

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-57652025v30id27605911>**PERFORMATIVE REPRESENTATIONS DURING THE SINAES EVALUATION: A CASE STUDY IN THE RIVERSIDE REGION OF THE EXTREME NORTH OF THE AMAZON¹**

Representações performáticas durante avaliação do sinaes: um estudo de caso na região ribeirinha do extremo norte da Amazônia

Representaciones performáticas durante la evaluación del SINAES: un estudio de caso en la región ribereña del extremo norte de la Amazonía

Margareth da Silva Guerra²

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9881-2853>

E-mail: profamargarethguerra@gmail.com

Abstract: This article presents a study on the performative representations (performances) activated within a private Higher Education Institution (HEI) located in a riverside area of the Amazon region in Brazil. The objective was to understand the performative dimension – namely, the dramatization of behaviors and the construction of scenarios – during evaluation procedures and the assignment of scores under the National System for the Evaluation of Higher Education (SINAES). As the analytical framework, Erving Goffman’s theory of representations was employed, along with Stephen Ball’s approach to scenario fabrication in educational management. The methodology was based on a qualitative and interpretative social research design. The findings indicate that effort, mobilization, and intentionality are involved in constructing an “artificial dynamic,” which characterizes the institution’s conduct during evaluation periods.

Keywords: SINAES; institutional self-assessment; performances.

¹ Excerpt from research funded by CAPES through a doctoral scholarship in Sociology at the Federal University of Ceará.

² Federal University of Amapá (UNIFAP). Macapá. AP. Brazil.

Resumo: Este artigo, apresenta uma pesquisa sobre as representações performáticas (performances) acionadas em uma Instituição de Ensino Superior (IES) privada, localizada em uma área ribeirinha da região Amazônica. O objetivo foi compreender a dimensão performática – dramatização de comportamentos e produção de cenários – em situações de avaliações e atribuições de notas por meio do Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior (SINAES). Como chave analítica, adotou-se a teoria das representações de Erving Goffman e, para entender a fabricação de cenários na gestão, a abordagem de Stephen Ball. A metodologia adotada foi a pesquisa social qualitativa e interpretativa. Assim, foi possível afirmar que há empenho, mobilização e intenções na construção de uma “dinâmica artificial”, características dos períodos avaliativos.

Palavras-chave: SINAES; autoavaliação institucional; performances.

Resumen: En este artículo, se presenta una investigación acerca de las representaciones de actuación (desempeño) suscitadas dentro de una IES privada, ubicada en una zona ribereña de la región amazónica. El objetivo fue comprender la dimensión teatral - dramatización de comportamientos y producción de escenarios - en situaciones de evaluación y atribución de nota por medio del SINAES. Como llave analítica se adoptó la teoría de las representaciones de E. Goffman, y para entender la fabricación de escenarios en la gestión, la de Stephen Ball. La opción metodológica fue la investigación social cualitativa e interpretativa. Se pudo afirmar que hay empeño, movilización e intenciones en la construcción de una “dinámica artificial” - características del tiempo de la evaluación.

Palavras clave: SINAES; autoevaluación institucional; representaciones.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article presents a study on the "circuits of evaluation," based on the components of the evaluation processes under SINAES, as experienced in the research field by its interlocutors, members of the academic community of a private Higher Education Institution (HEI) located in the Amazon, within a riverside region of the "Estrelas" archipelago. In order to understand how the institution prepared for visits from SINAES evaluators, an approach referred to as an "ethnography of evaluation" was developed. This ethnography was grounded in field diary notes, derived from participant observations conducted between 2014 and 2022, and interviews with members of the academic community (professors, staff, and administrators) during the visits of external evaluation committees from SINAES.

SINAES emerged from policies aimed at establishing systems or agencies for assuring the quality of higher education, as a result of educational policy reforms in Latin America in the early 21st century. These reforms reflect a higher education policy shaped by internationalization and diversity, operating under a public-private and national-international model. This includes the incorporation of transnational education and is characterized by international partnerships, public regulation, the presence of an evaluative state, and the implementation of quality assurance systems.

Within this framework of reforms imposed on higher education during the 1980s and 1990s, quality evaluation evolved in alignment with regulatory models defined by the concept of "accountability." These models sought performance and productivity indicators, supported by a discourse of transparency as a necessary requirement toward society. This productive tendency manifests in the concepts of efficiency, quality, and accountability, which have become foundational principles of higher education policies at international, regional, and local levels, serving as key indicators for the supervision and regulation of HEIs.

National systems for quality assessment have increasingly been adopted across Latin America, based on pre-existing models, particularly those developed in Europe. On this matter, Leite and Genro (2012) note that the expansion of higher education in Latin America, especially during the 2000s, produced a scenario distinct from that of the previous century. In the current context, policies aimed at creating national quality assessment systems or agencies were implemented, largely drawing from models imported from countries recognized for their achievements in higher education. These models are grounded in a logic in which "a new form of imperialism, albeit in a benevolent guise, takes shape, with the Europe of knowledge as the hegemonic center and Latin America as the subordinate center [...]" (Leite; Genro, 2012, p. 77).

Within this global framework, higher education policies are redefined. In what Leite and Genro (2012) describe as the third wave of imperialism, priority is given to curricular reform and institutional evaluation, both components of an ideological package linked to globalization, an economic phenomenon that seeks to expand the

world's economic frontiers and promote the concept of a knowledge society. Such a society demands scientific research and the formation of highly qualified human capital to meet the needs of the productive labor market.

According to Santos (2008a), higher education faces the challenges imposed by globalization, which introduces requirements aligned with the logic of the knowledge society. This society prescribes specific competencies for the provision of higher education, particularly in Latin America, and extends beyond technological innovations. From this standpoint, global geopolitics imposes the need for scientific research and qualified human capital to satisfy the demands of the global market and, supposedly, to contribute to societal development.

The underlying issue is the conception of what qualifies as acceptable knowledge, shaped by the logic of a dominant paradigm (Santos, 2008b), a form of university knowledge that serves the market and is accessible to those who control financial resources. In this relationship of dependence on capital, university knowledge becomes a commodity within an emerging market: the knowledge economy. Within this logic, the formation of human capital is structured according to productivist principles, with labor, research, and technological innovation oriented toward the needs of the capitalist market.

The models adopted in the design of national quality assessment systems contain, according to Contera (2002), an inherent ambiguity that reflects the prevailing trends of such systems within the context of hegemonic globalization. These trends reveal a tendency toward a regulatory model, characterized by a focus on technical evaluation, quantitative emphasis, and accountability. These are interwoven with processes of competitiveness, ethics, and performance indicators grounded in instrumental rationality. The logic of accountability exerts pressure for the implementation of quality assessment systems, with the aim of consolidating public and investor confidence in HEIs.

National assessment systems generally aim to establish a hierarchy among institutions or academic programs, aligning higher education with a neoliberal model of provision, through performance measurement based on predetermined standards. In this regard, Dias Sobrinho (2003) warns that evaluation has become a powerful instrument for monitoring educational systems, particularly in developing countries, serving the demands imposed by the logic of capital. Thus, assessment processes, under the logic of accountability, are appropriated by capital as tools for measurement, control, and the achievement of results, responding to expectations of efficiency, economic productivity, and utilitarianism. This logic, embedded in the assessment procedures of national quality assurance systems, reflects the role of the controlling State, referred to as the Evaluative State. According to Afonso (2000), the term "Evaluative State" refers to the adoption of market logic and private management models, with a focus on achieving productivist outcomes.

SINAES emerged with the proposal of regulating and enhancing HEIs in Brazil, within a context marked by the diversification of institutions, increased enrollment driven by rising demand, the massification of education, the expansion of distance learning, and heightened competitiveness in both the labor market and the productive sector. SINAES was established based on three main functions: regulation, supervision, and evaluation. The evaluation proposal, as outlined by SINAES and conceptualized by the Special Evaluation Commission, composed of experts designated to implement it, was initially grounded in a democratic perspective: “a conception of evaluation as a process that effectively connects the formative dimension to a societal project committed to equality and justice [...]” (INEP, 2009, p. 87). However, the implementation of SINAES gradually took on a regulatory character, distancing itself throughout its execution from the emancipatory essence that originally guided its foundation.

2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The methodological approach adopted in this study was qualitative and interpretative social research. According to Rosenthal (2014, p. 50), [...] from this perspective, we, as social scientists, are tasked with uncovering how everyday agents construct their reality, how they experience and interpret their world.

The objective of the research was to understand the meanings expressed through the performative representations related to SINAES, as enacted by the HEI’s actors between 2014 and 2022. The study was grounded in an approach based on the anthropology of representations, employing field immersion techniques and data collection methods, including participant observation, individual interviews, and focus groups with representatives from different segments of the academic community.

The empirical field chosen was a private HEI located in the “Estrelas” archipelago, in the Amazon region. Since 2014, participant observation has been conducted at the institution, particularly during periods preceding and coinciding with internal and external evaluation processes. The choice of this empirical setting was driven by the opportunity for immersion in the institution’s daily life and by the strong presence of regional identity, both among the administrators and within the academic community. This context led to questions aimed at understanding how evaluation processes promoted by SINAES are experienced in universities, based on the hypothesis that such evaluation is perceived by actors at the HEI, located in the Northern region of Brazil, within the Amazon, as an extraordinary event. During such events, a series of performative behaviors are mobilized to create a positive impression on evaluators. These practices differ significantly from the institution’s usual routines.

Understanding the context of SINAES, particularly in an HEI situated in an archipelago in the Amazon region, is relevant in light of these concerns. These concerns are part of the everyday reality of HEIs across various regions of Brazil. At other moments during the research and in professional practice, signs were observed that

tensions tend to arise during evaluation periods. According to Paulino (2011), such tensions stem from the relationship between the “familiar” and the “external,” which creates a field of tension between those who belong to the local context (proximity) and those who come from outside (distance). Applied to the field of SINAES evaluations, evaluators represent the external element, outsiders who impose rules defined by the system’s indicators, often disregarding regional culture, institutional context, and local individuals. These actions are justified by the need to comply with SINAES quality indicators. Such practices, however, generate contradictions in relation to what is prescribed in the system’s guiding documents, particularly regarding the respect for regional diversity.

Performative representations, as proposed by Goffman (2013), aimed at gaining acceptance and achieving positive outcomes, are activated with the purpose of securing approval and attaining high-quality ratings through compliance with evaluation indicators. Within this scenario, it becomes essential to reflect on the role of place, with all its diversity and contradictions. This reflection led to the formulation of the central hypothesis guiding the research: are the SINAES quality indicators in Brazil based on models external to the country, to the Northern region, and to local contexts, linked to symbols of a form of quality associated with supposedly more “developed” nations and cultures? At this point, it is important to highlight the possibility that the procedures applied within SINAES may be influenced by remnants of a colonized view of education, shaped by a logic that manifests itself in an ethnocentric manner.

Thus, it is necessary to recognize that the standardization of assessment parameters is grounded in reference models that, in practice, encounter specific demands and tensions inherent to local realities, where culture, or rather, cultural diversity, gives rise to its own arrangements, involving situations of resistance, assimilation, or rejection of certain standards. Considering these issues and with the aim of deepening the debate, this article is guided by the following research questions: What performative perceptions are observed or perceived throughout the SINAES evaluation circuits within the HEI? How do these performative representations influence the quality indicators within SINAES?

By entering the social world of evaluation processes, it was possible to identify different modes of theatricalization and performance, inspired by the work of Goffman (2013), who is regarded by some sociologists as a pioneer in the analysis of everyday life (Gastaldo, 2004). Goffman (2013) explains that performances are enacted by individuals seeking to produce favorable impressions of themselves, shaped by a set of ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes expressed as they interpret the reality in which they are situated. These are the forms through which knowledge is constructed or adapted within social interactions, in a process that ultimately becomes embedded in practice. In this sense, the representational activity of individuals who share the same condition enables them to experience the social world through systems of codes and interpretations provided by society and guided by social values and aspirations.

The study of behavior dramatization appears to be a valuable path toward understanding how individuals construct their perceptions of the social world they inhabit, by interpreting events within everyday reality. Due to its connection with language, ideology, and social imagination, and especially its role in shaping social conduct and practices, performance constitutes an essential element in analyzing the factors that influence contexts of social interaction. Regarding performative representations, Goffman (2013, p. 34) emphasizes:

[...] I have been using the term 'performance' to refer to all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on them.

The discussion proposed by Goffman (2013), based on a type of ethnography of performances enacted by social actors in everyday life, becomes a relevant analytical key to reflect upon the evaluation circuits established within the HEI through SINAES (2004). Considering the ongoing nature of these evaluation circuits, actors assume roles that may carry meaning, namely, the performance of social roles within the context of higher education quality assessment. The position these individuals occupy, particularly in relation to the institution, allows managers to assign them specific roles during evaluation circuits. Thus, it is possible to consider that such actors perform roles within a supposed or idealized reality.

Also relevant as an analytical perspective is the concept of performativity as articulated by Ball (2010), which relates to regulatory models and the organization of power within defined spaces. According to Ball, performativity plays a role in the production of both educational and societal management:

Performances – of individual subjects and organizations – serve as measures of productivity or outcomes, as forms of displaying quality, or as moments of promotion or inspection. They signify, encapsulate, or represent the value, quality, or worth of an individual or an organization within a field of judgment [...] (Ball, 2010, p. 38).

In the case of the HEI under investigation, performativity emerges as a strategy for achieving satisfactory levels according to SINAES indicators. The evaluation process has been carefully orchestrated around “representational games of competition, intensification, and quality” (Ball, 2010, p. 39). During fieldwork, performative representations, from both Goffman’s (2013) and Ball’s (2010) perspectives, supported analyses on the fabrication of scenarios and the representations that arise throughout the evaluation circuits, with the objective of securing a “positive” outcome under SINAES.

Field immersion took place between 2014 and 2022 and included visits from external evaluation committees tasked with recognizing a traditional health sciences program at the HEI. The focus group technique was chosen, with the participation of

the institution's Self-Assessment Committee (CPA), whose members shared the actions taken in preparing the Institutional Self-Assessment Report, as well as their experiences during the re-accreditation process of the institution. The present research explores the empirical fieldwork carried out during this period, with the CPA members serving as key interlocutors.

The work of observation and listening within the focus group was structured around a script composed of guiding questions, organized under the theme "SINAES and the CPA: Evaluation Dynamics and Conceptions of SINAES", followed by questions addressing broader topics. The purpose of these guiding questions was to provide participants with a space for spontaneous expression on the subject, allowing them to reflect on their experiences in the CPA and their perceptions of SINAES.

3 FOUNDATIONS OF THE SINAES PROCEDURAL FLOW: FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

This section proposes an internal discussion within the context of the SINAES framework, structured around the triad of Evaluation – Regulation – Supervision. These elements are interconnected with the aim of establishing processes based on internationally recognized quality indicators, which may contribute to the consolidation of Brazil's national higher education system. From this perspective, SINAES seeks to establish a higher education evaluation system capable of producing results acknowledged for their quality.

The operational structure of SINAES is guided by a set of directives defined by the National Commission for the Evaluation of Higher Education (CONAES), which is responsible for institutionalizing the evaluation process and making it an inherent component of delivering high-quality higher education. According to SINAES (2009), its purpose is to serve a quality evaluation policy that ensures:

[...] the national evaluation process of higher education institutions, undergraduate programs, and student academic performance, as set forth in Article 9, sections VI, VIII, and IX of Law No. 9,394/96, dated December 20, 1996 – the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law.

The regulatory structure encompasses procedures related to Institutional Evaluation (IE), Undergraduate Program Evaluation (UPE), and the National Student Performance Exam (ENADE). A set of regulations, official acts, and specific instruments constitute the scope of SINAES evaluation processes.

The results of SINAES evaluations are expressed as quality levels on a scale from 1 to 5. A score of 3 indicates an acceptable quality level, 4 represents high quality, and 5 corresponds to excellent quality. Scores of 1 and 2 are associated with unsatisfactory standards. Institutions receiving unsatisfactory ratings may be subjected to corrective

procedures, such as signing a commitment agreement, or in more severe cases, may be excluded from the National Higher Education System.

Within the methodological flow of SINAES, this study proposes an analysis of the Institutional Evaluation process, with emphasis on the Internal Evaluation phase (Institutional Self-Assessment). According to the SINAES definition,

[...] the self-assessment process is the responsibility of each institution, which should seek the broadest and most effective participation of its internal community in the discussions and studies. It is also recommended, at the institution's discretion, that members of the external community, especially alumni and representatives from sectors most directly involved with the institution, be invited to participate (INEP, 2009, p. 108).

During this phase, the HEI initiates its institutional evaluation process as established by SINAES (INEP, 2009), which is subsequently complemented by the external evaluation conducted by a commission of evaluators appointed by INEP. The self-assessment process is coordinated by the institution's Self-Assessment Committee (CPA), established by each HEI, and follows the guidelines set by CONAES.

The axes covered in the Institutional Self-Assessment include: a) Institutional Planning and Evaluation; b) Institutional Development; c) Academic Policies; d) Management Policies; and e) Physical Infrastructure. Each axis corresponds to one or more of the ten dimensions established in the SINAES Law, ensuring alignment between the institutional self-assessment report and the external evaluation report prepared by the INEP commission.

The self-assessment report must reflect an institutional diagnosis and constitutes a mandatory component of the Institutional Evaluation process. This internal evaluation, carried out annually, includes the administration of opinion surveys within the university community, focusing on the analysis of higher education provision by the institution. During this phase, the CPA coordinates the distribution of questionnaires and organizes the evaluation reports to be submitted to the e-MEC system. The findings presented in this report inform the initial impressions of the External Evaluation Commission from INEP/SERES/MEC. However, this study does not specifically examine the report or its technical features. Instead, it focuses on the perceptions gathered through ethnographic observations and the narratives collected in focus group discussions.

4 PERFORMANCES, FRONTSTAGES, AND SETTINGS: THE "FINDINGS" OF THE EVALUATION

Beyond the in-person visits carried out by the External Evaluation Commissions, other scenarios emerge throughout the SINAES evaluation processes, such as the internal evaluation circuits, namely, the Institutional Self-Assessment, which precede these visits. These circuits represent the first stage to be constructed and play a

significant role in presenting the institution's diagnostic to the evaluation commissions. The HEI's diagnostic, a component of the Institutional Evaluation process and referred to as Institutional Self-Assessment, is conveyed through reports prepared based on surveys conducted with the academic community. These reports serve as a form of preliminary diagnosis of higher education institutions and their programs.

The CPA of the investigated HEI was composed of representatives from the faculty, students, technical staff, and civil society (external community), in accordance with the guidelines established by Law no. 10.861, dated April 14, 2004, the SINAES Law. It is the responsibility of the CPA to coordinate the self-assessment process impartially, organize the instruments required for conducting surveys, and prepare the institution's Self-Assessment Report. The term "warming-up" refers to the preparatory phase of the self-assessment process, which includes organizing the surveys, drafting the report, submitting the documents to the e-MEC system, and presenting them to the on-site Evaluation Commissions.

The ethnographic work focused on the CPA's activities, examined through participant observation and focus group meetings, during which members shared their experiences from their participation in the most recent evaluation process, Institutional Reaccreditation.

The CPA was composed of members selected through different mechanisms: some were elected by their peers, while others were appointed by the institution's administration. The testimony of one community representative reveals the political and symbolic nature of her participation in the CPA:

I wasn't elected, I was chosen, because I'm always at the college, I want to know everything [...]. The director invited me, my [...], I feel very proud to be here. I must admit that I contribute very little to the activities [...] (Testimony of the Community Representative).

The presence of this representative visibly contributed to the perception that the CPA adopted a democratic posture, an impression which, according to the committee members, could positively influence the evaluation commission's perception.

The CPA was coordinated by a faculty member appointed by the institution's administration. This individual held a doctoral degree, had over 20 years of teaching experience, and had participated in several evaluation processes at another HEI. At the investigated institution, he assumed leadership of the process. The technical-administrative staff representative was also appointed by the administration, while the faculty and student representatives were elected by their peers. Thus, the CPA group was characterized by diverse educational backgrounds and cultural profiles, representing perspectives that, to some extent, resonated with their respective groups.

In the empirical field, the structure of the Institutional Self-Assessment process was detailed by the interviewees. According to their reports, the process occurs

through the application of data collection instruments within the academic community. The CPA's methodology is divided into three phases: Phase 1: Instrument development and methodological planning, including community hearings with academic sectors and student groups for awareness-building, collection of suggestions, and the organization of seminars, alongside communication efforts through posters, newsletters, and the CPA campaign website; Phase 2: Data collection, when students, faculty, administrative technicians, and support staff respond to the institutional self-assessment questionnaire made available on the CPA website. The questionnaire covers topics such as infrastructure, pedagogical organization, faculty profile, program coordination, student services, and institutional management; Phase 3: Drafting of the partial self-assessment report and dissemination of preliminary results to those involved. After feedback and incorporation of suggestions, the CPA revises and finalizes the report, which is then submitted to SERES/MEC via the e-MEC system.

According to the CPA coordinator, the self-assessment project is reviewed and adjusted annually, aligned with the principles of "participatory evaluation". In reference to the conceptual framework mentioned by the coordinator, Leite (2005, p. 113) defines this model as grounded in "goals or agreements: Institutional Evaluation, Negotiation, Transformation, Transparency, Legitimacy, and Collective Decision-Making". Although the HEI's self-assessment project does not explicitly cite a theoretical foundation beyond the concept outlined by SINAES, namely, "[...] an understanding of evaluation as a process that effectively links the formative dimension to a societal project committed to equality and social justice [...]" (INEP, 2009, p. 87), it is important to emphasize that, while a theoretical analysis of evaluation under SINAES is not the focus of this study, it is still subject to a merit-based judgment model. The absence of institutional ownership over the evaluation process (Santos, 2008a) has gradually diminished within the field of evaluation, as is the case with SINAES. This raises an important point of reflection: the lack of awareness regarding how SINAES's evaluation model impacts academic life as a whole.

There appeared to be a clear consensus among the interviewees regarding the importance of SINAES for the maintenance, and what they often referred to as the "survival", of the HEI, a theme frequently emphasized, particularly by the CPA coordinator: [...] we are fully engaged in the evaluation; we participate in the entire process. We know how important it is. Our survival depends on the SINAES evaluations [...]. Upon entering the field, several aspects discussed by Goffman (2013, p. 39) became evident, particularly the idea of "collective representations" emerging from the group's convergences and implicit agreements, since "[...] all individuals situated within a given group are permitted or required to maintain the same social front in certain situations". Under the leadership of the CPA coordinator, the commission members displayed a certain level of alignment in their responses, which generally echoed the coordinator's statements and were accompanied by approving glances and gestures.

A performative representation, interpreted through the perspectives of Goffman (2013) and Ball (2010), was the apparent acceptance of SINAES by CPA members. This acceptance, although perhaps unpracticed or spontaneous, was marked by an absence of dissonance and only minimal criticism. Throughout this ethnographic exploration of the institutional self-assessment process, additional dimensions of the SINAES framework emerged, contributing to the analysis of its evaluative circuits, among them, the concept of frontstage, which, according to Goffman (2013),

[...] may conveniently be called **front** that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion [...] it is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during their performance" (Goffman, 2013, p. 36, emphasis added).

The experiences observed throughout the research journey, as interpreted in the analysis of the evaluative circuits to which the HEI was subjected, allowed for the examination of the routines of the institution's management, faculty, and staff involved in the CPA. These observations revealed that fronts, that is, the images actors construct of themselves, are also produced during evaluation processes. According to the interviewees, this stems from the perceived need to "make a good impression": "[...] We are always concerned about the evaluation; we know how important it is to present a good appearance and make a good impression on the evaluators" (Testimony from a faculty member).

The use of expressions such as "good impression" and "good appearance" highlights the fact that members of the academic community, particularly those in the CPA, develop performative strategies to construct acceptable fronts during SINAES's evaluative circuits. One faculty member's statement clearly reflects the concern with meeting the expectations of the External Evaluation Commission, stating that doing so would result in a favorable SINAES evaluation. The notion that an artificial dynamic emerges during the "evaluation period" is present in several accounts, bringing to light issues raised by Goffman (2013) regarding the dramatization of behavior and the theatrical dimension of social interactions in everyday life.

In his analysis of social interaction, Goffman (2013) defines audience as the presentation of oneself to others with whom one interacts. In the context of this study, the audiences are represented by the external evaluation commissions of SINAES and the academic community during data collection or during mobilization and feedback seminars. Another element observed during fieldwork was the deliberate organization of settings, which, according to Goffman (2013, p. 36), "[...] includes the furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background elements [...]"

There was a clear concern with constructing and/or organizing settings to receive the evaluation commission, ranging from more complex arrangements to simple gestures, such as offering a box of traditional regional sweets to the evaluators. Each group mobilized by the HEI's administration had well-defined tasks, whether in

the administrative or pedagogical sphere, to ensure that everything was properly arranged for the days of the external visit or for the institutional self-assessment process.

The role of the CPA in creating acceptable settings and fronts during the evaluation circuits, whether external, through participation in meetings and presentation of the self-assessment project and its results, or internal, through coordination of the institutional self-assessment, was as emblematic and relevant as that of any other sector within the academic community. However, the CPA members' perception of SINAES appeared to be as superficial as their belief in the system itself. Throughout the observations and group discussions, the narratives were consistently focused on the settings and fronts constructed for the evaluators' visit, arrangements that, once the evaluation process was completed, were immediately dismantled.

5 WHAT "STEERS" THIS RIVER

The performative strategies observed during the on-site research do not represent falsifications but rather expressions of a broader context, marked by an exceptional occasion triggered by the visits of INEP Evaluation Committees. On such occasions, a series of performative behaviors is adopted to create a positive impression on the evaluation committees, with the expectation of obtaining "positive" assessments based on the quality indicators outlined in SINAES instruments. The research participants expressed a clear understanding that a significant degree of staging or fabrication of actions takes place, though they perceive it as a necessary factor for the institution's continuity.

In light of this perception, the participants' accounts confirm the staging or construction of acts, which helps address the guiding questions of this research, particularly the following: What performative perceptions are captured or emerge throughout the SINAES evaluation circuits within the HEI? How do these performative representations influence SINAES quality indicators? During the on-site research, it was possible to identify a series of performative acts functioning as mediating strategies for the HEI's alignment with SINAES quality indicators, aiming to positively influence the evaluation results.

The set of settings and façades, or expressive equipment, produced by the actors (participants in this research) involved in the evaluation circuits, whether during the visits of external committees or throughout the institutional self-assessment process, reveals, as suggested by Goffman (2013), the performative dimensions of these settings and façades, aligned with the perspective embedded in SINAES evaluation indicators.

SINAES is incorporated into academic management as an institutional policy, with regulatory processes as its main guiding principle.

The regulatory perspective prevails in the discourse of those who advocate for the importance of evaluation as a tool for institutional diagnosis and planning. From

this viewpoint, the result is the construction of an idealized academic routine, marked by carefully orchestrated settings and performative façades that conform to the logic of SINAES quality indicators. Consequently, the outcomes of the evaluations, both in external committee reports and in institutional self-assessment, end up losing their diagnostic or strategic value within institutional planning.

The interlocutors, through their reflections, reveal a belief that the creation of acceptable façades is necessary to generate positive impressions, stemming from an artificial dynamic that characterizes the institution's "evaluation period." Representational games, as discussed by Ball (2010), impose a competition for recognized quality and reflect how evaluation can be used as an instrument of power dispute, depending on the level of understanding and control that actors possess over the evaluation dynamics. Mastering evaluation processes, within the context of internal disputes in the HEI, becomes a tool of empowerment for institutional maintainers and administrators.

Thus, this study suggests the need to rethink SINAES, particularly regarding the lack of feedback from SERES/MEC on institutional self-assessment reports. A new in loco evaluation dynamic could be implemented. Reflecting on the 20th³ anniversary of SINAES (2024), it is worth considering greater support from specialists, researchers, and other professionals involved, aiming to provide effective feedback to higher education institutions.

One suggestion is that evaluation efforts should focus more on the regional development of HEIs, contributing to a higher education system with greater social value.

As a contribution of this research, and based on the guiding principles of SINAES, such as social responsibility, recognition of diversity, and respect for institutional missions and histories, an evaluation model that fully embraces these principles is proposed. The issue raised responds to the performativity observed in the empirical field, which is currently enabled by the sporadic and distant nature of SINAES evaluation cycles.

To address this issue and improve the evaluation process, the formation of local or regional evaluators is recommended, through agencies of a similar nature, operating in cooperation with national and regional agencies. Proximity between evaluators and institutions would allow for periodic visits and more consistent follow-up, fostering a shift in the culture of performativity within evaluation processes.

This is the contribution of this research to the reflection on the quality assessment process in higher education institutions located in the Amazon region, taking into account their singularities and challenges.

³ In 2024, SINAES celebrated its 20th anniversary. INEP has promoted a series of seminars to encourage dialogue on the impacts, challenges, and advancements of SINAES since 2004.

REFERENCES

AFONSO, A. J. **Avaliação educacional**: regulação e emancipação. São Paulo: Cortez, 2000.

BALL, S. J. Performatividades e fabricações na economia educacional: rumo a uma sociedade performativa. **Revista Educação e Realidade**, Porto Alegre, v. 2, n. 35, 2010. Disponível em: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/3172/317227077004.pdf>. Acesso em: 14 out. 2024.

CONTERA, C. **Avaliação democrática**: para uma universidade cidadã. Florianópolis: Insular, 2002.

DIAS SOBRINHO, J. D. **Avaliação**: políticas educacionais e reformas da educação superior. São Paulo: Cortez, 2003.

GASTALDO, E. **Erving Goffman desbravador do cotidiano**. Porto Alegre: Tomo, 2004.

GOFFMAN, E. **A representação do EU na vida cotidiana**. Petrópolis Vozes, 2013.

INEP. SINAES - Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior: da concepção à regulamentação. Brasília: INEP, 2009.

LEITE, D. **Reformas universitárias**: avaliação institucional participativa. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2005.

LEITE, D.; GENRO, M. E. Quo Vadis? Avaliação e internacionalização da educação superior. In: LEITE, Denise (org.). **Políticas de avaliação universitária em América Latina**. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2012.

PAULINO, A. G. L. Lugar e poder simbólico em riacho doce. **Revista de Ciências Sociais**, Fortaleza, v. 42, n. 1, p. 110-128, 2011. Disponível em: <http://www.periodicos.ufc.br/revcienso/article/view/449>. Acesso em: 14 out. 2024.

ROSENTHAL, G. **Pesquisa social interpretativa**: uma introdução. Porto Alegre: EDIPUCRS, 2014.

SANTOS, B. S. **Um discurso sobre as ciências**. São Paulo: Cortez, 2008b.

SANTOS, B. S. **Pela mão de Alice**: o social e o político na pós-modernidade. São Paulo: Cortez, 2008a.

SINAES. Seminário de 20 Anos do Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior. Brasília: [s. n.], 2024. 1 vídeo (2:48:06). Publicado pelo canal Inep Oficial. Disponível em: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQ0AYk0UYUU>. Acesso em: 9 jul. 2025.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the article "Performative representations during the SINAES evaluation: a case study in the riverside region of the extreme north of the Amazon".

Data availability

The data supporting this study are not publicly available due to ethical and/or privacy restrictions.

Translated by: Lesy Editorial
E-mail: lesyeditorial@gmail.com