

CONTINUING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS AT HIGHER EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN GUINEA-BISSAU: EXPECTATIONS AND TRAINING EVALUATION

M. J. Rodrigues¹, F. Dias¹, E. N'Luta²

¹Center for Research in Basic Education (CIEB), Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (PORTUGAL)

²Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Scientific Research (GUINÉ-BISSAU)

Abstract

Teacher training, for any level of education, according to educational research carried out at the international level, is one of the pillars for the development of any country's educational system. In this sense, it is necessary to guarantee these professionals quality training, of a multidisciplinary nature in the most diverse dimensions of knowledge, which, in turn, requires qualified staff in Higher Education Schools (ESE) and other training institutions. This work aims to understand the expectations and how teachers evaluate the training course "Research in education – investigative dimension and professional development of teachers" offered to 16 teachers from four ESEs in Guinea-Bissau. This way it will be possible to envisage other training, outline priorities and make recommendations for the training of ESE teachers in Guinea-Bissau. This is a qualitative work, with descriptive and interpretative characteristics. To collect data, we used two questionnaires, one applied at the beginning of the course and another at the end, the answers were subject to content analysis. It should be noted that the participants had high expectations regarding the course, highlighting the relevance of the theme for their practices. On the other hand, they emphasized the need to update and deepen their knowledge. At the time of evaluation, the trainees were unanimous in recognizing the importance of training for their professional development, however, they pointed out some constraints such as the lack of resources, time and the low level of digital skills. They suggested more training so that the topic can be deepened and so that they can appropriate knowledge for their practices, as teachers and researchers. To conclude, the need to adapt the ongoing training offered according to the specificities of work contexts, in this case in Guinea-Bissau, is corroborated, and it responds to the real needs of the different educational agents, taking into account the challenges faced and contributing to the production of praxeological knowledge.

Keywords: Higher Education, Teacher Training, Guinea-Bissau Higher Education Schools, Continuing Training.

1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers represent one of the fundamental pillars for the educational progress of any society. In this context, global policies have increasingly emphasized the relevance of training these professionals. Examples of these measures are the Continental Strategy for Education in Africa (2016–2025) of the African Union [1], in which the first objective focuses on revitalizing the teaching career with a view to ensuring its excellence at different levels, and the action plan of the UNESCO integrated into the United Nations 2030 Agenda [2], which, in target 4.c, establishes the substantial expansion of the availability of highly qualified teachers, highlighting the importance of international cooperation for this purpose. Thus, initial and ongoing teacher training is conceived as interconnected stages of a comprehensive and integrated training process, aligned with the notion of continuous professional development and lifelong learning [3], which presupposes an understanding of practice in a dimension broad, focused on contextualized interaction, in constant renewal and based on ethical and humanizing principles. In this way, it is clear that teacher training must be approached in a praxeological way, in which the ethics of relationships guide humanized action in favor of the well-being of educational agents, a context in which Higher Education Institutions assume a crucial role.

In Guinea-Bissau, higher education falls under law no. 3/2011 of March 29 [4], which, like any society, provides for the design of inclusive and equitable Higher Education, however, the training of qualified professionals it's one of the biggest challenges facing the country. In this field, teacher training is an extremely relevant topic for the country's educational and social development. The training of these professionals is essential to guarantee quality, equitable and inclusive education, aligned with the contemporary challenges and needs of the Guinean population. There are significant challenges to be

faced, including a lack of resources, adequate infrastructure, political and economic instability, and the need for a culturally sensitive approach. Therefore, it is essential to address these issues to ensure that teacher training is effective and meets the needs of the population and the educational system. According to [5], developing countries, such as Guinea-Bissau, often face difficulties in providing quality training due to a lack of investment and resources.

Teacher training must be holistic and integrated, encompassing not only the transmission of academic knowledge but also the development of pedagogical skills, socio-emotional skills and an in-depth understanding of local realities. In this sense, authors such as [6] defend teacher training centered on reflective practice, which promotes a critical and sensitive approach to the context in which teachers work.

Beyond that, it is crucial to consider the cultural and linguistic diversity present in Guinea-Bissau. According to [7] they highlight the importance of an intercultural approach in teacher training, which values and integrates local languages and cultures in the educational process, promoting the inclusion and cultural identity of students.

To overcome these challenges and improve teacher training in Guinea-Bissau, significant investments are needed in educational infrastructure, quality training programs, research support and international partnerships that can provide additional expertise and resources. It is essential that educational policies are oriented to promote more effective teacher training, addressing the specific needs of the country and its population, in accordance with the recommendations of international organizations such as UNESCO and the African Union [1] [2].

Therefore, this study focuses on the expectations and evaluations that Guinean teachers, from Higher Education Schools, made regarding a training course in “Research in education – investigative dimension and professional development of teachers”, since we consider that in education, the investigative dimension, sustained in an environment of cooperation and collaboration, allows the construction of a climate of mutual learning and sharing of the intentionality of pedagogical action, attributing meanings and interpretations to professional experiences, contributing to reflection and change in practices. This course lasted 30 hours, 20 hours of which were in-person and 10 hours of independent work. It intended to bring to the debate some questions within the scope of research in the field of educational sciences and respond to the following objectives: (i) understand the role of research for professional development; (ii) identify research paradigms and methods; (iii) build research projects, using different data collection instruments; and (iv) present, analyze and discuss research proposals in an educational context. Regarding the contents, the main ones were: 1- the importance of an investigative attitude in the reflection and evaluation of educational practices; 2- investigation into educational practice; and 3- investigative projects in education.

The contents were developed in in-person training sessions on joint work and autonomous work. In the face-to-face sessions, an approach based on knowledge of a theoretical and practical nature was promoted, using the presentation of content that allows trainees to develop investigative skills. Some research projects in education were also analyzed from a reflective perspective, systematically debating the issues under analysis and the methodological steps followed. In the autonomous work sessions, the trainees developed research projects, possible to develop in their intervention contexts. Subsequently, other in-person training sessions were held to discuss, analyze and reflect on the work developed, proposing, whenever necessary, suggestions for improvement. Finally, the evaluation of the course was carried out considering the perception of all participants.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study, with the aim of understanding and interpreting complex and contextual phenomena through the analysis of narratives, observations and human interactions. This methodology seeks to explore participants' meanings, perceptions and interpretations, offering an in-depth understanding of the phenomena studied. A descriptive and interpretative qualitative study, such as this one, is inspired by the fundamental principles of phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory and content analysis. Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of the experiences lived by participants [8]. Ethnography seeks cultural and social understanding through immersion in the studied environment [9]. Grounded theory provides an emerging analytical framework based on the data itself [10] and content analysis allows us to identify patterns and meanings in textual data. By adopting a qualitative descriptive and interpretative approach, it is possible to explore phenomena in a deep and contextualized way. Data interpretation leads to valuable insights into participants' perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, providing a basis for formulating practical and theoretical recommendations.

To collect data, we used two questionnaires, one administered at the beginning of the course and the other at the end. The questionnaire is widely recognized as one of the most used data collection instruments, it is the organization of a set of structured and standardized questions, presented to study participants to obtain information on a variety of topics, such as opinions, attitudes, behaviors, and demographic characteristics, among others.

Developing a questionnaire is crucial to ensuring data quality, which involves formulating clear, concise, objective and impartial questions, as well as a logical sequence of questions to maintain the interest and cooperation of participants [11]. Furthermore, ethical issues must always be respected, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent from participants.

In this study, two questionnaires were created, one to find out the participants' expectations about the course, applied in the first training session and another to evaluate the course, applied in the last training session. The data collected was analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics and content analysis, which allowed us to carry out a deeper analysis and seek inferences and interpretative explanations of the results. Below we present some of the results that seemed most relevant to us within the scope of this study.

3 RESULTS

For a better reading and understanding of the results, we organized them into three sub-points: (i) characterization of the group of participants; (ii) expectations regarding the training program; and (iii) evaluation of the training program. Each of these subpoints is presented below.

3.1 Characterization of the group of participants

Sixteen teachers from four Higher Education Schools in Guinea-Bissau (training units) collaborated in the study, all male and aged between 31 and 56. Regarding the training unit to which they belong, the data is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of trainees per training unit.

<i>Training Units</i>	<i>Number of teachers</i>
17 de Fevereiro - Bissau	7
Bolama	3
Buba	3
Cacheu	3

The collaborating teachers are part of the professional staff of the different training units, with the largest number corresponding to 17 de Fevereiro, in Bissau, the capital of Guinea-Bissau, as it is the unit with the largest number of professionals, the remaining are from the following Training Units: three from the ESE Amílcar Cabral – Bolama; three from the ESE Serifo Fall Camará – Buba; three from the ESE Domingos Mendonça – Cacheu.

Of the participating professionals, ten have a bachelor's degree and six have a bachelor's degree, all of whom reported that they had no training in research throughout their training and professional careers. Regarding years of service, the data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of trainees per training unit.

<i>Years of service</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>
Less than 5	6
5 to 10 years	5
11 to 15 years	2
+ 25 years	2
NA	1

By reading the table we found that six teachers have less than 5 years of professional experience and five have between 5 and 10 years, which shows us that the Higher Education Schools in Guinea-Bissau have a relatively young teaching staff in terms of regard to professional activity.

3.2 Expectations regarding the training course

When asked what expectations they had regarding the training course, all teachers indicated that they had high expectations and justified their positions according to the arguments presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' expectations about the training program.

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>No. of responses</i>
Deepen knowledge	9
Help with research	5
Improve professional activity	3
Solving problems in the education system	1

Nine of the teachers say that they hope that the training course will allow them to deepen their knowledge and five that it will help them carry out research. Three indicate that they hope to improve their professional practice and only one hopes that the training will contribute to solving problems in the education system.

We highlight some episodes that show us the position of teachers on whether they consider research relevant to their teaching activity and professional development:

Yes, because an education professional always has to have an investigative component in order to help or deepen their knowledge (teacher 1)

Yes, because a teacher is a researcher par excellence, so research is fundamental to teaching (teacher 4)

Yes, since normally any teacher must have effective knowledge about the research aspect in order to improve their profession (teacher 8)

I consider research to be very relevant to my teaching activity and my professional development, because only by researching can I respond to my challenges and improve my teaching role (teacher 9)

Participants are unanimous in considering the importance of research for their professional activity, which justifies the expectations they had regarding the training course.

Regarding the aspects of research in education in which they experience the most difficulties, they listed those presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Teachers' expectations about the training program.

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>N. of responses</i>
Structuring the investigation (project design and guidance)	11
Lack of materials (resources and bibliography)	11
Financial resources	3
Others (opportunity, mastery of ICT, obtaining data, etc.)	3

Eleven of the teachers mention that they find it more difficult to structure a research project, which shows us that this is an area in which greater investment is needed, both in initial training and in the ongoing training of teachers. They also mentioned the need for more documentary resources, highlighting the need to create structures that improve the possibilities for professionals to carry out research and, consequently, improve their practices and the quality of teaching in the context of teacher training.

Although fewer in number (three responses), teachers indicated that they needed financial resources and needed to develop some skills, particularly in the field of digital technologies. In this regard, we can highlight the following testimonies:

“I don’t know how it presents itself, whether it’s reading or what I should do” (teacher 8);

“With 30 years of teaching, I had never done any work like this” (teacher 11).

Thus, several situations inspired teachers to begin a reflective process on research in education.

3.3 Evaluation of the training course

Regarding the evaluation of the course, we asked trainees to position themselves, on a scale of 1 to 5, on the following items: (i) relevance and interest of the content covered; (ii) quality of the information provided; (iii) relevance of the documentation used; (iv) methodologies used; (v) quality of the teacher’s work; (vi) contribution of the action to their personal and professional training and development; and (vii) global appreciation of the action, all responses fell at levels 4 and 5, with a predominance of 5, which demonstrates a very high global appreciation of the course.

Regarding the aspects they would like to maintain and change, respectively, the answers are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Aspects that teachers maintained and changed during the training course.

<i>Things to keep</i>	<i>N. of responses</i>	<i>Things to change</i>	<i>N. of responses</i>
Contents covered	6	Participation of more teachers	4
Maintain session continuity	5	More conditions	3
Methodology used	4	More Documentary Resources	3

Reading the table allows us to verify that teachers consider the contents covered in the course to be comprehensive, relevant and highly satisfactory, as it was the item most indicated as an aspect to maintain. They also highlight the need for continuity of sessions. This suggests that they see value and benefits in continuing the course, indicating that they want this type of initiative to persist in the future. Four teachers mentioned that the methodology used should be maintained, which suggests that it was effective.

As aspects to change, they indicate the participation of more teachers, showing that they consider it important and want to increase the participation of more colleagues in the course. On the other hand, they feel there is a need to improve their working conditions and they want more available resources to work.

Regarding their self-assessment, they consider the work they developed as very positive, they classified their participation as very important; good; and great; some of them expressed a desire to continue. Regarding the work sessions, they reinforce the need for continuation and, overall, classify it as excellent.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The training course was carefully designed taking into account the availability, expectations and needs of the trainees. This aspect is a fundamental element in ensuring that training is effective and fully benefits participants. The expectations of trainees were taken into account during the development of the course. The specific needs of the trainees were also identified and integrated into the course design. Knowledge gaps were carefully analyzed to ensure that the content was comprehensively addressed and met these needs. Therefore, the course was designed to provide a relevant and meaningful educational experience. Trainees were involved in a program that respects their realities and is aligned with their expectations, resulting in an effective and motivating learning environment, ensuring the practical applicability of the knowledge acquired and promoting a positive impact on the participants' professional development.

Based on the participants' self-evaluation, it is clear that the work developed was received highly positively. The majority classified their participation in the course as being of great importance, good or even excellent. This feedback reflects the significant impact the course had and the recognition of its relevance. The desire expressed by some teachers to continue indicates not only their satisfaction but also a desire to continue contributing and actively participating. This highlights the effectiveness of the course in inspiring and maintaining faculty engagement, providing a solid foundation for future related activities and initiatives.

Regarding the work sessions, teachers emphasized the need to keep them in the future. This finding is a recognition of the usefulness and relevance of these sessions as spaces for learning and collaboration. Furthermore, the overall classification of the sessions as excellent demonstrates the relevance of the content and dynamics presented during the work period.

The conclusions drawn indicate not only the success of the approach and execution but also point to the importance of considering the continuity and expansion of training, taking advantage of the momentum and enthusiasm generated. However, there is a need for these trainings to be more continuous in time and in a more systematized way so that they can respond to the needs of teachers at the Higher Education Schools in Guinea-Bissau.

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