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FACULTY RECRUITMENT FOR A PORTUGUESE-LANGUAGE OPTOMETRY PROGRAM: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES OF THE MOZAMBIQUE EYE CARE PROJECT

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Introduction

The Mozambique Eyecare Project (MEP) was launched in February 2009 at Universidade Lúrio in Nampula, Mozambique.

This unique institutional collaboration is a programme for the development of a regional optometry training model for Portuguese-speaking Africa. With no professional optometrists locally or regionally, faculty had to be recruited from outside the continent. Nine faculty recruited to date to deliver the undergraduate academic programme include optometrists from:

- Spain
- Portugal
- Colombia.

This paper will present data related to the challenges and experiences of recruiting expatriate optometric faculty for this first Portuguese-language undergraduate optometry program for Africa.

Materials and methods

- Semi-structured interviews conducted with five expatriate faculty who worked on the Project between May 2010 and October 2011
- Project reports and observations to elicit qualitative information on faculty recruitment challenges and experiences, as well as general faculty experiences and challenges in the project
- Data from all nine faculty recruits analysed for common themes

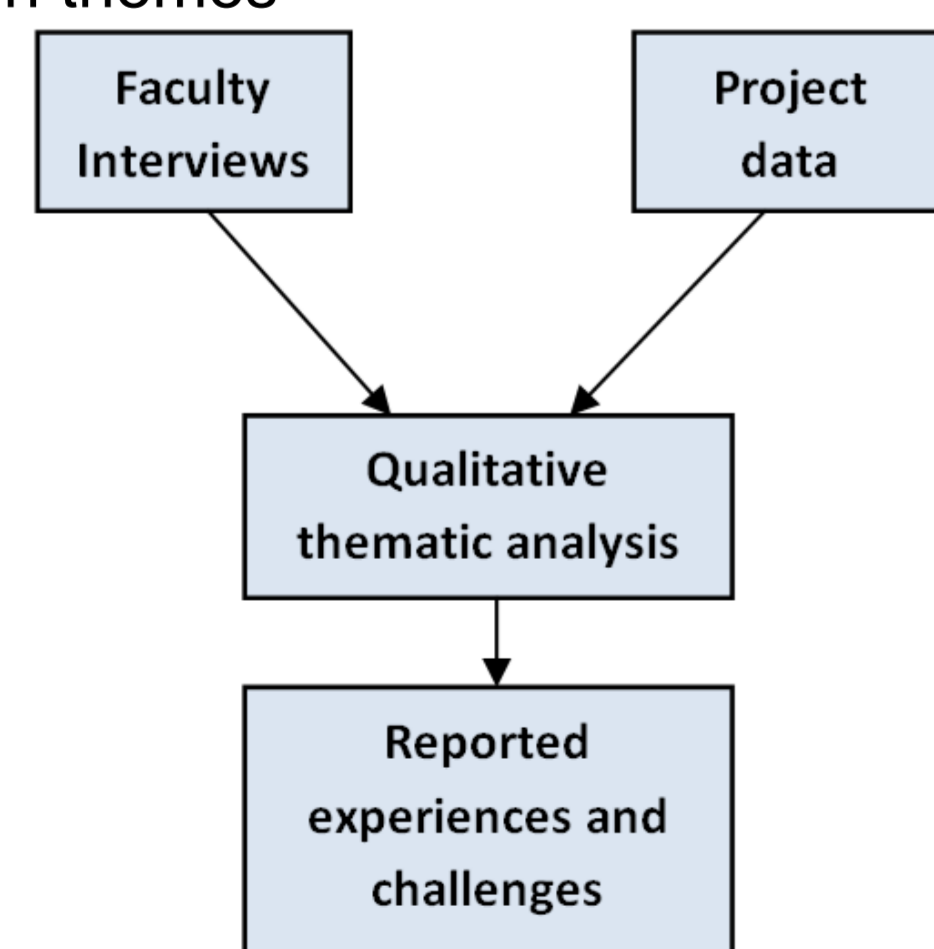


Figure 1: Flow chart showing data collection and analysis



Results

Methods of faculty recruitment:

- Professional networks
- Web postings
- Word-of-mouth

Faculty Nationalities

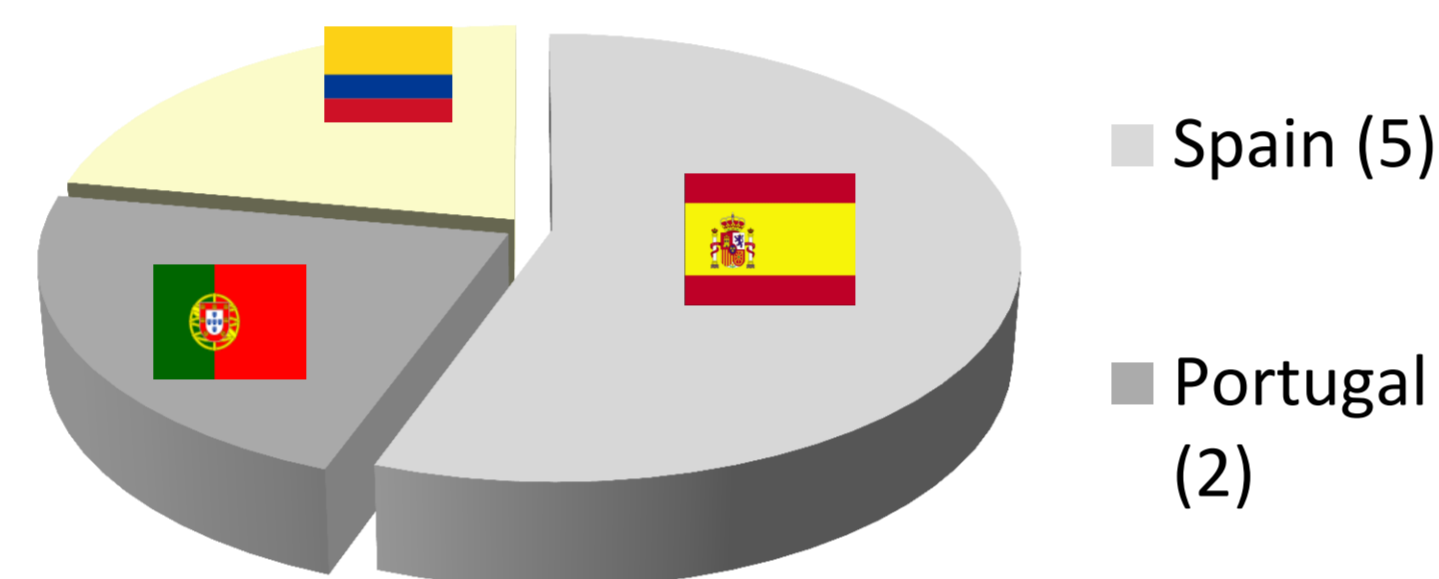
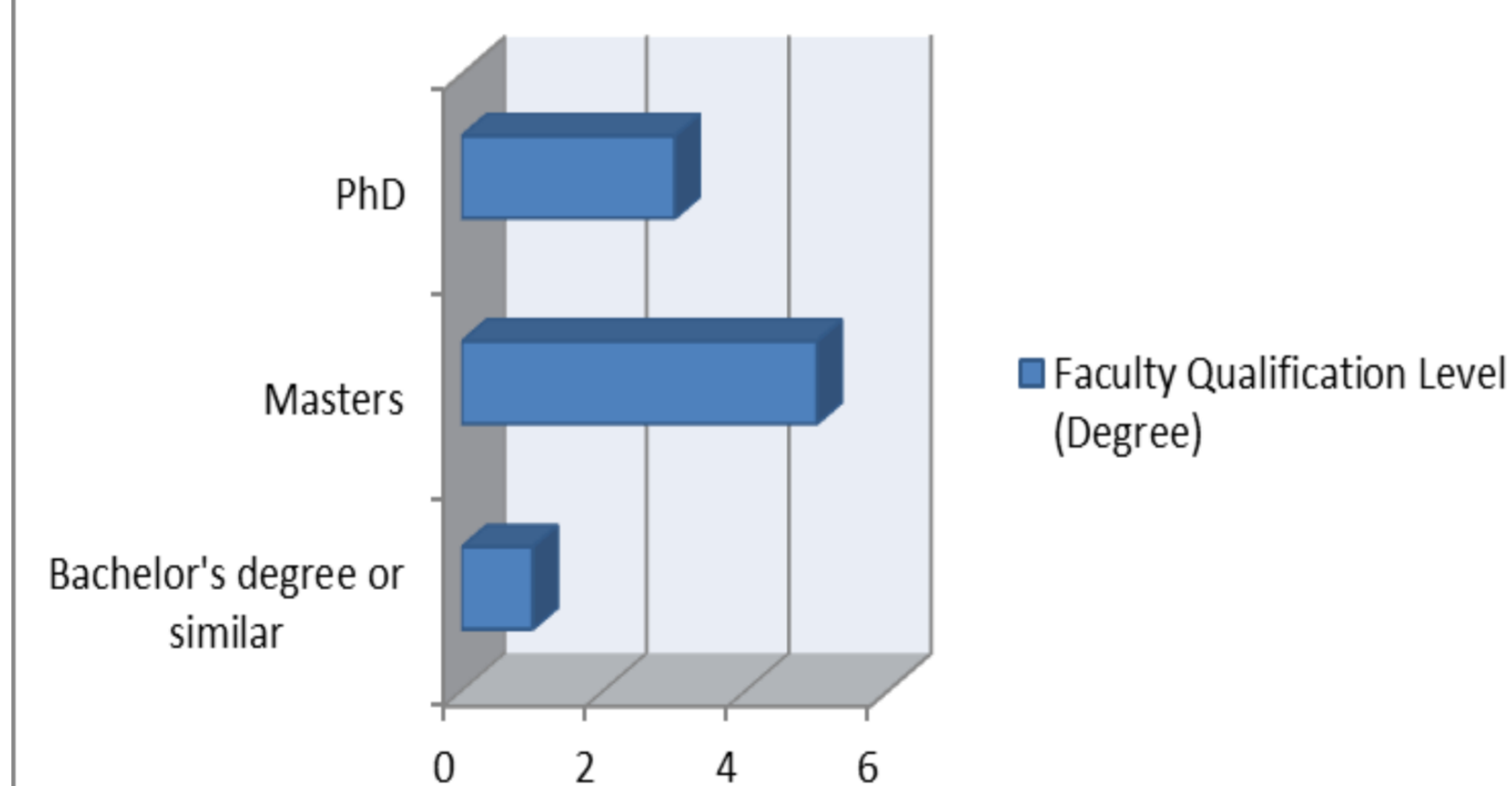


Figure 2. Countries representing recruited faculty

Faculty Qualification Level (Degree)



Faculty reported experiences on the Project:

- "Personally challenging"
- "Professionally fulfilling"
- Significant cultural adjustment required
- Important to have prior understanding of secondary level education in Mozambique; undergraduate teaching in Mozambique different to the rest of the world
- Student motivation high as "first optometrists"
- Motivated to make a contribution to international development and holistic education e.g. soft skills transfer



Figure 4. Expat Project staff and faculty, by Feargal Ward

Faculty challenges:

- Portuguese translation for Spanish speakers sometimes challenging – notes, exam-setting, etc.
- Cultural / professional dynamics within the team
- Local bureaucratic systems / delays
- Resource limitations (personal and professional)
- Limited / no opportunities for CPD

Project experiences and challenges:

- Difficult to attract experienced academics
- Post-graduate qualification required for teaching but sometimes have to forego this
- No prior pedagogic skills assessment / training for faculty recruits
- Shorter term commitments from faculty recruits serve as stop-gap, but raise concerns around continuity and quality impact
- Difference in scope of practice across different countries poses challenge in delivering unified curriculum

Contractual commitment from faculty (months)

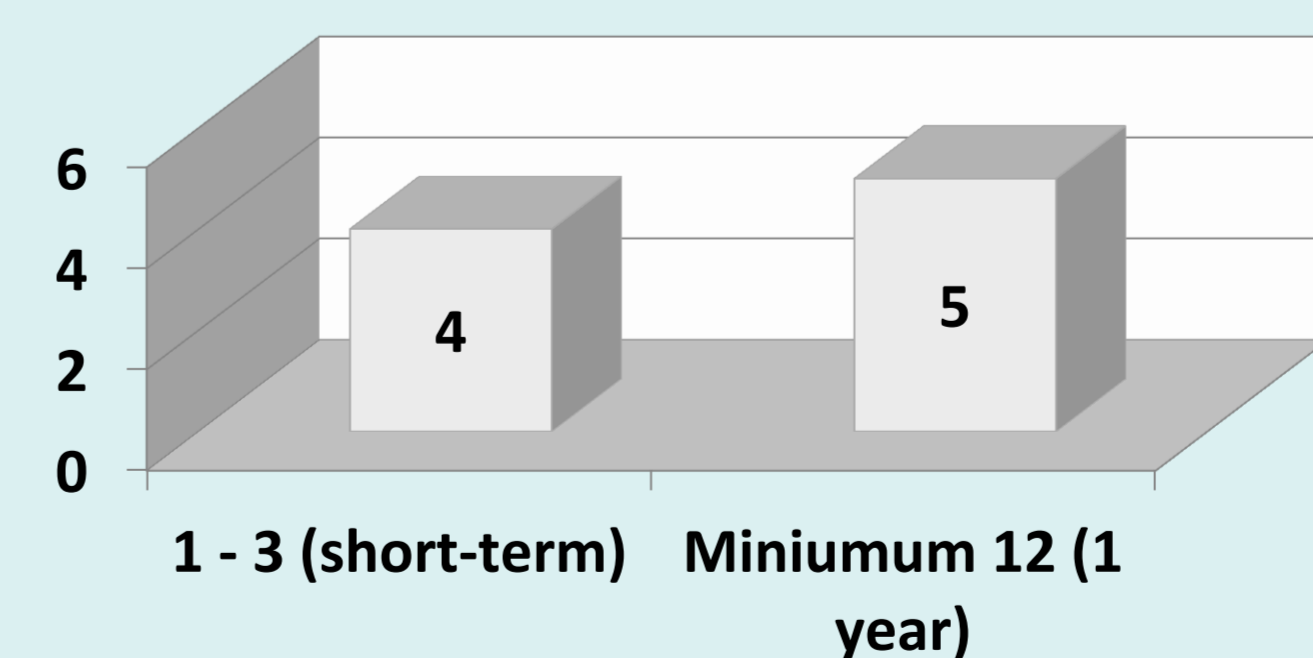


Figure 5. Graph showing comparative lengths of commitment from faculty to project

Discussion and Conclusions

- Optometry still a developing profession in most Portuguese-speaking countries, with varying scope of practice challenges; therefore difficult to attract suitably qualified and experienced Portuguese-language optometrists who are available for long term contributions to such culturally- and professionally -challenging assignments.
- Linguistic variations between Portuguese and Spanish pose some challenges to accurately delivering required academic content.
- Faculty noted personal satisfaction and sense of contribution to greater development agenda for Mozambique, despite logistical, cultural, as well as professional challenges and sacrifices.
- Those who had never worked in academia or development before also acquired a new skills set they could carry into their future careers.



Figure 6. Dr Vivien Ocampo, Course Coordinator, Unilurio by Feargal Ward

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- Padilla, MA and Di Stefano, AF. 2009. A snapshot of Optometry around the World. *Review of Optometry*. Available online http://www.revoptom.com/content/d/coding_and_practice_management/c/14608/ (Accessed 1 April 2012)

Acknowledgments

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For further information

Contact wallaced@ukzn.ac.za. More information on this project can be obtained at www.mozeyecare.org