

*YOUNG PORTUGUESE TALK ABOUT THEIR EXTRA-MUROS EXPERIENCES:
“QUANDO OS PROFESSORES DEIXAM DE PUXAR A CORDA”*

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ESL was identified by the European Union as a major social problem, but its characteristics differ across Europe. Portugal still presents higher percentages of ESL, although they have decreased in the last decade. Hence we may say that ESL risks social and educational justice. In Portugal, compensatory educational pathways for Early School Leavers (ESLrs) are also provided by extra-muros institutions; an expression that is used to refer all types of organisations that are not upper secondary schools but provide alternative education and/or training to young adults, leading to the direct or indirect attainment of ISCED 3 (International Standard Classification of Education).

This paper explores the views of young women and men that left school without attaining this qualification. They were consulted as former ESLrs about the similarities and differences between mainstream education and their current educational experience in extra-muros settings. The analysis is based on 8 in-depth individual interviews and 4 focus group discussions among peers gathered in 4 extra-muros contexts in Porto district, on a total of 40 participants.

Taking into account the social economic status, gender and culture of the interviewees, we analyse the experiences that led them to leave school and the ones that helped keeping them in education/training in terms of the pedagogies, teachers' roles, and the relationship between education and the labour market. These have shown to be pertinent aspects in their narratives. More open and flexible pedagogies that take into account students' needs and former work experiences; engaged teachers that value students' points of view and interests; the possibility of earning a small subsidy and the horizon of finding a job post-training seemed to be the most attractive features for the young adults consulted.

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