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Education, development and social inclusion in Portugal: policies, processes and results[*]

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Abstract

The Lisbon Strategy's guidelines transformed education and training into unavoidable economic and social priorities. These guidelines also revealed that some European countries were far from achieving the minimum baseline for their inclusion in new knowledge economies and guaranteeing the sustainability of the lifelong learning processes implemented. In this context, a broad priority education program started developing in Portugal (TEIP Program), aimed at recovery from a significant educational lag and fulfilling the European guidelines that maintain that all citizens must develop skills and competencies towards their employability and foster further learning, active citizenship and intercultural dialogue. Throughout the communication we will present our analysis and reflections about the program's dynamics and results, mainly through methodologies of a quantitative nature (education statistics, national examinations results). Reflections will be complemented by information gathered from interviews with key actors in the TEIP program (educational administration offices' program coordinators; program consultants; school directors) where some of the core strategies and change processes harnessed are identified. Data points to a reduction in school failure and school dropout rates in TEIP schools. However, significant differences still persist when comparing TEIP results and national results, proving that an important path must yet be taken in Portugal in order to ensure a quality inclusive education.

1. Education, development and inclusion: A structural challenge in Portugal

In Portugal, the processes of alphabetizing and schooling were protracted, with citizens maintaining a relationship with reading and writing that was typical in pre-modern societies. This was due to a set of circumstances more complex than the traditional relationship between economic development and schooling. The country's semi-peripheral location, the linguistic homogeneity, the existence of an old and well-established nation-state (12th century) and the long dictatorial period in the 20th century are also factors that contributed to the late consolidation of the school model in Portugal.

It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the first universally schooled generation emerged, although very high levels of illiteracy still existed (41%). During this period a rapid development of the educational system

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also took place and was then intensified after the transition to democracy (1974). This allowed for a positive evolution in the democratization of education (Barroso, Carvalho, Fontoura & Afonso, 2007):

> *"In order to understand the effort that was necessary to undertake in the field of education one needs only to remember that it was during the global crisis of the 'welfare state' model that, in Portugal, we started building our 'welfare state'.*
> *During that period, education went through a process of 'permanent reforms' (...) that resulted in educational measures of diverse conceptual natures, stimulated by the strong financial investments made with European funds. This resulted in a significant increase in the number of students, teachers, qualified teachers and schools (p.12)."*

Despite progress, the instruction levels of our active population were still very low at the end of the 20th century (Table 1). It can thus be stated that Portugal extracted "the maximum wealth from population with few modern academic skills" (Candeias, 2009, p.238).

Table 1.Schooling levels in Portugal - 15 year olds and older

Instruction level	1981	1991
Illiterate	20,6%	12,1%
Reads and writes but does not hold a basic education diploma	16,3%	13,9%
4th grade	38,9%	36,4%
6th grade	10,6%	15,0%
9th grade	6,5%	10,2%
12th grade	3,5%	7,6%

Source: adapted from Esteves (1995).

The depletion of this economic model became visible towards the end of the 20th century when Portugal started to present economic indexes divergent from those of most developed countries, with GNP growth rates that did not reach half of the mean values recorded in OECD and Euro Zone Countries (Candeias, 2009). The Portuguese State seemed aware of the need to change its development patterns, as can be inferred from the growing investment in education that in the last half of the 20th century approaches typical European patterns. This process is then reinforced by the Lisbon Summit's directives (2000), which defined as its main strategic goal that the European Union should become the most competitive knowledge–based economy in the world, with secondary education as a minimum standard for inclusion in the European space of education and training. The universalization of secondary education not only presented a challenge for all European countries but it also represented a near-unattainable goal for Portugal, given that 15% of young people reached the age of 15 without completing basic education and that early school leaving rates were very high (Dias, 2008).

This situation was particularly serious among young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, who often showed high school failure rates. Is was in this context that Portugal created the Priority Intervention Educational Territories Program (TEIP), aimed at improving the perspectives of school achievement in socially disadvantaged contexts.

In this paper we will describe and analyze the TEIP Program. Firstly, however, we will present the methodology used to collect all data presented throughout the paper.

2. Methodology

Results shown in this paper are the result of a broader research project being carried out by the author. The research analyzes the main intervention programs, both public and private, that are being implemented in Portugal as a strategy in the struggle against school failure and dropout. This paper includes the following data: analysis of TEIP Program legal directives; analysis of annual TEIP evaluation reports produced by education central administration

offices; analysis of national statistics comparing the results of students in TEIP schools with national average results. These data will then be supplemented, although in a necessarily concise way, with information gathered during interviews conducted with some of the Program's key actors (educational administration offices' program coordinators; program consultants; school directors).

3. TEIP Program: policies, practices and results

The TEIP Program was initiated in Portugal in 1996. It attempted to be an innovative experiment that would allow the social and school inclusion of children and youth from highly disadvantaged communities and ethnic groups. The strategies utilized favoured the articulation between schools, resources and actors, but also encouraged the development of new forms of pedagogic work. This phase of the Program was suppressed in 2000 for reasons that were never publicly explained, although certainly the reorganization of the Portuguese school network undoubtedly played a significant role in the process because it made redundant one of the main innovations of the TEIP Program: the creation of school consortia providing students with more integrated progress in school.

One decade later the Program was redefined and broadened, preserving social concerns but clearly aiming at a higher efficacy of the education system. The proximity between the Program's framework and the directives defined for Europe in terms of education and training are clear: "As stressed by the Lisbon Strategy and by the National Reference Strategic Framework, state school (…) is still a basic condition for national social cohesion, for growth and for technological modernization within the scope of the transition to a knowledge-based economy and an information society" (dec. law nº 55/2008).

The goals defined for the Program are also considerably more explicit about its expected results, confirming its proximity to the 2010 European Education and Training Strategy: improvement of basic competencies; reduction of school failure and dropout; qualified school-to-work transition. It was also intended that school outcomes would be followed up more closely, both in their internal and external results, and that schools would be overseen by specialists/consultants in their change processes. Currently the Program involves over 10% of all national basic and secondary schools, distributed in several areas of Portugal.

Four years have passed since the Program's relaunch and it is now pertinent to reflect upon the intervention strategies being harnessed and the results already achieved. To do so we analyzed the Program's evaluation reports and the education statistics available for the period 2007-2011.

With regard to improvement strategies, the documental analysis allows us to gain an overall insight into the main pedagogical, social and organizational strategies implemented (Table 2).

Table 2. Intervention axes and strategies.

Intervention Strategies	Incidence of actions (%)
Support to improvement of learning (advice, pedagogical pairs, co-teaching)	30, 7
Prevention of school dropout and indiscipline (Sociocultural programs, Student and Family Support Offices)	30,7
Organization and management of school consortia (monitoring and assessment; intra and inter-departmental liaison)	22, 1
Relationship with families and communities (raising family awareness, establishing partnerships)	16.4

Source: DGIDC (2011).

Table 1 indicates that the actions taken in schools have been focusing mainly on the support to improvement of learning and on the prevention of school dropout and indiscipline. This aspect confirms the proximity between the strategies utilized within the Program and the objectives defined in the Lisbon Strategy: improving the qualifications of citizens, reducing early school leaving and promoting social cohesion. It is, however, important to assess whether the strategies utilized have allowed for the achievement of the goals defined. In fact, the literature identifies difficulties in putting into practice the democratic ideals of equality of educational opportunities, even when positive discrimination strategies are harnessed. (Frandji, Pincemin, Demeuse, Greger & Rochex, 2009).

In response to this issue we analyzed the evolution of students' internal results in TEIP and non-TEIP schools from the beginning of the Program (2007-2011). Documentation consulted allows us to identify a positive evolution in internal results of students in TEIP schools, throughout the Program's implementation and in all school years. This evolution was not identified in national average results, which are similar in 2007 and 2011 (Figure 1).
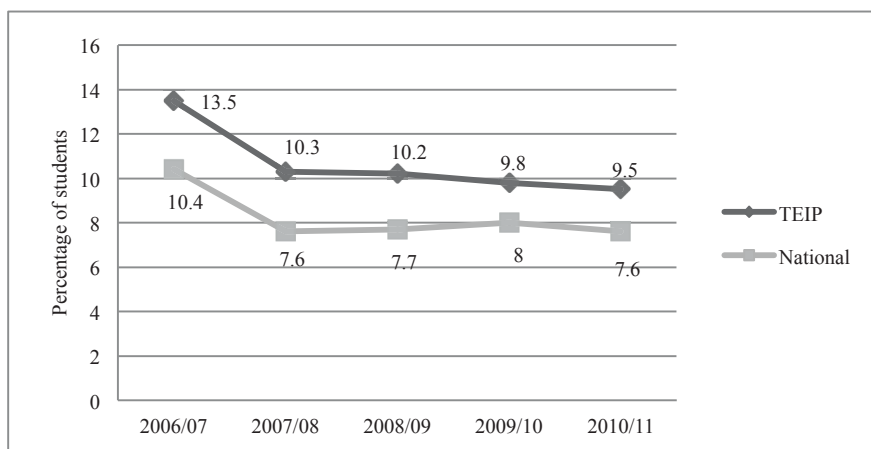

Figure 1. TEIP schools' and national average failure rates.

While these results are positive and encouraging, they cannot mask important problems that still need resolution, namely, TEIP schools' external evaluation results, i.e., students' results in national exams in the 4th, 6th and 9th grades (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' mean results from 2007/08 to 2010/11/2011 (evaluation scale 1-5).

Grade	Group	2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011
4th	TEIP	3,19	3,17	3,25	3,19
	National average	3,33	3,44	3,51	3,47
6th	TEIP	3,02	2,94	2,90	2,83
	National average	3,29	3,22	3,18	3,16
9th	TEIP	2,82	2,70	2,54	2,33
	National average	2,99	2,90	2,77	2,51

The statistical analyses conducted regarding 9th grade results (the only ones we were able to carry out, given that 4th and 6th grade data are global and not broken down by school) confirm what general data had already predicted: namely that differences between TEIP and non-TEIP schools are significant. However, because both internal and external evaluation results are considered for students' transition or retention, success rates in TEIP schools have been improving. This allows students to complete their compulsory schooling, which, although it does not ensure an effective proportional equality in results, cannot be underestimated in an analysis of social inclusion processes. On the other hand, the evolution of TEIP schools in reducing school dropout shows more consistent results, with rates almost residual during basic education (0,4% in TEIP schools; 0,3% nationwide).

The interviews conducted with educational administration offices staff that followed the Program's implementation in schools highlighted the positive evolution in the field of organizational planning, as well as in the creation of schooling and life trajectories more congruent with the principles of equity. This process is equally recognized by the directors of many TEIP schools, although they also highlight aspects they consider to be

fundamental in the identity of their schools: 1) the openness to diversity, translated into the welcoming of a population considered problematic in a variety of aspects (poverty, ethnicity, lack of family background); and 2) "education towards citizenship", focused on reducing indiscipline and violence in schools, as well as on solving situations that involve risks for students (drug abuse, juvenile delinquency).

4. Conclusions

The definition of a European strategy for education and training at the beginning of the 21st century helped to reinforce, in Portuguese public policies, concerns with school achievement, with the universalization of basic and secondary education, and with combating early school leaving. The TEIP Program has played an important role in this regard, guaranteeing higher school achievement rates at the end of compulsory schooling (9th grade) and making for a reduction in school dropout in Portugal. Nevertheless, in a wider perspective, the Program's impact may raise certain issues, in the sense that, although formally achieving its defined goals (to reduce school failure and dropout rates) it cannot get students' external evaluation results in TEIP schools to approach those obtained in non-TEIP schools. It therefore remains to be seen whether there is effectively an improvement in students' learning and also if students from TEIP schools can compete equally with students from non-TEIP schools in national and international contexts. This situation raises a question that is not specific to this Program and that some authors call "priority tension". This tension results from the recognition of the non-fatalist nature of school failure, which contrasts with the disappointment generated by the fact that priority education policies have been implemented in several countries for a few years now without significant improvements in the situations of students at social disadvantage.

It is however important to bear in mind that the elimination of the formal barriers to employment or to continuing studies, made possible by the increase in basic education completion rates in TEIP schools, is important both from an equity and from a lifelong learning perspective. The recognition of these positive aspects in the TEIP Program should not, however, hinder us in our quest for ever more inclusive paths for socially deprived children and adolescents within the Portuguese educational system.

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