From Equity to Containment? A Critical Analysis of Compensatory Education in Portugal

Hélder Ferraz
University of Porto, Portugal

Tiago Neves
University of Porto, Portugal

Gil Nata
University of Porto, Portugal

Abstract

This article assesses the performance differences (2001/02-2015/16) among schools that integrate Portugal's main compensatory education programme – Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (TEIP). Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study combines a longitudinal analysis of quantitative educational data with semi-structured interviews conducted with headteachers and TEIP coordinators in 6 secondary schools selected for their contrasting trajectories. Although TEIP schools benefit from greater autonomy and additional human and material resources – factors often cited as enabling pedagogical innovation and community engagement –, the evidence indicates that school-level outcomes are associated with a) how autonomy and resources are translated into internal monitoring and organisational routines; b) the expansion of vocational education, which in some contexts coincides with reduced exam intensity and more limited routes into higher education; and c) structural inequalities and reputational dynamics that shape intake composition and partnerships. The analysis suggests that TEIP can align with broader changes in the Portuguese educational context; however, an equity-oriented discourse may at times coincide with patterns of social segregation, channelling disadvantaged populations toward less socially prestigious labour-market opportunities. Accordingly, the results are interpreted as associational, not causal, and we note a key data limitation: the absence of comparable school-level indicators on higher-education transitions and long-term employment outcomes. Overall, the study is consistent with the hypothesis that compensatory education, while well-intentioned, may inadvertently reproduce social hierarchies unless accompanied by redistributive, recognition and representation policies that mitigate structural inequalities. These findings raise critical questions about TEIP's transformative potential for upward mobility and social inclusion.

Keywords: educational inequality, compensatory education, social mobility, school autonomy, teip, vocational education

The Ongoing Educational Inequalities in Portugal

The Portuguese educational system experienced substantial transformations during the past twenty years through: expanded compulsory education until age eighteen; the addition of vocational pathways to public secondary education, diversifying training options; and creating a compensatory education programme in 2006 – Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (TEIP) – designed to mitigate socio-economic inequalities and to boost the educational and social opportunities of the most vulnerable groups. Over the same period, attainment levels rose markedly, particularly the share of 25-34-year-olds with higher education increased from roughly one fifth in the mid-2000s (19%) to nearly half by the early 2020s (47,5%), bringing Portugal closer to the European Union average (EUROSTAT, 2025).

The overall educational progress in Portugal coexists with persistent barriers to equal access to upper-secondary and higher education. Three critical problems emerge in the educational system: a) evidence of grade-inflation dynamics in private providers that may advantage their students in higher education access (Nata et al., 2014; Neves et al., 2017); b) the over-representation of disadvantaged students in vocational programmes, pathways that statistically correspond to lower probabilities in higher education enrolment (DGEEC,2020, 2020a, Correia, 2022); and c) mixed or limited evidence that TEIP narrows performance gaps to non-TEIP public secondary schools (Ferraz et al., 2019; Abrantes, 2022).

Secondary education in Portugal consists of scientific-humanistic courses oriented towards higher education progression and vocational courses oriented to practical training and labour market entry after secondary education completion (DGE, 2025). Diversified pathways can accommodate different student expectations; however, higher education remains a key route to upward social mobility, typically associated with better-paid employment opportunities and access to prestigious professions. The income difference between those who finished secondary school versus those who finished higher education is estimated at around 60% (OECD, 2022, 2023). Prior research consistently associates higher education with improved employment opportunities and occupational status (Martins et al., 2016; Neves et al., 2017; Abrantes, 2022; Sá et al., 2022).

Against this backdrop, we examine school-level dynamics within TEIP programme, Portugal's flagship compensatory education policy. We adopt three complementary conceptual lenses: Fraser's triad – redistribution, recognition, representation (Fraser, 2003) – as a macro policy frame; Bourdieu (1986) and Bernstein (2003) to understand school (re)production and stratification processes; and a programme-theory account of TEIP that makes explicit the chain from inputs – mechanisms – outcomes.

The Role and Limits of Compensatory Education

The "compensatory education movement" started in the 1960s in the United States as a policy response to the persistent social inequalities in the post-segregation era (Silver & Silver, 1991), with the aim of promoting more equitable educational achievement across social and ethnic

groups. Various countries, including the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, and France established compensatory education programmes premised the idea that additional resources would mitigate structural disadvantage, improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, and support labour market access (Karsten, 2006; Bénabou et al., 2009; Powers et al., 2016).

However, several researchers have challenged the transformative potential of compensatory education by pointing out four main limitations: a) lack of scientific evidence to support the national expansion of small-scale experimental programmes; b) absence of complementary redistributive policies which ensure household income stability and social support; c) schools may reproduce social inequalities through the validation of middle-class cultural and linguistic capital according to Bourdieu (1986) and Bernstein (2003); d) the need for unified policies that combine redistribution with recognition and representation (Fraser, 2003; Power, 2008).

The scepticism regarding the transformative potential of compensatory education, has been reinforced by studies reporting inconsistent or unsatisfactory effects on the performance of vulnerable students, with persistent gaps relative to more socio-economically advantaged peers (Slavin et al., 1989; Anderson & Pellicer, 1990; Silver & Silver, 1990; Reisner et al., 1992; Meuret, 1994; Driessen, 1997; Farkas et al., 2000; Karsten, 2006; Bénabou et al., 2009; Powers et al., 2016; Brown & James, 2020). This evidence underlines the need for more comprehensive approaches to educational equity.

Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (TEIP)

TEIP programme, launched in 2006, drew inspiration from worldwide compensatory education models including, Zones d'Éducation Prioritaire (ZEP), in France, the Education Action Zones (EAZ) and Excellence in Cities (EiC) programes in United Kingdom. The TEIP programme aims to decrease educational inequality through four main objectives: a) better student achievement; b) reduce retention and dropout rates; c) improve school-family partnerships; and d) better articulation between educational pathways and labour market opportunities (Despacho Normativo n.º 55/2008).

TEIP provides additional resources alongside expanded autonomy for resource management and support from external expert support and incentives for school-community partnerships. The framework requires TEIP schools to develop a strategic and pedagogical programme along with administrative, financial and organizational responses that address community needs, while using their autonomy and support to achieve long-term academic development and promote a stronger school-family and school community engagement, and labour market integration (Abrantes et al., 2011).

Research conducted by Abrantes et al. (2011), DGEIDC (2011), DGE (2012, 2020), Rolo, (2012); and Abrantes & Ferreira (2014), indicates positive trends regarding decreased student misbehaviour, absenteeism and dropout rates. These achievements are echoed by Palmeirão and Alves (2021) who characterize TEIP schools as territories of pedagogical innovation.

The evidence base for academic performance improvements resulting from pedagogical innovation remains mixed. Jesus and Azevedo (2020) pointed out that the educational transformation promoted by innovation discourse remains uncertain and sometimes aligned with consumerist framings of schooling. Also, the evaluation of TEIP remains limited by structural barriers: limited data comparison between TEIP and non-TEIP public schools, insufficient assessments of school-community relations, and scarce evidence on student trajectories and labour market integration (Frandji, 2012; Ferraz et al., 2018; Correia, 2022). In this sense, the literature identifies several essential challenges that coexist with TEIP programme:

1) the TEIP label may create a negative stigma associated with intensified social and educational inequalities through middle-class student departures to other non-TEIP schools while concentrating vulnerable populations in TEIP schools (Quaresma & Lopes, 2011);
2) the overemphasis on behavioral and attendance indicators may sideline academic achievement as a core educational objective (Rolo, 2012; Abrantes & Ferreira, 2014; Melo, 2016);
3) the lack of specific teacher training contributes to deficit-based perspetives, and relational work with families and communities is often delegated to specialized staff (Abrantes & Ferreira, 2014; Melo, 2016);
4) evidence from DGEIDC (2011), DGE (2012) and Ferraz et al., (2018, 2019) points to limited, or in some cases negative, impacts of the programme on students' academic performance;
5) the growing number of TEIP school students who select vocational pathways is statistically associated with lower probabilities of higher education enrolment, with potential implications for social and professional opportunities (Correia, 2022).

This study leverages a mixed methods design to examine how inputs (resources, autonomy, partnerships), mechanisms (monitoring, pedagogical practices, curricular and extracurricular options), and outcomes (exam scores, retention and dropout rates) unfold in TEIP secondary schools. The questions that oriented this study are:

a) to what extent do school-level performance indicators (national exam scores, percentage of students with positive results in the 12th grade national exams after progressing without grade retention in the 10th and 11th grades, grade retention and dropout rates in 10th, 11th and 12th grades; the progression of student performance in Portuguese and Mathematics from the 9th to the 12th grade exams, compared to national averages; and the evolution of the number of exams undertaken) vary across TEIP schools between 2001/02 and 2015/16?
b) is the share of vocational education provision associated with, and does it mediate, apparent differences in those indicators across schools?
c) what organisational practices (assessment and monitoring cultures, resource use, partnership work) characterise schools with more favourable versus less favourable trajectories?

We contribute by: a) linking school-level performance trajectories to differentiated organizational responses and the expansion of vocational education provision under TEIP, and b) articulating a programme-theory lens that clarifies how inputs may activate mechanisms consistent with observed patterns. We deliberately refrain from strong causal claims and acknowledge structural confounders (intake composition, feeder patterns, mid-years transfers, local labour markets, concurrent reforms).

Methodology

In Portugal, performance in secondary education plays a decisive role in access to higher education. The admission process is based on a weighted average of the internal grades awarded by schools (which must account for at least 50% of the final score) and the results obtained by students in national exams (which must contribute a minimum of 35% according to the specific criteria of the study programme and the institution selected) (Neves et al., 2017). We believe that this information is relevant in order to contextualise and justify the choice of methodological design that we consider most appropriate to answer the questions posed at the end of the introduction and which we will present below.

We use an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (QUANT – QUAL – Integration). In phase 1 (QUANT), we assemble a longitudinal school-year panel (2001/02-2015/16) for TEIP secondary schools and analyze the indicators national exam scores (NES), the percentage of students with positive results in the 12th grade national exams after progressing without grade retention in the 10th and 11th grades, grade retention and dropout rates in 10th, 11th and 12th grades; the progression of student performance in Portuguese and Mathematics from the 9th to the 12th grade exams, compared to national averages; and the evolution of the number of exams undertaken (definition below). Only the NES indicator was normalised using z-scores to ensure fairer comparability across disciplines and years, as detailed above. All other indicators were used descriptively in their original scales We then classify performance trajectories and draw a purposive sample of six schools with contrasting trajectories from a frame of 36 eligible TEIP schools (criteria detailed below and available in Appendix A). In phase 2 (QUAL) we conducted semi-structured interviews with school headteachers and TEIP coordinators in the sampled schools, following a guide organised around governance/monitoring, curriculum/time, resource use, vocational pathways and guidance, partnerships, and student trajectories. In phase 3 (Integration), we examine whether the vocational share statiscally mediates observed differences (model-based tests and descritive contrasts) and explain the quantitative patterns using qualitative themes (assessing and monitoring cultures, resource deployment, partnership functioning

Table 1
Mixed-Methods Workflow

Stage	Description/Subcomponents
Data	Select indicators: National Exam Scores (NES); Percentage of students with positive results in the 12th grade national exams after progressing without grade retention in the 10th and 11th grades; Retention and dropout rates; Mathematics and Portuguese results; Number of national exams.
Indicator Scale and Timeframe	NES: standardized (z-score) by discipline and school year: 2001/02-2015/16; Percentage of students with positive results in the 12th grade national exams after progressing without grade retention in the 10th and 11th grades: Percentage Points / 2013/14-2015/16; Retention and dropout rates: percentage points / 2008/09-2014/15; Mathematics and Portuguese results: -1, 0, +1 / 2011/12-2014/15; Number of National Exams: absolute number / 2001/02-2015/16;
School Selection	TEIP eligible frame (n=36)/Trajectories/ Sample (n=6)
Interviews	Headteachers and TEIP coordinators | Guide: assessment and monitoring; trajectories; time; resources; vocational education; partnerships
Integration	Mediation: vocational share | QUAL explains QUANT patterns | Joint display (themes and indicators)

To enhance the comprehensiveness and robustness of the analysis, we drew on data from the Infoescolas[1] portal, complemented by administrative data compiled by the Directorate-General for Education and Statistics (DGEEC) covering all secondary schools between 2001/02 and 2015/16.

Five quantitative indicators were selected for each school year: national exam scores (NES) (between 2001/02 to 2015/16); the percentage of students with positive results in the 12th grade national exams after progressing without grade retention in the 10th and 11th grades (between 2013/14 and 2015/16); grade retention and dropout rates in 10th, 11th and 12th grades (between 2008/09 and 2014/15); the progression of student performance in Portuguese and Mathematics from the 9th to the 12th grade exams, compared to national averages (2011/12 and 2014/15); and the evolution of the number of exams taken (between 2001/02 and 2015/16).

The core quantitative indicator used in this study is the National Exam Scores (NES), because exam subjects differ between schools and national grading patterns, we computed z-scores by discipline and year to allow fairer comparison between subjects and schools. For each school i, discipline d, and year t, the standardised value is:

[1] Infoescolas - Estatísticas do Ensino Básico e Secundário

$$z_{idt} = \frac{NES_{idt} - \mu_{dt}}{\sigma_{dt}}$$

where $\mu_{dt}$and σ_{dt}represent the national mean and standard deviation in that discipline and year. Each school's annual NES indicator corresponds to the weighted mean of these discipline specific z-scores, using the number of exams per subject as weights. This procedure was applied exclusively to ensure greater fairness across disciplines and schools; no other indicators were standardized but used descriptively to contextualize patterns and as tie-break criteria when selecting schools.

Each of the three authors independently interpreted the results and selected schools whose academic trajectories, relative to non-TEIP public schools, reflected either the most favourable or unfavourable performance trends. It should be noted that the selection of schools did not follow a purely quantitative ranking based on fixed thresholds. Instead, performance trajectories were interpreted qualitatively in relation to each school's starting point and its outcome in the final year analysed.

This criterion allowed the identification of schools that had improved, stagnated or declined relative to their own baseline, rather than privileging those with the highest absolut scores.

It is important to highlight the challenge of reaching a consensus on the selection of schools with a favourable trajectory, due to the fact that no school had a consistent positive performance in all the selected indicators. Thus, the final group of "success trajectories" emerged from a comparative synthesis, favouring the indicators that provided longer time coverage, particularly those that allowed for pre- and post-TEIP analysis (NES and number of national exams), while the remaining indicators were considered with caution (some only presented data from the post-TEIP period, and the combined retention/dropout rate showed marked volatility between years and schools). For example, the indicator for successful progression from 10th to 12th grade without prior retention was only available for three school years (from 2013/14 to 2015/16) and was therefore used as a tiebreaker when necessary.

After collective deliberation, we reached a consensus on a sample of seven schools: four with favourable trajectories and three with unfavourable trajectories. However, the refusal of one school to take part in the study resulted in a final sample of six schools (four favourable and two unfavourable). At the time of selection, 51 TEIP schools offer secondary education and were therefore eligible for the study. However, in order to ensure comparability of the data and the length of time schools have been in TEIP that could generate results, only schools with at least five years of participation in the TEIP programme (as of 2019) were considered eligible, resulting in a pool of 36 schools.

After selecting the sample, semi-structured interviews were scheduled with school headteachers and TEIP coordinators, chosen for their in-depth understanding of institutional logics, dynamics, and practices (Kantek & Baykal, 2009). The interview guide focused on three main objectives: (i) assessing whether school performance aligns with the expectations of

leadership teams; (ii) exploring perceived reasons behind success or failure; and (iii) understanding the role of the TEIP Programme played in the results obtained.

Some sample questions from the interview guide included:

a) How do you assess the differences between TEIP and non-TEIP public schools with regard to national exam scores, retention/dropout rates, number of exams undertaken?
b) What activities/projects have been developed under the TEIP Programme?
c) How do you assess their contribution to your school's outcomes?
d) Do you believe the TEIP Programme could be more effective in supporting schools? If yes, in what ways? (organization, resources, partnerships, family involvement, monitoring?)

Six interviews were conducted across the selected schools, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. Interviewees were coded using a system where "D" refers to the school director, "C" to the TEIP coordinator, and "S" to the school. Schools were identified by letters A to F and categorised as "Favourable" or "Unfavourable" based on their trajectories. For example, "D_SA_Favourable" refers to the Director of School A with a favourable trajectory, while "C_SB_Unfavourable" designates the Coordinator of School B with an unfavourable path.

The interview participants included three Directors (Schools C, D, and F), one Vice-Director (School B), and three TEIP Coordinators with additional roles: the Vice-Director of School A, the Assistant to the Director at School E, and a Coordinator with management responsibilities at School D. Additionally, two TEIP Coordinators without management responsibilities were interviewed at Schools B and D. In the case of School D, both the current and former TEIP Coordinators were present due to a transitional phase in coordination. All participants provided informed consent.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006), with full assurance of anonymity and confidentiality. The analysis followed a primarily semantic approach, focusing on participants' explicit accounts rather than latent meanings.

Initial open codes were generated inductively by the three authors, discussed colectively, and then consolidated into broader themes that captured recurrent institutional mechanisms rather than isolated opinions. Coding consistency was checked through peer debriefing, and full anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. This process resulted in three core themes that structure the qualitative findings: (1) autonomy and human resources; (2) factors explaining TEIP schools' success or failure; and (3) vocational education and the transition into higher education.

The researchers' stance was reflexive and non-evaluative: none of the authors were employed in the participating schools, though all had prior experience with educational policy research

in disadvantaged contexts. To mitigate bias, analytical memos were maintained throughout data interpretation, and themes were validated collectively.

All participants provided informed consents, and data were stored securely with anonymised identifiers (e.g., D_SA_Favourable)

The selected schools have the following characteristics regarding their date of integration into TEIP and their geographical location:

Table 2
Characteristics of TEIP Schools Selected

Denomination	TEIP Integration	Localization	Results
School A	2006/07	North/Urban Periphery	Favourable
School B	2009/10	North/Urban	Unfavourable
School C	2009/10	North/Rural	Favourable
School D	2006/07	South/Urban Periphery	Favourable
School E	2009/10	South/Urban Periphery	Unfavourable
School F	2009/10	South/Rural	Favourable

Despite the methodological robustness of this mixed approach, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The study is based on a small sample of six schools, with marked contrasts between two lower-performing and four higher-performing institutions. This asymmetry limits the generalizability of findings and highlights the need for caution when extrapolating conclusions beyond the studied context.

Quantitative Analysis: Evolution of Key Indicators in TEIP and Non-TEIP Schools

A concise summary of the main quantitative trends is presented below; detailed year-by-year series for each indicator and school are available in Appendix A (Figures 1-7 and Tables 3-6).

Overall, the longitudinal analysis reveals a clear differentiation between schools with favourable and unfavourable trajectories. In schools B and E, academic performance measured by the National Exam Score (NES) steadily diverged from the national mean throughout the observation period, accompanied by increasing grade-retention and dropout rates and a sharp decline in the number of national exams undertaken.

By contrast, schools C, D and F displayed gradual improvement in NES relative to non-TEIP public schools, with moderate reductions in retention and dropout. School A, despite an initially high NES, experienced a mild downward trend but remained within the group of favourable trajectories due to stronger performance in other indicators.

The indicator of "positive Grade-12 results after progression without retention" was only available for three academic years (2012/13-2014/15) and was therefore used descriptively and as a tiebreaker.

Taken together, these results suggest that TEIP schools have followed distinct institutional paths: some consolidating improvement in exam performance and retention rates, others showing signs of performance stagnation and/or decline and a growing shift toward vocational pathways.

Results

This section presents the three analytic themes emerging from the qualitative analysis, each addressing mechanisms that help explain the differentiated trajectories of TEIP schools. The first theme, *"Autonomy and resources: similar strategies, divergent outcomes"*, shows that while all schools received comparable support and autonomy under TEIP, only those that developed participatory management and internal monitoring cultures, translated these conditions into improved academic results. The second theme, *"Explaining divergence in TEIP schools performance"*, reveals how institutional capacity, leadership stability, and the ability to mobilise community partnership shaped contrasting patterns of success and stagnation. The third theme, *"Vocational education and higher education transitions"*, uncover how the strategic expansion of vocational programmes, though useful for short-term retention, risks reinforcing social segmentation and limiting access to higher education.

Autonomy and Resources: Similar Strategies for Divergent Outcomes

Although TEIP provides similar forms of autonomy and additional human resources, schools diverge in how they mobilise these resources. In favourable trajectories, autonomy is channelled into capacity-building (specialist staff, external expertise, and teacher development), whereas in less-favourable trajectories are used instrumentally to support exam preparation within classrooms, for example. These distinct uses are consistent with the different NES patterns reported earlier.

> The contribution [of TEIP] is obviously the fact that we have more human resources in schools, the fact that we have technical staff in schools, the possibility of having an external expert, the possibility of reinforcing training (...) (D_SD_Favourable).

> (…) we have two teachers in classrooms [provided by TEIP programme], particularly in the subjects in which students undergo national exams, precisely to bridge the gap between the students, but also to prepare them for the exam, because often students do not know well what kind of questions are asked in the exam, and therefore they are trained, in a manner of speaking, during classes, for the exam (D_SB_Unfavourable).

Despite the value attributed to additional resources, most interviewees did not articulate a clear needs-based diagnosis or a strategic use of autonomy. In several cases, autonomy appeared administrative rather than developmental, with for example exam-oriented co-teaching

substituting for broader capacity-building or reflective practice. This pattern reflects a recurring trend noted in the compensatory education literature, where resource enhancement is sometimes assumed sufficient (Carter, 1984; Karsten, 2006; Bénabou et al., 2009) and coincides with the NES trajectories observed (e.g., improvement in school D versus stagnation/decline in schools B and E).

School leaders also frequently frame underperformance through as external determined, citing student disengagement, lack of motivation, or the misalignment between curricular flexibility and the national exam regime, such attributions tend to deflect attention from institutional practices (monitoring, time protection, curriculum alignment) that are within schools' scope of action.

> (…) [regarding the low performance of students] more and more students also have divergent interests from school, and for many, as the education system is currently structured, it doesn't resonate with them much. Therefore, they have other attractions, they are more inclined towards technology, right? Hence, perhaps lately, the Ministry of Education is more focused on curricular flexibility, which is excellent if applied in the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd cycles, but in secondary education with nationwide exams, it's very difficult because they have to know this and that precisely. Therefore, curricular flexibility appeals to other skills, skills that, as the national exams are currently structured, do not apply (C_SB_Unfavourable).

> At the high school level, and that's exactly what we're talking about here, we have a somewhat pre-selected audience. In other words, the students who reach high school are practically those with no grade retentions, and they follow a clean academic path. However, when we reach the 10th grade, let's say there is almost a natural selection. Those in the scientific-humanistic courses, which is essentially what we have—this year, for the first time, after three years without it, we have a vocational course. However, students who seek a more professional path have been leaving high school. The students who remain in high school are those who want to pursue a path that leads them to higher education. So, fundamentally, there is a first point here, which is motivation (D_SF_Favourable).

These narratives surface two tensions: first, a policy tension: curricular flexibility coexists with a high-stakes exam regime, especially salient in schools struggling to improve; second, an analytic tension: explanations centred on motivation risk masking organisational levers, for example, backward planning from exam blueprints, formative feedback in co-teaching, and protection of instructional time (Hauge et al., 2014). Where flexibility is translated into routines that support teaching and monitoring, NES tends to improve; where flexibility is seen as inapplicable in upper-secondary, gains tend to plateau.

Partnership orchestration emerges as a limiting condition. TEIP expects schools to mobilise community partners, yet the coordination burden often falls disproportionately on schools,

where orchestration capacity exists, autonomy is more likely to convert into organisational capability.

> I think that TEIP Programme foresees partnerships and an insertion of the school in the community, and that there are several partners to help the school in its projects, but it leaves the school with this task, this responsibility, (…) we should have more support in that fight (D_SA_Favourable).

This testimony clarifies the friction identified above: autonomy and resources are enabling conditions, but outcomes depend on internal coordination (monitoring, time protection, staff training and development), and external orchestration (partnership routines, clear goals, calendars). In favourable trajectories schools, partnership work is structured and complements internal monitoring; in less favourable trajectories schools, the coordination load and limited external support coincide with more instrumental responses (e.g. exam-coaching) and stagnant NES.

Explaining Divergence in TEIP School Performance

Schools with stronger and more consistent results tend to couple TEIP support with internal monitoring/assessment routines and leadership practices that make performance data actionable; underperforming schools more often emphasise structural constraints and the stigma associated with the TEIP label (Quaresma & Lopes, 2011) without detailing internal mechanisms.

> There are some results here [the research team provided the interviewees with the findings from their previous quantitative analysis] that are really important in terms of analysis. If I tell you that they are new to us it would not be true because we have an Observatory within the group to know what we are doing (…) being TEIP, I think, is a decisive factor for that to happen (…) (D_SF_Favourable).

> (…) There is always the stigma of the TEIP school. The best students, the families whose students were really committed, interested students, make their choices at the school level and therefore many parents felt the stigma of the TEIP school: «Oh, don't go to that school because that school is TEIP, and therefore it is a problematic school» (D_SB_Unfavourable).

The first account signals a monitoring culture (an internal "Observatory") where TEIP support is embedded in cycles of evidence and follow-up; the second foregrounds stigma and competition as external pressures (Quaresma & Lopes, 2011). While both perspectives are valid, only the first specifies organisational practices that plausibly align with the favourable trajectories documented earlier, whereas the second leaves the mechanism of internal response less explicit.

In schools with less favourable trajectories schools, leaders often describe changing intake and local competition (mobility to better resourced or more central schools) as headwinds, which can coincide with shrinking cohorts and reduced academic intensity.

> (…) The school has few students, they have been decreasing over time and most students prefer an environment with more students, a school in the city centre, a public transport pass to be able to go to the shopping centre, etc., a whole series of external conditions that end up taking students away from here (…) (C_SE_Unfavourable).

This narrative points to structural confounders, feeder patterns, transport, proximity, reputational effects, that shape intake composition. Such pressures are consistent with the persistent gaps observed for some schools, and underscore why TEIP inputs alone may not translate into convergent outcomes without strategies to buffer intake volatility (e.g., targeted supports, timetable protection, partnership leverage).

Vocational share appears as a mediating factor in apparent performance differences, but its effects are contingent on institutional strategy. In some schools, expansion of vocational tracks coincides with lower national exams intensity; in others, strong organisational routines offset this risk.

> (…) We haven't had vocational education for 3 years. This is again the year zero, so to speak, in vocational education. The students that we had in secondary school were students motivated to continue their studies, that is, they were here with goals, with defined objectives, and we just had to help them on their path to university, which was what I wanted, because students who wanted a more vocational path were directed to professional schools by our vocational guidance office (D_SF_Favourable).

> (…) We are transforming our school gradually. We have mostly a school population for vocational education. Therefore, for regular students, we have fewer students, and this discrepancy and decrease will be noticed more and more, (…) we are able to have one student or another who stands out for good grades, but most of our students have some difficulties and will conclude the 12th grade, sometimes at cost, within their areas (C_SE_Unfavourable).

Descriptively (Infoescolas), School F, reported no vocational enrollment between 2014/15 and 2017/18, coinciding with favourable exam results; School E, expanded vocational enrolment from 42% to 64% in the same period, while scientific-humanistic enrolment declined from 58% to 36%, coinciding with weaker exam outcomes.

Yet, the association is not deterministic: School D, maintained a high vocational share(82% of its students enrolled in vocational tracks in 2014/15 and 75% in 2017/18), with only 18% and 25% in scientific-humanistic courses, respectively (Infoescolas), yet achieved the best exam results, suggesting that broader institutional routines (monitoring, staff development, partnership use) can sustain exam performance even with extensive vocational provision.

Conversely, School A kept a balanced distribution between vocational and scientific-humanistic education (36% vs. 64% in both years), yet shows a decline in national exam results, indicating that composition alone does not explain trajectories.

Overall, vocational expansion seems to mediate performance patterns in interaction with internal capacity and leadership ability. Echoing the first theme: Autonomy and Resources: Similar Strategies for Divergent Outcomes, partnership orchestration is work-intensive and often under-supported, where schools have clear routines for engaging external actors (goals, calendars, roles), partnerships appear to amplify internal monitoring and mitigate intake pressures; where orchestration capacity is fragile, school leaders tend to default to instrumental responses (e. g., exam coaching) or to external attributions (stigma, motivation). This integrated reading is consistent with the quantitative differentiation of trajectories and sets up the next theme on vocational pathways and higher education access safeguards.

Vocational Education and Higher Education Transition

Building on previous themes, which highlighted organisational capacity, monitoring cultures, and intake dynamics, the Vocational Education and Higher Education Transition theme, examines how the curricular mix, especially the vocational share, is associated with TEIP schools' performance trajectories and students' transitions. While vocational education is often positioned as a pathway to faster labour market integration (Hanushek et al., 2017), evidence in Portugal links higher education to stronger income prospects and mobility (Martins et al., 2016; OECD, 2022, 2023) and shows a social gradient in vocational participation (Correia, 2022).

> I think it may have to do with the context in which some TEIP schools may be located in which, in fact, students choose more professional courses because they need to earn money quickly, and for example here at the school we have catering courses in which students find temporary and part-time jobs that provide them with some economic comfort and I think that has to do with it. (D_SA_Favourable).

> (...) as we are a country of emigrant people, but also a city in the countryside, in which part of the families are already scattered around the world, we have many students who finish vocational education and go to work in European and non-European countries, and have a wide range of options where they go (D_SC_Favourable)

> (...) we have a range of offers [vocational courses] in which some students really like what they do, and are dedicated to that and we spend time telling them that this is not a course that is minor, of less importance, than the regular course, of whatever it may be, languages, humanities, or science and technology (...) (C_EE_Unfavourable).

These perspectives reveal that vocational education in TEIP schools responds both to structural needs – economic insecurity, early entry into the labour market -, and to students' genuine interests and identities. The findings align with research showing that vocational pathways in

Portugal are predominantly chosen by socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Correia, 2022). While such courses can promote inclusion and completion, they may also reflect adaptative responses to limited academic opportunities rather than deliberate empowerment (Hanuschek et al., 2017).

Across the six schools studied, the share of vocational students evolved unevenly, coinciding with distinct performance paths. This pattern indicates that the institutional configuration of each school mediates the association between vocational education and academic results.

These contrasts are consistent with the idea that vocational expansion coincides with different organisational responses. School F's restrictive offer helped sustain exam preparation for higher education, while School E's expansion may reflect a strategic direction of lower-performing students to less exam-intensive routes. However, School D demonstrates that strong leadership and institutional routines can counterbalance these effects, maintaining high performance even with extensive vocational provision.

School F, with minimal enrolment in vocational education, consistently performed near the average of non-TEIP public schools. Conversely, School E, which expanded its vocational enrolment, shows a widening performance gap, from -1.72 points in 2009/10 to -3.65 in 2015/16. Notably, School D, despite its strong vocational focus, achieved the best results, improving from -2.77 points in 2006/07 to 0.05 in 2015/16, indicating that performance is not determined by curricular composition alone.

Interviewees highlight how the decision to promote vocational education is shaped by local contexts, students' economic pressures, and individual aspirations, rather than by a unified pedagogical rationale.

The prominence of vocational pathways within TEIP schools may coincide with reputational challenges, reinforcing social segmentation and the symbolic boudary between schools oriented toward higher education and those focused on employability.

> (…) most TEIP schools consider vocational education because regular secondary education is not very attractive. Here is the stigma: if you want to go to university, you must leave TEIP schools. As we have schools nearby that are more dedicated to that type of education, to pursue studies [into higher education], it is not very strange that my students say that they go to secondary schools that are not technical, so to speak. I think this is a generalized thing (C_SD_Favourable).

> There it is, the perverse effect that the school has to transform itself and having more and more professional and CEF [Education and Training Courses] classes. For other students who want to continue their studies, it is not so appealing and ends up being almost a stigma (...) (C_SE_Unfavourable).

These statements illustrate a reputational dilemma: TEIP schools' emphasis on vocational education, while aiming at retention and inclusion, can inadvertently signal limited academic aspiration, thus deterring higher achieving or more advantaged students. This risk echoes earlier research on compensatory education's dual mandate – equity versus containment – in managing difficult neighbourhoods (Rolo, 2012; Melo, 2016). The result is a self-reinforcing cycle where social composition, institutional perception, and curricular offer coincide to sustain educational stratification (Quaresma & Lopes, 2011; Correia, 2022).

The evolution of vocational education within TEIP schools encapsulates the tensions of compensatory education itself: promoting equality of opportunity while managing the structural reproduction of inequality (Ferraz, 2025).

> (...) this school has a tradition in sports management, and we always have students to form at least two classes, and we ask the Ministry for authorization to open two classes, because we have students that come, but the Ministry does not authorize and so we have to do a selection of those students (D_SB_Unfavourable).
>
> (...) we have a vocational school side by side with us and with whom we have a good relationship, and we understand that in terms of vocational education it has much more advanced technology than us, much more state-of-the-art, and that it can promote better skills than us. (D_SF_Favourable).
>
> (...) the situation is: with the population we have, what they feel useful means, "I will have a job in 3 years, when it's over I'll have an occupation" (C_SD_Favourable)

Taken together, these excerpts expose the structural constraints of the TEIP framework: while promoting autonomy and responsiveness, schools still operate within unequal ecosystems and resource hierarchies (Ferraz, 2025). Vocational programmes can support employability and short-term retention (Hanuschek et al., 2017), but without mechanisms for upward transition, they risk consolidating educational containment rather than mobility. This mirrors the dual role of TEIP identified by Rolo (2012) and Melo (2016) – to promote opportunity and to manage exclusion simultaneously.

The available data confirm that vocational education expansion coincides with declining exam participation and a weaker presence in higher education-oriented courses, yet does not allow for causal inference regarding long-term labour market outcomes. This limitation should be explicitly recognize in policy and research design.

Nonetheless, the observed trends suggest that, although vocational education supports retention and short-term completion, it may also contribute to educational stratification (Correia, 2022) and challenge the transformative promise of compensatory education. This pattern aligns with national policy developments promoting vocational pathways, which have led to a 40% increase in completions over the past 15 years (OECD, 2016), even as access to higher education remains the main route to social mobility (Martins et al., 2016; OECD, 2022, 2023).

Discussion

The results presented allow us to understand the dynamics of internal differentiation in TEIP schools based on an interpretation that combines longitudinal quantitative evidence with qualitative analysis of organisational structures, strategies and mechanisms. The triangulation between the plans confirms that the evolution of school results, measured through the NES and indicators of progression, retention and dropout, cannot be understood solely as a direct reflection of socio-economic conditions or the additional resources made available by the programme. On the contrary, the differences between schools with more and less favourable trajectories stem, to a large extent, from the way each organisation interprets and operationalises its autonomy, manages teaching time and mobilises human resources and partnerships.

The quantitative component revealed the coexistence of three main patterns: a) schools with consistent improvements in NES and progression rates; b) schools with intermediate stabilisation; and c) schools with persistent decline. Qualitative analysis shows that this differentiation is associated with distinct institutional cultures: schools with favourable trajectories show a closer link between autonomy and diagnostic capacity, reflected in continuous monitoring and evaluation practices, intentional co-teaching and enhanced teacher training. In less favourable trajectories, on the contrary, autonomy tends to take on a more administrative character, with a focus on instrumental responses, for example, reinforcement of classes for exams, without systematic reflection on the mechanisms underlying performance. This reading is in line with the literature on school improvement in disadvantaged contexts, which highlights the importance of distributed leadership, self-assessment routines, and the pedagogical use of data (Ainscow et al., 2012; Harris, 2013).

The interviews further reinforce the existence of a double disconnect between policies and practices. On the one hand, the coexistence of rhetoric about curricular flexibility and the rigidity of the national examination system creates organisational tensions that seem to legitimise the inability to innovate pedagogically, especially in schools where the pressure to achieve results is most intense. On the other hand, the emphasis on (dis)motivation or student profiles tends to shift responsibility to external factors, particularly to students and families, obscuring opportunities for internal intervention. Thus, while some schools use the autonomy provided by TEIP as a lever for organisational development, others reproduce a logic of remediation that reinforces dependence on external resources, confirming what Bernstein (2003) called the “restricted recontextualisation” of policies, a bureaucratic translation of instruments of autonomy that reduces their transformative power.

The analysis also shows that the evolution of vocational education is a crucial mediator in the differences observed. Quantitative data indicate that the expansion of vocational pathways coincides, in several cases, with less intensive examinations and decreased participation in scientific-humanistic pathways, although there are notable exceptions (such as School D, where the expansion of vocational education had no impact on good performance in the NES). Qualitative evidence helps to understand this variation: when vocational expansion stems from

instrumental strategies aimed at improving completion rates or managing student flows, it tends to be associated with weaker academic results and internal segmentation between pathways. Conversely, when based on strategic decisions and linked to monitoring and follow-up practices, vocational provision can coexist with good performance and promote successful alternatives. This distinction confirms that TEIP results do not derive from the nature of the courses, but from the way each school structures its "ecosystem of opportunities" (Reay, 2004) and manages its symbolic boundaries between educational pathways.

The articulation between quantitative and qualitative dimensions also shows that school trajectories are constructed within a space of significant structural constraints: student composition, recruitment patterns, local employment dynamics, and school reputation. Schools located in more socially volatile contexts face higher turnover and less predictability in class sizes, which hinders the consolidation of collaborative work cultures. The international literature on compensatory education (Power et al., 2003; Demeuse et al., 2012) has highlighted precisely this vulnerability of territorial programmes: by acting on isolated school units, without changing the broader logic of student and resource distribution, there is a tendency to reinforce local management of inequality without structurally transforming it (Powers, Fischman & Berliner, 2016; Ferraz, 2025). The analysis developed here is consistent with this interpretation: TEIP provides enabling conditions (autonomy, resources, partnerships), but its effect depends on prior organisational capacities and the stability of the social context.

From this perspective, the results can be interpreted in light of Nancy Fraser's (2009) triad of justice. In terms of redistribution, TEIP introduces compensatory correction mechanisms, but the inequality of results shows that the redistribution of resources does not, in itself, guarantee equal opportunities and conditions for success, something that had already been pointed out in relation to US compensatory education programmes (Carter, 1984; Borman & D'Agostino, 1996), and which is naturally related at the macro level to localised intervention in deprived contexts and at the micro level to internal (school) structures. In terms of recognition, there is an ambivalence: the programme aims to strengthen, empower and value disadvantaged contexts, but the label "TEIP" is simultaneously a marker of stigma and symbolic differentiation (Quarema & Lopes, 2011), as the interviews illustrate. Finally, in terms of representation, TEIP schools have limited scope to influence national curriculum and examination policies, which restricts their institutional agency. Thus, Fraser's (2009) framework helps to understand why the equity pursued by the programme often translates into containment rather than transformation.

From a public policy perspective, the convergence between quantitative and qualitative data points to three main implications. First, the importance of protecting instructional time and curriculum intensity in exam subjects, preventing inclusion strategies from becoming forms of academic dilution. Secondly, the need to strengthen organisational capacity, monitoring, planning, and teacher development as a condition for autonomy to translate into innovation. And finally, the urgency of preventing vocational drift through monitoring and transition mechanisms to higher education, ensuring that professional pathways do not become pathways of social containment (Correia, 2022).

In summary, the analysis shows that the impact of TEIP is contingent: the programme creates potential for organisational development and equity, but its implementation depends on the interaction between structural factors (context, composition, national policies) and institutional factors (leadership, monitoring, pedagogical strategies). This realistic and associative reading, consistent with the methodological design adopted, reinforces the idea that compensatory education policies only achieve sustainable results when they combine material redistribution, symbolic recognition, and participatory representation. It is precisely at this intersection between resources, practices and meanings that it is decided whether compensation becomes emancipation or containment.

Implications for TEIP Policy and the Ministry of Education

The findings suggest that while TEIP provides a necessary framework for equity, its effectiveness depends on how autonomy, resources, and vocational expansion are managed at the school level. To strengthen compensatory education and avoid stratification, the following safeguards are recommended:

a) **Redistribution:**
   Targeted funding adjusted to student intake; guaranteed instructional time in exam subjects; and funding formulas that do not incentivise off-ramping to vocational tracks merely to raise completion indicators.
b) **Recognition:**
   Public communication strategies to counter the stigma of TEIP schools; valorisation of both academic and non-academic outcomes; and community co-design in planning TEIP projects.
c) **Representation:**
   Inclusion of school communities, parents, and local organisations in decision-making to ensure policies reflect contextual needs.
d) **Transparency and accountability:**
   Reporting frameworks that include both exam-based results and broader educational outcomes (certifications, internships, transitions), avoiding narrow performance metrics.
e) **Bridging mechanisms:**
   Support for hybrid academic–vocational pathways, guidance counselling, and credit recognition for students seeking to transition from vocational to higher-education routes.

Together, these measures could align TEIP with broader redistributive, recognition, and representation principles (Fraser, 2003), ensuring that compensatory education contributes to equity rather than reproducing social hierarchies

Conclusion

This study provides an integrated reading of why TEIP schools display divergent trajectories. Across six secondary schools, stronger results are associated with organizational routines that convert autonomy and additional staffing into monitoring cultures, protected instructional time, and structured partnerships; weaker results coincide with external attributions and a more instrumental use of resources. The vocational share functions as a mediating factor: its expansion often coincides with fewer exams and reputational risks, yet these effects are contingent on institutional strategy, some schools sustain exam performance despite extensive vocational provision.

Given the small, purposive sample (n=6) and the exploratory mixed-methods design without counterfactual identification, the evidence should be read as indicative. Results may also be shaped by unobserved confounders (intake dynamics, mobility, local labour markets, concurrent reforms). Further research should combine school-level administrative data with longitudinal follow-up of student cohorts to track higher-education transition and labour market outcomes, enabling stronger inferences about trajectories beyond secondary school.

At the policy level, the analysis supports a view of TEIP as a necessary but insufficient instrument. To advance equity, compensatory funding and autonomy may need capacity-building safeguards: a) the establishment of minimum standards of higher-education readiness, ensuring adequate instructional time and targeted support in examination subjects, as well as structured transition pathways for vocational students aspiring to enter higher education; b) the implementation of dual, transparent metrics capturing both academic outcomes (examination performance and completion rates) and non-academic outcomes (certifications, work placements, and post-school transitions), allowing for a more comprehensive assessment of educational effectiveness; and c) the strategic coordination of partnerships with local stakeholders - such as municipalities, employers, and higher-education institutions - to strengthen institutional capacity, diversify learning opportunities, and mitigate trade-offs between reputation and resources. These implications align with a broader logic, in which redistributive policies, recognition and representation are pursued jointly both within and beyond the school context.

Within these limits, the study´s mixed-methods evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that organizational capacity and ecosystem strategy – not the vocational share per se – help explain why similar TEIP inputs are associated with different performance patterns. The central question for schools and policymakers remains whether TEIP coincides with patterns that reproduce socioeconomic inequality, or whether it can be steered to expand opportunities for the most disadvantaged students.

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Corresponding author: Hélder Ferraz
Email: hnrferraz@hotmail.com

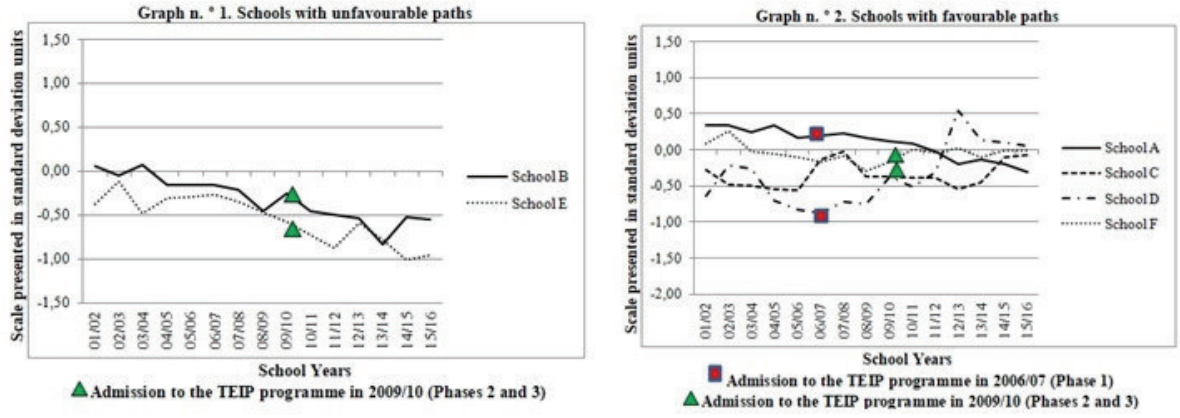
Appendix A – Year By Year Series for Quantitative Indicators

Quantitative Analysis: Evolution of Key Indicators in TEIP and Non-TEIP Schools

Note*:* scales vary across figures to optimise the visibility of within-school trajectories. Since the magnitude and dispersion of scores differ substantially between indicators and schools, fixed scales would have obscured relevant variation. All figures use absolute values consistent with the indicators' original metrics, and trends are directly comparable in direction and timing.

Figure 1

Differences Between the Average Score in National Exams (NES) by TEIP and Non-TEIP Public Schools (Z-Scores by subject and year), 2001/02 to 2015/16
X axis: School Year; Y Axis: NES Z-Score



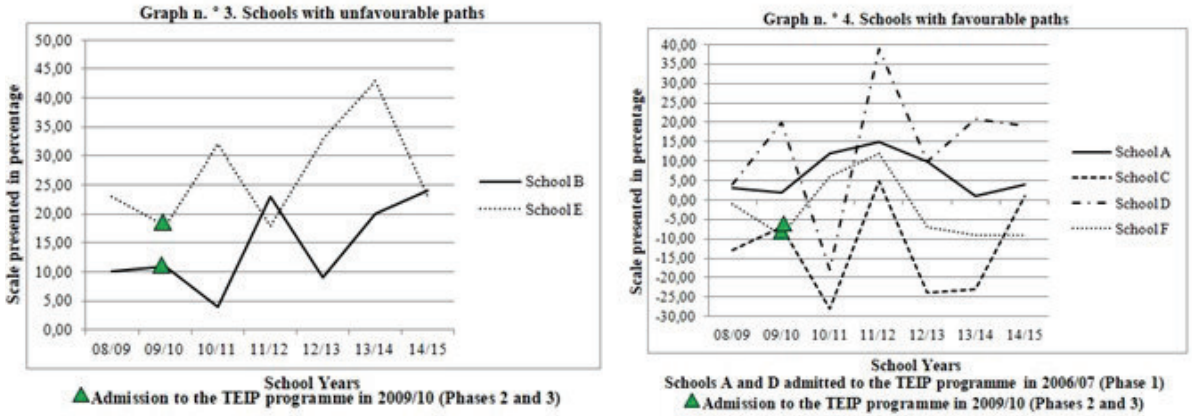
Note: NES standardised by discipline and year (national mean = 0; σ = 1). School-level NES is the weighted mean of discipline-specific z-scores (weights = number of exams)
Source: based on DGEEC databases (2001/02 and 2015/16)

Figure 1 shows that the performance in national exams of schools B and E had been worsening since the beginning of the time frame considered, a situation that did not change with their entry into TEIP. Between 2009/10 and the last year under review (2015/16), School B doubled the distance relative to the performance of non-TEIP public schools, from -0.25 to -0.55 standard deviation units, while School E went from -0.58 to -0.96 standard deviation units. In contrast, there was an improvement in the performance of schools C, D, and F, with School D presenting itself as the most relevant case, considering that between the year in which it entered the TEIP Program (2006/07) and 2015/16 it went from -0.87 to 0.06 units of standard deviation, an improvement in the performance of almost 1 unit of standard deviation, performing above non-TEIP public schools between 2012/13 and 2015/16. On the other hand, School A presents a decrease in its performance: between 2006/07 and 2015/16 it went from 0.20 to -0.31 units of standard deviation. And, although the decrease is similar to other schools, its selection as a school with a favourable path is due to its performance in the remaining indicators, as shown below.

Figure 2

Differences in 10th Grade Dropout and Retention Rates – TEIP minus non-TEIP (pp), 2008/09 to 2014/15

X axis: School Years; Y Axis: Percentage Points (pp)



Note: indicator is descriptive (not standardized)

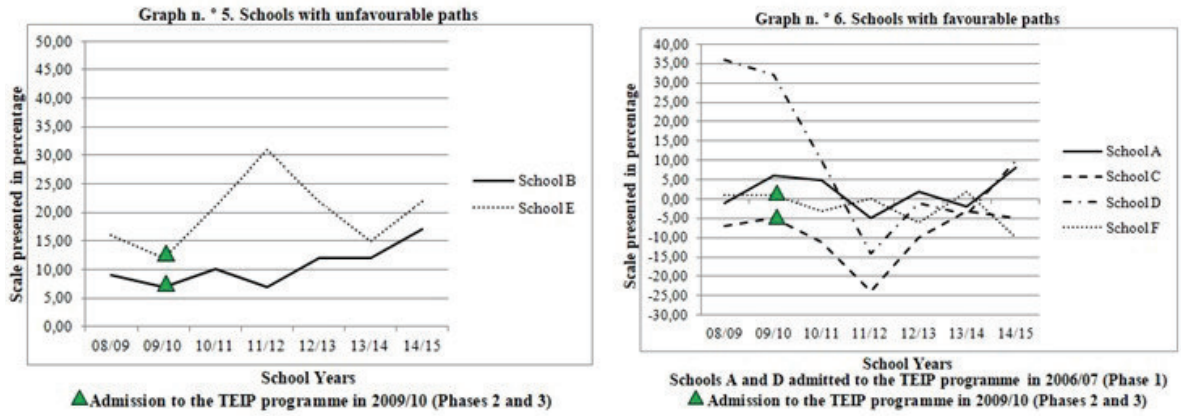
Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2008/09 and 2014/15)

Figure 2, shows an increase, between 5% and 10%, in grade retention and dropout rates for schools B and E, between the year they entered TEIP (2009/10) and the last year under analysis (2014/15). We also note that School F is the only one that decreases grade retention and school dropout rates by 11%, compared to non-TEIP public schools. Both School A and School C increased them by 9% and 2%, respectively.

Figure 3

Differences in Dropout and Retention Rates – TEIP and Non-TEIP Public Schools (pp), 2008/09 to 2014/15

X axis: School Years; Y Axis: Percentage Points (pp)



Note: indicator is descriptive (not standardizes)

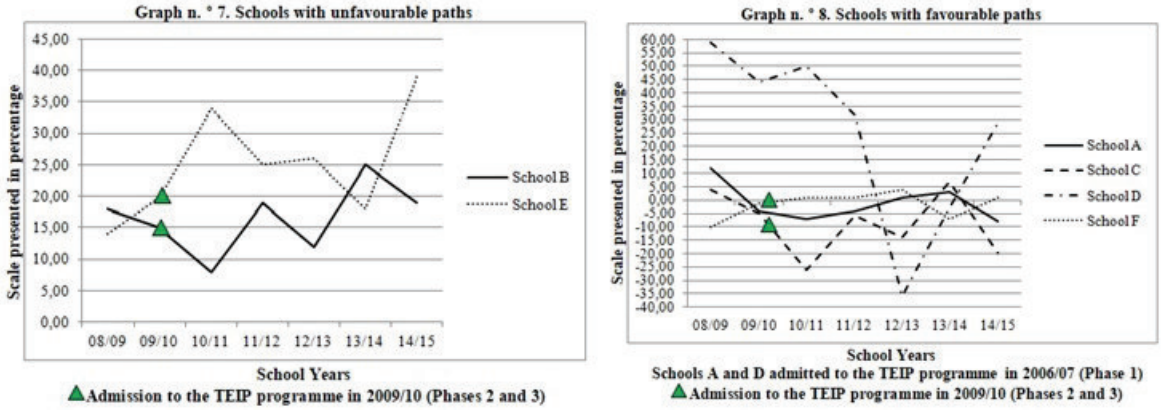
Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2008/09 and 2014/15)

Figure 3, shows a 10% increase in grade retention and dropout rates for Schools B and E between their entry into TEIP (2009/10) and 2014/15. School D records the greatest reduction

(26%), followed by School F with an 11% decrease, while Schools A and C saw increases of 9% and 2%, respectively, compared to non-TEIP public schools.

Figure 4

Differences in 12th Dropout and Retention Rates – TEIP minus non-TEIP (pp), 2008/09 to 2014/15
X axis: School Years; Y axis: Percentage Points (pp)

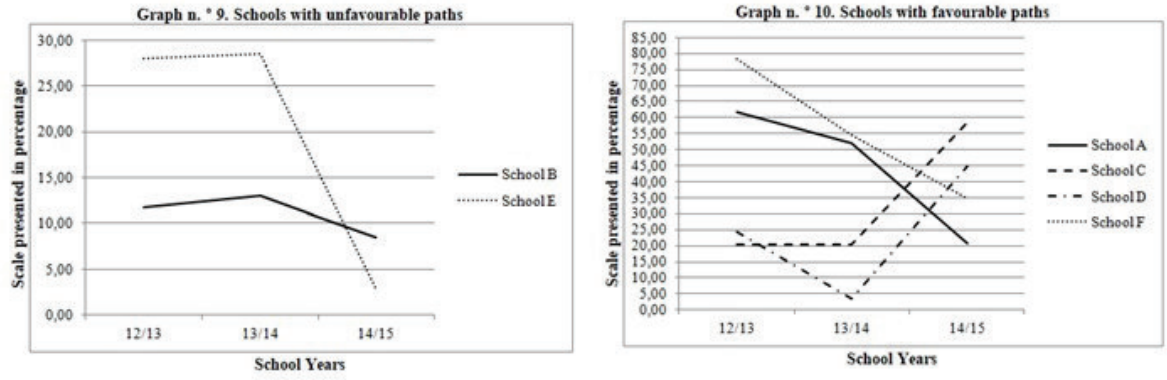


Note: indicator is descriptive (not standardized)
Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2008/09 and 2014/15)

As in the previous figures, also in Figure 4 we can see that schools B and E increased grade retention and dropout rates. Between the year of entry into TEIP (2009/10) and the last year under review (2014/15), Schools B and E had an increase of 4% and 25%, respectively. Regarding schools A, C, and D we note that they improved 12%, 24%, and 30%, respectively, and School F had an increase of 11% between the year of entry into TEIP (2009/10) and the last year under review (2014/15).

Figure 5

Percentage of Students with a Positive Score in National Exams in the 12th Grade After a Path Without Retentions in 10th and 11th Grades
X axis: School Years; Y axis: Percentage Points (pp)

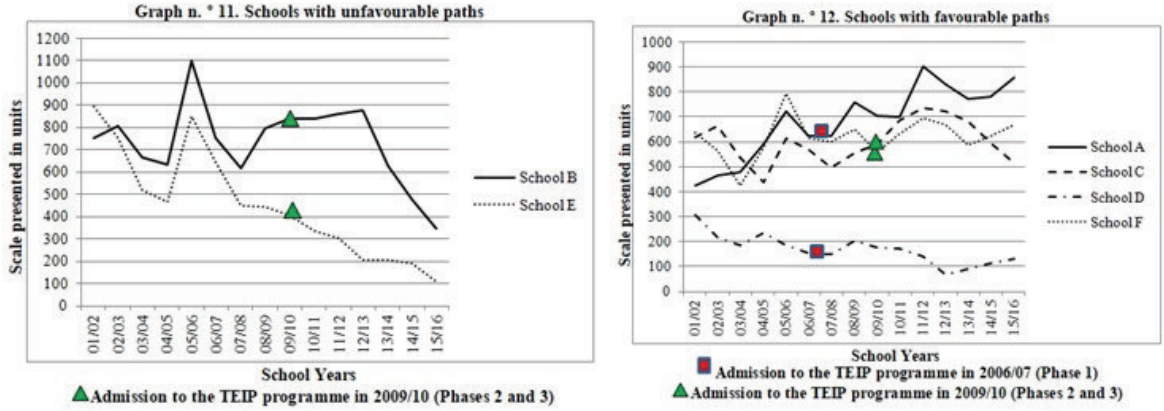


Note: Data available for three years only (2012/13–2014/15); used descriptively and as tie-breaker
Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2012/13 and 2014/15)

As we can see in Figure 5, after a slight increase in the percentage of students transitioning without grade retention, both schools B and E had a decrease, quite marked in the case of School E, from 28.5% in 2013/14 to 2.8% in 2014/15. Also, we note that both School A and School F show a downward trend in the number of students who transition without grade retention between 2012/13 and 2014/15, of approximately 40% and 50%, respectively. In another direction, schools C and D had an increase of approximately 40% and 20%. However, the fact that this indicator offers data only for three school years has led us to consider it only in cases where there was a need for a tiebreak.

Figure 6

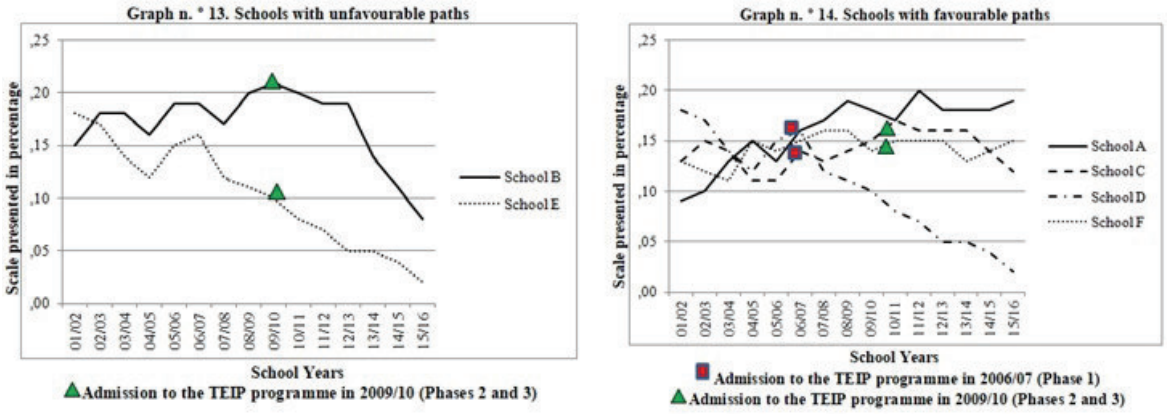
Number of National Exams (NES) Undertaken in Each TEIP School, 2001/02 and 2015/16
X axis: School Years; Y Axis: Count of Exams



Note: Descriptive counts (not standardized)
Source: based on DGEEC databases (2001/02 and 2015/16)

Figure 7

Evolution of the Proportion of National Exams (NES) Undertaken in TEIP Schools Considering the Total Number of Exams Undertaken by Public Schools, 2001/02 and 2015/16
X axis: School Years; Y axis: % of public-school exams



Note: descriptive indicator (not standardized)
Source: based on DGEEC databases (2001/02 and 2015/16)

According to Figure 6, schools B and E had a decrease in the number of exams undertaken. School E has faced a decline since 2006/07 and even the entry into TEIP (2009/10) has not contained the drop: in 2006/07, School E recorded 642 exams and, in 2015/16, 107 exams. In 2009/2010, when entry into TEIP, School B undertook 837 national exams and, although it has seen a slight increase in the following years, since 2012/13 there was a gradual decrease from 877 to 348 national exams.

In Figure 7, we find that School A is the one with the most relevant increase, considering that in 2001/02 it had 423 national exams, 621 in the year it entered TEIP (2006/07) and 858 in 2015/2016. School C, despite some fluctuations between 2001/2002 and 2007/08, shows an increase in the number of national exams in the first years after joining TEIP; however, since 2011/12 there has been a gradual decrease, from 736 to 514 national exams in 2015/16. School F, despite fluctuations, has maintained some stability in the number of national exams, particularly from 2006/07 onwards. As for School D, although with fluctuations, it has had a downward trend in the number of national exams, going from 308 in 2001/02 to 131 in 2015/16. As we can verify by comparing Figure 6 and Figure 7, the results are quite similar. In proportion to the national exams carried out in public schools, schools B and E show a decrease in the percentage of national exams, as can be seen in Figure 7, while School A maintains a trend in increasing the percentage of national exams carried out in proportion to the total exams carried out in public schools, School F maintains some consistency, decreasing the percentage of exams carried out since 2011/12, and School D has had a growing trend since 2005/06.

Table 3

Performance in Mathematics of TEIP Schools With an Unfavourable Path, 2011/12 and 2014/15

Mathematics	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
School B	-1	0	-1	0
School E	0	0	0	0

Note: −1 = below national mean; 0 = at national mean; +1 = above national mean. Annual coding based on NES distribution for the discipline

Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2011/12 and 2014/15)

Table 4

Performance in Mathematics of TEIP Schools With a Favourable Path, 2011/12 and 2014/15

Mathematics	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
School A	0	1	1	1
School C	0	-1	-1	-1
School D	0	0	0	0
School F	0	0	0	0

Note: −1 = below national mean; 0 = at national mean; +1 = above national mean. Annual coding based on NES distribution for the discipline

Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2011/12 and 2014/15)

Table 3 shows that School E has been in line with the maths' results of other students in the country, while School B reveals some inconsistency. Table 4 shows that Schools D and F also have results in line with national average, while School A has been the one with the best results, having been above the national average in the last 3 years under analysis. School C is the one with the worst results in the same period.

Table 5

Performance in Portuguese of TEIP Schools With an Unfavourable Path, 2011/12 and 2014/15

Portuguese	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
School B	-1	0	0	0
School E	0	0	0	0

Note: −1 = below national mean; 0 = at national mean; +1 = above national mean. Annual coding based on NES distribution for the discipline
Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2011/12 and 2014/15)

Table 6

Performance in Portuguese of TEIP Schools With an Unfavourable Path, 2011/12 and 2014/15

Portuguese	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
School A	0	1	1	1
School C	-1	0	0	0
School D	0	0	0	1
School F	1	1	0	0

Note: −1 = below national mean; 0 = at national mean; +1 = above national mean. Annual coding based on NES distribution for the discipline
Source: based on Infoescolas databases (2011/12 and 2014/15)

Table 5 shows that the results of schools B and E are consistent with the results at national level. However, School B improved its performance, since in the academic year 2011/2012 it was below the performance registered at national level.

Table 6 shows that School A, after an initial year (2011/2012) where performance was below the national average, had a better performance than that the national average for three consecutive years. School C also shows signs of improvement, since after being below the national level in 2011/2012, it managed to maintain a performance in line with the national results for the following three years. An improvement in performance can also be seen at School D, considering that after three years with results in line with the performance of schools at national level, in 2014/2015 it presents better results than the national average. School F is the one that after two years above the national average (2011/2012 and 2012/2013) worsened its performance, although it has remained in line with the national performance since 2013/2014.

These quantitative results help frame the subsequent qualitative analysis, which explores the perspectives of school headmasters and TEIP coordinators in relation to school performance factors, establishing links with broader theoretical debates.

Appendix B - Quantitative Sampling Frame and School Selection Criteria

Supplementary Table B1

Trends in Key Performance Indicators Across 36 TEIP Secondary Schools (2001/02–2015/16) – Six Schools Selected for In-Depth Qualitative Analysis Marked "YES" in the Column

School	NES	Ret/Dro.10.º	Ret/Dro. 11.º	Ret/Dro. 12.º	Prog. w/ ret.	PT	Maths	Number of national exams	Selection
A	↓↓	↑	↑	↓↓	↓↓	↑	↑	↑	YES
B	↓↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	→	↑	↓↓	YES
C	↑↑	↑	↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑	↓	↓	YES
D	↑	↑↑	↓↓	↓↓	↑↑	↑	→	↓↓	YES
E	↓↓	→	↑	↑↑	↓↓	→	→	↓↓	YES
F	↓	↓	↓	↑↑	↓	↓	→	↑	YES
G	↓	↓↓	↓↓	↑	↓↓	↓	↓	↓	NO
H	↓	↓	↑	↓↓	↑↑	→	↑	↓↓	NO
I	↓↓	↓↓	↓↓	↓↓	↓↓	↑	↓	↓	NO
J	↓	↓↓	↓	↑↑	↑↑	↓	↑	↓↓	NO
K	↑	↑↑	↓	↓	↑	→	→	↓↓	NO
L	↓↓	↓	↓	↓	↓↓	↑	↓	↓	NO
M	↓	↓↓	↓↓	↑↑	↓↓	↓	→	↑	NO
N	↓	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↓↓	→	→	↓↓	NO
O	↓↓	↓	↑	↑	↓↓	→	→	↓↓	NO
P	↓↓	↓	↓	↓↓	↓	↑	→	↓	NO
Q	↑↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	→	→	↓↓	NO
R	↓	↑↑	↑↑	↓	↑↑	→	→	↓↓	NO
S	↓↓	↓	↑	↑↑	↓↓	↓	→	↓↓	NO
T	↓	↓↓	↓	↓↓	↑↑	→	→	↑	NO
U	↓	↑↑	↑↑	↓↓	↑	→	→	↓	NO
V	→	↓↓	↓	↓	↑	→	→	↑	NO
W	↑	↑↑	↓	↓↓	↑↑	→	→	↓	NO
X	↓↓	↑	↓	↑	↓	→	→	↓	NO
Y	↓	↑↑	↑	↑↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	NO
Z	↓↓	↓	↓↓	↑	↓↓	↓	→	↓	NO
AA	↓↓	↑	↑	↓↓	↓	↑	↓	↓↓	NO
AB	↑↑	↑	↓	↓↓	↓↓	→	↓	↑	NO

AC	↓↓	↑↑	↓	↓	↓	→	↓	↓↓	NO
AD	↓	↑	↓	↓↓	↓	↑	↓	↓	NO
AE	↑↑	↑	↑	↓	↑	→	↓	↓	NO
AF	↓	↓	↑	↓↓	↓↓	→	↓	↓↓	NO
AG	↓↓	↓	↑↑	↑	→	→	↑	↑↑	NO
AH	↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑↑	↑	→	↓	↓	NO
AI	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	NO
AJ	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	n/d	NO

Note: This table presents summary trends across the main quantitative indicators used in the study. Arrows indicate overall directional tendencies between 2001/02 and 2015/16 — ↑ improvement, ↓ decline, → relative stability — with double arrows (↑↑/↓↓) denoting stronger patterns.

Indicators differ in temporal coverage and measurement scale (e.g., National Exam Scores [NES], retention/dropout rates, progression without grade repetition, and subject-specific exam results in Portuguese and Mathematics). As such, the synthesis captures general trajectories rather than year-by-year variations.

Some internal fluctuations and context-specific differences within schools are not represented in this summary but were fully considered in the underlying analysis and visualised in the original graphs used for school selection.