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IMPACT OF REFORMS TO VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION CERTIFICATE ON TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF GRADUATES IN BENIN: CASE OF MUNICIPALITY OF PORTO-NOVO

ABSTRACT

Meeting market needs inevitably requires improving the skills of human resources and their ability to adapt to related changes. To address the significant challenges faced in the craft sector and improve the quality of its workforce, political will has initiated several reforms and, with the support of stakeholders, implemented numerous initiatives. This research aims to analyze the impact of these reforms, particularly those of the CQM (Certificate of Professional Qualification), on the training and professional integration of graduates. To obtain reliable data relevant to this research, a mixed-methods study was conducted. Interview and questionnaire survey techniques were used to collect data from 115 individuals divided into three target groups. The data were analyzed using the theories of Human Capital (Becker, 1964), social representations (Moscovici, 1961 &Jodelet, 1989), and the theory of the transition to the labor market (Elder and Koné, 2014). The collected data revealed some persistent challenges regarding the quality of training and the professional integration of graduates.

Keywords: Crafts, Reforms, Quality, Vocational training, Professional integration

INTRODUCTION

Work enriches individuals, shapes their character, gives them purpose, and contributes to the progress of humanity. (Ferhat, 2022). Ferhat (2022) demonstrates that the importance of work for individuals and for humanity is undeniable. Every individual, in order to give meaning to their life, for their personal fulfillment, and to contribute to the evolution of their environment, their society, and ultimately, all of humanity, must pursue a trade or profession.

It is one of the most fundamental values shared by humanity. Deeply rooted in the collective consciousness, this value is instilled in human beings from childhood. The newborn child is subject to the process of socialization, which allows them to learn and integrate the norms, values, social roles, and expected behaviors of their society (Durkheim, 1922; Bourdieu, 1979). Throughout their life, they undergo a learning process that prepares them for a trade or profession (Dubar, 1991; Hughes, 1958; Demazière& Dubois, 2012).

This learning can take many forms and be described according to the characteristics and contexts in which it occurs. Thus, formal learning occurs when it takes place in structured and institutionalized settings, such as schools, universities, or vocational training centers, where learning objectives are clearly defined and teaching methods are planned (Brougère, 2007; Babault, Grabowska & Rivens Mompean, 2022). Learning can be described as informal when the process of acquiring skills and knowledge takes place outside of formal educational structures, often characterized by observation and participation in activities (Chamoux, 2001).

We can also speak of workplace learning, which focuses on an approach combining theoretical training and practical work, allowing learners to acquire skills directly in the workplace (Veillard, 2017).

Other authors have developed concepts such as continuous learning or collective professional learning (De Laat, 2001), etc. Training in artisanal trades in Benin is strongly characterized by so-called traditional apprenticeship, where the vast majority of young people learn "on the job," with an artisan, the techniques of the given trade. Today, traditional apprenticeship remains closely linked to the informal sector and production within the craft community. The training, which is purely practical, is not regulated by the state, and there is

no predefined training program. Employers and apprentices are bound by an apprenticeship contract, most often verbal, and each apprentice pays their own apprenticeship fees.

The amount can sometimes reach up to 160,000 FCFA (Swisscontact, 2017) for the entire duration of the apprenticeship, representing a considerable expense for the apprentices' families. In the craft sector, the acquisition of knowledge and skills is based on observing and imitating professional techniques (Chamoux, 2001).

One of the strengths of this system is its close connection to the production process, offering apprentices opportunities to practice throughout their training.

This apprenticeship model, although it has some advantages, also has major shortcomings: high apprenticeship costs are a deterrent, power relations generate conflicts between the master craftsman and the apprentice, there is an unsanitary working environment, insufficient and often obsolete equipment and tools, there is a lack of theoretical courses, the master craftsman has a low level of education, there is no official recognition of the skills developed and the qualifications acquired, and the system is not well taken up by professional craft associations, which are still insufficiently involved in its organization and implementation, even though they should be the main actors responsible for it (Swisscontact, 2017).

Traditional apprenticeships received little attention from political authorities. The craft sector itself, long considered part of the informal economy, was long neglected by policymakers who failed to exploit its vast potential. The craft sector plays a significant role in the Beninese economy, contributing between 10.6% and 13% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) according to different sources and periods. For example, an assessment covering the years 2005 to 2010 indicates an average contribution of 10.8% of GDP. More recently, the Craft Development Fund estimates this contribution at approximately 12%, positioning crafts as the third largest economic sector after agriculture and trade. Furthermore, at the 2023 Benin National Craft Fair, it was mentioned that crafts contribute nearly 13% to the GDP. In terms of employment, the craft sector represents a significant portion of the active population. According to the Handicrafts Development Fund, it encompasses nearly 50% of the active population and approximately 52% of economic units. These figures underscore the importance of handicrafts not only in wealth creation but also in job generation in Benin.

In recent decades, recognition of the sector's economic potential and the desire to improve it have led to numerous discussions culminating in national reforms and policies. These reforms have contributed to enhancing the sector's economic potential, recognizing the craft profession, and regulating the vocational training system for apprentices. They have led to clarifications regarding training, particularly concerning the age of entry into apprenticeships, the duration of training, the requirements for becoming a master craftsman, and the establishment of the CQM diploma by Decree No. 2005-117 of March 17, 2005, concerning the Certification of Professional Qualifications through Apprenticeship, amended by Decree No. 2010-641 of December 31, 2010, of the same name.

The Vocational Qualification Certificate (CQM) thus replaces the apprenticeship completion certificates known as the Apprenticeship Completion Diploma, which master craftsmen previously issued to apprentices upon completion of their training. Based on the operational framework document supported by regulatory texts, the first CQM examination session was held in 2013 on an experimental basis with 1,190 registered candidates. Subsequent sessions of this examination continued until October 2022. However, in light of the crisis and developments in the sector, the aforementioned decree was repealed and replaced by Decree No. 2022-389 of July 13, 2022, concerning the certification of vocational training through apprenticeship in the Republic of Benin. This decree introduces major innovations in vocational training programs through apprenticeship, as well as in the technical

aspects involved in organizing the CQM examination. This new regulation has been applied ever since.

In this process of continuous improvement, it is clear that each reform brings with it a host of changes, improvements, and restructuring of the learning process. It is the results of the implementation of these reforms that we explored in this research.

The main question of this research is: what changes have been brought about by the CQM reforms, and what challenges do they present for the training and professional integration of graduates? This research aims to understand how the CQM reforms have influenced the quality and relevance of vocational training for apprentices; the perceptions of stakeholders in the sector regarding the CQM reforms; and the ongoing challenges related to the professional integration of CQM graduates.

This research aims to contribute to improving the quality of vocational training and the professional integration of young graduates in the craft sector in Benin, particularly in the municipality of Porto-Novo. Several studies have been conducted on this issue, leading to numerous conclusions. However, further avenues for exploration remain to be explored in order to obtain up-to-date data that can inform public debate and inform public policy.

This research will help to define the actual situation of vocational training and the integration of CQM graduates in the craft sector in Benin, and particularly in Porto-Novo, in light of the reforms undertaken in recent years to improve the quality and competitiveness of the sector.

1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

1.1. Study Type

In order to fully understand the subject and obtain reliable results, a mixed-methods research approach was undertaken.

This study analyzes the impact of the CQM reforms on vocational training in the skilled trades and the professional integration of graduates.

The mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research allows for a deeper exploration of the research topic with participants capable of providing adequate and objective information. Quantitative research provides statistical and numerical data from a large number of participants.

The work was conducted on well-defined participants with specific characteristics. The following section presents the categories of participants and their characteristics.

1.2. Study population

For the purposes of this study, the target population consists of several categories of individuals. These include three categories, resulting in a non-homogeneous target group:

- managers of the Chamber of Trades and Crafts and training engineering experts;
- master craftspeople and professional associations of the targeted trades;
- CQM graduates with at least three years of experience.

1.3. Inclusion criteria

To be included in this study, participants must:

- be a manager at the Chamber of Trades and Crafts, a master craftsperson, or a CQM graduate in the trades targeted by this research;
- be a training engineering expert specializing in vocational training for craftspeople;
- provide free and informed consent.

1.4. Exclusion Criteria

These were not included in the other trades subject to the CQM requirements.

1.5. Sampling Method

In the context of this research, due to the objective and in order to better define the subject, a non-probability sampling method, using both random and purposive sampling techniques, was chosen. Random sampling involves using individuals immediately available in the field to create a sample. This involves selecting targets as they present themselves, without prior selection. Purposive sampling is the technique that consists of choosing sample elements based on the researcher's judgment. To successfully complete this research, purposive sampling was primarily used for training engineering experts or trade experts and for managers of the Chamber of Trades and Crafts. This choice was based not only on the reliability of the information provided by the target groups but also on its accuracy, using the principled selection technique, which led to the choice of the non-probabilistic method. For master craftsmen, recent graduates of the CQM (Certificate of Professional Qualification), and members of professional associations, random selection was used.

1.6. Sample size

To obtain quantitative data, 100 recent graduates of the CQM with at least three years of experience were included in our research. These individuals were selected because they are the primary beneficiaries of the research. They can also provide us with information on the ongoing challenges they face in their professional integration, their perceptions of the quality of the training they received, and recommendations for improving their employability.

For the qualitative research, three (3) representatives from the Chamber of Trades and Crafts and two (2) training engineering experts were selected for our survey. Their selection was important because they are best positioned to provide us with information on the implications of these various reforms, the different actions undertaken, and the current challenges hindering the quality of training and the professional integration of young graduates. Furthermore, these experts are able to make a value judgment on the quality of vocational training, the challenges faced by young graduates of the CQM (Certificate of Qualification in Trades and Crafts), and to identify avenues for improvement.

For the qualitative research component, ten (10) master craftsmen were interviewed. These individuals were selected to gather information on the current vocational training system they provide and their perceptions of the reforms. The interviews also allowed us to collect their recommendations for improving the quality of training and the professional integration of young graduates.

Our sample size is therefore one hundred and fifteen (115) subjects. For this study, each target group was assigned a specific data collection tool. Semi-structured interview guides were distributed to the heads of the Chamber of Trades and Crafts, training engineering experts, and master craftsmen. Questionnaires were sent to recent graduates of the CQM (Certificate of Qualification in Crafts).

The table below presents the sample size of the target population for the survey, as well as the sampling techniques used.

Table 1: Presentation of the target population

Target audience	Size	Sampling techniques
Officials from the Chamber of Trades and Crafts	03	A reasoned choice
Training engineering experts	02	A reasoned choice

Master craftsmen	10	Accidental choice
CQM Graduates	100	Accidental choice
Total	115	

1.7. Research techniques and tools

Two techniques were used in this research to collect data: semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys. The data collection tools are related to the data collection techniques used. Two interview guides were used to conduct the interviews. These guides were semi-structured. A questionnaire was used for the questionnaire survey. The interviews were recorded using a smartphone.

2. Results

2.1. Impact of the CQM reforms on the quality and relevance of apprentices' vocational training

The results presented below highlight graduates' assessments of training content, acquired skills, supervision during training, and access to modern equipment. Only 17% of graduates stated that their apprenticeship was structured. The same graph reveals that 38% of surveyed graduates stated that their training was poorly structured, while 45% stated that the training was not structured at all.

58% of graduates state that the content of their training is adapted to market realities. Furthermore, 32% of graduates state that their training is poorly adapted to market needs. The same graph shows that 10% of graduates state that the content of their training is not adapted to market realities.

68% of respondents are satisfied with their supervision during their training period. Moreover, 17% of respondents state that they are very satisfied, while 25% consider their supervision unsatisfactory.

50% of graduates answer in the affirmative, while 23% answer in the negative. Additionally, 27% of graduates state that they have partial access to modern equipment and tools during their training period.

2.2. Stakeholders' perceptions of. CQM reforms

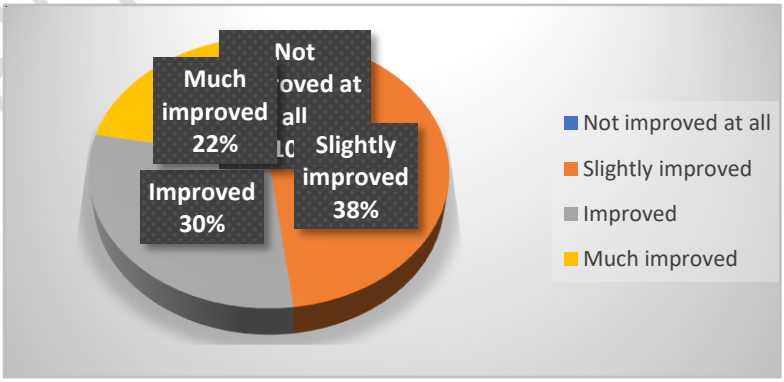

Figure 1: Perceptions of whether the reforms have improved or not the quality of training

Figure 1 shows graduates' perceptions of whether the reforms have improved the quality of their education. The figure reveals that 22% of respondents believe the reforms have significantly improved the quality of their education. Furthermore, 30% believe the reforms have improved the quality of their education. For 38% of respondents, the reforms have had little impact on the quality of their education. However, 10% of respondents believe the reforms have not improved the quality of their education at all.

2.3. Challenges of professional integration for CQM graduates

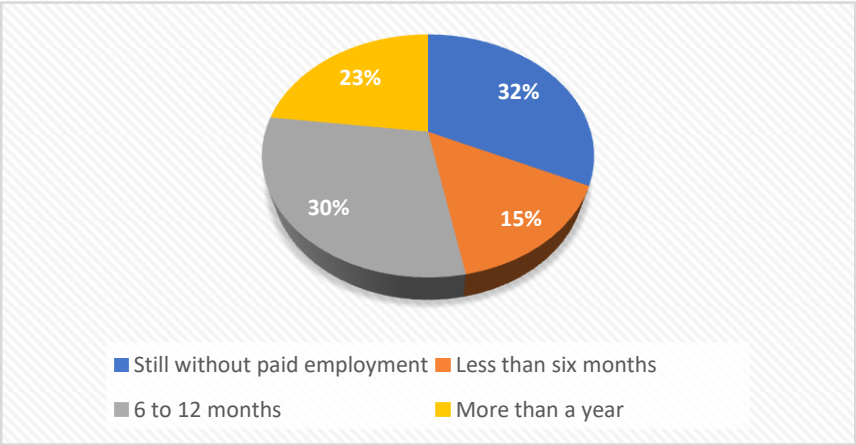

Figure 2: Time taken by graduates to obtain their first job or to set up their workshop

Figure 2 shows the time it took graduates to find their first job or to set up their own workshop. Observation of this figure reveals that 15% and 30% took "less than 6 months" and 6 to 12 months, respectively, to find their first job or set up their own workshop. Furthermore, 23% of graduates took more than a year to find their first job or to establish their own workshop. However, 32% of respondents stated that they are still without paid employment.

3. Discussion

3.1. Analysis of learning standardization

Standardizing training involves making the content, objectives, methods, tools, and evaluation criteria of a training program consistent so that they are the same everywhere the program is implemented. According to the authors, standardizing training requires adherence to certain essential conditions. Among these conditions are: the development of a structured skills framework (Le Boerf, 2000, AFNOR, 2004), the definition of clear and operational objectives to be achieved by the training (De Ketele& Roegiers 1996), the existence of defined and harmonized programs planned in advance and organized according to a logical progression (Perrenoud1994), the definition of teaching methods adapted to each content or skills to be transmitted (Baier-D'Orazio, 2016), the duration, modalities and resources formalized (Carré,2001) and, the result of official validation or institutional recognition and the obtaining of a diploma or certificate upon completion of the training (UNESCO, 2012).

Analysis of the data collected in the field reveals that the reforms have led to the development of skills matrices for 74 of the 175 officially recognized trades in the sector, as well as theoretical and practical assessments of learning and marking grids for the CQM exam. Acknowledging the existence of these documents, one of the master craftsmen interviewed stated, "Yes, they gave us a document; it includes everything the apprentice must be able to do at the end of their training. We also send our apprentices to the exam, and they are marked according to a very detailed grid. I am even one of the examiners." (A. M. Field Data, May 2025). Regarding the importance of these tools, one of the training engineering specialists stated, "The skills matrix is very important; it is a significant step that Benin has taken, and initiatives have been put in place to ensure that every craftsman adopts it." This helps raise awareness among stakeholders about the essential skills they need before entering the market as practitioners in a particular field, even if it is not sufficient on its own to

guarantee the acquisition of these skills. The existence of these tools meets the requirements related to skills frameworks and those related to validation.

When asked whether the training content was structured, 45% of respondents stated that it was unstructured, while 38% stated that it was poorly structured. Only 17% of respondents stated that their training content was structured. Field data also revealed the absence of curriculum documents for the training and therefore no pre-established training program. One of the artisans interviewed added, "…we operate based on the problems our clients present to us. If a client has a breakdown, we identify its source and look for a solution. The apprentice observes everything I do; they are also involved and contribute. That's already part of the learning process…" We therefore conclude that the condition of existence of defined and harmonized programs planned in advance and organized according to a logical progression, as Perrenoud (1994) described, is not respected, nor is the condition related to the definition of teaching methods appropriate to each learning situation or skill to be acquired.

Furthermore, the conditions related to the duration, methods, and formalized resources are not being met. Indeed, field surveys reveal that the data on the duration of training varies from one master craftsman to another. In this regard, Jean-Pierre (2023, p. 3) states that "The average duration of training is three (3) years, but remains largely at the discretion of the master craftsman based on the skills acquired by the apprentice. It also depends on the intensity of the companies' production." It is also noted that there is no minimum number of equipment or tools required in a workshop before taking on an apprentice. In light of this information, it is clear that even though considerable efforts have been made, resulting in the development of skills matrices for certain professions, the creation of theoretical and practical assessments for learning, and marking grids for the CQM exam, some important elements for standardizing trainingsuch as the development of a harmonized program organized according to a logical progression, the definition of teaching methods, the duration of training, and the modalities and resourcesare not yet in place. Therefore, it is clear that vocational training according to the traditional model is not yet standardized.

3.2. Analysis of Learning Quality in Light of Reforms According to UNESCO (2002), the quality of vocational training can be defined as "the capacity of a system to meet the expectations of learners, employers, and society in terms of skills development, professional integration, and contribution to economic productivity." It therefore refers to the alignment between the content taught and the needs of the labor market, the pedagogical effectiveness of the system, and also equity in access to training. In the context of crafts, quality encompasses the technical mastery acquired by learners, the relevance of the skills transmitted, the ability to integrate professionally, and the level of recognition of qualifications. Deciphering the quality of training is a complex task that requires careful consideration of several crucial criteria and aspects. Among these criteria are: the existence of skills frameworks and standardized programs (Lenoir, Y. 2013), the relevance of the training content to market needs (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2015), the presence of cross-cutting modules, the qualifications of trainers (since, according to the ILO (2016), a competent trainer must not only master the profession but also teaching techniques and the pedagogical methods used (Joanert, P. 2009), rigorous, objective, and standardized assessment of learning outcomes (ILO, 2011), the material conditions of the training, and the job placement rate (UNESCO, 2012). It is on the basis of these criteria that we will analyze the quality of vocational training delivered according to the traditional model in light of the CQM reforms.

According to data collected in the field, the idea that reforms have significantly improved the quality of vocational training is not widely shared by stakeholders. Indeed, according to CQM graduates surveyed, only 22% stated that the reforms had greatly improved the quality of training, while 30% stated that they had contributed to a moderate

improvement. Conversely, 38% and 10% of respondents respectively stated that the reforms had little and no impact on the quality of training. These statements call into question the quality of the current training system. Similarly, one of the experts who participated in this survey stated that "...considerable efforts have been made, but more remains to be done to meet all the requirements for quality training in the sector." Let us therefore examine this criterion by criterion.

First, the criterion related to the existence of a skills framework or matrix and training programs is only partially met. Indeed, there is currently no training program in the workshops, and apprentices can only observe and reproduce their instructor's actions. This situation constitutes a serious obstacle to the quality of learning. According to Fassinou (2006), this often-undocumented method limits apprentices' ability to acquire diverse skills that would allow them to respond effectively to the demands of a world constantly shaped by technological advancements. One training engineering specialist also states in this regard, "They have the skills frameworks at their disposal, but in practice, this is not yet what is needed. The framework clearly describes teaching a particular skill, but if no client has requested a service related to that skill, the apprentice will not have the opportunity to acquire it." This method is sometimes limiting. (A. P. Field data, May 2025).

Regarding the qualifications of the trainers, several respondents stated that they lack the necessary skills to provide better guidance to apprentices during their training. They noted that most master craftsmen are illiterate and lack the creativity or skills needed to create an ideal learning environment. This data corroborates the findings of Fassinou (2006), who concluded that despite their difficult living conditions in the workshops, child apprentices receive their training from employers who are mostly illiterate or functionally illiterate. Consequently, they have little opportunity for initiative and creative imagination and are confined to the routine practices taught by their masters. As a result, the knowledge acquired by these young children after years of hardship depends on the master craftsman's expertise, competence, and commitment to providing effective training. On this subject, one of the respondents stated that tradespeople need to learn to improve their practices and abandon certain outdated approaches. Among these approaches, he cited the case of diagnostics performed by mechanics. He asserted that these diagnoses are often biased: “I’ll take a common example with mechanics. Every time I tell a mechanic that my vehicle is consuming more fuel, the first question they ask is: ‘How many liters of gasoline do you use per day?’ And at that point, the probability of getting a sound diagnosis is very low, if not nonexistent. All vehicles have a dashboard that displays the number of kilometers traveled and the fuel level. Considering that every vehicle has a normal fuel consumption expressed in kilometers per liter, you can easily assess the difference between the observed number of kilometers per liter when you suspect increased consumption and the normal figure (the number of kilometers per liter listed in the vehicle's specifications). Very few of our tradespeople operate this way.” And that's what we would have hoped for from the standardization of training programs: to be able to define standard processes, practices, and operating procedures for the essential tasks that professionals are required to perform. (M. H., field interviewee, May 2025)

Furthermore, the relevance of the training content to market needs was also called into question. Nearly a third (32%) of respondents stated that their training content was poorly adapted to the actual needs of the market. They justified this by pointing out that certain problem-solving or task-execution techniques lacked precision and needed to be replaced by more innovative approaches. However, they continued to repeat the same tasks with the same margins of error, which is not aligned with customer satisfaction. Some mechanics also stated that they had learned to work on specific brands, but these are becoming increasingly rare on the road, giving way to newer brands. To address the specific requirements of these newer

brands, they will have to proceed by trial and error. Yet, this criterion of adapting the content to the specific needs of a constantly evolving market is of paramount importance to the quality of training.

Furthermore, it is clear that the training program as it currently operates does not include cross-cutting modules such as hygiene, workplace safety, entrepreneurship, etc. We see professionals who know virtually nothing about their own protection and who handle substances that have no short-term effects but can seriously impact their long-term health. They find themselves in workshops without wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) or having the necessary protective measures to mitigate certain risks. Normally, the training period should be crucial for learning how to manage a workshop, customer relations and customer satisfaction criteria, and also how to market one's expertise. This is not yet the case in the current system, where everything is based on imitation.

Regarding the criterion of rigorous, objective, and standardized assessment of acquired skills, the data collected reveals the existence of assessment tools, including theoretical and practical tests, as well as evaluation grids for organizing the CQM exams.

Furthermore, the current material conditions for conducting training reveal several shortcomings. Many respondents highlighted the lack of inadequacy of modern equipment in the workshops, which could facilitate learning and allow apprentices to keep pace with technical and technological developments. A 2016 study by Swiss contact on vocational training in Benin reveals the same issue and emphasizes the inadequacy of equipment as one of the main obstacles to quality training.

Finally, it is observed that the professional integration of graduates from this system is not guaranteed. According to the Beninese Economic Report: Crafts, a Promising Sector (2017), despite their representation of 51% of Beninese businesses, craft enterprises contribute only 13% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Field surveys revealed that only 45% of the graduates in our survey were able to establish their own workshop or obtain salaried employment within the first twelve months after graduation. Nearly a third (32%) stated that they were still without paid employment, citing several reasons such as market saturation in certain areas and difficulties in raising sufficient resources to manage their workshop or business. Others had to retrain for other activities or pursue other jobs alongside their craft.

Based on these analyses, it is clear that the quality of a vocational training program depends on several conditions. However, within the framework of apprenticeships subject to CQM exams, while efforts are being made, several shortcomings hinder the quality of training, particularly in terms of training programs, their alignment with market needs and developments, the professional integration of graduates, the material conditions of the training, and the qualifications of the trainers.

Moreover, considering the results from the analyses of the standardization of training and the analysis of the impacts on the quality of training, we can deduce that if the reforms are intended to carry the gene of harmonization of practices related to learning and national certification of the skills of apprentices of the CQM, we are still far from a satisfaction of the criteria related to the standardization and quality of learning according to the traditional model submitted to the CQM examinations in Benin.

3.3. Perceptions of different stakeholders regarding reforms

The information from the collected data reveals that the various stakeholders in the sector are aware of the sector's reforms and, to some extent, understand certain rules governing their activities. But do they share the same perceptions or assessments? For the

members of the Chamber of Trades and Crafts interviewed, the reforms, legislation, and initiatives of recent decades bode well and have contributed to better control of the sector, improved practices related to the craft, and enhanced vocational training in the field, as well as promoting Beninese craft products and creations both nationally and internationally. For them, the rationale behind these reforms lies in satisfying a socio-professional need, giving social recognition to these categories of workers who contribute to the social, economic, and tourism dynamism of our country, and also in creating a certification mechanism for traditional apprenticeships, formalizing what has been informal until now. Some authors support these viewpoints. For Aihou& Dossa (2023, p. 22), "In Benin, the certification of professional qualifications through apprenticeship is part of the overall framework for the modernization of traditional apprenticeships, supported by the 2001 reform and by regulatory texts." It is also worth noting that the implementation of the reforms is taking place within a fairly participatory framework. Artisans, artisan collectives, training experts, and technical and financial partners are collaborating with administrative authorities to ensure the success of these activities.

Some master craftsmen share this view and welcome the initiatives. They acknowledge and commend their involvement in certain activities, such as serving on examination boards. For them, it is a source of pride to participate. The success of their apprentices who participate also brings them pride and gives them confidence in the quality of the training they have provided. On the other hand, some master craftsmen see this as a loss of some of their former prerogatives. They lament the loss of the financial benefits they received through graduation dowries and the organization of graduation ceremonies. Others even consider apprentices as a kind of workforce, difficult to dismiss, and may retain them for a long period before awarding them a diploma. This can sometimes justify the long years of training, but regulations have introduced some moderation in this regard. This more or less negative interpretation of the reforms creates some resistance and means that certain practices that should have been obsolete continue to exist. The data collected revealed that although the CQM (Certificate of Qualification in Trades) is issued by the Ministry of Secondary Education, Technical and Vocational Training (MESFTP) to apprentices, some apprentices still have to hand it over to their employer, and it is only during a graduation ceremony that they officially receive their diploma.

Through this information, we observe that while some respondents offer an objective assessment of the reforms and welcome the opportunities they provide, others take a subjective approach, leading to diverse interpretations that can sometimes hinder the smooth implementation of the initiatives underlying the reforms.

3.4. Professional integration of graduates in light of CQM

Reforms According to Dubar (2002), "Professional integration is a social process through which an individual manages to secure a place in a given employment system, based on the recognition of their qualifications." Giret, (2015) considers that professional integration involves "entering stable, skilled employment related to the training received, through a process of social and professional integration." Successful professional integration is primarily characterized, according to the authors, by access to employment, its sustainability, the alignment of training with employment, economic autonomy, and social recognition.

Information gathered in the field reveals that CQM graduates face significant challenges, both in terms of finding employment or establishing their own workshops and in ensuring the long-term viability of their businesses. The graduates surveyed had diverse experiences in entering the job market. Some took nearly a year or more to set up their own workshops or find their first job. However, to date, nearly a third of the surveyed graduates

(32%) are still without paid employment. Some of them have had to retrain for other activities or pursue them concurrently.

Several obstacles stand in their way to successful professional integration. These include a lack of capital to establish or grow their workshops (51%), a lack of entrepreneurial skills (35%), the low recognition of the CQM (8%), and a lack of job opportunities (6%). The lack of entrepreneurial skills is a significant obstacle highlighted by observers. DEDRAS-Benin (2021) states that many young graduates, while technically competent to carry out the work, lack crucial skills in management, marketing, taxation, or customer relations, which limits their ability to launch or sustain an independent business. Adding to these challenges is the overabundance of graduates in certain professions. Some respondents warn of a likely saturation of professionals in these fields.

Regarding tailors, one of the interviewees stated, “Before, we didn’t have so many tailoring workshops in the area. But today, the number isn’t growing. If we don’t commit to retraining the young people who come after us or who are still enrolling in workshops, we risk having a tailor’s house in 5 or 10 years. In that case, not everyone will be able to work. Only those who are truly skilled will be able to stand out.”

This increase in the number of graduates in certain trades is also a concern for some authors. In this regard, Idrissou (2012), in a study on urban growth and the development of crafts in Pobè, already points out that the craft sector has become a refuge for many unemployed young people, leading to saturation in certain trades. He notes a situation exacerbated by the lack of regulation and planning in vocational training for crafts. Swisscontact (2016) also highlights that the contraction of public sector employment and the stagnation of the private sector have driven many young people into the informal sector, particularly in crafts. It concludes that this rush into crafts has led to an excessive concentration of labor in certain trades, exceeding the market's absorption capacity. However, this situation could have been anticipated, as a report (published in 2004) by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis on craft enterprises in Benin already revealed rapid growth in the number of craft economic units, from 9,380 in 1980 to 145,078 in 2002. According to the institution, this rapid expansion, without adequate planning, has led to increased competition and saturation in certain craft trades.

Some graduates, despite having successfully established their own workshops, face numerous challenges. These include a lack of appropriate and modern equipment to operate their businesses (72%), a lack of specific skills to adequately meet certain customer needs (72%), difficulties covering workshop operating expenses (43%), and a lack of clients (35%).

These analyses reveal that the professional integration of young graduates faces several challenges, including a lack of specific or entrepreneurial skills, insufficient workshop equipment, a lack of clients, a lack of job opportunities, limited recognition of the CQM (Certificate of Professional Qualification), challenges related to workshop management, and the over-population of graduates in certain trades.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to analyze the impact of these reforms on the training and professional integration of young graduates, primarily those with a Vocational Qualification Certificate (CQM). The analysis of these impacts considered two fundamental aspects: the quality of vocational training in the skilled trades and the professional integration of young graduates into the economic fabric.

This research, employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, revealed significant findings that were cross-referenced with theoretical variables. Firstly, the introduction of standardized tools into the training system was observed, namely the development of competency matrices for certain trades, theoretical and practical assessments, and evaluation grids for the CQM exam. However, vocational training in the skilled trades

remains largely traditional and unstructured, characterized by a lack of harmonized curricula, empirical teaching methods, content sometimes dictated by the volume of goods and services requested by clients, and an unfavorable work environment. The hypothesis of a significant improvement in the quality of training through standardization has thus been disproven.

Furthermore, it was observed that the reforms were interpreted in various ways depending on the type of actor and their level of involvement in the process. Some people recognize the importance of these reforms and welcome the significant progress made in the sector in terms of recognition and structuring. However, others see them as a challenge to established practices or a loss of some of their advantages. This diversity of viewpoints confirms the hypothesis that the perceptions of different actors in the sector regarding the reforms vary according to their role, interests, and level of involvement in the system.

Finally, the professional integration of graduates into the Beninese economy continues to face numerous obstacles, including a lack of opportunities, insufficient capital to establish a workshop, a shortage of professionals in certain trades, inadequate equipment, and a lack of specific, transferable skills. These observations, combined with theoretical variables, have also confirmed that, despite reforms, the professional integration of CQM graduates into the Beninese economy remains a significant challenge.

Ultimately, while the CQM reforms hold the seeds of a positive transformation for the artisanal sector in Benin, their effectiveness remains contingent upon strong political will, enhanced inter-institutional coordination, and increased involvement of stakeholders on the ground. Only then can traditional apprenticeship, enriched by formal skills recognition, truly become a driver of development, employment, and sustainable empowerment for young people.

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