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Secondary education in East Timor: Settings for curriculum development of Portuguese

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Abstract

The present article is part of an ongoing research at PhD level, integrated in the Timor Project. It aims to describe and analyse the curriculum development for the Portuguese subject in context of the Restructuring of the General Secondary Education Curriculum in East Timor. It embodies a qualitative case study, whose participants are students, teachers and trainers from East Timor and trainers from Portugal, specifically of the Portuguese subject. The data collection consisted on document analysis, questionnaires, interviews, focus group and direct (non-participant) observation of classes.

In the context of this article, contributes from a focus group with the Timorese teachers and trainers of Portuguese, an interview with the teacher trainer from Portugal and notes from direct observation of classes were all used to discuss the main results regarding: the pedagogical practices and the main teaching strategies, based mainly on a transmissive logic; the use that teachers make of curriculum resources, particularly the teachers' guides and the students' textbooks, which, if existing, tend to be used daily, both in planning and in delivering classes. The main advantages of these resources are the guiding role within pedagogical activities and the systematisation of contents to teach, despite the excessively demanding language in which they are drafted. The aim is also to discuss the teachers' knowledge about the implemented curriculum, which seems to depend on the frequency of ongoing training programs. More in-service teacher training is needed to support teachers through these curricular changes, allowing them to enhance their scientific and pedagogical knowledge.

Keywords: General secondary education; East Timor; Curriculum development; Professional knowledge.

Resumo

O presente artigo discorre de uma investigação ao nível do Doutoramento, integrada no Projeto Timor, que se propõe descrever e analisar o desenvolvimento curricular para o Português à luz da Reestruturação Curricular do Ensino Secundário Geral em Timor-Leste. Concretiza um estudo de caso qualitativo, cujos participantes são alunos, professores e formadores timorenses e formadores portugueses, especificamente de Português. A recolha de dados privilegia técnicas como a recolha documental, a inquirição por questionário, entrevista e *focus group* e a observação direta não participante.

No contexto deste artigo, mobilizam-se vozes de professores e formadores timorenses de Português, do formador português e notas da observação direta de aulas para discussão dos principais resultados. Os mesmos discutem-se relativamente: às práticas pedagógicas e principais estratégias de ensino, assentes, maioritariamente, numa lógica transmissiva; e ao uso que os professores fazem dos materiais curriculares, particularmente do guia do professor e do manual do aluno, que, quando existentes, tendem a ser utilizados diariamente, quer na planificação como na dinamização de aulas. As principais vantagens destes recursos passam pela função orientadora da ação pedagógica e de sistematização de conteúdos a lecionar, apesar da linguagem demasiado exigente na qual estão redigidos. Pretende-se, igualmente, discutir o conhecimento dos professores acerca do currículo implementado, que parece depender da frequência de ações de formação contínua. Assim, mais formação emerge como necessária quer para apoiar os professores com as mudanças curriculares introduzidas, como para aumentar o seu conhecimento científico e pedagógico.

Palavras-chave: Ensino secundário geral; Timor-Leste; Desenvolvimento curricular; Conhecimento profissional.

Resumen

Este artículo es parte de una investigación a nivel de doctorado, integrado en el Proyecto de Timor, que tiene como objetivo describir y analizar el desarrollo del currículo de portugués a la luz de la Reestructuración de Currículo General de la Educación Secundaria de Timor Oriental. Encarna un estudio de caso cualitativo, cuyos participantes son estudiantes, profesores y formadores de Timor Oriental y formadores portugueses. La recogida de datos se centra en la recogida documental, el cuestionario, la entrevista, el *focus group* y la observación directa no participativa.

Para este artículo se movilizan las visiones de los profesores y formadores de Timor Oriental del portugués, el formador portugués y apuntes de la observación directa de las clases para discutir los principales resultados en cuanto a: las prácticas pedagógicas y principales estrategias de la enseñanza, basadas principalmente en una lógica de transmisión; y el uso que los profesores den a la material curricular, particularmente el guía del profesor y el manual del estudiante, que tienden a utilizarse todos los días, tanto en la planificación de las clases como en la enseñanza. Sus principales ventajas son el papel orientador a la acción pedagógica y la sistematización de los contenidos para enseñar, a pesar del lenguaje demasiado exigente en la que están redactados. También pretende discutir los conocimientos de los profesores sobre el currículo implementado, dependiente de la frecuencia de la formación continua. Así, más formación es necesaria para ayudar los profesores

con las mudanzas curriculares y ampliar sus conocimientos científicos y pedagógicos.

Palabras-clave: Educación secundaria general; Timor Oriental; Desarrollo curricular; Conocimiento profesional.

Introduction

East Timor, as one of the youngest nations on earth, has developed a profound restructuring in its educational system (Robinson, 2009). As a result of decades under several foreign countries rule, Timorese education has gone through continuous changes and, in the early 21st century, schools were completely destroyed and the country presented a lack of qualified human resources, particularly concerning professionalised teachers (Albergaria-Almeida, Martinho, & Lopes, 2013; ME-RDTL, 2011a; Robinson, 2009; Soares, 2014).

In order to face this dilemma, as much as to eradicate the high levels of poverty, health problems and to respond to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (DRET, 2009), education became the focus of the political agenda (ME-RDTL, 2011a; Ramos & Teles, 2012) and it was restructured. The Timorese political authorities' commitment was to reform the educational system by developing and implementing policies (ME-RDTL, 2011b; Ramos & Teles, 2012). For that purpose, several international cooperation initiatives were established, some of which were with Portuguese universities, in order to qualify human resources, to rebuild schools and to improve educational levels (Boon & Kurvers, 2012; ME-RDTL, 2011a, 2011b; UNICEF, 2010).

Particularly in relation to the restructuring of the general secondary education curriculum (RGSEC), a cooperation project was established between East Timor and Portugal, namely the University of Aveiro (PRCESGTL, 2014). The main purpose of this project was to conceive: a) a curricular plan for the three schooling years which compose the general secondary education; b) 14 syllabus for the disciplines of this course; and c) 14 teachers' guides and 14 students' textbooks for each of the three schooling years of the general secondary education (PRCESGTL, 2014). The RGSEC, in particular, and the educational reform, in general, also introduces Portuguese as the language of instruction (ME-RDTL, 2011c; Ramos & Teles, 2012). Furthermore, considering the lack of qualified teachers (Albergaria-Almeida et al., 2013), the implementation of the RGSEC was followed by an in-service teacher training programme for secondary school teachers, mainly focused on the new curricular resources and on the Portuguese language (Cabrita et al., 2015a; ME-RDTL, 2011c; PRCESGTL, 2014).

In addition, an impact evaluation of the RGSEC is being carried out by a research project, entitled "Evaluating the impact of restructuring secondary education in East Timor – a study in the context of international cooperation" (Cabrita et al., 2015a, 2015b). The main purpose of this project is to investigate how the new general secondary education curriculum is being implemented (Cabrita et al., 2015a, 2015b). For that, the study is organised in two phases: one that is oriented on monitoring the curriculum implementation (phase I) and the second is focused on a short-term impact evaluation (phase II) (Cabrita et al., 2015a, 2015b).

As part of the aforementioned project, a research at the PhD level is being carried out, aiming to describe and analyse the curriculum development of the Portuguese subject regarding the RGSEC.

A qualitative case study is being conducted, supported by a constructivist paradigm. Data was gathered mainly through document analysis, a semi-structured interview with the Portuguese trainer, a focus group and questionnaires to Timorese teachers and students, and direct (non-participant) observation of Portuguese classes.

The present paper intends to describe and analyse the curriculum development for the Portuguese subject regarding the RGSEC and concerning: a) the teachers' knowledge on the new curriculum implemented; b) the teaching practice, in particular the main teaching strategies; and c) the use of the new resources introduced, such as teachers' guides and students' textbooks, as well as identifying their advantages and disadvantages. For that purpose, data collected via a semi-structured interview with a Portuguese trainer, and a focus group with Timorese teachers (learning to become teacher trainers) is mobilised. Also, notes registered during direct (non-participant) observation of Portuguese classes are considered. It is organised into three main sections: theoretical contextualisation; method; findings; and final remarks.

What about curriculum development and professional knowledge?

The RGSEC introduces new curricular orientations and try to accomplish the main aims embodied by the law for the educational system (ME-RDTL, 2011c). Referring to the general secondary education, a new model of teaching is pursued, where students must be critical and participate more actively during classes.

Several studies (e.g. Roldão, 1999; Sá-Chaves, 2003; Shawer, 2010; Zabalza, 2003) show that a curriculum can be conceived in different logics. Some of the theoretical approaches allow us to reflect upon it from a technical point of view to a critical and reflexive logic (Alarcão, 2011; Sá-Chaves, 2003; Tomaz, 2007). Therefore, the teaching practice can be conceived under more reproductive approaches or oriented towards emancipatory perspectives (Andrade & Canha, 2006; Sá-Chaves, 2003; Vieira, 2009).

According to technical approaches, a curriculum is seen as a sum of syllabuses (Roldão, 1999; Sá-Chaves, 2003), where knowledge is assumed as a rigid body (Roldão, 1999) oriented by a plan of studies (Sá-Chaves, 2003). Also, pedagogical resources, such as textbooks, emerge as curricular tools for teaching practices. In this context, teaching assumes a more applicative function, where teachers act mainly by providing contents in a linear, simplistic and reproductive way (Sá-Chaves, 2003). They could also be seen as technicians (Andrade & Canha, 2006; Sá-Chaves, 2003; Vieira, 2009).

In respect to more critical and reflexive approaches, curriculum development tends to be conceived as a process where the teaching practice plays a very important role (Sá-Chaves, 2003). Also, it can be seen as a process where there is place for development through contextualised learning, promoting scientific and pedagogical interaction between students, knowledge and teachers (Sá-Chaves, 2003).

Therefore, when teachers teach in a more active, reflexive and critical way, recognising that professional knowledge plays an important role in their performance (Andrade & Canha, 2006), they become essential to advise educational policy, and to improve teaching and learning practices (Alarcão, 2011; Andrade & Canha, 2006).

What Shawer (2010) named as curriculum-developers, curriculum-makers and curriculum-transmitters, all emerge at the convergence of the teaching practice and teachers' conceptions about the curriculum. The first approach includes curriculum development strategies from a macro to a micro level, operationalised by a diversity of pedagogical resources, where documents and strategies developed on a macro level are embodied. The curriculum-makers approach supposes that teachers find their own curricular strategies, meaning that they start from a previous evaluation of the teaching situation and then organise the sequence of pedagogical strategies to be used (Shawer, 2010). The inputs for that evaluation are from a wide range of sources, but the curricular strategies to be adopted are guided by the curriculum provided. Finally, in the curriculum-transmitters approach teaching strategies are focused on a linear transmission of programmed contents, "*unit-by-unit, lesson-by-lesson, page-by-page, task-by-task, and predictable classroom content […] linear-sequence, static-lesson plans, single-source of the student's book, and teacher's guide pedagogical instructions*" (Shawer, 2010, p. 181).

Teachers have an important role in the curriculum development (e.g. Hargreaves, 1998; Shawer, 2010; Tomaz, 2007), as it depends on the manner that they relate contents, learning and contexts of learning (Alarcão, 2011; Roldão, 1999; Sá-Chaves, 2003). Also their knowledge and conception of teaching and learning have an important role in its development (Gomes, 2013; Korthagen, 2004, 2012). Being part of the curriculum management, with school leaders and policy-makers, teachers also appear to play an important part to ensure a more sustaining and integrated curriculum development (Law, Wan, Galton, & Lee, 2010).

Within this context, it is important take into consideration that teaching structures and cultures are changing, and teachers seem to be trapped by guilt, pressed for time and overburdened by decisions imposed upon them (Hargreaves, 1998). It is also crucial to highlight the role that teachers play in the development of the curriculum (Shawer, 2010). Besides, teachers come from different backgrounds and, thus, have distinct ways of conceiving teaching and learning, and also the curriculum (Hargreaves, 1998; Shawer, 2010).

The role of in-service teacher training in teachers' professional development

Several studies (e.g. Lam, Alviar-Martin, Adler, & Sim, 2013; Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014; Shawer, 2010) focus on the role of in-service teacher training and the part that it plays on teachers' professional development. It can serve as a base for their practice improvement, helping them to promote more effective and meaningful learning (Gomes, 2013) and, therefore, to improve education (Page, 2015).

It is important to note that professional knowledge includes dimensions that are crucial to teachers, taking into account themselves as teachers and as persons (Gomes, 2013; Korthagen, 2004, 2012).

If training plays an important role on teachers´ professional development, it becomes very important in the context of curricular changes, where teachers have a leading role (Gomes, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998). In fact, training allows teachers to be well informed about curricular changes, as well as getting to know their role in those changes, which is crucial for the consolidation of the curriculum and for educational development (Gomes, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998). Training also has a positive impact on the development of teachers' professional skills, particularly concerning contents and pedagogical knowledge, as well as their capacity to put it into practice (Shulman, 1986). Ultimately, training

should have a positive impact on implementing curricular changes (Gomes, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998; Shulman, 1986).

Despite the fact that in-service teacher training frequently occurs through financial support, or for career development (Gorozidis & Papaioannou, 2014), it is important to consider training as a setting for teachers to reconstruct their professional identity and knowledge (Gomes, 2013), and, consequently, to evolve professionally. It can lead teachers to know their role as teachers and how to perform in face of today's reality, being the setting of curricular reform and, therefore, a context of change (Gomes, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998; Lam et al., 2013).

The training activities accomplished during the Timorese RGSEC are described in table 1. They were implemented through a project named PFICP[1] that was established between the Timorese Ministry of Education and the Portuguese Ministry for Foreign Affairs. It aimed to strengthen Portuguese as a language of instruction, and to prepare teachers for the RGSEC implementation, by working with them in scientific and didactical contents (PRCESGTL, 2014a).

Table 1. In-service teacher training activities developed between 2012 and 2014.

2012	2013	2014
Training for trainers (Dili) 30 July– 3 August	Training for trainers (Dili) 12 August – 18 October	Training for trainers (Dili) 5 May – 27 November
Intensive course of teachers training (Dili) 6 August– 17 August	Intensive course of teachers training (Dili) 4 November – 4 December	Intensive course of teachers training (Baucau, Dili, Same) 11 August – 16 August
Training for trainers (Dili) 8 October 8th – 30 November		Complementary courses of training for trainers – Portuguese and English 1 December – 12 December
Intensive course of teachers training (Baucau, Dili, Maliana, Same) 3 December – 15 December		

Source. Adapted from *Implementar a reestruturação curricular do ensino secundário geral em Timor-Leste: Construindo qualidade*, by Cabrita et al. (2015a).

[1] The Initial and In-service Teacher Training Project (http://www.pficp-esg-estv.com/) – translated from the original "Projeto de Formação Inicial e Contínua de Professores".

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The activities described were mainly focused on curricular resources, particularly the students' textbooks and the teachers' guides. They were organised to work contents of the first cycle year of secondary education during 2012, the contents for the second year during 2013, and the last one during 2014. The sessions were also delivered according to curricular guidelines displayed in the curricular plan and syllabuses, and always trying to answer teachers' main needs (Cabrita et al., 2015a).

Within this framework, the present study aims to describe and analyse the curriculum development for the Portuguese subject concerning the knowledge of teachers about the new curriculum, the teaching practice, particularly by identifying and characterising teaching strategies, and the use of new curricular resources introduced by the RGSEC. As so, we propose to discuss the results achieved regarding: a) the teachers' knowledge on the new curriculum implemented; b) the teaching practice, particularly concerning the main teaching strategies, by identifying and characterising them; and c) the use of the new resources introduced, such as teachers' guides and students' textbooks, as well as identifying its advantages and disadvantages.

Method

The present paper consists of a qualitative case study (Yin, 2009) supported by a constructivist paradigm (Amado, 2013). For the purpose of this study, data was gathered mainly through an interview with the Portuguese trainer on in-service teacher training, a focus group (FG) with six Timorese teachers of Portuguese (T), at that time being prepared to become teacher trainers for this subject. In addition, non-participant observation (O) of Portuguese classes (PC) was held.

Data collected through the focus group aimed to understand the perceptions of these six female teachers. Only two of them studied to become teachers of Portuguese. Of the other four teachers, two hold a bachelor degree in Biology and the other two in Mathematics. At the moment of the inquiry, they taught in six different schools.

From the group of these six teachers, two of them were observed during classes, one in a public school (ES12NOV), and the other in a private school (SM). Notes were registered. One of the classes was delivered by a teacher who holds a teaching degree in Portuguese and the other one by a teacher with a bachelor degree in Mathematics.

The observation of Portuguese classes was conducted in a direct, but non-participant way. It had to be authorised by both teachers and principals of the schools, and so non-participant observation was limited to three classes, where notes on teaching practice and the use of new curricular resources were taken.

Through an interview with the Portuguese trainer for the in-service teacher training, we were able to access his perceptions on the new curriculum implementation, as well as about teacher training for the Portuguese subject. The interviewee holds a degree in Modern Languages and Literature – Portuguese Studies – and has been a teacher trainer in East Timor since 2005 up until the date of this study.

The codification adopted for the data analysis is registered in table 2, and is related to the procedures took during the data collection.

Table 2. Collecting data and codes.

Collecting data	Codes
Interview with the Portuguese trainer on the 23rd of January, 2014.	I-PT-23&24.1.14
Focus group discussion with Timorese teachers of Portuguese, on the 4th of June, 2014.	FG-T-4.6.14
Direct observation (non-participant) of classes on the 12th of June and the 12th of October, 2014.	O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14; O-PC-SM-10.6.14

Finally, the categories discussed in the section "Findings" result from a recursive way of data analysis. In this kind of procedure, categories arise in first place from the aims or the research questions of a study, which are recursively enhanced or complemented by those categories emerging from the content analyses. Thereby, in the context of this article, the categories emerged both previously and during the content analysis (Bardin, 2007).

Findings

This section focuses on the discussion of the main findings achieved concerning: a) teachers' knowledge about the new curriculum; b) the teaching practice; and c) the use of the new resources, such as teachers' guides and students' textbooks. For that, we use data gathered through an interview with the Portuguese teacher trainer, a focus group with Timorese teachers of Portuguese and observation notes provided by classes' observation.

a) Teachers' knowledge about the new curriculum

As mentioned by the interviewee, at the beginning of the RGSEC implementation, schools did not have access to the curricular documents and resources (I-PT-23&24.1.14). Also teachers did not have access to students' textbooks, teachers' guides, the curricular plan or the subject syllabus (I-PT-23&24.1.14). So, "if we are speaking of an implementation, a restructuring depending on new tools, new resources and [if teachers] do not have the resources, it makes it very difficult to implement"[2] (I-PT-23&24.1.14). In fact, it was only at the beginning of the teacher training sessions that some teachers (those who participated in the training) became aware of the reform: "we verify that teachers were not aware of the curricular restructuring [… as so] the country was functioning without knowing precisely the reform [… for instance] the plan allocates five 50 minute sessions per week for the Portuguese subject"[3] (I-PT-23&24.1.14). The first few training sessions were focused on showing

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[2] Translated from the original "se estamos a falar de uma implementação, de uma reestruturação curricular com novos instrumentos, novos materiais e não tendo [os professores] esses materiais na sua posse, portanto, seria muito difícil proceder a essa implementação".
[3] Translated from the original "fomo-nos apercebendo que os professores não tinham conhecimento desta

teachers what the RGSEC was and its implications on the educational system, trying to make them aware of the curricular documents and resources (I-PT-23&24.1.14).

In this respect, during the focus group, teachers show to have generalised knowledge about the new curriculum, mostly because of the teacher training. They showed to be aware of the relevance of having a well organised and oriented curriculum, with resources to homogenise the educational system in the country (FG-T-4.6.14). Teachers also pointed out that both the curricular plan and syllabus were important for the purpose of consulting, and to provide them guidance in their pedagogical practices (FG-T-4.6.14). For instance, the curricular plan indicates how often Portuguese classes should be delivering per and within a week (FG-T-4.6.14). However, it was possible to notice that these resources were not often used, as they mentioned it was "more to consult"[4] (FG-T-4.6.14). Also, they share the same point of view on the new teaching methods that the curriculum introduces to conceive both teaching and learning, as students must be at the centre of this process (FG-T-4.6.14). Moreover, teachers now have students' textbooks and teachers' guides as resources for the general secondary education (FG-T-4.6.14). Plus, in these resources, teachers are able to find guidance throughout their teaching practice, as they have within their reach well organised contents, theme by theme, unit by unit (FG-T-4.6.14). Particularly, the teachers' guides have examples of exercise resolutions, and suggestions of activities, in addition to those that can be found within the students' textbooks (FG-T-4.6.14).

b) Teaching practice

In relation to teaching strategies, and the use of new tools and pedagogical resources, a new constructivist approach is introduced, where students are asked to participate more actively in the learning process in order to develop specific and transversal skills (ME-RDTL, 2011c; PRCESGTL, 2014b). Teachers, according to this new approach, must help students by providing supported guidance through teaching (ME-RDTL, 2011c; PRCESGTL, 2014b). For that, a few examples of activities are described in the curricular plan, the Portuguese syllabus and the teachers' guides (e.g., debates, group work, students' oral presentations, oral exposition of contents, questioning) (PRCESGTL, 2014b).

When questioned about the teaching and learning strategies pursued, teachers highlight "oral exposition, reading, resolution of activities from the textbook, text reading, text dictation and oral questioning"[5] (FG-T-4.6.14) as the ones implemented. These strategies were also mentioned by the Portuguese teacher trainer as the most common in classes. In fact, he added that the dictation might still be happening because of the lack of textbooks for students in schools (I-PT-23&24.1.14).

Through the observation of the Portuguese classes, it was possible to observe some of the teaching strategies implemented by the teachers. Apart from being familiarised with the new teaching strategies, displayed in the curricular resources, and mostly because of the work held during teacher

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reestruturação curricular [... e o] o país [estava] a funcionar sem ter um claro conhecimento do que é a reestru-turação curricular [... por exemplo que] o plano curricular determina que tem de haver 5 tempos letivos para Português e sugere-se que cada tempo letivo seja de 50 minutos".

[4] Translated from the original "mais de consulta".

[5] Translated from the original "exposição oral, leitura, resolução de fichas do manual, leitura dos textos do manual, ditados e questionamento oral".

training (FG-T-4.6.14), teachers tend to keep putting themselves at the centre of the educational process (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14). Classes are mainly delivered through oral exposition of contents, supported on the students' textbooks and by reading or copying contents on the blackboard (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14). Despite this, there are a few moments where one of the teachers shows herself to be more comfortable on questioning the students, mostly by asking if they understand what she just said, or providing a direct question about the current content being dealt with at that time (O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14).

However, all the teachers show themselves to be in a constant dilemma of balancing the importance of the strategies introduced by the new curriculum and the difficulties on its implementation during classes (FG-T-4.6.14). As they argue: "in a class with 50, 60, 70 students it is difficult to implement these strategies"[6] (FG-T-4.6.14). Also the Portuguese teacher trainer affirms that teachers are aware of the teaching strategies, as they are worked on during training, but find them hard to put into practice with the high number of students per class (I-PT-23&24.1.14). Still, there are some moments where students are stimulated to work in pairs or share the didactical resources (O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14), as there are not enough for every student. Moreover, teachers tend to replicate what is practiced in training during their classes (I-PT-23&24.1.14), as we were able to confirm (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14).

Concerning the evaluation, teachers claim to have started to use different types, ways and instruments to evaluate their students (FG-T-4.6.14). In their words, there is "summative, formative and diagnostic evaluation"[7] (FG-T-4.6.14). They also declare to use these three types of evaluation to assess their students. Yet, they tend to underline, once again, that the use of the new evaluation strategies are deeply dependent on the difficulties found in everyday classes (FG-T-4.6.14). Teachers understand the importance of the new tools introduced by the RGSEC and state to use them (e.g., "observation guides [or] checklists"[8]) (FG-T-4.6.14), but also come across problems when implemented, due to the large number of students (FG-T-4.6.14). In terms of the dimensions to evaluate, teachers say that they consider students' behaviour, attendance and class participation (FG-T-4.6.14). Likewise, they affirm to evaluate students' oral and writing performance, and use results from tests and exams, resolution of activities from the students' textbooks and oral participation (FG-T-4.6.14).

The Portuguese teacher trainer has a contrasting opinion. He confirms that these six teachers know and work with different types and strategies of evaluation, as they are worked on during training, such as "specific observation guide sheets to oral performing evaluation [...;] the same for reading, and for writing"[9] (I-PT-23&24.1.14). Still, the educational system is oriented around exams, "there is final and mid-term exams, exams to pass to another level, therefore, there is a wide range of exams that students have to sit"[10] (I-PT-23&24.1.14), so teachers keep mobilising more traditional tools in their classes, such as tests and exams (I-PT-23&24.1.14). Notwithstanding, these six teachers seem to also use observation guide sheets, checklists and self and group evaluation (I-PT-23&24.1.14). But, still,

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[6] Translated from the original "[n]uma turma com 50, 60, 70 alunos é difícil implementar estas estratégias".

[7] Translated from the original "avaliação diagnóstica, formativa e sumativa".

[8] Translated from the original "grelhas de observação [ou] listas de verificação".

[9] Translated from the original "grelhas de observação específicas para situações de oralidade [...;] o mesmo para a leitura, o mesmo para a escrita".

[10] Translated from the original "há exames intermédios, há exames finais, há exame de passagem de classe, portanto, há toda uma gama de exames a que os alunos têm de se sujeitar".

they find it hard to implement with those conditions (I-PT-23&24.1.14).

In this respect, during observation of classes we were able to experience their fixation on tests and exams, tools also found in the curricular documents (ME-RDTL, 2011c; PRCESGTL, 2014b). In fact, tests continue to be the tool that teachers seem to use the most, as they also tend to show some particular concern about final exams (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14).

In addition, the lack of a grounded school leadership and infrastructures also conditions their teaching practice, as they do not have enough students' textbooks for every student, as well as other pedagogical resources (FG-T-4.6.14). Still, as the teaching practice depends on the use of curricular resources, mainly the teachers' guides and the students' textbooks, it is crucial to have a well oriented and organised school leadership (I-PT-23&24.1.14), one able to manage a proper distribution of curricular resources, making them available to teachers and students, and to organise schools as needed (I-PT-23&24.1.14; O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14).

c) Use of new curricular resources

Concerning the use that teachers made of new curricular resources, we will focus on teachers' guides and students' textbooks, identifying its advantages and disadvantages.

According to the curricular plan (ME-RDTL, 2011c), teachers' guides and students' textbooks constitute the main resources for the teaching process. As to the use of the curricular plan and the Portuguese syllabus, it is mainly done for the purpose of consulting and preparing classes (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14), whenever teachers feel that guidance is needed (FG-T-4.6.14).

The students' textbooks and the teachers' guides are frequently used to prepare and deliver classes (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14), particularly the students' textbooks, as it constitutes the everyday class resource (FG-T-4.6.14) and provide guidance to teachers (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14). It collects a diversity of texts converging with the Timorese culture and oriented to students' needs (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14). Also, it appears to be well organised and "presents didactical sequences that teachers can reproduce […] during classes"[11] (I-PT-23&24.1.14). Additionally, teachers can find all the contents to be taught throughout the general secondary education in the students' textbooks (FG-T-4.6.14), thus teachers seem to follow it "step by step"[12] (FG-T-4.6.14), turning it into "the resource mostly used"[13] (I-PT-23&24.1.14). These are also pointed out by all participants as the main advantages of this resource (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14).

The teachers' guides are also seen as very important because allow teachers to prepare much more oriented classes, in respect to the main goals of the subject (FG-T-4.6.14). They are resources to complement the students' textbooks, as are being used "to consult the resolutions of the activities of the students' textbook, to prepare moments for evaluation, to find resolutions for the exercises […] To clarify vocabulary doubts as well"[14] (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14). In this respect, the teachers' guides

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[11] Translated from the original "apresenta sequências didáticas que os professores podem reproduzir […] em sala de aula".

[12] Translated from the original "passo a passo".

[13] Translated from the original "o recurso mais usado".

[14] Translated from the original "para consulta de soluções dos exercícios dos manuais, para preparação de momentos de avaliação, para encontrarem as soluções […] Para esclarecimento de dúvidas de vocabulário também".

also present some suggestions of activities (I-PT-23&24.1.14), some examples of observation guide sheets, answering scenarios for the activities on the students' textbooks, and glossaries apart from those on the textbooks (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14).

Through observation of classes, we were able to confirm that teachers follow the contents exposed in the students' textbooks, but also use other pedagogical resources (e.g., such as grammar copies), as a complement of the main didactical resource (O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14). Teachers at the same time show some difficulties in oral expression and comprehension of the Portuguese language (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14), a fact that was also registered during the focus group (FG-T-4.6.14) and confirmed in the interview (I-PT-23&24.1.14).

Referring to the disadvantages pointed out about these two resources, all participants agreed that the high level standards of the Portuguese language is the main challenge of the curricular resources (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14). During classes, teachers tend to give additional examples from those which are in the students' textbook (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14), for instance by using those presented in Portuguese grammar books (which are normally photocopies) (O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14).

In short, this teaching method reveals a way of conceiving the curriculum and its resources, as we analyse in retrospect, and it has a direct influence on teachers' teaching strategies (e.g. Gomes, 2013; Korthagen, 2004, 2012; Shawer, 2012).

Final remarks

The main aim of this paper was to describe and analyse the curriculum development for Portuguese regarding the RGSEC. For that, we have discussed the main results achieved regarding a) the teachers' knowledge of the new curriculum being implemented; b) the teaching practice, particularly concerning the main teaching strategies, by identifying and characterising them; and c) the use of the new resources introduced, such as teacher guides and textbooks, as much as identifying its advantages and disadvantages.

Results helped us to primarily conclude that the teachers of the Portuguese subject became familiarised with the new curriculum through teacher training. As we were able to confirm, training seemed to have a big influence on teachers' performance. In this context, they started to use curricular resources to prepare and deliver classes, particularly the teacher's guides and the textbooks. They are mainly used to transmit curricular contents, as teachers still teach mostly in a more transmissive way (Roldão, 1999; Sá-Chaves, 2003; Shawer, 2010), tending to deliver classes through oral exposition of contents, followed by exercise resolutions, copying and reading (O-PC-SM-10.6.14; O-PC-ES12NOV-12.6.14&12.10.14). Also, it appears to be important for teachers to improve their domain of the Portuguese language, as much as to evolve their scientific and didactical knowledge (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14). Nevertheless, they started to introduce, even if shyly, new teaching strategies, in order to improve teaching and students' performance, as they showed to be aware of the new teaching approaches. The same appears to be happening with the new evaluation strategies. Apart from being familiarised with the new strategies, teachers tend to use more traditional evaluation strategies and tools, despite recognising their value on the educational process. Still, they find it hard to implement, mostly because of the difficulties that they find in everyday class. The large number of

students per class, the high level standards of the Portuguese language in secondary education, the lack of curricular resources, and the inadequate school leadership and infrastructures are some of the constraints encountered (I-PT-23&24.1.14; FG-T-4.6.14). These elements are documented as crucial in terms of pedagogical methodology – pedagogical resources' availability, teachers training, and logistical conditions (ME-RDTL, 2011c). In addition, they still face some school organizational problems and curricular and didactical weaknesses (I-PT-23&24.1.14), a fact that could be justified by the high level standards of Portuguese to be taught and a lack of proper training for teachers who are teaching Portuguese. In this respect a change of perspective and practice seem to be needed, in order to make teachers, school leaders and policy-makers engaged in curriculum decision-making (Law et al., 2010), truly committed to teaching development and the improvement of education (Alarcão, 2011).

Despite some few signs of change, more in-service teacher training emerges as necessary to help teachers to develop their knowledge about the curriculum (Gomes, 2013; Korthagen, 2004, 2012; Lam et al., 2013). Also, it seems to be crucial for teachers to evolve from curriculum transmitters to curriculum developers (Shawer, 2010), as well as to support them through these times of change in their professional knowledge and development (Albergaria-Almeida et al., 2013; Gomes, 2013; Hargreaves, 1998). Teacher education still remains crucial on any educational reform (Page, 2015).

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