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POLICIES FOR ATTRACTING CPLP STUDENTS IN BRAZIL AND PORTUGAL: IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC COOPERATION IN THE LUSOPHONE WORLD

Políticas de atração de estudantes da CPLP no Brasil e em Portugal: implicações para a cooperação acadêmica no mundo lusófono

Políticas de atracción de estudiantes de la CPLP en Brasil y Portugal: Implicaciones para la cooperación académica en el mundo lusófono

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Abstract: This paper discusses the programs to attract CPLP higher education students from two member states, Brazil and Portugal. The aim is to discuss how they, as members of the CPLP and sovereign states with international relations with other countries, establish their policies to attract students. Starting from the questions - What policies have Portugal and Brazil adopted to attract students from CPLP countries? What are the implications of these policies for academic cooperation? - we identify a set of challenges and benefits of the articulation of national policies with the CPLP vision and mission within the scope of academic cooperation.

Keywords: international cooperation; student mobility; higher education

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Resumo: Neste artigo, aborda-se os programas de atração de estudantes de ensino superior da CPLP de dois estados-membros, Brasil e Portugal. O objetivo é discutir o modo como eles, membros da CPLP e estados soberanos com demais relações internacionais com outros países, estabelecem as suas políticas de atração de estudantes. Partindo das questões "Quais as políticas de atração de estudantes da CPLP em Portugal e no Brasil? Quais as implicações dessas políticas para a cooperação acadêmica?", identifica-se um conjunto de desafios e mais-valias associados à articulação de políticas nacionais com a visão e a missão da CPLP no âmbito da cooperação acadêmica.

Palavras-chave: cooperação internacional; mobilidade estudantil; ensino superior.

Resumen: En este artículo se abordan los programas de atracción de estudiantes de educación superior de la CPLP en dos Estados miembros: Brasil y Portugal. El objetivo es discutir cómo estos países, miembros de la CPLP y Estados soberanos con diversas relaciones internacionales con otros países, establecen sus políticas de atracción de estudiantes. A partir de las siguientes cuestiones - ¿Cuáles son las políticas de atracción de estudiantes de la CPLP en Portugal y Brasil? ¿Cuáles son las implicaciones de estas políticas para la cooperación académica? - se identifican una serie de desafíos y beneficios asociados a la articulación de las políticas nacionales con la visión y misión de la CPLP en el ámbito de la cooperación académica.

Palavras clave: cooperación internacional, movilidad estudiantil, educación superior.

1 INTRODUCTION

Academic cooperation has played an important role in fostering interactions among the member states of the Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP) throughout its nearly three decades of existence. The ties established within this framework have mobilised political, economic, social and symbolic mechanisms that contribute to the construction of a shared sense of belonging to, and within, the Lusophone world. Far from constituting an uncontested political project or institutional arrangement, the CPLP has generated diverse and often critical perspectives on the very notion of *Lusophony* (the cultural and linguistic bond that is assumed to unite, or perhaps not unite) its member states. Within this context, student mobility across higher education institutions (HEIs) operating in Portuguese as their official language constitutes a privileged context for understanding the various dynamics that shape it.

Against this background, this article examines and discusses how the two CPLP countries hosting the largest numbers of higher education students from other CPLP member states, Brazil and Portugal, have developed policies aimed at attracting students, in alignment with broader foreign policy strategies directed towards the Community. The analysis stems from an international and inter-institutional research collaboration involving researchers from the University of Aveiro (Aveiro/Portugal), the Federal Fluminense University (Rio de Janeiro/Brazil), and the State University of Paraíba (Paraíba/Brazil). The discussion is guided by the following research questions: What policies have Portugal and Brazil implemented to attract students from CPLP member states? What are the implications of these policies for academic cooperation within the Community? To address these questions, the study draws on documentary data collection and analysis.

In addition to this Introduction and the Final Considerations, the article is organised into two main sections. The first provides a brief historical overview of the CPLP, with particular attention to its relationship with Portuguese and Brazilian foreign policies. The second examines the policies and programmes implemented by both countries to attract students, together with data on the enrolment of Lusophone students in their higher education systems. The Final Considerations offer the authors' reflections on the importance of academic cooperation among CPLP member states as a means of fostering a sense of Lusophony, while also acknowledging the critical perspectives that continue to surround this concept.

2 PORTUGAL, BRAZIL AND THE ARTICULATION OF THE PORTUGUESE LANGUAGE SPACE

Established in 1996 at the Lisbon Summit, the CPLP was created with the declared objective of fostering political, economic and cultural cooperation across the Lusophone world. Although it was repeatedly praised by the then Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2002) — who described it in official speeches and interviews with the Brazilian and Portuguese press as a "long-standing dream" shared by Brazilians and Portuguese alike, tracing its origins in Brazil to the early twentieth

century and to the ideas of thinkers such as Gilberto Freyre and Silvio Romero (Cardoso, 1998) — and despite the fact that prominent Brazilians, including Ambassador José Aparecido de Oliveira and former President José Sarney (1985–1990), were among its principal architects, the Community was, during its early years, essentially a Portuguese-led project.

Although *Lusophony* had already become an important issue in Portuguese foreign policy during the final years of the 1980s, it was in the following decade that a broad national consensus emerged in Portugal around this idea and the articulation of a community space founded upon it. Embedded within this project — either explicitly or implicitly — were lingering echoes of Freyrean *Lusotropicalism*, the official ideology underpinning Portuguese colonialism (Freixo, 2015). These echoes did not go unnoticed by dissenting voices in Portugal, such as the essayist Alfredo Margarido (2000), who defined *Lusophony* as the revitalisation of an imperial nostalgia arising from the ideological vacuum left by the decolonisation process and the loss of the imperial dimension of the Portuguese nation. Nor did they escape the attention of intellectuals and political leaders from the former Portuguese colonies.

Throughout the entire period preceding the creation of the CPLP —"innocently" referred to on several occasions as the *Lusophone Community*, *Lusophony*, or, by those nostalgic for the Empire, the *Lusian Community* — alongside more enlightened positions, there were countless statements that explicitly or covertly revived *Lusotropicalism*, apparently without even realising the shock they caused among some of their African partners (Neto, 1997, p. 329).

From this perspective, it may be argued that Portugal undertook a reinterpretation of a series of issues deeply embedded in the Portuguese social imaginary — most notably, the myth of its "imperial destiny" — which were reinvented and recast in a multiculturalist and humanist guise. Alongside these symbolic dimensions, however, it should be noted that the construction and consolidation of the discourse of *Lusophony* took place at a time when Portugal, already fully integrated into Europe, sought through the CPLP to strengthen its negotiating capacity within the European Union (EU) and to redefine its international position. In this regard, following a period of relative "turning its back" on Africa that characterised Portuguese foreign policy in the years after 25 April 1974 and the dissolution of the colonial empire — when integration into the European Community became the fundamental political and economic option of the Portuguese state (Ferreira, 1994, p. 150) — the second half of the 1980s witnessed a gradual "return to the Atlantic."

As part of this strategy, the establishment of a Lusophone community space assumed a central role, not least because integration into Europe provided the Portuguese state with a margin of manoeuvre that it would not otherwise have possessed. By capitalising on the opportunities offered by membership of the European Union, Portugal, in this context, claimed the leadership of the community that it regarded as its own by historical right, despite lacking the economic strength required to act as a genuine neo-colonial power (Gonçalves, 2000, p. 401).

Meanwhile, between 1964 and 1985, Brazilian foreign policy was guided by the objective of expanding the country's influence among the countries of the "Third World", particularly in Africa — where some states had gained independence only shortly before this period (Silva, 2014–2015). This orientation led to the establishment of strong ties with several of Portugal's former African colonies. However, during the 1990s, the integration of the Lusophone world became a secondary concern — despite diplomatic discourse and the enthusiastic rhetoric of Fernando Henrique Cardoso — because, although Brazil maintained relatively significant economic relations with some CPLP member states, such as Portugal and Angola, its preference was for selective bilateral relations rather than for strengthening the community space.

This policy choice was linked to the fact that, beginning with the government of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–1992), Brazilian diplomacy, strongly influenced by the then-dominant liberal doctrines, shifted its priorities towards relations with the major powers on the one hand and South American economic integration on the other. As a result, Brazil's "Africa policy" — which had begun to take shape during the years of the Independent Foreign Policy (1961–1964) and reached its peak between 1974 and 1985 under the "Ecumenical and Responsible Pragmatism" promoted by Foreign Minister Azeredo da Silveira during the administration of General Ernesto Geisel (1974–1979) — was relegated to the background:

> Brazil's relations with Africa during the 1990s and the beginning of the new century were adjusted to an Atlantic context, which foreign policy makers regarded as less relevant to the country's international insertion. Gone were the years of active cooperation and joint initiatives sustained by the Brazilian state's commitment to developing economic projects aimed at Africa's development, diversifying the country's international trading partners, and overcoming the difficulties arising from the energy vulnerability of the 1970s and part of the 1980s (Saraiva, 2002, p. 10, authors' translation).

In addition to these selective economic relations, Brazil's presence in the Portuguese-speaking countries during this period was also reflected in its participation in peacekeeping missions in Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and East Timor. In 1975, East Timor ceased to be a Portuguese colony and was immediately subjected to a violent Indonesian occupation that lasted for 24 years, a situation that received little attention from the international community (United Nations, CPLP) until images of the Santa Cruz Massacre (1991) and the events taking place in the country were brought to international attention by the journalist Max Stahl (CAVR, 2005). As Cassiani (2021) notes, from the 1980s onwards, Brazil also sought to play a more prominent role within the United Nations, thereby demonstrating a more proactive stance towards the global agenda.

Brazil effectively resumed this African policy during the administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2010), when the continent once again became a priority area for its foreign policy. It was only then that the CPLP assumed a degree of priority within Brazilian diplomacy, which proved crucial in mitigating the organisation's relative decline. During this period, Brazil established a permanent delegation to the CPLP (from 2006 onwards), and the Portuguese-speaking African Countries (PALOP) became

the destination of a significant proportion of the country's international technical cooperation.

However, even during the early years of the CPLP, Fernando Henrique Cardoso — albeit more at the rhetorical than the practical level — identified what would become one of the main guiding principles of the Lusophone space:

> I see the CPLP as a democratic forum, one in which there is an awareness that, if we are to turn our aspirations into reality, we must devote ourselves wholeheartedly to overcoming each successive stage. Our primary objective is to promote peace, democracy, sustainable development and social justice. To achieve this, we must invest in our greatest asset— our people. And the best way to do so is through education. I do not wish to dwell on this issue at present, but I would like to put forward the idea that cooperation in the field of education should become a central objective of the Community's action. (Cardoso, 1998, p. 434, authors' translation).

Over the following quarter of a century, cultural and educational cooperation involving both state institutions and civil society organisations became one of the principal drivers of integration among the Portuguese-speaking countries, despite the difficulties encountered in consolidating the CPLP as a genuinely influential international organisation. These difficulties stemmed from the discontinuities in Brazilian foreign policy following successive changes of government, the reservations and mistrust of the PALOP towards the Community project, and the hegemonic ambitions — though not always explicitly acknowledged — that continued to shape Portugal's approach.

In this regard, Cahen (2015) argues that, indeed, "the CPLP appears to function", but that this functioning is marked by several contradictions, including the strong "ideological burden" of *Lusotropicalism* underlying its foundation, the scarcity of financial resources, and the differing perceptions that member states hold of the organisation. Thus, "this heterogeneity in the way the CPLP is perceived" may well constitute "the main challenge to its survival"; consequently, although it functions, it does so "primarily as an intergovernmental organisation rather than the community it claims to be" (Cahen, 2015, p. 73, authors' translation).

Particularly regarding Portugal and Brazil, Burity (2018) argues that the leading countries within the Community have tended to prioritise bilateral initiatives in the fields of Science, Technology and Higher Education. The author contends that, rather than competing for leadership within the CPLP, cooperation can operate as a "positive-sum game, generating mutual gains across a range of issues on the international agenda" (Burity, 2018, p. 135). To achieve this, one possible path is to invest in human resource development, promote "quality education", and build a shared area of Science and Technology among the CPLP member states. After all, as Burity emphasises — and as this article likewise argues — student mobility and academic exchange promote countries' actions and images (perceptions) abroad, generate "cultural and [...] economic dividends"—"through expenditure [...] on tuition fees, food, accommodation and transport"— and thus reinforce the various internationalisation strategies

underpinning foreign policy (Burity, 2018, p. 135). The implementation of policies aimed at attracting international students therefore encompasses all these dimensions.

3 NATIONAL POLICIES FOR ATTRACTING STUDENTS FROM CPLP MEMBER STATES TO BRAZILIAN AND PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic cooperation in higher education within the CPLP is regarded as a fundamental dimension for achieving the organisation's objectives and, in many respects, as a driving force for cooperation across a wide range of other areas. Within this framework, measures have been introduced to facilitate the movement of citizens from the member states throughout the Portuguese-language space, with particular emphasis on student mobility. The mobility and attraction of students from CPLP member states to Brazil and Portugal are recognised by both countries, as well as by the Community itself, as being of particular importance for fostering scientific and technological cooperation and enhancing their international standing. For this reason, the mobility of students, academic staff, researchers and highly qualified scientists within the CPLP constitutes a priority axis of the CPLP Strategic Plan for Multilateral Cooperation in Science, Technology and Higher Education (2022–2026). The implementation of this plan is coordinated by the Directorate for Cultural Action and the Portuguese Language (DACLP), in close collaboration with the International Portuguese Language Institute (IILP).

3.1 Brazilian policies for attracting students

Changes in the direction of Brazilian foreign policy, particularly with regard to the PALOP — marked by shifts during the administrations of Collor de Mello and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, followed by the renewed focus on the African continent under the government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva — had a direct impact on Brazil's principal programme for attracting international students within its broader strategies of technical, educational, academic and development cooperation: the Student Exchange Programme (PEC) As discussed above, successive Brazilian administrations sought to diversify the country's international relations by prioritising political arrangements such as Mercosur, multilateral organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), and "strategic partnerships, such as IBSA and the CPLP" (Silva, 2014–2015, p. 37, authors' translation).

The result of policies implemented since the 1960s, the admission of international students to Brazilian higher education has largely taken place through the PEC, administered by the Division for Educational Affairs and the Portuguese Language (DELP) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, MRE). The programme comprises two strands: the Undergraduate Student Exchange Programme (PEC-G) and the Postgraduate Student Exchange Programme (PEC-PG). As explained on its official website ((Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2022, n.p.):

> The idea of establishing a government programme to support students from other countries emerged in response to the growing number of international

> students in Brazil during the 1960s and the consequences this brought for the domestic regulation of their legal status in the country. There was a need to standardise the conditions governing student exchange and to ensure that universities provided students with comparable treatment. Consequently, the first PEC-G Protocol was launched in 1965. Since 2013, the Programme has been governed by Presidential Decree No. 7,948, which has provided the PEC-G regulations with a stronger legal basis. (authors' translation).

At present, 74 countries participate in the PEC-G, comprising 29 from Africa, 28 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 from Asia, and 7 from Europe (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2024). Since the 2000s and up to 2024, more than 10,000 students have enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate programmes through the initiative (Ministério da Educação, 2024). Africa is the continent of origin for the largest proportion of participating students. Among the African countries represented, Angola, Cape Verde, and Guinea-Bissau stand out as the principal countries of origin.

The PEC-PG was, in turn, established with the objective of:

> enable citizens from developing countries to undertake postgraduate studies in Brazil, thereby contributing to the development of human resources, in line with the objectives of the (PEC-G). The first Protocol was signed in 1981 and was subsequently updated in 2006" (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2022a, n.p., authors' translation).

The number of participating countries is the same as that of the Undergraduate PEC-G, namely 74 countries. Since the 2000s, more than 3,000 students have been selected through the programme (Brasil, 2024a).

The Student Exchange Programme is one of the Brazilian government's longest-standing and continuously operating initiatives within the framework of technical cooperation, established to "enhance the profile of the country's international engagement" (Silva, 2014–2015, p. 36, authors' translation). There is, therefore, a clear correspondence between the selection of countries covered by the Programme and the regions regarded as priorities for Brazilian foreign policy. In the same vein, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) was established in 1987 with the purpose of "negotiating, coordinating, implementing and monitoring Brazilian technical cooperation programmes and projects carried out on the basis of agreements concluded by Brazil with other countries and international organisations" (Silva, 2014–2015, p. 35, authors' translation).

Discussing Brazilian development cooperation in higher education, particularly the relationship between the PEC and Brazil's foreign policy towards the PALOP, Silva (2014–2015) argues that concepts such as *cooperation*, *international aid* and *official development assistance* carry "a set of meanings" that reflect the relationship between donors and recipients, characterised by asymmetries and by the "prevalence of the interests" of the former over the latter. These are, therefore, not neutral concepts (Silva, 2014–2015, p. 34, authors' translation). With regard to East Timor, a number of technical and educational cooperation agreements have also been implemented, including the Teacher Qualification and Portuguese Language Teaching Programme (PQLP) (Silva; Nogueira; Pacífico, 2020; Pereira; Cassiani; Lisigen, 2014), as well as other bilateral

agreements, for example between the Timorese government and the Federal University of Santa Catarina and the State University of Paraíba.

In the Brazilian case, within the framework of what has become known as South–South Cooperation or Global South Cooperation — which expanded significantly during Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's first two presidential terms with the aim of reducing power asymmetries and strengthening Brazil's international role (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2007) — the principal objective is to promote "the domestic development of recipient countries in a horizontal manner, that is, without restrictions or conditions arising from differences in power between donors and recipients" (Silva, 2014–2015, p. 35, authors' translation).

In this regard, Pinto and Larrechea (2018) argue that the "national higher education systems of developing countries [...] have undergone an intense process of transformation over the past three decades", a process that can be understood in light of phenomena such as "the expansion of higher education enrolment, in a manner consistent with the experience of other regions of the world, including North America, Europe, Asia and Africa", which has led to "a strong internal differentiation within higher education systems" (p. 717, authors' translation). However, the authors also point out that, although the countries of the Global South play a significant role as "providers of student mobility", they remain "highly limited in terms of destination points", suggesting that the Global South continues to direct its mobility flows primarily towards the Global North (Pinto and Larrechea, 2018, p. 733, authors' translation).

Global South cooperation, however, may be approached from different perspectives within the field of International Relations. According to Muñoz (2016), the issue may be examined either through the classical agency/structure debate or from a critical perspective, which understands it as a "complex of State–market–society relations", encompassing the internationalisation of the State, the transnational action of social classes, and the international division of labour within a context marked by inequalities among countries and groups "that adopt different forms of international insertion and transnational solidarities" (Muñoz, 2016, pp. 230–232, authors' translation)[5]. Along similar lines, while recognising the diversity of actors and perspectives that characterise the field, Ramanzini Junior et al. (2015, p. 17) argue that the Global South is "a category that possesses a certain capacity to attract developing countries, without necessarily implying absolute unity among them" (authors' translation).

Malomalo, Lourau and Rosa Souza (2018, p. 521) note that the term Global South encompasses two distinct meanings. The first refers to the geographical South (the Southern Hemisphere), comprising countries "historically colonised by the European empires", while the second relates to "the epistemological diversities existing in the world", namely the epistemologies of the South, a metaphor in which "the South is [...] a field of epistemological challenges that seek to redress the damage and impacts historically caused by capitalism in its colonial relationship with the world" (Santos and Meneses, 2010, p. 19, authors' translation). From a political perspective, therefore,

[5] "[...] que adoptan diferentes formas de inserción internacional y de solidaridades transnacionales"

South–South Cooperation, or Global South Cooperation, is generally associated with models of development, strategies of international engagement and regional integration, which shape both the volume, and the nature of the resources allocated to it (Giacalone, 2016).

Academic cooperation promoted through the Student Exchange Program[6] (with CPLP member countries is situated within this broader political and diplomatic framework of South–South or Global South Cooperation. It is therefore no coincidence that, in terms of nationality, students from Portuguese-speaking African countries constitute the largest group of participants. According to the Division for Educational Affairs and the Portuguese Language (Brazil, 2022a), between 2000 and 2019, the PEC-G admitted a total of 6,055 students from CPLP member states, excluding Portugal, whose nationals are not eligible for the programme. By region, the undergraduate programme received a total of 7,991 students from Africa, 2,292 from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 87 from Asia (figures covering the period from 2006 to 2019).

The distribution of CPLP[7] nationals participating in the undergraduate programme is as follows: Angola – 753 students, with the highest intake in 2008 (91) and the lowest in 2019 (2); Cape Verde – 3,169 students, with the highest intake in 2008 (381) and the lowest in 2019 (52); Guinea-Bissau – 1,416 students, with the highest intake in 2005 (186) and no students admitted between 2013 and 2016; Equatorial Guinea – 27 students, all admitted in 2019 (the country joined the CPLP in 2014); Mozambique – 229 students, with the highest intake in 2002 and 2005 (27 in each year) and the lowest in 2016 (1); São Tomé and Príncipe – 388 students, with the highest intake in 2005 (381) and no admissions in 2000, 2001, or 2003; and East Timor – 73 students, with the highest intake in 2013 (37) and no admissions in 2019 (Brasil, 2022).

Between 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the programme, disrupting both its operation and the recording of selected and admitted students on official government websites. Consequently, there is a gap in the available data for this period. Data reporting resumed in 2022, with the following figures: Angola – 9 (2022), 11 (2023), 91 (2024), and 310 (2025); Cape Verde – 18 (2022), 19 (2023), 66 (2024), and 97 (2025); Guinea-Bissau – 10 (2022), 9 (2023), 64 (2024), and 191 (2025); Equatorial Guinea (which joined the CPLP in 2014) – 27 (2022), 17 (2023), 17 (2024), and 11 (2025); Mozambique – 0 (2022), 3 (2023), 11 (2024), and 65 (2025); São Tomé

[6] During Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's first two administrations (2003–2010), 16 new bilateral agreements were signed, significantly expanding the number of partner countries participating in both the PEC-G and PEC-PG programmes. During Dilma Rousseff's administration (2011–2016), students enrolled in these programmes were granted parity of rights with Brazilian students across all universities. This development reinforced the conclusion expressed in a 2010 report by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) regarding the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC), which identified the PEC-G as one of the most significant initiatives within Brazil's international development cooperation framework.

[7] As of March 2025, the MRE website does not provide specific data on Portuguese students studying in Brazil. Although this issue does not constitute the focus of the present article, it warrants further investigation, particularly given that Portugal and Brazil compete for leadership within the CPLP.

and Príncipe – 3 (2022), 0 (2023), 20 (2024), and 49 (2025); East Timor – 1 (2022), 6 (2023), 2 (2024), and 12 (2025) (Brasil, 2025).

Lusophone students participating in the PEC-PG postgraduate programme are distributed as follows: Angola – 89 students, with the highest intake in 2011 (10) and the lowest in 2000, 2001, and 2004 (1 in each year); Cape Verde – 163 students, with the highest intake in 2006 (22) and no admissions in 2019; Guinea-Bissau[8] – 60 students, with the highest intake in 2018 (12) and no admissions in 2014 or 2015; Equatorial Guinea – no students during the period under analysis; Mozambique – 485 students, with the highest intake in 2018 (66) and the lowest in 2009 (3); São Tomé and Príncipe – 15 students, with the highest intake in 2005 (4) and no admissions in 2000, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2006–2008, 2015–2017, or 2019; and East Timor – 72 students, with the highest intake in 2008 (16) and no admissions in 2000–2004, 2006, 2013, 2016, 2018, or 2019. By region, the PEC-PG programme received a total of 870 students from Africa, 2,060 from the Americas, and 97 from Asia (Brasil, 2022a)[9].

It is worth noting that the presence of federal public universities — eligible to host students participating in the programme — in all regions and states of Brazil makes it possible for PEC students to be found throughout the country. In addition to the PEC, Brazil established the University of International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB) with the specific purpose of attracting students from Portuguese-speaking countries. According to Machado et al. (2020), Barros & Nogueira (2015), and Diógenes and Aguiar (2013), the university represents a significant advance in Brazil's policy of cooperation within the framework of the CPLP.

UNILAB is a federal public university established in 2010, which began its academic activities in 2011, with campuses in Acarape and Redenção, in the state of Ceará (Northeastern Brazil). It is noteworthy that Redenção was the first Brazilian city to abolish slavery, doing so in 1883, five years before slavery was officially abolished throughout Brazil in 1888. The university also has the Malês Campus in the state of Bahia, located in São Francisco do Conde, a municipality that, according to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), has the highest proportion of Black residents in the country. This geographical setting reinforces the university's symbolic significance with regard to Lusophony and the ethnic-racial dimensions underpinning its mission (Barros & Nogueira, 2015).

According to official UNILAB data (2024), between 2021 and 2024, the university enrolled students from Angola (724), Cape Verde (29), Guinea-Bissau (947) — the largest national group — Mozambique (78), São Tomé and Príncipe (80), and East Timor (14). At the postgraduate level, enrolment figures for the period 2021–2022

[8] Guinea-Bissau joined the PEC programme in the early 2000s, sending 88 students in 2001. This number increased steadily until 2007, when it declined sharply, from 159 to 19 students. In the following years, the number of Guinean students studying in Brazil gradually recovered, returning to previous levels. This fluctuation was largely attributable to the country's political and social instability during that period, an issue that remained a persistent concern for the CPLP and its member states, as reflected in the statements and resolutions adopted by the organisation.

[9] According to the MRE website, as consulted in March 2025, from 2020 onwards the lists of successful applicants were published by name only, without indicating their nationality.

included 13 students from Angola, 9 from Cape Verde, 21 from Guinea-Bissau, 9 from Mozambique, 19 from São Tomé and Príncipe, and none from East Timor. No international students enrolled during the first semester of 2023[10]. There is a clear predominance of students from Portuguese-speaking African countries at UNILAB (2023). It is also worth noting, as observed by Malomalo, Lourau, and Souza (2018), that in 2018 the university employed "21 international academic staff, 19 of whom were from the PALOP" (p. 518; authors' translation).

In addition to UNILAB, bilateral academic cooperation agreements have also been established[11] between higher education institutions across the CPLP. One example is the partnership between the State University of Paraíba (UEPB) and the Human Capital Development Fund of East Timor. Under this agreement, the Fund sponsored the enrolment of 31 Timorese students in 2012 and a further 19 students in 2015, all supported by scholarships from the Timorese government. The initiative aimed not only to provide professional training but also to strengthen proficiency in the Portuguese language, which, despite being one of East Timor's two official languages alongside Tetum, is still not widely spoken in the country (Nogueira and Araújo, 2019).

It is important to note that the provision of scholarships to students from developing countries through the educational cooperation initiatives promoted by the Brazilian Cooperation Agency (ABC) may both foster shared educational standards, encourage "dialogue between Brazilian and international students," and promote "Brazilian culture and the Portuguese language" (Milani; Conceição; M'Bunde, 2016, p. 17; authors' translation). At the same time, such initiatives may also function as instruments of *soft power*, shaping cultural practices and values through the dissemination of the donor country's norms, references, and perspectives (Nogueira and Araújo, 2019; Reis, 2016; Burgess, 2014).

3.2 Portuguese policies for attracting international students

Within the context of their internationalisation strategies, Portuguese HEIs have increasingly invested in attracting international students, particularly from the European Higher Education Area and the CPLP (França; Alves; Padilla, 2018; Sin; Tavares; Cardoso, 2019; Veiga; Rosa; Amaral, 2006). This investment is framed by the Bologna Process, which emphasises the development and promotion of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as a shared responsibility of all European Union Member States. In response, Portuguese HEIs have pursued two complementary strategies. On

[10] It should be noted that the official websites consulted were not always up to date and, in some cases, were marked as "under update", which made access to the data more difficult. Moreover, some information that had previously been available was no longer accessible by March 2025. Accordingly, we have sought to use the most up-to-date reference years possible, based on the information that was available at the time of data collection.

[11] The bilateral cooperation agreements are not the focus of this article. Rather, the information presented here is intended solely to highlight the diversity of academic and educational cooperation opportunities available.

the one hand, they have expanded the provision of programmes taught in English, viewing this as a means of attracting European students and academic staff while enhancing their international competitiveness and positioning in global university rankings (Lourenço and Pinto, 2019). On the other hand, they have strengthened international development cooperation programmes with CPLP countries (Lopes; Albergaria-Almeida; Costa e Callapez, 2016). Indeed, reflecting the decentralised model of Portuguese development cooperation (Sangreman, 2015), which is regarded as a key pillar of Portugal's foreign policy, Portuguese HEIs have increasingly emerged as important actors in international development cooperation (Lopes, 2020). Their activities have been aligned with the three most recent Portuguese development cooperation strategies, adopted in 2005, 2014, and 2022 (Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 17/2014; Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 121/2022, 2022).

Many international students from developing countries, particularly from the CPLP, have benefited from scholarships funded by the Portuguese development cooperation authorities, notably through the former Institute for Development Assistance (IPAD), now known as Camões, I.P. According to Sousa Júnior (2021), more than 9,000 students from the PALOP received scholarships between 1995 and 2010. Similarly, many Timorese students pursued higher education in Portugal with direct financial support provided through cooperation agreements between Camões, I.P. and East Timor (Magalhães et al., 2019).

Beyond responsibilities arising from the European context, the internationalisation strategies of Portuguese HEIs, and their emphasis on attracting international students, are also closely linked to the need to generate institutional revenue to support financial sustainability (Alves, 2015). The importance of attracting students from both the European Higher Education Area and the CPLP is clearly reflected in the report *Uma estratégia para a internacionalização do ensino superior português*, published by the Ministério da Educação e Ciência. This report constitutes a key policy document underpinning Portugal's strategy for attracting international students, which is identified as one of the principal pillars of the internationalisation of Portuguese higher education. As the report states, "higher education in Portugal benefits from two particular conditions arising from the two international spaces to which Portugal belongs: the European Union and the Community of Portuguese Language Countries" (Portugal, 2014, p. 11; authors' translation).

To enhance the capacity to attract students from both the European Union and the CPLP, the report puts forward several recommendations: promoting Portugal and its HEIs internationally; developing cooperation strategies with different regions of the world; expanding the provision of programmes taught in English; improving the availability of information for prospective applicants; and simplifying bureaucratic procedures related to visas, accommodation, and identification documents through closer cooperation with public authorities (for example, the Serviço de Estrangeiros e

Fronteiras[12]). With specific regard to student mobility within the CPLP, the report recommends the creation of a CPLP Mobility Programme and a Lusophone Higher Education Area to strengthen cooperation, envisaging these initiatives as a gateway for CPLP students to the European Higher Education Area:

> Portugal is a member of the European Union, a status that also gives the country a significant role in international relations. Many opportunities for study and business arise from the expectations associated with partnerships established with Portuguese institutions, providing access to the benefits deriving from their European status. This pathway enables access to European institutions and funding opportunities, as well as to markets and, naturally, to the higher education and scientific research networks developed within the European Union (Ministério da Educação e Ciência, 2014, p. 45; authors' translation).

In this context, the Portuguese language is highlighted as a key strategy for internationalisation and cooperation within the CPLP, being described as "an instrument of knowledge and interaction in economic activity, with growing relevance worldwide" (Portugal, 2014, p. 91; authors' translation).

Also in 2014, the Council of Ministers enacted the International Student Statute through Decree-Law No. 36/2014 (Portugal, 2014), regulating the admission of non-European students to Portuguese HEIs. The legislation defines international students as those originating from countries outside the European Union and the European Economic Area, while also providing for a special scholarship scheme for students from the PALOP and East Timor. In support of this objective, in March 2014, the Executive Secretariat of the CPLP approved the Agreement on the Granting of Visas to Student Nationals of CPLP Member States, which entered into force in 2015. The agreement was approved in Portugal by Decree-Law No. 10/2014 and had originally been signed on 2 November 2007 by Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, and East Timor.

The internationalisation policy of Portuguese HEIs was further strengthened with the publication of Resolution No. 78/2016 of the Council of Ministers, which established guidelines aimed at aligning the internationalisation of higher education with Portugal's broader internationalisation policies. The Resolution entrusted the Directorate-General for Higher Education (DGES), in close collaboration with the HEIs and the Portuguese Trade and Investment Agency (AICEP), with promoting the educational provision of Portuguese institutions through the digital platform Study & Research in Portugal (www.study-research.pt). The platform was launched in 2016 by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education, in partnership with the Directorate-General for Higher Education, the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), the Secretary of State for Tourism, and Turismo de Portugal.

[12] The Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (SEF) was abolished on 29 October 2023 as part of a restructuring of Portugal's immigration system. Its responsibilities were transferred to the Agency for Integration, Migration and Asylum (AIMA).

In parallel with these developments, the Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities (CRUP) has also played an important role in policies aimed at recruiting international students, particularly those from the CPLP. It has encouraged public universities to develop the Portugal Universities initiative, which aims to "serve as the gateway for all those considering Portugal as a destination for university studies" (Portugal Universities, n.d., n.p.; authors' translation). The initiative provides comprehensive information about Portuguese HEIs, their degree programmes, and Portugal as a study destination. It is presented as a strategy that "will enable Portuguese universities to increase their international influence, demonstrate their quality, gain experience, and adopt best practices in the international promotion of Portuguese higher education" (Portugal Universities, n.d., n.p.; authors' translation).

Within the framework of the 9th Meeting of the Ministers of Science, Technology and Higher Education of the CPLP, held in Luanda on 19 January 2022, Portugal presented a project, through the Directorate-General for Higher Education (DGES), to establish a specialised working group dedicated to supporting students from CPLP countries studying at Portuguese HEIs. The initiative also sought to promote and strengthen these students' links with, and opportunities for returning to, their countries of origin (CPLP, 2022).

These policies have contributed to a steady increase in international enrolment in Portuguese HEIs, where international students currently account for approximately 17% of the total higher education student population (Portugal, 2024). This growth is evident across all levels of higher education, including professional higher technical programmes, bachelor's degrees, postgraduate specialisation programmes, integrated master's degrees, master's degrees, and doctoral programmes, with the most significant increases occurring at the bachelor's and master's levels. In the 2022/2023 academic year, 446,028 students were enrolled in Portuguese higher education, a figure that includes students participating in international mobility programmes. Of these, 74,597 were foreign nationals, and students from CPLP countries represented the largest group, totalling approximately 35,679 students, or 47.8% of all international students (Portugal, 2024). The scale of this growth becomes even more apparent when compared with earlier years: in 1995/1996, there were approximately 4,000 students from CPLP countries enrolled in Portuguese higher education, increasing to around 15,000 in 2011/2012 (Portugal, 2015).

In terms of nationality, Brazilian students currently constitute the largest group, accounting for 22.8% of all international students, followed by students from Guinea-Bissau (9.3%), Cape Verde (8.6%), Angola (7%), and Mozambique (2%). Historically, students from Angola and Cape Verde represented the largest international student groups in Portuguese HEIs. However, the number of Brazilian students has increased markedly since 2008.

4 Final Considerations

In 2021, the CPLP marked its 25th anniversary. The organisation was established with the aim of fostering political, economic, and cultural cooperation across the Lusophone world. Brazil and Portugal played leading roles in its creation and development, although differences in the foreign and domestic policy orientations of the member states have influenced the degree of their participation in CPLP initiatives over time.

One of the areas in which the greatest progress has been achieved is academic cooperation, albeit predominantly through bilateral agreements signed between individual CPLP member states (Burity, 2018). Nevertheless, student mobility has made a significant contribution to the development of multifaceted and multilateral cooperation, encompassing policies directed both towards the European Union and Portugal's former colonies, in the Portuguese case, and towards the Global South, particularly Africa, in the Brazilian context. Moreover, academic exchange within the CPLP represents one of the most important dimensions of this cooperation, contributing substantially to the internationalisation of higher education, particularly within Brazilian and Portuguese HEIs, and to the strengthening of the CPLP itself.

In this context, academic cooperation connects the processes, priorities, and interests of CPLP member states in projecting their presence internationally, of HEIs seeking to strengthen their internationalisation strategies, and of students pursuing high-quality academic and professional training. In other words, it operates simultaneously at the international, national, institutional, and individual levels. The formulation and implementation of policies aimed at attracting international students serve as a catalyst for academic cooperation and contribute to the creation and maintenance of enduring ties among Portuguese-speaking countries.

In response to the guiding questions of this study — What policies have Portugal and Brazil adopted to attract students from CPLP countries? and What are the implications of these policies for academic cooperation?— it is evident that, in Brazil, initiatives such as the PEC at both the undergraduate (PEC-G) and postgraduate (PEC-PG) levels, coordinated by the Division for Educational Affairs and the Portuguese Language of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DELP/MRE), together with the establishment of the University of International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB), constitute important examples of cooperation and exchange in the fields of education, technology, and research across the Lusophone world. In this regard, the PALOP have been the principal beneficiaries. In this respect, Silva (2014–2015), in his analysis of the PEC — an interpretation that could equally be extended to the Portuguese case — highlights a deeper dimension of academic cooperation: the influence of educational processes on the formation of intellectual elites and political leaders during the independence movements in Latin America and Africa, whose European educational experiences shaped nation-building projects and, potentially, the policies of the cooperating countries themselves.

In the Portuguese context, considerable emphasis has been placed on the development of international development cooperation programmes with CPLP countries, in line with Portugal's decentralised model of development cooperation and in close alignment with the Strategic Framework for Portuguese Development Cooperation 2030, approved by the Council of Ministers in December 2022. Also noteworthy is the Strategic Plan for Multilateral Cooperation in Science, Technology and Higher Education (2022–2026). In addition, a substantial number of international students from CPLP countries have benefited from scholarships funded through Portugal's development cooperation policy, particularly by Camões, I.P. (formerly the Institute for Development Assistance – IPAD).

The Brazilian and Portuguese governments have therefore invested in policies relating to science, technology, and higher education with the aim of attracting students from the CPLP. Their commitment to academic cooperation within the Lusophone world reflects not only strategic objectives of international projection and influence, particularly in the cases of Brazil and Portugal, but also a broader effort to strengthen a shared sense of Lusophony among the member states. This vision is grounded in the premise that their historical, cultural, social, and linguistic ties provide a legitimate foundation for multilateral political cooperation within the CPLP.

The ties established through academic cooperation within the CPLP hold considerable potential: a) they contribute to strengthening the construction of Lusophony through collaboration between HEIs and civil society organisations; b) they can foster a more inclusive and intercultural understanding of Lusophony by recognising and engaging with the educational, socioeconomic, political, and cultural diversity of the member states; c) they generate economic benefits for both HEIs (application and tuition fees), and the participating countries (mobilisation of direct and indirect financial resources, and enhanced economic competitiveness resulting from increased exchanges of goods, services, and knowledge).

Alongside the multiple possibilities for mutual benefit, student mobility and student attraction policies within the Lusophone world are marked by several challenges: a) how to provide students with adequate support regarding the practical aspects of everyday life (accommodation, bureaucratic procedures, healthcare, etc.), as well as academic and pedagogical issues (the adaptation of students and academic staff in host institutions to different academic and pedagogical cultures); b) how to address the issue of language, given the existence of different varieties of Portuguese, resulting not only from differing levels of access to the language (which generally coexists with local and traditional mother tongues, particularly in the PALOP countries and East Timor), but also from the cultural diversity of the CPLP member states themselves; c) how cooperation between the former metropole and the former colonies can move beyond asymmetrical colonial practices and social representations, as well as forms of coloniality; d) in the specific case of Portuguese higher education, how to articulate, in a synergistic manner, the recruitment of students from the CPLP and the European Union, particularly with regard to communication strategies and the delivery of teaching in Portuguese and/or English.

One of the major challenges facing Brazilian and Portuguese policies and strategies for attracting students may lie in the encounter between different institutional, academic, pedagogical, epistemological, and communicative cultures, which further increase the complexity of studying, teaching, conducting research, and living across languages, language varieties, and cultures. This encounter is often perceived as problematic by students, academics, and higher education institutions, giving rise to feelings of distress, anxiety, and inadequacy (Pinto, 2020; 2021).

It is important for HEIs and their actors to develop a deeper understanding of students' countries of origin, their linguistic and communicative repertoires, their knowledge traditions, and their educational backgrounds, as well as of their experiences while studying at Brazilian and Portuguese universities. This requires investment in monitoring and evaluation programmes for these initiatives at both the institutional and national levels, as a means of recognising the cultural, historical, and linguistic knowledge that international students bring to their academic studies.

Similarly, it is not sufficient merely to attract international students; it is equally important to provide positive, meaningful, and genuinely empowering educational experiences. Some actions that could be adopted towards this goal include: a) investigating the educational trajectories, academic experiences, and degree completion rates of students from the PALOP and East Timor enrolled in higher education programmes in Portugal and Brazil; b) evaluating the effectiveness of institutional welcome and orientation programmes; c) analysing the availability, structure, and impact of student support and integration initiatives (e.g., mentoring programmes, language classes, and psychological support services) at the HEIs that receive the largest numbers of students from CPLP countries.

This would foster the promotion of plural perspectives, helping to make student mobility within the CPLP a dialogic space in which heterogeneity enables reciprocal learning. Closely related to this is the need to challenge the assumption that linguistic and cultural diversity within CPLP student mobility constitutes a site of deficit discourses (Robinson-Pant, 2017). In this context, it is also important to examine the imposition of particular varieties of the Portuguese language and to consider the extent to which such imposition may contribute to the hegemony of some countries over others within the framework of academic cooperation.

In this regard, considering the fourth Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations 2030 Agenda—*Quality Education*—and, more specifically, Target 4.b, which seeks to increase the number of scholarships available to students from developing countries to pursue higher education (UNESCO, 2016), it is expected that the number of international students from the Global South enrolled in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd cycle programmes at Portuguese and Brazilian HEIs will continue to grow. This makes a shared, comprehensive, and sustained discussion on academic cooperation among CPLP member states even more pressing.

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Finally, it is worth noting that UNESCO is developing a search tool that will function as an indicator for monitoring and quantifying the scholarships awarded to international students in higher education over a given period (UNESCO, 2025). However, it is important to emphasise that investing solely in the monitoring of these quantitative indicators is not sufficient. Rather, greater attention should also be devoted to investigating the quality and equity of the educational opportunities made available through these scholarship schemes.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Contribuição	Silvia Garcia Nogueira	Adriano de Freixo	Susana Pinto	Betina Silva-Lopes
1. Conceituação	X	X	X	X
2. Curadoria de dados				
3. Análise formal	X	X	X	X
4. Obtenção de financiamento				
5. Investigação	X	X	X	X
6. Metodologia	X	X	X	X
7. Administração do projeto				
8. Recursos				
9. Software				
10. Supervisão				
11. Validação				
12. Visualização				
13. Redação (rascunho/original)	X	X	X	X
14. Escrita (revisão e edição)	X	X	X	X

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

Os autores declaram que não há conflito de interesse com o artigo "Políticas de Atração de Estudantes da CPLP no Brasil e em Portugal: Implicações para a Cooperação Acadêmica no Mundo Lusófono".

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Todo o conjunto de dados de apoio aos resultados deste estudo foi publicado no próprio artigo.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Não houve utilização de ferramentas de Inteligência Artificial.

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