

A.5. Portugal

In the framework of the project within which this case study falls, the approach towards educational research in Portugal will place special emphasis on this area's contribution towards resolving educational problems, towards policy decisions and professional practice, and towards efforts to promote quality in education.

Structures and institutions

The development of educational research in Portugal is recent. It began to take on a significant aspect only after 1974, and more particularly in the past ten years. This development is a consequence of the creation of training courses for teachers in higher education and of masters degrees and doctorates. These, at an early stage, were aimed at training teachers, who in turn, would give these courses.

They are currently run at 20 university departments and at 14 polytechnic departments; between them, they are responsible for the pedagogical aspects of teacher training courses (polytechnics for preschool teachers at infant schools and of teachers of the 1st to 6th grades; universities for teachers of the 7th to 12th grades) and for short specialisation courses in various fields of education; the university departments are also responsible for masters courses and doctorates.

These departments sometimes have their own research facilities, usually called centres, but in many cases the teaching staff/researchers carry out their research without any specific support structure (as is mainly the case in polytechnic departments), and there are cases where a centre embraces staff from various educational departments.

But educational research has not developed in the same way in all the departments. If certain indicators are taken into account (number of senior researchers, published research papers, students who have completed a masters course or doctorate), significant development is noticeable in only seven university departments.

It is worth stressing that in some social science departments, which have also developed since 1974 (psychology, sociology, anthropology, etc.), educational research linked to the specific subjects is also undertaken.

Outside higher education institutions, educational research is undertaken at the Institute for Educational Innovation, a national research institution for the promotion of

innovation which was created in 1987 and which, as shall be seen, also finances research undertaken by other institutions. There are also private associations which develop research projects, but their researchers are almost all teaching staff/researchers from higher education; in the field of research, these associations make it possible for researchers located in different departments to be integrated into the same project.

If we take into account research-action and the innovation projects under way at schools, it is necessary to make reference to primary and secondary schools which may also be considered research institutions; in many cases, however, such initiatives are undertaken in collaboration with the higher education departments.

Resources for research

Human resources

Since research into education is closely linked to the teaching of educational disciplines, the researchers are teaching staff from the different courses mentioned or they are masters or doctorate students. Primary and secondary school teaching staff, when they undertake research, usually carry it out within the framework of masters degrees, doctorates and specialisation courses. The research projects of higher education departments also sometimes link up with primary and secondary education teaching staff.

Most of the top teaching staff/researchers (more than 100) in the field of education were trained abroad: in Belgium, France, Switzerland, Quebec, the United Kingdom, or the United States.

There is an association for researchers and teaching staff (the Portuguese Educational Research Association), created in 1990, which currently has about 700 members. To become a member of the association requires only being a teacher in the field of educational disciplines.

Material resources

The costs of premises, equipment and research staff are covered by the higher education institutions, which in fact are teaching *and research* institutions, and it is not easy to separate the costs of the two. Special financing for research projects, as well as that covered by higher education institutions, comes in part from public institutions and outside private institutions. The public institutions are the National Scientific Research Board (JNICT), which backs research in all areas, and the Institute for Educational Innovation, which supports research in the field of education insofar as it focuses on the problems raised by it.

Among the private financing institutions are the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation and the Aga Khan Foundation, the latter two mainly for research-action projects. Financing of research is also provided by the JNICT and by the Gulbenkian Foundation through scholarships for masters degrees and doctorates.

Requests for studies from higher education departments are also beginning to appear from public bodies, and various projects are being financed directly by the European Union.

Research themes and methods

If educational research is approached from a broad perspective – that is, including comparative and historical studies, analyses and theoretical reflections, the setting-up of instruments for the observation, description and diagnosis of situations, the evaluation of needs, well-grounded proposals for change, planning and evaluation of measures for educational policy and pedagogical innovation, experimental and quasi-experimental or qualitative research, and research-action studies – it could be said that there is virtually no educational theme which has not been the subject of educational research or any research methodology which has not been rehearsed.

The *raison d'être* of most research carried out so far has been the preparation of masters or doctorate dissertations. A large part of the research has been developed in the context of the theoretical and methodological framework of the classic subjects: philosophy, history, psychology, sociology and administration.

Among the educational issues touched upon by research, those which stand out are success and the lack of success in school, the evaluation of the learning process, the didactics of some subjects (natural sciences, physics, chemistry, mathematics and languages), special teaching, school management, the relations between the school and the family, education for a democracy, teacher training, the teaching profession, and the use of new information technology in learning. In this context, Portugal has taken part in various international comparative studies.

It is not easy to determine the amount of research in the field of education carried out over the past 20 years. Taking into account the number of masters and doctorate theses, it can be seen that the most complete (if still incomplete) database on this matter recorded 396 masters and 45 doctorates. There are almost 100 projects which, over the past seven years, have received financing from public or private institutions.

Priorities for research

In order to identify research priorities, it is necessary to look at the problems raised by the development of primary and secondary education today in Portugal. Grilo (1995) has defined the following priority issues:

- the new compulsory basic education model of nine years;
- combatting high failure and dropout rates, also taking into account regional imbalances;
- the ability of the school to attract and motivate pupils;
- the relevance of post-school curricula and programmes, taking into account the “employability” of young people not only in the short term but also in the

- medium and long term, in view of the speed of technological change and the inherent obsolescence of training;
- trans-subject themes and non-subject learning;
- directing and managing schools;
- the relationship between education and social development.

Other issues which could be included are:

- the evaluation of processes and results of the implementation of reforms and conditions for the local creation of educational changes (innovation);
- the reorganisation of time and space for learning;
- the development of different teaching strategies, and recourse to the media and new information technologies;
- school administration beyond the school;
- vocational training;
- adult education;
- university teaching.

Above all, it is necessary to know the pupils better and to understand their points of view about their educational process and their future.

Problems and prospects

There are various problematic aspects in the development of educational research in Portugal:

- Research into education is not yet a clear political objective; although education is cited as a priority political issue, research in this field is not considered relevant to the development of education, as far as can be deduced from the policies adopted.
- Research into education in Portugal has not yet gained recognition from education professionals, from decision-making politicians, from social partners or from public opinion in general.
- The national body which finances research in various scientific fields (the JNICT) has not yet drawn up a consistent policy towards research into education; it is not a priority area, nor does it merit treatment which reflects the sector's social importance.
- Demand for research from the various bodies linked to education and training, whether it be through requests to the higher education centres or by setting up their own research facilities, has been limited and is only now beginning to emerge.
- Few higher education institutions have a concerted policy of promoting educational research: this matter is left to the initiative of each staff member, without any effort being put into creating the conditions (in terms of time and of other resources) for the research; the time available is what is left over after teaching and management duties, and the stimulation is that provided by the demands of career advancement; the situation is worse in the polytechnic departments.

- The documentation centres of the educational departments vary greatly in terms of the type of document; many are not computerised, neither are the documents themselves indexed so as to facilitate consultation; also, there is still no means of easy access to consultation of documents between centres.
- The critical mass made up of qualified researchers is still small and dispersed, not only in the geographical sense but also insofar as theoretical and methodological aspects are concerned, which makes it difficult to pool strengths in teams with larger projects; available time to invest in research is for many very restricted, and the national organisational structures are still fragile.
- Research undertaken into education is largely confined to academic circles because it is usually aimed at obtaining university qualifications (masters degrees, doctorates) or at moving up the career scales of higher education teaching staff; the first objective is training staff and researchers, undertaken on an individual basis.
- The starting point for research into education is often not the detection of problems in the world of education, and the results do not appear to be relevant to the behaviour of decision-making politicians and education professionals.
- There is still no significant research based on schools or where there is participation of teachers concerned with making the most of their knowledge and encouraging the interaction of that knowledge with that of researchers.
- Much of the research carried out, since it is in the form of university theses, is published for a restricted audience, there still being no national database on these or on research projects under way; and there is also no tradition of dialogue, debate and critical discussion on research presented at conferences or published.

Planned innovations

It may be conjectured that the problems which hinder the contribution of educational research in Portugal to decisions on education policy and towards stimulating concepts and practices among education professionals are, in part, the same as those encountered in other countries and, in part again, specific to the case of social development and of the development of educational sciences in Portugal. Considering the future outlook only in terms of this last aspect, the problems referred to can be linked to the recent nature of the development of educational research in Portugal; however, conditions are in place for a significantly different phase to take shape over the next few years. For example:

- There will be an increase in the number of qualified researchers, free from the concerns of academic advancement and with more availability for research.
- The bodies linked to education will resort more and more to the research institutions for studies to guide their work.
- Competition between higher education bodies and the progressive evaluation of them is bound to make them focus increasingly on relevant social problems.
- The Institute for Educational Innovation will develop a clearer policy of support for research considered relevant to the development of education.

- The fact that more and more primary and secondary school teachers have masters degrees in education will contribute towards research which is based on schools and enjoys the participation, in co-operation with higher education researchers, of the teachers who work in them.
- The ever larger investment of higher education institutions in continuous teacher training (for which substantial Community funds are available) will lead researchers to better perceive what is relevant knowledge for education practice.
- The creation, under way at the Institute for Educational Innovation, of a database of masters and doctorate theses and of research projects, as well as the prospect, now being studied, of making it possible in the medium term to consult thematically from any centre the collection of all the educational documentation centres, will facilitate interaction between researchers and education officials.

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