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Paving the way to student-centred education in Mozambique

By Isabel de Sousa

Student-centred learning approaches are still a novelty to most higher education institutions in Mozambique. For Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM), the time has come to embark on a large-scale project which will leave classical teaching methods behind. According to Herco Fonteijn and Annechien Deelman, who have recently come back from Maputo, this project is one of a kind.

Network

Maastricht University (UM) is internationally renowned for using Problem-Based Learning, a student-centred learning method, in all its programmes. Through Mundo, the Maastricht University Centre for International Cooperation in Academic Development, UM has often been involved in projects in Mozambique and other parts of the world, aimed at assisting universities in implementing student-centred approaches in their curricula. "Maastricht University has been cooperating with Mozambican universities for over 10 years now, but this project is different from the projects I've been involved in before, which is a good thing" says Annechien Deelman, project manager at Mundo. "Because it is such a large-scale project involving 16 UEM facul-

ties and schools, we have to be innovative, get financially creative and work accurately, often under time constraint."

Why student-centred learning?

"Mozambique has been developing at a fast pace and so has the labour market. Universities have to ensure that their graduates meet the demands of the changing labour market" says Herco Fonteijn, associate professor of Work and Social Psychology at the Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience. "Student-centred learning, in whatever form it may take, appears to be an adequate teaching and learning approach for bridging theory and practice. Traditional educational methods are less suited to serve this purpose."

Project goals

"We are currently in the inception phase," says Herco Fonteijn. "At UEM we met with the faculty deans, groups of students and members of the academic staff. I'd say the main goal is to stimulate UEM faculties/schools to go ahead with student-centred learning. At the end of this project, I'd like to see a considerable number of academics at UEM sharing knowledge, experimenting with student-centred learning methods and introducing these methods in their curricula. Knowledge management is also an important component of this project. We plan to create a website to sustain the project online. It will serve as a knowledge sharing platform, include examples of good practice and allow academics to take the results of this project further."

Scarce means

The standards of life in Mozambique are significantly lower than the ones we are used to, and that also applies to university facilities. "Poverty is a serious issue in Mozambique," says Herco Fonteijn. "Sometimes the means are simply not available."

"At the moment universities are facing serious funding cuts," adds Annechien Deelman. "This year, Mozambique's university budgets have been cut by 40 per cent. In addition, only 20 per cent of the project's budget is allocated to equipment. In face of this, we have to choose carefully what we spend our money on. For instance, we're thinking of making extensive use of online resources as they are a cost effective alternative to books and study material."

How have people responded so far?

Annechien Deelman: "On the whole, people have responded very positively but, as with everything, some people are less receptive to change. That's why an inception phase is

so valuable. Fortunately, Nuffic (Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education) gives us the room we need to analyse the current situation with our partners, discuss the possibilities available and only then – together with UEM – set priorities.

Herco Fonteijn explains, "People in Mozambique are used to talking with each other. Discussing things is part of their culture, it is just a question of getting used to having this open and participative attitude in the classroom as well."

Mozambican students vs Dutch students

Herco Fonteijn: "I think in general students in Mozambique are more eager to learn than students here. Many of them are the only ones in their family who have the opportunity to study. Besides, pursuing a degree is also a way to escape poverty which is more than a valid reason for wanting to do your best."

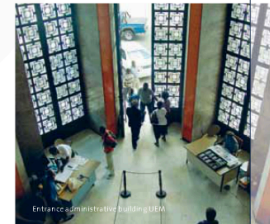
Future developments

According to Annechien Deelman, there are many possibilities as far as participative learning methods are concerned. "I think UM can play an active role in this project. We're going to Maputo again in April. The purpose of our second visit is to find out what each faculty/school wants to focus on and what support they need from our end to achieve their goals in the next four years."

Herco Fonteijn: "In the meantime, we'll be in close contact with our partners in Mozambique reporting back the results of the meetings, answering questions, and so forth. We're also going to approach students via Facebook. The idea is to create a Facebook group to keep students in contact with each other. We're currently looking for Portuguese speaking students at the UM who would like to contribute to this project."



Students of Eduardo Mondlane University (UEM)



Entrance administrative building UEM

