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Research Article

Inner Tensions in Changing Pedagogical Approaches in Mozambican Higher Education

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The paper discusses tensions in the process of implementation of student-centered pedagogical approaches in Mozambican higher education. A qualitative study was carried out based on document analysis, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews at one selected university. The analysis of this data was based on an activity theory approach which connects psychological, cultural and contextual perspectives. Data collected in this study showed that the teachers did not feel ownership of the innovation and the students revealed difficulties in taking responsibility for their learning. Traditional ‘punitive’ assessment culture and the Mozambican ‘poverty context’ influenced pedagogical practice. Younger teachers appeared to have more interest in the innovation.

Key words: Activity theory, Curriculum reform, Student-centered learning, University pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last fifteen years, Mozambican higher education has implemented a student-centered pedagogical approach (UEM, 1999). However, curriculum documents (UEM, 2006) and reports (Cossa et al., 2012) state that this approach is still poorly realised in practice. The study reported in this paper attempts to explore reasons for that.

Student-centered learning (SCL) has been actively implemented in many countries over the last decades. SCL is based on the expectation that students will master their own learning and teachers facilitate such a process. Students construct their own meaning by talking, listening, writing, reading, and reflecting on content, ideas, issues and concerns (Di Napoli, 2004). A student-centered pedagogy demands close and confident relationships between teachers and students so that dialogue becomes an important scaffold for learning. Educational research recognizes SCL as a powerful approach that gives students greater autonomy, empowerment, control over his or her own learning, subject matter, methods and pace of study (Sparrow, Sparrow & Swan, 2000; Di Napoli, 2004).

Having been originally developed in the West (Europe and North America) this approach is currently finding its way to the East and the South (i.e. Asian and African countries). In a study carried out in Vietnamese Higher Education, Thanh (2010) showed that an SCL approach is seen as ideal for local
education reforms that aspire to provide students with the skills requested by the labour market such as independence, creativeness, activeness and cooperativeness. However, its implementation requires significant changes in the structure of the traditional teaching environment in terms of pedagogy and its physical characteristics (Cossa et al., 2012). According to Thanh (2010) various local infrastructural conditions and cultural barriers can hinder the implementation of SCL. Similarly, Chisholm and Leyendecker (2008) showed that many countries in sub-Sahara Africa witnessed in the early to mid-1990s the homogenization of educational discourse, with focus on SCL, but with little regard to available capacities and resources.

SCL has also been actively spread in developing countries by Western aid agencies. They believe that it can play an important role in the democratic development process and simultaneously contribute to individual empowerment (Tabulawa, 2003). In low income countries this approach is promoted as a curriculum policy imperative by international organizations (such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) conditioning provision of financial and technical aid in the field of education and training (Tikly, 2004). In this context, current curricular reforms in many African countries emphasize the adoption of a student-centered pedagogy as the official pedagogy in schools and higher education (Tabulawa, 2003).

The same scenario of the external imposition of SCL is happening in some Asian countries. In Laos, the official educational slogan developed with help of foreign advisors is that teachers must be managers and facilitators of learning, plan practical student-oriented activities and function as psychologists, counselors and consultants. However, teachers frequently lack the competencies necessary to fulfill these tasks and no training, infrastructure or resources are created to support the implementation of SCL (Chounlamany and Khounphilaphanh, 2011). Similar conclusions were made by Schweisfurth (2011) based on the analysis of publications reporting the implementation of an SCL approach in the global South. The author showed that the main barriers in this process are related to traditional teacher-learner power relations, lack of resources, higher student-teacher ratio and differences about how teaching and learning is understood in different cultural contexts. Her analysis did not include Mozambique as information about this country is still poorly represented in international educational research literature and locally produced reports are published only in Portuguese. However, currently some changes happen in this field as more Mozambican PhD students conduct their research with help of foreign donor organizations. Thus, Guro and Weber (2010) reported in their analysis of teacher education reform that Mozambican government adopted SCL similarly to reforms introduced in industrialized countries. Accordingly, they stated in their study that the movement from policy to practice and from global to local is complex and contradictory, because teachers must implement innovations that they have not been motivated and trained for.

This paper discusses issues of introducing a SCL approach in the process of current curriculum reform at Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM) in Mozambique. An important contextual factor to consider is that the university is situated in one of the poorest countries in the world. According to the Human Development Index (HDI), Mozambique was ranked on 185th place out of 187 ranked countries in year 2013. Higher education in Mozambique is rapidly expanding. Currently, there are almost forty public and private higher education institutions operating in the country. According to information collected by the Ministry of Education (ME) the number of higher education students increased from about 28,000 in 2005 to about 101,000 in 2010 (MINED, 2012). However, it still has about half of the average African enrolment per thousand inhabitants (MINED, 2011). The country has Portuguese as the official national language and it is also the language of instruction throughout the entire educational system.

At Eduardo Mondlane University systematic efforts have been made to change the curriculum in line with the demands for a new type of professional equipped with the skills, attitude and disposition necessary to cope with the requirements of the modern workplace (Linden & Mendonça, 2006). According to the actual curriculum framework (UEM, 2008; MINED, 2011), focus is placed on the continuous improvement of the quality of teaching, learning and research. The study reported in this paper attempts to explore how SCL is being perceived and implemented at UEM. In this regard, the aim is to provide a deeper understanding of how and why different stakeholders act and react in the process of educational reform and what factors shape their curriculum work. The following research questions were paramount in the investigation:

- How do UEM teachers and students perceive their curriculum roles and agency?
- What influence does local context exercise on implementation of SCL?
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Activity theory is used as a theoretical lens for the study. We found this theory useful to explore how the implementation of the new pedagogical approach is influenced by the Mozambican context, and how socially mediated and interconnected actions of students, teachers and managers shape collective curriculum reform activity. The theory is based on Vygotsky’s developmental perspective and assumes that human activities are shaped by the socio-cultural and historical contexts they are embedded in (Vygotsky, 1962). Thus, we need to consider local context as an active component in the process of introducing pedagogical innovations that interplays with all curriculum activities.

The collective activity system is taken as a unit of analysis that connects psychological, cultural and contextual perspectives. In this way, an activity is undertaken by a human agent, (subject) who is motivated towards the solution of a problem or purpose (object), and mediated by tools (artifacts) in collaboration with others (community) (Engeström, 1999).

The relations between subject, object and mediating tools of activity imbedded in socio-cultural context are illustrated in figure 1 below:

![Figure 1. Fundamental structure of activity](image)

In the context of educational reform, it can mean that the teachers should be involved in the construction of the object and also the mediation of the activity. We can talk about mediated agency of teachers (Lasky, 2005) meaning that teachers mediate students’ learning and their own actions are mediated by structural elements of their setting, resources available to them, norms and traditions at the university. In turn, the students are expected to assume the role of active subjects. In the learning activity, an example of the object of activity can be the understanding of events, concepts, and theoretical relationships. In the process of curriculum reform the object of activity can be an expected change in the patterns of behavior of different curriculum actors. In this study, we consider SCL as the object of the collective curriculum activity at UEM.

The principle of tool mediation plays a central role in activity theory. Tools shape the way in which human beings interact with reality. In the context of this paper, mediating artifacts in the curriculum activity refer e.g. to laboratory equipment, technical resources, textbooks, internet and computer facilities, administrative tools, pedagogical techniques, established norms and professional language. Comprehensive collection of these tools can be called mediational system. The study of mediating tools becomes important as they usually reflect the experiences of other people who have tried to solve similar problems at an earlier time and have invented or modified the tool to make it more efficient (Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2006). It also means that in order to understand agency of a person and his or her actions we need to consider mediational systems (sets of cultural artifacts) shaping person’s behavior which condition ‘the incorporation of the collective into the individual’ (Edwards, 2005).

METHODS

A qualitative study was carried out at UEM during 2011. UEM was selected, because is the oldest and biggest public university in Mozambique. The data collection was organized at two levels: at the central level based on an analysis of the official UEM policy documents, reports and statistical data sources and at faculty of Agriculture and Forestry Engineering level based on classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers. The faculty was selected based on the accessibility for data collection. The observation classes were selected from the list of lecturers’ names and schedule provided by the pedagogical director of the faculty.
The document analysis gave insight into the administrators’ visions and the rhetoric of the reform as well as particularities of the UEM’s educational context. Through observations it was possible to see to what extent teachers and students appropriated the new pedagogical approach and used its strategies and methods in the classroom. Attention was paid to the activities carried out in the classroom, based on teacher-student relationship and contextual factors. The interviews were done to explore students’ and teachers’ feelings about the innovations and any concerns they were facing in practice. The choice of these methods aimed to triangulate the data in order to achieve higher reliability of the results. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) triangulation technique is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research.

In this way, seventeen lessons given by ten different teachers were selected and observed. The number of observed lessons was defined by ‘data saturation principle’ (Bryman, 2012, p. 426). Five teachers, three of them female and six students, four of them male, were selected randomly from the list of classes observed to be interviewed. All of the teachers observed and interviewed have been teaching for several years. All of the students interviewed came from public secondary schools. The language of the interviews was Portuguese. The interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes; they were tape-recorded and later transcribed verbatim and translated into English. As Denscombe (2008) has pointed out, the process of transcriptions brings the researcher closer to the data. Validation of the interviews was carried out after each interview through replaying the recording in the presence of the interviewee.

Administrative and ethical issues were considered. A letter was sent to the Dean of the Faculty to get permission to carry out the study. The teachers were informed by email from the head of department and a hard copy was posted on the Faculty wall, explaining the researcher’s intention. All teachers and students involved gave their permission to participate in the study.

In the process of the analysis of the interview transcripts the answers from the respondents were thematically grouped, considering the activities carried out in the classroom, and relating them to the context. Subsequently, similar answers were summarized and one quotation was used as an example of each group. The different answers were accordingly highlighted with examples through quotations. In this way, categories of similar and different responses were generated and grouped.

Theoretical framework also contributed to the identification of themes in the process of data analysis. Activity theory highlights the role of contextual factors and mediating tools in the process of the realization of specific tasks. The following themes were identified: contextual influences on teachers’ academic roles, teacher and student agency in the context of the reform, and structural and psychological tensions in the reform process. The literature review supported the observations and interviews and helped to achieve a better understanding of the issues discussed in this paper, such as SCL’s association with the empowerment of students to have more control over the process of learning and influence of the physical characteristics of the learning environment (Estes, 2004; Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2008; Thanh, 2010).

RESULTS

The findings are presented following the main themes identified in the process of data analysis. Personal long-term experience of active academic work in Mozambique and at UEM also helped the researcher to interpret the results.

Contextual influences on teachers’ academic roles

UEM is the oldest and most comprehensive public institution of higher education in Mozambique. It operates in the shadow of the absolute poverty which has dominated the country for dozens of years. The complex historical and socio-economic context of the country has a strong influence on UEM’s academic environment. Since 1962, when the university was founded, Mozambique has gone through colonialist (until 1975), socialist (until beginning of 1990s) and capitalist (current) phases of development. Each phase had its own system of values and offered different possibilities for survival and success in society. Most of the senior academic staff at the university has their own experiences of living, studying and working during all three dramatically different phases of social development in the country. They have managed to cope with the rhetoric of successive socio-economic transformations and learned the ‘rules of the game’ imposed on them by different foreign actors (Portuguese colonial government, Soviet socialist
reform advisors, World Bank restructuring/privatization promoters, and other subsequent donors) in order to become successful. A senior teacher explained that his generation has developed good skills of living and working adapting to impositions of different foreign projects and rapid changes in Mozambican society.

According to policy documents (UEM, 1999; 2008), the university aspires to conduct teaching, research and extension activities. However, teaching at undergraduate level constitutes the major part of the workload for academic staff. Research outcome in the form of peer-reviewed papers and doctoral graduates is extremely low even in comparison with other African countries (MINED, 2011). The main form of extension activity appears to be consultancy work by academic staff on behalf of the university or privately. The practice of topping up salaries with extra teaching at private institutions or doing projects and consultancy outside UEM is broadly spread among the university teachers.

Currently, about twenty percent of the university’s academic staff have PhD degrees (315 out of 1585, less than 25% of them are women, MINED, 2012). UEM employs on a permanent and temporary basis sixty percent of all doctoral degree holders working in Mozambican higher education (315 out of 528, MINED, 2012). All of them gained their doctoral degrees abroad. Local PhD programs have just started with the help of foreign universities. However, the critical mass of researchers necessary to conduct effective projects has not yet been accumulated. Additionally, research and research training is almost entirely dependent on foreign aid and a close collaboration with international partners. Further, the financial rules of external aid givers result in much lower individual material rewards for carrying out research projects than for doing extra teaching and consultancy assignments.

Mozambican senior academics at UEM have many administrative duties inside and outside university. They enjoy high social status in society and are used to being excused for not having much time for research and teaching. However, university leadership has recently recognized the necessity of establishing mechanisms to systematically engage senior academic staff in teaching and research in their departments. Official documents (UEM, 2008; MINED, 2011) identify as an important priority the investment of time and effort by professors in research and the improvement of the quality of education offered by the university, as opposed to doing consultancy work in exchange for individual material or financial remuneration. Nonetheless, instruments for the implementation of such aims have not yet been developed.

Junior academic staff carries the main load of teaching and project activities within the university. Most of them were the best students at their departments who were invited to stay as teaching assistants. They are enthusiastic and aspire to an academic career. However, they have poor pedagogical training, a heavy work load and their positions at their departments are too precarious for them to make effective contributions to central curriculum innovations. Social and economic responsibilities for their extended families also make them more eager to search for extra income rather than invest their time and energy in ‘unpaid’ extra activities (research and curriculum innovation work) at the department. In particular, their chance of getting the opportunity for PhD studies is primarily connected to the availability of centrally distributed foreign scholarships rather than academic performance at the department. It becomes more important to seek the benevolence of powerful administrators and senior academics than just to reveal scientific and pedagogical curiosity. Thus, local context appears not provide real stimulation for staff to pursue pedagogical innovations.

Teacher and student agency in the context of the reform

The analysis in this section focuses on how different curriculum actors perceive their agency in the process of introducing SCL. The study revealed highly centralized power relationships and tensions in communication. There was no shared understanding of the meaning of the reform and of the new teaching paradigm. Consequently, the process became an obligation that was not appealing. Neither the teachers nor the students felt that they were owners and active agents of the curriculum reform. It appears that university management drove this reform, rendering it ‘administration-centered’.

Evidence collected in the study indicates that the teachers are aware of the curriculum reform directives to implement SCL. However, their interpretation of this approach and its practical implementation differs significantly. A teacher expressed shared opinion stating "we have not enough knowledge about SCL." A common understanding revealed by the interviewed teachers was that students should have more responsibility for their learning. However, this could result in, as one student mentioned, that some teachers just give assignments and send them to do self-study (referring to the student’s own responsi-
bility for learning) without giving any clear instructions what to do or how to do it. The student's interpretation of this is that the teachers are too busy with other things and do not have time to teach rather than that this strategy is a well thought-out pedagogical method. Students' narratives about their classroom activities suggested that differences existed between classes and teachers. For instance, one person explained "…our performance depends on the discipline… we are more participative in the disciplines where the teacher gives us a description of activities in advance. Then we solve the tasks at home and in class we discuss and present our doubts." It appeared during the observations that younger teachers attempted more often to create dialogical learning environment and had less autocratic position in the classroom.

The results from the students' interviews showed also a lack of knowledge and skills concerning SCL. One of the reasons for this could be a lack of communication at department level in order to introduce students to the innovation. During classroom observations it was evident that few alternative forms of student activities took place. Students simply wrote down what their teachers said or displayed. There was absence of teacher-students dialog and generally low student engagement in the lessons. In this context, it is possible to state that the academic staff at UEM was not very successful in creating a dialogical classroom climate and enhancing student agency in the collective curriculum reform activity.

Structural and psychological tensions in the reform process

The following analysis attempts to highlight influences of UEM's institutional context on organization of teaching and learning. Different structural factors of a practical and administrative nature strongly affected teachers' and students' curriculum activities. They were identified by the interviewees and were also evident during the observations.

All interviewed teachers reported poor conditions for the implementation of SCL– even if they agreed that it can be a good practice. For instance, one teacher said "The number of students is too high in the classroom and we have difficulties with everything! Difficulties in organizing practices, difficulties with equipment, difficulties with space, difficulties with time". Observations revealed also that the physical prerequisites for pedagogic change were very limited. Most notably there was a lack of laboratory equipment, literature, audiovisual equipment and internet facilities. During a laboratory class observation disappointment was revealed by the teachers and the students that lab work could not be completed due to lack of necessary materials. Thus, in theoretical terms, it is possible to state that centrally mandated reform was not supported by necessary meditational system for implementing the innovations.

An interviewed student told “If books are available, they are in English and many students have weak competences in English! We don’t have many books related to the Mozambican context”. Another student explained that the library does not allow books to be taken home, and that “at home [it] is difficult to study due to lack of literature, computers or internet access. Even here on campus, sometimes we have problems accessing the internet!” The electronic library at UEM is still not much used by the students due to technical and logistical problems, making access to e-resources very limited. The above mentioned problems with access to information are aggravated by general poverty in the country. Most of the students have a rather low income level in their families which makes it difficult for them to buy course literature due to its high cost; furthermore, it is frequently not even possible to find the recommended readings in the bookstores.

Records from the students’ interviews showed that their daily schedules were not well organised. Sometimes students spend much time waiting for classes, due to long gaps between lessons. For instance, one student reported that”...we start early and end so late and this is very difficult for us. Our schedule is badly organised. We can have classes from 7.00 to 9.00 am and the next class can take place from 5 pm to 7 pm”. The students also stressed that their main concern was to be present merely to make notes from the lectures.

Inter-personal tensions were revealed in peer-relationships at the department as some teachers have had difficulty in sharing their knowledge with colleagues. For instance, one person said that “...there are courses/subjects with only one teacher and he refuses to collaborate with and train assistants”. Thus, “when this person is absent at the department nobody can substitute for him.”

Psychological tensions were obvious in the student groups. An interviewed student explained “…even in practice, we are not participative, some people are shy, maybe we are afraid to make a mistake and …my colleagues can laugh at me, something like that. When the teacher poses a question I prefer to comment to my neighbor than to talk aloud to the whole class. ” Observations also confirmed that few students
were able to talk freely when asked to give their opinion or to provide an argument in a class. They apparently felt too insecure to publicly expose their opinions.

Teacher-students relations were also not friction free. Classes were observed where teachers made an effort to maintain the authority of “the sage on the stage” using rather autocratic communication with the students. In one case observed, the teacher could not accept that he was not able to answer a student’s question directly. As a result the teacher was rather rude to a questioning student, blaming him for not preparing enough for classes, not searching for information, and not working at home. If the student had done so he would not pose such questions but would have found the answer himself.

Sometimes students slept during the lectures and some also came late to classes. This could be related to their heavy study schedule (start early and finish late) and transportation difficulties. Most of the students come to university by rather expensive private buses (chapas) or long walks if there are no public transport alternatives. This could take more than two hours one way. Hence, students feel exhausted, tired and hungry coming to classes. It is also worth mentioning that the transportation situation for many teachers is not fundamentally different from that of the students.

Some students interviewed reported pedagogical problems affecting their performance at university. For instance, one student was upset about the assessment process “our marks are so weak; we get many zeroes, ones, and twos; these are unbelievable marks for the assignments”. When asked about the reasons for these weak marks, the student said that sometimes the teachers don’t spend all the allocated time in the classroom with the students and don’t include laboratory work either. In general, assessment was perceived as a problematic aspect by all actors involved, who recognized that it had in practice not been affected by the curriculum reform. In aggregated terms, UEM statistics show high dropout and repetition rates; thus only about twenty percent of students manage to pass courses (MINED, 2012).

The study revealed also general tensions between university administration, teachers and students concerning introduction of SCL. The teachers complain that they do not have administrative support and necessary pedagogical knowledge for the introduction of a new teaching approach and blame students for lack of engagement in their studies. Students accuse teachers of unfair assessment and not giving them enough teaching time, and they accuse administrators of providing poor learning conditions and educational facilities. At the same time, administrators blame (in the reform evaluations and other internal documents) their teachers and students equally for low engagement and a failure to implement student-centered learning.

DISCUSSION

Related to the first research question about how UEM teachers and students perceive their curriculum roles, evidence collected in this study shows that they do not see themselves as active curriculum agents. These findings are attuned with Schweisfurth (2011) analysis showing that the implementation of SCL carries a particular risk due to the top-down nature of its imposition and unrealistic expectations regarding the ease of its implementation. In the case of UEM, the lack of enthusiasm and the low pedagogical productivity of teachers could also be connected to relatively low salaries\(^1\) and the absence of other stimuli for teachers (UEM, 2008).

The official curriculum documents at UEM recognize the value of SCL and the responsibility of teachers to organize students’ learning activities in appropriate ways. In the time between classes, students are supposed to search for information on the Internet, study in groups or work in the library. However, the students were ill-prepared for self-directed learning and did not possess the necessary tools to help them in this process. Additionally, contextual factors related to the general poverty of the country such as poor living conditions inhibit an effective study process at home.

Other factors impeding students’ out-of-class activities could be linked to the underdeveloped infrastructure at the university. Campus buildings were constructed and dimensioned during the colonial time for rather few “white” students, children of Portuguese settlers. However, currently all facilities are overcrowded, with an acute shortage of group-work spaces for students. Even toilets are few and some of them are often closed. Thus, it is problematic for students to stay on campus for extended periods and spend time productively when they are not attending classes. This is just another example of how new forms of learning organization can be hindered by meditational system. In this sense, the challenges

\(^1\) Even if average salary of academic staff at UEM is about ten times higher than officially established minimum salary in the country which is 3,386 Meticais, equivalent to 121 USD (Ministério das Finanças, 2012) it is difficult for UEM lecturers to provide for a family living in Maputo.
posed by the Operational Plan of UEM (UEM, 2010) related to the implementation of SCL appear to be difficult to overcome. This shows tensions between the rhetoric of the official documents and the classroom practice as realized.

Related to the essence of the proposed curriculum reforms, cooperation among colleagues at department level is crucial for the success of SCL implementation. Interviews with teachers revealed tensions in professional communication and cooperation among colleagues. Reflecting on similar situations encountered in other contexts, Handal (1999) stressed that such reactions might illustrate uncertainty about teachers' professional roles.

The students interviewed reported organizational and administrative problems in their learning environment, e.g. long gaps in their study schedules and “unfair” assessment procedures. However, difficulties in the students’ performance at the university can also be related to structural differences between secondary school and university concerning levels of content presentation and ways of teaching and learning. Teaching in public Mozambican schools is still very traditional, based on one-way (teacher-to-student) communication with chalk and blackboard as the main mediating tools for learning. At university, students are expected to quickly develop dialogical communication skills, improve computer skills, their ability to use the internet, and acquire self-study skills. The possession of these skills (necessary mediating artifacts of learning) was not clearly revealed by the students in the classes observed in this study.

Considering the cultural context of learning, we agree with McCaslin and Hickey (2001) that teachers should be active mediators, helping students to reconcile the contrasting environments of the traditional and modern worlds of home and university. This includes, for example, “age authority” and behavioral gender patterns. Communication between teachers and students and among students at UEM was not relaxed. Strictly hierarchical relationships between teachers and students were visible in most of the observed classes. Meanwhile, the students reveal a lack of confidence in participating in the classroom discussions as they worry about making mistakes when exposing their ideas. This shows the need for a supportive learning environment where making mistakes is considered as the creation of new opportunities for learning.

Discussing issues of learners’ interaction with others, Vásquez (2006, p. 36) argues that learners not only acquire new forms of knowledge and skills but also acquire the ideas, language, values, and dispositions of that social group, making their experience a “culture learning experience”. Our study has shown that attempts to create a new culture of teaching and learning may encounter internal tensions in the process of its creation. Following Vásquez (2006) reasoning we suggest that such tensions could be related to a complex interactive relationship between the individual and the social environment and they are also imbued with personal and cultural histories grounded in the beliefs and expectations of a particular context. The absolute majority of the students at UEM are the first representatives of their extended families aspiring to obtain a university degree. It appears that many of them feel like pioneers exploring an unknown and rather hostile social environment. Only about one fifth of the students are able to eventually reach the goal of graduation; for the majority this will forever remain just an unrealized dream.

Students’ comments about assessment and grading showed that they felt discouraged and disappointed by their study results. Obviously, the process and results of students’ assessment could lead to an increase or decrease in learning motivation. According to Young (2005) it seems that no matter what innovative and engaging teaching methods are used, assessment will interfere with the effects of any other aspect of the curriculum, causing students to base their decisions regarding approaches to learning on how they will be graded, not on how they are taught. Unfortunately, as anecdotal evidence collected during the study shows, the assessment process at UEM still remains summative and punitive rather than formative and developmental.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings suggest that multiple inner tensions exist in the collective activity system aiming to introduce SCL at UEM. Attempts to develop a new pedagogical culture based on dialogue, confidence and transparency encounter the explicit and implicit resistance of different academic actors who are reluctant to change the rather hierarchical interpersonal relationships and authoritative teaching traditions ‘cemented in the university walls’. It appears difficult to change pedagogical culture without changing broader academic culture at university. However, during classroom observations the researchers could
notice examples of ‘new pedagogical practice’ that were also prized by the students during the interviews. A trend towards a more dialogical learning environment and less hierarchical relationships within the classroom was also observed in lessons conducted by the younger generation of teachers. Therefore, there are some optimistic signs concerning opportunities for the further development of academic culture based on open-mindedness and a free flow of information and ideas between all curriculum actors pertinent to a SCL approach. The results of this study can be generalized to other Higher Education Institutions in Mozambique as their material and human conditions for implementing innovative pedagogical approaches are much poorer than at the UEM.

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