



An examination of the suitability of PADev as a method for effective participatory assessment of the development of higher education institutions: the case of Eduardo Mondlane University (1976-2016)

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CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The study examined the effectiveness of the participatory assessment of development (PADev) method in assessing the development trajectory of Eduardo Mondlane University (EMU) from 1976 to 2016, by identifying the factors that may have contributed to such development, the resulting changes, and the actors that promoted change. The study aimed to extract the experiences and perceptions of change and development from the university stakeholders. In so doing, it also tested the suitability and validity of the PADev approach as an evaluation tool to assess, from the beneficiary's point of view, the development path of a higher education institution on a long-term perspective.

To address the research problem, the PADev conceptual and theoretical framework was adopted, and the related methodological conventions taken into account in carrying out the study. The concepts of "evaluation", "participation" and "development" were related to PADev principles that underpin change assessment in poverty context, namely bottom-up approach concerning participation, long-term perspective towards inclusion, and holistic view that trace the development path.

Moreover, the epistemological assumption for knowledge production was drawn from the social realism and institutional theory. Social Realism Theory allowed to describe how the intended knowledge is constructed, and Institutional Theory of Change allowed to explain the changing process within institutions answering the *what, how, who* and *why* of change. The sociality of knowledge production and development matters most, as it portrays how people are related in the process of knowledge production, their willingness, engagement and participation. The Institutional Theory enabled to understand why and how change took place in the institution, and what sources or forces influenced and affected the change process, regardless of the direction of the change.

To carry out the study, a PADev experiment should be performed, and a case study research design of EMU was employed. Two board member categories of participants were involved, namely university community and university external stakeholders. The university community was comprised of staff from six units, including academic (Faculty of Education, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Sciences), research (Centre for Academic Development, and African Studies Centre) and non-academic (a collective administrative unit also called Central Services, comprised of Human Resources Directorate, Directorate of Documentation Services, Finance Directorate, Scientific Directorate, Planning Office, Directorate of Property Administration and Institutional Development, Academic Vice-Rectorship, and Vice-Rectorship for Administration and Resources.

The original plan involved seven academic units, and apart from the above referred to, it included the Faculty of Agronomy and Forestry Engineering, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, but only three academic units, two research units and one administrative or central services unit, were involved in the study. Lack of time and limited resources were the main constraints and the reason for researcher's decision to re-evaluate the initial plan. Data collection per each unit, particularly to carry out PADev workshops, revealed to be a lengthy process, since different groups were convened separately. Workshop timing and set up was dependent on the availability of the group members. Negotiating participant's availability, getting participants' feedback and workshop preparation was time-consuming but crucial for the success of the PADev workshops. Therefore, the compliance of the fieldwork schedule was affected and delays were inevitable. The workshop duration (one morning or afternoon), organization (venue, materials), and catering (refreshments and lunch) per unit demanded a substantial financial amount that made it impossible to carry out the data collection in all intended units despite the uniqueness and complexion. Resources were relocated, but still budget constraints demanded downsizing the list of academic units to be covered by the study. The university external stakeholders' category included representatives of the Association of Psychology of Mozambique, the Mozambique Engineers Association, the Geological and Mining Association of Mozambique, the Centre for Applied Psychology and Psychometric Tests, the National Directorate of Higher Education, the Directorate for the Coordination of Higher Education, the National Council for the Assessment of Quality in Higher Education, the Higher Education, Science and Technology, the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. A non-probabilistic sampling design was used, employing non-proportional and purposive sampling strategy for the selection of academic and administrative units, and the various category of participants (former and current rectors, vice-rectors, central management directors, deans and deputy deans, managers, alumni) and the external university stakeholders.

Since the study was conducted in three (03) academic units, two (02) centres and eight (08) administrative units from central services, the generalization of the results for the entire university and university community was pointed as an issue. Whereas the characteristics of the study units do not allow a complete generalization of the study results, if we look from a systemic perspective, there are units that might be seen through those which took part in the study, taking into account the nature of the changes, the scope of development interventions, as well as their impacts.

Even though the study portrays the characteristic of a participatory evaluation of development activities and its impacts, the circumstances in which the study was planned and designed did not allow participants to be involved in the preparatory and subsequent phases of data collection. Whereas stakeholders were not involved in defining the evaluation, the ones taking part on the PADev try-out have contributed to develop the data collection instruments, and they

were the most relevant data collection sources. The challenge was concerning data analysis and reporting, that demanded a better understanding of the digital PADev data templates and Excel database format for data recording, NVivo 12 for data analysis and a PADev format analytical report, which prevented the involvement of participants in this phase of the study. The study results will on due time formally disseminate to the study participants. In fact, participants did not take part in the choice of the evaluation approach, but in the data collection instruments.

The study used mixed methods for data collection and analysis. The data collection entailed document review, focus groups through PADev workshops, individual and group semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires and crowdwriting. The study was designed as qualitative research, but combined qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques aiming to reach participants. While this was pointed as an issue in the methodological chapter, it does not call into question the predominantly qualitative nature of the research. Furthermore, as a complementary technique, the use of the questionnaire provided some degree of objectivity to the process and increased the effectiveness of PADev in considering its results.

The data generated from the data collection process responded to this main research question: To what extent can the PADev method of assessing development and change at EMU in a participatory way be effective in measuring the impact of development interventions at EMU?

Three sub-questions follow from this main question: (i) Which development interventions were implemented at Eduardo Mondlane University between 1976 and 2016? (ii) How did the development interventions change Eduardo Mondlane University between 1976 and 2016? (iii) What is the stakeholders' assessment of the impact of the development interventions at EMU?

The data gathered through written documents and different tools were systematised using a digital PADev data template, Excel database format, and NVivo 12, and the analysis was performed through content analysis and thematic analysis enabled by generated analytical categories.

The findings concerning the effectiveness of the PADev method was that the PADev design, as it was originally conceived (as a community development evaluation tool), did not fully suit the assessment of a higher education institution such as EMU. The university dimension (large-scale setting) and the complexity inherent in its organisation and functioning jeopardised the successful application of the method. It was revealed that the PADev method alone is ineffective, particularly as a method for data gathering in the case of EMU, due to the lack of commitment of a significant number of potential participants. Additional methods were employed to carry out the study, namely semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and crowdwriting. Data gathered through PADev tools were not enough to convey the wider context of change and development, and so it needed to be complemented by the previously referred data collection methods. Therefore, it should be noted that commitment

and engagement on the part of participants are crucial for the successful use of the PADev method, and, in the EMU context, this was not the case.

The main constrain regarding the experiment was related to the number of planned PADev workshops considering that the participants categories was reduced due to participants withdrawn after confirmation, and the need to change the data collection technique to get access to informants. The level of participation was also an issue, and it determined participants' group size in the workshops. One could question the efficacy of the PADev method in terms of scope, and the meaningfulness of its data, and authority of the claims, due to the level of participation, but workshop exercises require shared knowledge. In fact, empirical evidences showed that most participants in small group are more likely to get some knowledge, and be able to assess projects, changes and agencies, if compared with larger groups. Participant's involvement and engagement is enhanced in small groups rather than larger groups with positive effects on the quality of data gathered. In addition, combined data collection techniques allowed to expand the sample size. Whereas the size group might not be a problem, the composition of the group (representation and inclusion) might be an issue whenever all the relevant categories of the study population are not represented in the sample. The heterogeneous compositions of PADev groups and the adoption of other data collections instruments to reach key informants made it possible to reach the principles of representation and inclusion.

Despite this limitation, as a participatory evaluation tool, PADev did enable the contextualised reconstruction of the institution's history from the perspective of the university, particularly the history of the sampled units. In so doing, PADev also created a platform for social interaction among the study participants that resulted in collective learning, self-knowledge and the production of shared knowledge about the context of change, the factors and actors that have contributed to the transformation and development of Eduardo Mondlane University.

PADev literature point out that the broad scope offered by the method reduces the focus on specific projects or interventions, and also gather too much irrelevant information. However, its ability for enabling early first data analyses onsite, by using digital PADev data templates, minimize this limitation. Probing more accurate information from participants during the data collection is possible. As a method for impact measurement based on a long-term perspective and from a beneficiary's point of view, this PADev experiment succeeded. While allowing participants to share their appreciation on the development intervention based on its usefulness and impact on various domains, valuable information concerning the effectiveness of the interventions was shared through their assessment of development and change, and expressed as best or worse initiative, producing positive or negative impact. The social realism perspective can be envisioned if we consider that participants' involvement in evaluating produce knowledge claims, an objective knowledge about the development of EMU on the basis of their collective memories and their experiences.

Concerning PADev validity, the conclusion is that the internal validity of PADev method was established. On the one hand, the case study design, conducted employing a PADev method, and content and reactive sequence analysis of the data enabled to answer the study's research questions. On the other hand, PADev tools original design was comprised of nine (9) exercises, but only seven (7) could be applied to the university context as it was. The urban setting, the professional participant's profile, and the small-scale determined the need to select from PADev exercises the ones that best fitted the university setting with minor adjustments. Moreover, some modifications, adjustments and extension are recommended in the literature to PADev methodology to fit the scale and settings that differ from peri(urban) environment, the one PADev was tested against. Therefore, looking at the study objectives and research questions, only those exercises more relevant to the assessment needs were selected. Since the main PADev's construct - evaluation, participation, and development – was measured, the implications of discarding some PADev exercises did not affect the instrument's robustness and internal validity. Accordingly, the study results were trustworthy and meaningful. Given the specificity of the sample units, and considering the university organizations and structure, the study findings cannot be extended to other populations, settings and times beyond the study's specific context, which means that its external validity can be questioned. The reliability of the PADev method lay on the fact that part of the results was repeatedly found across the study units, which leads to the conclusion that it can be replicable. It means that the consistency of the measure against the main constructs were observed.

PADev, conceived as a holistic evaluation tool, provided factual and experiential data on change and development of this higher learning institution. A more comprehensive, long-term perspective would require the resizing of the units of analysis and the performance of multiple case studies. However, from the findings one can infer that the PADev method and its methodological principles and epistemological assumptions surpass the traditional evaluation methods that make use of top-down evaluation approaches, as it stands in terms of stakeholder participation and involvement in the evaluation process, which enables a collective historical reconstruction and meaningful recollection of events, factors, and actors influencing change and development.

A range of development interventions was implemented at the institution during the period under analysis. However, the most recalled interventions were donor funding initiatives, either in the form of programmes (mainly MHO, NPT, Italian Cooperation, SIDA, and *Desafio*) and projects (CBP, BUSCEP, and NICHE-032), or in the form of funds where foreign donors individually fully provided or co-funded activities (FDI and FNI). Within the programme and project category, the study identified three main typologies of interventions: (i) research cooperation programmes and projects (SIDA Programme, *Desafio* Programme, NUFU Programme, and National Research Fund – FNI); (ii) capacity building programmes and projects (NICHE Programme, Italian Cooperation, BUSCEP project, and Institutional Development Fund – FDI); and (iii) inter-institutional cooperation programmes (PUO, SV, MHO, NPT and NICHE, CAPES – AULP Programme). Other types of interventions included

those promoted by foreign governments, agencies, and foundations; local and foreign universities; businesses and multinational companies; and government institutions through consortiums, networks, and partnerships. Overall, the interventions addressed institutional capacity building, staff development, physical infrastructure, research infrastructure, curriculum development, funding, and equipment.

The research results showed that some of the changes that occurred at EMU were specifically influenced by a path-dependent reactive sequence of events that led to the implementation of a range of interventions, which affected the functioning of the university. Considering Kezar's higher education models of change, the evolutionary approach towards change might explain why change occurred at EMU. This approach to change is a response to external circumstances, situational and environment variables. Different sectors of the university experienced a variety of changes. These changes affected five domains, namely pedagogic, administrative, management, human resources, and infrastructure and property. Accordingly, new study fields were introduced both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as new teaching and learning methodologies. Moreover, there was improvement in the academic qualifications of the staff (master's and doctorate degrees) during the period under study, and the physical infrastructure and facilities were expanded and modernised during that time. By analysing the reported changes according to the sources, degree, timing, scale, focus, responsiveness, intentionality, response time, involvement level, and target, one can conclude that change at EMU occurred in a spontaneous manner as a result of isolated uncoordinated actions of many agents, but also in a centralised and coordinated manner mainly resulting from long-lasting, comprehensive, and result-oriented development initiatives, guided by EMU leadership.

Concerning the internal stakeholder's appreciation and assessment of the impact of the external interventions, one can conclude that it was generally positive. According to stakeholders' valuation of the interventions, these were influenced by what they considered personal and institutional gains, particularly when the benefits involved staff training and infrastructure to improve teaching and learning conditions. They were more likely to rate as 'positive' the interventions implemented in their own units, about which they had personal information and so were able to see the long-term effects that these interventions had. This did not prevent the stakeholders from valuing negatively the interventions they recalled had led, from their perspective, to institutional crises, discontinuous change, and paradigmatic shifts. The intervention that was criticised the most was the implementation of the Bologna Protocol, which was later withdrawn. The whole experience concerning the adoption and withdrawal of the Bologna Protocol raise the awareness towards a more democratic university governance structure and more emphasis on its autonomy.

The implementation of development interventions and related changes produced a positive impact on the quality of the education offered at EMU, in the pursuit of scientific excellence, and in the student and staff emancipation. Thus, the data showed that the increase in quantity and quality of the teaching staff, the adoption of student-centred teaching methodologies; the

curriculum reforms, and the quality assessment practices directly and positively affected the quality of teaching and the learning outcomes. The strengthening of the research infrastructure, research capacity and research funding stimulated an emerging research culture; and the provision of specific services to assist special education needs holders, as well as the implementation of a gender-related policy and other specific regulations contributed to promoting emancipation amongst students and staff.

This study, aimed to conduct a PADev experiment at EMU, tested the suitability of PADev as a method for effective participatory assessment of the development of higher education institutions. Adaptation to the original design of the method was performed to suit the setting (urban), type (higher education institution), and size of the institution (17 academic units, 7 research centres, 2 special units, 19 administrative units). The method's capability to ensure effective participatory assessment of development was achieved through PADev exercises, which require reconstructing the most important historical events and assess their most important effects in the institution; listing the perceptions about positive and negative changes (interventions contributing to major changes, interventions that helped to mitigate the major negative changes), listing and assessing the perceived impact of all the development interventions (valuation of interventions); assessing best and worst interventions; relating positive and negative changes to specific or generic development interventions.

If compared with other participatory evaluation approaches, namely Practical Participatory Assessment and Transformative Participatory Evaluation, regarding its utilisation, objective, control of evaluation process, stakeholders' selection, and depth of participation, PADev is the most appropriate for the study and generate the kind of data the study results were expected to produce. Overall, the study results, particularly concerning the changing factors and agents, their contribution and effects on the institution, does not contradict the findings reported in the existing program and projects' evaluation and annual reports produced by foreign consultants and implementing teams. Moreover PADev's ability to compare the contribution made by particular interventions to institutional change, as stated in PADev literature, is highly important for impact evaluation in development assessment.