

Chapter Seven

Curriculum Reform in the Faculty of Arts of the Eduardo Mondlane University

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Introduction

This chapter deals with what is an ongoing process of curriculum reform within the Faculty of Arts of the Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) in Mozambique. It focuses on the scope of the process, motivations and envisaged objectives and/or outcomes. It also tackles some constraints experienced along the way, and the expected institutional impact of the reform.

Given that most of our readers may not be familiar with the framework within which the Faculty operates both at the university and national level, I also provide in this chapter an overview of both the Faculty and Social Sciences in the country. This will help readers understand not only the context within which those of us directly involved in curriculum reform have been operating, but most important of all, the changes that we are implementing which, to a great extent, have been influenced by the institution's Strategic Plan approved in the 1990s.

Overview and Emergence of Institutions of Social Sciences in Mozambique

Like most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mozambique was in the past under colonial rule, and with independence it went through some socio-political instability resulting in debilitating economic hardships. This has greatly affected all of society and it is not surprising that academic institutions, particularly public universities in Mozambique, which have been crucial in imparting

knowledge to new generations, deliver their services at low levels both in research and teaching.

Although I am presenting what seems to be a grim situation, as far as the Mozambican context is concerned, I would agree with a report claiming that ‘broad structural conditions have not necessarily determined the fate of ... social sciences’ (UNESCO, 1999: 122). New socio-economic and political developments, both at the national and global levels, have in the past few years triggered the emergence of several new institutions of Social Sciences, public and private. Indeed, the national environment is now a much more open space allowing for intellectual exchange and diversification of academic institutions.

Before enumerating current Social Sciences institutions within the country, it is worth mentioning the academic context within which the institutions have been emerging and striving to grow. It is well known that Portugal, as a colonising power, was a relatively backward country when compared to other colonial powers. This backwardness in economic terms was also reflected in education. Colonies such as Mozambique suffered the effects of this dire situation.

Because of the nature of the issues addressed in the Social Sciences, it seems that the Humanities and Social Sciences were not encouraged by Portugal in its colonies. This can be seen if we look at the number of Social Science institutions at the time of independence, and also at their genesis. At the time of independence, hardly any ‘pure’ Social Sciences, such as Sociology, Political Science or Public Administration featured in university education. The colonial regime was rigid in its educational policies, and so fearful of educating the indigenous people in Social Sciences that even the establishment of the Faculty of Economics ‘at the University of Lourenço Marques in 1970 was partly due to pressures from the [Portuguese] business community’ in the country (Jinadu, 1985: 12).

The regime, however, did establish a Faculty of Arts devoted mostly to teaching Humanities disciplines, namely History, Geography and Modern Languages. It is important to refer to this unit because it serviced several degree courses within the University by offering subjects such as Philosophy (which took a Marxist turn at independence), Sociology, Psychology and Social Anthropology. There is a sense, then, in which the conception and/or departmentalisation of Social Sciences at the University began within the Faculty of Arts – either with people deployed in the Faculty, or people who had once been there.

It is not my intention to go further into this discussion. My main aim in briefly sketching this background is to emphasise that historical, socio-economic and political antecedents largely determined the underdevelopment, but also growing

status of Social Sciences, on the one hand. On the other hand, the need to house some kind of a 'humanistic basis for [the] collective welfare' of Social Sciences (Jinadu, 1985: 12) within the Faculty of Arts at the UEM has made an important contribution to the definition of the social within the University. In that sense, as far as UEM is concerned, Jinadu's (1985) claim that in some cases the Social Sciences have emerged as autonomous after serving apprenticeships under the Humanities and Arts, remains true.

In a recent study by Ngunga et al. (2000) four public institutions are listed that undertake teaching and research in Social Sciences in Mozambique, namely the Eduardo Mondlane University, Pedagogic University, the Higher Institute for International Relations/Centre for International Strategic Studies attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, and the Cultural Heritage Archive within the Ministry of Culture.

The UEM is the oldest institution and the one that houses the most units involved in Social Sciences. These are the Faculty of Arts, CEA (Centre for African Studies), AHM (Mozambique Historical Archive), UFICS (Unit for Training and Research in Social Sciences), and the Faculty of Economics. The Faculties and UFICS undertake teaching and research extension activities. The Centre is just a research body, although some of its academic staff are involved in teaching in the Faculties and at UFICS. The Historical Archive can be regarded as Mozambique's documentation centre, and some of its academic staff are involved in research and teaching in the faculties. Indeed, most of the staff from the Archive and the Centre are attached in one way or another to the Faculty of Arts.

As we have mentioned earlier, the field of Social Sciences is growing in the country and in addition to public institutions, there are now private institutions housing Social Sciences – mostly economics – such as the Catholic University, ISPU (Polytechnic and University Higher Institute), and the ISCHTEM (Higher Institute for Science and Technology).

The Faculty of Arts

The Faculty of Arts at the UEM currently accommodates five academic departments, namely Archaeology and Anthropology, English, Geography, History, and Modern Languages. We should mention that the Department of English was originally established as a sector within the Department of Modern Languages, but because the scope of its involvement within the university grew, it was thought desirable to transform it into a department in its own right.

The departments are mainly teaching units, but their staff are also involved in research and extension activities in their respective areas of interest. In addition to departments, the Faculty also houses three research centres, namely the CEP (Centre for Population Studies), NELIMO (Centre for the Study of Mozambican Languages), and NET (Nucleus for Land Tenure Studies). The main activity of these units is research in subject-specific areas. Though their academic staff are usually attached to teaching departments, the centres are not accountable to any department but rather directly to the Dean of the Faculty. Very important to mention here, in terms of research activities undertaken both in the centres and the departments, is that very little of the research outputs feed back into teaching activities. Indeed, it seems that basic research is quite scarce, apart from that done for purposes of training for higher qualifications, such as for Masters or Doctorates. What is on the increase, is contracted research in the form of consultancy, the approach and motivation for which do not spring directly from the teaching classroom. As a result, as I claim elsewhere, 'if not reversed, the consultancy tradition [and priority] may do some long-term harm' to the institution (Manuel, 2000: 3).

The Faculty can be described as being well staffed if we take into account staff qualifications and turnover. There are 65 staff members, of whom 20 hold a PhD degree (two of whom are part-timers), 17 have Masters degrees (of whom two are part-timers) and 23 have completed their *Licenciatura*, equivalent to a BA (Hons). – five of whom are part-timers.

The Eduardo Mondlane University has a two-semester academic calendar. The first semester runs from August to December each year, and the second is in force from February to June. Up until June this year, the Faculty offered three degree courses – in Geography, History and Linguistics, offered respectively by the departments of Geography, History and Modern Languages. The departments of Archaeology and English have merely been servicing units up to now. However, thanks to curriculum reform, more courses have been introduced, of which I will make mention in the following section.

Curriculum Reform in the Faculty

Background information

Because many qualified people fled the country after independence and at the advent of the revolution, the Mozambican government was forced to take some drastic measures in the field of education. Some of these included, for instance, prioritising teacher training both for primary and secondary school education

(especially for the latter). In the wake of this new regulation some university courses were shut down and some of their students diverted to teacher training (and others to other priority areas). Thus, provision of degree courses in the Faculty of Arts was suspended in 1978, and as result, most of its staff were re-deployed in the newly established *propedeutical* courses¹ and then later in the Faculty of Education.

Though this closure may be viewed as having deprived the Faculty of its mission, we would want to claim that the period, which lasted for about a decade, helped to serve the Faculty through producing a reasonable number of better qualified and thus well-informed members of staff. In fact, it was during that period that successful young teacher training graduates with academic merit were recruited to be part of the University staff. Later on some of these staff members studied for Master and Doctoral degrees abroad, and on return, were based within their relevant faculty and department.

In the Arts, the period in question provided not only for the training of staff but also provided the Faculty of Arts with time (although this was unplanned) to reflect upon and conceive degree curricula that could be considered academically sound, but more importantly, that tried to be in line with Mozambique's actual socio-economic needs and public policies. This view seems to be confirmed in a document drawn up by the Arts Faculty in which it tried to account to the University Council for the changes being proposed in the current process of curriculum reform. It reads as follows:

A careful assessment of the current courses shows that these ... were conceived and implemented in a historical and development context in which concern was much more on issues of planning and management of resources and ideas. Within that context, the main goal of the Faculty was to train graduates who would go and work in research of several issues of their specialising fields The philosophy of the courses did perfectly match the context of the country (Faculdade de Letras, 2001: 2).

The context of the country refers to the situation in which Mozambique was very much involved with revolutionary and/or solidarity ideals and which made possible the reintroduction of *Licenciatura* degree courses in History and Linguistics (in 1989) and Geography (in 1990) in the Faculty of Arts. The approach in the faculty was clearly directed at trying to understand more about the country's socio-historical and economic development.

The reform: inception, justification and some objectives

Current curriculum reform in the Faculty of Arts follows from shortfalls identified within the curricula in force since the introduction (mentioned above) of the three

degree courses more than a decade ago. In fact, some minor adjustments had been made to the courses in the mid-1990s, but in the past few years the departments came to realise that the current trend of globalisation, and thus national, regional and global openness, call for complete curriculum reform, rather than mere curriculum revision.

The new context which Mozambique finds itself calls for a more integrated, practical and multi-faced approach in its higher education as a basis for future specialisation and/or post-graduate study that will enable its people to participate inclusively and confidently in harmonious socio-economic development.

It should be mentioned, however, that although the Faculty's departments began to realise the inadequacy of courses in the current context, it was not until the conception and approval of the University's Strategic Plan in 1998 that the process of reform gained some impetus.

Among other activities, the Strategic Plan of the UEM held curriculum reform to be one of its top priority tasks. It has, since its inception, served as a driving force of the process. This has happened in close collaboration with the faculties and departments. From that perspective, the process of curriculum reform in the Faculty of Arts can be seen as one in which both bottom and top structures have had some initiative and responsibility. That the process was directed to meet expectations of the national agenda and was linked directly to the mission of the University, can be seen from the following quotation drawn from the Faculty's curriculum reform document:

With the new courses, the Faculty of Arts seeks to integrate theoretical and practical skills as a whole, incorporate practices of the Mozambican and global realities in their multiple dimensions. The integration of (theoretical and practical) knowledge and appropriate professional deontological attitudes when training students, shall serve the constitution of a critical and/or well-informed mass, capable of solving concrete development problems of the country, on the one hand, and capable of intervening in the formulation of public and private policies, on the other (Faculdade de Letras, 2001: 3).

The objective set above is primarily oriented to upgrading competencies and skills, and therefore, the quality of Arts graduates. Other objectives of the reform, are to increase the number of enrolments, and the rates of graduation. At the Faculty of Arts, this objective has been defined as complementary to training high quality graduates capable of seeking work confidently and integrating effectively into inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary working teams. This corresponds to the national agenda in higher education and also to the mission of the UEM as stated in its Strategic Plan (UEM, 1998), which among other things, aims to ensure:

- ▶ excellence and quality in training;
- ▶ increase of enrolments and graduations;
- ▶ reduction of school wastage;
- ▶ national and gender equity on entry to the University;
- ▶ upgrading of staff qualifications;
- ▶ introduction of new and relevant courses; and,
- ▶ introduction of postgraduate studies (MA and PhD).

The role of central University bodies in the process

This account of the involvement of central University structures in the process of reform serves to illustrate that being part of the institution makes faculties accountable to the operational framework within which all other units operate. In that context, we believe that the involvement of top university structures has been crucial to the process. This helped to provide a sense of unity in the institution, while nonetheless taking the specificity of each academic unit into account.

Although sometimes criticised, the role of central bodies was much more one of guidance than of interference. It was in light of such guidance that a Central Committee on Curriculum Reform (CCRC) was set up, comprising staff from various faculties. The committee initially operated under the Academic Vice-Rector and later, delegated by the Rector, the Pedagogic Director co-ordinated the process at the University level. It established schedules, and most important of all, held several university-wide seminars and workshops on curriculum reform and/or development. It also helped faculties to hold their own seminars. In addition to this, the committee, through the Pedagogic Directorate, provided some funds for those faculties involved in the reform.

In our view, the main goal of the CCRC was to try to make our academic community realise that change was necessary and thus make us develop a common understanding, not only of the nature of change but also the need for, and direction of, change. In 1999, the discussions promoted by the CCRC culminated in the approval of the New Curricular Framework of the UEM in 1999. (Unpublished report: UEM, Maputo). This framework put forward some general guidelines, including:

- ▶ improvement of student selection procedures on entry to ensure that access is not only based on knowledge, but also on candidates' skills and potential relevant to the intended course of study;
- ▶ involvement of highly qualified and/or senior staff in the selection and teaching processes; and,

- ▀ the establishment of systematic interaction with high schools and pre-university education bodies at the Ministry of Education.

The CCRC also laid down a profile of a typical UEM graduate who would be trained not only academically, but also as a person. The emphasis here is on graduates being able to understand the context of Mozambique within the global world. Thus, university education is called to impart attitudes of intervention and change. In order to attain the envisaged goals, the new curriculum framework, among others, establishes the following:

- ▀ adoption of a correlated curriculum model, i.e. one that starts with a common core and progressively integrates subject-specific courses;
- ▀ adoption of new and modern teaching and assessment methods, that mainly foster a student-centred education;
- ▀ implementation of ‘support subjects’ such as study skills, discourse logic, communication techniques, research methods, and others to support the learning process at the University; and,
- ▀ reduction of the length of most *Licenciatura* courses from five to four years so as to be in tandem with practice in the region and most parts of the world.

Replication and results of the reform at the faculty of arts

The idea of a University Central Committee was replicated within the Faculty of Arts. In addition to departmental curriculum committees, a Faculty Committee on Curriculum Reform was set up, consisting of all curriculum co-ordinators of existing departments and the Deputy Dean of the Faculty. This committee has been co-ordinating reform activities in an attempt to reach a common view within the Faculty and, if possible, to implement the new courses at the same time.

In general, the faculty has adopted the recommendations that emanated from the new curriculum framework of the University. Where appropriate and justifiable, however, it has safeguarded some curricula features that it considers intrinsic to its identity. This can be seen, for example, in the retention of a flexible dissertation in some courses despite recommendations from the CCRC document to avoid it for *Licenciatura* degrees. Another example has to do with the common core, as illustrated later.

In addition to the discussions held at the university level, the heated debates at faculty and departmental level bore fruit by August 2001. UEM started implementing new courses conceived during the preceding process of curriculum reform. Indeed, in a joint effort, the current departments of English and Modern

Languages are now offering degree courses in Linguistics and Literature, Translation and Interpretation Studies (Portuguese-English-Portuguese and Portuguese-French-Portuguese) and Language Teacher Training Programmes (English, French and Portuguese). The Department of Geography has also started a new curriculum leading to graduation in Human and Physical Geography, Regional Development, and Environment Studies. These programmes also cover population studies and GIS (Geographic Information Systems). It is also possible to graduate as a teacher of Geography. We should mention at this stage that some subjects for teaching degree programmes will be provided in collaboration with the Faculty of Education, which re-opened in 2001 after about 10 years of being dormant.

As stated previously, the underlying philosophy of the new courses is found in the CCRC document, but I feel it is important to mention that for graduation from the Departments of English and Modern Languages, students will have to undergo a common core of two semesters, while for graduation from the Department of Geography, the common core period is four semesters. However, the philosophy underlying the curricula is the same: there are compulsory common core subjects in the courses of the departments, followed by specialisation-specific compulsory subjects, complementary subjects and also optional subjects. We could say that the way these curricula are organised opens possibilities for the future adoption of a credit-bearing system. Also, when fully implemented, the new courses, through their complementary and optional components, will allow some effective inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary studies in Arts Faculty curricula.

As yet, however, Arts has not been able to establish an extended Faculty core. There are a few subjects with which, I believe, all graduates from the Arts Faculty should be familiar. The subjects at issue are communication techniques, study skills and research methods.

Constraints and institutional impact

Curriculum reform in the Faculty of Arts at UEM is far from over. It has also been far from perfect. Of the five departments in the Arts Faculty, two are still working on their new curricula with a view to implementing them in the next two years, and the Department of Modern Languages has not started running two of its approved courses, namely Translation and Interpretation Studies, and Mozambican Languages Teacher Training.

From my involvement in the process, I conclude that there have been two main factors that have influenced the reform: one is institutional and the other is attitudinal.

The institutional factor concerns the inability of the university, at some crucial moments, to provide adequate (material, but mostly human) resources to support the process at the faculty level. Indeed, the past few years saw many transformation efforts at UEM and it was found that a number of senior staff were involved in several other tasks, such as taking on leadership positions, conceiving and putting into operation the Strategic Plan, and the Reform of University Management (RUMA), just to name a few.

On the other hand, the attitudinal factor accounts for resistance to change on part of some staff who were quite happily accommodated within the old *modus vivendi*, and who did not want to be bothered by shuffles in the organisation of the Faculty of Arts.

In relation to institutional impact, the following conditions need to be set in place to meet the expectations raised by reform efforts:

- ▶ recruitment, training and/or redeployment of qualified staff;
- ▶ adoption of new and modern teaching and assessment methods;
- ▶ establishment within the faculty of reasonable working conditions, such as ICT facilities, updated bibliographies, larger lecture halls and/or amphitheatres;
- ▶ re-structuring of the faculty with new academic departments and sections; and
- ▶ closer collaboration with other units across the faculty, university and the wider national, regional and global academic communities.

Execution of the above tasks is twofold, i.e. locally (at Faculty level) and centrally (at University level). Indeed, on the basis of the way that UEM is organised, the involvement of central bodies is crucial for the provision, for instance, of new facilities and also of a legal and flexible institutional framework within which the Faculty may establish collaboration with other institutions, especially those abroad.

Curriculum reform also impacts on teaching and assessment methods. These have been included in the reform document. In addition to traditional lectures, we also cater for tutorials, practicals, probation, and students' individual project work, among others. For assessment, the approach tends to be the so-called pondered evaluation, where in addition to written tests at mid-term and exams at the end of the term, staff are encouraged to go on monitoring students' progress through continuous assessment in the form, for instance, of homework, group work, practicals, class participation, and other methods.

The effects of curriculum reform are also felt in the academic structures themselves. The Arts Faculty has been working at its own restructuring. As new courses are developed, new areas of knowledge may, in the medium to long term,

lead to some restructuring of the whole University in terms, for instance, of its faculties. At this stage it is not clear what the eventual outcome will be.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to share the experience of curriculum reform at the Eduardo Mondlane University. For a better understanding, I thought that some background about the institution and the framework within which it operates, was needed, because, if reform is to be undertaken, one needs to know what is to be reformed, why, and how.

In general terms, as I have mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, reform has been triggered by two driving forces.

First, the local political and educational history required a move to a new dispensation responding to the needs of a post-colonial and post-war Mozambique. Secondly, the realisation that the University operates in a global context required openness not previously reflected in either the national psyche or higher education (curriculum) planning.

Of all reform objectives, some of which have been referred to in this document, I have identified the following as being the most important ones:

- ▀ an increase in the number of enrolments and graduation rates; and,
- ▀ delivery to society of high quality graduates capable of integrating into inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary work teams with confidence.

Indeed, I believe that these objectives can be regarded as the envisaged and measurable indicators of the change to be brought about by reform. The results have been encouraging: the Faculty of Arts enrolled approximately 90 students each year up to 1999, but thanks to reform, in June 2001, we enrolled 250 first year students for the 2001/2002 academic year. This is not to say that there have not been any constraints. In some cases, the faculty was not able to complete and implement the new curricula from the start. It is clear that the process is not over, as illustrated by the list of requirements sprouting from the institutional impact of the effected reform.

In conclusion I would like to mention that, unlike the University Central Committee on Curriculum Reform that was dismantled after approval of the New Eduardo Mondlane University Curricular Framework, the Faculty of Arts has been considering the possibility of turning its Curriculum Reform Committee into a Faculty Pedagogic Committee when all new curricula have been implemented. The Pedagogic Committee among others, will co-ordinate all teaching activities in the

departments, be involved in the implementation of the courses, and be accountable for all curriculum developments, changes and/or adjustments within the Faculty.

These ideas are the result of our realisation that curriculum reforms or revisions must not only be dependent on a significant social breakthrough, but also, and chiefly, should be part of a continuous process of improving education. Unless we do this, we may end up grounding curriculum reforms on subjective emotional responses and on the orientation of the regime of the day. Worst of all, we may end up accommodating out-of-date approaches for fear of change. We owe it to Mozambique and the sub-continent, to continue our efforts at providing high quality responsiveness in higher education for the people of our region.

Endnote

- 1 *Propedeutical* courses were established in the university after closure of all high schools in the country, and were meant to prepare students to enter proper university education. The people who went through this programme were later admitted to universities either at home or abroad.

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