

Higher Studies in Foreign Lands, Diploma Equivalent and Integration into the World of Work: Gabon-China Case Study

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Abstract

Today's world is opening up to great bilateral trade. Cooperation agreements keep growing and the countries of the world are getting closer and closer. As part of education, world universities are filled with students of different nationalities, for all available professional training. Faced with different education systems, students experience adaptations and certain challenges, both on foreign lands and after their studies back in their country of origin. And these adaptations and challenges must also be recognized by the countries of origin. Thus, this study mainly deals with the issue of Gabonese students in Chinese territory, for higher studies, the equivalence of diplomas and integration into the labor market after graduation. It also offers some suggestions and recommendations to meet the challenges posed for a promising and better future for African youth and more particularly for Gabonese youth. But it is also with a view to improving cooperation relations between countries for a win-win cooperation.

Keywords

Higher Education, Foreign Land, Diploma Equivalent, Integration

1. Introduction

Gabon, like many countries in the world, more specifically the countries of Africa, sends their students abroad to pursue their higher education. And for many African countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa, it is about providing better learning or training conditions. Today for Sub-Saharan Africa, sending your child to study abroad is no longer an impossible mission thanks to cooperation scholarships which testify to the good relations between countries. And Gabon, which has very good international relationship, registers its students in all con-

tinents and in more than 60 countries around the world and China is not an exception.

According to [The People's Daily Online \(2019\)](#), China is ranked first among host countries for foreign students. And China is now the second destination for African students after France.

China-Africa education exchanges and cooperation began with the education of international students. From 2000 to 2011, the government scholarships China provided for students from African countries increased in number from 1154 to 6316 ([Zhang, 2012](#)). In 2015, the Forum on China-Africa cooperation Johannesburg plan of Africa announced that the number of government scholarships China would offer to Africa from 2016 to 2018 would be 30,000. At the same time, China would also provide 2000 admissions of degree education to Africa students; its support for African education reached a historical high. In addition to government scholarships, Chinese local government, universities and corporations have also established scholarships for African students. The number of African students studying at their own expense has also increased significantly. In 2005, the number of students who choose to study in China is growing rapidly. According to statistics, the average annual growth rate of African students coming to China from 2005 to 2014 was 35%, ranking the highest among all international students ([Report on Studying in China, 2014](#)).

According to the Ministry of Education of China, there were 440,000 foreign students in China in 2016, including 61,594 African students, accounting for 14% of the total, a year-on-year increase of 23.7%. This trend of growth is expected to continue in the future. China has become an important educational destination for African students. China is therefore the place par excellence chosen for many Africans to pursue their higher education ([The People's Daily Online, 2019](#)). Generally, students fix as problems climate, language etc. to adapt abroad.

For Gabonese students, there is the problem of suspension of scholarship during the course due to the long duration of study in China longer than in Gabon. And another concern, is after school. Because once graduated, these students face the problems of equivalence of diplomas and above all integration into the world of work. Many graduate students find themselves working in fields that have nothing to do with their original education. And some are part of the brain leaks. Because when you return to Gabon, there is no guarantee of finding a job.

To understand this problem that facing Gabonese students abroad, more specifically those in China, it is therefore with a view to satisfying what has been called a national concern that this study on higher studies in a foreign land, equivalent of diplomas and integration into the labor market: Gabon-China's case study will help to better understand the topic and see possible recommendations or suggestions.

This study is organized into four parts or chapters. The first chapter is the general Introduction, from which emerges the problem of the study. The second chapter presents the challenges linked to the training abroad. By looking at the suspensions of scholarship often linked to the length of study sometimes longer

than in Gabon. Then, the equivalences of diplomas sometimes do not correspond to the education system of Gabon, and finally the problem of integration linked to the training that has no outlet on Gabonese territory. The third chapter presents in a very brief way, the different university educational cycles, passing through the main or the most popular university cycles and a study on a global view of the University cycles of Gabon and China. By looking at the suspensions of scholarships often linked to the length of study sometimes longer than in Gabon. Then, the equivalences of diplomas sometimes do not correspond to the education system of Gabon, and finally the problem of integration linked to training that has no outlet on Gabonese territory.

And finally, the fourth chapter presents the suggestions and recommendations so that Gabon can find solution to all these concerns or shortcomings observed throughout this study for a better Gabon, and of course, the general conclusion.

2. Challenges Related to Training Abroad

It is more than normal that the students once outside the borders of their country can meet challenges. Most of these challenges may be due to climate change. An African who has never been to a country where there is winter. He will experience some difficulties in adapting at first. There is also the problem of languages.

When an African student specifically from the French-speaking area flies to an English-speaking country or other for higher studies, the language becomes a challenge because once outside the French-speaking area he is completely lost. Such as power supply etc.

But with regard to Gabonese students in China, it will be important to note three specific challenges that they encounter. In particular, the suspension of scholarships, the equivalence of diplomas and integration into the labor market once back in Gabon.

2.1. Equivalence of Diplomas

It is true that there are similarities with diplomas, but there is still a difference. And this difference is in the number of years of study. Can we close our eyes to it? Take a comparative example of two students, one student in Gabon and the other student in China, both undergraduate. After the license, they immediately go on to a Master. Those from Gabon will have a Master1 or Master 2 diploma, but leaving for a Master 2. Their Master 2 will be equivalent to a BAC + 5, while those who have studied in China will also have a Master degree, equivalent to a Master2 but which will be equivalent to a BAC + 7. And if you have to do with a Master1, the equivalent will be a BAC + 4, which corresponds to the Chinese undergraduate degree whose license according to the European system. So the student from China finishes his training by obtaining a diploma equivalent to a BAC + 4 but is classified in License which is normally 3 years of training. It seems easy to just consider 3 cycles of study and divide them up like the European system, but there is a time factor, including the length of studies or training which normally should not be overlooked.

2.2. Integration into the Labor Market

In Sub-Saharan Africa, access to the labor market is not easy. And unemployment rates are more increasing, among young people and especially young graduates. In Gabon, this can be explained by training, because it does not correspond or do not meet the needs of the country and therefore the demand on the labor market. There is employment but a category of diploma or training. But the lack of orientation of students on promising courses is at the root of all graduates who are unemployed (MAYS MOUISSI, 2015).

And this problem arises both for students on Gabonese territory and for those returning from abroad benefit from scholarships to attend these trainings. Why not make a selection and target training for these young people? Due to this lack today, there is also an increase in the number of brain leaks. Because, knowing the fate of their return to the country, many prefer to stay there to work in the countries of study.

2.3. Suppression of Scholarships

One of the specific challenges faced by Gabonese students in China is the suspension of scholarships at the end of their schooling. Referring to the article 23 of the student guide. The scholarships are awarded for a period of studies required for the obtaining of the prepared diploma, namely:

- 2 years (DUT/BTS)
- 3 years (License)
- 2 years old (Master 2)
- 3 years old (Doctorate)

So according to the Gabon National Scholarship Agency, here is the duration according to each different cycle and the scholarship agreement. According to Article 19 of the same student guide, only one repetition is allowed per study cycle beyond the grant is suspended (Student Guide, 2013). It is clear that there is a problem for Gabonese students in China over the length of their studies. For an undergraduate student who obtained a scholarship from the Gabonese government. Gabon will grant it to him for a period of 3 years plus an authorized repetition that leads us to 4 years no more. And in the event of another failure, the scholarship is suspended (Student Guide, 2013).

But in China, according to the table which was presented, gives as detail that for a license it takes 4 years of training and a year of language, this leads to 5 years for a license in China.

So in this condition the student sees his scholarship suspended at the end of the 4th year while he is still in full training. And if you have to apply the principle of repeating a year, instead of 5 years, it will be 6 years for students in China. But that has never been the case.

On the contrary for Gabonese students in China, they are automatically recognized as having experienced a failure or a repetition in the system which is not true for many. What to do to remedy this problem that these students fix?

Conclusion

Know that the country cannot guarantee them a job with all these diplomas. It is important to remember that among the challenges related to foreign education for Gabonese students in China, there is a major problem for the duration of longer studies and which can subsequently arouse problems in the certification of diplomas.

3. The Different University Cycles







3.1. Main University Cycles

The higher education system is not the same in all countries. Moreover, there are significant disparities in several areas (Chez-Merlin, 2019). There are several criteria that must be taken into account when comparing education systems. For example, school rhythms, government policies in relation to education spending or the performance of school systems etc. Hence the emphasis will be placed on University cycles. A University cycle is a graduate study program spread over several years and leading to a specific title or degree. In this study, attention will be placed on the English and French systems which seem to be the most widespread and popular and also corresponding to those two countries China and Gabon.

Below is **Table 1** of two different systems French (European) and English (American).

Table 1. French (European) and English (American) education system.

21	Phd 3	PHD	Doctorat 3	DOCTORAT
20	Phd 2		Doctorat 2	
19	Phd 1		Doctorat 1	
18	Postgrade 2	Master's	Master 2	MASTER'S
17	Postgrade 1		Master 1	
16	Undegrade 4	Bachelor	Licence 3	LICENCE
15	Undergrade 3		Licence 2	DEUG, BTS or DUT
14	Undergrade 2	Associate Degree	Licence 1	(University)
13	Undergrade 1	(University)	Terminale	BACCALAUREAT
12	12 th Grade	High School Diploma	1ere	
11	11 th Grade		2 nd	LYCEE
10	10 th Grade		3eme	
9	9 th Grade		4eme	
8	8 th Grade	(Middle school)	5eme	
7	7 th Grade		6eme	COLLEGE
6	6 th Grade		CM2	
5	5 th Grade		CM1	
4	4 th Grade		CE2	
3	3 rd Grade		CE1	
2	2 nd Grade	(Elementary School)	CP	
1	1 st Grade		SIL	PRIMAIRE
Years of Studies	Anglo-xason System	Diplomas obtained (Schools)	French System	Diplomas Obtained (Schools)

Source: 2008-2021 Selected Immigre, Understanding the American University System. From this table, the information that is retained is quite simply the European and American education systems. There are the different cycles from primary to university in detail.  Years of Studies According to each Cycles of Study;  The University Cycle and diploma;  The High School Diploma;  The Middle school;  The Elementary School;  The different Education System.

3.2. Global View of the University Cycle of Gabon

First of all, it is important to note that education in Gabon or the Gabonese education system is largely based on the model of France which is the colonizing power of Gabon. And the official language of communication in Gabon is also French (Scholaro.pro, 1978).

Also, access to university or higher education schools, the student must be in possession of a high school diploma, the Baccalaureate. It is also important to note that there are training courses that do not necessarily require it and also give access to the labor market. But for the University cycle which concerns this study, obtaining or having the Baccalaureate is essential (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, 2019).

So Gabon falls within the framework of the French-speaking system. **Table 2** shows the university cycle selected or recognized in Gabon.

- **DEUG:** The “Diplôme d’études universitaires générales” (Deug) is an old national university diploma leading to the level “bac + 2”.

Before the implementation of the three-cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate), this two-year-long training was accessible with a “Baccalauréat” diploma or equivalent. Since its implementation (2003-2006), the students who completed a “Baccalauréat” diploma or equivalent directly register in a six semester-long training course in order to obtain a “Licence” diploma. However, it is still possible, for the universities accredited for “Licence” diploma awarding, to offer, at the intermediate level (L2), the “Deug” national diploma, in the specific training field, once the student has completed his four first semesters.

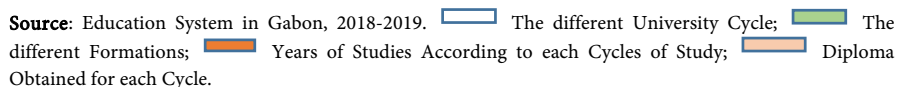



This first short-cycle degree was therefore classified at level III in the French classification of education levels and at level 5 in the international standard one (INSEE, 2019a).

- **BTS:** The Diploma of Advanced Technician, named “Brevet de technicien supérieur” (BTS) in French, is a two-year post-secondary national professional degree.

It is usually prepared in an advanced technician section during four semesters after the “Baccalauréat” or after an education or a diploma deemed to be equivalent. This vocational degree is oriented to labour market. There are hundreds of

Table 2. University cycle (Francophone).

Cycles	Formations	Durée d'étude	Diplômes Obtenus
First Cycle	-Licence 1	1 year	-Deug
	-Licence 2	2 years	-BTS ou DUT
	-Licence 3	3 years	-Licence
Second Cycle	-Master 1	1 year	Master
	-Master 2	2 years	
Third Cycle	Doctorat	3 years	Doctorat

Source: Education System in Gabon, 2018-2019.  The different University Cycle;  The different Formations;  Years of Studies According to each Cycles of Study;  Diploma Obtained for each Cycle.

tertiary, industrial or agricultural (it is then named “Brevet de technicien supérieur agricole” or BTSA) fields of education.

This first short-cycle degree is classified at the level III in the French classification of educational levels and at the level 5 in the international standard one (INSEE, 2019b).

- **DUT:** The “Diploma in Technological Studies”, named in French “Diplôme universitaire de technologie” (DUT), is a two-year post-secondary national university diploma. It is usually prepared in a university institute of technology (IUT). The access to its training course is conditional on obtaining a “Baccalauréat” diploma or on having a level judged equivalent. This professionalizing and general training intends both to lead to an immediate professional integration and to enable to continue more advanced studies.

This first cycle degree is therefore classified at the level III in the French classification of education levels and at level 5 in the international standard one (INSEE, 2019c).

The French (European) system. From this table, the information shows the different cycles, the number of years per training and the diplomas obtained.

-Obtaining a BTS (Higher Technical Certificate) or a DUT (University Diploma in Technology) can lead directly to a job. And that does not prevent the pursuit of his higher education. And it is still relevant in Gabon.

Now it is clear that Gabon remains in the old French education system. Also for the license and the Master. The student can decide to stop and enter the workforce or to pursue a doctorate. The LMD reform—abbreviation of the 3 diplomas concerned: License Master Doctorate—was implemented in 2004, its objective is to harmonize higher education diplomas in Europe. No more Franco-French diplomas, long live the simplification of diplomas and the internationalization of studies (GABRIEL, 2017). The BTS, DEUG, IUT, DUT and other training courses remain the same. This is what the university cycle in Gabon corresponds to today.

3.3. Global View of China’s University Cycles

The Chinese university system is completely different from the French-speaking system. It cannot be placed on the same plane.

First of all, it is important to note that in order to gain access to university, students must take an exclusively determining exam by obtaining a score obtained in the GAOKAO (Bachir Kaba, 2017).

This exam is relatively equivalent to the Baccalaureate. But the competition is severe, because failing the GAOKAO is extremely damaging to the future prospects of a Chinese student. Because the large Chinese universities judge students only on the marks obtained in GAOKAO. Regarding university training in China. It is also important to note that training is more often if not generally in Mandarin, the official language of China. So for foreign students, a language year is imposed on them before the university training for which they will be trained (Bachir Kaba, 2017). But again, today there is also the possibility of con-

tinuing your studies in English, but it is a program which is not yet widespread in all Chinese universities (*Country by Country Guide, 2017*). University cycles have some similitudes to the Anglo-Saxon system with some slight differences (**Table 3**).

It is also important to stress that Dazhuan is a course generally dedicated to adults who need a qualification in order to enter the workforce, or to students who have not obtained a good way at Gaokao to be accepted into a university. The choice of the type of institution for a Chinese student is based solely on the Gaokao, a test administered at the end of secondary education. If successful, he will be able to start long studies of 4 years or more. Otherwise, he will turn to short vocational training in 2 or 3 years, or in the worst case will be excluded from the Chinese university system (*Bachir Kaba, 2017*).

- **Benke:** this is the equivalent of the Bachelor of the Anglo-Saxon system or the License of the French-speaking system, therefore of the first cycle of university. And for the continuation to the higher cycle, admission is made after successful completion of the proposed competition.
- **Shuoshi:** This is the Master, this training takes 3 years. And the diploma obtained will be equivalent according to the European system to a Master 2. For the pursuit for the upper cycle, there is also a competition as well as for the Benke. And places are limited.
- **Boshi:** This is the upper class and more often referred to as the elite class, the best. The longest training; it represents a Bac + 10.

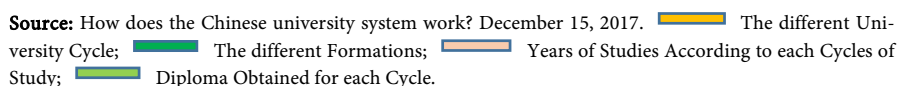



For foreign students, it will be necessary to certify an excellent academic level, but also in English and Chinese and to have at least a master's degree with honors, or even a doctorate. So that their file is accepted. The Boshi is the equivalent of the Doctorate in the European system.

It is important to note that this table corresponds to Chinese students. But what corresponds to foreign students and a little different. First of all, in a policy of opening up its higher education, China has gradually adapted its diploma system in order to come closer to the Anglo-Saxon model, and thus facilitate equivalences as well as the overall understanding of different training courses for foreign students (*Benke Program in China, 2018*).

But again, English taught program in China has successfully attracted international students from all around the world. You don't need to be fluent in Chinese

Table 3. University cycles (Chinese).

Cycles	Formations	Durée d'étude	Diplômes Obtenus
First Cycle	-Dazhuan	2 or 3 years	-Dazhua
Second Cycle	-Benke (本科)	4 years	-Benke
Third Cycle	-Shuoshi (硕士)	3 years	-Shuoshi
Fourth Cycle	-Boshi (博士)	3 years	-Boshi

Source: How does the Chinese university system work? December 15, 2017.  The different University Cycle;  The different Formations;  Years of Studies According to each Cycles of Study;  Diploma Obtained for each Cycle.

language to study in bachelor or master degree program in China. International students can receive education with medium of instruction in English and explore potential opportunities in China for the future. Prospective students need to consider whether they should apply for Chinese or English taught degree program (China Education Center, 2021).

Conclusion

In light of these tables above, it emerges that the two systems do have similarities, but the most striking is the number of years of study which appears to be longer in the Chinese system.

4. Suggestions and Recommendations

4.1. Suggestions

- Diploma equivalence

It is important to note that even these 2 systems have similarities, the time factor is very important. The duration of the trainings are not the same. The 1st Chinese university diploma cannot be the license, because it is obtained after 4 years of study. Therefore it is equivalent to a Master1 which is equal to 4 years of study. So according to the system equivalent to a Bac + 4, it will be more beneficial for Gabonese students in China if Gabon can review how to adjust the accreditation of these Chinese diplomas so as not to waste all these students these extra years of study.

Otherwise in the long term, studying in China will be seen as too long and in the long run; it will take a lot of thinking before coming to study in China, and the winning cooperation will no longer find its initial meaning.

- Integration into the labor market

The problem of integration is very serious in Africa. It is really very important that the countries of sub-Saharan Africa pay attention to this problem of integration into the labor market of young graduates, considering the training according to the needs of the country. These trainings, which specifically benefit these students abroad, can be of great benefit to the country, as long as they receive quality training. It is therefore necessary to review the orientations of the students by setting up a guidance agency so that upon leaving the country of origin for abroad, the student receives an orientation interview and upon his return by the same agency, the placement in a company is done automatically. And we are no longer going to hang out with unemployed graduates who have received extraordinary training. And we will also witness an exceptional brand and development in sub-Saharan Africa and in particular in Gabon, an emerging country.

- Suppression of scholarships

-Here is a calling to Gabonese government to pay attention to the grant allocations that they are given to young students for the high studies in foreign lands. It would be more than urgent for Gabon to pay attention to the different educational systems by paying attention to the duration of training in the countries in all the countries where they are sending Gabonese students. As far as

China is concerned, it is now more than clear that the duration of studies is longer. So Articles 3 and 19 cannot apply to these students. Insofar as the duration of the study is longer than that of the European system and therefore of Gabon (Student Guide, 2013). It is therefore not possible that these students can be treated in the same way as those of Gabon, because they live different realities. It is therefore advisable in Gabon to review the application of Articles 3 and 19 for foreign students according to the realities of the study countries.

4.2. Recommendations

- Gabon must review its scholarship allocation policy depending on the host country, so that this does not affect the future of the students and will also facilitate the work of ANBG (National Agency of Scholarships), because they will have less problem complaint and others.
- Gabon must review its diploma certification system, taking into account the educational system of other countries because not all of them are part of the system French or European.
- To resolve the problem of unemployed graduates, Gabon must make a selection of training courses for students, both those on Gabonese territory and those abroad, according to the needs of the country and current employment opportunities.

General conclusion

It is very important to note that education is the foundation of a country but also the foundation of a powerful country, because when education prospers, the country prospers and if education is powerful the country is powerful (Li, Wu, & Zhang, 2018).

China-Africa cooperation in education is very important for a good, win-win friendship cooperation. And so far the cooperation scholarships awarded to Africa by China have more or less been successful and the number of foreign students in China has indeed increased. Gabon and China are two friendly countries, and their cooperative relationship dates back to 1974. To continue to maintain such a friendship, it is important that cooperation agreements are in a win-win manner. For this, Gabon needs to pay attention to the suggestions and recommendations cited above. Not only for a better development of the country but also for good relations of cooperation.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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