

LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: PORTUGUESE STUDENTS' VOICES

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In this paper we try, firstly, to contribute to the reflection about plurilingualism as a holistic and integrative concept which is valued by different scientific areas that attribute it diverse benefits. So, we present a reflection about a number of arguments (of a social, cognitive, environmental, and economic nature, among others) that value the promotion of plurilingualism and plurilingual competences and we situate this issue in Higher Education (HE), namely within the scope of the provision of languages. We then present a study from the University of Aveiro, Portugal, that set out to identify student representations concerning: i) the importance of integrating language courses in their Bachelor's degree/Master/PhD programmes and ii) the languages considered to be most important in their academic career and why. The results show that most students believe that language learning is important in HE and that they have a pragmatic perspective regarding the integration of languages in the curricula, perceiving it in terms of employability, mobility and professional needs (both in Portugal and abroad) and revealing an instrumental representation of languages which supports the economic arguments originally presented. Although students refer to English as the main language to be included in HE programmes, they also refer to other languages (Spanish, French, German, Italian and Chinese) as distinctive assets in the job market. We cross these results with other results of our research, showing that the integration of diverse languages in curricula is much more valued by students than by other academic actors, such as Programme Directors and Vice-Rectors. These results highlight the importance of knowing student perspectives on educational language policies. Indeed, students may play an important role in the planning and development of educational language policies in Higher Education Institutions.

Keywords: language education, higher education institutions, plurilingualism, student representations

Biographical Note

Susana Pinto holds a Degree in Teaching of Portuguese and English, a Master Degree in Didactics and a PhD in Didactics and Training (University of Aveiro). Her PhD thesis is entitled “Languages at the University of Aveiro: discourses and practices”. She is a member of the Open Laboratory for the Learning of Foreign Languages (LALE) of the University’s Department of Education and the Research Centre “Didactics and Technology in the Education of Trainers” (CIDTFF), at the University of Aveiro. Her research areas centre on (educational) language policy and planning, specifically within Higher Education Institutions, language learning and the development of plurilingual and intercultural competences. She has participated in several national and international research projects in the areas of Language Didactics and Teacher Training.