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ED-TED
equity & diversity teacher education

A narrative of provision for equity and diversity in Portuguese teacher education

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Co-funded by the European Union

[ED-TED project]

This narrative serves as the first step in the Erasmus+ funded project, 'Equity and Diversity in Teacher Educators' Professional Development' (ED-TED), backed by the European Union. The primary objective of ED-TED is to establish a strong European network for higher education teacher educators, with a focus on nurturing their professional development. The overarching aim is to provide teacher educators with the necessary competences to effectively tackle equity and diversity in their teaching and throughout teacher education programmes. Regular updates and supplementary details regarding the project can be found here.

The initial phase of ED-TED focuses on evaluating the current status of equity and diversity provisions in teacher education within seven participating countries: Germany, Finland, Flanders, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal. To obtain a comprehensive perspective, the project team used a structured methodology (elaborated further below) to conduct a thorough examination and evaluation of quality at three distinct levels: the macro level (national policies), the meso level (teacher education programmes and institutions), and the micro level (individual practices). This mapping serves a dual purpose: establishing an online repository of equity and diversity resources tailored specifically for teacher education and laying the groundwork for policy recommendations designed to enhance the competencies of teacher educators at local, national, and European levels.

The current narrative offers an in-depth look at and puts into context the results of this mapping endeavor, with a specific emphasis on teacher education in Portugal.

[Teacher education in Portugal]

The Portuguese system of initial teacher education (ITE) has experienced significant changes lately, mainly due to the Bologna Process. Before 2007, teacher education in Portugal usually followed an integrated approach, allowing future teachers to complete a four-to-five-year degree that combined subject knowledge with pedagogical training and included one-year school-based practicum. However, with the publication of Decree-Law No. 43/2007, a consecutive model was implemented. This model requires prospective teachers to first complete a three-year undergraduate degree in their chosen subject (Bachelor's), followed by a two-year master's programme in teaching. This two-stage structure is now applied across all educational levels, from pre-school to secondary school, with future pre-school and primary teachers completing a degree in Basic Education before their master's in teaching.

The change from an integrated to a consecutive model aimed to bring Portuguese teacher education in line with wider European standards. This means that academic and professional preparation are now separated, with the undergraduate (*licenciatura*) degree focusing on subject-specific knowledge, while the master's degree focuses on pedagogical training, specific teaching methods, and practicum. The Decree-Law No. 79/2014, currently in place, stipulates five core areas in ITE curriculum: subject knowledge, educational foundations, specific teaching methods, cultural and ethical education, and professional practice. However, this reorganisation has led to both positive and negative aspects. While the new requirements have enhanced qualifications with a master's degree now being necessary to become a teacher, it has also shifted the focus of training, decreasing the time spent in schools and placing more emphasis on university education. Some view this as causing a disconnect in the curriculum, creating a gap between theoretical learning and practical experience. Nonetheless, it has also encouraged new teaching methods, particularly a more inquiry-based approach during practicum, urging student teachers to deeply engage with a variety of knowledge sources, from contextual to research-based, while developing their teaching skills. Although this change has aligned Portuguese teacher education with European standards, it has also brought about new challenges. The

limited time for teaching practice, heavy workload during the practicum, and the need for more sophisticated mentoring emphasise the continuous need for improvement.

[Research project methodology]

All project countries used the same technique for the mapping process, which combined macro and meso-level examination of important documents with focus group interviews with programme directors and pre-service teachers to analyse practices. The sample used for the Portuguese case narrative is described in depth in this section. To develop a comprehensive understanding of equity and diversity within initial teacher education (ITE) in Portugal, a three-tiered analysis was undertaken, covering the macro, meso, and micro levels.

At the macro level, 11 key legislative documents published between 2007 and 2024 were scrutinised, forming the foundational policy framework for equity, diversity, and inclusion in teacher education across Portugal. This analysis covered both general educational policies and specific regulations aimed directly at teacher education. The documents include national decrees, laws, and resolutions that address themes such as inclusive education frameworks, curricular adaptations, professional qualifications for teaching, and evaluation processes. Some of these documents provide overarching guidelines for inclusion and diversity across all educational sectors, while others are focused specifically on teacher education, setting standards for professional competencies. Focusing exclusively on primary policy sources, this analysis captured an unmediated view of national directives that show how Portugal integrates the core concepts of this project into the teacher education landscape.

Moving to the meso level, an exhaustive examination of all teacher education programmes in Portuguese higher education institutions (HEIs) was conducted, containing 35 institutions, both universities and polytechnics, public and private, and 163 teacher education programmes. This required identifying and analysing the specific courses and curricular offerings within these programmes that address inclusion, diversity, and equity, in order to comprehend how these themes are integrated into teacher education curricula nationwide. This analysis was meant to allow the understanding of the extent to which Portuguese ITE programmes incorporate equity and diversity topics into their educational frameworks.

The micro level analysis was carried out through two focus groups (FG), which were conducted online during July 2024, involving a total of 14 participants, 8 programme leaders and 6 pre-service teachers doing their practicum. These FG were designed to capture perspectives on equity, inclusion, and diversity within the context of teacher education, and to gather insights into the pedagogical practices of teacher educators. The focus groups were selected by convenience. This approach was chosen to facilitate access to participants and ensure logistical feasibility, enabling an in-depth exploration of local practices. A thematic content analysis of the focus group discussions was conducted to identify patterns in the participants' experiences and perceptions. This level of analysis facilitated an in-depth exploration of practical experiences and teaching practices, offering a grounded view of how equity, inclusion, and diversity are approached within the day-to-day realities of Portuguese teacher education.

This three-tiered approach yielded a holistic understanding of the equity and diversity landscape within Portuguese ITE, containing policy, institutional provision, and classroom practices.

Macro level analysis

The analysis of educational policy documents in Portugal, over the years, reveals a growing emphasis on the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. These concepts, although integrated unequally, reveal an intention to develop an educational system that meets the needs of all students, valuing their differences and ensuring fair and accessible opportunities.

Considering the last ten years, policy documents started to focus predominantly on the creation and updating of the legal framework for the professional qualifications of teachers with Decree-Law No. 43/2007 and Decree-Law No. 79/2014, which aimed to ensure the quality of the teaching staff but did not include explicit references to principles of equity or inclusion. This initial phase was dedicated to improving the overall teaching standards, laying the groundwork for a future aligned with the demands of a more inclusive educational system.

In 2016, Dispatch No. 6173/2016 represents an important step by creating the Working Group for Citizenship Education, which aimed to integrate topics such as citizenship, human rights, and gender equality into the curriculum. This was one of the first explicit movements towards inclusion, addressing the need to integrate people with disabilities and promote equality. Although these documents already mentioned inclusion, they did not yet fully integrate the concepts of equity and diversity. It was only in 2017, with Dispatch No. 6478/2017, approving the Students' Profile upon Completion of Mandatory Education (12 years), that a framework for a more inclusive educational system was established, promoting equity and respecting diversity.

The year 2018 represents a fundamental milestone, with the introduction of Decree-Law No. 54/2018 and Decree-Law No. 55/2018. These diplomas established a comprehensive framework for inclusive education and the curriculum of basic and secondary education, marking the emergence of strong references to the concepts of inclusion, equity, and diversity, signalling a shift towards a more holistic educational approach.

Between 2019 and 2023, several laws and decrees further reinforced the commitment to these principles. Law No. 116/2019 introduced curricular adaptations to better meet the needs of students, extensively highlighting inclusion. Decree-Law No. 62/2023 continued to adjust the assessment rules to support inclusive education, ensuring that all students could reach their full learning potential.However, some recent documents, such as Decree-Law No. 112/2023 and Decree-Law No. 23/2024, while addressing challenges in teacher recruitment and professional development, do not explicitly incorporate the principles of equity, diversity, or inclusion. This last law does include inclusive education as a topic for the foundational courses but at the same time it also implies a reduction of the credits for the general educational component. Additionally, although Resolution No. 90/2023 of the Assembly of the Republic recommends strengthening teacher education for special education and emphasises the need for differentiated practices and curricular flexibility to better address diversity, initial teacher education remains reliant on recommendations rather than mandatory guidelines, limiting its practical impact.

This chronological evolution alone does not fully capture the depth of the concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion within these policies. To explore this further, an analysis was conducted to examine both the context and frequency of these concepts across the policy documents. Regarding the concept of equity, although it is a concept that appears less frequently in policy document frameworks (only 16 mentions), specifically when compared to the concepts of inclusion and diversity, it is recognised as an important pillar to ensure fair access to educational resources and opportunities for all students. In documents such as Dispatch No. 6478/2017, equity is mentioned in the context of access to school and the democratic values of citizenship and human rights. In Decree-Law No. 54/2018 and Law No. 116/2019, equity is mentioned in relation to the need for support structures and resources that allow all students to realise their potential, so that no one is disadvantaged because of their social context or their

abilities. It is assumed, in fact, the responsibility to remove obstacles and ensure the necessary support for the educational success of each student.
The concept of diversity stands in an intermediate position (26 mentions) in various educational policy documents, especially in Decree-Law No. 55/2018, which emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing the different cultural and linguistic contexts of students. This document refers to the need to promote educational practices that reflect and adjust to the diversity of students, seeking to eliminate obstacles and stereotypes. The focus is on creating a flexible, innovative, and personalised educational environment that meets the diverse needs of students, allowing each of them to feel represented and welcomed in the school environment.
Inclusion is the concept that most strongly permeates educational policy documents (144 mentions), with Decree-Law No. 54/2018 and Law No. 116/2019 standing out. These documents are related to the creation of an inclusive educational environment that meets the needs of all students, regardless of their personal and social situation. For example, Decree-Law No. 54/2018 describes a holistic approach to inclusive education, which implies the existence of flexible curricula, the active participation of special education teachers, and the reconfiguration of support units into dynamic learning support centres. This diploma recognises the crucial role of each school in addressing the diversity of its students and in adopting inclusive practices that ensure the full participation of all.
Portugal has, therefore, made significant efforts to integrate inclusion, equity, and diversity into educational policies, but the consolidation of these principles in teacher education and educational practice still seems to require greater consistency and support. The absence of explicit references to these concepts in some recent documents suggests exactly such a view. International recommendations, including those from the OECD report (2022) highlight the importance of more effective management of resources allocated to inclusive education and the need to expand teacher education to include a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusive practices. For this, it would be essential to establish concrete standards for the initial and continuous education of teachers, incorporating competencies for an inclusive and responsive pedagogy to diversity. Therefore, the introduction of more robust policies and the allocation of resources for the continuous professional development of teachers and teacher educators in these areas could contribute to the realisation of a more just educational system adapted to the diversity of today's society.

Meso-level analysis

Higher education institutions offering teacher education in Portugal have made some efforts to integrate the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion into their curricula. However, this integration does not appear to be consistent or extensive.The emphasis given to each of the concepts, at the programmatic and institutional levels, seems to reflect what has already been observed at the macro level.
In fact, inclusion stands as the most frequently mentioned concept within teacher education curricula, appearing in 66 courses across 163 study programmes. Despite this prominence, such coverage seems to offer only a modest representation of the concept, suggesting that inclusion may not yet be fully integrated or emphasised to the extent necessary for a comprehensive understanding among future teachers. Inclusion emerges particularly in subjects that address broad themes such as Inclusive Education Practices, Curriculum and Inclusive Education, and Inclusive Physical Education, and it is presented as an element that offers future teachers a basic understanding of inclusive principles.
Diversity is addressed even less frequently, appearing in only 36 courses, mainly optional or peripheral. When included, diversity generally focuses on discussions about multiculturalism, linguistic plurality, and intercultural education, fostering awareness of cultural and linguistic differences among students, but it does not seem to fully prepare teachers for the practical management of diverse classes. Although discussions about school cultures and intercultural education promote the appreciation of the different

contexts of students, the absence of a systematic presence of diversity as a central concept may mean that future teachers are not receiving the necessary tools to promote inclusive and representative environments in classrooms.

Equity is the least emphasised concept of the three, appearing only in 22 courses. The concept is primarily addressed in the context of citizenship, ethics, and human rights education, providing a moral foundation for daily teaching. The scarcity of courses focusing on equity risks leaving the educational environment as merely aspirational, where justice is acknowledged in theory but not consistently realised in practice – particularly for students requiring additional support to succeed. This gap suggests that, without a stronger emphasis on equity, teacher education may fall short in preparing educators to implement fair and supportive practices for all students.

The analysis revealed a distinct trend differentiating universities from polytechnics. On the one hand, universities tend to prioritise the construction of a theoretical foundation in inclusive practices, integrating these ideas with broader discussions on civic engagement, critical thinking, and social responsibility. This approach encourages a reflective understanding of inclusion as a social objective, but the lesser presence of practical strategies may limit the concrete application of these concepts. Consequently, future teachers may be aware of the importance of inclusion while being less prepared to implement it effectively in the classroom. On the other hand, polytechnics appear to prioritise practical application, with a strong focus on early intervention and direct support for students with special educational needs (SEN). While this practical emphasis fosters immediate readiness to support inclusion in the classroom, in some cases it may lack the broader, reflective framework that connects these strategies to wider social and ethical considerations.

At the levels of preschool education and the first cycle of basic education, teacher education offered both in universities and polytechnics prioritise early intervention and SEN, with mandatory subjects such as Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Education. Courses that specifically address multiculturalism and linguistic diversity are limited and generally offered as elective subjects, which means that many future teachers may complete their education without adequate exposure to these critical areas.

At the 2nd and 3rd cycles of basic education, teacher education in universities and in polytechnics emphasises differentiation techniques and strategies for inclusive education, but the practical implementation of equity and diversity remains limited. Although universities include courses such as Educational Psychology and Differentiated Instruction as fundamental requirements, these focus on general differentiation without directly addressing how to support students from varied cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Polytechnics at this level continue to prioritise practical strategies, but the lack of a more systematic integration of diversity beyond SEN limits educators' preparation for the broader realities of diverse classrooms.

At the secondary education level, teacher education in universities introduces topics such as critical reflection and civic engagement, addressing SEN through subjects like Ethics in Education. Polytechnics, on the other hand, emphasise practical strategies for SEN and social impacts, offering tools to manage diverse learning needs. Themes such as Multiculturalism and Linguistic Diversity may be present, but they emerge as complements.

This meso-level analysis reveals a discrepancy between the commitment to inclusion, diversity, and equity and the depth of their actual integration into teacher education curricula. Although inclusion appears more frequently, its practical application remains inconsistent, and diversity and equity are generally treated as secondary considerations. This incomplete integration suggests that, although there is an awareness of these concepts, they have not yet been fully incorporated as essential competencies in teacher education. To cultivate a truly inclusive and equitable educational system, teacher education programmes may need to move beyond theoretical mentions, developing structured and practical approaches that empower future educators to effectively respond to the diverse needs of all students.

Micro-level analysis

The analysis of focus groups conducted with pre-service teachers and course directors/teacher educators in the context of teacher education in Portugal revealed how the concepts of equity, inclusion, and diversity are approached in both initial and continuous teacher education programmes. The study involved two main focus groups: the first centred on the practical experiences of pre-service teachers during their internships, seeking to understand their perceptions of the training received and the challenges faced when implementing inclusive principles. The second group focused on institutional and curricular approaches to equity and diversity, examining their presence within curricula and discussing both pedagogical practices and the specific training and professional development opportunities of course directors.

Regarding equity, pre-service teachers understand it as promoting equal opportunities, adapting resources, and tailoring pedagogical strategies to meet individual students' needs. This understanding translates into the application of inclusive strategies, especially during practicum, with the aim of accommodating the specific requirements of their students. Course directors share a similar definition, in which equity implies equal opportunities, personalised diagnoses and interventions, adapted resources, and pedagogical differentiation. However, course directors/teacher educators think that equity is addressed implicitly, relying heavily on the supervisor/course director's profile, and lacks structured and explicit intentionality within the curriculum.

In terms of diversity, pre-service teachers perceive it as related to variety and respect for cultural, social, and individual differences, stressing the importance of inclusive communication and critical reflection, particularly as they deal with cultural and social diversity in classrooms, including the integration of students from different backgrounds. Course directors have a similar perception of diversity, associating it with variety, cultural sensitivity, and inclusion. Nonetheless, although diversity is acknowledged as essential, there is an observed gap in specific training to enable course directors to address diversity more comprehensively.

When it comes to pedagogical practices, pre-service teachers use strategies such as heterogeneous group work, cooperative activities, and adapting teaching methods to include students with diverse needs. However, quickly adapting these practices to the varied realities encountered in schools has proven to be challenging. Teacher educators/course directors perceived pedagogical practices such as storytelling and student-centred active methodologies as effective tools for promoting equity and diversity. Yet, they note the need for additional time and specific training to consistently implement and develop these inclusive practices across curricula.

Regarding their education, pre-service teachers appreciate the inspirational role of some educators who model equity and diversity in exemplary ways, though they recognise the need for more specific practical and theoretical training. Course directors see opportunities for development through internal and external initiatives, such as those promoted by the Council of Europe and EuroClio, as well as through volunteer programmes and international projects. However, both groups emphasise the need for stronger institutional support and continuous professional development programmes that address equity and diversity more deeply.

Regarding institutional evaluation, pre-service teachers value the curricular units that address equity and diversity but feel there is a need for greater integration of these topics throughout their education. Teacher educators/course directors evaluate the inclusion of these themes within their courses as inadequately and insufficiently addressed. There appears to be a tendency towards a reactive approach to contextual needs rather than a clearly defined programmatic intent.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis materialise in several key recommendations. Concerning equity, there is a need for explicit and intentional inclusion within curricula, making equity a central objective rather than an implicit consideration. For inclusion, systematic and continuous integration of

inclusive practices within teaching methodologies is recommended, as well as specific training to address special educational needs and cultural diversity in the classroom. Regarding diversity, there should be increased awareness and preparation for future teachers to respond to the cultural, social, and individual differences present in schools, encouraging critical reflection and the integration of diversity into pedagogical practices.

To enhance the training of future teachers, the creation of professional development programmes focused on equity and diversity would be beneficial. Also, greater institutional support for continuous training initiatives would allow for a more in-depth and comprehensive approach. A strong and explicit institutional commitment to equity and diversity in teacher education is essential to promote a culture of collaboration and sharing of best practices among educators to foster a more integrated and effective approach.

This preliminary analysis of the focus groups reveals, therefore, an urgent need for a more systematic and intentional approach in both initial and continuous teacher training, with a clear and explicit emphasis on equity, inclusion, and diversity. Achieving this objective requires a robust institutional commitment, supported by innovative and inclusive pedagogical practices, to better prepare future teachers to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse society effectively.

Challenges ahead

As the mapping process unfolded, the scale of the challenges confronting the ED-TED project became increasingly evident. These obstacles are not merely superficial but are deeply embedded at every level of Portugal's teacher education system – from overarching national policies to the specifics of institutional curricula, extending down to the daily realities within classrooms. Amidst this complexity lies a significant opportunity to reshape the educational framework into one that genuinely embodies equity, inclusion, and diversity.

The analysis revealed several key challenges that lie ahead. A significant challenge lies in the insufficiency of continuous professional development opportunities for teacher educators. Both teacher educators/course directors and pre-service teachers highlight the pressing need for ongoing training and resources, especially as classrooms become increasingly diverse due to demographic shifts across Europe. Without adequate professional development, educators may struggle to meet the evolving social, cultural, and educational needs of their students. Establishing a European network is therefore instrumental in this regard. By facilitating the sharing of best practices, standardising professional development requirements, and providing accessible resources, it becomes possible to support educators in adopting inclusive and equitable practices more effectively.

Cultural and organisational inertia within institutions presents another challenge. The implementation of reforms is often hindered by longstanding practices and a lack of formalised support. Both pre-service teachers and Teacher educators/programme directors report that efforts towards equity, diversity, and inclusion are frequently left to individual initiative. While personal commitment is worthy, this approach can lead to inconsistencies and insufficient support for inclusive practices. To enact meaningful change, it may be necessary to encourage institutional policies that prioritise equity and diversity as essential values. Embedding these principles into the core ethos of educational institutions could foster an environment where best practices are not merely encouraged but are integral to the institution's identity, promoting a more cohesive and sustainable approach to inclusive education.

Furthermore, logistical and resource limitations within teacher education institutions cannot be overlooked. Teacher educators/programme directors point out that time constraints and a lack of specialised resources hinder the effective incorporation of equity and diversity training. Without sufficient support and access to relevant professional development programmes, educators may find it

challenging to implement the inclusive strategies recommended in policy. Addressing these practical concerns is crucial for any transformative effort to gain traction.

Eventually, these challenges suggest that a paradigm shift is necessary in how teacher education addresses equity, diversity, and inclusion. Simply adding modules or workshops on these topics may be insufficient. Embedding equity and diversity into the very fabric of teacher education – making these values central to the professional identity of educators rather than peripheral considerations – is essential. In practical terms, this could mean integrating inclusive teaching competencies as core requirements in teacher certification processes. In this scenario, it would be more likely that all future educators graduate not just with an awareness of these principles but with the concrete tools needed to create diverse learning environments.

Confronting these challenges presents a daunting task but also an invaluable opportunity. This transformation holds the promise of not only improving education in Portugal but also setting a precedent for embracing equity, inclusion, and diversity throughout Europe. The path forward may be complex and demanding, but the potential rewards – a more just and inclusive educational system – are undeniably worth the effort.

Recommendations

- To develop a more systematic and intentional approach in both initial and continuous teacher education, with a clear and explicit emphasis on equity, inclusion, and diversity.
- To develop an explicit and intentional inclusion of equity within initial teacher education curricula, making it a central objective rather than an implicit consideration;
- To reinforce systematic and continuous integration of inclusive practices within teaching methodologies in teacher education as well as specific training to address special educational needs and cultural diversity in the classroom;
- To promote an increased awareness and preparation for future teachers to respond to the cultural, social, and individual differences in schools, encouraging critical reflection and the integration of diversity into pedagogical practices;
- To design and monitor professional development programmes for teacher educators focusing on equity and diversity in teacher education;
- To promote greater institutional support for continuous training initiatives that would allow for a more in-depth and comprehensive approach to issues of equity and diversity in teacher education;
- To develop a strong and explicit institutional commitment to equity and diversity supported by innovative and inclusive pedagogical practices to better prepare future teachers to meet the challenges of an increasingly diverse society effectively;
- To promote a culture of collaboration and sharing of best practices among educators to foster a more integrated and effective approach;
- To establish a European network to support educators in adopting inclusive and equitable practices more effectively through facilitating the sharing of best practices, standardising professional development requirements, and providing accessible resources;

- To encourage national and institutional policies that prioritise equity and diversity as essential values, embedding these principles into the core ethos of educational institutions where best practices are not merely encouraged but are integral to the institution's identity, promoting a more cohesive and sustainable approach to inclusive education.

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