

Importance of Professionalization in Haitian Universities

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To cite this article:

Wander Numa. Importance of Professionalization in Haitian Universities. *Advances in Sciences and Humanities*.

Vol. 8, No. 3, 2022, pp. 53-56. doi: 10.11648/j.ash.20220803.11

Received: May 29, 2022; **Accepted:** July 1, 2022; **Published:** July 28, 2022

Abstract: The University is the best place to promote scientific knowledge and research as well as service to the community. In Haiti, due to the weakness of state institutions, we are witnessing a trivialization of these institutions. To date, despite the official figure available showing 138 recognized universities, and without counting hundreds of others who are not yet accredited, some wonder how important professionalization is in these “university institutions”. In addition, the majority of these institutions do not have enough qualified staff to teach. It is very common to see cases where professors barely hold a bachelor’s degree. At best, the classes as they are offered do not generally reflect the Haitian reality, since the teaching materials used by most teachers are imported from Europe or North America. Thus, they do not always reflect the reality of Haitian students who are not always able, after having completed a cycle of studies, to put their skills at the service of society. Inspired by existing work on the issue as well as our experiences, we have presented in this article the importance of professionalization in Haitian universities. Because most of these universities put too much emphasis on theories and they are not always competitive.

Keywords: Professionalization, University, Haiti, UFCH

1. Introduction

Over the past three (3) decades, Haitian higher education has experienced prolific development that seems to want to follow the ideal of the lower part of the education system and lead to results far from those desired, know how to respond effectively to the needs of the country in terms of qualified human resources and knowledge capable of contributing to economic and social progress.

The 1987 Constitution [3] which prescribed the autonomy of the University marks a new period in the evolution of higher education in Haiti. First, it canceled the 1960 decree which governed the sector, and limited access to it for reasons, among others, of political control of the circulation of ideas among young people. Then, it opened the sector to private initiative, which then had a very small number of small establishments, compared to the State University of Haiti, which was the only public university and the largest institution. Higher education in the country.

Thus, for the past ten (10) years, we have witnessed an exponential increase in higher education centers in Haiti. In other words, university education is at the heart of the news

today. According to the latest available censuses, there are approximately 138 universities and colleges recognized by the Haitian state¹. Knowing that to date, there are only 11 public universities (the State University of Haiti and the 10 public universities in the region², i.e. one public university per department, except the department of Artibonite which has two and the department of the West which does not have one). Access to these universities is generally based on an entrance examination.

Because they are free, these universities welcome profiles who had not necessarily made choices based on what they like, but preferably on what they find.

Alongside these numerous legal institutions, Bénédicté Paul³ estimates that there are more than 200 “university”⁴

¹ cf: <http://lenouvelliste.com/article/193660/138-institutions-denseignement-superieur-sont-reconnues-en-haiti/amp> page consulted on April 1, 2020

² Since 2006, the Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (MENFP) has set up public universities in the regions (UPR) to meet the constantly growing demand. As a result, today there are a significant number of undergraduate graduates from these institutions.

³ <http://cutl.free.fr/EDU> page consulted on April 1, 2020

⁴ This number is much lower compared to reality since each year we see a new “university structure” appear.

brands operating without the authorization of the Department of Higher Education and Scientific Research (DESR), the supervisory body for institutions of private higher education from the MENFP. To access these structures for the majority, the entrance examination is not compulsory.

If we rely on these available figures, we can say that there are on average 13 universities per geographical department of the country⁵. Such figures would mean that access to higher education is very easy. Moreover, for information, in developed countries such as France, for example, there are not as many university centers per department.

However, between what the figures show and what reality paints, there is a total inconsistency. There are fewer and fewer quality managers trained in Haiti during this same period.

Several reasons would explain this: firstly, there is, to date, no concern for harmonizing the curricula of these centers; then, these centers limit their levels of training essentially to the bachelor's degree, or even just a lower university degree; finally, the professors giving the courses in these institutions are not always competent. Faced with such a finding, one wonders what role does professionalization play in these university centers?

The methodological approach adopted for the writing of this essay consists first of a brief presentation of the mission of the University in general, then, we will see the strategic place of professionalization in Haitian universities.

2. Mission of the University

By definition, a university is a higher education institution whose emphasis is essentially placed on the dissemination of knowledge, research and innovation, service to the community, international cooperation, the success and professional integration of students. According to Meirieu [9], the university is therefore a place where the teaching of knowledge is organically linked to the questioning of the process of its elaboration and the process of its transmission.

At the university, different types of knowledge are offered. We can cite, among others, knowledge which is essentially based on theory, know-how which focuses on skills, know-how which refers to professionalization, life skills which focus on behavior or attitudes to be adopted by the student, and knowledge about knowledge which is concerned with the metacognitive aspect [1, 2, 4].

Thus, the courses that are offered at the university pursue at least a double objective: on the one hand, it allows the teacher to better progress in his research; on the other hand, it places the student at the center of his learning. In this sense, we can say that a course at the university is not just a course in the sense that there is a teacher who speaks for two hours in an amphitheater, but it is also a set of activities in network where one can first find the personal experiences of teachers, but also of students; secondly exchanges and interactions between

students versus teachers, students versus students and also teachers versus teachers; thirdly, basic or complementary readings related to the subject to be taught. In the end, all this must also respond to a social demand [5, 11, 13].

A student who leaves university without having the ability to be useful to his environment will be considered too much in society. Moreover, the student, in principle, does not choose his training at random (at least in most cases), he does so according to an objective to be achieved. For example, in Haiti, some parents want (or demand in most cases) that their children learn the "traditional sciences"⁶, because in their eyes these disciplines offer more opportunities.

This conception somehow translates the importance of professionalization. We don't learn to learn; similarly, a university cannot afford to offer a training offer without specifying the related outlets. In the following section, we will establish an inventory of the importance given to professionalization by public and private universities.

3. Strategic Place of Professionalization in Haitian Universities

Our words are inspired by those of Richard Wittorski (2008: 11) who puts forward the following: [The theme of professionalization is today meeting with great success not only in the field of training, but also in that of work]. At a time of major changes on a global scale, universities seem to be adapting more and more to them. According to Bourdoncle [15]⁷, at least five meanings can be attributed to this concept:

- 1) The professionalization of the activity;
- 2) The professionalization of the group carrying out the activity;
- 3) The professionalization of knowledge;
- 4) The professionalization of people carrying out the activity;
- 5) The professionalization of training.

If we try to compare these meanings to the reality of universities in Haiti, we will emphasize that we are seeing more and more transformations of professional schools into university centers. In other words, knowing that the word "university" seems more prestigious, some schools adopt this name even if the same training courses formerly offered in these structures are found in these new universities. This means that for certain positions, in certain companies, university licenses are increasingly required where previously a professional diploma was required.

Then, the professionalization of groups of professionals exists in a marginal way. Note, for example, that professional associations are very rare in the country. In any case, the very few that exist do not always work transparently. Add to that a legal framework that does not always exist. At the level of education, there are several teachers' associations, but their

⁵ Haiti is divided into ten (10) geographic departments.

⁶ By traditional sciences we mean medicine, agronomy, engineering sciences, law, administrative sciences, theology, etc.

⁷ Quoted by Wittorski [15]

members do not always find themselves there. Like political parties that exist only to meet a specific demand.

To continue, we must also focus on the issue developed in the latest framework document published as part of the last conference on higher education and research in 2019 with the theme Modernization of higher education in Haiti: challenges and governance challenges:

This exponential development of higher education raises several questions. First of all, is there an institutional framework at the foundations of all these higher education establishments which award academic titles valid on the job market? What relationships exist between these training programs and the socio-economic needs of Haitian society, because if it is the physical framework for the development of these training programs and the receptacle of the graduates who come out of them, it is expected that the relevance criteria serve at least as a guide to their implementation. Generally, higher education differs markedly from secondary education. How do these institutions go about managing the careers and development of their faculty? Do they have an administrative structure that allows them to respect the standards of the sector and to ensure that they provide students with the minimum conditions for the success of their learning, when we know the glaring lack of higher education establishments in this area? Postgraduate training often goes hand in hand with research activities to allow these students a better understanding of research and to have a certain practice in it which facilitates their subsequent integration, what about in these establishments? These questions raised by the recent development of Haitian higher education are all concerns that will help guide a reform of the higher education sector aimed at improving both its framework, its relevance, its quality, as well as the conditions of its funding.

In the light of these considerations, we must emphasize that the concept of professionalization rather exists in the great speeches and debates. But in practice, there are very few professionals from universities. To illustrate our remarks, we will take the case of the State University of Haiti, particularly the Henri Christophe Campus which has been established in the Nord department for about eight years. To date, this university structure, which hosts the largest number of students, awards very few bachelor's degrees (for example in psychology only (3) three⁸ students out of around (150) One hundred and fifty were able to defend their end-of-studies work⁹).

Curiously, the others usurp the title in connection with their profession with a disconcerting usurpation. Everyone

calls themselves a professional. The student who enrolls in the first year of the license is already called by the professional title related to this study. How can a first-year engineering science student arrogates to himself the right to call himself an engineer? And that doesn't seem to shock anyone, or at least not many people!

This reality is no different in private universities which still not only operate for the most part without any legal framework, but do not seem to show too much interest in granting undergraduate degrees to students. In addition, in universities most of the teaching staff is made up of part-time teachers [7]¹⁰. So the supervision of students therefore requires additional costs. This seems to demotivate the students to be able to write the said work.

Note that in our remarks we mainly focus on the first cycle since to be a professional in Haiti, you must in theory have a license. But the latest official figures¹¹ show that only 3% of executives are trained in the civil service.

A final aspect to mobilize in our work is the professional internship. Apart from the disciplines for which this step seems compulsory worldwide (health sciences, engineering sciences, etc.), most universities do not give too much priority to the professional internship, an important step that can allow the student to better confront the theories learned at university to the reality of the market. At the state university, but also at private universities, internship services are not always operational. Moreover, even if the service exists, the supervision of students by internship supervisors is proving to be very problematic. This is one of the causes of the lack of professionalism of most employees in Haiti [6, 8, 14].

4. Conclusion

At the end of this reflection, which, moreover, is not closed, we must remember that professionalization occupies a negligible place in Haitian universities. This is explained by the virtual absence of a framework document governing the operation of these structures, but also by the absence of an accreditation policy for the curricula offered by these institutions, and a lack of innovation in the training offers. Moreover, a large majority of these institutions offer the same training offers. Add to that incompatibility between what is offered in most universities and societal realities.

Moreover, as in Haiti, we do not necessarily have a stable university orientation service, it often happens that most students study just to have a social promotion. Moreover, it is very common to hear most of them estimate during their training that they are studying just to please their parents or to fight idleness. At the end of their training, they do not always know what they will do with the diploma. In other words, where will they be able to get a job related to their fields?

These sad observations lead us to believe that Haitian

⁸ I must specify that I work in this university structure as a teacher and student supervisor. As such, I was able to access these figures.

⁹ In Haitian university education, the license is typically obtained after 3, 4, or even 5 years of study plus research work (thesis, professional projects or internship report). It is therefore common to meet students who complete the cycle of studies without presenting the TFE. These students just hold a certificate of completion with a mention stipulating that the student will be dismissed once the TFE has been submitted.

¹⁰ This reality is found in public universities in the regions which, according to available figures, have 478 teachers, including 445 temporary workers (Fieuvre) [7]

¹¹ see an article published in the Haitian daily *Le Nouvelliste* on October 1, 2018

university education needed to be deeply reformed in order to provide it with the appropriate services so that the training offered really meets social demand [10, 12].

Among these services, open days in companies or workshops on the construction of the professional project by professionals for the benefit of students would be strongly recommended. Because the professional project allows the student to make contact with the environment in which he is destined to work. If it is well done, it can be presented during a job interview and be a good way to make yourself known in a professional environment. In short, a competitive university can simply contribute to social progress.

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