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Assessment in higher education: voices of programme directors

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the views of assessment of programme directors at a Portuguese public university ($n=60$). Data were collected through a questionnaire which included closed and open-ended questions. The participants hold different professional categories and come from medical and health sciences, exact sciences, engineering and technology, social sciences and humanities. Data suggest the use of a variety of assessment methods, through a mix of learner-centred and traditional methods. The year of study, the type of course, the nature of the programmes and the institutional regulations were identified by the programme directors as factors that may influence the selection of the assessment methods. The participants considered assessment practices to be in general adequate, but there is room for improvement, namely through an integrated and interdisciplinary approach.

KEYWORDS

Assessment practices;
higher education;
programme directors;
Bologna Process

Introduction

Universities have been continually challenged over the last two decades. In the European context, in addition to globalising trends and challenges worldwide, the Bologna Process brought about a series of specific changes with the aim of creating a European Higher Education Area and, thus, promoting comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications. The Bologna Process was intended to instigate a wide range of changes in teaching and learning practices in higher education institutions across Europe. Issues such as high staff competence, student-centred approach to teaching, flexible learning paths, individual needs of students, competency-based education, and learning outcomes and generic skills were emphasised (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA 2015). However, the question whether these features led to changes at the level of the conceptions and assessment practices of Portuguese university teachers remains unanswered.

The implementation of the so-called ‘new educational paradigm’ within the Bologna Process had implications for curriculum and teachers’ and students’ work, involving, among other features, the promotion of tutorial support strategies and the renewal of assessment methods and feedback seen as an essential element for learning (Pereira and Flores 2013; Pereira et al. 2016). Under Bologna’s umbrella, Portugal has followed structural changes in the organisation of study cycles, standardised criteria according to European patterns and the implementation of a quality improvement system (Decree-Law 74/2006; Decree-Law 107/2008; OECD 2007). The Bologna Process provided an opportunity for ‘curriculum renewal and re-examination of the teaching

process' (OECD 2007, 162) considering the acquisition of knowledge process, students' outcomes and a greater and further interconnection between study programmes and the labour market (OECD 2014, 2017). The Bologna Process has contributed to the recognition of active student learning (Powell 2007) and has accelerated the need to rethink higher education in 'its foundations, structures and purposes' (Damásio 2005, 55).

Existing literature points to the role of assessment as a key factor determining the quality of teaching, learning and academic results. In higher education, traditional and prescriptive assessment methods are often used (mainly written tests and examinations) (Perrenoud 1999). Reliance on such assessment methods suggests that faculty tend to feel that assessment is about measuring recall of material transmitted in class (Samuelowicz 1994; Sambell and McDowell 1998). It has been argued that such methods lead to less sophisticated learning outcomes among students (Kember 1997). Classroom assessment is 'quite diversified and not well documented' (Gilles, Detroz, and Blais 2011, 721). It reflects teachers' values, perceptions and experiences, which are influenced by environmental variables, with an emphasis on the institutional context, tradition and assessment culture (Gilles, Detroz, and Blais 2011).

Existing literature also shows that teaching and learning practices are influenced by university teachers' views of assessment (Samuelowicz and Bain 1992, 2002; Samuelowicz 1994; Prosser and Trigwell 1999; Pereira and Flores 2016). Previous studies have focussed on teachers' assessment practices (e.g. Brew, Riley, and Walta 2009; Gilles, Detroz, and Blais 2011; Adachi, Tai, and Dawson 2018; Panadero et al. 2019); assessment validity (Tummons 2011); the use of learner-centred methods, such as portfolios (Brinke, Sluijsmans, and Jochems 2010); and feedback practices (Price et al. 2010), indicating that when students recognise the relevance of assessment, they tend to use insights from it to improve their learning, performance and achievement (Flores et al. 2020).

Brew, Riley, and Walta's (2009) study reveals that teachers are more supportive of peer and self-assessment and modestly supportive of group assignments. In the Spanish context, Panadero et al. (2019) highlight the wide variety of assessment practices between universities and courses, and point to the frequent use of traditional assessment practices. Tummons (2011) suggests a new critical analysis of reflective practice assessment raising questions related to its validity. The assessment of reflective practice 'masks complexities and contradictions in both how students write reflective assignments, and how tutors read them' (Tummons 2011, 471). In turn, Adachi, Tai, and Dawson (2018) suggest a strong belief of academics in the power of self and peer assessment as formative assessment, opposing an earlier literature which focussed on the accuracy of students' marking. Within this perspective, clarifying assessment requirements may also be a critical issue in the assignment preparation and students' academic self-regulation (To and Liu 2018).

There has been a greater focus on the perceptions and experiences of students regarding assessment (e.g. Struyven, Dochy, and Janssens 2005; Pereira et al. 2016; Gómez, Aranda, and Santos 2017; Nasser-Abu Alhija 2017; Panadero, Jonsson, and Botella 2017; Preston et al. 2020) particularly around assessment quality (Gerritsen-van Leeuwenkamp, Joosten-ten Brinke and Kester 2017).

In the Portuguese context, the connection between the Bologna Process and the assessment of learning has already been approached by a number of scholars who have investigated students' perspectives about assessment (e.g. Flores et al. 2015; Duarte 2019), and the effects of the implementation of the Bologna Process on higher education teachers' teaching and learning strategies (e.g. Brito 2012; Monteiro, Leite, and Souza 2018).

However, few researchers have investigated programme directors' perspectives about assessment under the framework of the Bologna Process. Earlier work suggests the need to analyse the impact of different methods of assessment (Watering et al. 2008), especially the before so-called alternative methods (Sambell and McDowell 1998) on student learning (Segers, Gijbels, and Thurlings 2008), as well as the ways in which assessment practices relate to feedback mechanisms (Flores et al. 2015).

Programme directors are teachers actively involved in designing, administering and interpreting the courses and programmes they supervise, being privileged informants about their functioning. The analysis of the programme directors' perceptions about assessment provides

an opportunity to understand higher education assessment practices as well as pedagogical leadership in university higher education. This exploratory study intended to analyse the programme directors' views of assessment as they are seen as key informants in regard to changes in assessment as a result of the implementation of the Bologna Process.

The study

This study draws upon a wider piece of research within a PhD in Educational Sciences, funded by Portuguese National Foundation for Science and Technology, which in itself is a part of a broader three-year research project entitled 'Assessment in Higher Education: the potential of alternative methods'. The exploratory study reported in this study aimed at analysing the programme directors' views of assessment. In particular, the following research goals are addressed:

to analyse the programme directors' views of assessment;

to identify possible effects of the Bologna Process on the assessment practices taking the programme director's perspective;

to understand the main challenges in higher education assessment practices from the perspective of the programme directors.

Research instrument

The study was carried out in a Portuguese public university through the administration of a questionnaire. Data collection took place between June and July 2018.

Participants' scientific areas were identified according to the framework of the Portuguese National Foundation for Science and Technology. With faculty or institute permission, programme directors were invited to participate in the study. All procedures were approved by the University of Minho Committee of Ethics for Research in Social and Human Sciences (Ref. SECSH035/2016 and SECSH036/2016). All participants were fully informed and provided a signed written consent.

The questionnaire was composed of both closed and open-ended questions and was validated by two external experts (higher education university teachers with experience as programme directors, from different study cycles and experts in assessment in higher education). The final version of the questionnaire was improved taking into account their comments and suggestions. [Table 1](#) illustrates the structure of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed taking into account the general goals of the project. Two groups of questions were included: (1) demographic characteristics of the participants and (2) perceptions about assessment in higher education after the implementation of the Bologna Process. Issues related to professional experience as university teachers and as programme directors were included, in order to understand if the participants already performed coordinating functions before the implementation of the Bologna Process.

Table 1. Structure of the questionnaire.

I – Demographic characteristics

Age, gender, teacher experience, coordinating experience, the field of knowledge and the cycle of study.

II – Perceptions about assessment in higher education after the Bologna Process

Themes

Overall effects of the implementation of the Bologna Process on higher education institutions

Changes in assessment as a result of the Bologna Process

Most used assessment methods

Strengths and aspects to be improved in the assessment practices

Articulation between learning outcomes and assessment practices

Comments

The participants were asked about the overall effects of the implementation of the Bologna Process on higher education (according to a 5-point Likert scale 1=very positive, 2=positive, 3=neither positive nor negative, 4=negative and 5=very negative). They were also asked about changes in the assessment as a result of the Bologna Process (1=yes, 2=maybe, 3=no and 4=does not apply). Participants were asked to justify their responses. Three open-ended questions about the use of different assessment methods and the strengths and aspects to be improved in the assessment practices were also included in the questionnaire. Finally, programme directors were asked to write about the articulation between learning outcomes and assessment practices in the courses and modules, and about the coordinating meetings within the programme they coordinate.

Participants

A convenience sample of programme directors from a Portuguese public university located in the northern part of the country was used. A non-probabilistic sample (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2007) was adopted and a convenience sample, commonly used in studies with students and teachers (Cohen et al. 2007), was defined. This type of sampling represents only itself and does not seek to represent the general population. Different areas of knowledge were selected to obtain richer and more diverse information. The selection of the areas of knowledge was based on the scientific fields of research identified by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology: medical and health sciences; exact sciences; engineering and technology; social sciences; and humanities.

Table 2 summarises the participants' demographic characteristics. Almost all of them (58) completed the questionnaire using a link provided via email and two participants sent their

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the participants.

	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	33	55.0
Female	24	40.0
Missing	3	5.0
Age		
30–40	2	3.3
41–50	30	50.0
51–60	21	35.0
More than 60	7	11.7
Teaching experience		
5–15	5	8.3
15–25	29	48.4
More than 25	26	43.3
Coordination experience		
Less than 1	4	6.7
1–2	9	15.0
2–5	22	36.6
5–10	15	25.0
More than 10	10	16.7
Cycle of study		
Undergraduate	13	21.7
Integrated master degree	8	13.3
Master degree	29	48.3
PhD and PhD programme degrees	10	16.7
Field of knowledge		
Medical and health sciences	1	1.7
Exact sciences	5	8.3
Engineering and technology sciences	16	26.7
Social sciences	28	46.7
Humanities	10	16.6
Total	60	100.0

questionnaire via institutional mail. Programme directors are actively involved in designing, administering and interpreting the courses and programmes they coordinate. Nevertheless, they also have teaching experience and, for both reasons, they are key informants about how programmes operate. Although this area of research has implications for policy and practice in tertiary institutions, little is known about the views of the programme directors about assessment practices after the implementation of the Bologna Process.

An inventory of 2017/2018 academic year programmes and a list of directors were identified, according to '2018 Institution Programme Guide'. This task was undertaken in May 2018, through the university's official channels. A total of 211 programme directors were contacted via email, from all study cycles and from the five fields of knowledge.

The majority of the participants were male ($n=33$). Half of the participants were between 41 and 50 years old, and the majority of them had more than 15 years of teaching experience. Participants came from different fields of knowledge, with a greater number of social science participants ($n=28$). About half of the participants coordinated a master's degree programme ($n=29$) and 22 participants have between two and five years of coordination experience (cf. Table 2).

Analyses

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software. Data collected through the open-ended questions were analysed through content analysis guided by the principles of completeness, representativeness, consistency, exclusivity and relevance (Bardin 2009) and by recognising the interactive nature of the process of data analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994). For the purpose of content analysis, the definition of more general categories was privileged (Esteves 2006; Bardin 2009), articulating an inductive (emergent character of the data) (Cho and Lee 2014) and a deductive perspective through the definition of categories of analysis in compliance with the research goals and theoretical framework (Ezzy 2002). The categories of analysis were semantic (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Findings

The analysis of the participants' discourse, combined with a critical review of the literature, supported the following themes: Bologna Process and its effects on changing higher education practices, assessment practices and the role of assessment.

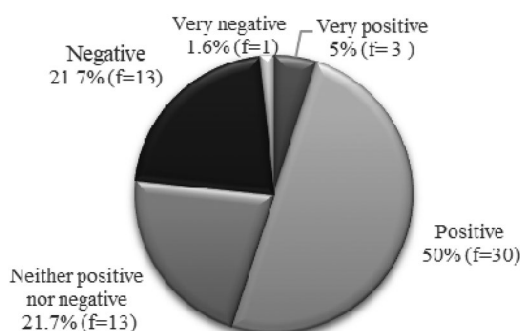


Figure 1. Participants' views of the changes as a result of the Bologna Process.

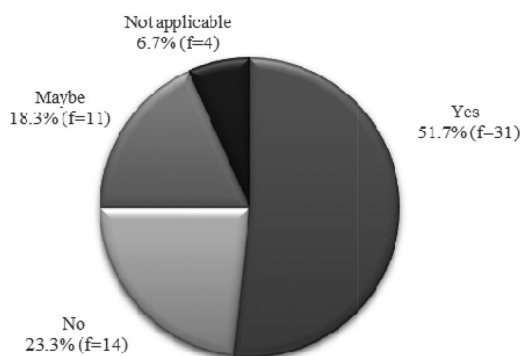


Figure 2. Participants' views of the changes in the assessment as a result of the Bologna Process.

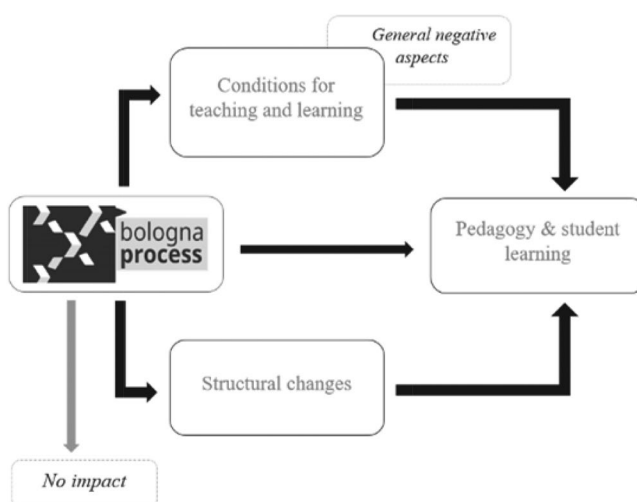


Figure 3. Changes as a result of the Bologna Process.

Bologna Process 20 years later: what kind of changes?

Data indicate, on the one hand, that participants have a generally positive view of the changes promoted by the Bologna Process and, on the other hand, that the Bologna Process has led to changes in higher education assessment practices. The majority of the participants (30) considered the changes instigated by the Bologna Process as positive; three participants considered it very positive; 13 participants considered it neither positive nor negative; 13 participants considered it negative; and one participant considered it very negative (Figure 1).

The majority of the participants (31) recognised that the Bologna Process has promoted changes in the assessment practices, 14 participants considered there were no changes at all and 11 participants answered maybe (Figure 2).

Data revealed that the Bologna Process influenced the conditions for teaching and learning, structural changes, pedagogy and student learning. The results also pointed to the influence of both conditions for teaching and learning and structural changes on pedagogy and student learning (Figure 3).

Most of the participants considered that the Bologna Process had both positive and negative effects (Table 3) in terms of conditions for teaching and learning, structural changes, and student learning and pedagogy. Others stated that there was no impact at all.

The analysis of the qualitative data identified dimensions related to the overall changes as a result of the

Table 3. Changes as a result of the Bologna Process (dimensions, categories and subcategories).

Overall changes as a result of the Bologna Process	Changes in assessment as a result of the Bologna Process
1. Conditions for teaching & learning - Focus on pedagogy - Educational offer's discussion - Reflection about practice But... - Increasing number of students per class - Lack of human and material resources - Reduction of contact time - Condensation of the programmes - Student's profile (e.g. lack of autonomy) - University teachers' and students' resistance to change	But... - Demands on teachers' work - Reduction of contact time - Utilitarian strategies
2. Structural changes - Design of programmes and courses - Programmes' internationalisation - Programmes' standardisation according to the European standard - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) But... - Decrease in terms of the value of the diplomas - Increase in bureaucracy	- Assessment's schedule - Curricular component of the PhD Programmes - European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)
3. Pedagogy & student learning - Variety of assessment methods - Learner-centred methods - Discussion and transparency of the assessment process - Self-assessment But... - Less interactive practices - Programmes' superficiality - Maintenance of practices in place before Bologna (periodic assessment) - Decreasing of student's profile (lack of autonomy) - Negative impact on student's professional profile	- Variety of assessment methods - Learner-centred methods Continuous assessment - Research - Skills But... - Traditional methods - Facilitation and fragmentation of efforts on the assessment practices - Maintenance of old assessment practices - Dualism of assessment practices
4. General negative effects - Over valorisation of the English language - Unrealistic internationalisation idea	
5. No impact - No experience before Bologna - Inexistence of Bologna's impact on the programme	- Superficial changes

Bologna Process and changes in higher education assessment practices. The diagram of higher education assessment practices (Figure 4) identifies and establishes a relationship between the most used assessment methods, the positive features and the issues to be improved.

Assessment practices

The participants' responses indicated a combination of traditional assessment methods and learner-centred assessment methods, especially through the use of written tests and practical work (Figure 4). On the one hand, the learner-centred approaches, the nature of assessment methods and the connection to professional practice are pointed out as positive aspects of the assessment practices. On the other hand, pedagogy related to improvements, improvements related to conditions for teaching and learning, structural changes related to improvements, and no improvements are also identified by the participants. Data also revealed the influence of conditions for teaching and learning and structural changes on pedagogy and student learning.

Most of the participants considered that the learning outcomes and assessment practices are articulated (Figure 5). This articulation occurs 'in most of the courses, however, it may not happen in all the courses' (Q9). The main goal is that 'the different assessment methods allow to assess students' results' (Q37).

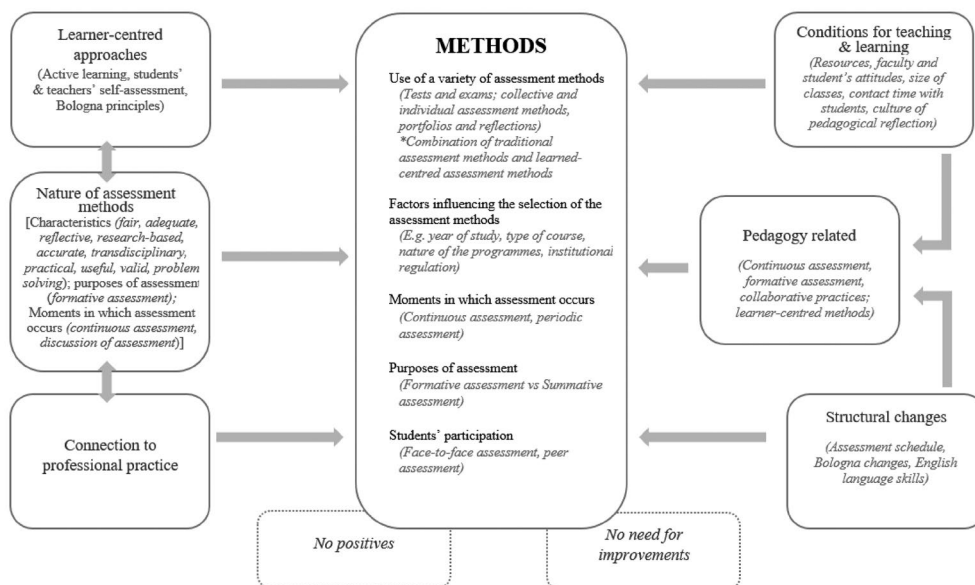
POSITIVES**ISSUES TO BE IMPROVED**

Figure 4. Higher education assessment practices.

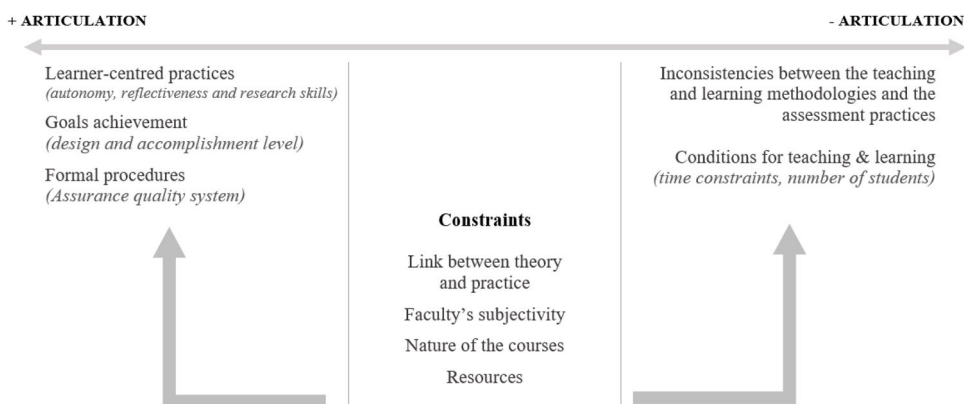


Figure 5. Articulation between learning outcomes and assessment practices.

This articulation is present in the learner-centred practices and in meeting the courses' and programmes' goals, and it is explicit in the formal procedures of the programme. The learner-centred practices are highlighted by the participants as promoters of autonomy, reflectiveness and research skills:

Yes. The aim is to train reflective professionals with a transformative vision and prepared for lifelong learning. (Q52)

The goals point to a participatory self-construction of knowledge and assessment methodologies. (Q56)

The goals (their design and accomplishment level) are also highlighted by the participants as an integrating element of the learning outcomes and assessment practices. The importance

of knowing the methodologies and goals of the courses at the beginning of the academic year was also stressed:

The goals of the courses and their methodologies are presented to students in the first class of each semester as well as the learning outcomes. (Q22)

It is because they enable students to safely assess the acquisition of knowledge, to achieve the goals established in the courses' programmes. (Q33)

This articulation is also explicit in the formal procedures, leading to reflection and design of the integrative practices, including their monitoring and analysis. Nevertheless, this articulation is often not fully achieved. The participants highlighted the lack of articulation between theory and practice, university teachers' subjectivity, the nature of the courses and the scarcity of resources as constraints to the articulation between learning outcomes and assessment practices:

This articulation is not always there. There is a discrepancy and imbalance between the scientific/theoretical component and the practical component, which is related to the specific skills of the professional profile. (Q6)

In theory yes. In reality, I would have to conduct a study (with observation) to have valid information. (Q16)

This less successful articulation may be explained by faculty's subjectivity in the interpretation of the programme goals or by the selection of the assessment practices. The adjustment of assessment practices is determined by the nature of the courses or by the scarcity of human resources, in particular the increasing number of students and reduced number of university teachers. In some cases, there is no articulation between learning outcomes and assessment practices due to the inconsistencies between teaching-learning methodologies and assessment practices. The assessment practices are learner-centred but the teaching-learning process still follows a rather classic model due to the increasing number of students. Time constraints are also pointed out as obstacles to the implementation of learner-centred assessment practices:

The goals follow the classical terminology and the assessment methodologies are built based on the so-called, and non-existent in practice, autonomy of learning. Students aren't encouraged to be autonomous. If they decide to go that way, their boldness is not well accepted. The teacher commands and the students obey. It is this way since pre-school and it is not the years spent in higher education that will change that. However, I want to make it clear that with the classical teaching process designed to large groups, the autonomy of learning cannot be realised. (Q9)



Figure 6. Participants' views of the opportunities to discuss assessment in the context of the programme.

The place of assessment

Most of the participants (31) recognised that there are opportunities to discuss assessment in the context of the programme; 29 participants answered no (Figure 6). However, the differences between negative and positive views are small. The following categories emerged in terms of the opportunities to discuss assessment in the programmes: informal discussion, moments in which discussion occurs, general strategies and problem-solving.

Generally, the discussion about assessment in the context of the programme may occur both in a formal and informal way. The informal discussions may address several dimensions beyond assessment and emerge as a viable option to overcome difficulties, to articulate university teachers' work and to solve problems:

This issue has been handled informally. (Q10)

These meetings do not necessarily fall within the Programme Coordination competencies and can be more informal. They focus on several aspects of the programme beyond assessment. I consider that teachers should have autonomy in the design of their assessment practices because they have a privileged vision and it corresponds normally to their research area. But, sometimes, it is necessary to discuss assessment, for example: to articulate different courses; to work together with teachers within the same course; or when specific problems occur. (Q7)

On the other hand, the formal discussion may occur in different moments, before, during or after the academic year. The initial discussion aims to plan the programmes' functioning, involving, in some cases, the students and answering previously reported problems. The final discussion has a greater focus on the appreciation of results and accountability (through formal reports). As for the discussion occurring during the academic year it relies on the perceptions of the students, especially the class representatives:

Only at the end, due to an appreciation of the results, during the semester the perceptions are monitored as requested by the students, specially the students' representatives. (Q24)

As part of the final course report. (Q32)

In other cases, the assessment discussion intends to address problems identified by students or via accountability mechanisms:

Cases are raised by students, or because it is integrated into the general evaluation of the academic year. (Q4)

In the case of courses identified due to assessment problems, I meet with the teacher responsible for the course. (Q18)

Formal discussions are also used to define general strategies such as practice standardisation, the assessment schedule, methodologies, problems and possible solutions, or even to work against university teachers' individualism. Data indicate some isolation and fragmentation in university teachers' work. They tend to develop more individual ways of operating within their course. Little joint or articulated work among the other courses of the programme is identified. This is accentuated by the demands of teachers' accountability. The formal moments to discuss assessment are, in the opinion of some directors, an opportunity to overcome individualism and to articulate strategies and joint efforts. However, 'there is still a long way to go, especially when there are many individualist approaches to work; each colleague is especially concerned with his/her performance evaluation and not so much with the formative process itself' (Q44). In some cases, the courses are taught by several teachers and extra effort is needed at the articulation level. This articulation also extends to the different courses of the programme, namely at the level of the programme functioning, the procedures to be adopted, the assessment moments or the quality of the work produced by the students.

The discussion of assessment is particularly important to help to promote formative moments for teachers and students and to develop self-regulatory strategies that enhance students' learning or/and collaborative strategies and professional development for teachers:

Assessment implies a lot of time, so it should have a formative dimension and help students to develop self-regulatory mechanisms which, given the number of students, is sometimes difficult to adjust and needs reflection from the part of the teachers. (Q36)

Despite this positive view of the discussion of assessment practices, some participants identified the main reasons for not discussing assessment: it is not a core issue, and there are no opportunities or conditions to discuss assessment, formal aspects and university teachers' pedagogical autonomy. Some of the participants argued that the discussion is not useful because teachers are resistant to change and operate according to old practices:

Because it is useless. In higher education, teachers don't like to confront their methodologies, they think they are always right and others are wrong. They are resistant to change. They continue to see the world and the profession as they were educated. Since they have autonomy, and quite rightly, they do what they want, even if they are not up to date... In the academy, it is hard to realise that we have 19th-century schools, 20th-century teachers and 21st-century students. (Q9)

Other participants question the usefulness of the discussion around assessment since all teachers 'apply similar methods' (Q43), assessment is not a problem, or the discussion makes no sense in this study cycle. For these reasons, the discussion is seen as useless in terms of effects unless it results from an institutional imperative:

Because I'm afraid to upset colleagues for a meeting that would have no consequences. This kind of meeting, in my view, can only have any chance to succeed if it is institutional and transversal to the institution's courses and structures. (Q16)

The lack of opportunities or conditions to discuss assessment was also highlighted by the participants, due to the lack of time or because they are not used to discussing this topic:

There is no space for that: space for reflection and no availability from the part of university teachers to discuss assessment. (Q5)

A general meeting with all the programmes' university teachers is not usual. I used to hold meetings with the new staff from specific areas to present the programme and the students. At that moment we use to discuss assessment. There are usually meetings for all teachers who guide the pedagogical practice (supervisors) to identify standardise criteria. (Q11)

In addition, the participants also highlighted some formal arguments, for example being recently appointed to the position, the scope of their competencies and the institutional assessment of the programme:

The assessment methodology is defined in the course unit form and it is the responsibility of each teacher who should be aware of the Bologna guidelines. (Q30)

The number or type of assessment elements is never addressed. Nevertheless, the programme supervisor doesn't have the competence to question the decisions of the teaching teams. The teacher in charge of a given course is sovereign. The role of the programme director is limited, or even non-existent, in the pedagogical aspects. At most, it is an intermediary to take the problems to the level above - The Pedagogical Council - and collect information to clarify the university teachers and students' doubts. Just that. There is no anticipated mechanism of active intervention. And the teachers only report to the department directors. They have more to do than discussing the pedagogical questions of programme X or programme Y. (Q55)

Finally, the participants emphasise respect for teachers' autonomy and the difficulty of changing the ways in which teachers teach and perform assessment. They coordinate the different courses but only take action in the most problematic situations:

In general, I think every teacher should be free to determine the assessment of their courses. I'm aware of isolated cases when there were many complaints from students about the teachers' very high demands. In that case, I spoke to the colleague to warn him about the students' complaints, but there were no changes at all. I think that the programme directors have no tools to force teachers to change the way they teach or assess. (Q34)

I seek to foster it but it is not easy. In general, each teacher is very proud of his/her assessment. (Q42)

Conclusions

Findings indicate that the programme directors seem to hold a positive and constructive view of assessment. However, they were very critical of their programmes, particularly in regard to the effects of the implementation of the Bologna Process. Previous studies focusing on higher education leadership in the Portuguese context identified the importance of the transformation of teaching approaches to enhance the learner-centred requirements of the Bologna Process (Veiga and Amaral 2009).

Findings also suggest that the changes resulting from the Bologna Process have been both positive and negative and with impact on assessment, namely on the conditions for teaching and learning, on structural changes and on pedagogy and student learning. The Bologna Process influenced both positively and negatively the conditions for teaching and learning, the formal aspects within higher education institutions, and pedagogy and student learning. In turn, the conditions for teaching and learning, and structural changes have an impact on pedagogy and student learning. The greater focus on pedagogy, the discussion about the educational offer and the reflection about practice were highlighted by the participants. However, Bologna also appears as the reason for the increasing number of students per class, the scarcity of resources, the reduction of contact time with students, the condensation of the programmes, negative changes in student's profile (e.g. lack of autonomy) and faculty and student resistance to change. Bologna generated additional demands concerning faculty work, namely the facilitation and fragmentation of efforts on assessment practices, the reduction of contact time and the development of utilitarian and instrumental strategies. This is a relevant topic in understanding teachers' work. The European guidelines (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – ENQA 2015) highlighted the importance of ensuring adequate conditions for teachers to work. International studies identified challenges in terms of working conditions (Kálmán, Tynjälä, and Skaniakos 2019), namely in regard to resources available, pressures from the labour market and articulation with other tasks (e.g. research) (Smith and Brown 1995).

The programme directors identified the use of a variety of assessment methods, including learner-centred and traditional methods. Even though the variation in assessment practices was recognised, in line with other studies in the context of higher education (Postareff et al. 2012; Pereira and Flores 2013; Flores et al. 2015), the programme directors recognised the emphasis on traditional forms of assessment. These findings corroborate earlier empirical work conducted in the Portuguese context (Torres 2012; Barreira et al. 2015; Pereira 2016; Flores et al. 2019; Fernandes et al. 2020) which shows the use of a variety of assessment methods, through a mix of learner-centred and traditional methods, but with an emphasis on a summative dimension. Several authors argue for the diversity of assessment methods in response to the current challenges in the teaching and learning process, through a 'mixed diet of assessment' (Brown 1999), recognising that assessment methods alone do not determine learning and that there is hardly a method that meets the objectives of education (Ramsden 2004). The year of study, the type of course, the nature of the programmes and institutional regulations are identified by programme directors as factors influencing the selection of assessment methods.

In general, the participants stated that the learning outcomes were articulated with the assessment practices, fostering learner-centred practices and goal achievement. This articulation was also explicit in the formal procedures and the design of integrative practices, ensuring their

monitoring and effectiveness. However, the participants also identify inconsistencies in terms of the theory and development of this articulation.

Findings also indicate the existence of moments to discuss assessment within the programmes, which assume different degrees of formality, involvement and importance. Informal discussions appear to have a special role in the discussion of assessment practices, allowing them to overcome difficulties, to articulate faculty's work and to solve problems. However, the participants stress the respect for teachers' autonomy and the difficulty of changing the ways in which teachers teach and perform assessment. Moreover, some of the participants stress faculty's resistance to change.

Two decades after the Bologna Process, the participants in this study identified several positive aspects, but also several limitations in the assessment practices, especially in terms of the conditions for teaching and learning. Despite the positive features, there is room for improvement, namely regarding the promotion of more active learning practices, formative and continuous assessment practices, self-assessment and a greater connection between course work and professional practice. This may represent opportunities for future research by expanding the possibility of obtaining new answers and a more complete understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of assessment in higher education context.

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