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Fifty years of initial teacher education in Portugal: looking back, looking forward

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at Initial Teacher Education (ITE) over the last 50 years in Portugal (1974–2024). This is especially significant as 2024 marks the 50th anniversary of democracy in the country happily coinciding with the Golden Jubilee of the *Journal of Education for Teaching*. ITE policy development over the last five decades has generally been positive, particularly regarding the professionalisation of teachers through the recognition of ITE at higher education level, the accreditation of ITE programmes, the adoption of a master's degree as the required level of professional qualification for all sectors of education (from pre-school to secondary school), and the role of higher education institutions in the education of teachers. However, a number of drawbacks can also be identified including the fragmentation of ITE curriculum components as a result of the Bologna process and the adoption of a sequential model, as well as, more recently, a reduction in foundational courses and the introduction of more 'flexible' ways to enter teaching within the context of a teacher shortage. The threats and opportunities in such a scenario are explored and implications for policy and practice are discussed.

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Introduction

Initial teacher education (ITE) has been a focus of interest for policy makers, researchers, academics and other stakeholders over the last decades. The need to overhaul ITE has frequently been advocated even though the reasons lying behind such calls for change are driven by a number of very different, and even contradictory, approaches. The ways in which ITE is understood in a given context are associated with the importance attached to the teaching profession but also with the role of education in general, and of teachers in particular. As Menter asserts (2022, 96), 'Teacher education may be taken to be highly symbolic of how a society sees its future and is therefore highly indicative of its underlying values. Perhaps it is a realisation of this that has turned teacher education into such a centre of political interest in the past twenty to thirty years in many countries'. What is the purpose of ITE? How important is it and what are the driving forces that influence policy development in this field? The international literature reveals how policies related to ITE have been developed and what kinds of political options and priorities have been advocated in a given context. Of particular relevance is how the role of universities and

schools in the education of (future) teachers is understood and what requirements are needed to become a teacher as well as how education is framed in general and, more specifically, the role of the teacher. For instance, Newman (2022, 2023) discusses how teacher education in England has been under attack with an emphasis on school-based experience and a focus on training rather than on education. Such a view stands in sharp contrast to teacher education in Finland which for decades has been university-based with a strong research-based approach (Aspörs and Eklund 2017).

Understanding teacher education and its relevance in a given society requires giving consideration to both the policy environment and the political and historical context in which it is embedded. This paper looks at ITE over the last 50 years in Portugal (1974–2024). This analysis is especially important as 2024 marks the 50th anniversary of democracy in the country. This celebration happily coincides with the Golden Jubilee of the *Journal of Education for Teaching* and also the 50th anniversary of the institution where I work, whose creation was also linked to the education of teachers. The Carnation Revolution, in 1974, marked the end of Salazar dictatorship, a period during which higher education was highly selective and only accessible to the elite. Between 1974 and 2024 the Portuguese education system has undergone profound changes with the process of democratisation of schooling, the universalisation of access to education and the expansion of higher education. For instance, in 1974, the illiteracy rate was 25.7%, but by 2021 it was 3.1%; the school dropout rate was around 50% in the 1990s but has fallen to less than 10% in the present decade; the schooling rate in secondary education was below 4.9% in 1974 but in 2023 was 89.8% (PORDATA database, July 2024).

Looking at the past is essential for understanding the present but also to envision the future. A detailed analysis of all the changes that have occurred during the last 50 years is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, it focuses on key turning points in terms of policy development in ITE. It also addresses the current situation of ITE within the context of a teacher shortage as well as the future in this field. Such a reflection draws on the analysis of policy texts and on the views of 10 experienced teacher educators and researchers in this field (including the author) who have kindly agreed to provide their personal perspectives and whose names are included at the end of this text, all of them having given their consent. As the focus of this special issue is ITE, the following questions will be addressed in this paper: What turning points have there been in the development of ITE over the last 50 years in Portugal? What is the current situation of ITE in terms of threats and opportunities? What might the future of ITE look like?

Key turning points in ITE development in Portugal

In this section, I look at key turning points in the development of ITE over the last five decades. Overall, what can be seen is a movement towards the professionalisation of teachers and the reinforcement of the importance of ITE at higher education level. This is shown, for instance, in the establishment of ITE programmes which included a compulsory practicum, specifically an integrated ITE model, as well as the need for a higher education degree to enter the profession for all sectors of education (from pre-school to secondary school), which, in the post-Bologna context, is at the master's degree level. Along with this there has been an expansion of higher education institutions devoted to teacher education and the definition of a framework for teacher education, including key principles for ITE and a professional teacher profile. I will deal with these issues below.

The expansion of ITE providers and the integrated model of ITE

One key element related to the development of ITE in Portugal is associated with the expansion and creation of higher education institutions. The need to recruit, professionalise and educate teachers led to the creation of the so-called 'new universities' in the early 1970s with the aim of investing in teacher education (an example being the institution in which I work and where I also completed my five-year ITE programme in the early 1990s). Whilst the details of this process are beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to emphasise that such new institutions played a key role in the education and professionalisation of many teachers who entered the teaching profession as a result of the expansion of schooling in the years after the dictatorship. The adoption of the so-called integrated model of teacher education is a key feature of these new universities in detriment to the sequential model which was implemented in the so-called 'classic universities'. The integrated model meant that content knowledge and educational studies were developed simultaneously from the very beginning of the programme, culminating in a one-year-long practicum in schools, whereas in the two-step sequential model educational studies were taught only after three years devoted to subject knowledge. The assumptions behind the development of the integrated model, as the word implies, related to the integration of theory and practice, including a practicum, integration of educational studies and subject knowledge and integration of work at university and work at school. This means that from the very beginning of the programme student teachers would be educated to become teachers, thereby enabling them to construct their professional identity as the programmes (usually a five-year degree) were specifically created for the education of teachers. Therefore, of key importance were the role of higher education in the education of teachers, a broad understanding of teacher professionalism, and the professionalisation of teachers as the following account testifies:

I was trained to become a teacher in one of the higher education institutions (HEI) founded in the 1970s to promote ITE in Portugal. The creation of these 'new' HEIs was a crucial step to enhance the quality of teacher education and teaching, mainly because it responded to the lack of qualified teachers in schools, the scarcity of programmes to educate teachers for all teaching levels, and the low status of research on teaching. (...) Although the 'integrated models' were far from perfect, they opened up opportunities for developing professionalism from a holistic perspective and for strengthening the role of HEIs in teacher preparation. (Teacher educator, 40 years of experience)

Along with the creation in the 1970s of new universities, another key element in the development of ITE in Portugal was the setting up of Higher Schools of Education (Polytechnics) in the early 1980s. These schools enabled teacher education specifically for basic level schooling (year 1 – year 6), involving both the first cycle/primary school level (year 1 – year 4) and the second cycle of basic education (year 5 and 6). Thus, they represented a significant step forward in the qualification of teachers in Portugal. Another important advance was the convergence of the level of education required by pre-school and primary school teachers with that of teachers teaching the third cycle of basic education (year 7 – 9) and secondary education (year 10 – 12). In consequence, in the 1990s, ITE programmes for pre-school and primary school teachers changed from being a three-year bachelor degree to a four-year *Licenciatura* degree. This change led to recognition of the same level of professional qualification

for teachers in all sectors of education which, in turn, was key to enhancing the status of the profession and viewing it as a single career for all teachers (see Lemos 2014; Mesquita and Machado 2017):

One key moment was the creation of the Higher Schools of Education in the 1980s and the restructuring of ITE programmes at the level of *Licenciatura* (4 to 5-year graduate degree). This moment represented a qualitative leap in ITE for pre-school primary teachers (for whom higher education programmes were required) and also for the second cycle of elementary school (year 5 and year 6), which also benefited from specific ITE provision. (Teacher educator, 44 years of experience)

While the expansion of ITE providers and enhancement of the degree required for teachers were very positive aspects, the 1980s also witnessed the creation of many higher education institutions to educate a large number of teachers who entered the school system. This eventually led to its deregulation with implications for the quality of ITE programmes (see Moreira 2017):

In the 1980s, to deal with the lack of teachers in state schools, and to respond to the democratisation of schooling, we witnessed an opening up of the system to quickly place teachers in schools, with no long-term strategic planning. This movement was successful in its primary goal but, in the following years, gave rise to a sudden overflow that schools could not absorb as the number of ITE programmes proved to be excessive, redundant and varying in their quality. (Teacher educator, 33 years of experience)

It should also be highlighted that, along with the integrated and the sequential model of teacher education, and as a result of the democratisation of schooling, the so-called in-service 'professionalisation' of teachers was also established. As unqualified teachers entered the system, due to the expansion of the school system, there was a need to educate them as they were recruited without completing their degree. In order to achieve this, the 'professionalisation in service/in the exercise of the profession' model enabled many teachers to complete their education by coordinating their work in school with the training and supervision given by the higher education institution.

Establishing a clear framework for teacher education

Following the publication of the Fundamental Law of the Education System in 1986 (Law nº 46/1986, 14th October), an important legislative text concerning teacher education was issued in the late 1980s. Decree-Law nº. 344/1989 established the legal framework for teacher education in which 'a flexible and dynamic structure' was adopted in order to enable coordination 'in a sequential and coherent manner, [of] the education of teachers'. A key feature involved the importance of the *continuum* of initial, induction and in-service education. The professional profile of educators and teachers was defined in the scientific field, in the pedagogical-didactical field and in the personal, social and cultural field, to be acquired in accordance with an integrated perspective. The same legislative text also stipulated that ITE should be at a higher level and be based on 'methodological practices aligned with those that educators and teachers will use in the exercise of the profession'. In addition, Decree-Law nº. 344/1989 also stated that teacher education must promote critical analysis, inquiry and pedagogical

innovation. This view thus showed a broad understanding of teacher professionalism as well as the recognition of the teacher's role and teacher education as key elements in the development of quality education.

Overall, this document represented a very positive advancement in teacher education in terms of its rationale, key principles, curriculum components and its holistic outlook, which included not only ITE, but also induction and in-service education of teachers. Unfortunately, induction has never been a political priority and has so far not been put into practice. Conversely, in-service education of teachers (INSET) was institutionalised in 1992 (Decree-Law n°. 249/1992), thereby becoming a right as well as a compulsory dimension for all practicing teachers for career progress purposes.

Definition of a professional teacher profile

To understand teacher education policy in Portugal, it is necessary to look at the publication of Decree-Law n°. 240/2001, 30th August, which stipulates the 'general performance profile' for teachers for all sectors of teaching. This profile constitutes a key reference for organising ITE programmes and includes four dimensions:

- (i) *Professional, social and ethical* – The teacher promotes curriculum learning basing his/her professional practice on specific knowledge resulting from the production and use of a diverse range of knowledge integrated according to the concrete actions carried out socially and ethically within that same practice;
- (ii) *Development of teaching and learning* – The teacher promotes learning within the scope of the curriculum, framed by quality pedagogical interaction, and integrating, through rigorous scientific and methodological criteria, knowledge of the fields that underpin it;
- (iii) *Participation in school life and liaising with the community* – The teacher exercises his/her professional activity, in an integrated manner, in the context of the different dimensions of the school as an educational institution and within the context of the community where the school is located;
- (iv) *Professional development within a lifelong perspective* – The teacher sees his/her education as a constitutive element of his/her professional practice, developing it on the basis of his/her needs and realisations, problematising his/her practice through substantiated reflection on the construction of the profession and research in collaboration with other professionals.

It is important to mention that the specific profile for pre-school educators and primary school teachers was also established, focusing, amongst other issues, on an integrated view of the curriculum (Decree-Law n°. 241/2001, 30th August). These profiles became the basis for organising ITE programmes and for teacher evaluation and represent another key aspect of the development of ITE in Portugal. The general profile (see Decree-Law n°. 241/2001, 30th August) clearly stipulates a broad understanding of the teachers' role as a curriculum agent, recognition of the importance of ongoing professional learning and development as well as issues of collaboration within and outside the school.

The Bologna process: a consecutive model with a master's degree as the required level of professional qualification

The implementation of the Bologna process constituted another turning point in ITE in Portugal since it involved the restructuring of all ITE programmes following the publication of Decree-Law n°. 74/2006 which stipulated the organisation of study cycles in higher education in general. A master's degree in teaching has become the required qualification for all entrants into teaching (from pre-school to secondary school). A consecutive model was adopted (Decree-Law n°. 43/2007) which involved a two-stage process beginning with a three-year degree (*Licenciatura*) in a specific subject (e.g. Mathematics, History) followed by a master's degree in teaching (usually a two-year degree, e.g. Master in Teaching Mathematics, History), combining subject knowledge with educational and pedagogical components, including a practicum. With regard to pre-school and primary school, student teachers complete a first degree in Basic Education followed by a master's degree in teaching for pre-school and primary school. The condensed two-year programme at master's level has led to the need to reorganise both the content and structure of the courses and modules. Although the Bologna process established a master's level professional qualification for teaching, it also represented a drawback in terms of, for instance, the duration of the programmes and the fragmentation of the curriculum components as a sequential model was adopted instead of an integrated one:

The Bologna process was an important turning point but in negative terms. While, on the one hand, Portugal is one of the few countries in Europe where the required level of qualification necessary for professional certification is the master's level (which is a positive aspect), in general, the option for a 3 + 2 system turned ITE into a two-stage programme, separating what had been combined. (Teacher educator, 37 years of experience)

This [2007] was a decisive turning point, which gave rise to the adoption of master's degree programmes for all education and teaching levels – a remarkable feat. Portugal took the lead in recognising that teaching, regardless of the education level, was a demanding endeavour and that ALL teachers should be highly qualified. (Teacher educator, 33 years of experience)

The legal framework published in 2007 (Decree-Law n°. 43/2007) was replaced by another legislative text which is still currently in place (Decree-Law n°. 79/2014). It was justified by the need to enhance the quality of the education system. Reference to multiple international studies, in particular OECD and Eurydice, was put forward to emphasise the need to overhaul teacher education. ITE is regulated by the Ministry of Education, which stipulates such issues as teaching profiles, length of programmes, curriculum components and the corresponding number of credits, resources, and conditions for the practicum. However, it is up to the institutions themselves to design and implement such programmes in accordance with the national legal framework. The legislative text currently in place (Decree-Law n°. 79/2014) stipulates five mandatory components for the ITE curriculum: i) subject knowledge; ii) general education (e.g. curriculum and assessment, psychology of development, school as an educational organisation); iii) specific didactics; iv) professional practice; and v) cultural, social and ethical issues.

Since ITE is situated in the second cycle (master's degree) level, the research component was tacitly assumed by institutions and encouraged by external assessments (Flores et al. 2016). Indeed, research was explicitly identified as a compulsory component of the ITE curriculum in Decree-Law n°. 43/2007, but with no specific credits allocated for it. The

Decree-Law issued in 2014 no longer stipulates research as a compulsory component of the curriculum of ITE, but it has been held as a key element of the practicum experience in most institutions, even though it may assume a variety of formats (see Flores 2018; Vieira et al. 2021):

The Bologna Reform, initiated in Portugal in 2006, involved structural changes in ITE through the setting up of master's degrees in teaching. A divide was created between subject training (1st cycle of studies) and educational training (2nd cycle of studies), which was somewhat of a return to a sequential model. Therefore, professional training became shorter (3 to 4 semesters), curricula were condensed, and time for field experiences in practicum was shortened in most programmes. These changes were quite controversial and many teacher educators would argue that there was a loss of quality in teacher education. Nevertheless, the design of the new programmes was also an opportunity to discuss and rethink teacher education purposes and curricula, and to design more appropriate methodologies to enhance the relation between theory and practice, and between teaching and research. The fact that the qualification to become a teacher was now at a post-graduate level made HEIs pay greater attention to the role of research within programmes, especially in the practicum. (...) I believe that the quality of ITE improved with the Bologna Reform (...) specifically because the programmes became more inquiry-oriented and more aligned with research developments in the field. (Teacher educator, 40 years of experience)

While the Bologna process may be seen as a missed opportunity in so far as it could have led to the implementation of a five-year integrated master's degree, instead of the sequential model that has been adopted, the master's level qualification implied, in some cases, the assumption of an inquiry-based approach to teaching, especially during practicum (see Vieira et al. 2021; Vieira, Silva, and Vilaça 2020). Nonetheless, there are challenges related to a reduction in time spent in schools, the demands of classroom inquiry in terms of student teachers' workload and the need for more sophisticated mentoring processes on the part of cooperating teachers.

Accreditation of ITE programmes

Another important feature in the development of ITE in Portugal is the accreditation of ITE programmes. The creation of the Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) (Decree-Law n°. 369/2007, 5th November) made it possible to evaluate and regulate the provision of ITE, thus contributing to enhance the quality of programmes. The A3ES is responsible, amongst other issues, for the evaluation and accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions and this has contributed to map but specially to examine the provision of ITE in the country:

Another key moment was the process of accreditation of ITE as a result of the creation of the A3ES. It is the first time that there has been any regulation of ITE, which has helped enhance the quality of many programmes, as those that did not meet the minimum requirements were closed. (Teacher educator, 44 years of experience)

In my view the external evaluation carried out by the A3ES has the following merits: i) discontinuity of a number of programmes that lacked quality; ii) the systematisation of external evaluation (criteria, timing, etc.); iii) the description and examination of a wide array of variables related to the programmes (e.g. goals, articulation between methodologies, goals, content and assessment, quality of each course, quality of practicum reports); iv) boost to increasing the qualification of teaching staff and appreciation of the quantity and quality of

their published research work; v) articulation between a summative evaluation (e.g. decision for the accreditation or non-accreditation of the programmes) and formative evaluation (identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and recommendations for improvement of the programmes). (Teacher educator, 38 years of experience)

As the above quote illustrates, the evaluation and accreditation of ITE programmes has enabled analysis of ITE providers, the profile of the teacher educators, the coherence (or lack of it) and the organisation of ITE programmes in the different institutions and their curriculum components, thus, contributing to a more systematic process of evaluation (and self-evaluation) and the regulation of ITE provision. Undoubtedly, there is a substantial amount of bureaucratic and administrative work associated with the process of evaluation and accreditation, which also requires the investment of a great deal of time. Nevertheless, in general, the need to provide a clear rationale and to demonstrate the relevance and coherence of the programmes has contributed to a proper examination of the quality of programmes leading to reflection on strategies to improve them, and, ultimately, to decisions about whether or not to continue with them.

2023 as a turning point: a drawback in ITE policy development

The year 2023 marked another turning point in ITE with the publication of Decree-Law nº 112/2023, 29th November issued within the context of a lack of teachers – the elephant in the room. Although the problem of teacher shortage has been identified by national and international institutions (see CNE 2016, OCDE 2019) as one of the biggest problems facing the Portuguese education system associated with the ageing of the teaching workforce, it did not become the focus of attention from a political point of view until recently when thousands of students were left without teachers. Official statistics point to the need to recruit over 34,000 teachers by 2030/2031 (an average of 3,450 per year) (Nunes et al. 2021) due to mass retirement and a decrease in teaching candidates. In the annual 'State of Education 2021', the National Council for Education in Portugal indicates that, in 2020/2021, 55% of the teaching workforce were 50 years old or over (CNE 2022).

Thus, the need to mitigate teacher shortage and hire teachers to fill the vacancies in schools constitutes the rationale of the new legislative text (Decree-Law No. 112, 2023, 29th November, subsequently altered by Decree-Law nº. 23/2024, 14th March) which highlights the aim of adopting an education model that is 'more flexible and effective, capable of enabling the effective development of candidates for the master's degree in teaching so that, in a sustainable way, state education is granted educators and teachers in quantity and quality as required to fulfil its mission' (Decree-Law nº. 112/2023, 4)

Its purpose is to accelerate student teachers' entry in the job market by introducing more flexible ways to educate candidates coming from different paths and increasing professional responsibilities in the practicum. The new policy was not without controversy, particularly in regard to i) the reduction of training for candidates with teaching experience or those who hold a post-graduate degree in the subject field, ii) the reduction of credits in general educational fields (e.g. curriculum and assessment, school as an educational organisation, developmental psychology); and (iii) a more intensive school-based practicum whereby student teachers are hired as teachers and assume professional responsibilities similar to those of qualified teachers. Since student teachers will be under

pressure to fulfil all their job commitments as teachers, this situation may undermine the opportunity for inquiry, reflection and research, which are a vital part of the practicum experience. Such a view is shared by the teacher educators who stated:

Since late 2023, the government issued new policies for master's degrees in teaching, with implications that may hamper their quality. For example, these policies reduce training in educational fields and assign more ECTS to the practicum so that student teachers can teach on a weekly basis for a whole year, assuming full teaching responsibilities. Opportunities for inquiry-based teaching will probably be limited and teacher education may become more instrumental and less reflective. (Teacher educator, 40 years of experience)

The urgent need to replace thousands of teachers in elementary and secondary education puts a lot of pressure on the policies leading to managerial processes but without a theoretical and strategic basis consistent with quality education. The virtual disappearance of foundational courses in the ITE curriculum and the overvaluation of didactics will lead, in a short period of time, to a return to technicist perspectives of teaching. (Teacher educator, 45 years of experience)

There are, therefore, concerns regarding the new policy issued in 2023 for the quality of ITE in relation to a rather technicist and instrumental approach to teaching. Clearly, the emphasis is on issues of quantity with a focus mainly on content and didactics, reducing the foundational courses and, thus, undermining a broad understanding of teacher professionalism. With the election of a new government in March 2024, the new policy issued in 2023 was suspended for further revision, and at the time of writing the final version of the new law is as yet unknown.

ITE at present: threats and opportunities within the context of teacher shortage

Changing ITE programmes in response to the teacher shortage in schools and the need to fill positions runs the risk of applying emergency and quick-fix solutions focused more on quantity rather than quality. Teacher educators voiced concerns with the development of ITE within a context of lack of teachers and they highlight the key importance of the accumulated experience of higher education institutions and the expertise of qualified teacher educators together with the plethora of research conducted in the field:

I believe that the main threat to ITE in Portugal is the shortage of teachers in schools. Political solutions aimed at compensating for the lack of teachers by rushing student teachers' entry into the labour market may represent a loss of quality. (...) One of the most positive aspects of teacher education is that HEIs still have quite a lot of autonomy to design their programmes, based on their experience and research. Networking and the formation of teacher educator communities would surely empower HEIs to face the challenges ahead. (Teacher educator, 40 years of experience)

The main threat is the lack of teachers as it may inevitably lead to less informed decisions being made than would be desirable with regard to the model of teacher professionalism. But I believe that, as happened in the past in Portugal, if the model of professional education (including crucial aspects such as knowledge, action, articulation, research and reflection) is clear to everyone and becomes 'compulsory', everything will end up being of high quality. (Teacher educator, 37 years of experience)

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in leading change and in finding the most appropriate strategies and solutions to ITE development. Their expertise must be considered as well as the role of higher education institutions (HEI) in debates about the topic. However, this perspective is far from what we see in reality. ITE is currently facing threats, whether from undervaluation of HEI, scarce consideration of teacher educators' experience or lack of investment in ITE. Along with this are concerns about narrow views of teaching and of the role of the teacher as well as other structural and situational factors such as funding and the importance attached to education of public policies, especially after the implementation of the Bologna process, that may undermine a more positive view:

I can identify a number of threats, some old and permanent, others associated with the current situation: the lack of recognition of teacher education as a (bad) response to teacher shortage; the return of the profile of the teacher as someone who only needs to master the content in order to teach; the lack of appreciation of the role of higher education institutions in providing ITE; the weak articulation between the various components of the ITE curriculum; the undervaluation of professional practice in the curriculum, projects and programmes of teacher education; the ongoing lack of strategic investment in the education of teacher educators and the weak investment in research on teacher education in many HEI. (Teacher educator, 38 years of experience)

Issues regarding the teacher profile as well as the purpose and quality of ITE require a long-term commitment and deep reflection involving all stakeholders, especially higher education institutions and teacher educators. Condensed programmes, less demanding policies in terms of teacher recruitment and qualification and emergency responses may undermine the quality of ITE leading to the deprofessionalisation of teachers and a decline in the status of the teaching profession. Such a perspective is also associated with a narrow view of teacher *training* along with the idea that teachers can learn how to teach on the job, thus reducing the role of higher education institutions, for instance (see, Newman 2022).

Considering the ageing of the teaching workforce, the number of graduates is insufficient to replace the teachers who are retiring. This situation poses a major drawback in terms of qualification as it will necessarily entail less demanding policies with respect to teachers' professional qualification and teacher recruitment. (Teacher educator, 45 years of experience)

In addition, there are also threats arising from the deregulation of ITE provision as well as the balance between the diverse components of the ITE curriculum. The overemphasis on the practical component without accounting for an adequate and solid knowledge of the foundational courses may lead to solutions that are disadvantageous given what research has taught us about the process of learning to teach and about the multidimensionality of teacher professional knowledge.

The main threats are the deregulation or even dismantling of the current regulation promoted by Decree-Law n°. 43/2007 which, in general, allows a balanced education system. Some trends are indicative of change whether they be the hypervaluation of the practice component of teacher education or the removal of teacher education from higher education institutions and handing it to other entities such as schools, the Ministry of Education, or private companies. (Teacher education, 44 years of experience)

To avoid such risks, it is again crucial to draw on existing research-based knowledge about teaching as a profession and about ITE. It is essential to consider the key role of research and the need to resist quick-fix solutions that lead to the lowering of ITE quality and diminish the professional qualification of teachers:

As positive aspects I can point to the existence of highly qualified teacher educators who are also greatly involved in the fight for maintaining quality teacher education. There is no doubt that the research that has been done is also a pillar and a very positive aspect. (Teacher educator, 45 years of experience)

The positive features I can see include the resistance of the academic community to the devaluation and downgrading of education; the resistance of institutions which educate teachers (HEI, Teachers' centres, research's centres); the diversity of models of education as well as the strategies, methods, and techniques to make them possible, the successful exploration of possibilities offered by digital technologies, and the existence of scientific communities. (Teacher educator, 38 years of experience)

The new government elected in March 2024 has announced changes in the existing legislation related to ITE and other new initiatives to deal with teacher shortage. Details of these initiatives are not yet known, but, according to the Minister of Education, the programme 'More classes, more success' will include: i) allowing teachers to have up to 10 hours per week of extra paid hours of teaching; ii) hiring retired teachers in subjects in need of teachers to take on this work with respective pay; iii) allowing teachers nearing retirement to stay in the profession with extra pay; iv) enabling PhD grant holders to teach up to 10 hours per week; v) attracting master's and PhD holders to teach; vi) enabling access to teachers and researchers with a PhD to enter the teaching profession with the requirement of doing pedagogical training; vii) simplifying the procedures to recognise the qualification of immigrant teachers; viii) attributing grants to students who enter a teaching degree in higher education institutions.

At the time of writing, the new law for the professional qualification of teachers and for ITE is as yet unknown. Therefore, the future of ITE remains uncertain. What is certain, though, is that the teacher shortage crisis needs to be dealt with seriously and systematically but also in a realistic way, which means applying not only short-term solutions but also long-term policy initiatives including investment in the teaching profession and in quality ITE:

I do not see the recent actions announced by the current Minister of Education, such as 'Mais Aulas, mais Sucesso' (More Classes, more Success), as being sufficient to solve the problem. They are merely applying Band-Aids to fractures. The root of the problem is twofold: lack of attractiveness of the teaching profession and lack of capacity-building in HEI. These issues can only be solved with serious medium and long-term policy measures, which I do not see happening. (Teacher educator, 33 years of experience)

The future of ITE: between pessimism and realistic optimism

The future of ITE is viewed with scepticism and concern. Instability and uncertainty hang over the field, particularly in terms of policy development but also regarding existing resources to continue to provide quality ITE:

My view is rather pessimistic. (...) Some universities are reducing in an alarming manner their responsiveness towards facing the new challenges as qualified staff with three decades of service are retiring and are not being replaced. This has been putting higher education institutions close to breaking point or even collapse. (Teacher educator, 44 years of experience)

ITE is a contested site which involves different purposes, priorities and views about teachers and the teaching profession. The master's level qualification to become a teacher in Portugal is seen as a positive feature that has so far managed to avoid other 'alternative routes'. Fighting against reductionist views of teacher professionalism and resisting movements towards the deprofessionalisation of teachers are also highlighted:

I see it as a continuing struggle. I believe it can go two ways: either following the route of deprofessionalisation, in accordance with the hegemonic international trend, or gaining leverage within the European Union and treading a tight rope, resisting and surviving as a master's degree. The latter could help restore the image of teaching as a demanding, high skilled profession, even though I am not particularly optimistic about it. (...) What is now saving the teaching profession from collapsing in Portugal, that is, from becoming 'alternative', fast track, deregulated and 'sold' to the private sector alone, is the current law. In the short term, it looks like major changes are not on the agenda; however, as stated above, the legal framework could change at any time. That is why it is a continuing struggle, like democracy – we can never take it for granted. (Teacher educator, 33 years of experience)

It is important to fight vigorously against the common view that 'anyone can be a teacher as long as he/she has a knack for teaching' (...) ITE must be challenged and should focus on more detailed research into how learning takes place that goes beyond the sporadic use of something with a 'placebo' effect. (Teacher educator, 24 years of experience)

The strategic importance of ITE is recognised as is the need to draw on existing expertise, particularly in terms of innovation in teaching and learning processes, the articulation between teacher education and teachers' work, and the strengthening of partnerships between schools and HEI. There is room for improvement and such a direction requires for research to be valued and for existing accumulated knowledge and expertise in the field to be recognised.

ITE is a complex field where diverse interests and rationales intersect and consensus-building is hard. Its quality will depend on many factors, but I would stress two: (i) policies that do not disregard the experience and research of HEIs, which means that teacher educators must have a voice in designing those policies, along with autonomy for their implementation; (ii) a scholarship of teacher education within and across HEIs, through networks and communities of practice where teacher educators work together to develop their field and enhance its status in academic settings. (Teacher educator, 40 years of experience)

More optimistic views include the importance of enhancing a scholarship of teacher education while also recognising the potential of existing experiences to be positive and, in a way, innovative:

I can see potential in ITE especially in terms of new programmes and new modes of education as a result of partnerships between HEI and schools as hybrid spaces between ITE and teachers' work. (Teacher educator, 24 years of experience)

I view the future with optimism, a realistic optimism as Perrenoud would say (. . .)The reasons for my optimism stem from i) the history of education, which has shown that, even with delays and insufficiencies, education systems, schools and teachers have responded positively to the increasingly complex and urgent demands that society has placed on them; ii) the search for a stronger connection between training and working contexts; iii) the ongoing questioning of what I think is desirable about what ‘higher level education’ means; iv) the focus on pedagogical training for staff that some universities are adopting; v) the integration of teacher education projects in national and international research networks, particularly in the European Union. (Teacher educator, 38 years of experience)

Conclusion and discussion

ITE has evolved greatly over the last 50 years in Portugal with several positive developments in the field. The key turning points were the creation of teacher education providers, namely the so-called new universities and Higher Schools of Education; a high professional qualification for teachers for all sectors of education (in the 1990s the *Licenciatura* degree – a 4 to 5-year degree and in the late 2000s the master’s degree level); the development of an integrated model of teacher education (which recognises the importance of integrating the various curriculum components of ITE from the very beginning of the programmes); the accreditation and evaluation of ITE programmes; the definition of a professional teacher profile; and the key role of higher education institutions in the education of teachers. These features have contributed to enhancing the status of the profession, the professionalisation of teachers and the consolidation of ITE. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, ITE has also faced criticism and presents certain drawbacks. One of these concerns the adoption of the consecutive model (replacing the integrated model) as a result of the implementation of the Bologna process, which has led to the separation of the various components of ITE into two cycles (the first cycle – a bachelor’s degree – focusing on subject knowledge and the second cycle – a master’s degree in teaching – devoted to educational studies, including a practicum). While it is possible to see interesting experiences related to an inquiry-based approach to teaching (Vieira et al. 2021; Vieira, Silva, and Vilaça 2020), the model resulting from the implementation of the Bologna process meant less time spent in schools and fragmentation of the ITE curriculum components. Therefore, the Bologna process may be seen as a missed opportunity to reinforce the integrated model and to strengthen ITE. More recently, new developments in ITE policy within a context of a teacher shortage also present drawbacks as they involve reducing the general educational component of ITE curriculum (the foundational courses) as well as creating more ‘flexible’ (and thus shorter) means of educating candidates coming from different paths and increasing professional responsibilities in the practicum. As Mayer, Goodwin, and Mockler (2021, 211) argue, a ‘deficit discourse’ has been associated with teacher education which is seen as a ‘problem to be solved’ and this has been the case in contexts marked by teacher shortages. In general, ITE has not been a political priority as shown, for example, by the lack of investment in ITE programmes in terms of human resources and conditions for their development, particularly in recent years. A consistent political response is needed, one which considers the complexity of the problem of teacher shortage but also the importance of investing in quality ITE in light of a holistic policy development which includes purpose, process, plan, pointers and possibilities (O’Meara et al. 2024). It is important to invest in policy initiatives in the short and

long term, which requires the consideration of the expertise of HEI devoted to ITE as well as of the teacher educators and researchers in the field. Their voice has not been considered in policy development. Rather, ITE has been subject to a process of change as a result of external impetus such as the Bologna process or, more recently, the lack of teachers.

Reasons for concern and cause for hope

There are, therefore, many reasons for concern but there is also cause for hope. In light of the drastic problem of teacher shortage, there is a real risk of looking for quick-fixes and emergency teacher education – following a quantitative rather than a qualitative approach. The adoption of immediate solutions to fix the problem may lead to simplistic views of the role of the teacher as someone who only needs to master content and how to teach it. There are concerns about the deskilling and deprofessionalisation of teachers if the complexity of teaching and the multidimensionality of professional knowledge are not acknowledged. There is also a real risk facing the standing of the profession if emergency and less demanding policies regarding teacher recruitment and teacher education mean lowering the professional qualification required to become a teacher. As Nóvoa (2017), 1131 asserts, ‘There is no good teacher education if the teaching profession is fragile, weak. But there is no strong teaching profession either if teacher education is undervalued and reduced only to the mastery of subject knowledge or pedagogical techniques’.

Recent policy initiatives do not include a long-term orientation; instead, they tend to focus on short-term measures to mitigate the problem of teacher shortage through more ‘flexible’ strategies for teacher recruitment and education. While diversity is important, it is also true that there is a need to guarantee that all entrants into teaching possess the required/core knowledge and skills to teach, without losing sight of the essential features of teaching as a profession, including its intellectual, relational, emotional and inquiry-based dimensions. An example of a positive initiative, however, is the awarding of grants to student teachers who enrol in a teaching degree. It remains, however, to be seen what the future will bring as, at the time of writing, the legislative text regarding ITE is not yet known. There is a need to put the focus on the pupils who not only need teachers but good teachers who are highly qualified, competent and committed.

Thinking about the future of ITE means moving beyond emergency responses, taking into account the expertise of teacher educators as well as investing in teacher educator development. In such challenging times, teacher educators need to show resistance and resilience especially when it comes to voicing their expertise in public debates and in policy development. There is a need to focus on structural elements of ITE and not only on situational aspects related to the current problem of teacher shortage. One good example is the recent approval by the National Council of Education of Portugal of a Recommendation focusing on the structural dimensions of the teaching profession (CNE 2024, Recommendation nº.3/2024). It aims to influence public policies in regard to teaching and teacher education and includes a total of 29 recommendations centred on four core dimensions: i) the valuation of teaching as a profession, ii) the *continuum* of teacher education, iii) the conditions under which the profession is exercised, and iv) teacher professionalism. Amongst the 29 recommendations are the following statements:

- To reinforce the *continuum* of teacher education – initial, induction and in-service – through policies consistent with the complex and multidimensional nature of the teaching profession;
- To rethink the model of initial teacher education in light of the comprehensiveness and multidimensionality of teacher professional knowledge, reinforcing the importance of the Educational Sciences and promoting the multiple competences and literacies inherent to the teaching profession;
- To create partnerships between higher education institutions and schools to educate future teachers based on a project approach and on the articulation of different spaces and times for teacher education;
- To recognise the importance of a solid initial teacher education at a higher education level that enables learning of the profession in all its various dimensions (intellectual, relational, technical, research-based, ethical, social, cultural, and emotional);
- To recognise and promote teacher agency, valuing the role of teachers as critical and reflective professionals in curriculum development, in pedagogical innovation and in the consolidation of the teaching profession;
- To implement mentoring and pedagogical supervision programmes to promote dynamics of collaboration, reflection, innovation and inquiry into teaching practice;
- To support the creation and consolidation of professional learning networks and communities to foster the collective and research-based dimension of the teaching profession and to reinforce teachers' professional identity.

Such recommendations are powerful, but it remains to be seen what the government will do about them. It is essential that public policies draw on these recommendations if we are to enhance the status of the teaching profession and if talk of the 'importance of teachers' is to be aligned with consistent actions and initiatives aimed at gaining public appreciation and recognition.

The future of ITE in Portugal, as in other countries, is uncertain and uncertainty calls into question issues of quality. Thus, it is important to interrogate how the teacher's role is understood in ITE policies and to what extent teacher professionalism recognises the complexity of the teaching profession and its intellectual, ethical, relational, political and inquiry-based dimensions. In other words, it is about looking at the enduring tensions between i) the teacher as technician vs. teacher as professional, ii) preparing teachers for the world we have vs. the world we want; iii) place-based vs. context-fluid teacher education; and iv) teacher shortages as a quantity or quality issue (Goodwin, Madalinska-Michalak, and Flores 2023). Added to this is the consideration of the role of higher education institutions and of research in ITE. As a contested site, ITE is associated with given views of the teacher, the teaching profession and the role of education (see, for instance, la Velle 2024; Lopes and Pereira 2012; Van Nuland et al. 2024). As Menter (2022, 97) argues, 'the analysis of teacher education policy in any state system is deeply revealing of the currently dominant values within that society. Through defining how and where teachers should be prepared for their work and sometimes through prescribing exactly what it is they should know and be able to do, we see how those in power in society are seeking to shape the world for future citizens'. There is a need to unpack the direction and focus of ITE policies within the context of teacher shortages in many countries and to resist the idea of narrow and

over simplistic solutions that undermine the profession and do not recognise the research-based accumulated knowledge in the field worldwide. There is, for instance, a need to foster stronger collaborations between HEI and schools and to develop project-based partnerships aligned with the third space (Zeichner 2010) in which all of the stakeholders involved in ITE interact together in a more consistent way. Such a view would serve to enhance the collective dimension of the profession and to bridge the divide between spaces and times of professional learning in HEI and in schools. ITE cannot be seen as the panacea for all problems in education, but it certainly has a pivotal role in improving teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. High quality teachers matter and, therefore, their education must be taken seriously in policy development.

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