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**“Ritualistic schooling” and returning of in-school-youths and students to craft  
apprenticeship:**

**Fear of unemployment or crisis in of the education system and how can states capitalize  
this new trend?**

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**Abstract**

The unemployment rate among youths in Africa has become a major problem in the continent. Mostly affected is the teeming population of young graduates from high schools and universities without any form of vocational skills or technical training. These ones can only desire to get white-collar jobs which are not readily available in any private organizations and government parastatals. Therefore, in order to make ends meet, some of these young graduates had to start doing menial jobs which are far below their qualifications and are not in any ways related to their courses of study. Meanwhile, others return to their villages to find solace in agriculture and small-scale businesses. It is however not uncommon to find a large number of young graduates in Africa going into vocational trainings or learning new handcraft to channel a new course for their lives.

This paper seeks to discuss the increase in the number of young and energetic graduates who engage in vocational training during or after their studies. These new tendencies are considered by many people as one of the solutions to combat unemployment in the continent. But it also an indication that there is a structural problem with the educational system in Africa. It is believed that the educational process and curriculum in Africa are not often designed to meet the needs and aspirations of the emerging labour market. As a reaction to this trend, many young people today, consider education as a mere ritual which would not address their needs nor the needs of the society. Therefore, many young people attend schools from the primary level to the university level without any expectation nor belief that education can bring them their desired lives or provide any suitable employment after they might have graduated from school. It is against this background that many youths resort to technical and vocational trainings to avoid the menace of unemployment.

**Keywords:** Benin, educational system, craft apprenticeship, handcraft, unemployment.

## **Introduction**

In many African countries, craft apprenticeship in workshops and different vocational centers is considered to be a traditional system of education. Therefore, there exist numerous training centers targeted at young people who could not afford to attend regular schools. While school is considered to be official and promoted by governments, craft apprenticeship is generally believed to be for children, who cannot achieve formal education or whose parents cannot provide sponsor for this formal education (Adekola 2013, 403; Mabawonku 1979, 54). Paradoxically, nowadays many unemployed young people have academic grades or have finish their secondary school (Gnanou 2017, 89; Guarcello et al. 2008). To face this situation, some of these unemployed young people, during or after their studies, decide to engage in craft apprenticeship. Craft apprenticeship is an educational model that includes the work context to prepare young people for the adulthood. It also emphasized job orientation and moral values (Adekola 2013, 398; Breuer and Siekmann 1997).

My interest in the subject of Craft apprenticeship emanated from my personal experience as an unemployed youth in Benin Republic and as a result of experiences gathered on vocational training in Germany specifically at the “Dual Hochschule Mannheim”. Through these experiences, I discovered that countries all over the world including third world countries can capitalize on the development and improvement of vocational training to increase the human capital capacity of companies and vocational organizations. Even if in the educational curriculum in Benin does not allow for the combination of vocational training alongside formal education, many young people through their own initiative decide to engage in craft training. The result of such engagement is that after graduating from the university, they do not seek to do any secular job but work as craftsmen and become Entrepreneurs.

To analyze the reason for this situation, I will first examine existing literatures on graduate/youth unemployment in Africa. Secondly, I will discuss the educational system and the background of the craft apprenticeship in Benin. Thirdly, I will present the experiences of two young graduates who are currently working as craftsmen in Benin. Through their experiences, I intend to establish that many young persons in Africa and especially in Benin attend high schools and universities without any sense of direction nor conviction that the system could give them their desired results. Study in high schools and especially the universities is considered today to be only a ritual rather than a process to becoming a professional seeking to contribute to the growth of the nation.

## **1. Debate on Young graduate joblessness in African countries: a general problem**

In many African countries today, children have access to attend schools which are mainly sponsored by the government. There are at least primary schools in most remote villages and more sensitization from government to motivate parents to send their children to school. Over the years, it has been discovered that not all these children complete the Basic Primary Education. Many of them leave the school without bringing the General Basic Education, that is supposed to give them fundamental knowledge on the life on the societies, to the termination (Hollingsworth 2012). However, some children through the support and the encouragement of their parents continue with their education until they reach the university. This process is more motivated by the hope that they can have better situation with a high school grade (Gnanou 2017, 88). But after graduation, they are faced with the reality of the over competitive labour market.

The challenge for these young people in many African countries is the transition from the school to work. Most of them after the studies have an initial time of unemployment to look for a good and well-paid job. That is the period of “Wait” unemployment (Guarcello et al. 2008, 137). But if this period become long and unending some of them are demoralized. Bakari Traore (2015) shows that African youth population is continually increasing, but there are not enough job opportunities. As such, young graduates are progressively getting disconnected from the labour market and are therefore demoralized (Traore 2015, 127). Mamadou Gando Barry explain for example that the unemployment of young graduates is a crucial problem in Guinea-Conakry. They have the sentiment that they are victim of injustice (Barry 2016, 51). Many students after and during their university studies need to take complementary training to increase their chance for a job, because there is no continuity between school and a system of apprenticeship based on the accession of practical skills (Barry 2016, 135; Gnanou 2017, 101).

The other important challenge for the young people is their inability to attain the stage of dignity, which make them responsible for themselves and for their family. Many young men and women after they graduate continue to live in the “waithood” (Honwana 2015, 49). They generally live in a precarity and are especially vulnerable. Their chances for a work in cities are also very slim. This situation has worst consequences like migration, victims of different traffics and criminalities, on the life of these young men and women (ibid., 52). Many parents and young people in African countries see high schools and universities as possibility to become an “akowe”: to know how to read, write and carry out administration. Formal education is seen as the only possibility to attain a higher social status. But today many people are disappointed

because most of the jobless are young people that are university graduates (Gnanou 2017, 89). To avoid the “wait” unemployment, “waithood” and the demoralization, these young people start looking for alternative means of survival such as small trade, self-entrepreneurship, or craft apprenticeships. In this paper I want to highlight two new trends in the education system in Africa and especially in Benin. The first is the “Ritualism” schooling of young people in secondary school and universities. The second trend is related to the decision-making process of in-school-youths and students who decide to return to craft apprenticeship.

## **2. The School system and Craft apprenticeship in Benin**

The Republic of Benin is in West Africa and have a population of 11.884.127 habitants. The birth rate is about 5,2 in urban region and 6,1 children for a woman in rural areas for the year 2017-2018 (INSAE). The consequence of the increase in population is the increase in demand on social and educational infrastructures. In Benin the official educational system is inspired by the colonial administration and missionaries (Tama 2014, 61). The goals of the first schools was to build personnel for the colonial administration. After independence in the year 1960, the republic of Dahomey, known today as Republic of Benin try to organize its own educational system. The changing in the educational system in Benin was according to the political development in the country. From 1960 to 1972, the school was in continuity of the colonial system of education. It continued to build personnel for work in offices and in public administrations (Davodoun 2009, 27; Amendt 1980, 288; Tama 2014, 61; Ibikounlé 2016, 352). Up to 1972, there is a change of politic regime. A military regime with socialist and Marxist background came to power and decided to orientate the educational system to the local realities and needs. This led to the creation of what was referred to as “École Nouvelle” and was expected to prepare students to reach full employment after school (Hazoumê 2012, 23). In the year 1990, after the “Conference Nationale des Forces Vives de la Nation”, there was an end to the hegemony of the military regime and the socialist and Marxist ideology in the educational system. The political choice up to 1990 was characterize by the political democracy and liberal economy (vgl. Davodoun 2009: 28ff). Consequently, different laws and decisions have been taken to dynamite the educational system.<sup>1</sup> There were also different decisions to make school accessible for a maximum number of children and specially for girls. These changes have as consequences the access for more children to education, but also increase the pressure in the labour market for young graduates.

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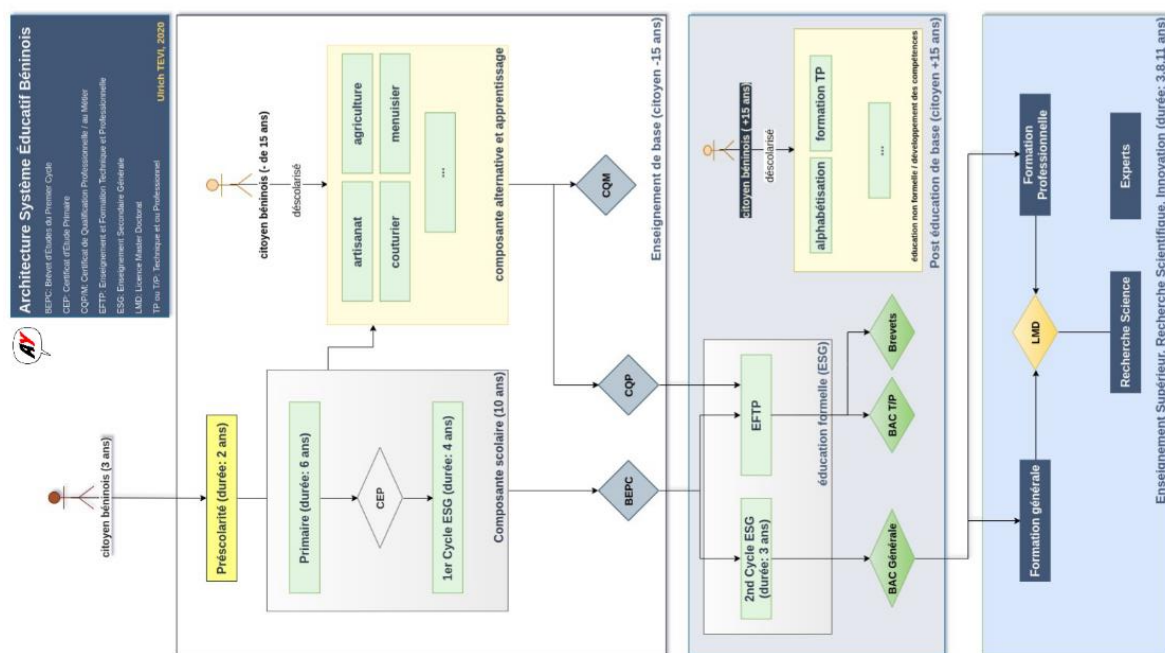
<sup>1</sup> The most important are the “États Généraux sur le Secteur de l’Éducation” in the year 1990, the “Table ronde sur le Secteur de l’Éducation” in 1996 and the “Loi d’Orientation de l’Éducation Nationale” in the year 2003.

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The educational system in Benin is organized into two broad aspects, these include. the horizontal organization and the vertical organization. The horizontal organization is made up of the general Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). In the vertical organization, there are “Éducation de Base”, “Post Éducation de Base” and the “Éducation Supérieure” (cf. Figure 1: Educational System in Benin). The analysis of this structure shows that the educational system is not adequately diversify. At school, children are systematical allocated into two different groups at the “Post Éducation de Base”: The General and the Technical groups. The consequence of this lack of many possibilities is that a lot of students drop out of school after some years. The second situation is that the option of the Technical School is very expensive. In Benin, students have to pay school fees and the toll of school fees in the Technical Secondary Schools, is very high (300.000 FCFA a year). The access to these Technical Schools is also limited through exams. So, only students that have good marks and whose parents have money can have access to such schools. The number of Technical Schools and the openings in are also limited. Consequently, most of the students after the “Education de Base” continue in the General section of the “Post education de base”. In this context, many students complete the “Post Education de base” without any practical skills.

**Figure 1: Educational System in Benin**



In Benin there are generally two types of vocational training. The first is the Technical and Professional Training in the formal educational system. Students can register for this training

up to the “post Education de base” (cf. Figure 1: Educational System in Benin). There is also a “Traditional Apprenticeship” system which take place in workshops and Constructions sites. Handcrafts such as Tailoring, glass cutting, building and hairdressing are also all embedded in this system. The process of apprenticeship in these handcrafts is On-the-job (Bankolé and Nouatin 2020). Generally, children and young people engage in these handcrafts if they never attended school or if they dropped out of school early (Viti 2013). The apprenticeship in these handcrafts are motivated by the proximity to their families and the communal way of the life. There are more than 200.000 young people in Benin involved in the traditional apprenticeship system of learning (UNESCO-BIT, 2013). Even if this on-the-job training and the work conditions are very hard, there are always many children, who do their apprenticeship in these centers (Viti 2013; Fassinou 2006). Nowadays, there is more implication of the state in the organization of the “Traditional Apprenticeship in handcraft. Since 2010 for example, apprentices must enroll and pass after a period of three- or four-years training the “Certificate de Qualification au Métier” (decree No. 117/2005; decree No. 641/2010). This development has been welcomed with a lot of criticism as many apprentices cannot read and write in French language. However, my interest in this paper is focused on young people that graduate at the university and engage in craft apprenticeship.

### **3. The analyses of two “university graduates” craftsmen in Benin**

#### **3.1. Wilfried the tailor and Enock the glazier**

I know Willy the tailor since he was in the primary school. We lived in the same district in Abomey-Calavi when I was student at the university of Abomey-Calavi. So, it is fulfilling and gratifying to see what he has become today. Willy was born in the year 1990. He became a foster child of his uncle after the dead of his father. He grew up with his uncle, whose wife is a tailor. During his primary and secondary school, he assisted the aunt with her tailoring works. The tailoring business contributed in no small measure to the family economy and enhanced Willy’s capacity to develop into a professional tailor. After his baccalaureate, Willy studied Linguistic and Communication and graduated with the Bachelor of Arts degree. As he explains, with his bachelor in linguistic he can only become a language teacher or work as a journalist and was not contended to choose these options. Therefore, based on his experience and acquired skills in tailoring, he decided to work as a tailor more so as he practiced the profession alongside during his undergraduate studies. For Willy, the unemployment of young graduates in the country is very high and the only solution and route of escape is entrepreneurship.



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“for me the tailor work is an aptitude and I also have the chance to grow up with my aunt who is a tailor. I start to learn up this moment. At the university I make a parallel training in the tailoring during my studies. I signed a contract with a tailor master, and I participate to the training when I have time. I go there during the weekend and holidays. Because I already have the basis knowledges from my aunt, it wasn't difficult for me” (Tailor\_Willy\_25.05.2020).

He got his certificate after 2 years of vocational training and paid the required 200.000 FCFA. Before fully going into the tailoring profession, Willy worked with an NGO for 2 years and served as speaker on public health and sexuality. Quoting him, he posits “*I personally decide to quit the NGO job, because I think I am more known and popular in the tailoring business*” (Tailor\_Willy\_25.05.2020). As at today, he has 12 apprentices and some of whom are also students at the university: “*I think many young people have interest for artisanry such as tailoring because of the high rate of unemployment. Also, tailoring is very interesting for students as they can easily combine it with their studies*” (Tailor\_Willy\_25.05.2018).

The glazier Enock was a young student who graduated from the University of Apply Science in the Department of Economy and Management. He finished his bachelor's degree in the year 2014 but could not find a job. He attempted to start a trade but could not raise enough money to begin. So, he decided to start an apprenticeship in glass cutting: “*I find the craft of glass cutting interesting and good because it is beautiful and also allows for creativity*” (Enock\_Glazier\_27.05.2020). Enock decided also to learn this job because he has an uncle whose friend is also a glazier. So, he believes that after learning this job, he could earn money and later start his desired trade. When he made the choice to start this apprenticeship, his parents were completely against his decision. They propose to finance him for a master study, so that he can get a higher qualification with better job opportunities.

“My parents were of the opinion that I already have a high level of education and should not downgrade myself to becoming an apprentice. They believed that apprenticeships are for people who cannot go to school. I therefore had to explain my predicament to one of my uncles who is an electrician, and he helped me to convince my parents” (Enock\_Glazier\_27.05.2020).

For Enock the most important thing in his decision to learn this craft was the fact that it will later provide him a job and that he would become his own boss. His father paid a part of the fees for him and he paid the rest by himself after he finished the training. The apprenticeship cost him about 400.000 FCFA and it lasted for 2 years. Enock thinks that having acquired a high level of education and having attended a university is to his advantage as he possesses the ability to learn faster when compared to other apprentices. Today Enock has his workshop with 10 apprentices who are currently under his tutelage. For him, learning a craft or starting one's own business is the best way to go as grades acquired in school cannot give many graduates the desired job.

### **3.2. Schooling and study as ritualism behavior**

At this point, I would like to introduce the theory of ritualism as developed by Robert King Merton (cf. Merton 1938). In his theory, Merton suppose that the society expect that members achieve cultural values and goals in accordance to given resources. So, people behave differently according to the internalization of the value and goals and the resources that they have. One possibility is that some people behave in conformity with the cultural goals and values and use institutionalized means to achieve them. There are also people that behave with innovation. It means that they accept the cultural goals and values however, they do not use institutionalized means to achieve them. Other people behave with rebellion by creating new goals and ways of achieving these goals. There are also people that behave with retreatism. They reject both goals and ways to achieve them. The fifth option is the one I am adopting in this paper: the concept of ritualism. This means that people reject the goals but however continue to work within an institutionalized framework (Merton 1938). I’m not supposed to apply this theory to all young people in Benin, however, it shows how most young people perceive schools and studying in Benin

The ritualism aspect of schooling is that many parents and young people today know that school cannot fill all their expectations. Because of the background of their parents, many young people know that it would not be possible for them to reach certain level in the social hierarchy. However, they continue the school and the study as long as their parents can afford the school fees. Parents also accept this situation although they recognize the fact formal education does not guaranty a job in the country. At the same time, they do not withdraw their children from the school for the “Traditional Apprenticeship”. They prefer to continue paying for the school because it is considered as an act of irresponsibility to have their children dropout from the school. The goal here is not to send the children to school to later help them secure a means of livelihood but to obey the cultural norm which indicate that formal education brings a high level of responsibility and independence. So, for young like Willy and Enock, the university cannot give them access to the job they expect. Taking the example of Willy, he attempted to dropout from school, but his uncle did not agree. So, he had to continue with school just to satisfy his uncle. Even though the study at the university help him to have a good structure and organization in his business, he opined that he has wasted more time on formal education that his passion.

The decision to change from the university to the handcraft could also be motivated by a fear of unemployment. As I have already established, many universities graduates decide to engage

in handcraft because there were no existing opportunities in the labor market. The glazier Enock after graduating from Economy and Management was supposed to work for a company. However, he realizes that the Beninoise Labour market was not favorable and thus decided to go into apprenticeship. The problem of job perspective play an important role here as he said: *“I don’t know anybody that have a company where I can work. I also don’t have enough money to start my own trade. So, it is better to do this craft apprenticeship”* (Enock\_Glazier\_27.05.2020). This perspective also shows the idealistic expectation of young people and parents from the educational system. Only when their expectations cannot be filled, they start looking for other options.

For many people, handcrafts provide opportunities for professional integration after school or study even if they are considered by the society to be demeaning or humiliating. Because of the condition in which these handcrafts are taught and how children in apprenticeship are treated, many people reject them. So, the problem today is how to make sure that these trainings can be considered to be more valuable with formal educational model. The second thesis related to this situation is to see, how without wasting time by doing a “ritualism schooling/study” more young people can be prepared their livelihood. One possibility can be a generalized “Dual study and apprenticeship” that requires the collaboration between training providers like the school (for the theoretical skills) and companies or industries which train apprentices for practical skills (Breuer and Siekmann 1997; Bankolé, and Nouatin 2020). Another possibility that I discuss with the craftsmen that I met during my fieldwork is to introduce Vocational training and Handcrafts into the country’s educational system up to the “Education de Base”. Some craftsmen also assert that children don’t need to stay for the whole day at school: *“they can make half day at school and half day in a training center”*. For other persons its will be better if the educational system offers more vocational training possibilities, so that children can do vocational training without dropping out of the school system. To achieve this feat, there is the need for a fundamental transformation of the educational system by the government. These options can help young people to gain practical skills as well as contribute to reduce the unemployment among young people in the country. Finally, it can also contribute more to social stability.

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I´m PhD student at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS). After a bachelor´s degree in Labor Administration at the University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin, I´ve moved to Germany where I´ve graduated in Sociology for Bachelor at the University of Heidelberg and for Master at the University of Osnabrück. I´ve joined since winter semester 2017 the University of Bayreuth for my PhD-project on the craft apprenticeship in Benin.