

## TNP2- Languages

### *Quality Enhancement in Higher Education Language Studies*

#### **National Report from Portugal**

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#### **1- Introduction**

Portugal, with its 9,979 inhabitants, is a monolingual country as Portuguese is the only official language.

The Portuguese language is also spoken in Brazil, five African countries and in Portuguese immigrant communities all over the world. In total, around 200 million people speak Portuguese.

Its monolingual status notwithstanding, Portugal has been developing its social and linguistic framework over time. Nowadays, it is no longer a country of outward migration but is instead the destination of immigrants from Brazil, Africa, China (Macau), East Timor and Eastern countries (former USSR). Portuguese remains the official language in schools but the Ministry of Education has secured special linguistic support for the children of alien residents. According to non-official data, the most relevant linguistic minorities present in compulsory level education are in order of importance: Cape Verde, Angola, Guinea, Gypsy population, Sao Tomé e Príncipe, Mozambique, China and Timor.

Foreign languages are optional in pre-primary and primary education (up to 9 years of age). In general, students tend to choose English (93%) as their first foreign language. When they reach the fifth grade (10 years of age), foreign language learning becomes mandatory. In the seventh grade students learn a second foreign language and in high school they revert to a single foreign language of their choice. In addition to English, the most popular languages are French and German, despite the growing supply of Italian and Spanish courses. There is also the legal possibility of choosing the "mirandês", which is a language spoken by a Portuguese minority in Northern Portugal.

Public or private schools belong to the Ministry of Education, despite the fact that Private schools are administered according to private and corporate schooling laws. Pre-primary schools can belong to the Ministry of Education or to the Ministry of Social Affairs. Public pre-primary and primary schools (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> cycles- basic education up to 12 years of age-), rely more directly on municipal authorities.

Recently, the Portuguese Educational System's most important development was the 1986 Education System Law, which created a new structure for the educational system. The latter recognised the right of all citizens to education and culture, to equal opportunity of access and academic success; the importance of decentralisation and diversification of educational structures and practices, of rectifying regional imbalances and of contributing to the development and practice of democracy.

Higher Education was divided into two sectors: University and Polytechnic, both private and public. The aims of both are to provide a well-grounded scientific and technical training that prepares for professional activity. Despite the fact that Polytechnic teaching is more focused on practical training, in reality, there has been a tendency for it to emulate University teaching.

The increased innovative practice of Higher Education since 1986 has been linked to advanced training of secondary and tertiary professionals, advanced training of educators and teachers of all levels of schooling and the recognition of their right to continuous education.

Higher Polytechnic Education, which initially provided intermediate degrees (3 years of training), is offering today higher diplomas of *Licenciatura* (4 years of training), Masters and PhD diplomas, with the latter requiring certain agreements with Universities.

Universities have maintained their 5-year degree, with the exception of longer programs such as Medical School or Architecture, although newer Universities tend to organise their diplomas based on 4-year programs.

The Portuguese Educational System has been highly centralised in the past, with the Ministry of Education located in Lisbon. More recently, there has been a tendency to decentralise through Regional Councils of Education that administer basic and secondary education in an attempt to pass on responsibility to Municipal authorities.

Public Polytechnic Education was a decentralising vector of Higher Education, given that it was created, in the 80s, in 14 District capitals, 11 of which did not have any University. Nowadays, more Polytechnic Institutes are being created across the country.

Public University Education has 13 Universities spread out through district capitals and autonomous regions, with several branches all over the country. Today, there are 224.091 students enrolled in Public Higher Education and 120,777 enrolled in Higher Private Education. In the public system, 150,493 are enrolled in Universities and 73,598 in Polytechnics, while in the private system the numbers are respectively 56,534 in University and 64.243 in Polytechnics.

As in other European countries, Portugal is restructuring its programs according to blueprints set out in Bologna and the therein established system of credits, such as the ECTS.

Restructuring has been gradually taking place in Universities. There is sufficient autonomy to create programs, with varying structures within the two cycles (3+2 or 4+1), according to each University. Teachers' education programmes must however follow the 4+1 arrangement. The Teachers' education programmes' accreditation is certified by an independent Institution.

In 1998, a National Institute for Accreditation of Teacher Education (INAFOP-Instituto Nacional de Acreditação da Formação de Professores) was created as an independent institution to assure and improve the quality of teacher education through the:

- accreditation of initial teacher education programmes preparing teachers for pre-school, compulsory and upper secondary education;
- external certification of teachers that have followed non-accredited programmes;
- establishment of quality standards for initial teachers' training;
- registration of accredited programmes and certified teachers;
- promotion of the debate and dissemination of information and practices that can contribute to improve the quality of teacher education;
- elaboration of general recommendations concerning initial teacher education addressed to the Government and to teacher education institutions;
- development of relations with similar institutions in other countries, with international associations or organisations and with the European Union on matters within each Institution's scope.

In the medium term, this institution is also expected to be in charge of the accreditation of in-service teacher education and of further teacher education for other educational tasks. However, although higher education strives for the excellence and quality of its programmes, the existence of an Institution such as INAFOP is not free from controversy as Universities fear for their autonomy. The Ministry of Education is soon to create a special department to assume responsibility and accountability in this area.

The main goals of the Portuguese Program for Educational Development (Prodep) initiated in 1990 were to "improve the quality of education", "expanded access to education" and to "modernise educational infrastructures".

In 1986, the Commission for the Reform of the Educational System (CRSE) had called for the "enhancement of the quality of teaching", translated, among other aspects, into the following goals: a) increasing the demand for qualitative excellence in teaching; b)

reorganisation of adult teaching in a framework of continuous education; c) improvement and modernisation of pedagogic and didactical methodologies; d) lowering of school failure; e) improvement in the teaching of Portuguese language and culture; f) teachers' education.

On the other hand, several studies revealed that quality in the management of the educational system and schools can be achieved through a democratic regulatory power of the State, a decentralised administration and an autonomous school/University/Polytechnic institution. Thus, the assessment of schools and quality of teaching have been targets set by governmental and administrative structures in the past.

In 1994, The General Assembly enacted the Higher Education Assessment Law covering institutions of higher education, both private and public universities and polytechnics.

The system of monitoring and assessment covers the quality of scientific and pedagogic performance of Higher Education Institutions. It comprises the following fulcra:

- Teaching, namely curricular structures, scientific level, pedagogic processes and innovative practices;
- Competency of teaching agents;
- Research;
- International co-operation;
- Placement of graduates in the labour market;
- Connection to the community, namely through the provision of services and cultural activities.

These goals would in turn:

- Promote improved quality of activities;
- Inform and raise awareness among the educational community;
- Ensure a more rigorous knowledge and a more transparent dialogue among Institutions of Higher Education;
- Contribute to the organisation of a network of Institutions of Higher Education.

As a result of this assessment, the Ministry of Education will apply adequate measures namely the:

- Strengthening of public funding;
- Incentives for new and existing programmes;
- Support for scientific research;

-Creation of plans aimed at correcting any dysfunction or irregularity in the assessment process.

In the case of a negative assessment, The Ministry of Education may apply the following measures:

-reduction or halting of public funding when institutions fall short of applying its recommendations;

-suspension of certain programmes.

Institutions of higher education, through their respective scientific, pedagogic and administrative agents, must collaborate with the appraisal structures, supplying all elements needed for proper judgement.

The assessment and monitoring system for institutions of higher education encompasses a process of self-assessment and a process of external assessment.

The external assessment undertaken by experts is aimed at complementing and corroborating the process of self-assessment and accreditation of results. The assessment processes are finalised with a global institutional appraisal of higher education.

The self-assessment report is prepared by an internal commission representative of the programmes being assessed. This commission is composed of teachers from the main components of the program and a student. A group of experts appointed by the National Assessment Council subsequently visits Institutions of Higher Education. This visit is planned in advance and is based upon the findings of the Self-Assessment Report, as well as from meetings with teachers, students and heads of departments among others. After this visit, the external commission produces a descriptive report on the assessed institution and program, with suggestions and recommendations.

Portuguese Universities are currently undergoing their second cycle of language teaching program evaluation. Therefore, there is a thorough knowledge of all programmes of teachers' education in language teaching. Though recommendations are in general well accepted by the assessed institution, they are sometimes difficult to implement given that changes depend on central governmental entities. On the other hand, visits by these commissions are always the source of important discussion among peer institutions, as ideas and experiences are often compared.

Parallel to Universities, Polytechnic Institutions are also subject to assessment. The emphasis of the process has changed from an institutional perspective to a more program-based approach.

Currently, the programs on teachers' education in Portuguese-English and Portuguese-French languages teaching are being assessed. The main goals of the evaluation are the improvement in the quality of teaching, more rigorous knowledge and a more fruitful dialogue among institutions of higher education. The assessment of each program - in particular language programs- aims at improving the:

-Organisation of programmes:

- adjusted to specific goals and to results from previous geographic studies on the needs of language teachers;
- matching training and professional profiles.

-Programmes focussing on:

- the selection of class typology (theoretical, practical and lab courses);
- the selection of class format (seminars, projects and in-service training);
- distant learning (e-learning);
- the student's autonomy in learning activities.

-Human Resources:

- quality of the teaching body;
- sufficient and competent technical and administrative personnel;
- continuous teacher education;
- native-speakers for foreign languages;
- teachers' research competency.

-Infrastructures:

- sufficient infrastructure for students and teachers;
- comfortable classrooms adapted to the special needs of its users;
- well-equipped libraries accessible to the needs of the programme;
- multimedia lab prepared for language teaching.

-Equipment:

- up-to-date and available equipment to serve the needs of teachers, students and personnel;
- internet access.

-Management and quality enhancement:

- professionalism, dedication to their work and pursuit of the programmes goals;
- assessment and quality enhancement agencies in each program;
- continuous evaluation of collective and individual performance.

-Social perception of the program:

- office for professional placement and monitoring of former graduates;
- results from professional placement of graduates;
- the community's opinion on the programme;
- the opinion of schools where students interned;
- participation of the programme's structures in scientific or professional activities;
- the graduates' behaviour during their professional activity and proven professional polyvalence.

Institutional visits by external assessment teams are similar to those of Universities, lasting two days and consisting of meetings with Directors, teachers, students, personnel and elements of the community. The meeting with the latter, named an "Open Hour", takes place only during the assessment of Polytechnic Institutions and addresses the importance of such institutions of higher education for regional communities.

The assessment Report of the Program /Institutions is based upon the self-assessment report previously presented by the institution and on the analysis of the discussion taking place among the participants in the evaluation.

The quality enhancement measures put into place for the assessment of Universities and Polytechnic Institutions have the same legal origin and are administered with the same objectives and strategies. However, there have been some differences on procedures and conclusions.

Universities started their assessment process sooner and, being older institutions, better organised and with more solid research structures, they offered more confidence and were more in accordance with the goals of the evaluation.

On the other hand, these commissions have also started a process of assessing private institutions, inducing some criticism given that most of them do not enjoy adequate functioning environments due to the dearth of infrastructures and the composition of the teaching body. The latter usually belong to Public Institutions or lack adequate qualifications for a career in higher education.

Private institutions seldom present a plan to train teachers, using teachers in higher public education that have until recently accumulated roles in Public and Private Education.

The *Estatuto da Carreira Docente* of Public Higher Education has recently deliberated new and stricter rules regarding teachers' services in their attempt to combine positions at Universities and Polytechnic Institutions. These measures aim at enhancing the quality of teaching in all Institutions of Higher Education, through increased teachers' attendance and dedication to their institution.

Several higher education programmes do not obey the rules set out by the Ministry of Education concerning the number of qualified teachers (with PhD's and Masters degrees) and have therefore been forced to close down or have no authorisation to function.

Infrastructures and equipment were also assessed and the teacher/student ratio remained one of the cornerstones of the process. The Ministry of Education has refused to increase this ratio, translating into over-crowded classrooms, especially in the case of practical lessons.

The aforementioned problem is more strongly felt in the case of Language programmes due to the need for practical lessons. Many Institutions are equipped with labs for traditional languages learning while others already own multimedia labs, wherein learning is more interactive. However, there are still Institutions lacking these means, namely Schools of Education.

International co-operation takes place through some exchange programmes for students and teachers, through Congresses and International Seminars, through gatherings and financial and scientific assistance from respective Embassies and Cultural Institutes. Many of these countries have provided lecturers of foreign languages throughout the years yet recently there has been some financial contraction that has put these positions at risk. Therefore, Portugal started to partially or totally co-finance these teachers. However, one of the biggest problems is that they sometimes lack appropriate academic qualifications to teach languages, making hiring more difficult. Nevertheless, the Departments of Cultural and Educational Affairs in some Embassies have started to send some experts, in language didactics for instance, to participate in learning sessions for basic and secondary education.

Institutions traditionally hire a foreign teacher who is qualified to teach his or her language and literature whenever the opportunity arises. It is also part of the recommendations proceeding from Assessment Committees to hire native speakers for language departments in Institutions of Higher Education.

Other assessments have taken place in Universities' Research Centres, with most of this applied research ultimately benefiting language programmes. Unfortunately, in general, Education Schools from Polytechnic Institutions do not own Research Centres. This is due to their recent creation coupled with numerous practical requests that have left them with little time for Research.

Another problem under discussion in Higher Education concerns the assessment of teaching *vs* research.

Although the system considers the primacy of teaching in determining the quality of "teaching" -of programs and courses-, in order to advance in their professional careers higher education professors are assessed based on their research, number of published articles and books –national and international- and number of advisees for doctoral and master-level theses.

There are however Universities that have already started student-based assessment of professors some time ago. The University of Minho for instance in Braga started this kind of assessment in the beginning of the 90s, addressing teachers' scientific preparation, their pedagogic capacities, their availability for students, their presence at school and other student evaluation methods.

Universities are currently concerned with the pedagogic preparation of teachers. Several Research Centres across the country are therefore developing research projects on the Pedagogy and Quality of Teaching in Higher Education. Though in the near future it would be possible to rank Polytechnics, Universities and/or Departments, there is still an adverse reaction on behalf of directors, professors and syndicates.

Universities are funded through various avenues. The government, through the Ministry of Education, funds infrastructures, wages, scholarships, libraries, among others and the Foundation for Science and Technology, pertaining to the Ministry of Higher Education, funds research, labs, scholarships, specialised books, etc.

There has also been a tendency for Institutions of Higher Education to seek funding through protocols with firms, industries and professional associations.

University and Polytechnic funding is based on the number of students per institution.

Tuition is around 400€ per year and students in need may apply for a scholarship, based solely on his or her family's financial situation. The Department of Languages in Institutions of Higher Education is usually located in Departments or Institutions of Humanities.

The area of didactics of languages is sometimes established in Departments of foreign languages or in Departments of Education and Didactics. Languages or didactics of languages courses are prepared by professors from the Department.

## **2. Description and analysis of quality measures related to defining and designing courses and programmes in the area of languages.**

Language programmes devised by teachers from the Department take into consideration not only the job market awaiting their students but also their linguistic, literary and civic education.

In language courses for teachers, the age group of future students they will be teaching is taken into account as well as nation-based programs currently taught in primary and secondary education. This concern arises especially in the case of disciplines such as Didactics, Psycho-linguistic and Socio-linguistics. There is a strong interaction between programmes and language teachers' professional associations.

For Science programmes, Engineering, Economics, Law and others, there is also an adjustment to the labour market. In all of these professions, there is always important value-added for a job search resulting from the knowledge of a language.

Naturally, the profile of language professionals is very heterogeneous. Interpreters and translators possess a different training and profile from a language teacher, an economist or an engineer, though all use languages in their activities.

In Institutions of Teachers' Education, the programmes of didactics focus on the reflexive education of teachers, which is relevant for their personal development and for learning. The levels of proficiency stated in the Common European Framework of Reference of the Council of Europe are usually accepted for training and assessment.

## **3. Descriptions and analysis of quality measures related to the process of teaching and learning.**

Teaching quality enhancement has remained a priority for these institutions as they try to keep up to date with recent research on learning theory. Through self-assessment, contact with other institutions and evaluation committees they seek to change their practices.

According to new learning theories, the student should be the centre of the learning process. Constructivist theories explain that the individual is gradually building his or her knowledge, enriching mental schemes through relationships established between new objects and a past world of experiences. The student must then learn how to learn, i.e. to be reflexive.

Rich learning environments facilitate quality learning, thus multimedia research centres can be representative of the quality of Higher Education Institutions in Portugal. Peer interaction, student mobility, inter-cultural interaction through co-operation with cultural Institutes are all important experiences.

In addition to Universities and Polytechnics that teach languages through their own Departments or Language Centres, there are also Language and Culture Institutes that sometimes interact culturally. The Portuguese educational system has also been concerned with the need for a relevant preparation for lifelong learning through the National Agency for Adult Education and Training. Basic skills for informal education have also been specified. The certification of skills acquired in informal environments, at work, through experience and practice is also well underway.

As far as languages are concerned, new methodologies have accompanied the training of translators and interpreters, chiefly through multimedia labs. As the communicative approach remains paramount, the main objective of language learning - constructivist theories - have helped shift emphasis from the teacher to the learner.

#### **4. Description and analysis of quality measures relating to the training of higher education teachers and trainers working in the area of languages.**

University Language Professors have the same standing as all other professors in other areas of study. To pursue a professorial career, professors must earn a Masters or PhD degree. To progress in their careers, following the earning of the PhD degree, professors must pass public examinations, which consist on:

- 1) an appraisal of the curriculum vitae by an outside committee focussing on the quality of scientific and administrative work conducted in higher education;
- 2) an appraisal of a public lesson lectured by the candidate and assessed by the same committee.

The teacher's evaluation is based more on his or her scientific activity than pedagogic merit. However, there is now a strong movement in Portuguese Universities to raise concern among

teachers towards their pedagogic training. There are research projects on University Pedagogy as well as Conferences and Seminars on this topic.

As far as language teachers are concerned, there are different training methods. Language teachers from the old Universities seldom have any pedagogic training yet teachers from new Universities have expertise in the following areas: Didactics of language and literature, pedagogic practice and monitoring of pedagogic in-service training; they can focus their Masters or PhDs in Education, on the area of teaching or pedagogic monitoring.

Given the need for proximity and co-operation between departments, teachers tend to seek an enriching integration of knowledge and activities. In more classic Universities, the sequential model creates a more significant detachment between professors from the first 4 years (scientific areas) and the two last (pedagogic areas). It is not in the tradition of classic Universities to focus on the pedagogic training of its students, not even during final years.

Foreign language lecturers in any University do not usually have any qualification to teach and remain in low standing, with no progression in their careers. In the field of Education, because there are programmes of post-graduation in teachers' education, monitoring, adult education, etc, it induces many of its graduates to integrate their academic careers in higher education.

Universities also provide grants to university professors to attend language programmes in Foreign Universities. There are also strong financial incentives for professors to direct or participate in research projects in language teaching as well as for their continuous training.

## **5. Description and analysis of quality measures relating to the organisation of management of the process of teaching and learning.**

The programmes devised by professors in their Departments are approved by the Department's Scientific Council and are subsequently publicly reported.

The programmes include objectives, contents, methodology, bibliography and student evaluation. They are part of the self-assessment reports and are submitted to the judgement of the external assessment team. They are also submitted to an internal evaluation by students.

Most of the recommendations emanating from these reports concerning programmes, methodologies, bibliography are taken into consideration by the authors of each programme.

The most relevant innovations in language programmes in Portugal have taken place in the field of teachers education, in Universities or Private Language Research Centres.