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Reforms of Technical Vocational Education and Training system in Benin: An exploration of social anthropological field

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Abstract

This paper deals with the interests of different actors involved in technical vocational education and training in Benin (a West African country) and the strategies used to reach them. In 2005, the Republic of Benin has introduced reforms to improve the technical vocational education and training system. These reforms have created two technical vocational education and training programs: the dual apprenticeship by the Certificate of Professional Qualification (CQP) and the upgrading informal apprenticeship by the Certificate of Occupational Qualification (CQM). The introduction of these programs involves several actors: master craftsmen and their apprentices, craftsmen associations, government, parents of the apprentices, donors, and so on. In the implementation of these programs, the stakeholders act to obtain or to save interests. To collect information, qualitative method through three techniques has been used: direct and participatory observations; individual unstructured and semi structured interviews to talk with officials, training providers and donors; and narrative technique with craftsmen. In total, 46 actors were interviewed, using purposive and snowball samplings. Actor-oriented perspective, which asserts that actors are able to act to steer their interests even in difficult circumstances, is used to analyze data.

The main findings show that the reforms introduced in Benin's TVET system have led to important changes in the traditional apprenticeship system. Even though the reforms have contributed to the design curricula and improve the pedagogical approach for skills achievement, the evidence from Beninese apprenticeships shows the persistence of some traditional practices such as the graduation ceremony. The graduation ceremony is an event organized in informal apprenticeship by master craftsmen and professional associations to release apprentices after their training completion. Celebration is an important for master craftsmen and the local community. The graduation celebration gives a social legitimacy by the whole community participation (parents, relatives, advanced masters, friends). In this circumstance, master craftsmen with their associations steer their interests by gifts, money and goods, offered to them as a social recognition. However, this practice constitutes limits to other apprentices with limited financial resources. Hence, the reforms have prohibited the celebration and allowed learners to receive directly their certificates. Through these reforms, apprentices receive formal certificates (CQP and CQM certificates) which are considered as higher than those received by their masters in the informal apprenticeship. Thus, master craftsmen train their future competitors. The reform of CQP program involved a good business for vocational training centers that developed

strategies to receive training contracts from FODEFCA. So far, CQP concerns only 13 craft occupations and CQM 46 out of 311 existing occupations. Hence, Beninese government must increase TVET policy in order to extend the reforms to other craft occupations. In addition, the government must allocate more financial and technical resources for the implementation of these programs. Furthermore, Benin government must undertake actions to adapt TVET innovations to the local context. The research illustrate that professional associations were less involved in the decision-making through these reforms. Hence, the improvement of the reforms should involve more professional associations and the community for inclusive actions and collective decisions.

Keywords: Interests, Legality and Legitimacy, Strategic actors and organizations, Technical Vocational Education and Training, Benin.

Introduction

Apprenticeship is the most common form of the informal learning in sub-Saharan Africa. This traditional training has expanded with the growth of the informal sector (Teal, 2016). Because, most the stakeholders are private actors and work as self-employed. Globally, the informal apprenticeship has been diversely considered as the priority by the governments in West Africa. Anokye (2014) showed that Ghanaian educational reforms had involved apprenticeship from the period of post-independence. Adekola (2013) argues that the informal apprenticeship is a traditional heritage for the Yorubas in South West of Nigeria (e.g. hunters, drummers', diviners' compounds). However, Nigeria apprenticeship had been developed by the penetration of Europeans into Africa.

In republic of Benin, reforms of the apprenticeship had first involved donors' initiatives. In 1993, Hanns Seidel Foundation (German Development Corporation) introduced the dual apprenticeship in the same period with Togo (Walther, 2007). In 1997, craftsmen associations had experimented a final evaluation of apprentices with donor's supports. This examination is named "Final evaluation exam of the informal apprenticeship"¹ (EFAT). The first experience of this evaluation test was held by the local craftsmen organizations² of the district of Malanville (North of Benin) in 1997. In 2002 and 2008, the districts of Djougou and Kandi (both located in North of Benin) were respectively involved by the financial support of Swiss Development Corporation³ (Davodoun, 2011a). The *Bureau d'Appui aux Artisans* (BAA) played an important role by sharing experiences with local craftsmen organizations⁴. Earlier in 2001, Benin Parliament has designed and voted the law No. 98-037/2001 on the crafts code. By this law, Benin State must control and regulate the crafts activities in workplaces. In 2003, donors as Swisscontact with financial support of Danish Development Corporation, Swiss Development Corporation and so on, have developed craft occupations through DACUM⁵ method. The pilot step of the implementation of the dual apprenticeship was done (Walther, 2007). Benin government took a decree to give a formal certification to the informal apprenticeship through the decree No. 117/2005. Two training programs were legally introduced through the decree No. 118/2005 that involved both in Benin TVET system (MESTFP, 2013). The first program is the upgrading informal apprenticeship⁶ for "certificate of skill qualification"⁷ and the second program is the dual apprenticeship for the "certificate of professional qualification"⁸.

In West African countries, the reforms of VET system have involved many challenges. Grossmann and Naanda (2006) had noticed the importance of the reform of management sector (especially the political will and the objectives), and the linkage between stakeholders.

Through the reforms introduced in Benin VET system, it is very important to understand drivers and barriers behind training program reforms? How is each training program designed? How is it performed? Who are the stakeholders? How do stakeholders receive the reforms? Are there any contradictions

¹ *Examen de Fin d'Apprentissage Traditionnel* (EFAT)

² *Collectif des artisans*

³ *Département de Développement et de la Coopération Suisse*

⁴ *Goupements et associations des artisans and collectifs des artisans.*

⁵ *Develop A Curriculum*

⁶ *Apprentissage traditionnel rénové*

⁷ *Certificat de Qualification aux Métiers (CQM)*

⁸ *Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP)*

about the reforms? What are the interests of each category of the training stakeholders? And how does each stakeholder act to obtain and save his/her interests? To answer to these questions, we structure the paper as follows: the first section describes the theoretical framework and methodological approach. In the second section, we describe our findings from the different methodological approaches. In section 3 we discuss these findings and in section four we conclude.

1. Literature review

This section has investigated in some literatures on the informal or traditional apprenticeship in Africa. Literature on West African apprenticeships first describes traditional or informal apprenticeship and its strengths and weaknesses. Secondly, desk research shows the role of the informal apprenticeship for alternative training to children out-of-school and those who dropout from school. Third, some authors illustrate the contribution of the informal apprenticeship to the informal economy.

Walther (2008) distinguishes Sahelian apprenticeship (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) from coastal apprenticeship (Benin, Togo and Senegal). The main practices that make coastal apprenticeship different are the commercial relationship between master craftsmen, apprentices and their families and the release ceremony (Walther, 2008). According to him, the common training pattern of both apprenticeship systems is based on the different roles of the master craftsmen. Most of the master craftsmen play role of the family-type to apprentices while training young people in the crafts occupations. Sonnenberg (2012) points out the strength of this traditional apprenticeship by focusing on its practical orientation, its self-regulation and self-financing. Moreover, he showed that the learning methods of the traditional apprenticeship in sub-Saharan countries can be considered as a big opportunity to improve apprentices work conditions and enhance the legitimacy of the training by the formal certification (Sonnenberg, 2012). Hence, the first reform involves dual/reformed apprenticeship which consists of improving skills and contributing to social inclusion. Secondly the reform improves the structure of apprenticeship, standardizes certification and upgrades master craftsman training. In the same regard, the study of ILO (2012) retraces the social legitimacy of the regulation of the traditional apprenticeship in Africa. However, results of this study reveal that the weaknesses of this informal apprenticeship are embedded in the traditional custom. These weaknesses do not favor gender equality and decent work. Teal (2016) provided some characteristics of the traditional apprenticeship in this African region by showing that the apprenticeship systems have expanded with the growth of the informal sector and its contribution to the informal economy. Adams et al., (2013) analyses the skills development in small and household enterprises in sub-Saharan Africa. The evidence illustrates that employment and earning in informal sector can be attractive and can match and exceed those of the formal sector. The surveys conducted in Rwanda and Ghana showed the positive effects of the traditional apprenticeship in informal sector. The study underlines five constraints to the skills development. First constraint is the cost structure that is different from larger enterprises; secondly, there is the lack of capital and inability of small firms to generate self-investment; third, it is difficult to find training providers offering multiskilling for the informal sector; and fourth, the investment in skills is impeded by financial and technical constraints. Hence, Adams et al., (2013) suggest to develop strategies on these factors for improving skills in the informal sector.

Even though these studies have informed much regarding the traditional or informal apprenticeship and the resource guides for improving the system, most did not focus on the effects the reforms have involved. the section 2 of the paper present the theoretical framework and methodology designed for the research.

2. Theoretical framework and methods

2.1. Theoretical framework

Apprenticeship reforms aim to improve the quality of the skills and the learning conditions. That implies such innovative practices are introduced in the traditional apprenticeship. In the context of development intervention, Long (2001) used "actor-oriented approach" to analyze actors attitude through two concepts: "social actor" and "Agency". First, "social actors" expresses local actors who participate to the intervention. They are involved as stakeholders who are able to steer their interests in difficult circumstances. The concept of "agency" describes the ability of social actor to act in order to influence his/her fellowship when they face a big stake.

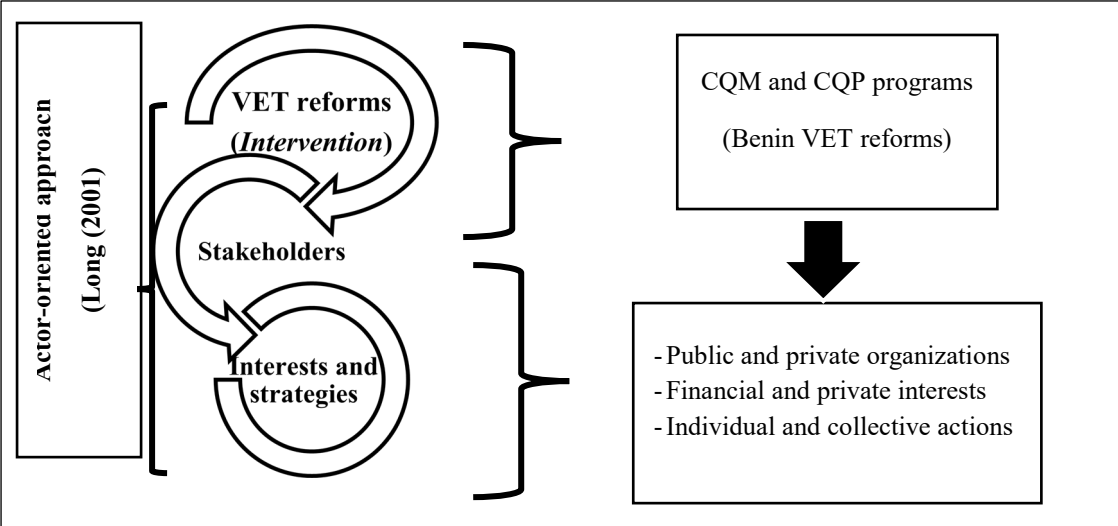


Figure 1: Benin VET system analysis framework

Through the fig. 1, actor-oriented approach is used in this study first, to learn about Benin VET reforms, secondly to identify TVET stakeholders and analyze the strategies used to steer their interests (see section 3). In addition, we design the fig. 2, based on the actor-oriented analytical framework, to summarize the main steps of each reform and the stakeholders involved.

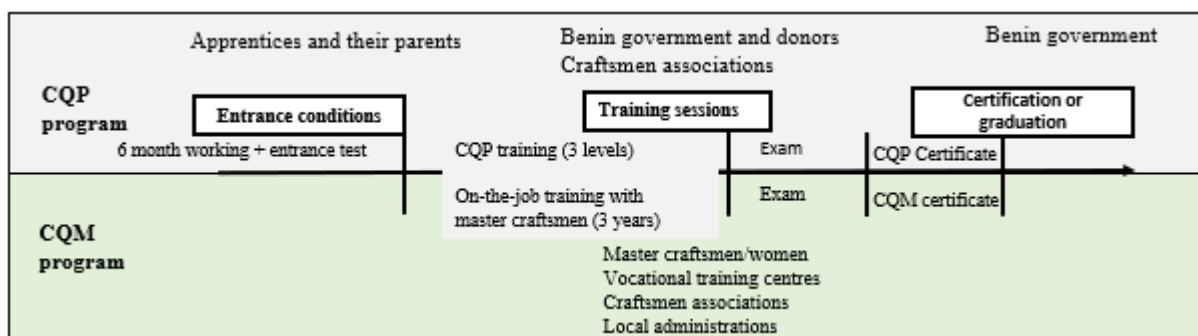


Figure 2: CQP and CQM process and findings related to the actor-oriented analytical framework

The fig. 2 shows three main phases through the implementation of both training programs: entrance conditions; training sessions and certification or graduation phase. Each of the three phases is regulated and involved specific actors. In the section 3, we provide detailed information about the role of the stakeholders.

2.2. Methodology of the research

This research adopted descriptive qualitative method. First, data we used for this paper were reviewed from the literature on Benin TVET reforms. We collected data on the introduction process of the reforms, the framework documents and their implementation. Secondly, we collected empirical data on the attitude, practices and perception of TVET stakeholders regarding the reforms. Through this field research we learnt about the interests of the stakeholders and the strategies used to reach them.

To conduct the study, three techniques were applied: literature analysis, direct and participation observation and individual semi structured interviews. Literature analysis was applied to provide an overview of the training programs introduced in TVET system. Through our participation to conferences and visits in master craftsmen workshops we used direct and participation observation to collect data on the practices and attitude of the craftsmen/women in their workplaces. The individual semi structured interview was used to learn about stakeholders' perception. Officials from public organizations, master craftsmen/women, members of professional associations were interviewed.

Tree sampling techniques (purposive, snowball and accidental sampling) were used. Purposive sampling was used to choose actors of public organizations, donors, members of local association, local craftsmen organization and National Confederation of craftsmen⁹. Snowball sampling was applied to find some resource persons and researchers. Accidental sampling was used to select craftsmen in the apprenticeship system. In total, 46 TVET stakeholders were interviewed.

Tableau 1: Distribution of participants in the research

⁹ Groupements et associations des artisans, collectifs des artisans, Confédération Nationale des Artisans du Bénin (CNAB) et Union des Chambres Interdépartementales des Métiers du Bénin (UCIMB).

Geographic areas of the research	Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Parakou
Number of participants	19	6	21
Total	46		

We selected Cotonou because many public and private organizations are located in this district. For Abomey-Calavi and Parakou, we chose both districts in order to know whether empirical data vary from a region to another. This research carried out three geographic areas: Parakou situated in the North of Benin and Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi in South of Benin.

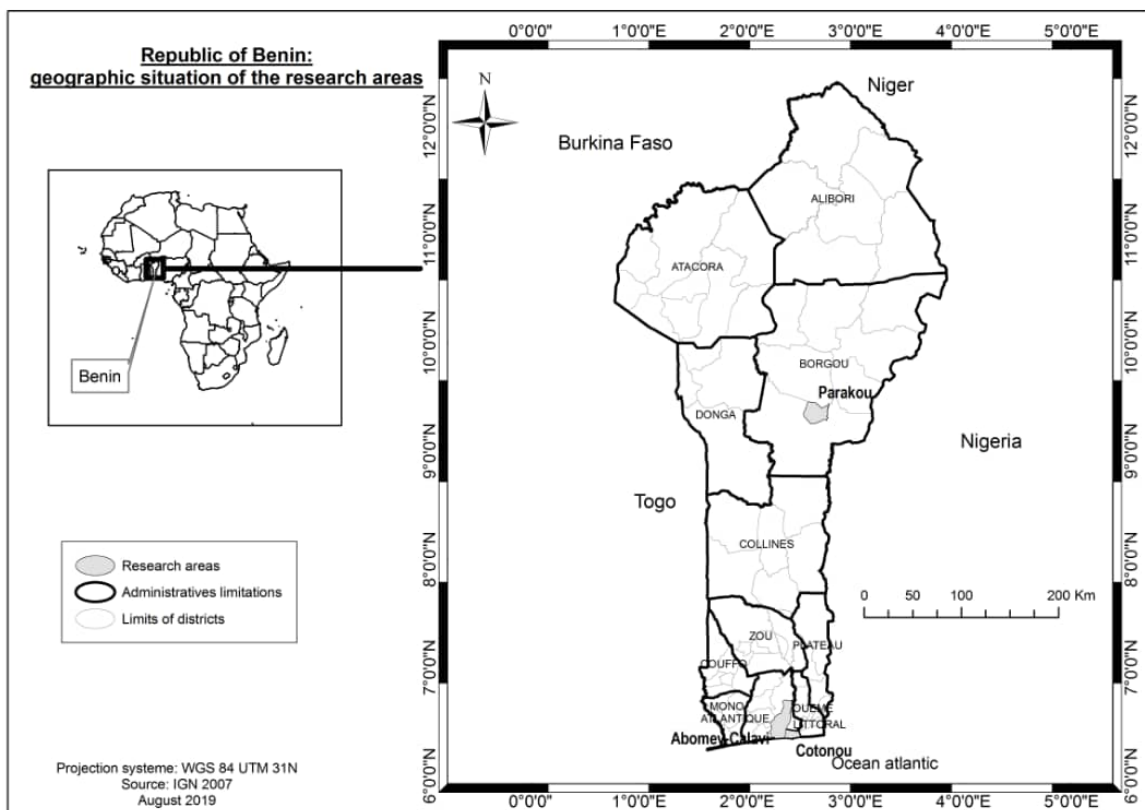


Figure 3: Geographic situation of Benin

3. Results

In the following we systematically evaluate the results of our field study along the actor-oriented approach of Long (2001) presented in figure 1 by using the TVET system analysis framework for Benin.

3.1. Benin VET reforms

3.1.1. Certificate of Occupational Qualification (CQM) program

In order to upgrade the traditional or informal apprenticeship Benin government introduced a national exam for providing a formal certificate to the apprentices. Certificate of Occupational Qualification (CQM) is a final evaluation taken by apprentices after completing the informal apprenticeship. This evaluation exam is based on specific skills qualification standards (MESTFP, 2016). The CQM exam has already involved 46 craft occupations out of 311 according to the national standard classification of craft occupations in Benin (Swisscontact, 2017). The CQM reform consists of designing a matrix of competencies to provide skills qualification for the evaluation exam. The CQM exam is taken after three years of the training especially offered in a master craftsman/woman firm. Apprentices must work five or six days at full time in the firm depending on the master (UNESCO-BIT, 2013). They also pay training fees to their master depending on the craft occupation and on the master (\$120 or FCFA 80,000) to \$450 (FCFA 300,000) (interviews with master craftsmen, 2018). The evaluation exam is organized twice per year in March and October. However, in the implementation of the program, the evaluation is sometimes delayed due to the limited of financial resources. Master craftsmen/women play key roles in organizing the exam process. By cooperating with professional associations, the Department of Evaluation and Test¹⁰ designs and provide evaluation tests in the nationwide. Master craftsmen in local community are involved in test supervision. Donors are also involved in the financing of the evaluation process. According to interviews with master craftsmen; apprentices pay \$23 to 32.5 (FCFA 12,500 to 25,000) to apply for the evaluation. Those who complete the program receive their certificate at the local administrations. This certificate is formal recognition that substitutes the traditional ceremony of graduation.

3.1.2. Dual apprenticeship program

Benin dual apprenticeship or Certificate of Professional Qualification (CQP) program¹¹ is a reform which combines work-based training and vocational education. To access the program, apprentice has to fulfill four conditions. First, apprentice must be at least 14 years of age to attend the program. Secondly, he must complete at least fifth class of primary school. Third, apprentice has to spend six months in apprenticeship or production centre. Fourth, the candidate must pass with success the entrance test organized by the Department of TVET (D-TVET) to be eligible for the scholarship offered by the government through a public agency, the Fund for the Development of Continuing vocational training and apprenticeship (FODEFCA¹²). The training system consists of theoretical education in vocational

¹⁰ *Direction des examens et Concours (DEC)*

¹¹ *Certificat de Qualification Professionnelle (CQP)*

¹² *Fonds de Développement de la Formation Continue et de l'Apprentissage (FODEFCA)*

training centres and practical training in masters' firms. The program has been implemented in 13 craft occupations: Hairdresser¹³; Metallic Construction¹⁴; Sewing cut¹⁵; Electricity¹⁶; Cold and Air Conditioning¹⁷; Masonry¹⁸; Car Mechanic¹⁹; Motorcycle Mechanic²⁰; Wood Carpentry²¹; Photography²²; Plumbing²³; Coating²⁴ and Weaving²⁵ (Ferland, 2016). The theoretical aspect of the training provided is based on the chart of competencies which designs the standards of qualifications. The training is structured in three training levels which require 32 weeks for each level. Apprentices receive theoretical education one day per week and must stay for four or five days in the masters' firms. According to some interviews, vocational training centres organize alternative training sessions for apprentices in the regions with difficult access for three weeks of intensive training (interview with officials of D-TVET, 2018). Globally, most of the training providers who offer theoretical education are from private business sector. Hence, the summative evaluation of CQP involves the participation of craftsmen/women and vocational training centres. As in the CQM program, professional associations participate in organizing of the CQP exam which remains the role of the Department of Evaluation and Test. The CQP students who pass with success the exam, receive their certificate at the national office of the Department of Evaluation and Test.

CQP differs from CQM in the structure of the duality of the training and the certification process which is only provided at the national office of the Department of Evaluation and Test instead of local administrations.

3.1.3. Master craftsmen perception of the CQM and CQP programs

Through the introduction of the reforms, it is noticed that master craftsmen/women have more access to the CQM than the CQP program. Most of the masters have a positive perception of the CQP program for two reasons. First, the program plays a big role in the skills development and secondly the CQP certificate would be equivalent to the Certificate of Professional Aptitude²⁶ which is a high literacy level in secondary TVET education. However, master craftsmen prefer participating to the CQM program because the program is addressed to all apprentices even though they have any literacy level. According to a researcher, the organizational and institutional frameworks of the CQP program do not meet the expectation of craftsmen because professional associations are less involved the final exam. However, the CQP program has been implemented since 2005 whereas CQM evaluation has been set since 2013. In some masters' views, the CQP program is very closed to apprentices who live in vulnerable

¹³ *Coiffure*

¹⁴ *Construction métallique*

¹⁵ *Coupe couture*

¹⁶ *Electricité*

¹⁷ *Froid et Climatisation*

¹⁸ *Maçonnerie*

¹⁹ *Mécanique auto*

²⁰ *Mécanique deux roues*

²¹ *Menuiserie*

²² *Photographie*

²³ *Plomberie*

²⁴ *Revêtement*

²⁵ *Tissage*

²⁶ *Certificat d'Aptitudes Professionnel (CAP)*

socioeconomic environment. Other master craftsmen do not see the CQP program relevant. The CQM exam comes from the local initiative of craftsmen associations in order to improve the old system of the final evaluation called EFAT. EFAT is an exam taken by apprentices after completing the informal apprenticeship in master's firms. This evaluation was the first official exam introduced by the local initiatives of craftsmen associations. It was organized with the support of local administration who provide a legitimacy to the certificate given to apprentices. Dual apprenticeship involves additional specific trainings. Nevertheless, for the implementation of the two programs, the informal apprenticeship plays an important role.

3.2. Stakeholders of VET system in Benin

CQM and CQP reforms' programs involved many categories of actors considered as stakeholders of the TVET system because of their roles. On the one hand, the key stakeholders of these reforms are essentially private sector: training providers, apprentices, their parents/relatives and donors. On the other hand, the main actors are from public organizations.

3.2.1. TVET stakeholders from private sector

Training providers

Training providers are professionals who train apprentices in workshops²⁷ or firms and those who provide vocational education. In Benin TVET system, two categories of training providers are identified: master craftsmen and vocational training centers. These two categories of actors train apprentices for CQM and CQP according to their position in both programs.

Globally, master craftsmen/women were trained on-the-job during several years before completing their training by the graduation ceremony. In informal apprenticeship, this ceremony is the one social legitimacy of the graduation of learners. Through the duration of the training, master craftsmen bear the subsistence of apprentices and pay them occasional wage for their motivation after performing beneficial services. During the graduation ceremony master craftsman/woman receive gifts, goods and money from apprentices, their parents and relatives. This ceremony is an opportunity for the apprentices to show to their parents; relatives, friends and local community their new status which allows them to enter the labor market.

Apprentices are trained by master craftsmen/women for three years in the workplaces or firms before taking the CQM exam. Those who pass with success the exam are entitled to receive the certificate of occupational qualification (CQM certificate). Apprentices work in their masters' firms depending on the craftsman planning and the labor market. By working in the masters' workplaces or firms, apprentices contribute to the firm level productivity and to the product market competition. Through a national census of business sector in 2008, 70,340 firms were identified in craft sector (INSAE, 2010). Thus, the CQM program involves many firms with informal apprenticeship system.

²⁷ *Atelier artisan*

In the CQP program, master craftsmen/women provide the practical part of the training during four or five days per week in the workplaces or firms. The theoretical part of the training is offered by vocational training centers for further skills through theory and practice sessions one day per week. Vocational training centers use some professionals' competencies as the main TVET instructors or trainers and local trainers²⁸. These trainers are either graduates from the cycle 1 of the technical secondary school with the Certificate of Professional Aptitude²⁹ or from cycle 2 of the technical secondary school with professional baccalaureate or from informal apprenticeship. Vocational training centers receive funds from FODEFCA to provide the dual training. Therefore, trainers earn a salary for the level of dual system in which they are involved. According to David-Gnahoui & Ahouangnivo (2017), 102 VTC provide training in dual apprenticeship program. The share of public sector is 24 vocational training centers (David-Gnahoui & Ahouangnivo, 2017).

In the reforms process training providers, especially CQP trainers receive training on capacity building to update their skills and knowledge. This demand driving training is occasionally organized by FODEFCA. However, master craftsmen/women do not receive any wage from the government for participating in the training neither in the CQM nor in the CQP program. The training fees are paid by apprentices with their parents.

Apprentices and their parents/relatives

Benin TVET reforms are globally addressed to young people who receive training in informal apprenticeship. However, their parents play non-negligible role. According to UNESCO-BIT (2013), the estimated number of apprentices is 200,000. In the period of 2013 to 2015, 13,233 apprentices have participated to CQM exam. So far, CQP concerns only 13 craft occupations and CQM 46 out of 311 existing occupations. For the CQP program, only 13,326 apprentices were involved from 2007 to 2014 because of the entry requirements, the number of craft occupations involved (13 trades) and the availability of scholarships offered by FODEFCA (Ferland, 2016). Most of the apprentices are from disadvantaged backgrounds. It is remarked that there are few learners who have entered in apprenticeship with high or highest education level. According to some interviews with training providers in vocational training centers, the low level of apprentices has negative effect on the training progression. Apprentices, parents and relatives play also important roles in the programs. First, parents and relatives are those who make decision by allowing their children to start a training in a workplace due to their limited financial resource to support formal education. Moreover, parents and relatives are entailed to pay the training fees of the apprenticeship scheme to the master craftsman/woman. Some of them ensure this role but those involve other members of the whole family to contribute to finance the training. Many parents renounce their obligations to take charge of the child's training, thus leaving him to the charge of the master craftsman.

"I have already completed my training. I am looking for money to pay my training fees by doing small and temporally jobs. But my benefits are not enough to save much money. Furthermore, the incomes are used for my subsistence." (Mr. D. Apprentice, sewing, 24 years).

²⁸ *Formateurs principaux et formateurs endogènes*

²⁹ *Certificat d'Aptitude Professionnelle (CAP)*

Many apprentices get "holiday entitlement"³⁰ to work to earn money to pay the training fees. Apprentice must either work for several years in his/her master craftsman firm after completing his training, or he/she can work for another master craftsman/woman to earn money, or he/she can also be employed in another sector such as commerce, domestic work in order to pay his/her training fees. With the financial and technical supports of donors Benin government improve youth training by apprenticeship.

Donors

Foreign donors contribute to the financing of technical vocational education and training. This contribution is very important for the implementation of the dual apprenticeship (Ferland, 2016 and David-Gnahoui, 2017). The main donors are: Swiss Development Corporation, Danish Development Corporation, Hanns Seidel Foundation, World Bank, French Development Agency and so on. Walther (2008) explains the reason why foreign donors support the government in these reforms is to improve apprentices' craftworkers skills (Walther, 2008). Hence, it is found that donors support Benin government to develop the informal apprenticeship in order to improve the youth employment and income.

3.2.2. Public organizations

In public sector, three main organizations are involved: Ministry of Secondary Education and Technical Vocational Education and Training³¹; Ministry of Labor and Public Service³²; and Ministry of Small and Medium Sized-Enterprises and Employment Generation³³.

The Ministry of Secondary Education and Technical Vocational Education and Training holds the TVET policies through the Department of Technical Vocational Education and Training³⁴. The Office of Evaluation and Test³⁵ organizes the entrance test and the assessment exam; and the Department of Pedagogical Inspection, Innovation and Quality³⁶ is responsible of quality assurance.

The Ministry of Labor and Public Service is charged of the financing and the training regulation. First, the main institution involved is FODEFCA, created by the decree N0. 053/1999. FODEFCA looks for donors for further financial resources to support Benin VET reforms. Secondly, the Department of Training on Capacities Building, Labor Force and Apprenticeship³⁷ designs law for regulating the relationship between master and apprentices.

Ministry of Small and Medium Sized-Enterprises and Employment Generation is the main organization in charge of organizing craft occupations. In 2003, Benin government had created Union of Chambers

³⁰ *Congé de libération.*

³¹ *Ministère des Enseignements Secondaire, Technique et de la Formation Professionnelle (MESTFP)*

³² *Ministère de du Travail et de la Fonction Publique (MTFP)*

³³ *Ministère des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises et de la Promotion de l'Emploi (MPMEPE)*

³⁴ *Direction de l'Enseignement Technique et de la Formation Professionnelle (DETFP)*

³⁵ *Direction des Examens et Concours (DEC)*

³⁶ *Direction de l'Inspection Pédagogique, de l'Innovation et de la Qualité (DIPIQ)*

³⁷ *Direction de la Formation Continue, de la Main-d'oeuvre et de l'Apprentissage (DFCMA)*

(UCIMB)³⁸ through the decree N0. 557/2003. However, this important structure has not played any role so far (interview with a staff of UCIMB). Most roles entitled to UCIMB are played by the National Confederation of Craftsmen. Union of Chambers are the representative body of craft professionals in which 95% of the members are form craftsmen organizations and 5% from self-employed.

3.3. Stakeholders interests

3.3.1. Entrance and graduation ceremonies: important events for master craftsmen

Globally, entrance ceremony, tools box and verbal or writing contract are the major entry requirements for informal apprenticeship in Benin. The entrance ceremony is a ritual of the entry in the craft occupation. This ceremony is a warm welcome for new apprentices. According to a master craftsman, apprentices must not start their training without this ceremony. Nowadays, many apprentices start their training without having the entrance ceremony because of religion reasons. Master craftsmen who do not practice *Vodoun* refuse the entrance ceremony. For those who still practice the entrance ceremony require the payment of \$37.5 (FCFA 25'000).

The tools box is the second condition to access to the informal apprenticeship. The tools box depends on each craft occupation and on each master craftsman/woman. The estimated value of the tools box according is \$30 (FCFA 20'000). Apprentice can either get the list of the tools or give money to his/her master for providing it. This condition is not decisive to start the training.

In the training contract, training fees are the most important condition to many of master craftsmen. Apprentice cannot pay all the training fees before starting the training. Nevertheless, master craftsmen/women attach a greatest priority to the training fees. Therefore, apprentices' relatives must pay for the fees before completing the training, in order to take the final exam and obtain the certificate. The training fees depends on each master craftsman/woman and on the craft occupation. Globally, the training cost is estimated at \$120 (FCFA 80,000) to \$450 (FCFA 300,000). This cost is estimated at \$300 (FCFA 200,000) by the study of Davodoun (2011a). When apprentice is involved in CQM program, he must pay \$18.75 (FCFA 12,500) or \$37.5 (FCFA 25,000) depending on the craft occupations, to apply for the evaluation. When apprentice is enrolled in the CQP program, he must pay additional training fees up to 10% or 5% for his/her dual training to the scholarship offered by FODEFCA (David-Gnahoui, 2017; Swisscontact, 2017). This scholarship offered by FODEFCA is the whole contribution by donors and national budget.

The first interest craftsmen get from the reforms is the formal certificate that apprentices obtain after completing CQM or CQP program. It is a formal recognition of the qualification of skills/knowledge apprentices have achieved during the training. Before the introduction of these reforms, any certificate and diploma received by apprentices is legally given. The completion for traditional apprenticeship was based on a ceremony of graduation that requires many conditions from apprentices and his/her relatives.

Through the reforms, craftsmen share different views regarding the graduation ceremony: while some of them agree with Benin government to prohibit the practice of the ceremony other master

³⁸ *Union des Chambres Interdépartementales de Métiers du Bénin* (UCIMB)

craftsmen/women support the fact that the ceremony of graduation can be saved. The same trends are also shared by apprentices' parents and relatives.

The ceremony of graduation is a symbolic celebration organized by the master craftsman/woman to release a cohort of apprentices who complete their training. As shared by many craftsmen, the symbolism of this ceremony is a ritual of socialization of new master craftsmen/women in the corporation:

"The graduation ceremony has two functions: first, it plays a role of blessing for the new master for his/her career. The master craftsman and his/her colleagues must pray for the graduate apprentice. This ceremony is a powerful prayer for the new master for a successful career of the graduate apprentice. Secondly, the graduation ceremony consists of promoting the apprentice in the community" (Mr. F. D., master craftsman, wood carpentry, Abomey-Calavi, 2019).

The ceremony of graduation involves two main practices: the dowry to the master craftsman/woman and the ceremony. The dowry must be paid before organizing the ceremony. According to Davoudou (2015), the dowry includes money, alcohol, clothes, beer, sweet drinks, foods, animals, kola nut, and so on. For the ceremony, apprentices with their parents engage other family members and friends to contribute in the financing and participate to the ceremony. During the ritual of new masters' integration, the master craftsman/woman stimulates the final symbolic punishment³⁹ and all the community pay for the value of this punishment. Dowry and ceremony, both practices require financial resources to celebrate the new status of the apprentice to which the whole community participates. At the end of the ceremony, the new master craftsman/woman receives an informal diploma from his/her master. This diploma provides information on the master craftsman/woman who trained the apprentice. This informal certification based on the master craftsman's identification is a factor of satisfaction.

"As master craftsmen, we are very proud to see our names on the diplomas of our learners. When you see my diploma, you can read the name of my master and see also his signature. For people who have shared work experiences with him, my boss is known as a very competent craftsman. But nowadays, there is no use of the master's name on the official certificates. There is no information about the master who trained the apprentice: we cannot know whether the craftsman is competent or not. We train apprentices and the Benin government provides them certificates" (Mr. T. A., master craftsman, wood carpentry, Cotonou, 2018).

Through this master's opinion, master craftsmen have the privilege by signing diplomas they deliver to apprentices.

In contrast, the ceremony of graduation became a good business for other master craftsmen/women who take this opportunity to earn money, enough goods and gifts. They abuse of the requirement conditions for the dowry and the graduation ceremony. Hence, some apprentices with their parents do not have enough financial resources to organize the graduation ceremony:

"For apprentices with parents who do not have enough money, we organized graduation ceremonies behind closed doors. However, it was noticed that some craftsmen/women ask for too many requirements for the ceremonies. They ask for many things: foods, drinks, goods, money and so on to celebrate the graduation. Apart from this, you have to rent chairs and tents/tarps for the celebration. Hence, the graduation ceremony becomes very expensive [...]. I think the main important is to give them a diploma. If he is competent, he will have a fruitful

³⁹ *Dernier coup de palmatoire*

career. If he was not competent, his master would be also responsible because he is the one who provided the training" (Mr. DS. J-M. Citizen, Abomey-Calavi, 2019).

Therefore, apprentices must work for several years before saving money to organize the graduation ceremony. In order to facilitate the graduation, the government prohibits the graduation ceremony. Through the reforms of CQM and CQP programs, master craftsmen do not sign anymore the diploma. These formal certificates are provided by the Ministry of the Secondary Education and Technical Vocational Education and Training⁴⁰. Master craftsmen agree with the government to provide formal certificates to apprentices. However, other master craftsmen/women wish that their professional association sign these formal certificates.

3.3.2. Interests through the training provision

The duration of the informal apprenticeship depends on the apprentice age and his/her capacity to achieve skills. In this traditional apprenticeship, master craftsman/woman remains the only one person who evaluates and appreciates the skills acquisition by apprentices. There is no training content for the training. Master craftsmen train apprentices according to their skills, experiences and the labor market. Through CQM and CQP reforms Benin government designs standards and referentials with matrix of competencies (for the CQM program) and chart of competencies (for the CQP program) to reorganize training provision. Master craftsmen/women share different perception on the reforms. Globally, the reforms were approved by them, but some conditions do not reach their expectation. Legally, for both training programs, apprentices must be trained during three years before taking the final exam. However, in master craftsmen/women view, three years are not enough to be well qualified in an occupation. Most masters suggest that apprentices be trained for four years because, apprentices differently achieve and advance knowledge according to their ability. A woodworking master thinks that the master craftsman/women is only qualified to appreciate the completion and achievement of the level of apprentice:

" Government has no power to define alone training duration of the apprentices. Master craftsmen/women and professional associations are person who are able to measure the achievement of the learners. We must be allowed to provide information about our learners before they take the final exam. But referring to the procedure, the apprentices are not well qualified before taking the exam. It is not good for their career" (Mr. F. D., Carpenter, Abomey-Calavi, 2019).

In this regard, many masters complained during a workshop in September 2018 at Cotonou regarding the low quality of evaluation forms in which apprentices take the final exam:

"The quality of the evaluation forms provided to test the apprentices is very low. The exam aims to measure the knowledge achievement of the learners during the three years in the master's firm. This is is very important to improve the quality of the evaluation forms" (Mr. D. G. C., master craftsman, aluminum carpentry, Cotonou, 2018).

According to some master craftsmen, CQM and CQP programs must be improved in terms of the duration of the training and of the final exam through which apprentices are tested.

⁴⁰ *Ministère des Enseignements Secondaire Technique et de la Formation Professionnelle (MESTFP)*

It is important to note that masters are also involved in this process of evaluation especially in the CQM exam. They are involved in the board of examiners; correction board and jury of deliberation. For these different services, master craftsmen/women receive participations fees. However, we don't know for how much they are paid for each activity. In November 2018, we participated to the CQP entrance test in a technical high school in Cotonou by observing how the test is organized. Results of our observations show that master craftsmen/women are not sometimes well paid for their roles. They refused to get the payment because they were not satisfied regarding the amount. The headmaster of the exam school had begged them to accept the payment:

"If you do not accept the money the government has given, you give me a great deal of trouble. I will be considered as incompetent to manage my team. Therefore, I can lose my place" » (Mr. D. E., November 2018, Cotonou).

Through this quote, it is noticeable that the headmaster had negotiated before they received the payment. Such reforms of the CQM and CQP in Benin VET system foster financial as well as private interests to the stakeholders.

3.3.3. Master craftsmen participation in workshop: uses and gratifications

Master craftsmen/women involved in the two programs, especially those who train CQP apprentices receive trainings on capacity building. Providing training to master craftsmen is an important role played by FODEFCA. Professional associations through CNAB and UCIMB apply for specific needs of training on capacity building and FODEFCA analyzes the relevance of the training needs and give financial support to provide the training. Moreover, they are involved in many workshops organized by public institutions. Most of the craftsmen/women who participate to these activities are members of the staff of local associations and trade unions⁴¹. For these activities, participants are regularly paid for transportation fees and for daily allowances.

3.4. Stakeholders strategies

3.4.1. How do master craftsmen/women do to face the training duration?

Through the reforms, the apprenticeship duration is three years. For the CQP program, master craftsmen/women are not able to keep apprentices, because dual apprenticeship follows an official training schedule. However, most CQP cohorts are delayed about the training schedule. As example, new CQP students (apprentices selected in November 2018) for the first level have not started the training up June 2019. For the CQM program, some masters keep apprentices more than three year before allowing them to take the final exam. Even though master craftsmen/women agree to follow the regulation, they do not respect the duration of the training. In this case, apprentices or parents put the master in pressure or complain to the local authorities regarding the training duration. The master can still act to express his/her disagreement. Apprentice attitude is considered as discourteous toward

⁴¹ *Groupements Associations, collectifs des artisans, Confédération Nationale des Artisans (CNAB) et Union des Chambres Interdépartementales des Métiers du Bénin (UCIMB).*

his/her master. By collaborating with the professional association in local community, some masters can influence the exam result for their apprentices.

"When the apprentice does not respect his/her master or when he wants to take the final evaluation without receiving the approval of his/her master, there is a way to proceed. The master craftsman/woman complains about the negative behavior of the apprentice to the members of professional association on local level. The master submits the apprentice's application for the final exam. But at the end of the evaluation, the apprentice fails and returns to continue the training in his/her master's firm" (Mr. G. Master craftsman, motorcycle mechanic, Parakou, 2019).

Other master craftsmen/women agree to release the apprentice for the final exam even though they know that apprentice is not competent.

"If an apprentice asks for the final evaluation, I do not disagree. If he/she succeeds that sounds great. But whether he/she fails it cannot be a problem. The main concern is the competency: if he/she is not well competent in the occupation he/she will not have a fruitful career" (Mr. C. M., master craftsman, hairdresser, Parakou, 2019).

Through this information, it is noticed that Benin TVET reforms have affected the relationship between master and apprentice.

3.4.2. Persistence of the ceremony of graduation and "fake" diplomas /certificates

At the time when reforms were introduced, master craftsmen/women must not practice the graduation ceremony any more: this is legality. Professional associations at local level⁴² have the charge of the monitoring and control of the legislation texts. However, it is remarked the graduation ceremony remains a widespread after the completion of CQM and CQP programs by the apprentices. In this case, the celebration is often supplied by apprentice and their parents. After getting the formal certificate from the "local authority of the district"⁴³ the apprentice gives it back to his/her master. By doing this, apprentice asks for the celebration of his/her graduation through the traditional ceremony.

"This is the procedure when you are interested in the graduation ceremony: you discuss with your parents. When they agree with you, you will inform your master. After receiving officially the certificate, you give it to your master. The master craftsman/woman organizes the graduation ceremony accordingly to the financial resources you are able to provide. However, this ceremony is not mandatory" (M. D. Apprentice, sewing, 24 years).

Through this information, the ceremony of graduation is still practiced and supported by apprentices, their parents and by master craftsmen/women. All actors involved know about the regulation but they agree to practice the graduation ceremony: this is legitimacy.

As the legislation texts prohibit the practice, the ceremony can take place either in Church or in the Mosque or at the master craftsman home/private place. By organizing graduation ceremony, they celebrate a private event that involves family, friends, and colleagues as witnesses. All of them contribute to the financing of the ceremony by providing foods, drinks, goods and money.

⁴² *Les collectifs des artisans.*

⁴³ *Maire de la commune.*

As mentioned above, the CQM and CQP programs do not involve all the 311 craft occupations in Benin. That implies that other craft occupations still provide informal apprenticeship training with graduation ceremony. Moreover, the CQM and CQP programs are implemented in collaboration with the informal workshops of master craftsmen/women. For both programs, apprentices work with their masters during the training duration. Therefore, the informal apprenticeship is still available and involved apprentices in formal training programs. Some master craftsmen/women give informal diplomas considered as fake diplomas or fake certificates to apprentices. The fake diploma issue was discussed during a big workshop held in Cotonou in September 2018. Neither the public institutions nor professional associations did not give response to solve this issue. However, professional associations in local community are charged of the monitoring of the apprenticeship acts with the support of local authorities. Nevertheless, it is easy to noticed that Benin government has challenge to involve the rest of the 311 trades in both programs.

3.4.3. Public-private partnership in Benin TVET system

The implementation of CQM and CQP programs involves master craftsmen/women for the training provision. Master craftsmen/women work in private sectors even though most of them work in informal. Partnership between public and private sector in apprenticeship consist of facilitating collaboration between government and business sector. Legally, master craftsmen/women involved in the training programs must meet the formal conditions before creating an enterprise. The required conditions to own his/her firm are:

- Professional card;
- Trade and Personal Property Credit Register⁴⁴;
- Individual Taxpayer Identification Number⁴⁵.

Master craftsmen/women who do not meet the requirements submit their apprentices to CQM and CQP programs through their colleagues.

"Master craftsmen/women who do not meet the requirements use to give the application file of their apprentices to the other masters or to vocational training centers who are eligible. They submit the apprentices' applications through their firms or centers. Consequently, some masters and vocational training centers had obtained from 10 to 20 CQP apprentices from the CQP entry test held in November 2018" (Mr. S. K., researcher, UAC, April 2019).

It is noticeable that master craftsmen support each other in the practice of informality. In the implementation of the CQM and CQP programs, Benin government provides training on capacity building to master craftsmen/women who meet the conditions. These training on capacity building are organized through the financial and technical supports of donors. The main function of such training to master craftsmen is to update their skills and knowledge to new technology. Public institutions train master craftsmen/women in the legislation texts, needs of specific training and challenges for Benin informal apprenticeship to improve their work conditions. Through these activities, Benin government develops partnership between public institutions and professional associations.

⁴⁴ *Registre de Commerce et de Crédit Mobilier (RCCM).*

⁴⁵ *Identifiant Fiscale Unique (UFI).*

Results from this public-private partnership consist in providing service contracts agreement to craftsmen/women for public institutions. Craftsmen are more interested in the training contract with FODEFCA for the CQP program. That requires craftsmen suppliers work in legal conditions. During the big workshop in September 2018, many craftsmen criticized Benin bureaucracy. Therefore, the inefficiency of Benin bureaucracy does not motivate master craftsmen to participate to the public-private partnership. Through this partnership, Benin government creates opportunities to business sector, especially master craftsmen, to provide services to public institutions. However, no service cannot be contracted with master craftsmen who work in informality. Professionals who got contracts with public sector did not have payment facilities. Due to this complexity of this process, master craftsmen are not interested to provide services to public sector. According to the ministry of TVET staff of the procedure of payment is very important.

Benin VET reforms aimed to renew the status of master craftsmen/women. At the beginning, master craftsmen/women were invited to participate to the CQP and CQM programs. How can master take the same training program with his/her apprentices? Many craftsmen did not agree to participate to the same evaluation with their own learners. Therefore, the big challenge for the government is to provide a formal recognition and accreditation of the master craftsmen skills and competencies that are different from the process for apprentices. In this regard, reforms are currently introduced to include the "validation of acquired experience⁴⁶" of master craftsmen in the national occupational standards.

4. Discussion

Informal apprenticeship in West African counties has been developed through a traditional education based on the family or clan skills transfer (Davodoun, 2011a; Adekola, 2013). As in many countries of this region, Benin has introduced reforms to upgrade this informal apprenticeship. Results of this research provide detailed information about the effects of these TVET reforms in the apprenticeship system.

Dual apprenticeship reform has changed the structure of the learning process through the entrance requirements, the training duration, the combination of school-based education and the work-based learning and the skills assessment of the students. As effects of CQP reform, results of the research showed that many business actors act to promote their vocational training centers by supplying own students to the entrance test from which apprentices must pass to be eligible for the scholarship. At the time when vocational training centers provide their own CQP students, the duality of the CQP program is not effective anymore because Benin dual apprenticeship consists of combining on-the-job training in the master craftsman's workshop and vocational education in training centers. Study of David-Gnahoui (2017) on Benin dual apprenticeship revealed the same result. Some master craftsmen and apprentices are less motivated to participate to this entrance test because of the limited number of scholarships FODEFCA provides. Regarding the duration of the training, other master craftsmen think insufficient to achieve enough work competences in three years of the training. In the informal apprenticeship, the

⁴⁶ *Valorisation des acquis d'Expérience* (VAE).

duration of the training depends on the craftsman who remain the only one person who can assess the apprentices' achievement (Anokye, 2014). According to ILO (2012), the duration of the stay of the apprentice in the master's workshop is a common regulation. Through the training process, master craftsman bears the subsistence of the apprentices whereas apprentice works for him. Hence, the long stay of the apprentice helps master craftsman to recover his investments on the apprentice. In a study by Ololube and Major (2014) in Nigeria, it is noticed that the lack of collaboration between school inspectors and teachers can have minimal effect on education. In the implementation of Benin dual apprenticeship, results of the research illustrate that there is low collaboration between training centres and master craftsmen. Furthermore, the CQP students' assessment does not take into account any training session in the workshops of the master craftsmen. The formative assessment of the CQP program involves 60% of vocational education by training centers and 40% of summative assessment for the final exam. This final exam provides a formal recognition by the certificate of professional qualification (CQP certificate) which is considered as higher than the diploma master craftsmen had received in the old system of informal apprenticeship. Hence, master craftsmen train young people who are able to defeat them in the labor market through this certificate. In this regard, master craftsmen claim Beninese government provides them national standards to validate their work experience. For the implementation of the CQP program, Benin government receive financial supports from donors for vocational education. Results of this research has showed that foreign donors provide a big contribution. While donors do not give financial resources, the government face difficulties to finance many apprentices. As example, in 2012, the number of apprentices supported by the national budget was 975. The same remark is noticed in 2018 with 830 apprentices in which 593 must receive scholarships on the national budget. Studies by Davodoun (2011b), Atindehou (2013) and David-Gnahoui (2017) illustrated that the financing of the dual apprenticeship in Benin (CQP program) is more dependent to foreign supports.

In the CQM program, a matrix of competencies is designed for each trade. Legally, there is no more informal learning due to the fact master craftsmen must follow the standards specified in the matrix to provide training to the apprentices. In addition, the duration of the training is three year after which apprentices take their final exam (CQM exam). This national exam involves the commitment of the professional associations and local administrations. After this exam, apprentices are invited to receive their certificate of occupational qualification (CQM certificate) at the local administration of the district in order to avoid the graduation ceremony. This event represents a social legitimacy of the master craftsmen/women who have trained apprentices for three year. The graduation ceremony contributes to the social recognition that provides them material and financial interests. Some master craftsmen have saved the entrance and graduation ceremonies although the practice have been prohibited by the government. Some researchers in anthropology of symbol showed that rituals play important role in social community. Cohen (1974) had supported that the ritual in kinship play the role of social integration of child in the community. As in kinship, the ceremony of entrance and graduation ceremonies in apprenticeship aims to integrate apprentice in the craft occupation. However, data collected showed that some master craftsmen/women had abused of required conditions for the graduation ceremony. Davodoun (2015) provided detailed knowledge regarding the negative effects of the practice of the

graduation ceremony by showing the limited financial resources can be a barrier for the graduation of many apprentices. Thus, the graduation ceremony becomes a "market"⁴⁷ for those master who used it as an opportunity to recover what they have invested by training apprentices.

In contrast, other master craftsmen/women do not receive much money from apprentices regarding the training fees. In some occupations as metallic construction, the training fees is estimated at about \$105 (FCFA 70'000) for three or four years of the training. The same remark is made in motorcycle mechanic because young people considered this occupation as "dirty profession"⁴⁸. The study showed that there are master craftsmen/women who train apprentices without receiving any tuition fees. Study of Walther (2008) illustrates that master craftsmen in most of Sahelian countries train for free. Despite this favorite condition, many young people do not receive financial supports from their parents to receive vocational education. Therefore, some masters keep apprentices working to them several years after completing their training in order to pay the training fees. Some of apprentices are poached to earn money in order to pay their training or to set their own firm.

5. Conclusion

This paper carried out the reforms involved in vocational education and training (VET) system in Bénin. In 2005, Benin Republic has introduced reforms in the technical vocational education training (TVET) system through the Decree No. 2005/117. These reforms have created two vocational education training (VET) programs: the dual apprenticeship by the '*Certificat de Qualification Professionnel*' (CQP) and the upgrading informal apprenticeship by the '*Certificat de Qualification au Métier*' (CQM). The introduction of these programs involves several stakeholders: master craftsmen and their apprentices, professional associations, government, parents of the apprentices, donors and so on. Since when many actors are involved, TVET stakeholders interact in the system to safeguard their interests.

This study identified the interests of each category of stakeholders and described the strategies used to reach them. To collect data, we used descriptive qualitative method through literature analysis, direct and participation observation and individual interviews.

Results analysis shows that master craftsmen/women have not integrated the legislation texts of the reforms. Some practices prohibited by the public authority is still performed. The entrance and graduation ceremonies remain very important ritual to save as a symbolic socialization of learners. With these reforms, apprentices receive formal certificates (CQP and CQM certificates) that are considered as higher than diploma their master had obtained in the informal apprenticeship. Hence, master craftsmen train their future competitors. In this regard, the public authority must work to improve the reforms by adapting innovations to the local context in which small and household firms are in informal sector. Moreover, it is noticed that the reform of CQP program involved a good business for vocational training centers who developed strategies to receive training contracts from FODEFCA. However, most training providers have argued that Benin bureaucracy is not efficient. That have negative effects on the public-private partnership between stakeholders. In addition, Benin government does not have enough

⁴⁷ Amouzouvi (2005) had used the concept of "market" in religion to study actors who use religious-based values to make profits.

⁴⁸ "*Métier sale*".

financial resources to provide the training programs. Thus, the financial aids of foreign donors have positive effects for the implementation of the training programs especially, the CQP program.

Beninese government must extend the reforms to other craft occupations and work to ensure independence financing to support the dual apprenticeship program by involving local administrations. For the welfare the Benin TVET reforms, it is very important public authority collaborate more with private organizations. In this partnership, reforms must be involved deeply professional associations at local level and local community for inclusive actions.

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