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INVESTIGATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM PLANNING, DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT IN PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning and teaching (FLLT) is a world-wide phenomenon.

Students dedicate time to learning a new language.

Teachers devote time to curriculum planning, design and development.

Curriculum is an outline of a didactic process. “Most simply put, it is a guide for learning” (Prevedel 2003, p. 8).

Curriculum comes from the Latin word “currere” meaning race course: the process of movement to achieve aims and objectives. An instructional programme which reflects an institution’s educational aims.

Since the 1960’s, the FLLT process has undergone changes with the emergence of different kinds of approaches and methods, due to language learning and teaching (LLT) not effectively addressing learners’ linguistic and communicative competence (Richards, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Willis & Willis, 2007; Livingstone, 2014a).
FLLT has experienced, in recent times, a number of influences and directions (Richards, 2013).

Influence of the Bologna Process (B.P.) of 1999. Intensified calls for reforms in all higher education (HE) curricula (Tudor, 2005). Reforms in HE language teaching to address (1) language and academic mobility, (2) language and employability, (3) lifelong language learning, and (4) HE language policy.


Effective curriculum design = Effective language pedagogy

“The visibility gained by Language Didactics in Portugal has justified its constitution as a disciplinary field institutionalised within higher education” (Alarcão 2010, p. 61).

FL curriculum development must meet the needs of 21st century communities.
Aim

Investigate curriculum planning, design and development for English and Spanish as foreign languages (FL) in Portuguese HEIs.
Research Questions

What kind(s) of curriculum planning, design and development practices are used?

Does course curriculum design incorporate the four mandatory areas (Objectives, Content, Method and Evaluation)? Are these clearly and sufficiently expressed?

Are objectives and content relevant and properly defined?

What kind(s) of methods and evaluation practices are employed?

To what extent do Portuguese HE foreign language curricula adhere to the principles established in the CEFR?

Are Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) considered in the curriculum development process?

To what extent can a ‘national’ HE foreign language curriculum be identified?
Objectives

Investigate curriculum planning, design and development practices.

Study the components of the curriculum documents.

Examine the kinds of objectives and content used.

Analyse the kinds of methods and evaluation practices employed.

Recommend the integration of newer and current curriculum approaches and the use of ICTs in the FLLT process.

Propose the restructuring of course curriculum documents on the basis of the research findings.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXTUALISATION

Political and socio-economic changes in Portugal in the 1970’s. With the April 25, 1974 Revolution (Boal, 1999; Sousa, 2000) came the end of the colonial regime and the establishment of democracy. Implementation of structural reforms in all sectors, including education.

Portuguese Constitution was approved on April 2, 1976, emphasising equal opportunities and access to education. Education seen as tool for economic, social and cultural cohesion, democracy, and tolerance (Sousa, 2000).

Two important events in 1986 in Portugal (Sousa, 2000):
(1) Approval of the Education Act
(2) Portugal’s integration into the European Union (EU).

Integration into the EU allowed for multilateral cooperation with other EU countries, and particularly in the field of education.
Influence of the B.P. of 1999 in European HE landscape. The focus of this process was on “the development of a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area by 2010” (Berlin Communiqué 2003 [cited by Tudor 2005, p. 2]).

This process allowed for consistency in European HE pedagogy, including foreign language didactics. This would foster interculturalism, multiculturalism, and plurilingualism among EU member countries, given the ‘importance of foreign languages for a global age’ (Kramsch, 1992).

As earlier mentioned, the CEFR document was introduced in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2001). Framework for the creation of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines and exams across Europe. Transformative reflection and reformation in FL pedagogy.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

A pioneer study, the first of its kind to be done in Portugal.

No documented evidence of such research having ever been done.

Evidence of one documented study in 1991 dealing with the analysis of 34 language curriculum documents (Portuguese as a first language (L1) and English, French and German as FL for language teacher trainees from different Portuguese teacher training institutions (Andrade, Araújo e Sá, Moreira, Sá & Vieira, 1992).

This research can serve as a guide for HEIs desirous of undergoing FL curricular reforms.
FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The focus is **only** on curriculum planning, design and development for **English** and **Spanish** as FL.

The focus is **not** on curriculum delivery and implementation (which would include methodology and evaluation practices).

Issues regarding **methodology** and **evaluation** will be addressed in this study, since methodology and evaluation are **two** of the four core components of the curriculum.

Core Curriculum Components (Objectives, Content, Method, and Evaluation).
Syllabus vs Curriculum

Syllabus – content to be taught and tested; content selection, coverage and grading (Nunan, 1993; Rahimpour, 2010). Syllabus is a small part of the curriculum (Richards, 2001).

Curriculum is more comprehensive. Curriculum – a learning plan (Lange, 1994). Its focus is on planning, design, development, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of learning programmes (Candlin, 1984; Rahimpour, 2010). Course design, transformation of course content into learning-teaching plan (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006; Richards, 2013).

Curriculum and Curriculum Development

Educational aims achieve concrete expression in a curriculum. Tyler (1949) is largely responsible for curriculum development. His four questions summarise what the curriculum is all about:
1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided, that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effective organised?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

The above questions refer to objectives, content, method, and evaluation, the four core components of any curriculum development initiative.

Other curriculum specialists (Nichols & Nichols, 1972; Inglis, 1975; Biggs 1999a, 1999b; Biggs & Tang, 2011) endorse Tyler’s (1949) curriculum development proposal.

Steady curriculum restructuring in 1990’s, because it was too teacher-centred and did not address student learning diversity (Prevedel, 2003; Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006). A more student centred curriculum was desired (Ramsden, 2003; Biggs & Tang, 2011; Livingstone 2014b, 2014c).
Curriculum focus should be on “what the student does” (Shuell 1986, p. 429). Learner needs and interests to be considered. As such, a needs analysis/needs assessment is mandatory for curriculum design (Ellis, 2003; Maki, 2004; Estaire, 2009; Livingstone, 2014a).

**Curriculum Design/Development Models**

Curriculum development - an ongoing process, constant mutation, seeking relevance and significance in a learning context. There have been many curriculum development models (CDMs) over the year. Smith (2000) offers four models:

1. curriculum as a body of knowledge
2. curriculum as a product
3. curriculum as a process
4. curriculum as praxis

Predevel (2003) discusses three curriculum development approaches:

1. traditional approach
2. learner-driven approach
3. critical approach
The models of Smith (2000) and Prevedel (2003) are not contradictory. **These models complement each other.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Development Models</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body of Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td>Learner-Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Praxis</strong></td>
<td>Critical</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

These models are important to curriculum design. The objective is to select the best characteristics of each model to craft a curriculum relevant to a specific educational context.

In order to develop a learner-centred curriculum, those CDMs that embrace **learner-centredness** must be considered.

**Learner-Centred CDMs**

**Learner-Driven Approach & Critical Approach** (Prevedel, 2003)

**Process Model & Praxis Model** (Smith, 2000)
**Language Curriculum**

Organisation of language learning and teaching. Since it is a roadmap for learning, the four core curriculum components (Tyler, 1949) must be included in its design and development.

**Language Curriculum Development**

Language curriculum development (LCD) originated in the 1960’s, with the notion of ‘syllabus design’ (Richards, 2001).

Syllabus design issues emerged long before the 1960’s as a major factor in the LLT process. Eventually, focus moved from syllabus design to curriculum design.

The concept of method in didactics is still influential on classroom practices and is still a major concern to all concerned parties.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2000) and Richards (2001), there have been a number of methods since the start of the 20th century, in search of the elusive “best method”. These include:

1. *Grammar-Translation Method* (1800-1900)
Richards (2001) and other language curriculum specialists (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Willis & Willis, 2007; Graves, 2008; Basturkmen, 2010; Coonan, 2012; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), endorse Tyler’s (1949) curriculum components and his position on curriculum design and development.

Language curriculum development is crucial in these times.

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Type of Research Method(s)
A case study (Thomas, 2011) is the research paradigm.
A purposive sampling technique (Palys, 2008).

Investigative Site(s)
Four Portuguese state universities:
(1) University A  (2) University B
(3) University C  (4) University D

(The names of the Universities have been excluded to preserve anonymity until the study’s completion).

Each university is representative of Portugal, in geographical terms.

The Programme
First Cycle Programme in Languages, Literatures and Cultures (LLC).
Respondents/Participants
31 teaching staff/lecturers from the four universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigative Site</th>
<th>Lecturers per Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>12</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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**Research Instrument # 1**

75 course curriculum documents from the four universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigative Site</th>
<th>Documents per Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
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**Research Instrument # 2**

An online survey to be designed and implemented, containing both open-ended and close-ended questions to obtain *additional information* on curriculum planning and design.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Four *core curriculum components* to be analysed: objectives, content, method, evaluation. Biggs and Tang (2011) focus on *student learning*, hence the following:

1. Learning objectives = intended learning outcomes (ILOs)
2. Method = learning-teaching activities (LTAs)
3. Evaluation = assessment tasks (ATs) and grading

**Other important curriculum components** to be analysed:

1. Course Name/Code
2. Language Level (as determined by the CEFR document)
3. Credits/Credit Hours (ECTS)
4. Language of Instruction
5. Lecture’s Name and Contact Information
6. Instructional Delivery Mode (Face to Face [F2F]/Web-Enhanced/Blended/Fully Online/Distance Education [DE])
7. Language of the Curriculum Document
**Data Analysis Methods**

Content analysis (Yin, 2011) to be done on course curriculum documents. Triangulation with quantitative/qualitative data.

**Principal Points of Reference**

(1) *CEFR Document* (Council of Europe, 2001)
(2) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University* (Biggs & Tang, 2011)

**Other Major Supporting Points of Reference**

(1) *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching* (Richards, 2001)
(2) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Richards & Rodgers, 2014)

**Comparative Analyses**

(1) Intra-university (English/Spanish Docs)
(2) Inter-university (English/English & Spanish/Spanish Docs)
(3) Compare and contrast all English docs against all Spanish docs.

Quantitative and qualitative analysis of online survey data.
PROPOSED ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

Topic
Acknowledgements
Content Page
Abstract
Chapter 1 – Introduction
  – Research Aim, Questions, and Objectives
Chapter 2 – Historical Background and Contextualisation
Chapter 3 – Theoretical Framework
Chapter 4 – Literature Review/State of the Art
Chapter 5 – Methodology
Chapter 6 – Presentation of Results/Findings
  - Online Surveys
  - Curriculum Documents
  - English
  - Spanish
Chapter 7 – Discussion/Explanation/Analysis of Findings
  - Comparison (Similarities/Differences) of Course Curricula
    (Eng/Eng; Spa/Spa; Eng/Spa)
  - Recommendations/Proposals
Chapter 8 – Conclusions
  - Recommendations
    (Curriculum Planning, Design and Development)
References
Appendices
PROPOSED WORK PLAN/TIME LINE

1. Bibliographical Revision/Literature Review

2. Data Collection and Analysis

3. Writing of Thesis (Various Chapters/Sections)

4. Observations/Modifications/ made by Supervisors

5. Corrections and changes to PhD Thesis by Candidate

6. Approved Changes/Modifications by Supervisors

7. Approval of Thesis Completion by Supervisors

8. Thesis Submission for Evaluation and Approval by FLUP Committee

REFERENCES


