An Analysis of the Use of English Language for Career Development in African Higher Education:

The Case of Two Mozambican Flagship Universities

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Abstract

Although the internationalization of higher education through the standardization of English language is considered progressive, unfortunately, for Lusophone universities it remains a deterrent for scholars' career progression. The evidence of lived experiences in Mozambican universities suggests that the relationship between English language competence and professional status remains inconclusive. The study explores the impact of English language for career development in two Portuguese language-speaking universities, namely Eduardo Mondlane and Catholic universities in Mozambique. Case study design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews with scholars, documents reviews and content analysis approach will be employed. Career construction theory and practice (Savickas, 2013), is considered ideal based on its fundamental premise of individual and social constructivism of knowledge through which individuals construct themselves. The study contributes to a comparative higher education career research by guiding the formulation of language policy for career development in Lusophone countries.

Keywords: language policy, internationalization, career development, English language, Mozambique, higher education

Introduction

Although internationalization of higher education (HE) is considered revolutionary in academia, it remains a key challenge for African universities with Portuguese language orientation (Lemberg, 2018;

Robson, 2019). The convenience of embracing English language for research and publication is understandable, it must also be noted that it presents a burden for most Lusophone (countries colonized by Portugal) scholars, particularly in career progression as they are subtly compelled to restructure their career development process (Altbach, 2007; Dearden, 2014; Gu & Kirkpatrick, 2014; Irving, 2010).

This challenge presents an opportunity for researchers to explore the relationship between English language and career development in Lusophone countries like Mozambique. The international community at large is also keen to address pertinent questions about this relationship evidenced by heated debates in Worldwide HE cycles (Kramsch, 2014; Lopes, 1998; Milligan & Tikly, 2016; Patton & MacMahon, 2014).

This study, thus explores the role English language plays in the career development of two Portuguese-speaking research universities in Mozambique, particularly looking at how English language influences research and publications. It is critical to conduct an empirical research to gauge the influence of English language on career progress.

Statement of the Problem

Research from multiple perspectives offer extensive knowledge on the importance of English language (Casale & Posel, 2011; Grant & Li, 2019). Although English language has contributed immensely to various spheres including: economic (enables efficient trade relations), politics (integration of Mozambique to SADC) and social context (NGOs establishment) (Coleman, 2014; Plonski et al., 2013). We still do not know much about the impact of English language on career development for academic researchers, especially in situations where multiple languages are used (Leibowitz, 2015; Treffers-Daller, 2019). We are also not privy to the lived experiences of English language users in Mozambican research universities compared to European non-English-speaking research universities.

The popular assumption has been viewing the adoption of English in a universal fashion with little regard for country specific context. Mozambique, for instance, has 20 active first languages, the formal language is Portuguese and English is a third language (Liphola, 2016; Plonski et al., 2013). Based on these perspectives in the literature on dual language usage, one can conclude that English has the power to build or block faculty members' career in Mozambique.

Centering on English language and career development, this study addresses this gap by exploring two bodies of literature: instrumentalist approach to English Language learning (Liu, 2015) and intercultural approach to English Language in career opportunities (Romaine, 2017).

Main research question:

What is the relationship between English language and career development at Eduardo Mondlane University and Catholic University of Mozambique?

Specific questions:

- What motivates academics' aspirations and desire to use English in their career advancement?
- How are universities institutionalizing the use of English language in academic profession?
- What are the perspectives of academics on the demands to use English in their professional work?

Theoretical Framework

The study focuses on career construction theory and practice by Savickas (2013), developed to help people identify appropriate careers. The theory explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals construct and build their careers through personal and social constructivism (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Rudolph et al., 2017).

This theory highlights the role of two structures—adaptability and identity—in coping with vocational development tasks and occupational transitions (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Different authors have expressed their views regarding these underpinning key structures. Hirschi et al. (2015) employed the theory to analyze how career adaptability is feasible from both a conceptual and empirical

standpoint. LaPointe (2010) adapted the identity structure with an emphasis on discursive approach to career identity as a narrative practice.

The two structures have been embraced to explore how Mozambican academic researchers adapt and establish their identity over English language in their career development.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, adapts multiple case study research design, and utilize in-depth interviews and document review (University language and research policy instruments and the scholars' curricula vitae) as data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Harvey, 2015; Rahman, 2017). The interviews mainly focus on exploring specific research questions discussed in this paper. The design strives to attain a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter in two universities under study.

Following Gericke and Blessing's (2012) design of disciplinary categorisations, participants are selected from social sciences and natural sciences. Purposive sampling approach posited by Creswell & Poth (2016) is considered applicable for the study as it acknowledges disciplinary dimensions that may lead to different contextual experiences due to English language use in HE.

Participants of this study included two heads of departments of the faculties' human resources, ten junior and ten senior professors employed permanently across departments at the Universities. These participants are selected based on their experience with English language and career development process in the Universities programs. The criteria used mainly focuses on how they consider strategies concerning language policy and career planning. The study employs the content analysis method (Bengtsson, 2016), a systematic description of the data and its meaning.

Extant literature mainly focuses on studies of English teachers' credentials, training, and career development conducted in 17 countries excluding Lusophone context (Braine, 2013; Emery, 2012). This study therefore fills the existing gap by exploring English language and career development in

Lusophone context. The findings of this study will be useful in guiding the formulation of language policy for career development in Lusophone countries.

Discussion

This study aims to inform language policy for research and publication, and its influence on career development in Mozambican HE. Informal discussions with subject experts at Eduardo Mondlane University about the engagement of English language in the academic researchers' career development revealed that focused language policies that enable effective relationships between English language and career development are non-existent. Future aspirations will therefore be focused on development of a sound language policy and framework that allows researchers attain the international HE standards and improve their careers.

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