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Reconstructing Higher Education? The Case of Master's and PhD Programmes in Education in a Portuguese Institution

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ABSTRACT Whether and to what extent we are in the process of reconstructing higher education following the Bologna Process orientation is the issue underpinning this article. To address this issue, the authors consider data from an exploratory survey conducted in a Portuguese university, focusing on the field of education. They take into account the contents of the educational policies at supra-national level in Europe and at national level in Portugal. In addition, they draw upon the conceptual debate about policy and politics. They acknowledge changes taking place in the organisational structure of the academic programmes, as well as in the students' perceptions. Additionally, critical issues concerning the organisation and implementation of these programmes allow them to identify challenges for universities and issues that need deeper inquiry and continuous monitoring.

Introduction

Within contemporary societies, the promotion of lifelong learning across Europe has featured a framework for (re) thinking about educational policies and institutions, as well as individuals' trajectories and projects regarding education and training. The aim of this article is to reflect on the changes taking place today at higher education level, taking into account data from an exploratory survey conducted in a Portuguese university in the field of education (PhD and master's programmes). Since the authors are all teachers and researchers involved in these same programmes, the research intention is twofold: to deeply examine changes occurring nowadays in higher education, and to promote the authors' reflexivity as higher education professionals.

The survey's focus is centred on three main issues regarding students' views about master's and PhD degrees in the field of educational sciences in our faculty: (a) Which reasons do students invoke to access these programmes? (b) How do students evaluate these programmes' quality? (c) What about students' perceptions regarding the competences developed within these programmes?

In the first part of the article, the exploratory survey is contextualised by considering the changes taking place within European educational policies in general and how they affect higher education. Moreover, how these changes are being (re-)interpreted in the case of Portuguese higher education will also be considered. In the second part of the article, the exploratory survey is presented and discussed. The article concludes with a description of the issues that, in our opinion,

need to be fully understood and other aspects that need to be critically considered within the changes occurring in higher education studies.

Overall, the findings of the research may contribute to raising some questions about the Bologna Process orientation and its implementation that can prompt further inquiry about higher education changes in different political and institutional contexts.

Political and Conceptual Framework

In the second half of the twentieth century international organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund initiated a global movement of financial and expertise networking that extended worldwide, opening up a new era of knowledge circulation about education. The trend towards standardisation (initiated by mass schooling) is enhanced by these organisations through experts and specialists who strive to achieve comparability between educational systems.

The European Union (EU) has followed similar footsteps, but the process of integrating education and training in the political sphere has been a lengthy process characterised by certain constraints (Antunes, 2005). During the 1970s and 1980s EU action regarding education and training began by slowly integrating the various dimensions of educational and school phenomena. It was the Maastricht Treaty, however, that gave education and training a key role in EU policies as they were specifically mentioned in the text of the treaty. In the post-Maastricht era, the need to link education policy to other sectors of the European policy such as employment, integration, research, innovation, etc. still prevailed. In this context two key concepts emerged: the knowledge society, and lifelong learning. The Lisbon European Council held in March 2000 represented a milestone in the process of integrating education and training in the political sphere, leading to the adoption of a programme on the future objectives of education and training for the European member states. This programme was adopted and became the first official document to define an approach to education and training policies in the EU.

From the founding treaties until the present time, education and training have been the target of several initiatives reconfiguring the legal framework of the EU. Despite the initial absence of references to education in the founding treaties, today's policies tend to strengthen the development of a European dimension of education in Europe through lifelong learning.

The way in which education and training have been defined within the European context has major implications for the education systems of the member states. Defining common goals, establishing quantitative targets, monitoring, comparing, and highlighting best practices are the hallmarks of a new form of governance in education and training in the EU, aiming at a greater harmonisation and coordination of policy efforts. The Bologna Process is a clear expression of this dynamic and systematically monitored process.

We agree with Ball (2006) that although the dominant discourses attempt to impose a certain order of ideas and a way of thinking, there are other conflicting and contradictory discourses that cannot be excluded from policy arenas. In this perspective, Ball considers that it is essential to understand the policy not only as a product but also as a process, meaning that policy is seen as not only the affirmation of values and organisational and operational strategies (product), but also as the ability to operationalise these values (process). Given this conception of policy presented as the ability to operationalise values within particular socio-political environments, we understand the concept of policy as a product (textual statement of values and principles) and a process (the power to make statements in textual operational practices).

To analyse educational policies, we draw on the distinction made by Ozga (2000) of policy as text and as discourse, and also on the distinction of Ball (2000), which adds the dimension of the 'effects of politics'. Ball's proposal (2006) defines an analytical model that encompasses a variety of contexts related to the production of educational policy: on a first level we have the *context of influence*; then we have the *context of the policy text*; and another level is the *context of practice*. Each of these contexts is a field of private and public actions and each involves struggle, negotiation and results. According to Ball (2000) we must add two other contexts: the *context of results*, that includes the first-order effects (changes in practice and structure) and the second-order effects (changes

related to social justice and equal opportunities); and the *context of the policy strategy*, that has to do with the identification of a series of political and social activities that can more easily identify the inequalities.

Ozga and Lingard (2007) state that educational policy has usually been understood in the sense of *politics*, in the sense of actions and logics of practice. Two conceptions of policy are considered: *policy* understood as strategic orientations, and *politics* understood as logics of action and practice. For these authors, the policy is more than simple policy texts, it also involves processes that continue beyond the production of legislative measures. Public policy concerns politics produced by governments, but there is another addition to the political context in which decisions are made and which also expresses power relations and interests outside the formal structure. These arguments lead us to a comprehension of the policy process, where several actors at different levels are introducing new directions in policy, making it a dialectical process that unfolds through multi-layered and multi-levelled contexts.

Within this context, the Bologna Process has established itself as a reality for higher education in Europe, with a view to building a European Area of Higher Education that could transform universities' fundamental structures of education, training and innovation. The Process was developed to create a European Area of Higher Education based on intergovernmental cooperation and international academic exchange, in order to stimulate students' mobility, not only in Europe, but around the world. The renewal of pedagogical practices is a central aspect in the discussion of the characteristics of the new model of organisation of higher education.

Following Ball's proposal, we share the idea of the Bologna Process as a policy defined in a particular context influenced by knowledge economy goals (context of influence), defined by policy texts that have different interpretations in the EU member states (context of policy text), which lead to different practices (context of practice). In the following section we reflect about the Portuguese experience within the Bologna higher education policy.

The Bologna Process and the Portuguese Experience

As stated before, the Bologna Process is a European reform of higher education, which aims to establish a European Higher Education Area. It is a voluntary process involving 47 countries and there is no treaty or law governing it. Its major goal is to make it easier to move from one country to another by making qualifications more transparent and comparable, to improve quality and make European higher education more attractive.

Many of the countries involved are EU members, and the EU supports the Bologna Process because it fits with its intention to create a stable and peaceful European community. Comparable qualifications make movement of people easier, which explains why employability and mobility are important within the Bologna Process.

In the European context, this higher education reform may imply the loss of power of national states, to the point that one could talk about a kind of 'denationalization' of higher education (Antunes, 2006). By virtue of its dual nature, the Bologna Process, according to Lima et al (2008), is recognised as a 'political process strongly governed in national terms in the context of certain countries and externally over determined by transnational agendas' (p. 13).

If we take a look at the regulatory framework of education and training policies in the EU and the Bologna policy, we can detect that there are core ideas underlying these policies: knowledge-based society; employability; mobility; quality assurance; construction of frameworks of reference for qualifications, etc. Undoubtedly, the two movements are clear examples of a process driving a borderless education space, as Nóvoa and Lawn (2002) observe. The policy frameworks of both lifelong learning and the Bologna Process have proved to be very influential movements of internationalisation in national education policies. Both present the exchange of information, standard-setting and technical and financial resources as key instruments for policy coordination.

The discourses presented in policy texts indicate inevitable future events, and the policy-making activity of the EU is aligned with the Bologna Process, because this process extends the limited competence of the EU within higher education. This regulatory convergence has different adaptations in national laws.

In the Portuguese case, the higher education system is binary, composed of universities and polytechnics, which can be either public or private. Recent manifestations of resistance and discontent, along with the publication in international reports of some indicators still being below the European average, suggest a process of adaptation that is controversial and enjoys little consensus.

Teodoro (2006) refers to these expressions of discontent as 'noises' that hinder the establishment of rules that enable the effective framework of Portuguese formations within European higher education. In Portugal these 'noises' are expressed by the cut in funding of higher education institutions, which now have budgets dependent on the number of students enrolled.

The rules of Bologna dictate that the reduction of the first cycle of studies (in general, down from five years to three) has serious consequences for the number of students enrolled at the undergraduate level. Related to this reduction, we have the problem of social recognition and professional training of some occupational bodies to which they relate. Additionally, the fact that there is a system of two cycles of studies (three years for a first degree and two years for a master's degree) has serious repercussions in the binary system that characterises Portuguese higher education, where postgraduate studies have been more oriented to universities. This binary system has been (re) designed to adopt the two-cycle system.

From the students' point of view, these 'noises' represent some discomfort. The Report *Bologna with Students' Eyes* (ESU, 2009), produced by the European Students' Union, reveals that in Portugal, the social dimension is a key factor in the success of this process, since Portuguese students have to bear financial costs if they are to enjoy very long periods of study abroad. In comparison with students from countries in, say, northern Europe, this explains the lower mobility of Portuguese students in terms of inter-university programmes.

If we analyse the ideological framework of the Portuguese policy documents for the implementation of the Bologna Process we can see that there is a very wide spectrum that involves cultural, professional, scientific and social goals. Besides the restructuring of the higher education system, the Portuguese law targets wider access to higher education for mature students and the establishment of recognition and validation of prior learning mechanisms. In fact, until very recently, just a small proportion of higher education students in Portugal were adults (over 23 years old), although since 2006 the access of mature students has been promoted through political initiatives that have also been responding to social demands (Pires, 2010).

Furthermore, it is considered that one central issue in the Bologna Process is the paradigm shift from a passive model of education based on knowledge acquisition, to a model based on developing skills, which include both the generic ones - instrumental, interpersonal and systemic - and the specific ones - associated with the training area - where the experimental components and design play an important role. (Decree-Law 74/2006)[1]

That being the case, the curricular and pedagogical dimensions of the Bologna reform are of major importance in the Portuguese context. The exploratory survey goal is to promote analysis of and reflection about curricular and pedagogical changes that might be taking place by collecting students' views about the quality of programmes, the development of competences, and reasons to enrol in master's and PhD degrees.

Research Method

Recognising the changes taking place at the political level and at higher education institutions, we decided to survey the students taking educational sciences degrees (master's and PhD) at FCT/Universidade Nova de Lisboa. This strategy has a double aim: to support reflexivity in our professional activity as teachers and researchers involved in these programmes, and to monitor changes now taking place in the programmes designed within the context of the Bologna reform. To deal with these aims, we considered it important to understand how students perceived and evaluate the programmes they were enrolled in. Assuming that higher education has a central role within lifelong learning political strategies (Alves et al, 2010a) and that it has been undergoing structural changes in respect of the organisation of master's and PhD programmes, we decided to analyse the students' profiles as well as their perceptions of the quality of the programme and their opinions about their competence development. Bearing in mind that we wanted to conduct an

exploratory approach that also allowed us to reflect on our practices as teachers and researchers, we chose to explore these issues by questioning students enrolling on postgraduate courses in the field of educational sciences in our faculty. Therefore, we designed a questionnaire that was answered in the academic years of 2008/09 and 2009/10 by students who were finishing the first year of master's and PhD programmes in educational sciences in our faculty.

The questionnaire includes five sets of questions focusing on: (1) reasons that led the students to enrol in the programme; (2) students' evaluations of the overall quality of the programme; (3) students' perceptions of the programme's impact at personal and career levels; (4) students' perceptions of competence development within the programme; and (5) personal and social characterisation of students (age, sex, previous academic degrees, professional activities). The items concerning the reasons for joining the master's or PhD programme, criteria for evaluating the quality of the programme, and the items about the programme's impact were designed in the light of a previous research project [2] that aimed at understanding lifelong learning effects on higher education graduates as regards professional and social progression routes (Alves et al, 2010b). The question about competence development included the items proposed by the Tuning Process concerning subject-specific competences in educational sciences (González & Wagenaar, 2003, 2008), which are in accordance with the Dublin descriptors for second- and third-cycle awards.

In order to answer the majority of the questions, the students had to specify their levels of agreement with given statements using a scale with balanced keying (equal numbers of positive and negative statements from one to four) to obviate the problem of acquiescence bias.

Master's and PhD Programmes in Educational Sciences at FCT/UNL

In Portugal, the Bologna reform meant a reduction in the first-cycle degree, which is now three years long, whereas the second cycle (master's) remained at two years and the third cycle (PhD) is stipulated to last for three to four years.

In the field of educational sciences we have identified a major change in the specific case of teachers' education, since it is necessary to complete a master's degree in order to teach at elementary or secondary level. Since master's degrees in teachers' education became mandatory for entering the profession, this change represents a 'professionalisation' of the master's degrees in education. According to the new law, teachers must complete the training offered by the second-cycle studies (master's) in teacher education that include three different components: education, practice and introduction to research. Before Bologna, in order to enter the profession, secondary education teachers had to complete a university degree that generally took five years, and elementary education teachers had to have a degree at a polytechnic institution that was generally four years long.

Our survey focuses on master's programmes that train teachers for secondary education. Master's students must have previously completed a first cycle in their specific scientific domain (at FCT/UNL, in mathematics or biology/geology or physics/chemistry), and must be attending a second cycle with a strong pedagogical-didactical component and an introduction to educational research. The programmes at FCT/UNL started in the academic years of 2007/08 (master's for maths teachers) and 2009/10 (master's for biology/geology or physics/chemistry teachers), organised according to the regulations of the Bologna reform. For the second cycle, the Dublin descriptors (general competences) and the specific competences for initial teacher education established by Portuguese law were also considered.

The programmes aim at contributing to the personal and social development of future teachers, to complete their scientific, technological and technical education in the field of mathematics, biology/geology or physics/chemistry, as well as scientific training in the pedagogic-didactic domain. They also aim at the progressive development of teaching competences and their integration in teaching practice, as well as developing the capacity for critical analysis, innovation and pedagogical research. The majority of the coursework is centred on the first year, and the practical training and introduction to research are centred on the second year. In order to obtain the master's degree, students have to present a thesis at the end of their second-cycle studies. From the analysis of the curriculum plan of these particular master's programmes we can say that they

are centred on a pedagogical-didactic approach to teaching, in the sense that they are mainly profession-based training with a working-life orientation (Jakku-Sihvonen, 2007).

Regarding the third-cycle studies (PhD programme), it should be stressed that there is almost no tradition of third-cycle programmes to support the process of research required for PhD degrees in Portugal. Before Bologna, PhD students were mainly isolated researchers developing their work and research competences under the supervision of a senior researcher, but they were not attending classes and doing coursework; neither was their progress monitored by targets and timelines. The increasing number of PhD students, as well as the changes occurring in higher education that are associated with the Bologna Process, represent a major challenge within doctoral programmes in Portugal, including a set of curricular courses and the presentation and discussion of an original thesis.

The doctoral programme in education offered by FCT/UNL began its academic activities in 2007/08, and it was the first doctoral programme in the faculty conceived under Bologna reform standards and directives. It adopted the idea of education as a complex and interdisciplinary field, in which research issues and problems should be addressed within a comprehensive approach, taking care of the non-linearity characteristics and potential emergence of educational phenomena (Alves & Azevedo, 2010). This standpoint requires that educational studies and following research should echo the main features of complexity thinking – namely, transphenomenality, transdisciplinarity, interdiscursivity and emerging pragmatics (Davis & Sumara, 2008). Consequently, the research problems addressed tend to be organised around themes and issues that can be approached in a transversal and transdisciplinary way concerning the different disciplinary fields, not being limited to a specific disciplinary field approach (Alves et al, 2012). Within this general frame, the programme has been organised in several courses that address different thematics within education, as well as methodological issues about educational research. The majority of the coursework is arranged in the first programme year. During the second and third years students are expected to develop their own research project and conduct a final dissertation in order to obtain the PhD degree.

Profile of the Students

Two different groups constitute the sample of the survey: master's students ($n = 19$), and PhD students ($n = 13$).

The 32 students enrolled in the first year of two master's degrees at FCT/UNL in 2008/09 and 2009/10 formed one target group of the questionnaire. Of those, 19 (60%) answered the questionnaire (13 women and 6 men). The survey showed significant age diversity among the students (from 23 to 54 years old, average 31) and significant diversity in professional experience as teachers (approximately half of the students had some professional experience as teachers – from one to 20 years – and the other half had no experience as teachers at all).

This may be explained by the fact that, in these first master's degrees organised according to Bologna, in the particular case of Portugal we found both teachers with some experience who needed a master's degree for professional reasons – namely, to progress in their careers - and students who needed to complete the master's in order to become teachers, as is mandatory according to the new Portuguese law of education. In fact, 10 of the 19 students who completed the survey were teachers with some work experience in basic and secondary education (eight) or higher education (two), whereas five did not have any professional activity, and four had experience in other professions.

The 18 students enrolled in the first year of the PhD programme at FCT/UNL in 2008/09 (11 students) and 2009/10 (7 students) formed the second target group of the questionnaire. Of those, 13 (72%) answered the questionnaire (8 women, 3 men; 2 responses missing). The survey showed that there is significant age diversity among the students (from 26 to 53 years old, average 36) and that they already had some years of work experience within education, mainly as basic or secondary teachers. Data showed that out of the 13 respondents, only two of the PhD students said they did not work. As regards the 11 who were working, three of them were teaching at secondary school, and other three were teaching at both secondary and junior school; only one of them was working at the university as a teacher assistant (and there were four missing cases).

The question of whether to continue to follow a teaching career in school or start research at university is of some significance (Alves & Azevedo, 2010), and other authors have expressed the same concern (Leonard et al, 2005). Are they going to be researchers? Or do they prefer to remain as schoolteachers? The more likely scenario is that the second hypothesis will prevail, since jobs as researchers and university teachers have not increased in Portugal.

Reasons for Starting and Pursuing Master's and PhD Studies

Taking into account the profile of the students on these master's degrees, it is not surprising that their reasons for starting and pursuing their studies are largely related to their professional trajectories.

From the collected data on master's students, reasons such as better chances of finding a job, advancing in the profession or looking for an opportunity to enlarge knowledge were classified as important or very important by almost all (18/19) of the respondents. There was also a wide consensus that master's programmes are important or very important as an opportunity for personal development (17/19), because of the research themes offered (16/19) or because they can meet students' own needs (15/19). The least important reason for starting master's studies was found to be unemployment for more than half of the respondents (13/19), and about half of the respondents (9/19) considered as slightly important the possibility of finding a better-paid job as a consequence of the master's degree.

The data about doctoral students indicate that they are mainly adults working full-time and pursuing a PhD in the educational field, above all to enlarge their knowledge, to meet their personal development and enrich their professional practice. When asked about the reasons for starting and pursuing doctoral studies, a large majority of the respondents (11/13) cited learning and knowledge acquisition as a very important reason, as well as the opportunity to promote personal development (10/13).

To progress professionally and to improve professional performance were important reasons (9/13), as well as the opportunity to belong to a scientific community (8/13). Unemployment was not considered an important reason for starting doctoral studies (11/13), although a majority (9/13) thought that having a PhD would improve their chance of finding a job.

Considering the data, two points should be highlighted. The first stresses the professionalisation of the master's degrees in the field of educational sciences within the Bologna reform. This trend is currently visible in the structure and organisation of the degree; and maybe students' expectations that the master's degree will improve their professional development and career could be related to that tendency. However, given the limited number of respondents, further research is needed to clarify this issue. The second point concerns the profile of our PhD students: they are mainly teachers and educators in different levels of the educational system looking to enlarge their knowledge and to promote their personal and professional development. Is this a general tendency in PhD programmes?

Furthermore, how are the master's and PhD programmes connecting with the professional contexts of the students and taking advantage of their professional experience? How are higher education teachers and courses adjusting to having adults as students instead of young people with no professional occupation? A more extensive study could help to answer those questions.

Perceived Quality of the Master's and PhD Programmes

As regards the perceived quality of the master's and PhD programmes under research, the results of the survey show us that students judged them as having an overall good quality. As shown in Table I, the majority of the master's students considered each of the aspects listed as being of good quality. It should be stressed that teachers' availability (item 5) and the resources available (item 7) are the most valued aspects, considered good or even very good by all the respondents. None of these items were considered to be bad or very bad.

Other aspects, however, such as the methodological features used by teachers (item 3), as well as the adequacy of the content for personal interest (item 1), were also well appreciated (classified as good or very good by a large majority – 16/19), and only three of 19 students

considered them as bad. The same applied to the adequacy of the content for professional needs (item 2) and the adequacy of the technical equipment provided (item 8), in that 15 out of 19 considered them good or very good.

Item	Very bad 1	Bad 2	Good 3	Very good 4	Total	Missing cases
						0
1. Adequacy of the content for personal interest	0	3	13	3	19	0
2. Adequacy of the content for professional needs	0	4	10	5	19	0
3. Methodological features used by teachers	0	3	12	4	19	0
4. School timetable	2	2	9	6	19	0
5. Teachers' availability	0	0	14	5	19	0
6. Activity schedule	0	5	14	0	19	0
7. Resources available	0	0	11	8	19	0
8. Technical equipment provided.	0	3	9	6	18	1

Table I. Perceived quality of the master's programmes.

The only aspect that was rated as very bad or bad (by 4/19) was the school timetable (item 4), but even so, the majority (15/19) evaluated it as good or very good. The activity schedule (item 6) also had a significant number of responses rating it as bad (5/19), although the majority (14/19) considered it good. These results reveal the difficulties working students have in integrating their professional work with their master's attendance. This aspect must be taken into account by the faculty when planning academic timetables and activities.

As regards the perceived quality of the doctoral programme, we find a similar trend, since the majority of the students classified the given criteria either as very good or good. As shown in Table II, the most valued aspects are adequacy of the content for professional needs, methodological features used by teachers, technical equipment provided and resources available, considered good or very good by all the respondents. Nevertheless, other aspects, such as adequacy of the personal interest content and teacher availability, are considered good or very good by 12 out of 13 respondents, whereas the school timetable and activity schedule are commended by 11 out of 13.

Item	Very bad 1	Bad 2	Good 3	Very good 4	Total	Missing cases
1. Adequacy of the content for personal interest	0	1	6	6	13	0
2. Adequacy of the content for professional needs	0	0	11	2	13	0
3. Methodological features used by teachers	0	0	7	6	13	0
4. School timetable	0	2	5	6	13	0
5. Teachers' availability	0	0	6	6	12	1
6. Activity schedule	0	1	9	2	12	1
7. Resources available	0	0	8	4	12	1
8. Technical equipment provided.	0	0	8	5	13	0

Table II. Perceived quality of the PhD programme.

Globally, the quality of both programmes seems to be well appreciated by the respondents, but the results show some very slight discrepancies between the master's and PhD programmes. The schedule and timetable seem to be a little less problematic for PhD students than for master's students, possibly because all the coursework of the doctoral programme takes place after 6 pm. Also, we found that among master's students the adequacy for professional needs is less appreciated than it is among PhD students, and this needs to be explored, since the master's has a professionalisation intention that is not applicable to the doctoral programme that aims, above all, at training researchers. It is a surprising result and needs to be explored to improve the planning of students' activities within our faculty.

Perceived Competence Development within Master's and PhD Programmes

The collected data suggest that students' perception about the master's programmes' contribution to the development of general competences is positive overall. There were, however, some variations in their answers that must be considered, as shown in Table III.

Item	None	Weak	Considerable	Strong	Total
	1	2	3	4	
1. Capacity for analysis and synthesis	1	2	16	0	19
2. Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	0	2	14	3	19
3. Planning and time management	1	4	12	2	19
4. Basic general knowledge in the field of study	0	4	13	2	19
5. Grounding in basic knowledge of the profession in practice	1	4	9	5	19
6. Oral and written communication in one's native language	1	3	13	2	19
7. Knowledge of a second language	11	7	1	0	19
8. Elementary computing skills	8	2	8	1	19
9. Research skills	0	7	12	0	19
10. Capacity to learn	0	5	14	0	19
11. Information management skills	1	4	14	0	19
12. Critical and self-critical abilities	0	4	15	0	19
13. Capacity to adapt to new situations	0	3	16	0	19
14. Capacity for generating new ideas	0	2	14	3	19
15. Problem-solving	0	5	12	2	19
16. Decision-making	0	7	12	0	19
17. Teamwork	0	7	8	4	19
18. Interpersonal skills	0	6	9	4	19
19. Leadership capacity	0	11	6	2	19
20. Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team	1	5	10	3	19
21. Ability to communicate with non-experts	2	9	7	1	19
22. Appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism	0	8	8	3	19
23. Ability to work in an international context	4	10	5	0	19
24. Ability to work autonomously	1	2	14	2	19
25. Project design and management	2	5	11	1	19
26. Initiative and entrepreneurial spirit	2	5	11	1	19
27. Ethical commitment	1	4	13	0	19

Table III. Perceived competence development in master's programme.

The most valued items concerning the competences developed by master's programmes are: the capacity for generating new ideas (item 14), referred to as a considerable contribution of the programme by 14/19, as strong by 3/19, and as weak by 2/19; the capacity for applying knowledge in practice (item 2), seen as a considerable contribution by 14/19, as strong by 3/19, and as weak by 2/19; the capacity to adapt to new situations (item 13), signalled as a considerable contribution by 16/19 and as weak by 3/19; and the ability to work autonomously (item 24), pointed out as considerable by 14/19, as strong by 2/19, as weak by 2/19, and not scored by 1/19.

Other recognised contributions of the master's programmes to the development of general competences are as follows: basic general knowledge on the field of study (item 4) is perceived as considerable by 13/19, as strong by 2/19 and as weak by 4/19; critical and self-critical abilities are perceived as considerable by 15/19 and as weak by 4/19.

The competences related to teamwork (items 17, 20) and interpersonal skills (items 18, 22), as well as leadership skills (items 15, 16, 25, 26) and other research skills (items 3, 6, 9), were given medium scores.

Lower scores were given to: the ability to work in an international context (item 23 – none, 4/19; weak, 10/19; considerable, 5/19); the knowledge of a second language (item 7 – none, 11/19; weak, 7/19; considerable, 1/19). Other poorly appreciated competences were: elementary computing skills (item 8); ability to communicate with non-experts (item 21); and leadership capacity (item 19).

Concerning the PhD programme, the data gathered on competence development (see Table IV) allow us to consider the assumption that the programme succeeds well in terms of the training of researchers.

Item	None	Weak	Considerable	Strong	Total
	1	2	3	4	
1. Capacity for analysis and synthesis	0	0	10	3	13
2. Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	0	2	8	3	13
3. Planning and time management	0	1	8	4	13
4. Basic general knowledge in the field of study	0	0	10	3	13
5. Grounding in basic knowledge of the profession in practice	0	4	6	3	13
6. Oral and written communication in one's native language	0	4	5	4	13
7. Knowledge of a second language	4	6	3	0	13
8. Elementary computing skills	0	4	9	0	13
9. Research skills	0	0	6	7	13
10. Capacity to learn	0	0	10	3	13
11. Information management skills	0	0	5	8	13
12. Critical and self-critical abilities	0	0	7	6	13
13. Capacity to adapt to new situations	0	2	9	2	13
14. Capacity for generating new ideas	0	2	7	4	13
15. Problem-solving	0	3	7	3	13
16. Decision-making	1	3	5	4	13
17. Teamwork	0	3	8	2	13
18. Interpersonal skills	1	2	9	1	13
19. Leadership capacity	3	6	2	2	13
20. Ability to work in an interdisciplinary team	0	3	9	1	13
21. Ability to communicate with non-experts	1	3	7	2	13
22. Appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism	1	2	7	3	13
23. Ability to work in an international context	2	5	3	3	13
24. Ability to work autonomously	0	2	6	5	13
25. Project design and management	0	5	2	6	13
26. Initiative and entrepreneurial spirit	0	4	5	4	13
27. Ethical commitment	0	2	8	3	13

Table IV. Perceived competence development in PhD programme.

Regarding the suggested competences, all the students acknowledged that capacity for analysis and synthesis, basic general knowledge on the field of study and capacity to learn were being considerably (10/13) or strongly (3/13) developed throughout the doctoral programme. Also, all the students stated that research skills, information management skills and critical and self-critical abilities were considerably (respectively 6, 5, 7 out of 19) or strongly (respectively 7, 8, 6 out of 19) developed.

The items considered not developed or weakly developed by more than half of the respondents were: knowledge of a second language (10/13); leadership capacity (9/13); and ability to work in an international context (7/13). A few students considered that the programme did not develop at all such aspects as knowledge of a second language (4/13), leadership capacity (3/13), ability to work in international context (2/13), as well as decision-making, interpersonal skills, ability to communicate with non-experts, and appreciation of diversity and multiculturalism (each aspect: 1/13).

Of course, we should remember that the students we surveyed had only concluded the first year of study, which corresponded to the curricular and course assignments. They had not yet started the research work that is a fundamental endeavour of any doctoral programme. Our data, and the positive appreciation that students expressed, seem to follow the trend of other studies that show that despite the frequency of student discussion of the worries, stresses and even terrors of

doctoral study... it is surprising that our informants were so positive about their experiences' (Leonard et al, 2005, p. 136-137).

Generally, considering the responses about both programmes, it is fair to say that the competences perceived as less developed are those related to internationalisation (knowledge of a second language and working in international contexts); other competences focusing on teamwork and interpersonal relationships are also not so highly praised. These issues need to be explored more deeply in order to allow us to conclude to what extent the changes taking place allow for the development of personal and social competences, besides promoting basic knowledge in the disciplinary field and teaching or research skills. In other words, qualitative research work is needed in order to assess pedagogical and curricular issues and the ways in which these are (or are not) being reconstructed.

Final Remarks

Bologna meant a reconstruction of higher education studies in terms of organisation and structure, and a change in the profile of students also seems to be occurring. The increase of students at PhD level and the changing profile for master's and PhD students (since adults with work experience who are willing to improve their labour market situation, or willing to enter teaching, or willing to develop themselves are going into higher education) seem to be two of the main impacts of the Bologna Process in Portugal.

Within higher education, our findings show that students are satisfied with several issues regarding the quality of the programmes as well as with the competence development that the programmes accommodate. It seems, however, that teamwork, interpersonal skills, knowledge of a second language, working in an international context and/or speaking to a non-expert audience are less developed/recognised. Does this imply that we need to open up higher education to different pedagogical ways of teaching-learning that take into account a perspective less confined to the student and his/her own development and knowledge?

Furthermore, the data presented urge us to analyse and explore how higher education teachers and organisations perceive these changes, as well as the extent to which they are adjusting their practices. The collected data offer us an overview of the programmes and their impacts on students, raising questions that need to be explored about the adjustment of higher education teachers' practices or the adequacy of activity schedules and timetables and so on. Moreover, we need to monitor the changes in order to evaluate to what extent the trends identified can be generalised to other disciplinary fields and to what extent they will remain the same in the next few years. For instance, the recent economic crisis may have an impact in reducing master's and PhD enrolment from 2012 onwards.

Within the context of the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area, we need to analyse different actors, contexts and experiences in order to make situated judgements about what is educationally desirable in relation to the different dimensions of educational processes and practices. These judgements are needed at multiple levels, international, national, institutional and individual, and they must be informed by educational purposes.

As regards the *multidimensionality of educational purpose*, Biesta (2011) defines three different domains for educational processes and practices: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. The three domains are not separate; they overlap and interrelate in synergetic or conflicting ways. We need to understand to what extent these dimensions are present in second- and third-cycle studies and how they relate to each other. Do they work in synergetic or conflicting ways? Why, and to what extent?

Some examples concerning the collected data illustrate some possible connections between those different dimensions: the achievement in the domain of qualification, if individual skills are the most valued, can have a negative impact on the domain of subjectification if competition is promoted as better than cooperation; the achievements in the domain of socialisation may be hindered if teamwork and interpersonal competences are not promoted, also compromising the qualification.

We acknowledge that some efforts have been made in reconstructing higher education, but we also recognise that deeper understanding and continuous monitoring of the changes taking

place are needed in order both to avoid risks and to improve educational practices within higher education. The data presented also urge us to analyse and explore how higher education teachers and organisations perceive these changes and the extent to which they are adjusting their practices. These issues are visible lines of inquiry demanding exploration in the near future.

This exploratory survey enables us to approach changes in practices and structures within a particular socio-political and institutional environment. Following Ozga and Lingard's (2007) proposal, it intends to contribute to an understanding of educational policy as both policy (strategic orientations) and politics (logics of actions and practices). Further research adopting such a conceptual framework would be useful to allow a comprehension of the policy process as the result of the interaction of different actors at different levels (supra-national, national, institutional, individual).

Notes

- [1] We refer to Law No. 74/2006 of 24 March 2006, which approved the three-cycle degree system, adopting the Bologna generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences. Earlier, Law No. 49/2005 of 30 August 2005 introduced changes in the Comprehensive Law of Education System (Law No. 48/1986 of 14 October 1986) in order to allow for changes in the legal framework, leading to the implementation of the Bologna Process.
- [2] Project 'Telos II' was funded by FCT/MCTES, the Ministry for Science and Technology, and developed between 2003 and 2006.

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