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Higher Education in Portugal and Cape Verde: curricular challenges

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Introduction

We are currently facing a turning period, living a visible transformation in society in general, and in the education in particular, due to the globalization policies, which impose new forms of regulation of society.

During the last decades, Portugal and Cape Verde, experienced a significant evolution in higher education (CNE, 2013; Varela, 2013; 2012), reflecting the commitment of the public authorities, academic institutions and other agents in promoting quality of academic projects and products, seeking thereby meet the aspirations of their societies.

Not ignoring national realities, but under the influence of transnational and supranational entities, more evident in Portugal, were introduced reforms in the education system, mainly in higher education, emerging new curricular proposals and new methods for the promotion and quality assessment according to the patterns shaped by the European Union (EU), the World Bank (WB) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

With the implementation of the Bologna process in the Portuguese higher education, was created the Agency for Assessment and Accreditation (A3ES)¹, in order to guarantee the quality required by the European standards and guidelines.

Regarding Cape Verde, in 2012, the legal system's reform in the higher education, gave rise the process of accreditation, in new ways, of the institutions and higher education courses, including the public university (Varela & Pacheco, 2013).

In this text, we briefly analyse the implementation framework, of the policy options of the higher education in Portugal and Cape Verde. Therefore, we refer the policies of globalization prevailing in Europe, mainly the process of Bologna, which ensure the quality of courses and a greater mobility within Europe, although leads to the curriculum's recentralization and of the outcomes, as well as to the standardization of knowledge and to the accreditation processes, phenomena which also strongly influence the higher education in Cape Verde, due to the close relations between this small country in the Middle Atlantic, the former colonial metropolis (Portugal) and the European Union, connected by a special Partnership Agreement, which are reflected in particular by the approximation of forms of legal regulation, curriculum and academic praxis, as well as the models of accreditation and evaluation, enhanced by the significant mobility of teachers of both countries.

The text also provides a brief reflective approach of curricular challenges to higher education in both countries, which are expressed on the basis of two dichotomous trends, but complementary and part of the institutions' everyday: the alignment with universal standards of regulation and assessment of higher education' quality; concerning the curriculum options, the affirmation of the purpose of higher education institutions reflect the specificities of the respective countries, namely culture, identity, traditions and national development aspirations.

Globalization policies

Currently, Cape Verde and Portugal meet new forms of regulation emerging from globalization policies which defend the standardization and homogenization of processes and practices imposed or induced by transnational and supranational organizations, including the EU, the World Bank and the OECD, promoting, thereby, the cognitive regulation through a conceptual change (Pacheco, 2011), sustained by the legitimacy and by knowledge sharing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2012), as well as by the imposition of standards for measuring academic results (Maroy, 2012).

¹ Decree-Law n. 369/2007, of november 5.



The harmonization and standardization of policies are in the basis for national proposals with identical reforms, which intersect with the travelling policies, which according to Steiner-Khamsi (2012, p. 11), "one does not know where they come from, or go to; they are at the same time nobody's and everybody's reform ". Respectively, Maroy (2012) says that this reform is impregnated of logics of legitimation of valid knowledge and by the ideology of "accountability", *i.e.*, the standardization of processes is replaced by standardization of academic results.

Therefore, in this recent reforms' context occurred in the higher education, we face doubts and uncertainties. However, we also face certainties, namely, that globalization is, in general, connected to a technical unicity (Santos, 2011) and, in particular, to a centrality of results and standardization of knowledge, rather than national differences indeed relevant. However, contrary to these global trends, there are practices promoting the increment of the autonomy of teachers and students, concerning the accomplishment of the curriculum, in environments conducive to reflection, recreation and appropriation innovative of the submitted curriculum in order to get the deepest meaning of the education, not aiming to educate automata, but to education of autonomous individuals, aware of their social role and able to integrate themselves the active life, envisaging their personal, professional and social fulfilment (Varela, 2011).

Educational Policies in Cape Verde

In an international context, Cape Verde is not immune to the pressures related to the imposition of standards of the educational policies, aiming the standardization of both education and curriculum. As such, reforms were introduced in higher education, under the influence of globalization policies and the European agenda, through the strong relationships it has with Portugal. Consequently, Cape Verde has as reference the Portuguese education system.

In the first decade of this century, Cape Verde faced a rapid expansion of the education offer, with a renewed framework, diverse and open. Consequently, in 2002/2003, Cape Verde had a greater number of students inside the country than abroad (Bartolomeu & Pacheco, 2013).

However the public university continued with autonomy to create, in the light of its statutes, the courses, without any requirement to bind to a legal obligation to previous accreditation, which only occurred in 2012, not following, however, "the institutionalization of a regulation system, and evaluation of its performance" (Varela, 2013, p. 1).

Assessment practices became regulated by Decree-Laws No. 20/2012, of 19 July, and 22/2012, of 17 August. However, in higher education, internal evaluation continued to occupy a more prominent status, focused on the measurement of academic knowledge, under the supervision of the Quality Council (Varela & Pacheco, 2013). The external evaluation continues to be carried out by Portuguese academics, through occasional invitations by the competent government department.

Given such scenario, it is urgent to establish, in the coming years, a system of consolidated evaluation practices that ensure the quality of higher education.

Educational Policies in Portugal

Portugal, like other EU Member States, besides confronting with a "globally structured agenda", grounded in the OECD (Dale, 2004; Teodoro, 2003), is also confronted with the supranational agenda based in EU discursive practices imposed on "lifelong learning", "expertise", "skill", "quality" and other training standards, grounded in professional skills (Pacheco, 2009).

Facing such educational scenario, Dale (2008) supports that there is a "European education", subdivided into other common spaces, "European higher education", "European Research" among others, which support the "Europeanization of curriculum". Therefore, in Lisbon's Agenda's perspective, the reform of the universities is based on the European university of the Bologna Process, in order to converge the higher education systems (Pacheco, 2009), inviting to such Portuguese reality's approach, the higher education reform resulting from the "European higher Education Area" which has resulted in the implementation of such process.

Bologna imposes supported pedagogical practices in three areas: didactic (formal classes); tutorial (dialogues between teachers and students) and investigative (studies and research conducted by the students). This philosophy leads us to Papert's pedagogical constructionism's concept (2008, p.134), when he says that "the goal is to teach in order to produce the greatest learning from the minimum of teaching." However, it is constituted by curricular units that follow a logic of credits and learning outcomes common to all EU countries. Despite allowing greater mobility of



students in the EU Member States, is anchored to a pedagogy of goals, not as a point starting, but as a point of arrival, i.e., focused on academic results, that fits into Tylor's practice.

In addition to the Bologna process and to increase the quality of higher education and the effectiveness of education systems in the EU countries, came up in 2009, the A3ES, an agency of public utility, in order to create procedures and external structures assessment associated to the existing internal structures assessment. Therefore, as from that date, A3ES became responsible, *a priori*, for the validation of new courses, no longer possible to open its courses without accreditation, and *a posteriori* for the validation of the courses already running in the institutions, i.e., is then responsible for approving, or not, of the courses and programs (Bartolomeu & Pacheco, 2013).

Curricular challenges

To better respond to the level of higher education in modern and democratic society, OECD, the European Commission, UNESCO and CNE, defend that higher education still needs greater attention and appreciation of extracurricular activities. According to the CNE (2013), these activities, also contributes to a differentiation and enrichment of personal journey in higher education, contributing to the mainstreaming of knowledge increasingly valued, required in the labour market also more demanding, being peremptory that graduates possess characteristics to distinguish them from the others, in order to easily framed them in the labour market. Therefore, the higher education institutions should give priority to the conditions for students to actively participate in these activities.

Bearing in mind the above said and according to the studies of the CNE (2013), the mobility of students, through programs which enable them the frequency of one or more semesters during their course of study at another institution of higher education, is an added value in academic and cultural terms. As such, education carried out at these institutions is complemented by extracurricular cultural systems, which provide an enriching and meaningful learning, assuming also that the field of knowledge is not restricted to formal learning environments, also covering informal environments of social interaction and cultural institutions.

Given the above, we find that, in the context of the internationalization of higher education, there are also possibilities for the development of processes and practices for translating national and local specificities in the global context, promoting areas for mutually supportive cooperation, by exploiting approach opportunities of higher education institutions, thus contributing to the development of the curriculum, from a perspective of collaborative network, in an emancipatory bases and with respect for reality, culture, and national idiosyncrasies.

Conclusion

Regarding the above mentioned, we conclude that the globalization policies intersect homogeneously the higher education, even though the procedures of standardization are more explicit in Portugal, through the Bologna process, than in Cape Verde.

Cape Verde and Portugal have been adopted in the reform of higher education, educational policies to create and implement a development process to ensure the quality, organizing activities with international rules. However, despite this renewed framework for higher education, open for a greater number of students, both countries must continue to focus on increasing higher qualifications, in order to achieve this Knowledge New Age's specific demands, and market increasingly competitive.

To this end, both countries should continue to make efforts to improve the conditions of access and frequency to higher education and, consequently, achieve the academic success.

Consequently, it is necessary to reflect, to innovate the educational practices, and adapt educational outcomes, enriching the experience of attendance in higher education, easing the curricula and methods assessment, not disregarding the requirement.

In this context, CNE (2013) suggest that students should be able to choose part of their curricular units that set their study cycle. These curricular units may be within their area of study or in a broader range of other areas of knowledge.

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