Skills Acquired by Primary School Teachers When They Are Trained in Higher Education

Luisa Soares dos Santos, Martins Vilanculos Laita
(1. Faculty of Education and Commination, Catholic University of Mozambique;
2. Distance Education Institute, Catholic University of Mozambique)

Abstract: This presentation is a synthesis of the field contact made with a group of primary school teachers who attend the licenciatura/honours course in Portuguese language teaching at the Catholic University of Mozambique at the Center for Distance Learning. For the research we came up with the following theme: "Competences/Skills acquired by teachers of basic education at the time of their training in higher education".

Our research was aimed at: verifying the competences that are foreseen in the licenciatura/honours course in Portuguese language teaching; to assess whether the elementary school teachers attending the licenciatura/honours course in Portuguese language teaching at the end of the course develop new skills at a personal, interpersonal, professional, scientific and pedagogical level and if the skills that primary school teachers develop respond to their expectations and professional needs and to see if the modality of distance learning is effective in the formation and promotion of new skills of primary school teachers.

Throughout our work we reflect on the main issues, trying to highlight the main theories or ideas that allowed a constructive reflection on teacher competence; training models, and the development of competencies of teachers in basic education in higher education.

After the theoretical foundation was established, we tried to give voice to the interviewees, that in the perspective of Boaventura Sousa Santos (s/d), Harding and Haraway, 2003, it was intended to give voice to the subject of study (trainees), giving them not only the possibility of sharing their experience but also to give chance to individual to speak openly, using words s/he wishes and in the order that suits her/him" (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1995, pp. 92–93).

In this sense, taking into account the context and the theme of the research, a semi-structured narrative interview was used as an information gathering tool, which allowed and facilitated the reflection on the reality using the theoretical aspects that underlie this article/presentation and obtaining themes to from interview registration. Ten (10) student teachers participated in the research.

The teachers' discussions allowed us to identify some recurrent themes that are: acquired competences, continuous training, experience and professional development, reflection on practices and attitude change in teaching practice

Key words: competences, training, teacher training

Luisa Soares dos Santos, Master of Education Sciences, Distance Education Institute, Catholic Universit of Mozambique; research areas: education sciences. E-mail: ced@ucm.ac.mz, lsantos@ucm.ac.mz.

1. A look at Competences

The concept of competences, also referred to as skills in this article, is not new. The presence of the term competence in training and employment, as Alaluf (1994) says, appears from the 1980s onwards, and is becoming more and more frequent so that today it has become a commonplace that tends to take over not only the field of professional activity, but also in the field of training, such as, still more recently the school. Already Mesquita (2013) makes a reflection of the concept of competencies citing some authors such as: Jonnaert (2000); Perrenoud (2000).

Le Boterf (1994, 1997, 2000 quoted by Mesquita, 2013, p. 36) defines competence "as knowing how to act pertinent to a concrete situation, which allows mobilizing all knowledge and not applying it in isolation". Allessandrini (2002) stresses that "competence relates toknowing how to do something, which in turn involves a series of skills" (p. 164). For the author, series of skills manifest themselves in the following aspects: "general intellectual ability, specific aptitude, creative and productive thinking, leadership ability, talents." Allessandrini (2002) and other aspects. Skills also consist of how each person expresses their ability to solve problems in their working lives. For Laita (2015) the competences "are understood like descriptions of the knowledge, abilities and attitudes that the students must develop" (p. 60).

2. A Look at Training

The notion of training can be seen in terms of life experience, reflection, the ability to tell its reality; the person throughout his training finds a space to reproduce his knowledge. The meaning produced in the act of training must become manifest, attributing the experience of training in the personal, interpersonal, professional, scientific and pedagogical life. Nowadays training is associated, that is, we have the idea of the existence of types of training. In this context we are interested in addressing the types of training in the professional field: the specific professional training that we can also call initial training and continuing vocational training. The first is sought after by the students who decide to start life and the second one is more sought after by teachers or practicing professionals who are supposed to acquire new skills, upgrade their own, increase possibilities for succession of the career, etc.

Reflecting on different types of training also leads us to develop ideals and seek to understand essential aspects that directly influence the formative course of the teacher. These aspects are: "scientific knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, processes of inter and transdisciplinary learning, training course, construction, production of knowledge" (Tavares, 1997, p. 61). According to the same author, the person in training within his / her abilities, and what is expected is that "attain competences in order to exercise a profession", and within "the conceptions of formation and competences that a good professional is expected to acquire, that people construct, produce scientific and pedagogical knowledge" (p. 66).

In this sense, training must be conceived, not only in a forecasting logic, but also in a construction logic, that is to say, "the skills to be developed , in any training system, naturally connect with different conceptions of training and has to do with the professional objectives to be attained" (Tavares, 1997, p. 67). This same author approaches in detail the types of competences that are acquired along the training course:

- **Scientific skills**: it implies the knowledge and mastery of the contents related to the subjects of a specific area of expertise, such as Portuguese, literature, philosophy, computer science, etc. It is a type of

competence that reflects on an area of knowledge.

- **Pedagogical skills**: this competence is associated with "know-how, listening, communicating the knowledge of different areas", trying to adapt to different realities and receptors: the trainees, students, etc. In this type of competence professionals should seek to master the concepts of the areas (specialties), they must also master scientific competence.
- **Personal skills**: as its name indicates, it is the effort that each professional must make individually, that is, "personal development is the fundamental competence of every educational professional" (Tavares, 1997, p. 69).

According to the author this is a mother competence, that is, if the personal competence of each person is well sustained, it will serve as a mirror for the other competencies.

3. Training Models for Teachers of Basic Education in Higher Education

Throughout the history of teacher training various programs and models have emerged that reflect different forms and understandings about the teacher and his/her role of professional practices. However, several authors have placed the centrality of the reflection in the professional formation of teaching, as for example: Demailly (1992), Marcel Lesne (1977), Zeichner (1993), Canário (1999), and others.

According to Demailly (1992), "thinking about training strategies and processes of professional socialization of primary school teachers' implies decoding a certain number of concepts" (p. 142). In this scenario, when a primary school teacher continues his education, he hopes to improve the quality of the education system, create initiatives or have training incentives linked to "solving real problems, problem solving skills mutual recognition of trainees and a situation to the work situation" (p. 144).

When the teacher-in-training is looking for training or is in training in Demailly's (1992) approach "it is in any case a learning in situ, but with a spatio-temporal decoupling of moments of action and moments of constitution of new competences , accompanied by a reflexive and theoretical activity supported by foreign aid" (p. 145).

The training models (university form, school form, contractual formative model and interactive-reflective form) enunciated by the author Demailly (1992), the teacher trainers in their training practice apply one and the other, which can be applied, that is, the teachers' tutors in their sessions apply both in the field of in-service teacher training so that they can develop their skills. The curricular plan of the courses and the way they work, in the Distance Learning Center, to which the teachers of the basic education are applying, considering the author mentioned above "formally presents the whole of its development and the training actions under the same contractual form". The tutors teachers "must teach knowledge that is defined externally in an official program" (p. 145). In this sense, the objectives of training in this form of transmission of knowledge are not the responsibility of the tutors, but of the teachers themselves in training for their own professional development and acquisition of skills.

Zeichner (1993) pointed to the North American reality, four traditions of teacher training (academic tradition, tradition of social efficiency, developmental tradition and tradition of social reconstruction), indicating priorities and meaning of each one. Each tradition presents a conception of school and society that emerges from the historical, social and educational context...the various existing training programs reflect with greater or lesser focus the elements present in each tradition. The analysis of the traditions allows the compression of several

factors present in each training program in the Mozambican reality as in any other territory. These four traditions of teacher training are a useful tool for thinking about professional development and the acquisition of new skills for teachers today.

3.1 Elementary School Teacher Skills Development

The development of professional skills of the teacher is one of the important aspects that is verified in our daily life. Professional skills are understood as "attitudes neces the exercise of the teacher's profession" (Altet, 2001). According to the author, these competences are "cognitive, affective, conative and practical" and each order has its effect on teaching and learning, for example the cognitive order "allowed to develop a current research on teacher thinking" (p. 28).

Thus, by examining today's society which brings so many and many challenges, the role of school and teachers must be an agent of change and transformation. Teachers should have an active and relevant role in the organization and curriculum development taking into account the different contexts in which students are found, creating spaces for reflection on the values and beliefs existing in society. This type of form of the teacher to develop his/her professional activity is presumed that it will allow a contribution, an aid in the reconstruction of the society thus promoting its own personal and professional development and a more dynamic and participative character of the students Cosme (2009), says that the school should fundamentally a matter of understanding that teachers should have a strong critical vision to ask relevant questions about what they teach, how they should teach and what objectives to pursue, making critical reflection and action a social project.

In this perspective and in the view of Baptista (2005), teachers have an obligation to think, that is, they should not be limited, only, to comply with the regulations imposed on them. An attentive teacher should be constantly in the process of equating their practices according and collectively for a more just society. Therefore, it is at school that social and human rights must be consolidated.

Speaking of professional development according to Sa-Chaves (1997), refers specifically to the domain of knowledge about teaching, attitudes towards the educational act, the role of the teacher and the student, their interpersonal relationships, the competences involved in the pedagogical process and the reflexive process about the teacher's practices.

In contrast, Rocha (2016) says that the "concept of professional teacher development is based on the assumption that changing the way of teaching is a learning process that involves, in part, the reconstruction of beliefs and actions on education" (p. 221). The professional development of the teacher can also be understood as a continuous process involving some fundamental aspects that can be articulated in the improvement of teaching and learning. As for example the aspect of knowledge, knowing - doing, knowing – how to be.

In this sense, the branch of knowledge in the teacher and according to Sá-Chaves (1997) is associated to three aspects:

> the acquisition and organization of specific knowledge of the area of education sciences and specialty of teaching; to their own professional performance and that has to do with the attitudes towards the educational act, the role of the teacher and the student implemented the activities and strategies of the teaching and finally the knowledge/being dimension that is a dimension that encompasses the perceptions about the and their professional performance, involving the interpersonal relations component, as well as their expectations and motivations always associated with the performance of their teaching duties and their training (p. 96).

4. Methodology

The study fits the interpretative paradigm. We considered it important to use this paradigm during the investigation, because this consisted in establishing an understanding of intentions, meanings, approximation, empathy, opinions, perceptions, representations and a commitment, an analogy of experiences among the students participating in the research at Catholic University of Mozambique. There was, therefore, a relationship among all.

Our research is exploratory. We decided to engage an exploratory study in order to provide greater proximity to the problem.

It should also be mentioned that in the epistemological pole, we opted for the qualitative approach and we also resort to the case study, since we understand that it was the most adequate to understand the reality under study in the context of the Catholic University of Mozambique, in the Centre for Distance Learning and in particular in the honours program in teaching of the Portuguese language. The research work was done in such a way as to "better understand the meanings of an event, to capture with greater insight the logics of an organization's operation" (Quivy, 2008, p. 19).

4.1 Number of Participants

They were ten (10) participants. These ten are teachers who teach in some elementary schools. It should be noted that in the case of a qualitative study, the number of participants responds to our concerns because the data and information that has been collected have provided a detailed description of events that have helped us to build knowledge about a given context. It was intended to understand realities, sought meanings that could underlie certain phenomena, thus constructing a critical reflection.

4.1.1 Instruments for Gathering Information

For our research, primary and secondary sources were chosen as instruments for collecting information. The use of the primary source consisted of gathering the information through the semi-structured interview and the secondary source that consisted of the analysis of files and reports. Content analysis was also an instrument for data processing.

5. Discussion of Results

From the transcription of the semi-structured interview, a reading was made that made it possible to obtain a global idea of its content and to know the themes around which the interviewees' discourse was articulated and also from the information provided by the interview that allowed to identify some recurrent themes of teachers' discourses that are: acquired competences, continuous training, experience and professional development, reflection on the practices and change of attitude in the teaching practice that are presented next.

5.1 Skills Acquired

One of the themes that emphasizes the teachers' discourse, focusing mainly on the dimension of acquired competences expressing themselves in a positive vision when they say:

> "... during my attendance at higher education I acquired social skills ... because I socialized with people I did
> not know and I ended up creating familiarity from this training in higher education" (teachers' opinion).

"... I am developing pedagogical, scientific, personal, interpersonal, professional skills, I understand that all are interconnected" (teacher's opinion).

And yet one of the teachers defines skills as something:

"... to know how to be, to know how to be and to know how to do ... how to know how to transmit to the students and this develops in higher education" (professor's opinion).

In addition to what we have just mentioned competences are classified in some types that are: personal, interpersonal, scientific, pedagogical, professional and others, respondents say that with the higher level they acquire scientific competence and one of the teachers understands it to be:

"... investigations that you do ... works that I investigate and I look for more information, I look for to investigate more ..." (teacher's opinion).

As regards professional skills:

"... we acquire through others who teach us ... to acquire this knowledge, for example if someone teaches us that it is done so, then we acquire from others that teach us to know these things ..." (teacher's opinion)

Pedagogical skills:

"... it has to do with education, you consume the pedagogical matter which is also to give to others who are still behind to consume the same matter ..." (teacher's opinion).

Experience and professional development:

The interviewees point out that the experience they have at school where they teach with the frequency of higher education look at professional development as a difficult task which is a great challenge in professional practice:

"... By attending higher education professional development, language changes, the way of dealing with colleagues also changes, the vision in things changes, I know how to control my nerves ... you know how to control your own students, you can see that this student today is not prepared for me to be screaming at him, knows how to control each child from higher education ... for example, the relationship between colleagues, friends, students that you did not even know...so I say that it is possible to attend higher education while teaching my students" (teacher's opinion).

Speaking of the teacher's professional development according to Day (2001) "are psychological and social dispositions that can encourage or discourage their learning, there are a series of theories about professional know-how that describe and explain differences between teachers" (pp. 87–88), as the teachers interviewed say when they say:

"Today, being a teacher is being a professional with great challenges especially that of educating children in matters that affect the life of the community" (teacher's opinion).

"The relationship of the student/teacher ... the teacher should motivate the student, laugh with the student, talk with the student" (teacher's opinion).

Reflection on practices:

Interviewees recognize that with the frequency of higher education gives us an open mind so as to look at the reflective process as a contribution to their professional development insofar as it allows the perception, vision of the problems encountered.

"... in the process of teaching-learning we make use alphabet charts, use of verbs and giving practical examples of day-to-day dialogue with the student ... as for example when speaking of the verb 'give', I tell the student to conjugate the verb 'give', what is 'give'? Ex: the person takes something out of a bowl and hands it over to another person ... when doing it at that present moment, they are using the present tense ... we can also conjugate the verb in the past giving the practical example: student yesterday you washed the plate ... It was yesterday it has already happened that is why we say you washed the plate ... posters with images that illustrate what we want to achieve ... we send the student to the board to see if the student can remove fear from the teacher and write what he knows about the subject that we are going to address ..." (teacher's opinion).

It is necessary for the school to fulfill its mission, in order to motivate the students, going against what each one brings as cultural capital and deepening these experiences ... to create meaningful learning ... besides this ideas, still according to the type of challenge maybe it's different; there are life lessons that, in this case, make us better professionals, more sensitive beings, able to understand each student as a singular being, with duties, but also with rights, and above all to understand that the mission of the public school is to give to each one what each one needs, not to treat everyone as if it were one, to consider a student as a whole and not only in the aspect of school success.

5.2 Changes of Attitude in Teaching Practice

Of the teachers interviewed affirm that with the frequency of higher education they changed the way of teaching:

"Students come from different types of family in harmony, in conflict, unstructured, tend to present behaviors and different behaviors, what I as a teacher do in the classroom is how I teach (language, conversion of dialogue in practice ...). We have changed above all in our relationship with our students in the pedagogical relationship ..." (teacher's opinion).

"... the use of technologies in order to prepare students for life, to encourage them to review the subject, to do their homework, to study in groups, to better explain the students to understand the subject with practical daily examples ..." (teacher's opinion).

"... to plan the classes ... to avoid lectures, higher education helped me to open my mind and change the way I have been working and the way of thinking and I saw this usefulness of having a work plan" (teacher's opinion).

We can also try to change our relationship with the students, namely the teacher/student pedagogical relationship. Regarding part of the professional performance as a teacher, I consider that:

"... the mission of the public school is to give each one what each one needs, not treat everyone as if it were one, consider a student as a whole and not only the aspect of school success. Today knowledge is ephemeral, sometimes obsolete, it is important to develop skills, prepare them for life, not require them to know the information that is available on everything that is site, Net, social networks, anyway ... " (teacher's opinion).

In this perspective and in the wake of Baptista (2005) an attentive teacher should constantly be in a position to consider their practices according to the diversity of the students, trying to prepare them to think critically, to fight individually and collectively for a more fair.

6. Final Considerations

The final considerations of this paper do not refer only to a conclusion, but also to a (re)starting of research

and considerations about experiences and needs that motivate me and challenge me to reflect, acting on professional competence, after completing the program. This reflection is, in my opinion, urgent in the current context of societies and will allow me a methodical analysis on the experiences of training of teachers of basic education who attend higher education in the honours degree in teaching of Portuguese language.

At the final moment of this reflection, it is opportune to return some aspects that seem to me more pertinent, regarding the teaching function; the way in which teachers participate in the construction of their knowledge, especially with regard to professional rationality. Therefore, in view of the call for lifelong education and training, the configurations of the teaching profession require urgent responses to the school system. The text of Cosme (2009) makes an approach to the question of rationality under two strands:

1) The rationality that understands that the knowledge and the experiences of the teachers must be dominated by the scientific knowledge that the specialists produce;

2) Another rationality from the produced knowledge establishes laws or norms between facts that are interpreted as being cause and effect. These norms have a predictive character which for the technical-scientific rationality is advantageous at a time when the teacher can anticipate the situations and consequences of these.

References

Alaluf M. (1994). "As competencias: O conceito e a realidade. A competencia mobiliza o operario? Formacao profissional", *Revista Europeia S/N*, pp. 42-46.

Allessandrini C. D. (2002). "O desenvolvimento de competencias e a participacao pessoal na construcao de um novo modelo educacional", in: P. Philippe, *As Competencias Para Ensinar no Seculo XXI: A Formacao dos Professores e o Desafio da Avaliacao*, Porto Alegre, Brasil: Artmed Editora, pp. 157–171.

Altet M. (2001). "As Competencias do professor profisional: Entre conhecimentos, esquemas de acao e adaptacao, saber analisar", in: P. Perrenoud, *Formando Professores Profissionais: Quais Estrategias? Quais Competencias?* Porto Alegre, Brasil: Artmed Editora, pp. 23–35.

Baptista I. (2005). "Racionalidade pedagogica e sabedoria etica", in: I. Baptista, *Capacidade Etica e Desejo Metafísico: Uma Interpelacao à Razao Pedagogica*, Porto, Portugal: Edicoes Afrontamento, pp. 229–253.

Cosme A. (2009). *Ser Professor: A Accao Docente Como uma Accao de Interlocucao Qualificada*, Porto-Portugal: Livpsic.

Day C. (2001). *Desenvolvimento Profissional de Professores: Os Desafios de Aprendizagem Permanente*, Porto, Portugal: Porto Editora.

Demailly L. (1992). "Modelos de formacao contínua e estrategias de mudanca", in: I. A. Nóvoa, *Formacao de Professores e Profissao Docente*, Lisboa, Portugal: D. Quixote, pp. 139–158.

Haraway D. (1998). "Situated knowledge: The science question in feminism as a site of discourse on the privilege of partial perspective", *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 575–999.

Harding S. (2003). *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*, London, Inglaterra: Routledge.

Laita M. (2015). *A Universidade em Questao: Uma Leitura do Processo de Bolonha no Contexto Mocambicano*, Nampula, Mocambique: Classica Artes Grafica.

Mesquita E. (2013). *Competencias do Professor*, Lisboa, Portugal: Edicoes Sílabo, LDA.

Quivy R. (2008). *Manual de Investigacao em Ciencias Sociais*, Paris, Franca: Gadiva.

Rocha I. C. (2016). "Formacao pedagogica e desenvolvimento profissional no ensino superior: Oportunidades e desafios", in: J. M. Barbosa, *Os Desafios da Educacao - Ensino Superior*, Porto, Portugal: classica, A. Graficas.

Sa-Chaves I. (1997). *Percursos de Formacao e Desenvolvimento Profissional*, Porto, Portugal: Porto Editora.

Tavares J. (1997). "A formacao como construcao do conhecimento científico e pedagogico", in: S. Chaves, *Percurso de Formacao e Desenvolvimento Profissional*, Porto, Portugal: Porto Editora, pp. 61–73.

Zeichner K. M. (1993). *A Formacao Reflexiva de Professores: Ideias e Praticas*, Lisboa-Portugal: Lisboa: Eeduca.