

The teaching and the learning of reading in the first years of schooling in East Timor

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Abstract

East Timor is a new country of the third millennium. Having a society of oral tradition and a predominantly illiterate population, East Timor faces many challenges in the era of globalization. Given the importance of reading for the lives of human beings, Timorese children should be taught to read since the early years of schooling and in doing so the sociocultural and linguistic reality of the country should be taken into account. With a case study in Public School Number 1 Nularan, in Dili, East Timor, on teaching and learning to read in the first three years of schooling, it was observed that both the guidelines of the curriculum and the reference books used by the school to work with students do not foster the development of reflective reading nor offer opportunities for children to express their ideas or communicate using texts for group discussions. Thus, we suggest constant monitoring and evaluation of the teaching and learning to read process in primary schools and investment both in human resources training and in the improvement of teaching materials and school infrastructure. It is not enough to mention education in the Constitution and laws: the important thing is that competent authorities take action to deliver quality education to the East Timorese as active subjects in inventions and knowledge so that they have access to better lives for themselves and for the communities which they belong to.

Keywords: East Timor - Nularan School - Teaching / learning - Reading.

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East Timor, the 191st UN member, is a country of the third millennium. After a Portuguese colonization of nearly five centuries and 24 years of Indonesian occupation, from 1975 to 1999, on May 20, 2002 restoration of its independence, which had been proclaimed on November 28, 1975, was recognized internationally.

The new country is located between Southeast Asia and South Pacific. It is composed of half of Timor Island (the easternmost of the archipelago), the enclave of Oecussi (on the north coast of the western part), the island of Atauro (23 km north of Dili) and the islet Jaco. The country's total area is about 18,899 km². Its current population totals approximately one million inhabitants.

Timorese society, according to the study of Gomes (2008), has an unwritten tradition, their vernacular literature is all oral and texts are preserved in the memory of their *lia-na'in*¹ or *mako'ar*² (the owner of tales).

To date, in rural areas oral literature assumes a very important role as an archive of ancestral knowledge. The wisdom of the people is basically condensed into a philosophy of life expressed in forms of popular literature of oral transmission, among which proverbs, legends, myths, fables and traditional folk tales stand out. All of them are part of the rich folklore of these people. Through these legends and folk tales, are traces of the psychology of the East Timorese, notes on their habits and customs, characteristics of their nature, data on their political, social and religious system, samples of their superstitious practices. (p. 38)

Moreover, it is noteworthy that there are many languages spoken by various ethnic groups that make up the Timorese people. In the book *Babel Loro Sa'e - The language problem in East Timor*, Thomaz (2002) mentioned the top twenty local languages spoken in the territory by the year 1975.

Although Mambae was the language spoken by the largest number of East Timorese, Tetun was the language one that became the lingua franca in the territory. It became the national language and it has shared with status of official language with Portuguese since 2002, when the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste was ratified.

As a logical consequence of the status of national and official language, it is critical that the Tetum passes from orality to written form and can play its role or function of community cohesion. This implies the need for a consensus on "[...] standards for the different language skills based on which teaching materials can be developed and quickly disseminated in the national education system [...]" (Corte-Real, 2007: 9).

In a nation with an oral complex linguistic context in which most of the country's population is bilingual or multilingual, and which still has much to be done to suit and fit the demands of today's world, one of the first initiatives was to include in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of East Timor, 2002, a guarantee that all East Timorese citizens have the right to education and culture through the public system of universal, compulsory and free basic education.

As a full member of the UN, during their General Assembly in September 2002, East Timor also joined other member countries in their commitment to fight each year for the guarantee of "Education for All and Quality Education," one of the goals to be

¹ Literally translated as "the owner of words", who is the professional narrator of the community.

² Idem.

achieved within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)³ (Timor-Leste, 2004).

With an education system concerned with the needs of the future generations of East Timor, this young nation must follow and take an active part in recognizing the importance of developing reading practices very early, since the early years of schooling.

In this era of globalization, reading is very important and indispensable for human beings, since it allows them to interact with others and to relate to multiple and relevant knowledge, developing their capacity for understanding, questioning and interacting with the inventions and knowledge of the world, as proposed by Soares (2003):

Reading is not only to read. Reading is also a way to be, do and have. Those who read do things, are in places, have things, are people who those who do not read do not do, are not. Those who read are different from those who do not read. Those who read get accustomed to go to, to be in, to do, to have what does not exist for those who do not read. People who read put in the fabric of their lives threads, motifs, colors of smart, open, free patterns, which develop them, enable them, distance them from animality, from mere sensitivity. Reading is one of the things that distinguish men from animals, combining the gift and the need for various skills such as analysis, relatedness, transfer, testing, potentiation. (p. 66)

There is a strand of scholars specialized in reading that emphasizes the importance of the social uses of reading and what reading should be able to do in people's lives. Jolibert (1998) highlights that:

To read is to directly assign meaning to what is written. "Directly" means without intermediaries such as: - decoding (letter by letter, syllable by syllable, word by word), - or reading aloud. To read is to question the written as such, from a real expectation (need / pleasure) in a "real life situation". To question a text is to formulate hypotheses of meaning from previously gathered evidence and to verify these hypotheses. This questioning is developed through a reading strategy [...]. To read is to read authentic writings that range from the name of a street written on a notice to a book, including an advertisement, a package, a newspaper, a leaflet etc, in situations of "serious" life, as children put it. It is by reading for real from the beginning (and not by learning to read first) that one learns to read [...]. (p. 18-19)

³ The Millennium Development Goals are: 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. 2. Achieve universal primary education. 3. Promote gender equality and empower women. 4. Reduce child mortality. 5. Improve maternal health. 6. Combat HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases. 7. Ensure environmental sustainability. 8. Establish partnerships for development.

The educator Paulo Freire (1985) believes that the act of reading does not end with the mechanical decoding of the word and of the written language; he anticipates and extends in the intelligence of the world by mentioning that

[...] reading the world precedes reading the word and reading the word implies the continuity of reading the world. [...] this movement from the world to the word and from the word to the world is always present. (p. 11)

Within this political and libertarian concept, reading is, above all, an act of knowing, because knowing means realizing better the forces and relations that exist in the world of nature and in the world of men, according to considerations of Silva (2005):

To read is, in the first instance, to possess elements to fight alienation and ignorance, [...] More specifically, the act of reading constitutes an instrument of struggle against domination. Critical reading is a prerequisite for libertarian education, it is a prerequisite for true cultural action that should be implemented in schools (and libraries). (p. 49-51)

Other researchers emphasize the multifunctional capability that reading tends to carry, pointing to the notion of distraction, of different pleasure, of awareness. Jose Louzeiro, (1982 *apud* Silva, 2005), during the Fourth Congress of Reading in Brazil (COLE), mentioned that:

For me, reading does not imply pleasure only - the kind of pleasure one has when enjoying apple pie or going on a good trip; for me reading gives essentially the LIBERTARIAN PLEASURE. It is by reading, even bad books, that we awaken to the questions about the NEW WORLD THAT IS BEING BUILT. (p. 11)

In the case of Antão, reading is taken as a complex and multifaceted practice. For the author, "[...] it entertains and gives pleasure, develops the individual intellectually and morally, develops the reader's imagination, increases one's critical capacity, favors the acquisition of culture, personal autonomy and social relations" (Antão, 1997, p. 13).

Smith (1989 *apud* D'Albuquerque, 1993, p. 8) points out that reading is often defined with formal statements such as "to read is to extract information from what is printed." However, the author considers reading as a social activity learned (or not) in a social context, rather than intellectual. This author talks about both sides of reading: on the one side, it is the visual information that disappears when the lights go out; on the other hand, the non-visual information (behind the eye) or "prior knowledge", which is

with the reader all the time and does not disappear when the lights go out. According to Smith, reading always involves a combination of visual and non-visual information.

The more non-visual information readers have, the less visual information they need.

Like the variety of the concept of reading, teaching and learning to read are activities that have not been developed homogeneously in all societies worldwide. Some societies have been able to develop education policies and systems in which reading has taken a major role in the intellectual growth of generations. In other societies, however, reading is still a major challenge to be faced over many generations.

Given the education situation of East Timor, the work on reading is still a great challenge. Most East Timorese children, besides being part of a society whose tradition is oral and unwritten, live amid linguistic diversity. When they go to school to learn to read, they simultaneously with the learn written and spoken Portuguese and have Tetum⁴ as the language of instruction in the early years of schooling.

The schools in East Timor do not have enough textbooks that depict local narratives, local people, the country's history, the culture and tradition of its different groups. There is no doubt that in the absence of textbooks appropriate to the context of East Timor, particularly local children's literature that fosters reading among children since primary school, children have to learn with the culture of other nations that are strange to them. Certainly, the other's culture must also be known, but the reality of East Timor should be privileged to cultivate and strengthen the nationalist and patriotic spirit of the new generations by providing historical and cultural information about their own nation.

To appreciate and understand the process of teaching to read and learning to read in the early years of schooling in East Timor, a case study was conducted in Public School Number 1 Nularan, in Dili. The audience consisted of teachers and students of the first cycle (first to third grade). The research was done through observation of the teaching and learning to read process in the classrooms, through dialogues with the school's principal, with teachers and students, guided by a script previously discussed and analyzed with the supervisor. In addition, the researcher did a literature review and teachers filled out questionnaires with information on the

⁴Tetum is not spoken throughout East Timor. Taking into account the country's capital, Dili, and the thirteen districts, Tetum is spoken and used as a language of instruction in Dili and the districts of Viqueque, Manatuto of Same, Cova-Lima, in the Suai region, in Raimera, in Bobonaro district, in Batugadé, Cova and Balibo.

curriculum, teaching method and teaching materials in use at school, besides the level of teacher training as well as the difficulties faced by students and teachers in the process.

The practice of teaching and learning to read in the first three years of primary education in Nularan public school in Dili

Based on the goals outlined in the research project of the dissertation⁵, the process of teaching and learning to read was directly observed in the classrooms of the first, second and third grades, from January 27 to February 18, 2009.

Teaching and learning to read are part of the curriculum currently in force in Portuguese. The main reference materials are the books *Os Loricos* 1, 2 and 3 which only teachers have access to, because few copies are available. Thus, the material for students' daily reading is practically limited to what the teacher writes on the blackboard and to what is copied by students on their notebooks. The *Lafaek Ki'ik* magazine is periodically distributed to the students of the first and second grades and *Lafaek Prima* magazine, to those of the third grade. Those magazines can be taken home.



Photo 1. Reading class in the second grade.
Source: Aicha Bassarewan, Formosa District, May 2009.

⁵ The research project of the dissertation was submitted in December 2008 under the title *O ensino e a aprendizagem da leitura nos primeiros três anos do ensino básico: estudo de caso na escola pública n. 1 Nularan, em Díli, ano letivo 2008-2009* (Teaching and learning to read in the first three grades of basic education: a case study in public schools No 1 Nularan in Dili, the school year 2008-2009).

To provide space and reading materials for both teachers and students, the school allocated a room to set up a library, but such room is still being renovated and prepared. The languages of instruction used in class are Tetum and Portuguese. But learning to read and write is done in Portuguese, according to the requirements of the curriculum in place.

Overall, it was observed that the process develops in an almost uniform way for all the parallel classes of the three initial years of schooling. Teachers follow a lesson plan prepared every week collectively by those who teach the same grade. As a result, the pace of advancement or progress of the subjects taught to students in parallel classes of the same years is relatively similar.

It is generally accepted that teaching and learning, development and mastery of reading in the early years of schooling are crucial factors in the basic foundation to access other types of knowledge. In many cases, they assume a key role in the student's future.

For that to happen satisfactorily, there is a need for considering factors that may directly or indirectly influence the process: teachers with appropriate training, teaching material relevant to the context and reality of students, the school environment and other support facilities.

However, in the school studied, the principal faces dilemmas. Although he is aware of the importance of teaching and learning to read for children in the early years of schooling, he cannot allocate the best teachers for that. The teaching staff is very limited: most teachers still attend training classes and others participate in Portuguese workshops. Because teaching and learning processes in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades have to be conducted in Portuguese only, while in the first three grades mastering Portuguese is less required, since Tetum is the main instruction language, the principal is forced to allocate the most proficient teachers to higher grades, not to the early ones.

It is important to mention that, in view of the constraints faced by the teaching staff, the principal has made several efforts to ensure better provision of learning for the first years of schooling. He has given special attention and support to the drafting and discussion of lesson plans with teachers, to the supervision and constant monitoring of the teaching and learning process.

Through conversations with the school principal, it became clear that he admits that there is some difficulty for teachers to relate the guidelines suggested by the curriculum with what the Portuguese textbook offers to the first three grades (*Os Loricos* 1, 2 and 3). In many cases, the content of the textbooks does not match the students' cultural and social context.

The curriculum in effect for primary education in East Timor, issued by the Minister of Education and Culture on August 15, 2005, has been implemented since the academic year 2005-2006.

In the curriculum currently in effect, teaching and learning to read do not appear as knowledge to be developed separately or independently. Teaching and learning to read are expected to be conducted simultaneously to the other language skills of the Portuguese language program, which are: orality (listening and speaking), reading, writing and explicit knowledge, which are expected to be addressed and articulated in an integrated way so that each is both the starting point as the point of arrival.

According to the curriculum, to be effective, the program is developed based on two levels of learning: an initial level, from first to third grade, and a middle level of development covering the next three years, i.e., from fourth to sixth grade. The initial level is considered a crucial period to acquire mechanisms and install basic skills to advance to other levels of learning and performance, particularly with regard to reading and writing.

The curriculum does not define a specific method to teach and to learn to read. Rather, it suggests a methodology, a path that lets one see the dimensions to be worked on, the basic mechanisms to start learning to read and write, the skills to develop understanding, in order to build readers who become skilled and competent, able to understand increasingly complex texts.

One can understand that by not defining a specific method of teaching and learning to read, but a possible methodology, the curriculum does not want to impose a specific method, perhaps so as not to limit the creativity of teachers who try to adapt to the local contexts of each school.

However, one should not ignore the fact that East Timor does not yet have enough professionals (either in number or in proper training), assigned to teach students in the early years of schooling, to let them be guided by the method they consider the most appropriate. The situation is aggravated by the fact that there are no books and

materials on the market of East Timor to meet the real needs of Timorese children and to give teachers room to know and evaluate materials appropriate to the learning needs of their students.

As for the mastery of core reading competencies, the curriculum of East Timor (2005) states that:

To read is to understand. There is no reading if there is no understanding. Decipherment is a significant component and competence of the reading process, but only read those who assign meanings to what they decipher, that is, those who understand what they read. Readers have a fundamental role in the reading process, because they will construct meanings for what they read not only based on what the text offers, but also by making their knowledge, their experience, the informal learning that they have been performing in their natural environment (family, group, community where they live) intervene in such construction of meanings. (p. 6)

According to the curriculum, while learning to read children learn to decipher, to come up with hypotheses and anticipate what is written in an attempt to discover meanings of the text presented to them. Listening to someone read and reading alone or with someone's help are activities that enable children to acquire a taste for reading and to understand the richness that the ability to read can add to their lives. To stimulate the ability to read and the interest in reading, children need to be in contact and to interact with various types of texts such as poems, short stories, tales, riddles, proverbs, mantra, news, advertising texts.

The development of the students' ability to locate information and answer questions about what they read, revealing the overall understanding of the text read, requires, according to the curriculum, a lot of reading.

The main reference teaching materials for teachers of the first three years to teach reading/Portuguese language is are the books *Loricos* 1, 2 and 3. Although the authors did include a few words and names related to East Timor in these books, they are possibly not the most appropriate to the context of East Timorese students. By stating so, we do not intend to minimize the work of the authors of these books, but to indicate that more efforts and contributions of all are needed in order to bring the materials closer to the linguistic, cultural, and social reality of the country.

It is also noteworthy that at no time does the curriculum mention that one should take into account the bilingualism of the Timorese children and their families, the illiterate tradition and the strong presence of orality among members of the different groups of East Timor, the few events that foster the contact with reading and writing, both in different social circles and at school.

With regard to the guidelines proposed by the curriculum, it appears that reading is understood as a process to be learned by the child in order to locate, recognize and decode information, and for entertainment and recreation. The concern shown by the curriculum with the mastery of this ability by children in the first years of schooling is understandable. However, research has shown that excessive work on pure decoding is no guarantee that the student will grasp the meaning of the text. Once children have mastered the code, in order to expand the meaning of the text and not just stick to surface reading, they need intense exposure to different situations of reading practice that enable them not only to reproduce the meaning of the text but also to reflect, to give opinions on what they read and to begin to understand the uses and functions of reading and writing in the world.

It is believed that it is necessary to provide children from the early years with moments of questioning, reflection, interaction, and of brief discussion about what they read and hear.

Moreover, it is recognized that the daily work of teachers with reflective and critical reading with students opens the possibility of accessing finer degrees of reading. One should not forget that living in an atmosphere of unwritten tradition, the repertoire and world knowledge of the Timorese children is often that of their Timorese colleagues, their family, and the group to which they belong; the access to other worlds, to other texts, is not so easy. Thus, schools have dual responsibilities, as they must take into account the skills and world knowledge of students and offer them other knowledge. Therefore, in the early years of schooling reading cannot be separated from the reality experienced by children, that is, from their lives. The language-thought association is not possible without reality. This kind of work with reading generally fosters the liberating education which Paulo Freire defended so much.

Another point highlighted in the observation in the school of Nularan concerns the existence of certain constraints to the application of the guidelines proposed by the curriculum related to meeting the needs of teaching and learning to read.

Even the school principal recognizes the difficulties that teachers face in the absence of a finely tuned synchrony between what the curriculum proposes and reference books, for example. Moreover, until the early months of 2009, the school did not have a library with books and reference materials. Teaching materials distributed by the government are not sufficient for all the children. Students may not take home books to which they sometimes have access in the classroom.

In general, the practice of teaching and learning to read, as observed during the study, consists of the following steps:

- a) when starting a new lesson, at the beginning of a class, the teacher writes on the board a text or some words, depending on the grade of the students (1st, 2nd and 3rd grades);
- b) in the second phase, there are some variations: some teachers ask students to copy the text or words on their notebooks and then the teacher begins to read aloud what is written on the board and asks students to repeat the reading twice or three times; there are other teachers who forbid students from copying the text or words written on the board, and then, the teacher and the students read in the same manner described above; in the third variation of the second stage, after writing the text or words on the board and before starting to read, the teacher briefly introduces the topic, making comments and asking questions; only then does the teacher proceed to reading: first s/he reads and then students read together;
- c) then the teacher calls on volunteer students to do the individual reading, then s/he calls the others, paying special attention to the most timid ones or the ones with the most difficulty; before ending the lesson, the teacher asks students to copy what was written on the board (for those who had not copied) or to finish copying on their notebooks.
- d) on the second day, the teacher writes the text or words of the previous class on the blackboard again; this time the teacher reads the text or words again and is followed by the students together, then students read in groups and individually; this activity is then followed by others to develop other listening, speaking and writing (copy) skills.
- e) the same reading matter: a new alphabet / a new word or a new text is taught during a week to better ensure the development of reading, speaking, writing and comprehension skills in Portuguese.
- f) on Saturdays, teachers carry out activities to develop and encourage the reading competence of students in the first and second grades through

games: students identify letters that form words on the board and the teacher draws on the board and fixes them on a cloth using pins.

In the following week, the teaching activity of a new element of the alphabet, a new word or a new text, according to the grade, is repeated in the same way.

From the description above, one can see that the attention paid to the process is confined mostly to presenting and memorizing the alphabet and/or the word. More emphasis is given to decoding, to the meaning of words, often in a decontextualized way, and to the mechanization of reading by repetitively reading in chorus.

The practice is to make the East Timorese child learn to recognize words and sounds of the Portuguese language, but this is not enough knowledge to begin the practice for reflective and inquiring reading in the first three grades, since what they learn does not make sense to them.

According Lefevre (1962 *apud* Antony, 1997, p. 15), a language can only be understood as a structured system capable of generating patterns with meaning, and reading is a process related to language and requires the simultaneous adoption of patterns of structure and meaning that are far above the level of words.

Thus, the development of reading does not occur, since the literacy offered by the school is limited to decoding skills, excluding the meaning construction skills. Unfortunately, there is no room for reflective and participatory reading.

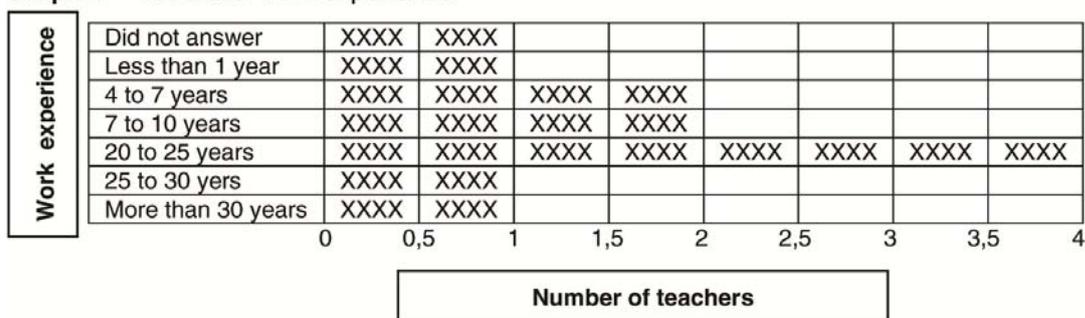
25 teachers (including the school principal) work at Public School Number 1 Nularan in Dili; 23 out of those 25 teachers filled out and returned the questionnaire. 13 out of those 23 are responsible for teaching first, second and third grade students to read.

Among the 13 teachers of the first three grades, three are male and 10 female. One teacher is aged between 21 and 30 years, two teachers are aged between 31 and 40 years, six teachers are aged between 41 and 50 years and four teachers are 51 or older.

According to the study, the level of training, courses and work experience of the 13 teachers vary a lot:

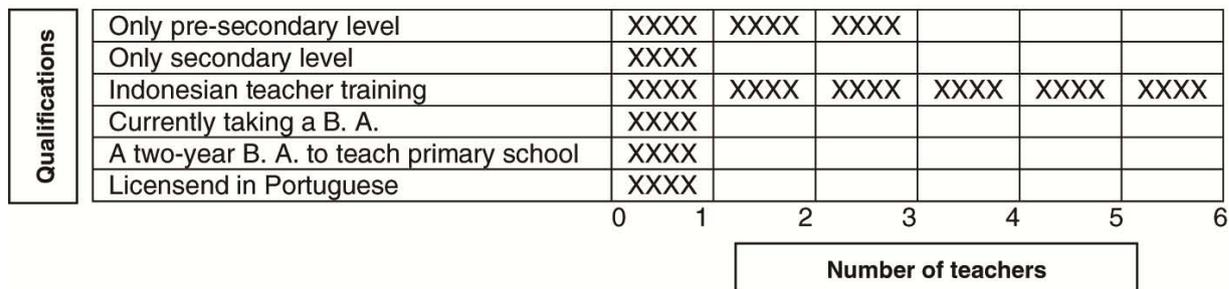
- About work experience: one teacher has worked longer than 30 years, one teacher has worked between 25 and 30 years, four teachers have worked between 20 and 25 years, two teachers have worked between 7 and 10 years, two teachers have worked between 4 and 7 years, two teachers have worked less than 1 year and one teacher did not answer the question (see chart 1).

Graph 1 – Teachers' work experience.



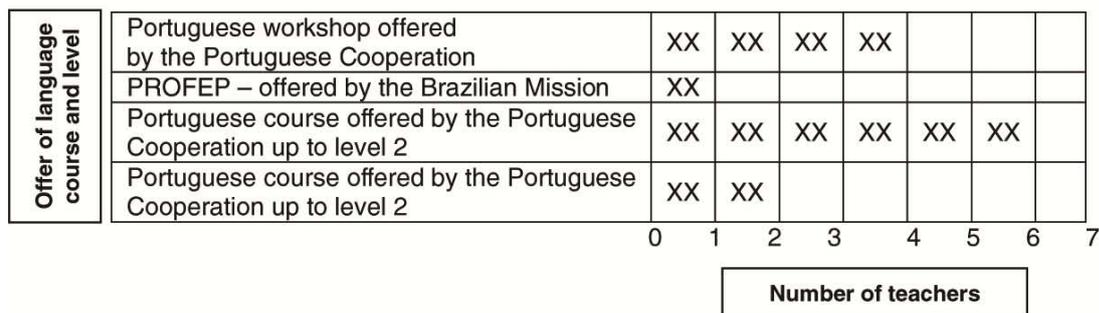
- Regarding qualifications, the school has one teacher who is licensed in Portuguese, one teacher with a two-year BA (to be a primary school teacher) , one teacher who is taking the first year of a two-year bachelor’s course, six teachers who did the teacher course during the Indonesian occupation, with a teacher trained in secondary education (post-1999) and three teachers with the pre-secondary level only (before 1975) (see chart 2).

Graph 2 – Teachers' training level.



- Portuguese language courses: two teachers attended up to level III, six attended only up to the level II and one teacher attended the Primary School Teacher in Service Training Program, PROFEPA; four teachers are currently attending the Portuguese workshop (from Monday to Friday in the premises of Nularan school, from 2 pm to 5 pm) (see chart 3).

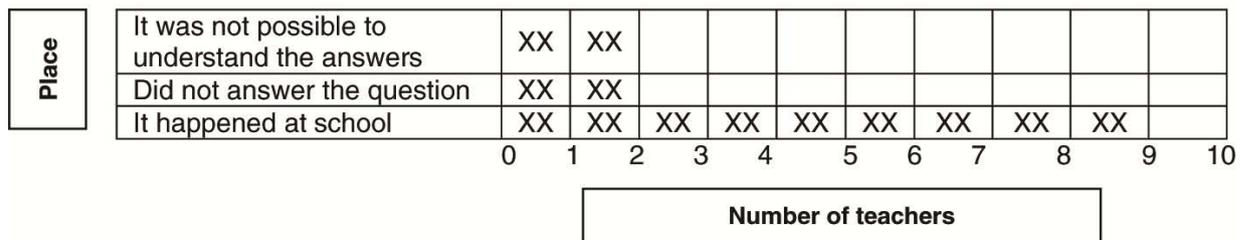
Graph 3 – Portuguese courses.



With regard to teachers' reading practices:

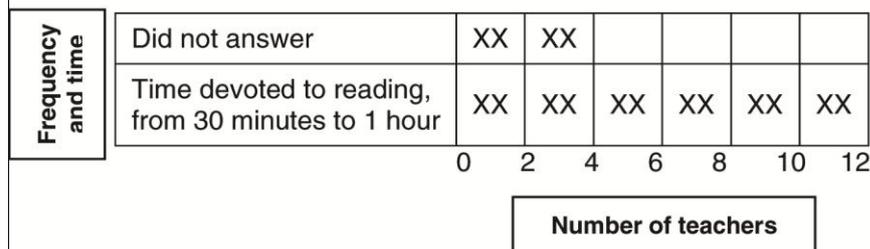
- On the first contact of teachers as children with reading, nine teachers answered that it happened at school, two teachers did not answer the question and the responses of two teachers were not clear enough; among the teachers who said that they learned to read first at school, two said it was on the blackboard and two said they were aged seven, two said that they liked to read and do the work (maybe exercises), others did not detail the process, while one of the two teachers who did not specify where they had learned to read the first time said s/he liked the learning process and the other said that it had been very difficult (see chart 4).

Graph 4 – As a child, where the first contact with reading took place.



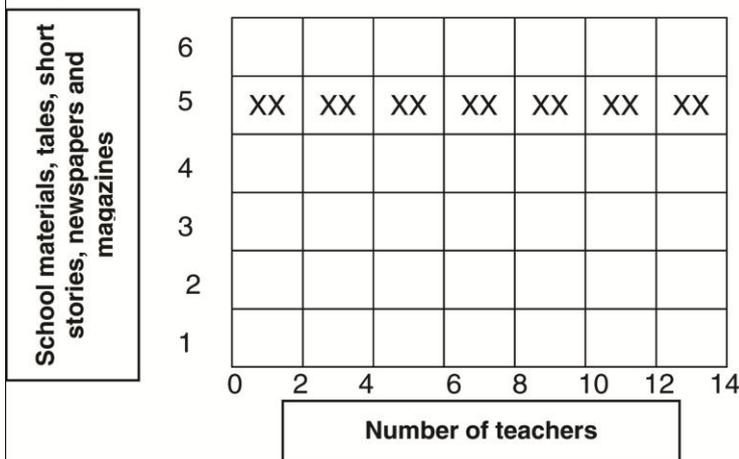
- As for the frequency and time devoted by teachers to reading, 11 answered that they read daily from 30 minutes to 1 hour and 2 teachers did not answer. (see chart 5).

Graph 5 – Time devoted to reading.



- Teachers indicated school materials, tales, short stories, and even newspapers and magazines as reading material, without specifying in what language the content was read (see chart 6).

Graph 6 – Teachers’ reading materials.



Legend: XX – Genres read without specifying in what language

With regard to the other 10 teachers who teach the second cycle:

- 9 are female teachers and one did not answer that question;
- in terms of age, one teacher is aged between 21 and 30 years, one teacher is aged between 31 and 40, one teacher is aged between 41 and 50, four teachers are 51 or older and three teachers did not inform their age;
- regarding work experience, five teachers have over 30 years’ experience , one teacher has 25 to 30 years’ experience, one teacher has 20 to 25 years’ experience, two teachers have 7 to 10 years’ experience and one teacher has less than 1 year experience;
- Qualifications or training: 7 out of 10 teachers graduated in the teacher course during the Indonesian occupation (from 1975 to 1999) and, after 1999, one teacher has a three-year bachelor's degree, eight teachers have a two-year bachelor’s degree and one teacher is taking the first year of a bachelor’s course. It is noteworthy that since 1999 the teacher training has been carried out in Portuguese.

Based on the data presented above, one can see that the teachers who teach upper grades completed their qualifications during the period when the Portuguese language was reintroduced, and as result feel safer to use that language than the teachers who teach the first three grades.

Final thoughts

Although the policies and laws of the Timorese State reflect the conscious need for citizens to monitor and take an active part in the international community and even though reading plays a key role in communication and interaction between peoples, the process of teaching and learning to read in the early years of schooling has not been developed from this perspective yet, much less taken into account the realities of the East Timorese children who come from societies of oral tradition and hence illiterate environments, which would require differentiated work with this community . A case study in a school cannot be used to draw general conclusions that apply to other regions of the country. However, a single curriculum and the same teaching materials used at the school studied are used elsewhere in the country. The level of the teaching staff of a school in central Dili is certainly not below the level of those in schools in remote areas. Therefore, there is an urgent need for more representative and comprehensive research to be conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture in order to acknowledge the Timorese reality and take appropriate and comprehensive action to improve teaching and learning of reading and hence to improve education in East Timor.

The guidelines of the curriculum applied by the school do not foster the development of reflective reading by pupils. Moreover, much of what is proposed does not encourage children to express their ideas, to communicate, to use texts as themes for group discussions. In many cases, the reading of the concrete, the reading for the unveiling of the world and reading for liberation are not considered a right of the child, who, therefore, should do nothing but read mechanically and decode words.

There is a need for reformulation of the national curriculum and for suiting the teaching materials to the Timorese reality and context in order to incentive reflective reading. There is also a need for constant monitoring and evaluation of the means and methods of teaching and learning currently in use so as to seek which ones are appropriate for the reality and context of East Timor.

Another element to consider is the fact that a significant part of the teaching staff does not meet the minimum requirements that contribute to and develop the learning of reading oriented to its social and liberating role. Some teachers recently recruited by the Ministry of Education and assigned to schools have attended no teacher training course. It is necessary to establish and meet eligibility requirements for the recruitment and selection of new teachers and school administrators. Moreover, of

course, it is also necessary to establish criteria for investments in the training of teachers and school management professionals.

One should not forget that, to guarantee high quality education, it is essential to encourage and promote the active participation of parents and of the community in the process of educating children.

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