The teachers' perception about CTESP's students and the academic success

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Abstract - **The students of the secondary vocational pathway find, in Portugal, in CTESP a privileged way of preceding their studies. Recognizing that teachers 'perceptions influence students' academic success; the present exploratory study focuses on the analysis of the teachers' perception about CTESP students.**

Keywords - academic success, polytechnic education, professional higher technical courses, social justice

INTRODUCTION

The students from the less favoured class are the ones who most complete compulsory education through vocational training (Viana, 2018), and these students find an important entrance door to higher education in the Professional Technical Higher Courses (CTESP) (Silva, 2017). These courses, with a marked vocational character, become more attractive for this student than the traditional degrees, which carry a more theoretical character and have a longer duration. The CTESP courses are taught mostly by polytechnic higher education and allow students, after the conclusion of a CTESP, to compete in a special regime for undergraduate's degrees (Decreto de Lei nº 393-A/99). Although access to the CTESP courses does not require prior attendance of professional courses, most of its students come from this path (Silva, 2017; Carriço, 2017).

Given this, polytechnic higher education that teach CTESP and Undergraduate degrees, have a relevant and potentially beneficial role in the practice of social justice, as they enable the social improvement of students from the most disadvantaged classes, providing them with a higher level degree of education (Balsa, Simões, Nunes, Carmo & Campos, 2001). But for such an important role to be successful, it is necessary to promote the academic success of the students.

Among the several aspects that most influence academic success, stand out the students behaviour during the classes, their commitment and previous basic knowledge (Ribeiro, 2008). However, besides the students role, and although this is fundamental, the teacher role is a determining influence for academic success (Silva & Lopes, 2015). Such a role is strongly influenced by personal conceptions and the perception that teachers have about their students, because their perception influences their positioning in the classroom, their expectations, their commitment and the didactic and pedagogical options.

In this sense, the present study, of an exploratory nature, focuses on the teachers' perspective: how the teachers of CTESP see their students, if they use different strategies to promote the academic success and if they consider necessary to make some changes in order to promote de academic success.

METHODOLOGY

Based on the presented objectives, a survey was carried out on a sample of 11 teachers from a polytechnic education institution in the engineering area. Only the professors who taught simultaneously in courses of CTESP and undergraduate courses answered. Teachers participated in the study voluntarily.

The survey included open and closed questions (Likert scale) and was anonymous. The results were analysed in a quantitative and qualitative perspective, using content analysis with non-exclusive categories. The questionnaire was distributed on paper and dealt with the following topics:

1. Teachers' perception regarding the students of the CTESP and undergraduate courses, choosing three different aspects that can influence academic success (Ribeiro, 2008): behaviour during class; commitment during class; prior knowledge.
2. Faced with the differences perceived by the teachers, they were questioned about whether they use different strategies for the two types of course under study, and what strategies they use to teach in the two types of courses.
3. Teachers were also questioned about whether they consider it necessary to make changes to the courses in order to increase the students' academic success.

FINDINGS

The results show that teachers see the CTESP students as having (on average) a more inadequate behavior during the classes than the students of the degree course. However,

several teachers focused on the existence of a great diversity of behaviours within each class, and between the various CTESP courses and from year to year.

The results also show that the professors (on average) perceive the CTESP students as little committed. However, taking into account the diversity of CTESP courses under analysis, some have classified students of CTESP as very committed. Some teachers emphasize that, although in general the CTESP students are misbehaving in the classes and little committed, there is also a group of highly committed and well-behaved students in class.

The data show that the teachers perceive the CTESP students as having low basic knowledge (mathematics, physics and Portuguese of secondary level). In opposition, they consider that the students of the undergraduate degree have good previous knowledge. However, it is worth noting that currently the legislation requires that students who enter a CTESP have completed the 12th grade of compulsory education, which officially places them at the same level of knowledge of the undergraduate students. In spite of this, most of the CTESP students come from vocational secondary level and not from the scientific-humanistic secondary traditional education. In this sense, the previous basic knowledge of the students coming from the professional courses may differ from the students' knowledge of the scientific-humanistic education, which may justify the teachers' perception.

Half of the teachers say they use different pedagogical strategies in the two types of courses (CTESP and undergraduate degree). The different strategies include simplifying the practical work, deepen less, to make more use of practical work, increase more students' active participation, use less slides projection - for CTESP; and promoting greater autonomy, for undergraduate students.

About CTESP, 60% of the professors stated that it is not necessary to make changes and 30% stated that some changes are necessary courses in order to increase the students' academic success; at the undergraduate level, 20% stated that changes should be made in the courses and 70% stated that this is not necessary. The suggested changes refer to the laboratory classes' increase, to involve students in extracurricular (or curricular) activities that motivate them (such as games and competitions) and increase theoretical-practical classes that help students to consolidate knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that the teachers perceive the CTESP students as being more badly behaved, less committed and with less previous knowledge than the undergraduate students. The data also show that half of the teachers do not use any specific strategy for this type of student, and for the most part, teachers also do not consider it necessary to make any changes in order to promote academic success. This can result from the fragmented view that the teachers have, that can miss the vision of the whole as a set.

Given the results, and considering the exploratory nature of this study, one can conclude from the need to promote more in-depth studies that foster understanding how the teachers' perception can influence the academic success. It is also important to promote studies that help teachers to better understand the characteristics of their students and thus better adapt pedagogical methodologies. Finally, to promote de academic success, it is important to promote the teachers training so they can recognize the role that their perception can play, and helping then to overcome the difficulties they encounter in teaching this student profile. Only in this way, higher education in general, and polytechnic education in particular, can play an even more prominent role in promoting social justice by promoting conditions of academic success for students from the most disadvantaged classes who traditionally have the most access to it type of education system.

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