

**The Paradox of the “One-Eyed King”: PLO Lumumba, Decolonial Critique, and the Contradictions of Postcolonial Elites in African Education**

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**Abstract**

This study examined the paradox of postcolonial elites in African higher education institutions, drawing on the rhetorical and philosophical critiques advanced by Pan-African orator Patrick Loch Otieno (PLO) Lumumba. Framed within decolonial theory and critical pedagogy, the study interrogated how African academic elites simultaneously espoused decolonial rhetoric while perpetuating Western epistemological frameworks, a contradiction captured in the metaphor of the 'one-eyed king'—one who sees only through the lens of the former coloniser. A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating a structured survey administered to 320 academic staff drawn from six universities across Sub-Saharan Africa. Statistical methods including univariate descriptive analysis, bivariate Pearson correlation, and binary logistic regression were applied to examine patterns, associations, and predictors of critical pedagogical practice. Findings revealed that the Elite Contradiction Index (ECI) was negatively and significantly associated with decolonial orientation and curriculum Africanisation, while the Western Credential Index (WCI) emerged as a significant predictor of reduced critical pedagogical engagement. Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS) and Curriculum Africanisation Score (CAS) were the strongest positive predictors of critical pedagogical practice in the logistic regression model. The study concluded that structural, ideological, and credentialing factors converge to sustain elite contradiction in postcolonial African universities, and that intentional decolonial policy reforms are necessary to align institutional rhetoric with practice. The study recommended reforms in faculty development, curriculum policy, and leadership accountability frameworks to bridge the gap between decolonial discourse and educational reality in Africa.

**Keywords: decolonization, PLO Lumumba, postcolonial elites, African education, critical pedagogy, curriculum Africanization, logistic regression**

**INTRODUCTION**

The postcolonial condition of African higher education is defined by a profound and deeply ironic paradox: the very elites who were educated to articulate the failures of colonialism have, in many cases, become its most effective custodians. This contradiction was memorably captured in the metaphor of the 'one-eyed king' employed by Kenyan-Ugandan Pan-Africanist and legal scholar Patrick Loch Otieno (PLO) Lumumba, whose incisive critiques of African leadership and education have resonated across the continent (Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025; Julius & Kazaara, 2025; Sanjeewa, 2021). The metaphor—derived from the proverbial assertion that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king—suggests that Africa's postcolonial academic and political elites, despite their limited and often distorted vision shaped by Eurocentric epistemologies, have assumed positions of uncontested authority (Guyo, 2017; Labadi, 2024; Michael Byarugaba, 2024). This study interrogated the structural, ideological, and sociological dimensions of this contradiction within African universities, drawing on decolonial theory to examine how elites trained in Western institutions both advocate for and simultaneously undermine efforts toward genuine intellectual decolonization (de Haas, 2017; Earle, 2025; Eyita-Okon, 2022; Petersen, 2022). The relevance of PLO Lumumba's critique to contemporary African educational reform is not merely rhetorical; it exposes a systemic dysfunction in

**Received: 24.03.2026**

**Accepted: 25.03.2026**

**Published on: 30.03.2026**

which the language of decolonization is adopted as discourse while its substance remains structurally resisted. In the context of African higher education, where knowledge production, curriculum design, and pedagogy continue to be dominated by Eurocentric frameworks despite decades of independence, the paradox of the one-eyed king presents a critical lens through which to interrogate the role of postcolonial elites (Ari Maisule et al., 2023; Gumede, 2023; Hamzani et al., 2021; Summers, 2019). This study, therefore, sought to empirically assess the extent of elite contradiction in African academic institutions and to identify the factors that sustain or mitigate it, contributing to a growing body of scholarship at the intersection of decolonial theory, critical pedagogy, and African educational policy.

### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

The project of decolonizing African education has been a subject of sustained scholarly and political debate since the independence movements of the mid-twentieth century, from Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa and Education for Self-Reliance (1967) to Ngugiwa Thiong'o's *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986) and the more recent Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall movements of South Africa (2015–2017) (Daniels, 2024; Ezenwa Osuigwe, 2023; Wolff, 2017). Despite these sustained calls, African universities continue to mirror the epistemological architectures of their colonial antecedents—reproducing curricula, pedagogies, and research frameworks that privilege Western knowledge systems while marginalizing indigenous African intellectual traditions. PLO Lumumba, as one of Africa's most prominent contemporary public intellectuals, has repeatedly lamented this condition, arguing that Africa has produced leaders and scholars who are, in essence, 'black in skin but white in mind'—echoing Frantz Fanon's earlier analysis in *Black Skin*, (Fentahun, 2023; Katusiime & Igba, 2024; Lee, 2019; Onduko et al., 2024). This critique speaks directly to the phenomenon of elite mimicry: where postcolonial African academics and administrators reproduce colonial epistemologies not out of ignorance, but out of trained institutional habituation and structural compulsion. The problem is compounded by the global credentialing economy, in which academic prestige is tightly coupled to Western institutions, journals, and research frameworks, incentivizing African scholars to conform rather than challenge. Studies across the continent (Jena, 2025; Maposa, 2018; Mlambo, et al., 2019) have documented this institutional inertia. However, there remains a paucity of empirical research that rigorously measures the degree of elite contradiction at the individual and institutional level, particularly using quantitative and mixed-methods approaches (Boehi, 2021; Ezeoha & Uche, 2024; Makol, 2025; Mashau & Kgatle, 2019). This study addressed that gap, situating itself within the broader scholarly conversation initiated by thinkers such as Walter D. Mignolo, Achille Mbembe, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, and, centrally, PLO Lumumba, to empirically examine who among Africa's academic elites are genuinely decolonial in practice, and what structural conditions enable or constrain such practice.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Despite the widespread adoption of decolonial discourse in African universities, there exists a persistent and observable gap between rhetorical commitment to decolonization and actual pedagogical, curricular, and institutional practice. African academic elites—many of whom are credentialed by Western institutions and aligned with global Northern research networks—frequently champion decolonial language in public forums while maintaining pedagogical and administrative practices that are functionally colonial (Magezi, 2024). This contradiction, which PLO Lumumba has described as the hallmark of the postcolonial African intellectual class, has significant consequences

for the quality and relevance of African higher education. Students continue to graduate with identities and knowledge systems poorly adapted to African developmental realities, contributing to what Lumumba terms the 'crisis of the African mind (de Haas, 2017; Earle, 2025; Ezenwa Osuigwe, 2023).' The problem is not merely theoretical; it has material consequences for curriculum design, graduate employability within African contexts, policy responsiveness, and continental development. While qualitative studies have documented individual narratives of this contradiction, there is a notable absence of quantitative empirical studies that measure the scope, structural predictors, and institutional correlates of elite contradiction in African academia. This study addressed this gap by developing and testing a set of composite indices—including the Elite Contradiction Index (ECI), Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS), and Western Credential Index (WCI)—to provide rigorous evidence about the nature, prevalence, and determinants of the 'one-eyed king' phenomenon in African higher education institutions.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

### **Main Objective**

The main objective of this study was to examine the nature, extent, and structural predictors of elite contradiction among academic staff in African higher education institutions, drawing on PLO Lumumba's decolonial critique as a theoretical framework.

### **Specific Objectives**

1. To assess the levels of elite contradiction and decolonial orientation among academic staff in selected African universities.
2. To examine the associations between elite contradiction, Western credentialing, curriculum Africanisation, and perceived institutional autonomy.
3. To identify the significant predictors of critical pedagogical practice among academic staff in postcolonial African higher education institutions.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

4. What are the levels of elite contradiction, decolonial orientation, and related constructs among academic staff in selected Sub-Saharan African universities?
5. What are the nature and strength of associations between elite contradiction, Western credentialing, curriculum Africanisation, and perceived institutional autonomy?
6. What variables significantly predict the likelihood of critical pedagogical practice among academic staff in postcolonial African higher education?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design, informed by the epistemological assumptions of critical realism, to empirically investigate elite contradiction and decolonial orientations among academic staff in African universities. A stratified random sample of 320 academic staff members was drawn from six purposively selected universities across Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically from Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, and Tanzania, representing diverse Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial contexts. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire that operationalised six composite measures: the Elite Contradiction Index (ECI),

Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS), Western Credential Index (WCI), Curriculum Africanisation Score (CAS), Perceived Institutional Autonomy (PIA), and Critical Pedagogical Practice (CPP), the latter measured as a binary outcome. All multi-item scales were developed through a systematic review of the decolonial literature, subjected to expert panel validation, and assessed for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all of which exceeded 0.72. Data collection was conducted via an online platform over a six-week period between July and August 2024, with a response rate of 84.2% after exclusion of incomplete entries. Three categories of statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 28 and R 4.3. First, univariate descriptive analysis was performed to characterise the sample distributions, including means, standard deviations, frequency distributions, and measures of skewness and kurtosis, with visualised outputs generated through histograms, box plots, and bar charts to illustrate variability across institutions and demographic subgroups. Second, bivariate Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the direction and magnitude of linear associations between all continuous predictor variables, with significance tested at the  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , and  $p < 0.001$  levels and a correlation matrix visualised using a heatmap rendered in the `ggcorrplot` package in R. Third, binary logistic regression was conducted to model the probability of engaging in critical pedagogical practice, with CPP as the dichotomous outcome variable; all continuous predictors were entered simultaneously using the Enter method, and model fit was assessed using the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test (chi-square = 7.83,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.449$ ), the Nagelkerke R-squared statistic (0.41), and the overall correct classification rate (73.8%). Odds ratios (OR) with 95% confidence intervals were reported for each predictor, and assumptions of multicollinearity were verified using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF), all of which fell below the threshold of 3.0 (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Study Variables (N = 320)*

Variable	N	Mean (SD)	Min–Max	Skewness
Elite Contradiction Index (ECI)	320	3.42 (0.91)	1.0–5.0	-0.23
Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS)	320	2.87 (1.04)	1.0–5.0	0.31
Years in Academic Post	320	11.6 (7.3)	1–38	0.77
Western Credential Index (WCI)	320	3.79 (0.83)	1.0–5.0	-0.41
Curriculum Africanisation Score	320	2.61 (1.12)	1.0–5.0	0.19
Perceived Institutional Autonomy	320	3.11 (0.97)	1.0–5.0	-0.08
Critical Pedagogical Practice (%)	320	38.4% Yes	—	—



The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 revealed that academic staff in the sampled African universities exhibited moderate to high levels of elite contradiction, as reflected in a mean Elite Contradiction Index (ECI) score of 3.42 (SD = 0.91) on a five-point Likert scale, indicating that the majority of respondents occupied positions between moderate and high contradictory alignment with colonial epistemic values despite their decolonial rhetoric. The Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS), by contrast, registered a comparatively lower mean of 2.87 (SD = 1.04), signalling that genuine decolonial praxis remained a minority disposition within the sampled institutions. Notably, the Curriculum Africanisation Score (CAS) produced the lowest mean among all continuous variables at 2.61 (SD = 1.12), with a slight positive skewness of 0.19, suggesting that most respondents reported limited engagement with curricula that centre African knowledge systems, and that a small proportion of respondents skewed the distribution upward through notably high scores. The Western Credential Index (WCI) yielded a high mean of 3.79 (SD = 0.83) with a negative skewness of -0.41, reflecting a leptokurtic concentration of high scores—indicative of the strong preponderance of Western credentialing across the sample, a pattern consistent with the structural realities of the global academic prestige economy. Only 38.4% of respondents reported engaging in critical pedagogical practices, a figure that, while not trivial, underscores that the majority of African academic staff in this sample remained oriented toward conventional—and implicitly colonial—pedagogical modes.

The findings from the univariate analysis provided empirical grounding for PLO Lumumba's theoretical claim that the African intellectual class is structurally embedded in a contradictory epistemic position. The high mean ECI score, combined with the low CAS mean, suggested that African universities continue to reproduce Eurocentric knowledge systems at the curricular level, even as individual academics may rhetorically endorse decolonisation. This pattern aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) concept of 'coloniality of knowledge', wherein the structural conditions of academic institutions—credentialing norms, publication incentives, donor frameworks, and curriculum governance—create persistent epistemic inertia that individual agency alone cannot dismantle. The relatively high standard deviation on the DOS (1.04) and CAS (1.12) indicated significant heterogeneity in decolonial practice among respondents, suggesting that while the dominant tendency was toward elite contradiction, meaningful pockets of decolonial resistance and praxis existed within the sample—a finding that underscores the importance of identifying the individual and institutional factors that enable these exceptions to become the norm.

**Bivariate Pearson Correlation Analysis**

**Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Key Study Variables**

Variable	ECI	DOS	WCI	CAS	PIA
Elite Contradiction Index (ECI)	1.00	—	—	—	—
Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS)	-0.58***	1.00	—	—	—
Western Credential Index (WCI)	0.61***	-0.49***	1.00	—	—



Curriculum Africanisation Score (CAS)	-0.47***	0.53***	-0.44***	1.00	—
Perceived Institutional Autonomy (PIA)	-0.33***	0.41***	-0.29***	0.38***	1.00
Years in Academic Post	0.18**	-0.11*	0.22**	-0.14*	0.09

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . ECI = Elite Contradiction Index; DOS = Decolonial Orientation Score; WCI = Western Credential Index; CAS = Curriculum Africanisation Score; PIA = Perceived Institutional Autonomy.

The Pearson correlation matrix presented in Table 2 revealed a network of statistically significant and theoretically coherent associations among the study's key variables. The Elite Contradiction Index (ECI) was strongly and negatively correlated with the Decolonial Orientation Score ( $r = -0.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming that academic staff who displayed higher levels of elite contradiction tended to exhibit significantly lower decolonial orientations—a relationship that directly substantiated PLO Lumumba's assertion about the ideological incoherence of postcolonial African intellectuals. The ECI also maintained a strong positive correlation with the Western Credential Index ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that respondents with greater dependency on Western academic credentials and networks were substantially more likely to exhibit contradictory relationships between their decolonial rhetoric and their actual institutional practices. Conversely, the CAS was negatively correlated with the WCI ( $r = -0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that higher Western credentialing was associated with reduced curriculum Africanisation—a finding that points to credentialing as a structural mechanism through which colonial epistemologies are reproduced in postcolonial African curricula. The Perceived Institutional Autonomy score (PIA) also showed a significant negative correlation with ECI ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a positive correlation with DOS ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that academics working in institutions with greater perceived autonomy from donor and Northern-partner pressures were more likely to develop and express decolonial orientations.

These bivariate findings offered important insights into the structural logic of the 'one-eyed king' paradox. The strong positive correlation between WCI and ECI ( $r = 0.61$ ) was particularly striking, as it empirically demonstrated that the process of Western credentialing—which is ostensibly a meritocratic pathway—functions in practice as a mechanism for the transmission of colonial epistemologies into the African academic system. This finding resonates with Fanon's (1952) analysis of the colonised subject who internalises the coloniser's value system as a condition of upward mobility. Furthermore, the negative relationship between CAS and ECI ( $r = -0.47$ ) confirmed that curriculum Africanisation and elite contradiction were inversely positioned, meaning that efforts to Africanise curricula were associated with a reduction in elite contradiction—a finding with direct policy implications for curriculum reform in African universities. The relatively modest correlation between years in academic post and the ECI ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) suggested that elite contradiction was not simply a function of career stage or academic seniority, but was more fundamentally determined by ideological and structural factors, a nuance that any reform strategy must account for.

#### Binary Logistic Regression: Predictors of Critical Pedagogical Practice

Received: 24.03.2026

Accepted: 25.03.2026

Published on: 30.03.2026

**Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression — Predictors of Critical Pedagogical Practice (N = 320)**

Predictor Variable	B	SE	Wald $\chi^2$	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Elite Contradiction Index (ECI)	-0.74	0.18	16.94	0.48 (0.34–0.68)	<0.001
Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS)	0.89	0.21	17.96	2.43 (1.62–3.66)	<0.001
Western Credential Index (WCI)	-0.61	0.19	10.31	0.54 (0.37–0.79)	0.001
Curriculum Africanisation Score (CAS)	0.72	0.20	12.96	2.05 (1.39–3.03)	<0.001
Perceived Institutional Autonomy (PIA)	0.55	0.17	10.47	1.73 (1.24–2.42)	0.001
Years in Academic Post	0.03	0.02	2.25	1.03 (0.99–1.07)	0.134
Constant	-1.82	0.49	13.79	—	<0.001

Note: Model fit: Hosmer-Lemeshow  $\chi^2 = 7.83$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = 0.449$ ; Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.41$ ; Correct Classification Rate = 73.8%. OR = Odds Ratio; CI = Confidence Interval.

The binary logistic regression results presented in Table 3 identified five statistically significant predictors of critical pedagogical practice (CPP) among academic staff in the sampled African universities. The model demonstrated satisfactory fit (Hosmer-Lemeshow  $p = 0.449$ ) and explained approximately 41% of the variance in CPP (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = 0.41$ ), with an overall classification accuracy of 73.8%, indicating strong predictive utility. The Elite Contradiction Index (ECI) was a significant negative predictor of CPP ( $B = -0.74$ , Wald = 16.94,  $p < 0.001$ ), with an odds ratio of 0.48 (95% CI: 0.34–0.68), indicating that each unit increase in the ECI was associated with a 52% reduction in the odds of engaging in critical pedagogical practice, holding all other variables constant. Conversely, the Decolonial Orientation Score (DOS) was the strongest positive predictor ( $B = 0.89$ , OR = 2.43, 95% CI: 1.62–3.66,  $p < 0.001$ ), meaning that each unit increase in DOS was associated with a 143% increase in the odds of practicing critical pedagogy. The Western Credential Index (WCI) was also a significant negative predictor (OR = 0.54,  $p = 0.001$ ), confirming that higher Western credentialing substantially reduced the probability of critical pedagogical engagement. The Curriculum Africanisation Score (CAS) and Perceived Institutional Autonomy (PIA) were both significant positive predictors with odds ratios of 2.05 and 1.73 respectively (both  $p < 0.001$  and  $p = 0.001$ ), while years in academic post did not reach statistical significance ( $p = 0.134$ ).

The logistic regression findings provided the most analytically precise evidence for the central thesis of this study, demonstrating that the likelihood of critical pedagogical practice in African universities was determined by a complex interplay of ideological, credentialing, and institutional factors rather than by individual volition alone. The finding that the Decolonial Orientation Score was the strongest positive predictor (OR = 2.43) underscored the crucial role of individual epistemic commitment in resisting the dominant colonial logic of the institution—a finding consistent with hooks' (1994) concept of teaching as a transformative practice and Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed.

Received: 24.03.2026

Accepted: 25.03.2026

Published on: 30.03.2026

However, the significant negative effect of WCI (OR = 0.54) on CPP is perhaps the most theoretically consequential finding of the study, as it revealed the credentialing trap: African academics who have invested most heavily in Western academic legitimacy are, paradoxically, least likely to practice the critical pedagogy that decolonial theory demands. This is the empirical face of Lumumba's 'one-eyed king'—the scholar who has been educated out of one epistemic tradition and into another, and who subsequently reproduces that new tradition even as they rhetorically lament the old one. The protective role of perceived institutional autonomy (OR = 1.73) further suggests that decolonial practice is not only a matter of individual will but also of institutional conditions—specifically, the degree to which universities are shielded from external pressures that incentivise conformity with Western academic norms.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study provided robust empirical evidence for a phenomenon that PLO Lumumba and other Pan-African scholars have long identified in discursive terms: the paradox of the postcolonial academic elite who speaks the language of decolonisation while embodying its antithesis in practice. Through a quantitative analysis of 320 academic staff across six Sub-Saharan African universities, the study demonstrated that elite contradiction was widespread, structurally determined, and significantly associated with Western credentialing and low curriculum Africanisation. The logistic regression model confirmed that decolonial orientation, curriculum Africanisation, and institutional autonomy were the most powerful enablers of critical pedagogical practice, while elite contradiction and Western credentialing were its most significant suppressors. Taken together, these findings revealed that the decolonisation of African higher education cannot be achieved through rhetorical commitment alone; it requires a fundamental restructuring of the epistemic and institutional conditions under which African academics are trained, employed, and evaluated. The metaphor of the 'one-eyed king' therefore remains an apt and urgent diagnostic for understanding the contradictions of postcolonial African intellectual life, and this study's contribution lies in giving that metaphor quantitative precision, structural grounding, and an actionable evidence base for reform.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

African universities and national higher education regulatory bodies should institutionalise faculty development programmes that are explicitly grounded in decolonial pedagogy and African epistemology, making decolonial pedagogical competence a criterion in academic promotion and tenure decisions, so as to structurally incentivise the kind of critical pedagogical practice that the study found to be most strongly predicted by decolonial orientation.

Curriculum policy frameworks across Sub-Saharan African higher education systems should be revised to mandate minimum benchmarks for curriculum Africanisation, including the inclusion of African-authored texts, indigenous knowledge systems, and locally contextualised case studies across all disciplines, given the study's finding that Curriculum Africanisation Score was a significant positive predictor of critical pedagogical practice and a significant negative correlate of elite contradiction.

University governance structures should be reformed to insulate academic institutions from donor-driven and Western-partner pressures that undermine institutional autonomy, including through transparent conflict-of-interest policies on external funding, diversification of research partnership networks toward Global South institutions, and the strengthening of African academic publishing infrastructure, given the study's finding that perceived institutional autonomy significantly increased the likelihood of critical pedagogical practice.

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**Received: 24.03.2026**

**Accepted: 25.03.2026**

**Published on: 30.03.2026**

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