



**SWOT ANALYSIS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF PORTO:
LINKS BETWEEN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE AT
POST-GRADUATION IN EDUCATION**

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1. Summary

This SWOT analysis aims to deepen the understanding of the relation and influences of hindering factors in ULL research and professional practice and assumes post-graduation in Education at the University of Porto as its point of departure. As our case study revealed, the implementation of the so-called Bologna process, at the University of Porto and beyond, resulted in a re-organization of the post-graduation curricula emphasising a strong articulation between research and practice and on a growing demand for post-graduation on the part of education professionals. Our previous analysis also showed that there is a tendency for these professionals to develop applied research, mostly involving their own professional contexts. However, little is known about the potential catalytic validity of this research (Lather, 1986); in fact, “there is no systematic analysis of the impact of these varieties of case-studies, internships and other research in changing actual practice” (Teixeira & Menezes, 2012, p. 7). This SWOT analysis was an opportunity to collect such data and to expand the findings at the national level.

2. Methodology

This report was prepared by Isabel Menezes and Ana Sofia Sousa and involved both former post-graduation students at the University of Porto, and a group of professors from the scientific council of the various post-graduation degrees: three 2nd cycle degrees (120 ECTS) in Education, in Adult Education and Training and in Visual Arts Education (a joint program with the Faculty of Arts), and one 3rd cycle (180 ECTS) in Education. Former students were approached with an email survey where they were asked to consider the personal, professional and organisational impact of their research. A summary of the findings was then presented to a panel of experts (Delphi approach) including members of the scientific council of the different post-graduation degrees, who were asked not only to perform a SWOT analysis based on the data and their own experience, but also to expand the findings by considering hindering factors and possible strategies to overcome them at the national level.

3. Links between research and practice: the views of former students

An e-mail survey exploring the personal, professional and organisational impact of the research conducted during post-Graduation was sent to a group of former students identified as having developed research on their own professional contexts. A total of 13 graduates responded.

Mostly, they consider that research had an important role in their own development as reflective practitioners who question their existing practices

I felt more self-assured, with stronger scientific arguments to support my practice (MCE,1),

I developed a new vision of my practice, more reflective and (re)constructive ... based on the need for a balance between training and practice (PDCE, 1),

generating change in their professional contexts

I was able to 'contaminate' my colleagues and call their attention to less valued but central pedagogical aspects of their work (MCE,1),

I created and developed a self-evaluation team at my school (MCE, 3),

As we work collaboratively, and we develop strategies and materials conjointly, the research had an impact in all the colleague who work directly with me (PDCE, 2).

However, there are also complains of isolation and lack of institutional recognition

My colleagues were not particularly interested and I felt quite alone during the whole process (PDCE, 1)

The consequences were a more critical vision of my role as teacher that – beyond me – had no impact on the schools where I work (MEAV, 2).

On the whole, and perhaps not surprisingly, the impact of research appears to be more evident on personal and professional levels, and less intense on organisational levels. Therefore, the potential for dialogue between research and practice should be stimulated through more extensive and institutionalized networking between professionals and researchers, between the educational institutions and the university.

4. SWOT analysis

As mentioned above, a summary of these findings was presented to a panel of experts, who performed a SWOT analysis and considered the hindering factors and possible strategies to overcome them at the national level.

Topic assessed: promoting the links between research and practice in education at post-graduation the University of Porto?	
Helpful in achieving the objective	Harmful in achieving the objective
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dissemination of the research produced at the U.Porto - Diversity of topics relevant to practice - Emphasis on the improvement of professional practice - Development of critical thinking, reflective capacity and intentionality - Development of group work and relational work competences - Emphasis on the role of research to support and sustain practice - Joint organization, with other universities and research centers but also professional entities, of national and international events and seminars - Visibility of the post-graduation courses through interaction with professional contexts - Synergy between professors, researchers, students and professionals - Definition of research and training goals that have social, professional and scientific relevance as a result of the cooperation between academics and professionals - Close relationships between the university and the professional community that influences the definition of scientific policies - The autonomy of the university in the definition of research and training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Less (or residual) impact of the research developed during post-graduation in the professional organizations of the former students - The relevance of the research developed during post-graduation is not always acknowledged by colleagues in the professional organizations of the former students - Constraints faced by students who are professionals (e.g., time, interest for theory, ...) - Constraints faced by professors (e.g., time, growing bureaucratization, emphasis on particular research outcomes such as papers on ISI journals...) - Different timings (time of organizations/professionals vs. time of university/researchers) - Difficulties that emerge from researching professional practice - Difficulties to overcome the gap between theory and practice - Difficulties in the transfer of knowledge from university to professional contexts
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interest in developing new forms of teaching and formats of ULLL at the university - Holistic vision of education that can help redefine the relationship with practice and professional contexts - Research provides the possibility to explore diverse professional contexts - Tradition of a strong involvement with institutions external to the university - Promotion of qualifications of education professionals - Strong experience of post-graduation, including various organizations and institutions - The creation of a network of alumni - The potential for innovation in professional practices as a result of research - The development of a culture of LLL that articulates the appreciation of professional 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of information about the real impact of post-graduation in the organisations where students work - Graduates have unrealistic expectations, that frequently result from a functionalist vision of post-graduate training - The professionals are not always really interested in changing their professional practices and research is not viewed as effective for changing practice - Modes of work organization that are strongly bureaucratic and hierarchical and resistant to change - Lack of articulation between individual commitment to ULLL and organizational and professional practices and policies - Scientific policies defined at national and European level that do not facilitate an articulation between research and practice - Educational policies at national and European levels.

knowledge and practices as well as of scientific knowledge and practices
 - The potential for generating outcomes that have a strong personal meaning for those involved in ULLL

Can the hindering factors (weaknesses and threats) be generalised and applied at national level? Which other hindering factors can be identified?

- A devaluation of the relationship between theory and practice, especially in dimensions that might transcend a restricted notion of accountability or productivity
- Lack of available data
- Educational policies at a national level that conceive educational work in a growingly bureaucratized and administrative manner
- Funding of higher education and applied research
- Economic crisis
- The history of the university institution and the social status of knowledge (that does not necessarily value applied knowledge)
- The definition of research and training priorities and its articulation with career progression at the University
- The difficulties involved in knowledge transfer processes

Once you have identified the general hindering factors, please try to analyse their reasons to find out how these factors are embedded in your respective learning and research culture.

- A traditional culture of university and university knowledge with suspicion regarding professional practice and applied knowledge
- Educational policies at a national level that de-value academic knowledge and its role in promoting change and innovation in educational contexts
- The emphasis on a culture of scientific productivity that overvalues immediate outcomes, not necessarily compatible with the time that is necessary to articulate research and practice, mainly in the social and educational sciences
- Tendency for researchers to follow “academic trends” that do not necessarily always value an articulation with practice/action
- In the Portuguese case, the social mission of the universities is less valued than in other contexts
- Research is seldom thought in terms of knowledge transfer and even less as partnership with professionals

Actions that could be carried out to overcome these identified reasons for barriers and hindering factors to cooperation between ULLL researchers and practitioners or solutions

Please identify and explain possible solutions for the identified reasons of barriers.

- The implementation of systems of quality assurance adapted to the University context
- The establishment of a system of rewards for professionals investing in ULLL
- Increase the funding for ULLL
- Engagement in national and international networks that foster a reflection and analysis of the dialogue between research and practice in ULLL
- Develop projects of in-service training and action-research with education professionals and organizations

- Create consultation councils of university research involving education professionals, leaders from professional associations and the civil society, and managers from educational organizations to develop a continuous reflection on the interface between research and practice
- Make funding available for applied training/research in relation to organizational change and innovation
- Develop forms of knowledge dissemination that expand beyond academic networks
- Develop devices for the recognition and validation of professional knowledge for professionals involved in post-graduation

Actors which (could) play a role in carrying out these actions (based on the network analysis of activity 2 and 3) and reason:

Please reflect on how the identified actors of the network analysis could help to overcome identified barriers and constraints.

Actors	Reason
Ministry of Education and Science	Availability of funds for ULLL Recognition of ULLL for education professionals that would make investments in ULLL more attractive Support of programmes that promote collaborative action, training and research
Rectors	Foster the access and progression of professionals in post-graduation courses Develop policies that would value the constitution of networks involving professional associations, unions, business representatives, managers, ... that might have a say in the implementation of ULLL and applied research Develop devices for the recognition and validation of professional knowledge for professionals involved in post-graduation
University Professors	Commitment to applied knowledge and collaborative research/training processes
Educational organizations/ companies	Willingness to collaborate with higher education institutions Readiness to learn from research Develop internal policies that value and recognize ULLL Requesting the intervention of universities in solving applied problems
Professionals who attend post-graduation courses	Readiness to learn from research and theory Readiness to become reflective and critical professionals who (can) question their own practice
Research centres	Emphasis on knowledge transfer and dissemination Valuing applied research and collaborative research strategies Active involvement in post-graduation courses

5. References

- Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange*, 17, 4, 63-84.
- Teixeira, P. & Menezes, I. (2012). Case study 1 for Portugal. Post-graduation in education at the University of Porto: linking research and practice. Report prepared for DIALOGUE/Eucen.