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Higher Education in the Face of the Congolese Intellectual Elite in Crisis: What's the Point? An Analysis of the Issues and Prospects.

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ABSTRACT

It is impossible to navigate the current world order without men and women capable of accurately interpreting our reality; thus, The purpose of this article was to analyze the challenges and prospects of Congolese university studies in the face of an intellectual elite in crisis. Through documentary research, we found that higher and university education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not in crisis. It is on the verge of disappearing. The education provided in its institutes and faculties has fallen below the threshold required to qualify for a higher-level professional or scientific degree; this applies to students, faculty, and academic authorities alike. Normally, the interests of these three partners are not identical, and teaching activity stems from this divergence: students want to learn and succeed, while teachers deliver their courses but are compelled to evaluate and select students to maintain the quality of education. Thus, it is clear that we should replace oral instruction in classrooms with the use of appropriate written and visual teaching materials; rely on self-directed learning and guidance provided largely by fellow students; and organize the advanced track of scientific education into small units that are well-equipped with materials and into which students would enter based on "vocation" or scientific motivation.

These units would operate alongside institutes and faculties that are autonomous in their management and recruitment; a national administrative body reporting to the Ministry of Higher Education and Universities should be created to manage the design, production, and distribution of new instructional materials and scientific equipment for these advanced units, as well as to organize university bookstores.

Keywords: university studies, intellectual elites

1. INTRODUCTION

For as long as anyone can remember, in our neighborhoods, streets, and avenues, everyone has been lamenting the decline in the quality of our higher and university education. The university, whose mission was to instill in students a critical mind and the habit of relying on verified information, has become a place for obtaining degrees for personal gain. “It has become a truism to say that our higher and university education is in crisis” (Bongeli Y: 2009: p. 11)

The founding of the Congolese university was not the result of long-term planning or a vision defined early on by Belgium. Rather, it was the result of pressure exerted on this colonial power by the United Nations irritated by human rights violations colonial companies seeking labor, and the indigenous elite, concerned with its own prestige. (MOKONZI, Gr.B: 2009, p. 20)

Thus, we believe it is possible to restore, within higher and university education while accommodating a large number of students all the traditional functions assigned to the university if we radically rethink its teaching methods, curricula, and management. (World Bank: 2023). Every university faculty member is a researcher who must be capable of creating jobs through the most compelling initiatives. Vocational schools are the foundation of any country’s development.

It is not possible to live in the current world order without men and women capable of correctly interpreting our reality. “If the school as an institution loses its educational power as a rational anchor as is currently the case in our universities things will get worse and worse.” Current analyses of education in the Congo offer little hope for a peaceful or enlightened future. Professor Emile Bongeli describes the Congolese school system as a factory for useless minds (crisis of reason). The former Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Bonaventure Chelo Lotsima, refers to it as a graveyard of values (ethical crisis). Professor Tshiyembe Mwayila does not hesitate to refer to academics as highwaymen (crisis of meaning). Those who speak this way are not just anyone. They know what they are talking about.” (Kà Mana: 2016, p. 38)

Proper training of its academic elite is the last line of defense for a nation’s development. *From this perspective, the main question in this study is: What are the challenges facing Congolese higher education and univers, and what are the prospects for improving Congolese university education, which is currently in crisis?*
The objective is, on the one hand, to analyze the challenges facing higher education and, on the other hand, to propose avenues for improving an education system in crisis.

In this study, aside from the introduction and conclusion, the following points will be addressed: the first addresses the observation that Congolese universities are currently in a state of decline; the second addresses the deterioration of the education system as a whole; and the final point addresses avenues for improving the education system as a way out of the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

2. THE DECLINE OF THE CONGOLESE UNIVERSITY

Higher and university education in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not in crisis. It is on the verge of extinction. The education provided in its institutions and faculties has fallen below the threshold required to qualify for a higher-level professional or scientific degree. For several years now, higher education and universities have ceased to produce new researchers; soon, they will no longer produce new academics.

Viewed from the outside, this problem is not immediately apparent for two reasons: the D.R. Congo is living off the legacy of 15 to 20 years of substantial, high-quality academic output; thousands of Congolese academics hold the majority of public and private sector positions in the country, not to mention the emigration of many of the most highly qualified. Added to this considerable contingent are those who complete their studies abroad and those—more rare—who have managed to further their education locally with whatever resources were available, but outside the higher education and university system (MULOWAYI, D.: 2013).

The problem lies within the current higher education system itself. Admittedly, a few oases still remain where some academic activity has been sustained: a department or a bachelor’s program in the science faculties, a laboratory here and there, one or two libraries, one or two higher education institutes; this amounts to very little, and these few oases are also threatened as soon as foreign cooperation withdraws. The humanities faculties were the first to experience this decline, but all signs indicate that the process of destruction is widespread, systematic, and irreversible unless the current

curriculum of H Higher Education, its teaching methods, and its administrative practices are fundamentally overhauled.

The frantic race for a degree, viewed as the necessary stepping stone to any social advancement and the sole purpose of education. (VERHA B.: 1978, pp. 261–283 and 277)

3. THE DETERIORATION OF EDUCATION AS A SYSTEM

Every educational institution brings together three categories of stakeholders: students, teachers, and academic authorities. Normally, the interests of these three partners are not identical, and it is from this divergence that educational activity arises: students want to learn and succeed; teachers deliver their courses but are obliged to evaluate and select students to maintain the quality of education; and academic authorities must both monitor teacher performance and ensure that students' educational needs are met.

However, if we abandon the very act of teaching and being taught if the sole function of education is to award as many degrees as possible with the least amount of resources and hassle, if what matters is the facade rather than the substance, the label rather than the content then all interests will converge on producing nothing but degrees, and the three partners will agree to do nothing that might expose the sham. (KAPUMBA P.: 2021, p. 112)

Students are satisfied because they are admitted en masse into degree programs and, regardless of their incompetence, have every chance of graduating provided they make an effort one that is more financial than intellectual; teachers, whose primary concern like that of any human being is physical survival rather than intellectual growth, are, barring exceptions, the beneficiaries of these financial contributions and supplement them through various so-called "extramural" activities at the expense of their teaching; Academic authorities, faced with the intractable problem of doing more and more with dwindling resources, tolerate the situation as long as order and stability are maintained and the number of degrees awarded reflects the smooth operation of the educational institution.

The ruling class is not concerned about this problem in the short term because it notes that the country already has more than 100,000 graduates and cannot employ them all. As for employers in the public and private sectors, they have already drawn their conclusions from the situation and are either taking charge of training their future executives themselves or sending them abroad (KADIMA, M.L.: 2013)

If, overcome by scruples or the zeal of a novice, one of the partners refuses to play by the rules and insists on teaching or being taught, all the others either bring them to their senses or exclude them; the conscientious, incorruptible, and competent teacher is a threat not only to the majority of students whose ignorance or cheating he risks exposing but also to his less scrupulous colleagues and to academic authorities, who are judged by the number of students they produce rather than by their quality or professional performance.

The most zealous student, who takes things too personally, is frowned upon by his classmates and little appreciated by his professors, whose shortcomings he risks exposing or whose survival strategies he disrupts. Academic authorities who wish to enforce educational standards and the institution's disciplinary rules would find themselves facing smear campaigns that would be interpreted as clear signs of their mismanagement. A well-established vicious cycle prevents any self-correcting mechanisms from emerging from within.

4. PATHWAYS FOR IMPROVING THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AS A WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Unfortunately, our educational system fails to take into account our talents and our challenges. The great challenge for the Congo is to completely eliminate this phenomenon and to instill confidence in all the brilliant minds emerging on Congolese soil. Those who believe that university is not for everyone fail to realize that within every person lies a depth of knowledge that no university can match. However, they are right if they consider that, at present, university has become a roadblock let's say, mere rote memorization just to answer a panel of examiners in order to obtain a small piece of paper. To make it more useful, the university must rid itself of its greatest weakness, which leads people to believe that it is reserved for those who can engage in competition. Those who have succeeded in our circle are not necessarily the ones who try to learn about what they do.

It is time for Congolese people to stop going to school without a specific goal, ignoring the challenges of their environment. Knowledge must no longer gather dust, just as that little piece of paper must no longer be their primary concern. Let those who are educated not imagine that they possess special abilities that prevent others from having them.

Unfortunately, due to a stifling environment, teachers keep our children in a disadvantaged position where they may graduate from college without a solid command of reading and writing. These teachers do not understand that they are making

their own situation worse by continuing to instill mediocrity in children who will not realize that they need to improve their situation when they reach old age.

The teacher's vocation is the last bastion for the salvation of the nation and for the improvement of living and working conditions. Their primary role should naturally be to train revolutionaries to challenge prejudices and fighters for citizens' rights. Otherwise, if they believe they are punishing their employer by providing subpar education that falls short of expectations, they are only harming themselves. Another war brewing is the one between the diaspora and those who have remained in the country. Can we imagine who will be the loser? The Congolese university, which is springing up everywhere without regard for the quality of education or infrastructure, is a disgrace we are bringing upon ourselves. This situation portends disaster, even though the university has a decisive role to play if only it can do even a little to help students discover the path to liberation and personal fulfillment. The university must not limit itself to teaching alone; it must also prioritize research so that our country can achieve sustainable and responsible development. Research at a university presupposes the presence of at least one library on campus. How many of our universities have one? And for those that do, what condition are they in? (KADIMA M.L., ibid., pp. 206–208)

Let there be no mistake: a country's greatness depends on its citizens' ability to read, for it is through reading that we learn what is needed to make our country our own refuge—a place where its citizens can live well. We must put an end to this refrain that *"Congolese people don't* read" by setting ourselves apart from that group.

Reading alone can greatly influence the way we understand things. It is reading that can guide our imagination toward solutions.

"Alexandre Mopondi, for his part, emphasizes the need to develop the educational system by adapting instruction to the African context, particularly when it comes to teaching mathematics to African youth. In the meantime, several reforms were undertaken, always under the vigilant, self-serving, and ultimately destructive oversight of Western aid workers, each carefully avoiding any disruption to an education system that was clearly obsolete. The most recent of these is the blind adoption of the so-called LMD system, designed in Bologna as part of a process aimed at standardizing European education systems, but copied without discernment or internal debate in the Democratic Republic of Congo." (Bongeli, Y.: 2015, p. 13)

A degree in and of itself is no guarantee that a person is a genius, especially since today there is more than one way to obtain one: memorization, cheating, connections, and other influences but increasingly less through the actual acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills. Most deplorable is the tribalism that plagues this environment, followed by the "maquisards" system and the concept of parity, which reinforces the notion of "sexually transmitted points."

Although writing and reading are indispensable, they remain merely tools for accessing information recorded in writing, whereas one can possess knowledge that has not yet been revealed. (KADIMA M.L., op. cit., pp. 211–214)

CONCLUSION

Higher education is on the verge of disappearing and must be completely rethought in terms of its objectives, resources, and teaching methods. We must reconcile two seemingly contradictory perspectives: high-quality mass or basic education and cutting-edge scientific training. It is possible to meet this challenge without significantly increasing available resources by implementing a few simple ideas:

- Replace lecture-based instruction in the classroom with the use of appropriate written and visual teaching materials;
- Rely on self-directed learning and supervision that is largely peer-to-peer;
- Organize the advanced track of scientific training into small units that are well-equipped with materials and into which students would enter based on "vocation" or scientific motivation. These units would operate alongside institutes and faculties that are autonomous in their management and recruitment;
- Create a national administrative body reporting to the E.S.U. and responsible for managing the design, production, and distribution of new teaching materials and scientific equipment for the advanced units, as well as for organizing university bookstores.

These proposals are realistic; that is to say, they can be implemented immediately in the context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo if the decision is made to do so.

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