

Reflexive Practices: Postgraduates' Dissertation Writing in the Congolese Context

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Abstract

This article aims at examining some practices of Congolese postgraduates and their supervisors during the dissertation writing process, particularly when elaborating a chapter. Accordingly, it draws on Reflexive Practices (Farrell 2025), and resorts to ethnographical techniques so as to penetrate this academic culture. It tries to compare these practices to the ones used in another educational system so as to improve these actors' academic literacy. That is, although glocalization is necessary for the respect of the local culture, herein academic globalization is wished to overcome local shortcomings. Both teacher development and postgraduates' initiation into the procedural knowledge of dissertation writing are required accordingly.

Keywords: reflexive practices, dissertation writing, globalization, glocalization, procedural knowledge, academic literacy.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Year in year out, students write dissertations under supervisors' guidance. A whole range of strategies are used in this process by both participants accordingly. Yet, all these strategies cannot be said entirely satisfactory. It is thus necessary to reflect on them for better performance. This paper investigates into postgraduates' and their supervisors' respective practices during chapter writing in the Congolese context in order to assess effectiveness of the strategies. As any reflective endeavour (Farrell 2025), it ultimately aims to suggest better strategies, particularly for saving the time of research completion.

In tune with the ideology of globalisation, new curricula for the tertiary education have been designed in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) so as to uplift the competence of university leavers to international standards. Among these changes can be mentioned the introduction of English as a transversal course for all levels of studies, and the LMD (Licence – Master – Doctorate) curriculum (Arrêté ministériel N° 175). The aim was to achieve global academic citizenry. The LMD system was extroverted and designed to facilitate the transfer of Congolese students to European universities. It had to operate like the Erasmus Programme which helped students to navigate European universities across national borders. However, while standardisation and equivalences of programmes can be achieved with respect to the coverage of the courses, such cannot be the case for practices, mainly the approaches to teaching, learning, and research doing. Hence, this reflexion on some of these practices/

The background to this study is an anecdote. During the 2022-2023 academic year, one student brought the whole dissertation at the very first tutorial with the teacher. It even included acknowledgments praising the tutor's hard work and sacrifice. When asked who was the supervisor of the completed dissertation, the student felt at unease. She realized that it was not just necessary to mention a teacher's name on the dissertation cover, but also to receive guidance as appropriate. She had to redo the work on the basis of the tutor's instructions; which led to a loss of time.

This paper is also an attempt to show the limits of glocalization in academia as emancipation from globalization. Globalization is summarily understood as 'homogenization of standards' after one which is considered as prestigious. Conversely, glocalization is adaptation of what is international to the local context by paying attention to local practices, customs, and culture (Richards and Schmidt 2010). As a matter of fact, Contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan and Connor 1987) and cultural studies (Ballard 1984) have shown relativity of practices across cultures, including academic norms.

Reflectively, it is argued that by adopting efficient practices of dissertation writing, that is, the procedural knowledge (Carter 1990) of dissertation writing as practised in universities with a long tradition of academic culture, it is possible to improve postgraduates' performance so as to save the time for the supervisors and

supervisees alike. In their seminal book *How to Get a PhD*, Phillips and Pugh (2005) have also addressed supervisor-supervisee relationships: the success of the enterprise heavily depends on their effectiveness.

Therefore, our research turns around this main question: how can dissertation writing be better performed in the Congolese educational context? This question is elaborated in these two subquestions:

- (1) How do postgraduates and their supervisors interact during the research process? and
- (2) What can be done in order to improve postgraduates' performance and reduce the duration of the research?

The following hypotheses can be put forth: dissertation writing can be better performed in this context by adopting the procedural knowledge of dissertation writing. The student and the supervisor have their respective responsibilities to fulfill. As an answer to the first subquestion, postgraduates and teachers interact insufficiently at the crucial moment. Students tend to work on their own to write a chapter, and later they turn to the supervisor for correction only. For the second subquestion, postgraduates' performance can be improved by adopting the strategies which have already yielded positive results in other educational contexts. Thanks to the joint preparation of a chapter writing by the student and the supervisor at the beginning, it is possible to anticipate errors and digressions, to avoid redoing the work, and to avoid a loss of time.

Structurally, after this introduction, the paper discusses turn by turn research methodology, globalization, glocalization and the LMD system. It also analyses some cases in the Congolese context and elsewhere, and suggests strategies for writing a chapter.

II. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper pertains to the domain of reflexive practices which, according to Farrell (2025), "entails retrospective and introspective processes where teachers constantly question what they do and why they do it." The goal of reflective practice is to create awareness by observing and refining practice on an ongoing basis rather than to address specific problems. Reflective practice offers teachers a way to articulate those aspects of practice that make up part of that knowledge base in teaching, by helping them better understand what they know, and do. In the same vein, Zwozdiak-Myers (2012: 3) argues that reflexive practice "helps teachers 'to analyse and evaluate what is happening' in their classes so that they can not only improve the quality of their teaching, but also provide better opportunities for their students to learn." We need to understand how students interact with their supervisors and how this impact the completion of their dissertations.

With respect to data collection, this work is based on a selection of some case studies, and relies on observation and protocols of some postgraduates involved in dissertation writing at three academic institutions: University of Lubumbashi, University of Kinshasa, and the Higher Teacher Training College of Bukavu (ISP). In all, there are 13 informants, viz. 5 doctoral postgraduates and 8 masters ones. Interactions with these informants helped us shed some light on the aspects of research doing and chapter writing, our main concerns.

Although the study focusses on postgraduate dissertations, additional evidence is found from time to time in lower dissertations. In fact, research culture starts with students' third year dissertations. This insider knowledge of this educational system is an asset to help us, through retrospection, to understand postgraduates' behaviour during their research process. Hence, this research also draws on our respective personal experience as dissertation supervisor (for Mulamba) and as both a postgraduate and a dissertation supervisor at the first level (for Alfani).

In line with contrastive rhetoric to justify the differences in writing conventions and practices (Connor and Kaplan 1987), this local academic culture will be compared to two previous studies, viz. Muchiri and coauthors (1995) and Shomba (2010). The former compares academic writing in some African universities (Congolese, Kenyan, and Tanzanian) to the (North-) American system. The latter discusses doctoral thesis completion via co-tutelage in Congolese versus some Belgian universities. Both studies challenge academic globalisation of academic standards, practices and cultures, and plead for some consideration of glocalization as shown in contrastive rhetoric and other cultural studies. The ideology of 'global academic citizenry' cannot hold because of differences inherent in financial means, administrative organization, rhetorical constraints/specific to every academic culture.

Along some previous studies on the genesis of scientific knowledge (Gilbert and Mulkay 1984; Myers 1990), and some on differences in academic practices (Shomba 2010), we proceed to a comparison of writing practices to show how these differences can lead to diametrically opposed results. The selected contexts of study are Lancaster University (UK) and Lubumbashi University. One author completed his doctoral research in the former, and pursue his university career in the latter.

Comparative pedagogy has as an advantage to show how the same issue has been tackled successfully with a different paradigm elsewhere. Making allusion to another educational system helps to present an alternative strategy which has worked better than the one in use locally. Like Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), we will try 'to open Pandora's box' to point out weaknesses for which we hope to suggest remedies. Writing expertise, as Carter (1990) argues, consists in mastering cognitive and social dimensions of writing. Accordingly, postgraduates must have an explicit "declarative knowledge" of their discipline or of the genre as well as a "procedural knowledge"

of how to interact with their supervisors during their dissertation writing process. In the same vein, Myers (1990) has shown how biologists modify their texts to meet editorial requirements in their efforts to publish.

Our approach remains descriptive and aims to make explicit the practices which are specific to each educational system. It is hypothesized that by demystifying the mechanisms and procedure of scientific knowledge production, it is possible to improve significantly the practice and production of scientific knowledge in general, and that of a dissertation chapter writing in particular. Otherwise stated, like for any culture, initiation into the practices and the commonplaces of chapter writing remains necessary in order to transmit procedural knowledge. Without any model to imitate, learners tend to invent their own unsuccessful models and rules as observed by Bartholomae (1985) and Blakeslee (1992).

III. GLOBALIZATION, GLOCALIZATION and the LMD SYSTEM

This paper is informed by the notions of globalisation and glocalisation of academic practices. There is a tension between them insofar as for some scholars the practices should be alike in all academic contexts whereas for others they should be context-bound or adapted. The recent changes in the Congolese educational system consist in the adoption of the Bachelor – Master – Doctorate scheme, known under the French acronym LMD. The main reasons which are given in the official documents are the need for internationalization of the educational system in order to join global academic citizenry. Accordingly, there was also introduction of English as a subject at all levels of tertiary education. Following are some criticisms on these notions.

Globalisation imposes same standards on all contexts regardless of the differences of financial means, availability of teaching staff, social expectations, etc. Such an assumption does not stand even for the northern context taken as a whole. For instance, with respect to universities, there are prestigious private universities (for aristocratic and upper social classes) with high standards of resources, equipment and with high academic fees. By contrast, there are also public universities accessible for working class citizens, with relatively low requirements and affordable academic fees. Equality cannot be expected or achieved in any competitive society.

With respect to glocalization, cultural studies have shown that even when they are informed about a given standard, learners can willingly resist it because of cultural reasons, impossibility to fulfil the requirements etc. In their paper on academic writing beyond North America, Muchiri et al. (1995) have shown the differences in standards (between American and some African universities) due to teaching ideologies, resources, political and social constraints: everything is contingent as held in contrastive rhetoric. Likewise, in his comparison of research doing in Congolese universities and in some European (Belgian, French, German) ones, Shomba (2010) has come to the same conclusion about academic standards relativeness. While in the northern universities a thesis is expected to end with theorization (theory-driven research), in southern universities the focus can sometimes be on empiricism (data-driven research), instead. However, when given opportunities to transfer to European universities, these southerners are capable to adapt themselves to the new system despite an initial shock of culture.

Finally, the LMD system has been imposed on universities more for diplomatic reasons than for educational ones because no weakness of the former curriculum has been wiped out or even simply addressed: student overpopulation, teacher attrition, lack of funding and resources for research, inadequate facilities, lack of libraries, laboratories and research supports still prevail. Introduction of a new curriculum necessitates huge amounts of money in order to design teaching materials, to print them, and to train the teachers who would implement the reform itself. Unfortunately, this 'high cost argument' (Schmied 1991) shows that these requirements cannot be met by the government. Hence, we cannot expect the local educational system to be like European ones.

Let us now turn to local practices in chapter writing.

IV. UNDERSTANDING POSTGRADUATES' WRITING STRATEGIES

This research is based on some case studies related to some aspects of dissertation writing, and how learners dealt with them. The common issue is that after having ignored to confer with the supervisor at the beginning, these students work on their own and eventually invent their own writing strategies. Unfortunately, these are less workable and inefficient. They contribute to prolong delays and to overstep deadlines.

Chapter drafts are submitted many times for correction, with the waste of time that is inherent in such a process. The obvious cause of the delay is the adopted procedure. Researchers sometimes write their chapters without negotiating with their supervisors as to the content, or the thesis of the chapter itself, the outline, the basic citations to incorporate etc. This practice will likely impact the number of the necessary revisions to bring the chapter to completion. The higher the number of revisions, the bigger the writer's disappointment, and the more negative the supervisor's opinion on the work and on the author's intellectual capacity to conduct advanced research.

4.1. Chapter writing in the Congolese context

Following are the reports of three cases in order to illustrate different strategies and lack of collaboration between students and their directors.

4.1.1. Writing a chapter on the interpretation of the results

The first case concerns a student who submitted a chapter on the results. This task happens to be a hard one for students; and the chapters on the results are often the weakest. After a very good literature review in the theoretical chapters, the candidate turned to data analysis. The ideal way would be to pilot the analysis first, to receive the tutor's greenlight, and then to extend the analysis to the rest of the data.

One type of data analysis consisted in presenting the results numerically. The use of the Likert scale meant that the Excel programme and histograms were the expected paradigms. The candidate had to redo all the work because he had used tables, instead. That brought frustration and delays. In the end, he realized his error and became aware of the relevance of piloting the analysis under the tutor's guidance.

Another weakness currently found in students' dissertations is the lack of citations and references in the chapters on results. Admittedly, the latter should be compared to the hypotheses and other previous works cited in the literature review so as to assert if they validate or invalidate them, or if they approximate them, and how. Hence, the relevance of citations and references, at least to make correlation and intertextuality among studies. Unfortunately, none of these could be found in the student's chapter. The reader was presented with the figures that s/he could see on the table; but no interpretation was made of them.

By trying to work independently from the supervisor at a critical stage of research, this student made two wrong choices of the research paradigm. He paid a high price for it in terms of emotion and waste of time. Procedural knowledge is transmitted by a master to a disciple through practice; a truth that some students tend to by-pass.

4.1.2 Ignoring the tutor

The second case concerns a postgraduate who had begun and completed her dissertation on her own. As aforementioned, this experience served as the background to this study. In fact, once the topic was agreed in the department meeting, the candidate decided to work alone, without meeting the director at all. Since tutorials are not regularly scheduled, every student works at his/her own pace until deadlines for submitting dissertations are announced. Some students wait until then to contact the tutor again, often showing impatience not to be left behind. They may take a whole month to write a chapter, but surprisingly they may expect the tutor to give feedback within a few days.

In this unregulated system, some students would be submitting their dissertations chapter after chapter while others would bring the whole work entirely finished – whether original or plagiarized. With limited declarative knowledge, and often without procedural knowledge of the genre, these solitary researchers often go astray and would have to start the work all over again. Such a situation could be avoided if the tutor was involved at the right time, and if the guidance was solicited at the beginning of every task. Because of self-tutoring, some students unwittingly delay the completion of their research.

In the present case, for the candidate, the tutor is felt necessary more for administrative regulations than for academic guidance; a misjudgement which is often detrimental to students.

4.1.3. Claiming novelty and self-tutoring

The last case illustrates a student's overconfidence. We evolve in an academic environment characterized by shortage of teaching staff and specializations, limited resources, and outdated facilities and libraries. Yet, these few teachers try to attend at students' needs even beyond their own cherished schools of thought. Therefore, a student who feels that s/he is embracing some new trend of knowledge may think the teaching staff uninformed and less helpful. Wrongly, s/he can belittle their knowledge and help, and engage in solitary research with all the negative consequences.

A postgraduate had been impressed by blended learning which he had observed in an international school run by the Belgian Consulate. The school was well equipped with audio-visual gadgets, Wi-Fi and permanent internet connections. Like the student described in the second case, he submitted his complete dissertation even before the topic was agreed and registered. It is noteworthy that, to monitor research progress, students have to give three staff seminars during their training as follows: the first in order to present the research project for agreement and registration, the second to justify the planned research methodology, and the third to report the provisional results. Expectedly, feedback from the panel would help the candidate and the tutor to improve the dissertation.

It became very difficult for this postgraduate to accept modifications to his text because he assumed blended learning to be a real novelty without any connection with previous paradigms in its genealogy. While he thought to have completed his research independently of the tutor, he was sent back to square one. Not only had he to read further about teaching methodology history as ancestry of blended learning, administrative regulations

were also activated to account for the research chronogram for staff seminars presentation, the nomination of the supervision committee, etc.

In summary, all the three case studies show how students' misconception of tutoring misleads them and delays their work progress. Since a chapter is, so to speak, the unit of dissertation writing, it is necessary to initiate learners into some efficient strategies to perform this task. We take for granted that these students know all the same the steps of writing acknowledged in the process-centred approach, viz. prewriting, writing, rewriting, and proof-reading (Hayes and Flower 1983). Therefore, to help them achieve international academic standards, let us report on practices of dissertation writing process in another context for the sake of comparison.

Chapter writing in another university context

This section describes the process through which postgraduates go in order to write chapters of their dissertations. The foreign university context in contrast is the Linguistics Department, Lancaster University (UK) where Mulamba got his M.A. and PhD degrees. We consider such a practice as "procedural knowledge" (Carter 1990) that has already yielded good results, and has become academic literacy. In the social view of writing, Beaufort (1990), quoted by Swales, identifies four components of an academic genre, viz. "subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, writing process knowledge, and genre knowledge." (Swales 2004: 62). They constitute what she calls "discourse community knowledge," also referred to under other names such as "experience of the community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991), "disciplinary culture" (Hyland 2000), or "habitus" (Bourdieu 1990).

Taking for granted subject matter knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and genre knowledge, we focus our attention on writing process knowledge because it is lacking in our postgraduates. Following are the main steps for writing a chapter.

1. Planning the tutorial

A student who gets an appointment for a tutorial, for instance, prepares the meeting. In the same way a carpenter who wants to make a table first gathers the necessary materials (wood, paste, nails), the writer of a chapter should first gather the sources of inspiration, viz. the texts (notes taken during research doing) read in relation to the chapter. S/he proceeds to a deep analysis of the topic by reading again these sources in order to select not only the main ideas, but also the citations which will enrich the chapter and support the argumentation. The outstanding and most relevant sources can also serve as a working bibliography to ensure the supervisor that sufficient research has been done on the topic.

After this step related to the invention of ideas (Hayes and Flower 1983) comes the planning of the work. It consists in writing a short outline of the chapter. The latter can be the same which was already proposed in the dissertation, or a modified one. The candidate submits them to the mentor, and waits for feedback, particularly a greenlight to elaborate the text of the chapter.

2. The tutorial

It consists in an actual meeting between the supervisor and the candidate if necessary. At this stage, the mentor responds to the text by evaluating it. At the same time, s/he plays his/her role of a research guide by either recommending modifications to the plan, suggesting alternatives, or by advising further documentation in order to enrich the work. In short, the mentor gives directions to the disciple et protects him/her from digression and other errors which usually delay the work progress.

3. Writing the draft

Ensured by the mentor's approval of the project, the candidate can then elaborate the ideas by translating them into complete sentences according to the disciplinary rhetoric. It is the opportunity for the candidate to put into practice advanced writing skills acquired in composition and research methodology courses. The process-centered approach comprises four stages: *prewriting*, *writing*, *rewriting* and *proof-reading*. Prewriting includes all the activities preceding writing proper. That is, invention and collection of ideas as well as outlining. Writing consists in translating the plan into a full but draft text. The latter is still perfectible; hence the next stage: rewriting. It may take as many drafts or editions as the writer finds necessary. Finally comes proof-reading during which the writer checks carelessness errors before submitting the text to the supervisor for correction.

4. Correction

Once the text is ready, the candidate can submit it to the supervisor for correction and feedback. However, given that the supervisor had been associated with the preparation of the chapter, s/he will have some ease to follow the writer's argumentation. Such is not the case when the text befalls unexpectedly on him/her and that s/he discovers it for the first time.

As to the correction itself, composition studies identify many styles of giving feedback according to the learners' levels. Observations, remarks, suggestions and corrections can be transmitted on a separate loose sheet of paper, without the teacher's interference with the text. They may appear in the left margin, at the same level, and indicated by means of dots or arrows by the reader. A helpful teacher can circle or underline the errors in order to attract the author's attention. By contrast, a purist teacher would correct all the mistakes for the student; a practice sometimes seen as spoon-feeding or writing for the learner, instead of initiating the latter into the task. In fact,

responding to student writing is rarely interpreted in the same way. What one sees as mere correction can be seen by another as a dishonest help of the learner (Sommers 1988).

With regard to the correction of a dissertation, the supervisor cares about both the content and the form. The content includes the chosen research paradigm, the techniques and approaches, data analysis etc. The supervisor should make sure that the candidate sticks to the main argumentation and does not digress or indulge in incoherence. To enrich the research, the supervisor can either complete former instructions and suggestions, or modify them.

5. Implementing corrections

The candidate goes through feedback to improve the work. Admittedly, s/he benefits from the master's help first as pieces of advice in order to design and plan the chapter, and second in terms of feedback on the draft. Through multiple revisions, s/he will reach a final copy to submit for assessment.

6. Proof-reading

The author quickly checks carelessness mistakes before handing in the text. This task is usually individually done, but it is better performed by another reader, for instance, by a peer group member. Once the text is too familiar to the author, s/he can become unable to detect spelling mistakes, omissions, etc. Hence, working in isolation does not pay. Scholars confess their collaboration when they acknowledge any assistance from colleagues and the peer reviewers of journals.

In short, the steps above constitute the procedural knowledge of dissertation writing, and commonplaces of academic literacy. Students should be initiated into them regardless of their educational environment.

V. EMPOWERING PARTICIPANTS IN DISSERTATION WRITING

Before discussing research doing in another context, we shed light on some assumptions around global academic literacy. We argued that uniformity of academic standards and practices is difficult to achieve because differences in ideologies, cultures, finances etc. are inherent in any competitive community, whether academic or otherwise. The claimed standards of the Northern American universities, for instance, are at most a target that other educational systems can aim to approximate. By so doing, the latter would narrow down the differences, and facilitate mutual understanding in academic literacy.

Then we compared the local approach to dissertation writing to the one which is current at Lancaster University, an academic context where research deadlines and academic calendars are rather strict. There, dissertations are mostly completed within deadlines despite a high number of candidates by supervisor. We came to the conclusion that the local practices are inefficient because they lead to delays in research completion.

Hence, reflectively, we should inspire ourselves from a system which works better than our own, that is, we should change the orientation of our actions by "directing" dissertations first, before "correcting" them. We explained the process so that collaboration can take place at the right time. Above all, the supervisor should intervene twice: at the beginning for instructions, and at the end for correction of the work.

The consequences of students' ignorance of this procedural knowledge of dissertation writing are attested in a high number of drafts being either rejected, or submitted by directors to substantial modifications because of digression and incoherence. They are also attested in the high number of dissertations which violate the chronogrammes, and go beyond the deadlines. In some strict educational systems, beyond five years, unfinished dissertations are considered as drop-outs.

With regard to empowering postgraduates for dissertation writing, let us turn to some learning strategies. The candidate should become aware of the necessity to be guided and to confer first with the director before undertaking a task, even if s/he has to evolve independently after. Above all, s/he should realize the irrelevance and uselessness to pile up chapters instead of completing them one by one under supervision. In fact, if the chapters are dependent on one another, the failure of one triggers the fall of all. Such a strategy would prevent him/her from redoing the same work.

Besides, we suggest that students should be provided with strategies that can help them survive in the system. Most sources on research doing are presented as "How to do books" (Mouton 2001, Phillips and Pugh 2005, Beaud 2006, Hunsmann et Kapp 2013); an indication of the importance of procedural knowledge in academic writing. What is taken for granted as a commonplace in academic writing usually happens to be an innovation in our context. For instance, study skills units which are a common remedial service to help weak students in English speaking countries (such as Kenya and Tanzania) are unheard of.

Additionally, we encourage the policy of self-study as advocated by Muchiri (1993) in order to train these learners to develop survival strategies. These will help them evolve quite independently from the supervisors, or at least to depend less on them. Students can just ask for crucial directives before embarking on a task, and return to the tutor for feedback. Among such strategies we suggest the following steps:

1. Tutorials before and after

There should be an interactive and anticipative supervision. That would allow postgraduates to elaborate on their research with better guidance from the start, while avoiding excessive corrections beforehand. The first tutorial,

whether physically present or by distance, gives the student the opportunity to inform the supervisor about the project. In the case of a chapter writing, it allows the supervisor to circumscribe the study by eliminating digressions and other irrelevant points. The preparation of such a tutorial is an opportunity for the student to understand better the project. Meeting a tutor is always prepared with care and enthusiasm in order to show him/her that the work is in the right track.

The second tutorial is aimed to discuss feedback on the text. If the text has been well written, this second can even be limited to written feedback alone because the first tutorial should have cleared the way. It is similar to checking implementation of the given instructions. Electronic communication can also replace physical tutorial.

2. A pilot study

Pilot studies can prevent researchers from doing the same work more than once. It helps the student to get the necessary guidance before s/he misleads him-/herself by choosing a wrong paradigm. At the level of data analysis, for instance, students waste much time by trying to work on their own without any directives from the supervisor. Yet, it is wise to analyse a sample of data and to present the results to the supervisor for approval. It will then be easy to complete the analysis of the data by replicating the process.

3. Bridging the gap: narrowing the social distance

One of the cultural hindrances that affect students' work is the vertical teacher-student relationship. Very few postgraduates feel at ease in the presence of their masters. They can hardly express a different point of view even when that is necessary. This respect of seniors blocks all criticism and can be detrimental to the advancement of the work itself. Step by step and on both sides, people must realize that a postgraduate is a colleague-to-be with whom to share views.

Tutorials imply physical meeting between the teacher and the student. They cannot be conducted fruitfully if the social gap is too big, and if the relationships are purely professional. Among the tutor's responsibilities, Phillips and Pugh (2005) list the necessity for him/her to get an interest in the social life of the student. Personal problems usually prevent students from conducting their research despite all the support made available for them.

4. Collaborative writing: peer editing, peer work and research groups

One of the commonest characteristics of student research is the tendency to keep one's work secret. Before imposition of staff seminars, research was conducted as a private business. It was not surprising that during the viva an examiner could criticize the work and brandish a relevant document which was available in his/her private library. Nowadays, information circulates thanks to staff seminars, documentation can be willingly shared on websites, and criticism be made appropriately before completion of the dissertation.

Given the attrition of the teaching staff and the work overload, postgraduates can learn from, and support one another by means of peer work and peer editing in research groups. Artificial Intelligence has made it easy for interest groups to create websites for sharing documentation and information on research. Phillips and Pugh (2005) have reported how research networks have boosted students' morale by sharing experience of the dissertation culture.

5. Self-access study and self-development

Whenever the teacher-student ratio is not adequate, and whenever classes are overpopulated, learners have to invent strategies in order to progress despite insufficient input from the teachers. In her book *Communication Skills: A Self-study Course for Universities and Colleges*, Muchiri (1993) addresses class overpopulation in Kenyan universities. She presents some learning strategies that candidates can turn to because of difficulties in getting access to tutorials and other remedial services.

Mutatis mutandis, Congolese postgraduates can exploit fruitfully the above strategies. Particularly, they can turn to peer work, e-learning, consultation of dissertations online to empower themselves and socialize into the rhetoric of their disciplines. Because of course overloads and large numbers of supervisees, tutors cannot have enough time to devote to well-focussed individual tutorials. Postgraduates must learn how to combine tutorials with independent work. Admittedly, supervision is not spoon-feeding.

Finally, students' initiation into the procedural knowledge of dissertation chapter writing (Mulamba 2023) remains very important. The postgraduates in this study did not succeed just because they were not explicitly taught how to proceed. Hence, without a model to follow, they invented their own conventions as implied in Bartholomae's (1985) "Inventing the university" and Blakeslee's (1992) "Inventing scientific discourse." It is unrealistic to expect learners to perform better in a genre (Swales 1990, 2004) for which they do not master the conventions and the rhetoric.

VI. CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, it is evident that there is necessity to change the habits of all the participants in dissertation writing, that is, to invert the orientation of the actions. Teachers should take their responsibility to learn about the projected tasks beforehand. On their side, students should ask for instructions before writing a chapter. Glocalization is not always necessary. In the present case, local practices hinder students' performance, and should be avoided. Foreign ones are worth borrowing because of their efficiency.

Furthermore, despite all the efforts to reach convergence of practices in the name of global academic literacy, there will still be some differences due to ideologies, cultures and (economical, educational and structural) environments. Non-native English learners (ESL and EFL) and English natives are not equally linguistically equipped with respect to dissertation writing. Awareness and understanding of these differences can facilitate tolerance of, and accommodation to other educational practices whenever necessary.

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