

Teacher Salary Appreciation and the Quality of Basic Education in Brazil: Limits and Possibilities of Fundeb in the Public Sector and of Trade Union Action in the Private Sector

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ABSTRACT

The issue of salary increases for basic education teachers is a central topic in the debate on Brazilian education, particularly with regard to its relationship with the quality of teaching in both public and private school systems. In a context marked by structural inequalities, resource shortages, and conflicts surrounding educational policies, teacher remuneration is intertwined with factors such as working conditions, education financing, and collective organization of the profession, making it a matter of significant academic and social relevance. The research was developed using a qualitative approach, which is appropriate for understanding complex educational phenomena shaped by historical, political, and institutional dimensions that cannot be reduced to numerical indicators. From a methodological perspective, bibliographic research was adopted, recognized as a fundamental procedure for the construction of scientific knowledge in the field of education, as it enables systematic dialogue with theoretical and normative productions related to the topic. The general objective was to analyze how the salary appreciation of basic education teachers in Brazil, mediated by Fundeb in the public sector and by trade union action in the private sector, affects the quality of education, considering its limits and possibilities within the scope of contemporary educational policies. In summary, the results indicate that increases in teacher remuneration exert a direct influence on the quality of basic education, although this effect is conditioned by broader political, institutional, and economic factors. Both Fundeb and trade union action present limitations, yet they play a relevant role in the organization of working conditions and in sustaining professional practice. The articulation between adequate financing, career policies, and collective protection of labor rights proves decisive for consolidating more consistent advances in the educational field.

Keywords: teacher salary appreciation; quality of basic education; Fundeb; trade union action.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of teacher salary appreciation lies at the heart of discussions on education in Brazil, particularly when considering the financing of basic education, which faces longstanding challenges, and the disparities in teachers' working conditions. Remuneration, which is closely linked to professional trajectories and to the institutional context in which teachers work, directly affects both the organization of pedagogical work and teachers' retention in the profession, making it a recurring topic in debates on the quality of education.

Within this context, two institutional axes emerge that, in different ways, influence teacher salary appreciation. In the public sector, the financing and redistribution of resources are ensured by the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Appreciation of Education Professionals (Fundeb), while in the private sector, trade union action plays a relevant role in mediating labor relations and negotiating rights. Understanding these arrangements makes it possible to examine how public policies and collective representation mechanisms influence teaching practice and educational outcomes.

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, which is appropriate for the study of educational phenomena that are complex and intersect with historical, political, and institutional dimensions whose aspects cannot be reduced to numerical data. From a methodological standpoint, bibliographic research was adopted as the central procedure, as this trajectory is indispensable to the construction of scientific knowledge in education, enabling critical dialogue with scholarly works, legislation, and official documents that support the theoretical analysis of the object under investigation.

The general objective of the study was to analyze how the salary appreciation of basic education teachers in Brazil, mediated by Fundeb in the public sector and by trade union action in the private sector, influences the quality of education, identifying its limits and possibilities within the context of contemporary educational policies.

As a development of this objective, the following specific objectives were defined: To examine the relationship between teacher remuneration, working conditions, and the quality of basic education in Brazil. To analyze the role of Fundeb as an instrument for salary appreciation and for reducing educational inequalities in the public sector. To assess the role of teachers' trade unions in the private sector and their effects on salary appreciation and the quality of pedagogical work.

The article is organized into four sections, in addition to this introduction. The first section presents the materials and methods adopted in the research, detailing the approach and procedures employed. Next, the theoretical framework discusses the main references related to teacher salary appreciation, Fundeb in the public sector, and trade union action in the private sector. Finally, the concluding remarks revisit the proposed objectives, synthesize the main findings of the study, and indicate possibilities for future research.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The investigation was conducted through a qualitative approach, which proved to be appropriate for the analysis of educational phenomena characterized by complexity and by the presence of historical, political, and institutional elements that cannot be reduced to mere numerical measurements. Qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of the meanings, interpretations, and relationships that emerge within educational policies and teaching practices, which is fundamental for the critical analysis of documents, legislation, and academic productions. In the field of education, this perspective is particularly useful for examining the social and normative processes that guide educators' practice and the organization of education systems, as highlighted by Pereira and Coutinho (2023).

With regard to the methods adopted, bibliographic research was chosen, as it represents an indispensable means for the construction of scientific knowledge in education. This method allows for the collection, organization, and analysis of established academic productions, such as scientific articles, books, legislation, and institutional documents, thereby fostering critical dialogue among different theoretical approaches. Bibliographic research, as stated by Pizzani et al. (2012), constitutes an essential stage of the investigative process, as it provides a solid theoretical foundation for data interpretation and for the analytical definition of the object of study.

For the development of the present research, a detailed analysis was carried out based on a total of 19 sources consisting of scientific productions. These sources were carefully selected considering their relevance to the topic under study, as well as their academic rigor, which is necessary to ensure the quality of the information. In addition, the degree of alignment between these productions and the objectives previously established for the research was also taken into account. The set of references used enabled a comprehensive and interconnected analysis of teacher salary appreciation, while also examining the importance of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education (Fundeb) within the public sector and the role of trade unions in the private sector. In this way, a robust theoretical foundation was ensured, supporting both the analysis and the discussion of the results obtained.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study was organized into three interrelated topics, with the aim of providing a progressive and integrated reading of the investigated theme. The first topic, **3.1 Teacher Salary Appreciation, Working Conditions, and the Quality of Basic Education**, focused on the discussion of theoretical foundations that link remuneration, career development, and working conditions to pedagogical performance and educational outcomes. Subsequently, **Topic 3.2 Fundeb and the Appreciation of the Teaching Profession in the Brazilian Public Sector** addressed the historical evolution, redistributive principles, and financing mechanisms of Fundeb, analyzing its role in teacher remuneration and in reducing educational inequalities. Finally, **Topic 3.3 Trade Union Action and Teacher Appreciation in the Private Basic Education Sector** examined the role of trade unions in salary negotiations, the defense of labor rights, and the regulation of working conditions in the private sector, assessing their effects on pedagogical practice. This structure made it possible to understand teacher salary appreciation through different institutional and political dimensions, ensuring analytical coherence throughout the study.

3.1 Teacher Salary Appreciation, Working Conditions, and the Quality of Basic Education

Educational literature has repeatedly emphasized that teacher salary appreciation is directly associated with working conditions and pedagogical performance in basic education. In the Brazilian context, teacher remuneration is situated within a scenario marked by regional inequalities, structural limitations, and historical challenges related to education financing. Law No. 11.494/2007, by establishing Fundeb, consolidated a normative framework aimed at the appreciation of education professionals, recognizing salary as one of the central axes for improving the quality of education (Brazil, 2007). Several studies indicate that low salaries, combined with the precariousness of working conditions, negatively affect the exercise of teaching. According to Silva, Miranda, and Bordas (2019), salary devaluation results in more intensive teaching work, with the accumulation of employment ties and limited time for planning and professional development. These factors affect not only teachers' well-being but also the quality of educational practices carried out in everyday school life.

Working conditions extend beyond the physical school environment and include administrative tasks, institutional pressures, and responsibilities that are often not accompanied by financial or symbolic recognition. Oliveira, Castro, and Assis (2024) argue that the increase in such demands has generated work overload, negatively affecting teachers' motivation and their permanence in the profession. In this sense, fair remuneration constitutes a central pillar for sustaining pedagogical work and for ensuring security in the professional exercise of teaching.

With regard to public policies, teacher appreciation has been regarded as a strategic means of strengthening basic education. According to Silva and Nunes (2021), when initiatives aimed at improving teachers' salaries are linked to career plans and adequate working conditions, they tend to have a positive impact on the quality of education. The authors also warn, however, that these policies may face limitations if they are not supported by effective mechanisms of implementation and supervision. The creation of the National Professional Salary Floor represents a significant advance in this debate, although its implementation faces challenges related to education financing. Teixeira and Nunes (2019a) point out that, despite the legal recognition of the salary floor as a teachers' right, its application still varies among federative entities. According to an additional analysis by Teixeira and Nunes (2019b), budgetary constraints and political disputes related to Fundeb make full compliance with the law unfeasible, directly affecting teacher appreciation. A synthesis of the main aspects addressed by the literature on this topic is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Teacher salary appreciation, working conditions, and their effects on the quality of basic education

Analyzed dimension	Main aspects addressed	Repercussions on basic education
Teacher remuneration	Salary floor, Fundeb, regional differences	Retention in the career and motivation
Working conditions	Workload, infrastructure, extracurricular demands	Organization of pedagogical work
Teaching career	Career plans and functional progression	Stability and professional development
Public policies	Education financing and regulation	Effectiveness of teacher appreciation actions
Pedagogical practice	Planning and continuing education	Learning outcomes

Source: Authors' own elaboration, based on Brazil (2007), Silva, Miranda, and Bordas (2019), Silva and Nunes (2021), Teixeira and Nunes (2019a, 2019b), and Oliveira, Castro, and Assis (2024).

Based on the broad range of theoretical and empirical contributions available, it is appropriate to state that the interconnection between salary, working conditions, and the quality of basic education is a phenomenon

characterized by complexity and multiple facets. This relationship is intricate, as numerous factors intersect in different ways. Salary increases, particularly when combined with clear professional development policies and favorable working environments, tend to promote greater job stability. Such appreciation, in turn, supports more consistent and coherent pedagogical practices, which translates into advances in the field of education.

3.2 Fundeb and the Appreciation of the Teaching Profession in the Brazilian Public Sector

The creation of the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Appreciation of Education Professionals represented a milestone in the organization of education financing in Brazil. Established by Law No. 11.494/2007, Fundeb consolidated a resource earmarking framework designed to ensure minimum standards of investment per student and to allocate a significant share of these resources to teacher remuneration, recognizing the role of teachers in the quality of basic education (Brazil, 2007).

Throughout its history, Fundeb has promoted important advances in addressing educational disparities among school systems and federative entities. Castioni, Cardoso, and Cerquira (2021) emphasize that the fund's redistributive design, which combines states' and municipalities' own revenues with federal government complementarity, increased the financing capacity of school systems facing greater vulnerability. This arrangement helped reduce regional disparities, albeit unevenly and depending on local management.

With the permanent Fundeb in force, new perspectives have been added to the discussion on teacher salary appreciation. Cortez (2024) notes that the constitutionalization of the fund enhanced its institutional stability and created greater room for more consistent remuneration policies in the public sector. However, the author stresses that the implementation of these measures will only be effective if supported by adequate financing, effective budget planning, and strong political commitment on the part of education managers.

Fundeb cannot be regarded as a mechanism for teacher appreciation in a context of fiscal austerity that imposes severe constraints. Gouveia (2021) argues that budgetary limitations and disputes over public spending compromise the fund's capacity to sustain more robust salary policies. In such a context, teacher appreciation often competes with other needs of the education system, weakening the continuity of progress already achieved.

From a constitutional legal perspective, Karnopp (2020) argues that the realization of basic education must occur progressively. The author emphasizes that education financing cannot be static, but must advance continuously to ensure not only access, but also conditions for retention and quality. Although Fundeb faces both structural and political challenges, it stands as a fundamental instrument for fulfilling this duty.

Recent empirical analyses have also focused on the redistributive equity of Fundeb. According to Santos, Callegari, and Callegari (2022), federal government complementarity mitigates financing disparities among school systems, but distortions remain that compromise teacher salary appreciation in certain contexts. Souza (2021) argues that the New Fundeb continues to present longstanding issues related to governance, transparency, and the sufficiency of resources, which limits its impact on teacher remuneration.

In this sense, expectations regarding an increase in the national teacher salary floor for 2026 have already become marked by uncertainty and frustration among education professionals. Santos (2026) points out that, under the current rule for updating the salary floor, the projected adjustment could result in a very small nominal increase, which generated widespread dissatisfaction. This perspective exposed the limitations of the current salary adjustment model, especially in light of rising living costs and accumulated losses over the years. The prospect of an adjustment that fails to meet the needs of public school teachers reopened the debate on the capacity of Fundeb, as currently structured, to ensure a salary policy that is at least stable and aligned with the demands of public education.

Within this context, the federal government has begun to signal possible solutions to the impasse surrounding the salary floor adjustment. According to Araújo (2026), a provisional measure is expected to be issued by the end of January, providing for an increase of approximately 6.25 percent, indicating an attempt to correct distortions generated by the strict application of the previous rule. The proposal seeks to respond to the demands of teachers and their representative entities, while maintaining compatibility between salary policy, budgetary limits, and the configuration of the permanent Fundeb. Even as an adjustment measure, the effectiveness of this solution still depends on the financial capacity of federative entities and on the persistence of a firm political commitment to the appreciation of the public teaching profession. Table 2 summarizes the main aspects of Fundeb related to salary appreciation and equity in the public sector.

Table 2. Fundeb, financing mechanisms, and teacher salary appreciation in the public sector

Axis of analysis	Central characteristics	Implications for the teaching profession
Legal basis	Law No. 11.494/2007 and Constitutional Amendment No. 108/2020	Constitutional earmarking of resources
Redistributive logic	Federal government complementarity and VAAF	Reduction of regional inequalities
Allocation of resources	Minimum percentage allocated to teacher remuneration	Support for the national salary floor
Permanent Fundeb	Institutional stability of financing	Medium- and long-term planning
Structural limitations	Fiscal austerity and local management	Inequality in salary appreciation

Source: Authors' own elaboration, based on Brazil (2007), Karnopp (2020), Castioni, Cardoso, and Cerquira (2021), Gouveia (2021), Souza (2021), Santos, Callegari, and Callegari (2022), and Cortez (2024).

According to this set of analyses, Fundeb is fundamental both to teacher salary appreciation and to the promotion of greater equity in access to public education in Brazil. Despite the fact that its redistributive mechanisms and expanded legal framework represent significant advances, its effectiveness still depends on fiscal disputes, the managerial capacity of federative entities, and the priority accorded to education within current public policies.

3.3 Trade Union Action and Teacher Appreciation in the Private Basic Education Sector

Trade unions have played a significant role in mediating between the interests of private educational capital and the rights of teachers in the basic education sector. In the current debate on education, unions are tasked with collectively representing the teaching profession, particularly in work contexts marked by flexible contracts, employment instability, and strong pressure for cost reduction. Gouveia and Ferraz (2020) emphasize that teacher appreciation, within the union context, is intrinsically linked to the struggle for working conditions considered dignified, as well as to the understanding of remuneration as an essential component of education quality.

Salary negotiations in the private sector take place within a context of transformations in the world of work and neoliberal-oriented reforms. As Bombarda (2020) points out, such reforms often dismantle collective teacher organization in favor of a business-oriented logic and the individualization of labor relations. As a result, unions face the challenge of maintaining their bargaining capacity while seeking to preserve historical rights such as salary floors, compatible workloads, and minimum job stability.

The directions taken by educational trade unionism reveal significant changes in the approaches and methods employed in response to the new realities surrounding the work of education professionals. This adaptation is crucial, as shifts in the educational landscape and in working conditions require a reassessment of traditional strategies previously adopted. Gindin (2013) notes that, within the private sector, unions face several challenges, including the fragmentation of labor categories, the diversity of employment relationships, and the growing expansion of private educational institutions. Taken together, these factors make trade union action more complex and demanding. Such circumstances require the adoption of more adaptable and flexible organizational methods, while consistently preserving the central importance of collective action aimed at the appreciation of teachers. It is crucial that this focus on the struggle for recognition and appreciation of teaching work is not neglected, even amid changes in organizational structures.

The literature also highlights the role of unions in regulating working conditions beyond salary-related issues. According to Kleinakuf and Furlan (2023), trade union action contributes to ensuring minimum standards regarding workload, number of students per class, and extracurricular activities. These factors have a direct impact on pedagogical work, as they affect the time teachers have for planning, assessment, and participation in continuing education.

From a legal perspective, trade unionism is grounded in collective labor law, which serves as an instrument for balancing relations between employers and employees. According to Zaffari et al. (2021), collective bargaining agreements and conventions established by unions are of great importance in protecting private sector teachers, especially in situations characterized by power asymmetry. Table 3 summarizes the main dimensions of trade union action and their impacts on teacher appreciation and pedagogical practice in private education.

Table 3. Trade union action in the private sector and its effects on teacher appreciation

Dimension of action	Main trade union actions	Repercussions on teaching work
Salary negotiation	Collective agreements and collective bargaining conventions	Salary adjustments and salary floors
Defense of rights	Labor guarantees and job stability	Reduction of job precariousness
Working conditions	Regulation of working hours and activities	Organization of pedagogical work
Collective representation	Mediation of labor conflicts	Strengthening of professional identity
Institutional regulation	Dialogue with employers and the State	Standardization of rights within the sector

Source: Authors' own elaboration, based on Gindin (2013), Gouveia and Ferraz (2020), Bombarda (2020), Zaffari et al. (2021), and Kleinakuf and Furlan (2023).

It can therefore be concluded that trade union action in the private sector carries considerable weight in both teachers' salary valorization and the quality of pedagogical work. Despite facing barriers arising from changes in the educational market and from labor reforms, unionism continues to function as a space for collective resistance and for the negotiation of conditions that directly affect everyday school life and teaching practice.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The issue of teachers' salaries and their connection to the quality of basic education is one of the central topics in discussions on Brazilian education, especially within a context marked by historical inequalities in funding, diverse institutional arrangements between the public and private sectors, and ongoing disputes over teachers' working conditions. In light of this, the present study set out to investigate how remuneration systems, mediated by Fundeb in the public sector and by trade union action in the private sector, interfere with pedagogical work and educational outcomes.

The results obtained confirm that the research achieved all the objectives initially established. The analysis facilitated an understanding of the multiple dimensions associated with teachers' salary valorization, highlighting its impacts on work organization, career retention, and the quality of pedagogical practices, both within the scope of public policies and in labor relations in the private sector.

With regard to the first theme addressed in the theoretical framework, it was possible to observe that teachers' remuneration, their career trajectories in teaching, and the conditions under which they carry out their professional activities constitute a set of factors that cannot be dissociated when discussing the quality of basic education. These interrelated aspects are essential for understanding how basic education can be improved and which challenges must be addressed to ensure better student education. Reduced salaries, extended working hours, and precarious working conditions tend to undermine pedagogical planning, continuing teacher education, and professional motivation. Consequently, these factors have a direct and significant impact on everyday school life, affecting teaching quality and relationships between educators and students. This situation therefore compromises not only the educational environment but also limits the developmental potential of both education professionals and learners. Within this context, salary increases proved to be a fundamental element for the consolidation of more robust and effective pedagogical practices. Such salary valorization plays a central role in shaping and strengthening educational approaches, contributing significantly to their consistency and sustainability.

Fundeb proved to be essential both for structuring the financing of basic education and for ensuring that public school teachers receive their salaries on time, as highlighted in the second axis of analysis. Its redistributive mechanisms mitigate disparities among education systems and federative entities, although limitations remain regarding resource sufficiency, local management capacity, and fiscal constraints. The consolidation of Fundeb as a permanent financing policy has brought greater predictability; nevertheless, teachers' salary valorization continues to face substantial challenges.

Regarding the third point, trade union intervention in the private sector proved crucial for defending teachers' remuneration and working conditions. The research showed that collective bargaining, the protection of labor rights, and the regulation of both working hours and teaching activities have a direct impact on the quality of pedagogical work. Despite the challenges arising from changes in the world of work and labor reforms, unionism continues to function as a space for mediation and collective resistance in the private education sector.

In summary, it can be stated that teachers' salary increases directly affect the quality of basic education, although this impact depends on a range of political, institutional, and economic factors. While both Fundeb and trade union action have limitations, they play a significant role in organizing working conditions and sustaining teaching practice. The connection between adequate financing, career policies, and collective protection of labor rights is fundamental to achieving more consistent advances in education.

As a development of this research, it is recommended that future studies focus on empirical analyses that further examine the effects of salary valorization on learning indicators, as well as comparative analyses between public and private education systems in different regions of the country. Research on the long-term effects of the permanent Fundeb and on new forms of union organization in the face of transformations in teachers' labor relations is also highly relevant.

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