

# THE LIBERTY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: METHODS AND PRACTICES

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## **Abstract**

Since we have been university professors for over thirty years, with thousands of hours of teaching experience and being the expositive method the privileged one for the explanation of the various subjects, we wanted to find out from our 2nd year students, from of the law degree at Portucalense University, which methods they would consider most appropriate in order to instil in them more interest in the presence of the classes and more use in the conclusion of the curricular units.

Indeed, in the recent years, we have been finding it more difficult for students to concentrate, subsequently they are more easily distracted and adopt behaviours that disrupt the normal functioning of the classes, namely producing noise, which compromises the intrinsic reflection inherent to the seriousness and importance of the topics covered in the classes.

It has also been found that students nowadays tend to read less, often seeking to study by simple summaries and / or notes on the subjects, elaborated by themselves or their peers.

For this reason, the presentation of audio-visual media, such as the exhibition of brief documentaries and thematic interviews, has already been taken to the classroom, all related to the subject to be taught or already taught, promoting, then, the critical discussion.

Empirically, it has been found that students appreciate this kind of presentation and discussion, which led us to ask them how they evaluate this experience and what, according to them, would be a methodologically interesting class, so as to capture them more interest. We also wanted to know about their reading habits, whether from manuals and other academic bibliographic sources or other kind of literature, as well as their willingness to actively contribute in the classroom context or to adhere to the study-research method and autonomous study with simple tutorial guidance from the teacher.

We create an anonymous brief-answers questionnaire so that our students could express themselves as clearly and truthfully as possible.

The questionnaire was prepared by us and answered by the students in November 2019. The average age of our students was around 20 years.

The results partly coincide with the perception we had already gained from our classroom experience: lectures are considered interesting, audio-visuales very interesting and PowerPoints interesting, contributing to the increased interest of students and their academic achievement; students do not reveal much interest in active participation when learning; students devote little time to reading; students consider the reading of simple summaries and /or notes, elaborated by themselves or their peers, to be sufficient to obtain approval, but nevertheless recognize that reading the manuals is interesting.

Keywords: pedagogy; methodology; teaching; learning; reading.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Article 43rd of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic enshrines the freedom to learn and to teach, in the chapter devoted to personal rights, freedoms and guarantees.

In the Basic Law of the Education System (Law No. 46/86 of 14 October), in Chapter VIII, the State recognizes “the value of private and cooperative education as a concrete expression of the freedom to learn and teach and the right to family to guide the education of their children” (Article 57th), ensuring that it parallels with public education.

In the exercise of freedom of teaching and learning, private and cooperative educational institutions, which are an integral part of the school network, are authorized to follow the curricula and syllabus of state education, as well as to adopt separate plans and programs.

The plans and own programs need official recognition and depend on their articulation with the general principles, purposes, structures and objectives of the education system, as well as a case-by-case assessment of their curricula and pedagogical conditions for teaching (Articles 58th and 59th).

Moreover, in cultural rights and duties, the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic expressly provides that the State recognizes and supervises private and cooperative education, in Article 75th, n.º 2.

On the other hand, it affirms, in Article 76th, n.º 2, the statutory, scientific, pedagogical, administrative and financial autonomy of universities, without prejudice to an appropriate assessment of the quality of teaching. As declares PINTO, MÁRIO [1]

School is the indispensable mean of exercising the freedom to learn and to teach. Freedom to learn and to teach is therefore freedom of school. And, necessarily (insist), freedom of school is attributed to the holders of the freedom to teach and to learn, that is, to individuals and families (firstly), and then to the various private instances of civil society (expression of freedom and personal sociability); therefore, freedom of private school.

Article 76 (n.º1) of the Constitution expresses the guarantee of equal opportunities and democratization of the education system under the regime of access to the University and other higher education institutions. This level of education must take into account not only the needs of qualified staff but also the rise in the educational, cultural and scientific level of the country. From this normative, ABRANTES understands that “the adjustment of the educational supply in this cycle should not only depend on the needs of the labour market in the short term, but also on the referred aim of educational, cultural and scientific development” [2]. indeed, demonstrate that “we have massified higher education system and a much higher supply than demand” [3].

The Portuguese University, being a cooperative higher education institution, created by Order No. 122/86 of 28 June, published in the 2nd series of the *Diário da República*, No. 146, 2nd supplement, is endowed with public recognition, and develops three dimensions within its scope: research, teaching and knowledge transfer. Its mission is to “contribute to the progress of knowledge and human development through the production and transmission of knowledge, as well as the provision of other services to the community” [4] and “aims to be an institution recognized for quality in the different dimensions of its activity” [5].

We aim to provide our students with the freedom to learn effectively, through more appealing methodologies, articulating them with their current interests, so that they can achieve more and reinforce their interest in the classes and contents taught, always valuing theory as a tool for solving practical situations. It is our goal that students understand the contents taught, to contextualize and apply them.

It is also our goal to acquire skills to intervene in the present and future. The learning process involves understanding beyond mere memorization. This modality is called significant learning [6]. This leads to a deep approach [7] and it is in this sense that we aim to improve teaching practices, as teachers always on the path to excellence, in order to “contribute to the transformation of individuals and society” [8].

The document entitled “Students’ profile upon leaving mandatory education” reveals that students “understand scientific and technological processes and phenomena, ask questions, seek information and apply knowledge gained in informed decision making, among the possible options” and “work using materials, instruments, tools, machines and technological equipment, relating technical, scientific and socio-cultural knowledge” [9]. We understand that we must take into account the profile of these students, who are those who arrive at the university, and our work is directed to intensify and deepen the knowledge so that they can later be trained individuals, well-educated and become valuable jurists, capable and talented.

## **2 PAPER’S GOAL AND METHODOLOGY**

We posed 18 questions that were answered online by 88 students of the 2nd year of the Law School graduation to whom we teach our subjects. Anonymity of responses was ensured in order to obtain

real and credible results. The questionnaire was short-answer-like, limiting the students to choose between four hypotheses of answer for each question. The methodology is quantitative in nature.

The goal is to know if the students:

- like the teacher's lectures;
- prefer another type of methodology namely those that appeal to movement, sound and image;
- whether these new methodologies encourage them to study more and have greater degree of approval in the subjects;
- whether they are available to actively intervene in class in order to put the spirit of Bologna into practice, with only the tutorial guidance of the teacher;
- like reading, what are their reading habits and what kind of reading tools do they use in their studies (manuals or notes taken in their own or colleagues' classes).

The questions asked were as follows:

- 1 How do you rate a lecture class?
- 2 How do you classify the phrase: "Lectures should be complemented with other resources"?
- 3 How do you rate the classes where complementary resources of the lectures are used, such as exhibition of documentaries / reports / interviews about the taught subject?
- 4 How do you rate lessons where complementary lecture resources are used as PowerPoints?
- 5 How do you consider all the classes you attend regarding the method used?

The answer's options to the questions 1 to 5 were:

- Nothing interesting;
  - Uninteresting;
  - Interesting;
  - Very interesting;
- 6 Does your level of interest in the subjects taught increase with the use of videos and PowerPoints on the subjects taught in the classes?
  - 7 Does the degree / intensity of studying the subjects taught increase with the use of videos and PowerPoints on those subjects taught in the classes?
  - 8 Do you consider that the degree of your success in CUs increases with the use, in the respective classes, of one of the above-mentioned means?
  - 9 As part of the implementation of the new pedagogies, as a student, are you available to present in the classroom a theme about the program of CUs you attend?
  - 10 On the teaching / learning process, are you available for the adoption of the autonomous research-and-study method with the simple tutorial guidance of the teacher?

The answer's options to the questions 6 to 10 were:

- Nothing;
  - Slightly;
  - Moderately;
  - Greatly;
- 11 On average, how many hours do you spend reading each month?

The answer's options to the question 11 were:

- Between 0 and 6h;
  - Between 6 and 12h;
  - Between 12 and 24h;
  - More than 24h;
- 12 Of these hours of reading, what percentage do you assign to your studies in your course?

- 13 To what extent do you consider fundamental what do you hear in class for your approval in CUs?
- 14 To what extent do you consider fundamental the reading of manuals and other books or articles for your CU approval?
- 15 To what extent do you consider reading your or colleagues' notes sufficient for your approval in the CUs?

The answer's options to the questions 12 to 15 were:

- Less than 25%;
  - Between 25% to 50%;
  - Between 50% to 75%;
  - More than 75%;
- 16 Tell me how you rate the academic reading of manuals, monographs and articles?
  - 17 Tell me how you rate the non-academic reading?

The answer's options to the questions 16 and 17 were:

- Nothing interesting;
- Uninteresting;
- Interesting;
- Very interesting;

- 18 Do you like to read?

The answer's options to the question 18 were:

- Nothing;
- Little;
- Medium;
- Very;

### 3 THE RESULTS

Being students of the Law Course, where the theoretical aspect of the subjects taught predominates, 72% of the students consider the lectures "interesting". Only 8 students rated them "uninteresting" and only 1 "nothing interesting", while there was a universe of 18% considering them "very interesting".

Only 6% of the answers indicated as "uninteresting" the complementarity of lectures with new teaching methods, with the majority of the answers being 63% "interesting".

The classes where complementary resources of the lectures are used, such as exhibition of documentaries / reports / interviews about the taught subject, were "interesting", with 34%, and "very interesting", with 61%. On the other hand, the use of PowerPoints in the classes obtained less adherents regarding the classification of "very interesting" (20%), but more adherents regarding the classification of "interesting" (58%).

We ask students to rate all of their classes according to the methodology used. The answers were mostly "interesting" with 74% and 17% "uninteresting".

The level of interest in the subjects taught increases with the use of videos and PowerPoints on the subjects taught in their classes: 47% "moderately" and 47% "greatly", with 3% answering "nothing" and the rest 3% answered "slightly".

The use of videos and PowerPoints on the subjects taught in the respective classes increases the degree / intensity of studying the subjects taught: 48% "moderately" and 30% "greatly".

A large proportion of the answers indicate that the degree of success in the subjects increases with the use of one of the above means in the respective classes, with 55% of the students going towards "moderately" and 31% of "greatly", 11% considered "slightly" and 3% considered "nothing" to influence their achievements.

Our students are not very available to present in the classroom a theme about the program of the CUs they attend: 19% “nothing”, 33% “slightly”, 36% “moderately” and only 11% “greatly”.

In the teaching / learning process, 10% of the students revealed that they were “nothing” available for the adoption of the autonomous research and study method, with the simple tutorial guidance of the teacher, 23% “slightly”, 53% “moderately” and 13% “greatly”.

Regarding reading habits, on average, 26% read “up to 6 hours”, 24% “between 6 and 12 hours”, 25% “between 12 and 24 hours” and 25% read “more than 24 hours”

Regarding question 12 “Of these hours of reading, what percentage do you assign to your studies in your course, 10 students say devote “less than 25%”, 11 “between 25% and 50%”, 27 “between 50% and 75%” and 40 “over 75%”.

What is heard by students in their classes contributes to their success in the following terms: Most students, 55 of them, recognize that the content of the classes is critical to achieving subject approval - “over 75%” - and 25 students consider that the contribution of the classes is “between 50% and 75%”. Only 2 students see the classes as having no more than 25% importance in their success and the remaining 6 give a weight “between 25% and 50%” to this class attendance / subject achievement ratio.

The reading of manuals and other books or articles is considered by students as fundamental for their approval in the subjects, although in variable measures: 38% answered that the importance of this type of reading is “between 50% and 75%”; 34% of the answers are “over 75%”; 20% “between 25% and 50%” and only 8% were in the “less than 25%” parameter.

Students find reading their or colleagues' notes sufficient for their approval in the subjects: 20% consider the importance of the notes to be “above 75%” and 44% “between 50% and 75%”; 24% “between 25% and 50%” and only 11% do not attach importance to approval.

Students rated the academic reading of manuals, monographs and articles:

- Nothing interesting 1%; uninteresting 31%; interesting 52%; very interesting 16%.

In turn, classified the non-academic reading:

- Nothing interesting 2%; uninteresting 17%; interesting 56%; very interesting 25%.

As for the last question, whether they like to read, the results were as follows:

- 3% nothing; 16% little; 45% medium; 35% very.

## **4 DATA AND ITS CONNECTIONS**

Students in the second year of their law degree completed anonymous inquiries about criminal Our students find the lectures interesting (72%) and, overall and globally have a good impression of all their classes (74%). They consider the content of what they hear in the classrooms as fundamental for approval in their respective curricular units (63%), quantifying this contribution by more than 75%.

Although they enjoy the lectures, most students find it interesting and very interesting - 63% and 32% - these being complemented by other resources, and are adept at using such means as showing documentaries / reports / interviews on the subjects taught (61 % answered to be very interesting and 34% interesting). Lower is the interest in the use of PowerPoints, with 3% considering them nothing interesting. In turn, the level of interest in the subjects taught increases with the use of videos and PowerPoints on the subjects taught in their classes.

Also, the degree / intensity of studying the subjects taught increases with the use, in their classes, of videos and PowerPoints about the subject taught but in smaller portion, with 20% that considers to increase slightly. The degree of success in the CUs increases with the use, in the respective classes, of one of the above-mentioned means (31% say increase greatly and 55% moderately).

As students, they are slightly available to, in the context of the implementation of the new pedagogies proclaimed by the Bologna System, to present in class a theme about the syllabus of the courses they attend: 19% revealed that they were not available at all, 33% slightly. , 36% moderately and only 11% said they were very available. These answers demonstrate that students elect other complementary methods of lectures, preferably without their active participation, contrary to the spirit of the Bologna System.

In the teaching / learning process, the adoption of the autonomous research-and-study method with the simple tutorial guidance of the teacher has a little more adherence: 10% exclude this method, 23% consider themselves slightly available, but 53% say they are moderately available and at the end, with a 14% adherence to be greatly available.

For the approval in the curricular units, 38% of the students attribute a 50% to 75% importance to the reading of manuals, other books and articles while 34% of them put their reading above 75%, although only 16% of the respondents find this type of reading very interesting and 52% interesting, while 31% rate the reading of manuals and analogues as uninteresting. In this line of answers, it is not surprising that a large proportion of students find it sufficient to read their own or colleagues' notes to obtain approval in the curricular units (44%).

Regarding the number of hours spent monthly in reading there is an almost equal division between the hypothesis of answer, which is in line with the data obtained on the interest in reading manuals and other books:

- between 0 and 6 hours – 26%;
- between 6 and 12 hours – 24%;
- between 12 and 24 hours – 25%;
- More than 24 hours – 25%.

From this number of hours of reading, students devote a substantial portion to their studies - 31% + 45%, the first percentage accounting for “between 50% and 75%” of their time and the second for “more than 75%” of their time. But when asked on how would they rate the academic reading of textbooks, monographs and articles, one student said it was not interesting, 27 students consider uninteresting, 46 students said it was interesting and only 14 turned out to be very interesting. Regarding non-academic reading, this type of reading appears to have more importance, with an increase in the interesting and very interesting answers - 56% and 25% respectively. However, only 35% of students reveal to like reading a lot, 45% shows a medium interest, with 16% saying they have little interest and 3% do not like at all.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Students in the second year of their law degree completed anonymous inquiries about criminal Our students find the lectures interesting (72%) and, overall and globally have a good impression of all their classes (74%). They consider the content of what they hear in the classrooms as fundamental for approval in their respective curricular units (63%), quantifying this contribution by more than 75%.

Surveys show that our students see their teachers as the transmitters of knowledge and give priority to lectures, against the background of the reforming spirit of the Bologna System and the redefinition of the teacher's role [10].

From the surveys it turned out that:

- a) the most conventional way of teaching Law, which consists of lectures of the expositive type, its pleasing to the students, who privilege the classroom space, having obtained 90% of favourable answers;
- b) the average student satisfaction rate in the classes they attend is 74% with answers indicating that classes are interesting and consider that what they hear in the classes contributes substantially to their approval in the curricular units (63% of respondents think that the contribution is above 75%, almost the double regarding to the reading of textbooks, monographs and scholarly articles);
- c) At the same time, they consider that the lectures should be complemented with other resources, with 95% of the answers in this sense, stating that the degree of interest in the subjects taught increases with this complementarity, as well as their degree of success in the curricular units (86. %);
- d) 95% of the inquired students are also of the opinion that the lectures in which complementary resources are used, such as the exhibition of documentaries / reports / interviews about the taught subject are more interesting, also stating that the degree of interest in the taught subjects increases with this complementarity, as well as their degree of success in the curricular units

(86%), which leads us to conclude that students are awake to methodologies with potentialities involving sound, image and action;

- e) The complementary use of PowerPoints satisfies 78% of the students, but there is a fraction of 18% that considers them uninteresting and 3% uninteresting, which stands out as the complementary resource most frequently used by teachers;
- f) In the context of the implementation of the new pedagogies, 19% of the students said they were not available at all and 33% said they were slightly available to present in the classroom a theme about the program of the curricular units that they attended, only 11% considered this practice very interesting, which shows students' low receptivity to the collaborative attitude in a teacher-student interaction environment;
- g) Regarding the possibility, in the teaching / learning process, of adopting the autonomous research-and-study method with the simple tutorial guidance of the teacher, 10% were not available at all and 23% slightly available, with an increase in the "interesting" parameter, in relation to the previous question, from 36% to 53% and only 14% consider this modality very interesting;
- h) Only 25% of the students spend more than 24 hours per month in reading, with another 25% spread between 12 and 24 hours per month, the remaining below these values, and 26% said they did not read more than 6 hours per month;
- i) Most of the reading time is devoted to the respective studies and the reading of their own or colleagues' notes are still part of their study habits as sufficient element for approval in the curricular units;
- j) There is no big difference between the interest in academic and non-academic reading, with only 35% of the inquired students saying that they enjoy reading very much, while 45% show a medium interest in reading, 16% slight interest and 3% do not like at all, which will be an increased difficulty for our students, given the course they attend to require a lot of reading, by its self-nature and purposes.

## FINAL TEXT NOTE

[6] Unlike mechanical learning, memorization. See Noel Entwistle, "O ensino e a qualidade da aprendizagem no ensino superior", *Análise Psicológica*. 1 (V), p. 141-p.142 (pp.141-pp.153), 1986.

[7] See Noel Entwistle, "O ensino e a qualidade da aprendizagem no ensino superior", *Análise Psicológica*, 1 (V), 1986, p. 145 (pp.141-pp.153), in Table I Characteristics of Approaches to Learning: "• The intention is to understand • It focuses attentively and critically on content • Relates new ideas to prior knowledge • Relates concepts to everyday experience • Relates demonstration to conclusions • Examines logic of the exhibition".

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