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Temporary Migrants, Young and Also Students: How to be a Foreign in a Military Institution of Superior Education

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Abstract

This research discusses about the temporary migration of young foreigners who come to Brazil in order to take their higher education. The scenario of this research is the "Escola Naval" (i.e. Brazilian Naval Academy), which promotes the formation of its future Navy officers. The young, before officially entering into mainstream education, spend one year in the "Qualification Stage for Academic Adaptation of Foreign Students", consisting of a period in which these students learn the Portuguese language and also the basic math knowledge with leveling purpose as prerequisites for admission into that institution. In this article, we propose to trace the profile of students who, in 2013, are attending this stage, highlighting their main characteristics, the obstacles encountered and their expectations for the future. Finally, from the reflections made above, we will think about the relevance of this first year of adaption, as well as possible solutions for its improvement.

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1. Introduction

About the relationship between youth and globalized world, we are faced with what Gusmão (2007 as cited in Faria, 2009, p.61) calls "nomadic student displacement", i.e. the disruption of physical, geographical and cultural barriers by the students, who seek in the foreign universities the space they believe to be unique for their future.

In our research, we found that the Higher Education Brazilian Institutions receive contingents of young foreign...
students seeking professional formation in first place, but also the construction of their individual, collective and social identity.

The focus of this research is young temporary immigrant students who left their home countries and conducted their training in a military high education, specifically in our case of study young Africans and Asians who currently study at the Brazilian Naval Academy (EN) aiming to understand how they experience, in a daily basis their difficulties in adapting to the local culture, to the language barrier and to the military and academic life.

A first survey was conducted in the bank of theses and dissertations from the Brazilian institution: Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES); and also the website “google”, using as search criteria the following keywords: "temporary migration" and "foreign students" in the period from 2004 to 2012. In this first selection, only a thesis of Subuhana (2005), and two dissertations, one of Mungoi (2006) and another Mourao (2006), were found, besides seven articles that focused on temporary migration, with a view of superior education, to Brazil and Portugal, of young people from Africa, belonging to the group of portuguese speaking languages: Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Sao Tome and Prince. Such a situation occurring becomes relevant in the expansion of studies on the subject.

The main driving wheel explored was the introductory teaching and the relationships built within the classroom, beyond the difficulties and potentialities that might by chance exist, as the adaptation to academic and military life in a foreign country.

Initially, we will present the main concepts related to student immigration, in particular the temporary one, to the legislation and to the bilateral agreements and interchanges about higher education in Brazil, and also to the social interaction of foreign young students and the molding of their identity as "subjects present on someone else's land" (Gusmão, 2008, p.1).

2. Immigration: some important concepts

As stated by Subuhana (2005, p.13), rephrasing Sayad (1998), immigration is the displacement of populations for all forms of space socially constituted and qualified, being "a complete social fact". The immigrant would be then, according to this author, a foreign citizen who has fixed residence in a country other than his or her own.

Regarding the particular case under investigation here, we can assert that immigration occurs in a provoked and temporary way, often involving cooperation agreements between the sovereign states of origin and destination, or even between institutions of higher education; which therefore may not be determined primarily as a mere political or economic relationship.

Subuhana (2005) reminds us that no identity is so rigid, solid and crystallized that cannot be questioned. The culture of the chosen country will cause significant impacts on the identity of an immigrant. Their values, their characteristics, their beliefs (their identity) will constantly be shocked by the foreign cultural assets abroad. From this confrontation, he will 'choose' to adopt or repudiate a cultural habit to which he has been exposed, and this 'choice' will leave “scratches” on his identity.

3. Bilateral Educational and Cultural Cooperation Agreements

Education has become one of the themes that managed to diversify the relations of international cooperation in the past decades. To Lanni (1996 cited in the Desiderio, 2005, p.3), this is a topic "inherent to the globalization of the social subject". On this study will shall not go into all the existing agreements in the educational field. We will stick to the Students-Agreement Undergraduate Program (PEC-G) and the ones related with the Navy Command, in particular the Maritime Professional Education and, the one, which is the focus of this article, the formation of foreigners as Officers in the Brazilian Navy Academy.

3.1. The Students-Agreement Undergraduate Program

With the increasing number of students from the Latin American countries included in Brazilian universities by individual and sporadic initiatives, emerged to meet this demand, in the 1920s the PEC-G (Mungoi, 2006). From the 1990s, according to Gusmão (2008), with the creation of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPPL),
Brazil, in order to assist in the development of the African continent, has come to play a central role both in commercial agreements and in the social field. Thus, were included in the PEC-G also young Africans, which, together with the Latin Americans, have constituted the group of temporary immigrants in higher education, which in essence provides opportunities for higher education and the possibility of social ascension when returning to their countries.

Developed by the Foreign Relations and Education Ministries, in partnership with public – federal and state – and private universities, the Program selects foreigners, aged between 18 and 25 years old, with high school completed, to take graduation in the country.

Decree n. 7,948, of March 12, 2013, which states about this Program already in its first article, evidences its purpose to training and qualifications of foreign students by offering free places on undergraduate courses in Brazilian higher education institutions, whether public or private. The unique paragraph of this article states that international cooperation in the field of education is to the one end of developing countries and that at the end of the undergraduate degree, obtaining a diploma, the students must necessarily return to their country of origin.

According to the data available on the website of the program on the Internet about the enrollments from 2001 to 2010, were selected over 6,100 young people for the PEC-G. The data point to a greater availability of undergraduate for the "Black Africa", probably due to the creation of CPPL. As can be noticed from the total number of foreigners, the Africans are more than 80% of the national enrollments in the Higher Education Institutions.

Currently, there are 45 participating countries, 20 in Africa, 14 in Central America, 11 South America, and one in Asia (East Timor). Courses are offered in several areas, and the Administration, Biology, Media, Applied Linguistics and Education are the ones most requested. We have had back in 2011 only one student from Asia (East Timor), tough in 2013 the number has substantially increased: to a total of 34 Timorese, 02 Pakistanis and 01 Thai.

There are some pre-requirements in the decree mentioned above: the candidate must pass the proficiency test in Portuguese for foreigners, must have completed high school in their countries, must have enabled temporary student visa - immigration status regularized on the student's responsibility -; and have financial conditions of subsistence in the country. The foreign students who by any chance fail the proficiency test of Portuguese (CELPE-Bras); also held in Brazil when unable to do so in their home country; are removed from the Program and shall obligatory return to their origin countries.

3.2. Technical Support in the Defense Field

Under the Ministry of Defense (MD), specifically with regard to the Navy Command, the courses for foreigners are included in the Naval Education Course and Internships Catalog for Extra-Navy personnel, and have short and long term durations.

The short duration ones are provided in the Short Duration Courses Annual Program for Foreign Ocean related personal and are held in training centers in Rio de Janeiro and in Belem. Such courses are intended for Governmental Administrative Body responsible for training personnel in the Merchant Navy from member countries of the International Maritime Organization, with which Brazil has cultural agreements. The list of courses is published annually through documents available on the website of the Brazilian Navy of on the Internet.

The long duration courses, including the formation of Officers in the Naval Academy, are agreed between the Brazilian Government and the Defense Attachés of the foreign countries that have representations in Brazil, and with which our country has close relations of cooperation. The places of interest from their respective Navies, whose analysis must be submitted to the Brazilian Navy, should be requested up to July 15 of the year before the start of the mentioned courses. The submission of States that do not have representatives in Brazil are held by our Brazilian Attachés abroad in response to the needs presented by the corresponding well related Navies.

It should be noted that the selection of foreigners who will carry out the various courses is not a responsibility of the Brazilian Force, nevertheless it is a responsibility of the countries of origin, which, in our point of view, sometimes results in the selection of a student without a minimum basic knowledge for the undertaking the courses.
4. Paths and trajectories: The look into formation

For methodological reasons, we will consider, in this study, the data obtained from the Navy Academy students who attended in 2013 the Qualification Stage for foreign students. It will be presented soon a brief analysis of the collected data: interviews with teachers and social and psychological profile questionnaire with students.

4.1. Qualification Stage for Academic Adaptation of Foreign Students

The locus of our research was the Brazilian Naval Academy “Escola Naval” (EN), which is situated in the historical Villegagnon Island in the city of Rio de Janeiro. This Military Higher Education Institution has as its mission to graduate Navy officers to the initial ranks of their careers, in the bodies of Line Officers, Marine Corps and Navy Stewards. To fulfill its purpose, the Naval Academy provides EN undergraduate courses.

The "Qualification Stage for Academic Adaptation of Foreign Students", also known as "leveling", was established by Ordinance on internal 10 of February 24, 2010, because of grade repetition and found the cancellation of enrollment. It is worth noting that most of these students had no prior mastery of the Portuguese language. Another problem found was that young, despite being within the age required for enrollment in EN, about 20 years, did not come from their country of origin with a basic workup of high school.

During their formation as a naval officers, it can verified with data supplied by the secretary of EN, out of the 87 foreign students enrolled – since 1956, when the program started, up to 2012 - 26 did not reach the goal aimed by their country or by themselves by completing the undergraduate program, i.e. 30% of the total number of enrolled foreign students.

The referred stage, according to the Decree that implements it (Escola Naval, 2010), is intended to provide the foreign students selected by the friendly nations, with the basic knowledge required to access the undergraduate course of EN. It basically consists of a set of classes designed with leveling content, skills and competencies considered prerequisites for following the subjects in the curriculum, so that it makes possible the comprehension, speaking and writing of the Portuguese language, as well as possible gaps in these students in mathematics and physics.

School activities are developed over an academic year, which consists of thirty weeks of classes, divided into two semesters. The referred students, for academic and military purposes are called "Trainees". A Trainee will be considered approved if obtains "satisfactory" grade in all subjects of the curriculum, and then will be able to be enrolled in the following year of undergraduate regular course at EN, as detailed in the internal rules of this higher education institution.

There is a pre-established curriculum to be followed by the teachers for each subject, and in most cases the written test is present as evaluation methodology. If the trainee receives "not satisfactory" grade, he will be invited, after acknowledge of the government of his origin country, to re-attend to the qualification stage once again in the following year. There is also the possibility that the duration of the qualification stage for a student is cut short, when is identified that this student masters the basic knowledge for following the school cycle.

4.2. Target Research Subjects of this Study

This work is based on the data obtained from the young foreign members on the Qualification Stage in 2013. On this year, we have had eight new trainees, distributed by the following national States: Lebanon - four students; Namibia - two students; Nigeria - one student; and Senegal - one student. These students represent a specific case of migration, since first of all: they represent their origin countries, second: they are receiving a special higher education - a military formation, which by its own inherent characteristics, such as living onboard and few contact with outside world, require special attention from all the institution, since from the teachers and the Department of Counseling and Educational (SOEP), up to the administration people managing their diet, as for example some of them are Muslims and can’t consume pork meat.
5. Results and analysis of the Data collection instruments

Were conducted an informal and open interview with the math professor and the reading of the academic report from a Portuguese professor. From the data obtained in both the interview and the report, it was possible to point some actions that could be developed in the next stages. Another source of data was the questionnaire of Social, Pedagogical and Academic Profile prepared by SOEP Institution, which was applied to the research subjects.

5.1. Analysis of the Professor’s Data Collection Instruments

The Portuguese professor follows foreign students at the Brazilian Naval Academy since 2009, and regularly produces a report about her activities with the foreign students and comments on their development in relation to learning the Portuguese language. In her reports, she refers to some of the methods used in teaching to foreigners:

- Employing Dynamic Classes: from the first moment of contact with the students, the professor aims to stimulate the oral expression. Therefore makes usage of the Portuguese language to communicate with them.

- Using de Complementary Material: since the third week, introduces, as a progressive measure, the reading of newspapers read all over the country.


In these same instructional media and also according to information requested to the students, compatible linguistic material with the degree of development of the group is collected for the study of vocabulary and linguistic structures, as the previously stipulated course plan.

The professor was stimulated by the Portuguese Coordination of the Institution, to weave a subjective evaluation about the group of foreign students received in 2013. In her report, she highlights the following observations:

- Personal and behavioral characteristics of students: the students generally demonstrate good education, discipline, responsibility and willingness to learn. Although open to all teachings, in most cases, people are reserved and observant. The first classes have resulted in visible mesh among the group, with the clear manifestation of mutual respect and collaboration, even in other areas of the school, where they do physical activity, for example.

- Development of language skills: the professor could see that two students initially had great difficulty understanding the mechanisms of the language, but empathized that the process of overcoming difficulties is usually evidenced in the course around the second to the third month, when students already understand the greater part of what they are told in the formal language and can express themselves even if in poor way. This difficulty can be explained by the fact that these young people have the English language as their second language.

The professor highlights that some students still can not be considered suitable for a desirable understanding of the Portuguese and good oral and written expression in the academic. In addition to the reduced active vocabulary, even trivial, they lack the structural knowledge of the language that allows them to climb more advanced positions in the acquisition of this language.

It adds that, as a result of that lack of knowledge of linguistic structures by all the eight students (with some clear and inevitable individual differences) as well as the complicity that is building between them, it is important that lessons Portuguese are given for the eight together.

The difficulties experienced by the math professor were related to their understanding of our language and also to their culture. Regarding the language, she stressed that they are not from natural Portuguese-speaking countries. Apart from Arabic and African dialects, the second language of the students is French or English, and many of the students did not have any knowledge over our language when they arrived to EN. Moreover, the professor, as a woman, often came across a cultural barrier, since, as students the describe: "hardly the men would be taught by a woman."

As for the teaching of mathematics, initially as a teacher explains, they sought to obtain information about the differences between the Brazilian education and the one from the countries of origin of foreign students. Then, to understand at which level within the Brazilian curriculum could fit their foreign students, she prepared a block of exercises with questions of the three years of our high school in order to determine the known content and thus be able to prepare a program for the discipline. As result, she was able to verify a discrepancy regarding the education...
of students, since a portion was leveled in what would be our primary school and others could already follow the curriculum of the first academic year of the Naval Academy.

5.2. Analysis of the questionnaires from the Foreign Students - Trainees

The questionnaire is applied, in order to draw a brief and objective social, psychological and academic profile of the foreign students. Such profile allows you to trace action strategies to facilitate the adaptation of these students to the routine of the school, as well as better understand the cultural differences of the students. The questionnaire was first applied in 2009 and since then has been reformulated and enhanced. Its current version has 36 objective questions.

In the period in which the students filled the data collection instrument, more specifically in the month of March, they had been already around two months in Brazil. All respondents have needed assistance to respond to the questionnaire, because they still had little knowledge of Portuguese. Only three of them had been in contact with our language in their countries of origin, but had not been verified the contact frequency and content knowledge.

All foreign students had been under studies before joining EN and had taken some kind of selection process back in their countries. Most attended elementary school in a private school. Already in high school, half have studied in public school and half in private school. According to the participants, there is no history of school failure and most were alphabetized with six years or less.

An interesting remark was that the majority have concluded their high school around two to three years ago back in their countries, a fact that may lead to a greater need to remember the content, because of not only the time of termination of their studies and differences in the contents, but mainly, the preparation for higher education in Brazil, more specifically in EN, an institution that has, in its "academic DNA", a walk through the exact sciences, with strong presence of calculus and physics.

The Trainees were asked in which academic disciplines they expected to have greater and lesser difficulty. To this question, there were no response options. We can verify that the discipline of Portuguese causes greater apprehension in the foreign students, as all members of the class of 2013 qualification stage did not have the Portuguese as an official language of their country. The Lebanese and Senegalese speak French, as the Namibian and Nigerian have English as the official language.

Regarding the subjects that students think they will have less difficulty, it was interesting finding that physics appears first near calculus, which can be secured by the Lebanese, who were already attending the Naval Academy from their country, with about a year and a half of higher education accomplished.

The biggest concern felt by the foreign students was at the beginning of the course and with the need to master the Portuguese language, a prerequisite to be enrolled in the class of 1st year of EN. The initial perception of the Trainees regarding the Aspirants 'they are very dedicated and are too afraid to fail a year "and they are respected, which they consider to be "very important". A reflection of their own expectations.

6. Final Remarks

The Qualification Stage becomes important when the temporary immigrants arrive to an academic course without the base language in a desired level, which can greatly prejudice their performance students, even leading to demotivation and cancellation or locking of their studies. The teaching of Portuguese is essential to be present in the qualification stage year, especially when it is directed to technically facilitate the adapting to the local cultural habits, in which these young people will be submerged for more than five years. So that the ability of expression and understanding of the Portuguese language is stated an instrument of integration. Math is probably the common language among foreign students who differ in ethnicity and language skills. It is, however, necessary to understand, through the qualification stage, the curricular differences between the countries of origin of our international students and what is required as a prerequisite to attend the Naval Academy.

Before 2001 there was the Qualification Stage, which was set internally in EN at 2010. Students used to be nominated by their countries, through local contest, and were immediately enrolled in the first year. It was from this experience that it was verified the need to think of a way to level the existing curriculum differences. One cannot ignore the fact that each country has its curricular priorities.
From the reports of the two professors, we assess that there is an initial relationship being built among the students, regardless of the origin and the former culture. It was found that they feel and recognize the difficulty of the language barrier when entering the undergraduate course at EN.

We pointed out that the teaching staff of the institution is considering the possibility of making use of the rules of the acceptance of foreign student by PEC-G, such as the obligation to provide certification of proficiency in Portuguese, which would be certified by the test CELPE-Bras. This practice, if adopted, would lower the qualification stage time, causing the student to be enrolled before the period of one year in the regular education of EN, thus reducing their complete time in Brazil as an immigrant temporary.

The qualification stage itself is a way of nice welcoming the foreign students, integrating them and adapting to the Brazilian naval culture. It is important to recognize and value the cultural and linguistic diversity of the foreign students, respecting their differences, ethnic identity, the system of beliefs and values, which belong to themselves. In addition to narrowing the diplomatic relations between the current Brazilians aspirants and the foreigners the presence of foreign students, the rich diversity evidenced from the integration of students from other countries can represent great opportunity to gain new knowledge.

References


