessary acts for the realization and dissemination of the results of the Selection Process for the Public Function of School Unit Director.

Art. 1 - CONSTITUTE the State Subcommittee made up of civil servants assigned to the Department of Education and will have the following duties:

- a) Receive and analyze the School Management Plan, the qualifications and the supporting documentation of the requirements for participation;
- b) Judging appeals and other events relating to the stages, except those within the competence of the State University of Tocantins - Unitins;
- c) Conducting interviews with candidates (Seduc, 2024).

In this second selection process for choosing school principals in Tocantins, we found that there were 740 registrations, and of the 139 municipalities in the state, only 126 had registered candidates.

Graph 3 - Total number of applicants in the selection process - SEDUC/2023



Source: Tocantins State Government/SEDUC (2023)

Of the 740 people enrolled to run for the position of principal in schools in the state of Tocantins, only 247 managed to advance to the second stage of the selection process, totaling 33%; we also found 308 people enrolled who abstained on the day the test was administered, a significant 42%; and finally, a worrying figure in relation to those who didn't make it to the next stage, with a 25% elimination rate - 185 people.

On November 24, 2023, the State Department of Education (SEDUC) released the results of Stages II - Management Plan and III - Titles of the Selection Process for

choosing school principals for the State Education Network. When we analyzed the results, we found that 173 of the candidates were classified for Stage IV - Interview, 37 were eliminated from the selection process and 8 didn't submit their Management Plan or supporting documents for their qualifications. The fourth stage of the selection process took place in December of the same year, and around 160 candidates were approved, according to Notice no. 11, of December 20, 2023, published in the Official State Gazette no. 6476.

According to SEDUC:

Those approved in all phases of the competition will hold the position of school manager for up to three years, with reappointment permitted provided they undergo a new selection process. Those selected will take office in January 2024 and will undergo training offered by the State Department of Education (Seduc) and the State University of Tocantins (Unitins). Sworn-in principals will also be offered a specialization in management by Unitins (Tocantins, 2023).

With regard to the sub-national plans⁴⁴, we had access to the Monitoring and Evaluation Reports through the PNE em movimento portal, which deals with the Technical Assistance Adhesion Term for Monitoring and Evaluating State Education Plans through the Secretariat for Articulation with Education Systems of the Ministry of Education and Culture (SASE/MEC).

As a result, we noticed that the state of Tocantins, since joining the term, had only carried out this action in 2017. However, we accessed the website of the State Education Forum of Tocantins (FEE-TO) and found data from another report prepared by SEDUC, the Report of the 2nd Cycle of Monitoring and Evaluation of the Goals of the State Education Plan - PEE/TO (Biennium 2018/2019). In it we find information that corroborates our inquiries, which reinforces what we have been saying throughout the research and object in focus, that is, the clientelist practices entrenched at the state level in relation to goal 19 of the PNE and 22 of the PEE.

According to the Report of the 2nd Cycle of Monitoring and Evaluation of the Goals of the State Education Plan - PEE/TO (Biennium 2018/2019):

Tocantins in 2015 began the process of implementing criteria for selecting principals through a qualified selection process and elections

⁴ Sub-national plan: the National Education Plan (PNE) determines the guidelines, goals and strategies for national education policy. Based on this document, states and municipalities must create their own sub-national plans in order to define strategies in their locality to achieve the national goals.

with the participation of the school community in the state education network. Initially, it was instituted by means of Ordinance-Seduc-TO No. 2910, of August 28, 2017, for the creation of the commission to establish the criteria and stages of the process, subsidized by the public consultation, carried out in the school units.

[...]

The Selection Process for the Public Function of School Unit Director of the State Public Education Network took place in 2017, and of the 351 schools that offered vacancies in the process, only 236 had candidates, and of these, 115 directors were sworn in for a three-year term. In the 2018/2019 biennium, the Tocantins State Department of Education did not open the Selection Process for the Public Function of School Director of the State Public Network, and the school directors were appointed to exercise the function by designation of the State Governor (Tocantins, 2023).

Also according to the report, in the municipal education network, "of the 139 municipalities in Tocantins, in the 2018/2019 biennium there was a selection process for choosing school principals in only 09 municipalities, as 130 municipalities did not comply with Strategy 22.1 of Goal 22 of the State Education Plan (PEE)" corresponding to goal 19, strategy 19.1 of the PNE (Tocantins, 2023).

The report revealed that the "number of school principals in basic education in the state network in 2018 was 420 and in 2019 it fell to 409. The percentage of public schools that chose school principals through a qualified selection process and choice with the participation of the school community in 2018 was 16% and in 2019 there was a large reduction, totaling 0.6%" (Tocantins, 2018-2019).

With regard to the percentage of municipalities that choose school principals in public networks by means of elections and/or technical criteria of merit and performance, in the two years mentioned the percentage remained the same, at 6.5% (Tocantins, 2018-2019).

It is clear that the method of choosing school principals used by the Tocantins state government is not sufficient to meet the demands of education, in addition to going against the principles advocated by national legislation on education and without the participation of the community, which we defend, because if school principals should already have been approved in public examinations to carry out their teaching duties, a reflection arises regarding this form of choice "what is the justification for applying more tests?".

Although public exams are one way of choosing school principals, there are those who defend and those who oppose this entry model, with the direct choice of principals being considered the most democratic, but also controversial in the school environment, since "this method is characterized by the resumption or conquest of the decision over

the destinies of management, through the choice of the school principal via direct elections" (Dourado, 1990).

As if that weren't enough, these professionals are chosen according to party-political criteria, i.e. those who have relationships and interests in common, serving as electoral cables in schools, thus fostering clientelism, in line with the thoughts of Paro (1996), who points out that these practices are "the product of governments with little commitment to democracy, filing direct unconstitutional actions against elections, with the clear intention of protecting their party-political interests identified with clientelist practices".

[...] are "a product of the actions of governments with little commitment to democracy, which file direct actions of unconstitutionality against elections, with the clear intention of protecting their party-political interests identified with clientelist practices" (Paro, 1996, p. 377).

Paro (2011) reports that the arguments used as pretexts by the executive branch when it comes to choosing principals are said to be guaranteed by law:

The argument of the supporters of this alternative refers to the legitimacy of the act, taking into account that the people elected the ruler and he has the prerogative, guaranteed by law, to choose his assistants, to implement the government policy suffraged at the ballot box.

This argument certainly doesn't stand up to confrontation with the reality of school leaderships provided by this criterion, which shows how the "liberal democracy" that is proclaimed in the discourse materializes in actions that are aimed not at the public interest, but at the (private) interests of the principals and the political groups that appointed them and whom they ultimately serve (Paro, 2011, p. 37).

However, the choice made by the executive further boosts the clientelist practices of political agents, thus removing autonomy from the school/education in terms of management, from pedagogical to financial, making it impossible for it to fulfill its social role and what the Constitution establishes in article 206, item VI, and article 3 of the LDB, item VIII, as one of the principles of the democratic management of public education (Brazil, 1988).

Final considerations

The choice of school principals at national level usually takes place in four ways: political appointment by the executive branch; public competition; choice by the school

community, which is treated as the most democratic in the educational context; or in the way that absorbs all three actions together.

In the current context, in relation to the choice of school principals in the state of Tocantins, what we have seen is a movement in opposition to the principles of the Constitution, LDB and PNE, when the choice is predominantly of a political nature with nomination by the executive power, because the way of choosing school principals coming from the secretary of education and the executive power is considered the most inappropriate form of choice, with selection processes consisting of several stages related to merit and performance, disregarding community participation, and also, due to so many stages, it has few approvals, which results in political appointment to fill the vacancies corresponding to the number of school units.

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RESUMO:

Este trabalho tematiza a escolha de diretores (as) escolares, tendo por objetivo correlacionar a gestão democrática da/na educação com a escolha de diretores (as) no estado do Tocantins no recorte temporal de 2015 a 2023, no que diz respeito a execução e ao cumprimento da meta 19 do PNE, notadamente, a estratégia 19.1, a qual trata da aprovação de legislação específica que regulamente a gestão democrática da educação garantindo a eleição de diretores(as) escolares. A pesquisa assenta-se em uma perspectiva crítica, realizada por meio de levantamento empírico documental e revisão bibliográfica. Os resultados demonstram que no estado do Tocantins, continuam os desafios para a democratização da gestão da educação como defendida no campo crítico e progressista da educação em se tratando da escolha de diretores (as) escolares, uma vez que ainda predominam as indicações políticas para as funções de diretores das unidades escolares da rede estadual de ensino.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gestão Democrática; Escolha de diretores (as) escolares; Clientelismo.

RESUMEN:

Este trabajo se centra en la elección de los directores de escuela, con el objetivo de correlacionar la gestión democrática de la educación con la elección de los directores en el estado de Tocantins en el período 2015-2023, en lo que respecta a la ejecución y cumplimiento del objetivo 19 del PNE, en particular, la estrategia 19.1, que se ocupa de la aprobación de una legislación específica que regule la gestión democrática de la educación, garantizando la elección de los directores Escuela. La investigación se basa en una perspectiva crítica, realizada a través de un relevamiento documental empírico y una revisión bibliográfica. Los resultados muestran que en el estado de Tocantins, los desafíos para la democratización de la gestión educativa continúan tal como se defiende en el campo crítico y progresista de la educación en lo que se refiere a la elección de los directores de escuela, ya que aún predominan las indicaciones políticas para las funciones de los directores de las unidades escolares de la red educativa estatal.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Gestión Democrática; Elección de los directores de las escuelas; Mecenazgo.