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Higher Education Systems and Institutions, Angola

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Without Abstract

Historical Background

The Republic of Angola is located in the southwest coast of Africa, bordered by the Democratic Republic of Congo to the north, Zambia to the east, and Namibia to the south. With an area of about 1,246,700 square km and a population of 30 million, it is the largest Portuguese-speaking country in Africa. In 1975, following the collapse of the authoritarian regime in Portugal, Angola became independent with the socialist MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) as the only legally recognized party and an economic regime of state control and collective property. After a prolonged and extremely destructive civil war with the other movements which had taken part in the colonial war, namely, UNITA and FNLA, the 1992 agreements led to general elections and the establishment of the Second Republic (in which MPLA still dominates Parliament, government, and presidency but in a multiparty regime) and market-driven reforms. The civil war would nevertheless continue to ravage the country until 2002 with the death of UNITA's historical leader Jonas Savimbi.

In terms of natural resources, Angola is one of the richest countries in Africa with extensive oil and gas resources, diamonds, hydroelectric potential, and rich agricultural land. However, the 27 years of civil war and the endemic corruption at all levels of government have stilted its economic development, and the majority of its population lives in poverty. The Human Development Index of 2019 rates the country in the 149th position (out of 189 countries); the life expectancy is at around 60 years and the adult literacy rate at 66%.

Development of Higher Education

The beginnings of higher education in Angola can be traced back to 1958 with the establishment of Catholic seminaries in Luanda and Huambo (de Carvalho [2012](#)). In addition to these institutions, in 1962, the “General University Studies of Angola” was created, as part of the Portuguese university system, being renamed as the University of Luanda in 1968. In 1975, when Angola became independent, the University of Luanda was composed of six schools or faculties: science, economics, engineering, and medicine in Luanda, agriculture in Huambo, and arts/education in Huíla. The number of students was around 2,400, and the great majority of these (around 95%) were of Portuguese origin, not only because of social discrimination but also due to the existence of fees in secondary and higher education which precluded most Africans from access to these levels of education.

Following its independence, there were important changes in the higher education system (Langa [2013](#)). For instance, the institutions of Catholic higher education were closed down (as all non-state educational institutions), and in 1979, the University of Luanda changed its name to University of Angola and later, in 1985, to University Agostinho Neto (UAN), named after one of the historic leaders of the independence, the country’s first president, and also the first rector of the University (Liberato [2014](#)). During this period, several faculties and institutes were created, such as the Law School in Luanda and the Superior Institute for Educational Sciences (ISCED) which operates in several cities and is focused mainly on training secondary school teachers. In 1995, the Angolan government conferred to UAN a new legal status and organic structure which somewhat reinforced its collegial decision-making structures.

At the same time, the advent of the Second Republic in 1992, and the new political and economic paradigm which followed, paved the way for entrepreneurial activities from the private sector including in the education system (Liberato [2014](#); Langa [2013](#)). In terms of higher education, the first private university was launched by the Catholic Church in 1992 (Catholic University of Angola) followed by the establishment of Lusíada University of Angola (a branch of a Portuguese private institution bearing the same name), the Private Superior Institute of Angola in 1999, Jean Piaget University in 2000, and the New University of Angola in 2002 (Kandingi [2016](#)). In 2002, a new public institution of higher education was established, the Superior Institute for Political and Social Sciences, located in Luanda and with a number of different programs in the social sciences, international relations, management, and public administration. Meanwhile, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, UAN underwent a process of geographical dispersion of its schools which ultimately led in 2010 to the fragmentation of the university in several autonomous and geographically dispersed institutions (Liberato [2014](#)).

The process of diversification and massification of higher education in Angola accelerated in recent years. This has resulted both in the rapid increase in the number of institutions (in 2014, there were 26 public HEIs and 45 private ones) and in enrolment rates with over 146,000 students and 4,100 teachers at all levels of tertiary education in 2017. As often happens, this has caused some concern that this process of rapid expansion has nevertheless negatively impacted the quality of the training being provided, especially in the newly created private institutions (de Carvalho [2012](#); Kandingi [2016](#)). This has given increasing visibility to the issue of quality assurance and accreditation.

The process of expansion is expected to continue, given the low level of qualification of the labor force and the large share of young population. In fact, the government led by the new president João Lourenço (elected in 2017), which has indicated the willingness to promote significant political changes, has pledged to increase participation in higher education even further by creating 7 new public institutions by 2022 and further increasing the number of new graduates by 33,000 in each year. It is yet to be seen how much of this expansion will be carried out exclusively through the expansion of the public sector or by a further expansion of the private sector.

Higher Education Governance and Funding

The governance of the higher education institutions and system are established by the “General Rules Regulating Subsystem Higher Education” (Decree No. 90/09 of 15 December), reinforced in 2016 by the approval of the Law 17/16 which provide the framework for higher education in the country. This legislation regulates academic autonomy and collegial participation by stating that “all individuals directly involved in the teaching and learning process, as an agent of education or of a partner, have the right to participate in the organization and management of the structures, modalities and institutions concerned with education.” Universities in Angola enjoy thus some autonomy and collegial decision-making processes (da Silva [2009](#)). This autonomy was, in the case of the UAN, reinforced by the approval of the new statutes in 1995 which also strengthen the collegial decision-making structures. However, some authors still claim that this autonomy has been found to be somewhat limited in the collegial structures and that the adoption of a centralized administration model in the UAN has allowed the Dean, representing the State, to effectively control the organizational action (Silva and Mendes [2011](#)). This has been a recent tendency also at the system level with the replacement of the still incipient collegial bodies by processes and dynamics that foster individual leadership and recentralization practices (Mendes [2016](#)). In practical terms, there is also evidence of a strong dependence of universities in relation to the Ministry of Education, which maintains extensive power in academic and scientific areas such as the opening of new degrees, approval of internal assessment schemes, and the establishment of curricular and pedagogical standards, including general methodological guidelines.

In terms of funding, Angola higher education institutions have four main sources for funding: direct state support (in the case of the public institutions), student fees, contributions from private and international donors, and paid services to individual or corporate users. While the public higher education sector is predominantly financed by the state, with tuition fees being charged only for evening studies and graduate programs, private institutions depend mainly on tuition and other fees paid directly by students. Despite the insufficiencies in the available data on overall funding for the system, all estimates point to a very significant annual increase in public funding since the end of the civil war in 2002, a period which coincided with the exponential growth of the sector in enrolment rates and number of institutions. At the same time, as in other Portuguese-speaking countries in Africa, the inordinate proportion of public funding directed at scholarships for studying abroad has declined in recent years in favor of directly funding the country’s higher education institutions and the students enrolled in those institutions. However, in spite of the significant increase in recent years in enrolment rates, participation levels are still below those of other regional countries, and a significant proportion of young Angolans are still excluded from this level of education, namely, those from lower-income families who are unable to meet the significant costs of tuition fees in private institutions.

Quality Assurance

In terms of quality assurance of higher education institutions, the practice of external evaluation began in very incipient form in the late 1980s and mid-1990s, followed by some sporadic practices of self-assessment by the higher education institutions themselves from 2005 onward. Until the late 1990s, it was the UAN itself, although under control of the Ministry of Education, that assumed the

dual role as a higher education institution and as an entity of central state administration in the design and planning of activities related to higher education. Despite the fact that the national evaluation policy is often referred to in institutional documents, several authors argue that the process was, until recently, still largely dependent on the institutions' initiatives and less on effective actions by the State (Silva and Mendes [2011](#)).

The issues of quality assurance and evaluation of higher education institutions have gained increasing relevance with the establishment in 2009 of a quality assurance system, coordinated at the national level by the Institute for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (INAAES) and, at the local level, to be operated by each of the universities and higher education institutions. The agency is mandated to “define general criteria for assessing the performance of institutions; create mechanisms ensuring the external evaluation of the quality of services; assess and evaluate the merit of the activity and the performance of higher education institutions” as well as “to approve the regimes for internal evaluation of higher education institutions” (Decree No. 90/09, of 15 December). The implementation of the system was not however above criticism, and the new government has further regulated the quality assurance mechanisms through the approval of the presidential Decree 203/2018 which reinforces the autonomy of institutions in its relation with the State (Tauchen et al. [2019](#)).

Challenges

Higher education in Angola faces important challenges. On the one hand, the system is under significant pressure to expand, in order to help the country to catch up regarding the qualification of its labor force and the significant social pressures for greater access to higher levels of education. This is particularly relevant given the economic potential of the country and its traditional reliance on foreign-trained skilled professionals. On the other hand, and as many other systems in Africa, the expansion of the higher education system was significantly supported by a large share of private institutions. This pattern of rapid expansion and diversification has created important regulatory challenges regarding both the public and the private sectors. In the case of the former, the system needs to strengthen its research base and its degree of autonomy. Regarding the private sector, the system needs to consolidate its quality and relevance regarding the labor market. Moreover, the system needs to continue expanding its regional diversification, fostering greater interaction with local needs and enhancing the contribution of higher education to economic and social development in different parts of the country (and not only in the capital and a couple of other major regional cities). Last, but not least, it needs to find sufficient resources to support a growing system in a context of scarcity and pressing needs in other areas of public services. Although the country owns important resources of economic potential, recent financial difficulties are likely to make that challenge even more complex.

Cross-References

- . [Autonomy and Accountability in Higher Education, Africa](#)
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- . [Higher Education Expansion in Africa and Middle East](#)

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